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**RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND OF GHANAIAN  
SOCIETY : A GENERAL SURVEY**

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There are three main religions which are embraced by the Akan and other societies in Ghana. The indigenous traditional religion (comprising 38.2% of the total population), the Islamic religion (12.1%) and the Christian religion (42.79%). Besides these three main religions, 7% of the population do not consider themselves as belonging to any religion. In addition to these categories, 6.8% of the population are Buddhist, Hindu or Jewish<sup>1</sup>. They represent a small proportion of the total population, and have little impact on the people of Ghana<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, this discussion focuses mainly on the indigenous traditional religion, Islam and Christianity. These are the most important religions.

A discussion of the impact of Islam and Christianity on Akan society would facilitate the understanding of the "quilted" nature of Akan religious ideas apparent in the interaction between traditional religion, Islam and Christianity. Among the Akan, 62.7% are Christians, 4.3% are Muslims, 25.4% belong to the traditional religion and 7.6% belong to no religion. People belonging to these various religions have lived side by side for many years and they share common values and beliefs, which have helped to strengthen their relationship.

The syncretism of Islam, Christianity and indigenous belief is tolerated in many if not most Ghanaian societies because the dominant religions have little power to stop one another. This syncretism is tolerated in Akan society, and although people in various religions will not openly go to one another's mosque, deities or churches to pray, in critical cases, such as illness, witchcraft or other misfortune, people often turn privately to religions that are different from their own<sup>3</sup>.

All the three religions share the same common belief in a Supreme Being. The traditional religion, although dealing with various deities, is not polytheistic as some scholars presume. The main concept of the traditional religion is focused on the Supreme Being, God. The deities are believed to be the children of God and these deities act as intermediaries between God and humanity. A corollary of this belief is seen in catholic practices in which Christ, the Virgin Mary or the other saints mediate between worshippers and God. In a sense, these religions take different "roads" to the same destination.

## Folk Religious Categories

All the three major religions are categorized as *Nyamesom*, from *Nyame* (God) and *som* "to serve", literally meaning "to serve God". Members of these religious institutions (in Twi discourse) are called *Nyamesomfoɔ*, i.e. people who serve the Supreme Being<sup>4</sup>

Typically, Christianity is termed *Onyamesom* or *Kristosom*, literally meaning "serving God and Christ". The Christian churches are categorized into two main groups, the *Kristosore*, literally meaning "Christ's Church or Christian Church" and *Kristo Sunsum sɔre*, literally meaning "Christ's Spiritual Church", that is, Christian Spiritual Church. The *Kristosore* are the non-spiritual churches such as the Catholic, the Methodist, the Presbyterian and the Baptist. Included in the Christian Spiritual churches are the True Church, the Aladure (from Nigeria) and the Apostolic churches. The congregations in these churches, which are sometimes referred to as *abɔnsamun sɔre*, literally meaning "hand-clapping church" believe in spiritual possession by the Holy Ghost, and dance to the church hymns<sup>5</sup>. Recently, the congregations in such churches together with others who are in Charismatic mode call themselves "Born Again".

The term *Onyamefre* (to call God) or *Nkramosom* (*Nkramo* from the Mande language *Nkramo*, Muslim), is applied to the Muslim religion. Muslims are called *Onyamefrefoɔ*, literally meaning those who call for God or *Nkramofoɔ* (Muslims)<sup>6</sup>.

Muslims are divided into two groups. *Pepe Nkramosom* (*Pepe* from *opepeni*, a term which refers to anyone hailing from the area north of the rainforest of Ghana), is applied to the traditional Muslims from the north and is usually of the Akan. The Ahmadiyya Muslim sect on the other hand, is linked to a mystical sect centered in Robwah, Western Pakistan.

The traditional Akan religion is called *Abosomsom* meaning "serving deities", that is, the *Onyamemma*, or children of God. The *Abosom* are tutelary or guardian spirits of a town, state or the family. Generally the Christian Europeans confusely call the *Abosom* "fetish". These *Abosom* are indeed the backbone of the Ghanaian Traditional religion.

Another important indigenous religious belief system is the concept of the soul. The Akan societies believe that every human being has a soul. The soul can leave the body and wander around upon death, if a person was good in his lifetime or fulfilled the will of *Nyame*, it is the soul that leaves the flesh and goes to the place for the dead, *asaman*, to reside with the great ancestor (God). If the person was bad, or never fulfilled the will of God, the spirit goes to a place called *asamandze*. It is also believed that witches kill people by feeding on their souls. (Brempong 1997 : 43). Libation is poured to invoke the souls of the ancestors for the belief that they can visit the living with blessings and can also punish, especially those who break customs.

Belief in supernatural spirits is also important. One important spirit is *Amokye* (a female spirit). This spirit inspects females after death before they are allowed to enter the ancestral world. It

is believed that women who do not possess enough beads are beaten by *Amokye* and sent back to the earth as wandering spirits.

*Mame Wata* (sea bride) is another female spirit. She resides in the sea and can be both good and bad to humans (good for magical purposes; most magicians are supposed to have met *Mame Wata*). Other spirits are "*Mmoatia*", literally translated as "short animals". They have human forms but dwarf stature and they live in *onyina* trees in the forest. These are like European faires. They possess magical powers which they give to people who are close to them (those with supernatural powers). "*Sasabronsam*" translated as "forest monster" is another important spirit whose main function is to cause accidents. He can cause automobile accidents and can kill hunters in the forest. (Individual spirit is the witchcraft). Witchcraft is a mystic power which can be utilized by its possessors (witches and wizards) to harm other persons in the matrilineal side of the family. This malevolent spirit when inherent in human beings, makes them spiritually cannibalistic; they kill and destroy their own blood kin group as their abode and their activities are often localized within the same group. Witches are believed to cause strictures, preventing members of their own kin group from producing children. In addition, the witches hinder man's prosperity and can alter man's destiny. (Brempong, 1996 : 43 - 44)

The term *wiasefo* is designated to those who do not belong to any religion, i.e., people who believe in worldly pursuits without regard to any spiritual beings<sup>7</sup>. Even though these people regard themselves as belonging to no religion, they share in the concept of God, which is basic to all religions in this society. The only difference between them, the Muslims, Christians and traditionalists, is that the *wiasefo* do not go to a church or mosque to pray. Ideas about God are often reflected in their perception of the world; God is regarded as the creator of all things and is frequently invoked in libations.

### **Islam and the Akan : Historical Perspective**

On the attainment of independence in 1957, the Gold Coast was renamed Ghana after one of the earliest (Sudanese) empires which emerged in the eleventh century. The name was borne to the Gold Coast due to some specific characteristics ancient Ghana had in common with the newly independent nation, particularly a peaceful relationship with their foreigners, who were also Muslims. Although ancient Ghana was a non-Islamic society, the impact of Islam on the empire was overwhelming.

According to historical evidence, the kings of ancient Ghana did not adopt Islam, but rather remained faithful to their traditional gods; yet they lived in harmony with the Muslims. The kings of ancient Ghana allowed complete freedom of religion, and employed some Muslims as civil servants, interpreters, and officials in charge of the treasury, the majority of ministers were Muslims<sup>8</sup>.

**RELIGION OR FORM OF MARRIAGE BY TRIBE (selected list)**  
**ADULTS, BOTH SEXES - Percentages**

Based on the P.E.S. sample

Tribe	RELIGION					FORM OF MARRIAGE					
	Total	Christ-ian	Nolesn	Tradi-tional	No religion	Total	Church and ordinance	Customary and church or ordinance	Monles with or without customary	Customary	Mutual consent
Total population	100.0	42.8	12.0	38.2	7.0	100.0	2.0	1.8	6.1	86.2	4.9
Not classified by tribe	100.0	87.0	3.2	0.8	2.2	100.0	71.8	8.7	1.3	8.5	-
All tribes	100.0	42.7	12.1	38.2	7.0	100.0	1.8	1.8	5.1	86.4	4.9
Men	100.0	82.7	4.9	25.4	7.6	100.0	1.9	2.2	1.4	87.5	7.0
Women	100.0	81.0	0.9	8.3	9.8	100.0	1.7	0.7	0.3	96.1	1.2
Naama and Ewaleo	100.0	92.3	1.0	5.4	1.3	100.0	1.7	1.0	0.2	95.9	1.2
Ahanta	100.0	57.6	0.6	14.3	27.5	100.0	1.6	0.5	0.5	96.2	1.2
Argi - Bawle	100.0	54.1	5.3	35.2	5.4	100.0	0.4	1.0	1.6	94.5	2.9
Sahwi (Sefwi)	100.0	61.1	2.4	30.6	5.9	100.0	0.4	0.9	0.1	97.0	1.6
Aowin, Bawle and Kyakosi (Chokosi)	100.0	38.4	11.7	45.7	4.2	100.0	0.2	-	5.0	89.1	5.7
Twi - Fante (Fante)	100.0	65.2	8.8	17.5	8.5	100.0	1.6	2.5	1.3	84.5	10.1
Fante	100.0	64.7	9.3	17.7	8.3	100.0	3.1	2.2	2.0	91.7	1.0
Agona	100.0	72.3	2.0	14.5	11.2	100.0	2.0	1.4	0.1	93.8	2.7
Twi - Fante (Twi)	100.0	60.3	2.8	29.6	7.3	100.0	1.6	2.5	1.3	84.5	10.1
Wasa	100.0	72.9	1.6	21.4	4.1	100.0	1.2	1.0	0.9	95.1	1.8
Dankyira	100.0	77.0	0.4	16.5	6.1	100.0	1.3	1.4	-	94.7	2.6
Ason	100.0	72.4	7.7	9.4	10.5	100.0	2.2	0.6	1.4	95.1	2.7
Akyem	100.0	76.0	0.4	14.9	8.7	100.0	1.6	5.5	0.2	85.2	7.5
Akumpan	100.0	70.2	0.6	23.9	5.3	100.0	6.9	4.6	0.2	82.7	5.6
Komuu (Kwabu)	100.0	59.9	0.2	28.5	11.4	100.0	1.5	4.6	0.1	89.7	4.1
Asante and Ahafo	100.0	58.3	3.1	30.1	8.5	100.0	1.2	1.7	1.1	82.7	13.3
Boron (incl. Banda)	100.0	43.2	5.9	47.8	3.1	100.0	0.7	1.6	4.3	81.8	11.6
Akan r.e.s. (incl. Akwamu)	100.0	59.5	1.1	38.0	1.4	100.0	2.2	4.7	-	88.7	4.4
Ga - Adangbe	100.0	54.5	1.5	35.2	8.8	100.0	2.9	1.8	0.5	86.7	8.1
Ga	100.0	69.2	1.6	21.4	7.8	100.0	5.3	2.2	0.5	87.7	4.3
Adangbe	100.0	42.9	1.2	46.5	9.4	100.0	0.8	1.8	0.2	83.7	13.3
Ada	100.0	23.0	1.1	68.8	7.1	100.0	2.1	1.0	0.1	89.9	6.9

\* Includes other Religions (8.8%) - e.g. Buddhists, Hindus and Jewish not shown separately.

## RELIGION OR FORM OF MARRIAGE BY TRIBE (selected list) (contd.)

ADULTS, BOTH SEXES - Percentages

Based on the P.E.S. sample

Tribe	RELIGION					FORM OF MARRIAGE					
	Total	Christ-ian	Moslem	Tradi-tional	No religion	Total	Church and ordinance	Customary and church or ordinance	Moslem with or without customary	Customary	Mutual consent
<i>Adangbe - contd.</i>											
Kpobo	100.0	47.0	1.0	42.3	9.7	100.0	0.5	1.9	0.2	81.4	15.0
<i>Ge - Adangbe w.o.s. (incl. Shai)</i>	100.0	46.5	2.3	43.1	10.1	100.0	1.8	0.7	1.0	80.3	6.1
Ewe	100.0	48.3	0.4	46.1	6.2	100.0	1.5	2.1	0.2	86.8	7.4
Gee	100.0	42.8	6.1	41.9	6.7	100.0	1.6	2.4	2.9	88.3	3.8
Efutu and Anutu	100.0	30.9	0.9	39.2	9.0	100.0	1.4	1.2	0.1	96.4	0.9
Kyerepon, Larte and Anum - Bono	100.0	55.9	0.7	31.1	11.3	100.0	2.0	5.1	0.1	86.6	6.2
Gongya (Gonja)	100.0	2.1	45.7	53.6	0.6	100.0	-	-	16.9	79.9	3.2
Micogo, Krachi (Krachi), Atsede, Wacumari (Nchamari) and Guan n.e.s.	100.0	44.4	1.2	52.9	1.5	100.0	2.7	2.0	1.8	80.3	4.2
Central Togo tribes	100.0	71.4	1.6	28.7	0.3	100.0	1.3	16.6	1.8	78.4	6.4
Yoruba	100.0	32.5	61.6	3.9	1.6	100.0	1.6	2.2	25.8	66.5	0.6
Ibo	100.0	47.9	6.5	4.6	1.1	100.0	27.2	2.7	1.8	64.8	4.0
Germa	100.0	2.0	20.9	71.7	5.4	100.0	-	-	6.4	91.1	6.6
Pilapila	100.0	-	92.3	3.2	4.5	100.0	-	-	37.0	62.2	0.6
Kyusha (Tchamba)	100.0	3.5	37.7	50.3	6.5	100.0	-	-	14.5	84.5	0.6
Konkomba	100.0	1.4	0.3	96.3	2.0	100.0	-	-	-	99.9	0.1
Siacha and Gurma n.e.s.	100.0	2.9	14.3	72.7	10.1	100.0	0.1	0.1	4.4	94.6	0.6
Tsu (Kotokoli)	100.0	-	96.6	3.3	0.1	100.0	-	-	36.9	63.7	0.4
<i>Nole - Dagbani</i>	100.0	7.4	21.9	63.9	6.6	100.0	2.0	0.9	7.8	80.7	0.6
Dagomba and Maruaha	100.0	0.5	53.0	42.3	4.2	100.0	2.7	2.0	1.8	89.3	4.2
Mamprusi	100.0	0.6	11.6	85.0	1.6	100.0	0.2	0.1	2.9	96.5	0.3
Dagaha (Dagarte)	100.0	25.6	3.0	62.6	5.6	100.0	9.6	3.2	0.6	85.2	0.4
Bulisa (Kangyaga or Kanjaga)	100.0	3.9	1.1	88.3	6.7	100.0	0.6	-	0.1	98.0	0.4
Nantsoi and Guranes	100.0	7.7	-	92.3	-	100.0	1.3	5.0	-	93.7	-
Frafra	100.0	3.1	2.8	79.3	14.8	100.0	0.7	0.4	1.0	97.6	0.3

contd - RELIGION OR FORM OF MARRIAGE BY TRIBE (selected list) (concluded)  
ADULTS, BOTH SEXES - Percentages

Based on the P.E.S. sample

Tribe	RELIGION					FORM OF MARRIAGE					
	Total	Christ-ian	Moslem	Tradi-tional	No religion	Total	Church and ordinance	Customary and church or ordinance	Moslem with or without customary	Customary	Mutual consent
Mole - Dagbani - conclud.											
Kumasi	100.0	4.7	3.8	75.4	15.1	100.0	-	-	1.4	98.2	0.4
Moel	100.0	2.7	70.5	19.4	7.4	100.0	-	-	30.3	67.1	2.6
Other Mole-Dagbani	100.0	1.4	25.2	73.6	1.8	100.0	0.3	0.1	7.0	92.6	-
Gruel	100.0	6.1	14.2	70.8	6.9	100.0	0.7	0.8	6.9	90.7	0.9
Sisala	100.0	5.5	15.0	73.3	6.2	100.0	-	1.7	8.0	89.9	0.4
Kasena	100.0	2.4	0.6	64.1	12.9	100.0	1.1	0.3	0.1	96.5	-
Mo, Wagala and Gruel w.o.s.	100.0	8.5	20.7	61.7	9.1	100.0	1.1	0.3	9.7	87.2	1.7
Lobi (incl. Kirifor, Yargala and Mlwo)	100.0	2.2	0.2	90.9	6.7	100.0	0.3	0.3	0.3	97.6	1.5
Songhai	100.0	0.2	99.8	3.8	2.2	100.0	-	0.6	43.9	53.1	2.4
Mande	100.0	1.7	56.2	35.3	6.8	100.0	-	0.3	28.5	78.1	2.1
Dunanga	100.0	2.0	34.9	51.9	7.2	100.0	-	0.5	16.1	81.1	2.3
Wangara (comprising Mandingo, Bambara and Dyula)	100.0	1.3	93.7	4.8	6.2	100.0	-	0.1	36.5	61.9	1.5
Hausa	100.0	0.9	98.0	0.5	0.6	100.0	0.1	0.1	57.1	41.9	0.8
Fulani	100.0	0.5	91.7	7.3	0.5	100.0	-	0.4	38.6	58.4	2.4
Other tribes (incl. the Kru)	100.0	37.2	22.5	32.7	7.6	100.0	1.5	1.7	7.0	86.0	1.8

In addition, ancient Ghana's capital city consisted of two towns, one of which was inhabited by the Muslims. The Muslim town was large and possessed twelve mosques in which the faithful assembled for prayers on Fridays<sup>9</sup>. Furthermore, there were Imams and Muezzins as well as jurists and scholars. This was a sort of Zongo, that is, Muslims' or Strangers' quarter<sup>10</sup>. Enid Schildkrout illustrates similar Islamic factors affecting Muslim quarters in the modern Kumasi, Ashanti capital<sup>11</sup>. According to Eva Meyerowitz, earlier than 1595, the royalty of Bona Kingdom (one of the neighbours of the Bono Kingdom) were forced by their king, Djakpa, to adopt Islam<sup>12</sup>. Meyerowitz again reports that a *zongo* even existed during the time of Bono-Manso<sup>13</sup>. Thus we see that by the time Europeans entered West Africa, Islam had made its place, with the African becoming Islamized in certain ways. Islam was already serving the purpose of government and politics.

The first current of Islamization in West Africa had an economic basis<sup>14</sup>. The Arab conquerors of North Africa had no desire to expand south of the Sahara. They were concerned instead with the organization of the gold trade. Habib ibn Abi 'Ubaida led an expedition against Negroes in A.D. 736 and his son Abdar-Rahman organized the caravan route to Awdaghost<sup>15</sup>. By the end of the seventh century, A.D., Muslims from Egypt, Ifriqiya, and the Maghrib attended markets in the Sudan. It was the same trade which brought Muslims in contact with the forest states of West Africa<sup>16</sup>. As Bravmann puts it, "The evidence is plain that virtually all the forest states came under the influence of Islam through the agency of traders. Their movements resulted not only in the creation of complex and active systems of trade but also in the continued advancement of Islam in West Africa"<sup>17</sup>. (1974:8)

Another factor which contributed to Islamic contact with the forest states was migration. After the fall of the three medieval Sudanic kingdoms of Ghana, Mali and Songhay and the fall in the fortunes in the eighteenth century of market towns like Begho and Old Bima, there were migrations of large groups of Muslims, smaller family units, occupational classes and individuals to the forest states of West Africa<sup>18</sup>. Undoubtedly, many Dyula and Hausa Muslims migrated to Gyaman, Bonoland and subsequently to the Ashanti<sup>19</sup>.

In addition, individual scholars contributed to the dissemination of Islam, forming Quranic Schools throughout West Africa<sup>20</sup>. Bravmann wrote, "From this base successive generations of Saghanughu scholars and their students established Quranic Schools throughout the savanna regions of Guinea, the Ivory Coast, Upper Volta and Ghana, many of which are still active today"<sup>21</sup>. Most traditional states in northern Ghana received Islam through the spread of Islamic education; and today, tribal groups such as the Dagomba, the Wala and many others are considered to be part of the Islamic world<sup>22</sup>. Levtzion, (1968) in his historical study, treats the impact of Islam on chiefs of Northern Ghana, focusing on Dagomba, Mamprusi, Wala and their contact with the forest states, especially the Bono and the Ashanti<sup>23</sup>.



## Islam And Education

Islamic impact on the the Ghanaian Societies was not only religious, political and economic; it also embraced other cultural values, especially folklore. The influence of Islam is particularly apparent in the area of literary tradition, material culture and folk medicine, which are discussed below.

Thomas Hodgkin's study on the literary tradition in Ghana is significant as a general survey of Islamic literary tradition. Although the materials presented in this project form a small fraction of the total body of Islamic literature that exists in Ghana, they are authentic as Muslim literature. Writes Hodgkin, "It is a literature which can properly be called, 'Islamic', in the sense that its authors were Muslims, trained in Islamic sciences, conscious of their relationship with the Islamic past, and regarding literature as a vehicle for the expansion of Islamic values",<sup>24</sup>. These materials indeed throw light on the history of Ghana and West Africa in general. They are also genuine since they came from the libraries of local '*ulama*' who were themselves brought up in Islamic literary tradition. The materials were constantly used for the purpose of teaching and also for individual study. Hodgkin discovered copies of *Dead Sea Scrolls* written by al-Hajj 'Umar Ibn Abi Bakr al-Salghawi, Malam al-Hasan and many others<sup>25</sup>. Some of these materials are examples of devotional poems, geneological work, and poetry (*shi'r*) by authors like Sheikh 'Umar Bamba of Banda. There are also composed works of *madh*, or poems in praise of the Prophet Muhammed. According to Hodgkin, these poems have a double rhyme-scheme which is based on all the letters of the Arabic alphabet<sup>26</sup>. Hodgkin again reports that there are praise poems, love poems, poems of social commentary, social criticism and poems which reflect on history. In addition, some of the materials are personal experience stories, religious morals and expressions against European colonial penetration. There are also poems dealing with the influenza epidemic of 1918, including the symptoms and treatment<sup>27</sup>.

By the sixteenth century the Muslims had established schools in Ghana Although most of the schools were in the north, there were also some in the Bono and Asante<sup>28</sup>. "The Community of scholars and schools that grew up around them, in such centres as Bona, Banda, Wa, Yendi, and Kumasi, were naturally sensitive to external intellectual and literary influences from other parts of the Muslim world<sup>29</sup>.

By the late nineteenth century Salaga had become the most prominent center for learning. Many African languages, particularly Hausa, were used as well as Arabic. Ali Mazrui feels such use of African languages was due to the suspicion African Muslims had of the English language. "*Muslims in Africa south of the Sahara have been both among those who have been relatively suspicious of the English language as a factor in cultural transformation and among those who have shown an aptitude for speaking it well*"<sup>30</sup>. Arabic was one of the media of communication in the nineteenth century. According to Ivor Wilks, "*In the nineteenth century, however, the Ashantehene came increasingly to conduct their correspondence in writing: in Dutch to Elmina, in English to the Cape Coast, and in Arabic to the provincial rulers and imams in the northern hinterland*"<sup>31</sup>. Many Arabic lexical items were also borrowed and incor-

porated into many African languages. Frederick Migeod believed that: *"This is borne out by the fact that the Arabic words borrowed or incorporated into the language (Hausah) are not, in most cases, taken from the modern colloquial but from classical Arabic"*<sup>32</sup>.

Today in both Techiman-Bono and Kumasi-Ashanti, the Ahamadiyya Muslim sect has established elementary and high schools which teach both Arabic and English.

### **Islam and Material Culture**

Another area in which Islam has had an impact is material culture, especially art and craft. In his book, *Ponoply of Ghana*<sup>33</sup>, A.A. Kyeremanten, the former Director of the Ghana National Cultural Center, illustrates the significant role Islam has played in the art of Ghana. This work concerns both the northern and the forest regions of Ghana, which also include the Bono and the Ashanti. He discusses Islamic architecture and other material objects such as clothing and Quranic charms. *Batakarikesee*, an Northern smock, is today an efficacious and powerful royal war gown for Bono, Asante and other Akan kings<sup>34</sup>. Meyerowitz reports that in the 1700's the Bono built their houses with flat roofs in the Sudanic style like those of the Hausa and also that Bono men wore the embroidered gown of the type the Hausa still wear today<sup>35</sup>.

One of the current occupations of Muslims in Accra, Techiman-Bono and Kumasi is tailoring (in Western and Islamic styles)<sup>36</sup>. The well-known '*dasikyɪ*' embroidered shirts from Ghana and other parts of West Africa are manufactured by these Muslim tailors. There are other Muslim specialists - artisans plying their skills as iron-workers, goldsmiths, bead-makers, weavers, glassware, charm makers and others in the dyeing industry<sup>37</sup>. Rene Bravmann's study, *Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa*, is a remarkable work which covers several aspects of Islamic art in West Africa. He concentrates on the Mande World as well as central Ghana, especially the Bono and the Ashanti regions. Bravmann believes that though these areas lack intense Islamization, aspects of the religion have filtered down into traditional life of the people<sup>38</sup>. In Banda, the paramount chief had a white linen cloth wrapper with Quranic inscriptions<sup>39</sup>. Most Akan arts do not exclude Islamic influence.

### **Islam and Folk Medicine**

Islamic medicine, faith healing and methods of divination are not unwelcome in Akan societies. In fact, they introduce parallels to Akan indigenous methods of healing since many diseases are considered to be spiritual<sup>40</sup>.

According to Malefijt, *"When illness is believed to arise from the anger of supernatural powers, prevention will take the form of endeavouring to remain in good terms with the gods and spirits. Because the rules of these relationships coincide with the value system of the group, this belief will contribute to upholding the norms of the society"*<sup>41</sup>. The Muslim clerics in Bono and Asante function as medicine men. Their divination practices enable them to diagnose physical and emotional problems and to provide cures. Some of these Muslims specialize in

sand or cowrie divination and their clients come from all ethnic communities, including many Bono and Asante, and northern Muslims. According to I.M. Lewis, Muslim theology is tolerant in its attitude towards divination, magic, witchcraft and sorcery. "*Islam fully approves and sanctions magical procedures which are directed towards such legitimate ends as the cure of disease, the prevention and curtailment of misfortune, and the assurance of prosperity and success*"<sup>42</sup>.

Although the Bono and the Asante accept Islamic magical systems, belief in saints is not included for it has not taken root in the Black Islamic world<sup>43</sup>. The Akan speakers are mainly interested in medicine to protect against witches or catch thieves, and amulets, bracelets, and necklaces which are meant to ensure physical vitality. According to Wilks, in the nineteenth century many Muslims visited King Osei Bonsu's court; among these were the Arab medical staff who recorded casualties of war<sup>44</sup>. Today in Techiman-Bono and Kumasi, there are Muslims who travel north regularly for herbs for curing many different kinds of diseases.

Aside from individual personal charms, there are Muslim charms at the court of the Akan kings. Bravmann reports on the Muslim charms associated with the court of *Nafana*, a non-Islamic town in central Ghana. He discovered that *Asipim* chairs and *akonkromfi* throne of the *Nafana* court were decorated with Muslim charms. There were also amulets which consisted essentially of scraps of papers with cabalistic signs or portions from the Quran written on them<sup>45</sup>. The use of other charms by Akan royal families is not restricted to the items of regalia such as head-gear, state swords, the *batakarikese* smock to which are sewn talismans. Again Bravmann recalls that in Bampo and Begho the earth priest pours Mande holy water on earth shrines to ensure the continued fertility of the soil<sup>46</sup>. (p. 97)

In Akan societies today, deities are not far removed from Islamic influence. For example, shrines of Taa Mensah (the third Tano deity of the Akan traditional pantheon, and the *Asubonten*, are decorated with Muslim caps during festivals and celebrations. There are also Muslim herbalists who cure people by preparing special roots and herbs suspended in a blue-black liquid derived from the washing of Quranic writing boards.

These are but few example of Islamic influences on Ghanaian societies and folklore; further research is needed to determine the full impact of Islam on Akan folk tales and other traditional genres.

### Christianity and the Akan Speakers

Although Islam had taken roots in tropical Africa long before the coming of the Europeans, the evangelization of Christianity slowly took hold of many African hearts. Consequentially, the rapidity with which changes have occurred in Africa is due to Western influence spearheaded by the propagation of the Gospel. Several scholars have written about the subject. The works of Rev. R. Laroche, Rev. John Mbiti and Ruth Readon on East Africa; I. Tufuoh; Bolaji Idowu and Asare Opoku on West Africa are a few examples<sup>47</sup>.

In West Africa Christianity, unlike Islam, entered by way of the sea. Consequently, the largest Christian communities are found in the coastal regions of Ivory Coast, Dahomey, Nigeria and Ghana<sup>48</sup>. In Ghana, Elmina, a Fante-Akan community on the coast, was the first to receive European contact. By 1482 the Portuguese had already reached the Elmina people; they built a castle and a church in the forts for the Africans and a catholic form of service was introduced<sup>49</sup>. With regard to the early church service in the forts, Hans Debrunner wrote: "The service consisted of a sermon, prayers, readings from the Bible, and singing. The great hall was decorated with halberds and guns and, according to Hemmersam, it resembled an arsenal more than a church"<sup>50</sup>.

Besides Portuguese activities and Catholicism, by 1750 the Anglican mission had settled at Cape Coast, another Fante-Akan town. By 1828 the Danish had established the first Basel missionaries at Christiansborg in Accra. Four years later they left the Coast and went inland to Akropong in the Akwapim district. In 1835 the Wesleyan missionaries had already arrived at Cape Coast and later established mission stations at Anomabu, Kumasi and other places.

It is true that Christianity started slowly at the coastal areas of Ghana, but it gradually took hold of a large proportion of the Ghanaian population. One of the most important factors which contributed to the rapid spread of Christianity was Western education.

All along the missionaries established schools to educate some of the people. The mission schools were tied into religion and therefore those who became students of these schools automatically became Christians. By 1860 the missionaries had already sent some of their African students to England to study European-style worship. For example, Philip Quacoe<sup>51</sup>, ordained as a clergyman by the Church of England, returned to Cape Coast, his native land, to preach the Gospel. Earlier, the Dutch, who superseded the Portuguese in their missionary work, had sent Jacob Capitein and William Anton Amo to Europe to be educated. In 1876 the Wesleyan mission founded Cape Coast Mfantsepm, the first boys secondary school in the Gold Coast.

Supplementing Western education was the development of vernacular literature in the missionary schools. Unlike Islamic education, which stressed the Arabic texts, the Christian missionaries devoted time to studying African languages. They wrote many of the school textbooks in the vernacular and taught reading in the local languages. Some of the missions established presses, such as the Presbyterian Press of the Gold Coast. The Basel mission concentrated on studying the Akwapim Twi dialect, while the Wesleyan Methodist mission wrote in the Fante dialect. Christaller, a Basel missionary, published the first Twi dictionary in 1875. By 1880 the Bible had been translated into the Twi language of the Akan peoples<sup>52</sup>.

Another important contribution made by Christian missionary education was in the area of music. Asante Darkwa, in his article "New Horizon in Music and Worship in Ghana," gives a general historical survey of Christian impact of Ghanaian music, especially church hymns which brought changes to the Ghanaian style of worship<sup>53</sup>. The missionaries translated several Western hymns into Twi.

Darkwa wrote:

*It is important to note that the new Twi hymnbook was not just a collection of traditional hymns. It included compositions of well-known Western composers of classical music such as J.S. Bach, Beethoven, Mendelson, Handel, Haydn, Gluck, Orlando di Lasso, and Mozart, as well as those of other 'minor' Western composers<sup>54</sup>. (p. 64)*

In addition to music, the introduction of Western education<sup>55</sup> by the missionaries was strictly integrated with government and politics. The governmental set up in Ghana after independence was based on a European model of the parliamentary system. This new model replaced the traditional tribal systems the chieftaincy.

While it is true that the Europeans brought some important benefits to the Africans, it seemed that Christianity mainly prepared the way for Western civilization. To the Europeans, Africa was a dark continent which could be illuminated only by gradual imperial penetration. The interest of missionary work in Ghana was not only to bring salvation to the African, but also to establish profitable trade. Between 1828 and 1874 the activities of Europeans on the Gold Coast were appalling; there were several conflicts between European nations on the Gold Coast. For example, the Dutch sacked the Portuguese fort and the English and the Danes became rivals of the Dutch<sup>56</sup>. The main issue in such conflicts was the question of which European nation should control the trade of the Gold Coast. Lord Lugard, one of the British administrators, summarized European intentions in tropical Africa as follows:

*One can see what it means: it is moral annexation. The evolution of colonial empires of this kind follows a well-known process of which the stages are in a measure inevitable: first, travellers, missionaries, and traders; then treaties of commerce and friendship; then a kind of protectorate half concealed under the form of an unequal alliance; afterwards the delimitation of spheres of influence and the declaration of a kind of right of priority; then a protectorate properly so called, the establishment of tutelage, the appointment of Residents and all that follows in their train; and finally, annexation pure and simple<sup>57</sup>.  
(p. 16)*

From this statement we could see that the main European interest was enhancement of their own economies rather than civilization for the African. J.S. Trimingham, commenting on early European interest in West Africa, wrote:

*The propagation of Christianity in West Africa derives its characteristics from its peripheral association with Western Civilization, the agents of whose expansion were motivated by false gods, and from the development of imperialism and commercialism in the past to the economic, scientific, and political panaceas of the present. In this context this propagation contrasts with the diffusion of Christianity among the pagan tribes of Europe<sup>58</sup>. (p. 28)*

During the propagation of Christianity to the European pagans in the middle of the seventh century, worship of the old gods did not die out at once. Although the European pagans were willing to accept the Christian dogma, they were also reluctant to give up their heritage. Pope Gregory I himself advised his missionaries to leave pagan shrines alone, and to try to introduce Christian worship gradually alongside pagan practices. This mingling of Christianity and paganism gave rise to such syncretic traditions as the celebration of Christ's birth day on December 25, the approximate date of the pagan winter festivals, such as the Teutonic Yuletide, the Roman Saturnalia, Kalends and others<sup>59</sup>.

The introduction of the Gospel to Ghana and other nations in tropical Africa was much more rigid in form than it had been in Europe. No respect was paid to the African way of life, especially the cultural ethos. The first goal of the European missionaries in Africa was to dissuade the Africans from their own cultural values. As Kofi Asare Opoku observed:

*The negative attitude towards African culture which led to an intolerant rejection of African experience, has become a heritage of the church in Africa and up to the present time, when most of the churches are in African hands, there is still the feeling that too much familiarity with African culture would sap the essential Christian flavour from the church's being and existence; and there is the constant insistence that the church must maintain its distinct identity and be different from the cultural environment in which it finds itself. evidence of this may be found in the church's overcautious attitude, bordering on fear, and its grudging acceptance of elements of African culture into its life and worship.<sup>60</sup> (p. 111)*

Despite the fact that early Christian missionaries tried to dissuade Africans from their own heritage, the presence of traditional beliefs, within African Christianity is overwhelming. Belief in the Supreme Being, *Nyame*, respect for the ancestors and fear of the supernatural, especially witchcraft, are all beliefs shared by Christians, Muslims and the practitioners of traditional religion.

## Notes

- 1) Ghana Population Census, 1960
- 2) Although these three religions are listed in the 1960 census material, there is no information on the activities of these religions, and there are no visible Hindu, Jewish and Buddhist temples in Ghana.
- 3) In Techiman, members of the extended families sometimes belong to different religions. The solidarity of the family is more important than religious affiliation; religion does not break down the family system.
- 4) For further information on Bono religious categories, see D.M. Warren, "*Disease, Medicine, and Religion Among the Techiman-Bono of Ghana*". Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University 1974, pp. 95 - 98.
- 5) For information on spiritual churches in Techiman see Warren and Brempong, *Techiman Traditional Histories*, Legon: University of Ghana. Forthcoming. Several spiritual churches in Techiman clap hands and dance to the church hymns. A typical church which performs dancing and hand clapping is the True Church of Christ. I spent several weeks with this particular church collecting information on their activities.
- 6) Warren, M.D. 1974 "*Disease, Medicine, and Religion Among the Techiman-Bono of Ghana*", Ph.D. Dissertation, Indiana University, U.S.A. p. 95.
- 7) *Ibid.*
- 8) Adu Boahen, A. 1964 *Topics in West African History*. London: Longman Green and Co., Ltd., p. 10.
- 9) *Ibid.*
- 10) *Ibidem.*
- 11) For information on "zongo" see Enid Childkraut, 1978 *People of the Zongo*. London: Cambridge University.
- 12) Meyerowitz, Eva 1952 *The Sacred State of the Akan*. Faber and Faber Ltd., London, p. 23

- 13) Meyerowitz, Eva 1952 **Akan Traditions of Origin**, Faber and Faber Ltd., London, p. 46.
- 14) Trimingham, Spencer 1962 **History of Islam in West Africa**, London: Oxford University Press, p. 27.
- 15) *Ibid.*
- 16) *Ibidem.*
- 17) Bravmann, Rene 1874 **Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa**. London: Cambridge University Press, p. 8.
- 18) *Ibid.*
- 19) *Ibid.*
- 20) *Ibid.*, pp. 63-67.
- 21) *Ibidem.*, p. 9.
- 22) Fikry-Atallah, Mona 1972 **"Oral Tradition of the Wala of Wa" in African Folklore** edited by Richard M. Dorson. New York: Doubleday and Co., , pp. 397 - 440.
- 23) Levtzion, Mehemia 1968 **Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa**. London: Oxford Clarendon Press.
- 24) Hodgkin, Thomas 1966 **"The Islam Literacy Tradition in Ghana"**, in **Islam in Tropical Africa**, edited by I.M. Lewis. London: Oxford University Press, p. 443.
- 25) *Ibid.*
- 26) *Ibidem.*
- 27) *Ibidem.*
- 28) *Ibidem.*
- 29) *Ibid.*, p. 457



- 30) Mazrui, Ali 1971 *"Islam and the English Language in East and West Africa"* in *Language Use and Social Change*, edited by W.H. Whiteley. London: Oxford University Press, , p. 179.
- 31) Wilks, Ivor 1975 *Asante in the Nineteenth Century*. London: Cambridge University Press, , p. 40.
- 32) Migeod, Frederick 1911 *The Languages of West Africa*. London: Kegan Paul, Trench Trubner and Co. Ltd., p. 211.
- 33) Kyeremantem, A.A. 1964 *Ponoply of Ghana*. London: Longman Green and Co. Ltd.
- 34) *Ibid.*, p. 69.
- 35) Meyerowitz, E. 1952 *The Sacred State of the Akan*. Faber and Faber Ltd., London p. 186.
- 36) For current occupation of Muslims in Ghana, see Schildkraut, 1978 *People of the Zongo*, London: Cambridge University Press. p. 56.
- 37) Bravmann, Rene 1974 *Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa*, London: Cambridge University Press p. 11.
- 38) *Ibid.*
- 39) *Ibidem.*
- 40) For spiritual and non-spiritual diseases see D.M. Warren, 1974 *"Disease, Medicine, and Religion Among the Techiman-Bono of Ghana"*, pp. 252-323.
- 41) Annemarie de Wal Malefijt, 1968 *Religion and Culture*, New York: Macmillan and Co., p. 262.
- 42) Lewis, I.M. 1966 *Islam in Tropical Africa*. London: Oxford University Press, p. 65.
- 43) Trimmingham, Spencer 1968 *The Influence of Islam Upon Africa*. London: Longman Green and Co. p. 57.

- 44) Wilks, Ivor                      1976                      **Asante in the Nineteenth Century.** London: Cambridge University Press, p. 344.
- 45) Bravmann, Rene                      1974                      **Islam and Tribal Art in West Africa.** London: Cambridge University Press P. 88.
- 46) *Ibid.*, p. 97.
- 47) These scholars have contributed important articles about the activities of the missionaries in Tropical Africa. See **Christianity in Tropical Africa** edited by C.G. Baeter. London: Oxford University Press, 1968.
- 48) For large Christian communities in the Coast of West Africa, see John S. Trimmingham's 1955                      **The Christian Church and Islam in West Africa.** London: S.C.M. Press, Ltd., 1955, p. 24.
- 49) Adu Boahen, A                      1967                      "*Topics in West African History*" London: Longman's Green and Co. Ltd., p. 106.
- 50) Debrunner, Hans W.                      1967                      **A History of Christianity in Ghana.** Accra: Waterville Publishing House, p. 37.
- 51) Quaoe is believed to have little success in converting his own people to Christianity because of the negative actions and attitudes of the English authorities towards the Africans. For further information on his work see I. Tufuoh's "*Relations between Christian Missions, European Administration, and Trades in the Gold Coast, 1828 - 74*" in **Christianity in Tropical Africa**, pp. 34 - 56.
- 52) Contrary to Christianity, the Koran is still not translated into the Twi language. Only few verses have been translated. See D.M. Warren's 1976                      **Bibliography and Vocabulary of the Akan (Twi-Fante) Language of Ghana.** Bloomington: Indiana University, pp. 85 - 120.
- 53) Asante Darkwa                      1980                      "*New Horizons in Music and Worship in Ghana*" in **African Urban Studies**, No. 8 pp. 63 - 70.
- 54) *Ibid.*, p. 64

- 55) In addition to Western education the Europeans especially the Portuguese introduced many important plants to the Gold Coast. These include oranges, lime, sugarcane, maize, cocoyam and cassava.
- 56) For the activities and hostility between the Europeans on the Gold Coast see A. B. Ellis, 1971 **A History of the Gold Coast**. New edition, London, Dublin: Curzon Press.
- 57) Lugard, Lord 1965 **The Mandate in British Tropical Africa**, London and Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson Ltd., fifth edition, p. 16.
- 58) Trimmingham, S. 1955 **The Christian Church and Islam in West Africa**, London: SCM Press Ltd., p. 25
- 59) For information on introduction of Christianity to European pagan in the Middle of the Seventh Century see "*A New Europe from the Ruins of Rome's Empire*" in **The Last Two Million Years**, London and New York: 1974, pp. 139 - 147. For further information see Robert J. Smith, "*Festivals and Celebrations*" in **Folklore and Folklife**, edited by Dorson, Richard M.. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971, pp. 159 - 172.
- 60) Opoku, K. A. 1978 "*Changes within Christianity: The Case of the Musama Disco Christo Church*" in **Christianity in Independent Africa**. London: Rex Collings Ltd., p. 111.
- 61) One informant told me that a Christian who does not believe in witchcraft does not believe that there is the devil. Hence any Christian who does not believe in the devil does not believe in the powers of Jesus Christ.
- 62) Brempong, Owusu 1996 "They have used A Broom To Sweep my Womb: The Concept of Witchcraft in Ghana" **Research Review**, Vol. 12, Nos 1 & 2, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon.