

## Is Everything Cultural Traditional Worship? A Ghanaian Response

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### Abstract:

The extent to which religion permeates the life of a Ghanaian has long been identified. The Ghanaian cultural practices and African Traditional Worship appear to be infused. Most Ghanaians who are Christians are also conscious and interested in their culture. However, aspects of some of these cultural practices such as puberty rite, installation of chiefs, royal burials have been perceived as idol worship by some Christians. Whilst a pastor felt the need to be installed a chief so that he could Christianize his traditional institution, his mother Church, The Salvation Army, Ghana compelled him to step down from being a sub-chief. This qualitative paper propped into existing literature, researcher's participant observations, informal discussions and an interview with a pastor enstooled a sub chief and destooled by orders of his church. It discusses some cultural practices in the Ghanaian setting to unravel the thin line between culture and Traditional Worship. We argue that there is a thin line between culture and traditional worship.

**Key words:** Culture, Traditional Worship, Ghanaian, idol worship

### Introduction:

The contribution of religion to Ghana's development has been enormous. Religion has contributed in no small way to Ghana's education, independence and politics. Issues of religion and culture have been given national attention to the extent of having a ministry of Tourism and Culture and at another time Ministry of Chieftaincy and Religious Affairs. It is therefore prudent to discuss the relationship between culture religion in this series which is on how the humanity is contributing to national development.

African Traditional Religion and Ghanaian cultural practices seem infused. Mbiti has noted, "That the African is notoriously religious", the Ghanaian inclusive. This has generally been explained that in Ghana everything has a religious connotation. Mbiti adds that the extent to which religion permeates the life of Africans, thus, Ghanaians included is in no small way: (Mbiti, 1990). One possible cause for this perception is that most indigenous Ghanaian practices have taboos attached as ways of enforcing the practices.

Amenga-Etego noted that among the Nankani in the Upper East of Ghana, everyday practices such as fetching water, harvesting food and dumping

waste materials have religious restrictions (taboos) which must be observed by the Nankani women, (Amenga-Etego, 2016) The belief is that the spiritual and physical parts of all aspects of life are much intertwined as has been noted by Opoku (1978), Bolaji (1962) and Mbiti (1990). Many other scholars have consented that African Traditional Religion and African cultural practices are inseparable. This presupposes that all cultural practices are religious in Ghana. However, Shorter and Onyancha, in their work on “Secularism in Africa, Introducing the Problem” contend John Mbiti’s assertion that, “*African people are notoriously religious (and) religion permeates into all the departments of life so that it is not easy or possible to isolate it*”. They have noted that with the influence of Western education and globalization, there are some Africans who are even non-religious, (Shorter & Onyancha, 1997)

The close link between cultural practices and Traditional Religion has led to some converts of other religions such as Christianity to abandon some cultural practices that may not be evil. Ganusah points out some challenges that some young converted Christians at Ewe-Dome had with certain aspects of the rites of passage. To the young ladies in question, the cultural component of the puberty rites was infused with Traditional Religious rituals which they dissented. A consensus was reached and the puberty rite was done without certain ritual activities which were noted to be “fetish”. (Ganusah, 2008). It has been noted that a billboard has been erected in Accra promoting atheism with the bold inscription, “Don’t Believe in God, you are not alone.” Thus, an atheist group has been formed in Accra, Ghana. Max Assimeng has noted that from the second world war the West African subregion has seen a speedy transformation. This includes urbanization which has affected the traditional and cultural practices of the citizens, (Assimeng, 2010)

The focus of this research is to unravel the thin line between Ghanaian cultural practices and African Traditional religion hence the question: Is everything cultural African traditional worship? We are focusing on the Ghanaian situation with

the view that the Ghanaian situation may not be different from other African communities.

### **Elucidation of Culture**

Culture is explained as a set of beliefs, ideas and ways of behaving especially relating to a particular society, race or religion. Cassell Popular English dictionary explains culture as customary activities or social forms of activities. It involves values and practices of traditional or inherited practices. This deals with beliefs, values and the practices associated with that.

Social anthropologists do not see culture to be as simple as such. Many varied definitions have been given by anthropologists on what culture is. Few of such definitions are as follows:

‘Culture ... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society: (Spencer-Oatey, 2012)

‘Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievements of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other, as conditional elements of future action.’(Kroeber & Kluckhohn, 1952)

‘Culture consists of the derivatives of experience, more or less organized, learned or created by the individuals of a population, including those images or encodements and their interpretations (meanings) transmitted from past generations, from contemporaries, or formed by individuals themselves. (Schwartz, 1992)

‘Culture is a fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people, and that influence (but do not determine) each member’s behaviour and his/her interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour: (Spencer-Oatey, 2008)

In this paper we are looking at culture as a way of life of a group of people which is influenced by their beliefs systems. People do certain activities because of what they believe. The beliefs tell them if you do not do such things what will happen is not good and when you what will happen to you will be good. The beliefs direct members to comply with taboos to avoid having bad repercussions, and people are encouraged to observe certain morals in order to attract rewards.

The belief system of the Ghanaian affects his entire life from birth, naming, puberty, marriage, nursing of babies and death. Each of these stages has special rites that are performed in the traditional way. The beliefs and values of the African have led to celebrating certain festivals.

Before Christianization of Ghana, the dominant religion was African Traditional Religion (ATR) which has been rendered by some scholars as “fetish religion”, “paganism” or “idol worship”. The traditional belief system influenced the practices or activities of the African hence Mbiti noted that the African is notoriously religious: (Uchenna, 2008)

This means that almost every aspect of the Ghanaian is not distinct from his religious beliefs. Farming and all other occupations of the Ghanaian has a link with his religion and belief system.

With the introduction of Christianity in Ghana, the belief system of the converted Ghanaians has moved from belief in the Almighty God through lesser gods and ancestors to belief in the Almighty God through his only begotten son, Jesus: (Pauw, 2024)

This paper examines some traditional cultural practices among the Akan of Ghana with the view to attempting to distinguish which cultural practices have direct link with ATR and which practices have not. The objective is to guide the converted Ghanaian Christian not to completely abandon his/her rich cultural practices on grounds that all cultural practices are fetish. The paper looks at some of the rites of passage and some traditional festivals to draw the line as to which

elements of the rites or the festivals are traditional worship and which aspects are not.

The Akan constitute the largest ethnic group in Ghana. They are found mostly in the Eastern, Ashanti, Brong Ahafo, Central and Western regions of Ghana. Some Akan are found outside the borders of Ghana such as Côte d’Ivoire, Togo and some are also in Benin. The Akan mostly speak Twi (Asante or Akwapim), Bono and Fanti: (Kissi & Eck, 2017)

### **Rites of Passage: Naming Ceremony**

Omosade and Adelumo observe that the passages of life in Africa, Ghana inclusive, are great events of life which have religious associations and are marked with religious ceremonies: (Omosade & Adelumo, 1979) Naming ceremonies are no exceptions to this observation. However, there are obvious distinctions or variations in this ceremony from one ethnic group to another and the religious significance may be relative to individual groups.

To the Akan, for example, the name of an individual is an essential component of his being. It connotes not only his personality but also his spiritual status as well as destiny. Kwesi Ra Nehem also reiterates that “The name is an essential component of the spiritual anatomy of the African person.”: (Nehem, 2012) Akan also regard names and the process of naming essential, since everyone and almost every living entity has a place and mission in the world.

An Akan family therefore observes this occasion with enthusiasm. The *Abusua panyin* usually chairs or oversees this meeting for its appropriate adherence to the culture of the clan. The occasion is normally scheduled on the eighth day after the birth of the new member of the family. The various rituals at this ceremony are interwoven with cultural and religious significance. After an Akan baby is born it is kept indoors for eight days. The eighth day is the day the public is allowed to see the baby and it is first done at the naming ceremony – “Din to”. It is observed that “The purpose of waiting seven days after the birth of a child is to ensure that he or she has come to stay

on earth and will not prematurely return to *Asamando* ("abode of the ancestors")." He further asserts that, until that day, the child is regarded as a "stranger" (*ɔhɔho*). Thus, the Akan say to the new infant child, *woaba a tena aseɛ* ("We wish you to stay after your appearance"); this phrase is a greeting that is said to an infant to wish the child long life. (Nehem, 2012, Agonglovi, 2024)

Before the scheduled day of the ceremony, items such as gin (*nsa*), two glass cups (*nkuruwa*), a bottle of water (*nsuo*), a mat (*ketɛ*), a calabash (*pakyi* or *kora*), and a broom (*ɔprae*) for young women and a cutlass (*nkrante*) for boys are gathered. Early in the morning of the scheduled day, two elders (*mpanyimfo*) of good character from the father's family are sent to go and bring the child and mother from the mother's house. One elder is chosen to perform the ceremony; if it is a male child, that person chosen will be a man and conversely. The mother bathes the infant and they both (mother and child) dress in white cloth and stay indoors until the ceremony begins. Certain sacred beads (such as *bɔɔm*, *ahenewa*, and *abobɔɛ*) are put on the child, and marks made with white clay (*hyire*) specific to this ceremony are put on the child and mother. As early as 5 or 6 in the morning, close relatives and friends of the mother help in the preparation. (Agyekum, 2006).

The ceremony starts with an opening libation (*mpaeɛ*) poured by an elder who announces the occasion and the purpose. The mother's family provides the drink used for this libation, which is poured at every doorstep and the main entrance to the house. The father's family provides the drink for the second libation. After this libation, the child is brought out and stripped naked. The child is then placed on a prepared area of the ground or on a comfortable cushion.

Around 7 a.m., when all guests have arrived, a female or male elder of the father takes the child to her or his lap and both the water and the gin is poured into separate glasses. Naming the child is the responsibility of the father's family. The father's female or male elder then dips her or his forefinger into the gin or uses a leaf and then drops it on the child's tongue and says, "when we

say that it is gin (symbolic of untruth), say that it is gin" (*sɛ yɛka se nsa a ka se nsa*) three times. The elder does the same with the water: "when we say that it is water (symbolic of truth), say that it is water" (*sɛ yɛka se nsuo a ka se nsuo*), (Konadu, 2023). Both of these tastings advise the child to seek and tell the truth and to distinguish it from falsehood as she or he tries to live a righteous and ethical life.<sup>1</sup>

The child's name is given by the father (*agya*) and the child is then given a name: we will call you ... and this name means ... (*yɛbɛfrɛ wo... ne asekyere din yɛ ...*). From today onward, we will call you ... (*ɛfiri nne rekɔ yɛbɛfrɛ wo ...*). The second name of the child can come from any of the following circumstances: (i) consulting an *ɔkɔmfɔ* (spiritualist/healer) or *ɔbosomfo* (spiritualist/healer), (ii) an elder or ancestor of the father's family of good character, (iii) circumstances of the child's birth, and the like. As such, the second name is properly called *agyadin* (name from the father), which was synonymous with a family name or surname. Most Akan had two names—their "soul" name and the name from their father at birth—before the arrival of the Christian orthodoxy in present-day Ghana. Today, many Akan people have a first, middle, and last name or surname, (Dadey, 2022).

The first name the child receives is called *kra din* or "soul name". This name is determined by the day of the week that the child was born as outlined below.

Day of the week	Associated name (Male)	Associated name (Female)
Sunday	Kwasi/Kwesi	Akosua
Monday	Kwadwo	Adwoa
Tuesday	Kwabena	Abena
Wednesday	Kwaku	Akua
Thursday	Yaw	Yaa
Friday	Kofi	Afua /Afia
Saturday	Kwame	Ama

<sup>1</sup> All researchers have observed the naming ceremony among the Akan on a number of occasions.

From the foregoing we observed two contentious rituals or practices in the naming ceremony; ancestor veneration and pouring of libation. It is these two elements in the ceremony that some Christians and scholars argue amounts to idol worship. As explained by Mbiti and affirmed by Addo Dankwa, the call of the ancestors to grace this occasion is a token of fellowship, respect and hospitality to the departed. It is also asserted that the practice cannot be classified as worship or even religious. (Sara, 2018).

Secondly, libation is clearly an act of worship as indicated by the English Dictionary. *The Oxford Universal Dictionary* defines libation as “The pouring out of wine, etc. in honour of a god... (Onions, 1955). Therefore, if Africans pour libation and call on their ancestors in prayer, it extends beyond “symbols of continuity and contact” (Mbiti, 1990) as Mbiti would want us to understand. This is clearly illustrated in the words of the one who makes the libation where the ancestors called upon are expected to assist the living in one way or the other thereby assigning to them divine abilities. For example, Ganusah illustrates a typical libation among the Ewe-Dome which is exactly the same as the Akan prayers on occasion of a child naming ceremony as follows, (Bonsu Et’al, 2020).

Ago na mi lo!

Tsiami se ne woado togbuiwo gbo be:

Le esime mieyo mi le ndi sia, mi meyo mi de vo dzi o.

Agbe dzi ko miyo mi do.

Le egbe nkekea dzia, miede devi (name)

Eyi ke mia nuto mietso na mi la de go.

Mina lamese devi sia

Be woatsi kple nunya, ade vi na mi kata.

Mina lamese, agbe didi, ga, dzilawo

Be woate nu akpo edzi abe aleyi ke wodze.

Ne amea de be devi sia mano anyi yeano o la,

Mikpo amema gbo kaba.

Mina ameyiwo medzi tsie, nadzi eve, eto, ene.

Agbe neva, fafa neva, ga neva.

Kuse, Kuse, Kuse.

This is translated as follows;

Ago (we ask for your permission)!

The spokesman should listen and take it to the elders, that:

Our call on you this morning is not for anything bad.

Today, we are gathered to outdoor (name)

The child that you yourselves have given to us.

We ask for good health for this child.

We ask for wisdom and growth for him/her.

That will be beneficial to all of us.

We ask for health, long life and money for the parents;

For them to be able to take good care of this child.

Whoever would not like this child to stay alive,

We ask you to see to (i.e. deal with) that person.

Those who have no children should have two, three, four.

We ask for long life, peace and money.

Peace, Peace, Peace. (Ganusah, 2008)

The disagreement between some Christians and the believers of such traditional prayer, as Ganusah observes, is with the calling of the spirit world to inform, to ask for blessings, to see to evil persons in the society or whatever the needs of the people may be. (Ganusah, 2008). It is the ascribing of abilities and powers to these ancestors to bless, curse or punish, give long life and good health, give wealth etc. that some Christians find unacceptable. They find the practice idolatrous

since it involves calling upon other spirit powers besides God. Such Christians believe that the ritual is against the very first commandment of God (Exodus 20:3 NIV) which states “Thou shalt have no other gods before me”. Some African Christians therefore find it difficult to accept this practice.

Again, the New Testament teaches that the work of the ancestors or the gods as mediators between man and God as in the African traditional belief is no longer needed because Christ has taken over that responsibility for all; “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5). The African and for this matter all other peoples do not need, according to Paul, any other mediator except Christ. The African Christian in this sense is therefore relieved of any controversy as far as pouring libation is concerned. Christians believe that the effect of the ancestral veneration and remembrance are aimed at securing the future of the community then becomes untenable in biblical understanding of Christ’s mediation role. It is through Christ that man communicates with God according to the gospel (John 14: 6, 14).

Again, libation is explained as a form of prayer. Nana Addo Panyin II *Adumhene* of Akuapem-Akropong indicates that “We pray to God through libation because the ancestors and divinities called upon to carry our request must be welcome with a drink, hence the phrase “*Nananom nsamanfo nsa, asaase yaa nsa*”, meaning, here is drink, great ancestors, here is drink, god of the earth.<sup>2</sup> In the gospel this role of the ancestors as carriers of petitions and requests is taken over by Christ as the Christian view explains in John 14:14. Jesus then becomes the channel through which the Christian prayer gets to God. It goes to suggest that one cannot hold on to the pouring of libation and still claim to be a Christian. This is because the two have different modes of communicating with God.

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<sup>2</sup>” Interview with Nana Addo Panyin II Adumhene of Akuapem Adukrom on 12<sup>th</sup> June, 2008

Consequently, some churches in Ghana, particularly Pentecostals have adopted a practice of taking over the naming of children born to their congregants. This usually is done at the church premises and mostly with church members who are friends of the couple in attendance. The aim ostensibly is to avoid the couple who are now Christians from engaging in the traditional ceremony which is deemed fetish by the church, so that instead of libation, there would be prayer offered by the pastor in the name of Jesus in line with the Christian beliefs.

### **Marriage Rite among the Akan of Ghana:**

Marriage is an intimate union between a mature man and a mature woman. A man is seen to mature when he can work and provide food, shelter and clothing for himself and the wife and children to be. Among the Akan there is no fixed minimum or maximum age for marriage. A woman is mature for marriage after she has experienced first menses. This is due to the premium the Akan place on procreation in marriage. (Teye Kau, 2020).

Among the Akan it is the man who searches for a woman to marry. Traditionally the father of the man has the responsibility to look for a suitable woman for his son to marry. Certain qualities are looked for before selecting a person for marriage. (Arthur and Mensah, 2021).

Some of the qualities include the following: Moral concerns, thus checking for faithfulness; meaning not having record of immorality or infidelity, health concerns; if there is any history of strange sicknesses such as epilepsy, blindness and mental challenges among others and the pursued attitude to work, thus if the woman is hardworking, if the woman can support her husband in marriage. The traditional perception was that such sickness could affect the offspring in the marriage. And also, immoral acts could be copied by the offspring.

When the father does his investigations on a young lady he intends getting for his son and he is satisfied he declares his intentions to his son. If the son also shows interest, his father goes to the lady’s parents to ask for the hand of their daughter

in marriage. This is to make sure the lady is available and not yet engaged. The woman's parents will also do an investigation similar to what the man's father does as indicated earlier.

On conviction that there is no serious problem in both families, the woman's father would give a list of items to be presented by the groom as the bride price on request. This list of items would normally include and not limited to a travelling suit case, six pieces of lady's clothes, bracelets and ornaments, half pieces of cloth for the bride's mother, one full piece of cloth for the bride's father, and an amount of money for the lady, an amount of money for the brother-in-laws, money for the bride's mother's family, drinks for the elders who sit to officiate the marriage. Some families could demand sewing machine for the lady. The groom's family could negotiate for a reduction of the items, especially the cost of the physical cash demanded, (Hagan, 2023).

After an agreed date has been fixed, both families inform their extended relatives and invite friends to witness the marriage ceremony.

The marriage rite is normally at the woman's father's house or a venue arranged by the woman's family. At the marriage rite four families are to be present, thus the bride's mother and father's families, the groom's mother and father's families, (Arthur and Mensah, 2021).

For the marriage rite proceedings, the bride's family would ask the groom's family their mission. The groom's family spoke's person would respond that they have come to officially ask for the hand of their daughter in marriage for their son. The bride's family would ask for the head drink (bride price) which the groom's family would present in the public. The bride's father and his family would inspect the items presented. The groom is called to be introduced to the gathering as the man coming to marry their daughter. That is followed by the introduction of the bride to the gathering as the woman whose marriage rite they have come to witness. This is also to ensure that the woman she has seen and wants to marry is the actual person and not a substitute. Publicly the

bride is asked by her father whether she agrees to the marriage to the man. This question is asked three times in public to avoid future accusation that she was forced into the marriage without her consent. When the bride consents to the marriage in public her father proceeds to accept the marriage dowry, (Arthur and Mensah, 2021).

After the dowry is accepted the family head of the bride prays for peaceful and fruitful marriage. Traditional prayers are normally in the form of libation to commit the marriage into the hands of the ancestors and family gods. Elders around are given the opportunity to offer pieces of advice to the couple. Then there is refreshment of food and drinks to entertain the gathering and to wish the couple a successful marriage, (Hagan, 2023).

The money (a token) collected for the bride's mother's family is because the Akan have matrilineal inheritance. This money is shared to the immediate and extended family members of the bride. Since the actual money was just a token, the family could use it to buy drinks or salt and share to the family members to, as it well, officially inform them that their daughter has been lawfully married.

The bride is escorted to the groom's house by the close of day to start their marriage life.

### **What aspects of traditional marriage is Traditional Religion?**

The whole process of the marriage rite seems secular, which shows the rich culture of the Ghanaian. However, there are two steps in the marriage procedure which are religious. The consultation of a priest to foretell the future of the marriage and the traditional prayer of libation. With the introduction of Christianity and Islam, most of the new converts of these religions do not consult the traditional priest for the future of their marriages. Also, during the performance of the marriage rite, the prayers for good marriage is not libation but Christian or Islamic prayers. Our participant observation has never seen and traditional marriage rite without a form of prayers.

## Funeral rite among the Akan of Ghana

Funeral rite is a ceremony done as a way of sending the deceased from the land of the living to the land of the dead (spirit world). Funeral is also an official announcement that someone is no longer among the living. It is a farewell ceremony to honour a relative who has passed on to the ancestral world.

The type of funeral rite performed depends on a number of factors such as the age of the deceased, the type of death which took him away, the social status of the person such a chief, a president, etc. We shall be looking at funerals of children and natives who die peacefully.

### Funerals of children from a day old to teenagers:

Traditionally when a child passes on, the body is bathed with soap and hot water. The hot water is to help testify that the body is dead. If the body is not completely dead the heat of the water will give some reaction to prevent burying a person in coma. The body is laid in state overnight for a wake. The idea of not burying the body immediately was to ensure that the body was dead. On certainty that the body was dead, an elder of the family prays by pouring libation to commit the soul of the dead to be received by the ancestors. The body is put in a coffin and sent to be buried at the cemetery. At the cemetery there is a traditional prayer of libation before finally committing the corpse to the grave, (Boaheng, 2023).

When a child of less than a year passes on some families may suspect that the child was a spirit-child that came to waste their resources and time that is why it did not survive. To avoid such disturbances the family may decide to revenge by tormenting the corpse by cutting some parts, like tribal mark on the face or any part of the body and also putting refuse and wooden thorns in the coffin to bury the body with it. This is to send a message to the spirit world that the family abhors child mortality, (Mensah, 2022).

The belief is that if they put a mark (cut) on the body before burial that spirit-child would know

that if it comes back, it would be identified so it will not come back and that will prevent the mother from losing subsequent children. This is a manifestation of the traditional belief in reincarnation. (Toluwale, 2021). After the burial, the family and sympathizers return from the cemetery to mourn for some time. For death of infants, donations are not normally given. By close of the day, they depart and that ends the funeral. If the mother has not lost a child before she is supposed to clad in white clothing for about one month.

### Funeral of adults who die peacefully

When an adult, married or single, passes on in an Akan traditional area the funeral process takes the following steps: Announcement of the death, family meeting to plan the funeral (One week celebration), laying in state, pre-burial gathering, the burial, post burial gathering, forty days celebration and one year celebration.

Announcement of the death:

On the passing on of a person, the people around send messages of the death to immediate family members who are far or near. The immediate family decides on what to do with the corpse, either to bury it immediately or balm (put in a mortuary) and bury later.

The announcement brings people to express condolences to the bereaved family. Sometimes the announcement is made with a drink or money. The invitee on coming to the funeral has to give a donation twice or more than the amount of money or drinks that was used to invite him/her to the funeral, (Boaheng, 2023).

**One week celebration:** The family meeting to plan for the final funeral rite

If the corpse is embalmed or kept at the mortuary, a day is fixed for the family to gather to plan the final funeral rite. This is often the eighth day after the death normally referred to as the one-week celebration. In recent times it the one-week celebration can be after one week, it is based on availability of time of most of the relatives. They will serve some drinks and pour libation for a

peaceful funeral. The meeting decides on how to raise funds for the final funeral rite. The cost of the final funeral rite comes in a form of coffin cost, mortuary cost, transportation and ambulance cost, payment for the undertaker, cost of drinks and food, cost of hiring funeral grounds in some cases, cost of chairs and canopies, and so on. (Adu Gyamfi, et al, 2020)

The total estimates for the funeral are calculated at this meeting and the cost shared among the stakeholders thus, the father's family, the mother's family and if married the spouse and children. Chief mourners are nominated from the family to steer the affairs of the funeral. The date for the final funeral rite is announced and the gathering can be dispersed.

### **Laying in State:**

Whether the person is buried soon after death (a day or two) or embalmed or kept in the morgue, before burial the body is bathed and dressed in nice clothing and laid on a bed. In addition to ensuring that the person is not in coma but actually dead, it is also believed that when a person dies the soul goes to the ancestral world. The ancestors could send him/her back and in that case the person would resurrect. This was a reason for having wake keeping. If by the next morning the body does not resurrect then there is the certainty that he/she is dead.

Before the body is put in a coffin, relatives and the public are allowed to file past the corpse to bid the dead farewell and to literally part company with him from the land of the living. After filing past close relatives are called to the room where the corpse is, the door is closed, if the body is laid in state at an open place, after the filing past the space where the corpse is, it is temporarily enclosed for the corpse to be put in a coffin. Putting the corpse in a coffin is a sacred act not exposed to the public eyes. It is the close relatives who gather around to lift the corpse from the bier to the coffin, (Adinkrah, 2021). The relatives gathered give their final words; this can be a form of fare thee well, asking for blessings from the dead, calling for the dead to revenge on the death

when they suspect that he was killed by a foul means. With the belief in life after death some of the relatives could put money and other items in the coffin for the deceased to use in the next world. Libation is poured to ask for permission from the dead to put his corpse into the coffin and the coffin is closed.

The closed coffin is brought to a durbar ground. Songs are sung with dancing, dirges are played, poetry and tributes are read in memory of the life and works of the dead. The body is sent to the cemetery for burial. At the cemetery libation is poured and the coffin containing the corpse is committed to the grave and covered with soil or concrete. The people then return to the funeral grounds. On returning from the cemetery, they put water at the entrance of the house for all who went to the cemetery to wash their hands. (Ogbonna, 2020).

A table is set and donations are collected from well-wishers. Songs are played, dirges are sung alongside drinking and sometimes eating. This goes on till the chief mourner closes the funeral meeting for the day.

Sometimes in the course of the pre-burial or post burial service the spirit of the dead (*sasa*) can take possession of somebody around and speak through the person. Most of the time, such messages are ecstatic revelations of the cause of the death and causes of other calamities in the family or town or even country at large. It can also be revelations of impending catastrophe. The person would normally remain under ecstasy until the elders pour libation to thank the ancestors for the revelation and to ask for their assistance in dealing with the revelation.

The costume for the funeral is decided by the immediate family. If the deceased is aged the funeral costume can be white and black but most of the time the funeral costume is black, brown or red as symbols of mourning, (Adinkrah, 2021).

### **Elements of Traditional Worship in Akan Funerals**

During funerals among the Akan there is the manifestation of belief in the ancestors. Libation

is done to pray to the ancestors. There is often divination to seek the cause of the death of a relative. These are aspects of African Traditional Religion. However, it has been noted that since funerals are the last respect people pay to their loved ones and relatives it is difficult for individuals not to participate. Both Christians and Traditionalists participate in funerals of loved ones. However, the aspect of libation has been substituted with Christian prayers. Also, Christians are not encouraged to do divination to seek the cause of death of their relatives. With the exception of these the cultural practices of funeral are not idol worship.

### **Festivals and Traditional Worship:**

Many Ghanaian festivals are celebrated in religious manner. However, there are elements of festivals which are not religious but purely cultural. We are looking at the Aday festival and Odwira festival with the view to finding which elements are religious and those that are cultural without religion.

### **The Aday Festivals of the Akan:**

The Aday is one of the sacred days among the Akan. *Aday* is from the Akan word 'da' which means to sleep, it also means to rest. Aday means a resting place, (Opuni-Frimpong,2021). The Aday days are sacred days for visiting the rooms where the stools for the departed chiefs are kept, the Stools House (*nkonguafieso*). Each departed chief who lived and ruled successfully has a stool kept for him which is believed to be the dwelling place for the spirit of the dead chief, (Buerthey & Hansen,2024). These stools are painted black with soot and yolk of eggs to last long. (Asare Opoku, 1970). Certain days on the Akan calendar are set apart for visiting the Stools House to feed the ancestors and to ask for their blessings for the traditional area. These days are the *Aday* days.

Opoku points out that the Akan annual calendar is divided into nine cycles of forty days in each cycle. (Asare Opoku, 1970). Each cycle has two special days, sacred Sunday (*Akwasi*) and sacred Wednesday (*Awukuda*) set apart for visiting the Stools House. The days from one

*Akwasi* and the other is forty days. From *Akwasi* to the next *Awukuda* is twenty three days and from *Awukuda* to the next *Akwasi* is seventeen days.

Akwasi -----> 23 days -----> Awukuda -----  
--> 17 days -----> Akwasi

A day before an *Aday* is called *Dapaa*. So we have Saturday *Dapaa* (*Memeneda Dapaa*) before the Sunday *Aday* and Tuesday *Dapaa* (*Benada Dapaa*). The *Dapaa* is a day for the preparations for the *Aday*. Items necessary for the *Aday* like food stuffs, fire wood, water, drinks, chicken, sheep eggs, and so on are gathered. Drums and all instruments to be used the next day are cleaned and put in order. There is also general cleaning of the palace and the surroundings and nearby foot paths. Generally, there should be no work done on the *Aday* except works related to the *Aday*. At the sunset of *Dapaa* the drummers gather at the palace to drum till late in the evening to announce to the townsfolk that the next day is an *Aday*.

At the dawn of an *Aday* the chief drummer (divine drummer) starts drumming to give appellation to the ancestors and asks for permission from them to start the *Aday*. He then drums to invite the chief and his elders that it is time to come and start the *Aday* ceremony. The chief and those eligible to enter the stool house come around and the chief attendant pours water from a calabash at the entrance to the room, by this he invites the spirits to come out to wash their hands to prepare for the feast for the day. (Asare Opoku, 1970).

The women in the palace will prepare mashed yam or mashed ripped plantain with palm oil. The chief dresses in old mourning cloths of *adinkra* or *kuntunkuni* to show humility to the ancestors. The Chief enters the stools rooms, prostrates, and starts to put the ceremonial food on the stools for the ancestors, starting from the first of the dynasty and ending on the immediate past chief. As he puts the food on their stools to feed them, he simultaneously asks them for prosperity, children, good health and avoidance of calamities from the land.

In the stools rooms the horn blowers blow the horns to praise the ancestors and also to motivate the ruling chief to excel in his tenure. After feeding the stools they come from the stools room to sprinkle food outside for the dead palace attendants and dead royals to eat.

A sheep is slaughtered on the Adae and its blood partly sprinkled on the stools and partly smeared on the forehead and chest of the chief and the immediate royals around, (Buertey & Hansen, 2024). The head and entrails of the sheep are placed before the stools. The queen mother and her crew prepare fufu and soup without salt with the rest of the meat and places it before the stools. After serving all the stools the attendant rings a bell to signify that the spirits are eating. The rest of the meals are served to the chiefs and the palace royals. The meal and meat of the ancestors remain in the stools house till late in the evening when it is believed that they have finished eating then the attendant will go and removed them from the stools house and dump them in dust bins.

The last Adae, which is the ninth one is called big Adae, *Adae Kɔse or Odwira*. It is a one-week festival to mark the end of a calendar year and to begin a new calendar year.

### **Odwira Festival in Akuapim:**

*Odwira* is celebrated among the Akim, Akuapim and the Akwamu of Akan of Ghana. It is the last of the Akwasidae in a traditional calendar year. It is marked in either late September or early October in the Akuapim area and climaxed with a durbar at Akuapim Akropong. It is a festival for cleansing the ancestral stools of any filth that has contacted it or the state throughout the year to the ancestors and the gods, (Buertey & Hansen, 2024).

On the eighth Awukudae festival, a ban is placed on noise making in the form of singing, drumming and funerals mourning. The ban on noise making is called *Adaebutuw* or 'turning over of drums. The ban on noise making lasts for about forty days. Within these days no one goes to the stools house. The ancestors are supposed to be given a time to rest after working for almost the whole

year. The Odwira festival is a weeklong celebration starting from Monday to Friday. Each of the days in the week has special activities to be performed.

**Monday:** The Monday is set apart for clearing the path to the royal mausoleum and tidying up the mausoleum itself. The belief is that even if the ancestors have travelled anywhere, they will come home during the festival and they have to come and find their resting place in good state.

In December 199

**Tuesday:** This is the official day for lifting the ban on noise making and also official launching of the permission to harvest new yams in the year. Tubers of yam are paraded through the principal streets of Akropong to signify that natives can now eat new yam. It is a taboo to harvest yam before the official permission has been announced. The chief sexton (*Adumhene*) and state executioners go to the royal mausoleum to slaughter a sheep to invoke 'the spirit of Odwira'. Thus, to officially inform the ancestors that it is time for the festival and also to ask permission from them. The Adumhene and his team return from the mausoleum at dusk to the paramount chief (*Omanhene*) with a sacredly prepared fluid of red clay from the royal mausoleum. He rubs some on the forehead and chest of the Omanhene and also on the chest and forehead of the queen mother and the palace elders. This is done amidst drumming. The drumming continues till late in the evening. (Asare Opoku, 1970).

**Wednesday:** The Wednesday is a special day for fasting and mourning for the dead especially those who passed on during the year that is ending. All the people dress in red and black cloths mourning and drinking to show their sadness within the year. All suspended funerals during the ban on noise making can be done on that day.

**Thursday:** This is a day for feasting and merry making. Mashed yam and boiled eggs without salt are served to the stools. There is a long procession to the outskirt of Akropong to the town's shrine at Nsorem to thank the God's for giving them new yam. Household prepare food to eat and share.

Strangers can go to the palace and eat. On this Thursday, deep in the night, the chief, the royal chief priest and other royals process with the sacred stools to a stream to ritually cleanse (*dwira*) the stools of evil to end the year peacefully.

**Friday:** Friday is climax of the festival when the chief holds a big durbar. The chiefs and people process to the durbar ground. Depending on the status of the chiefs some sit in palanquin whilst the rest go there under big umbrella. Even the size of the umbrella depends on the status of the chief or queen. The chiefs of higher status have bigger umbrellas whilst chiefs of lower ranks have smaller umbrellas, (Boamah, 2019).

When all the chiefs and sub chiefs are settled at the durbar grounds another procession brings the paramount chief in on a palanquin to the durbar grounds. He comes dancing in the palanquin to display his bravery.

After a while he settles on a royal high stool for the chiefs and subjects to pay homage to him. One after the other the chiefs go to the paramount chief. On reaching him a chief will doff his turban (cornet) bares his chest (brings his clothe below the chest), slips the right foot from the sandals before bowing to shake hands with the paramount chief to show respect and submission to him.

The paramount chief later addresses the gathering on the need to live peacefully, to be of good morals, be hard working, etc. He also uses the occasion to renew his pledge of loyalty to the traditional area and the government of the day in Ghana. He also provides foods and drinks to the gathering. There is much cultural display of singing and dancing which has been attracting tourists from far and near to the durbar. The durbar continues till about sundown when the paramount chief officially closes for the day and that ends the Odwira festival.

The Odwira festival shows a lot of cultural practices of the Akuapim without religion. The funerals on Wednesdays, the costumes, the dancing and the arrangements at the durbar ground, the sitting in palanquin are all cultural.

The religious aspects include libation, veneration of ancestors and the ritual cleansing of the sacred black stool.

### **The Church and Kingship in Ghana:**

Christianity in Ghana has generally enjoyed very cordial relationship with the traditional chiefs generally. For a church to be planted in a town the chiefs who are custodians of the land give permission to the church to have a piece of land to build a chapel on. Most often the chiefs give large portions of land at variably no cost for the churches to build chapel, mission houses, schools and clinics or hospitals, (Quayesi-Amakye, 2015).

However, the historic mission churches saw traditional cultural life as completely fetish so they established the mission quarters normally referred to as the Salem, (Afari, 2024). By that new converts were encouraged to evacuate their old family residence to stay at places near the chapel and even build their new houses there. The new converts were encouraged to abstain from all traditional practices. The reason being that traditional life is not separable from traditional religion. The introduction of drumming in the church and putting on native clothes to chapel was initially frowned upon, because it was considered as introducing elements of traditional worship into Christianity.

It was therefore unthinkable for a Christian in Ghana to be a chief. However, with further understanding of the Christian message, as enculturation is getting down better in the Ghanaian Christianity, some Christians are accepting to be made Chiefs with the understanding that the traditional practices that involve idol worship will be Christianized. At Ajumako Bisease in the Central region of Ghana, a chief, Nana Damfo Baah VII, was installed with the supervision of a Presbyterian Reverend Minister to ensure that acts that involved idol worship were avoided. Libation was replaced by Christian prayers. There was no animal sacrifice.<sup>3</sup> At Abokobi, near Accra, because the town was established by the Presbyterian Church, the chiefs

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Prof Abamfo Atiemo was interviewed in July, 2020.

are installed by the Presbyterian Church, (Sule-Saa, 2000).

two students of the University of Ghana who were members of the Salvation Army Students Fellowship went to Asiakwa, near Kyebi in the Eastern Region, for students' vacation outreach. They joined The Salvation Army at Asiakwa for a crusade in town on 28<sup>th</sup> December, 1998. The sermon was discouraged idol worship and traditional festivals that lead to invocation of ancestors. The crusade message and prayer session became the talk of the town the following days.

On the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1999, thus five days after the crusade, the chief of Asiakwa, then Osabarima Agyeman II, called pastors and elders of the local council of churches. There was a kind of anxiety as to why the chief was calling for that meeting. People in town were speculating that the chief was going to accuse the preacher for speaking against Traditional Worship. However, at the meeting Osabarima Agyeman II rather encouraged the churches to unite and help develop the town. He said he had seen that it takes both Christianity and Education to develop the town. He stressed that whilst he remained a chief, he would not allow any traditional priest to build their temple in the town, but if any church comes, he would give them land to build a chapel.<sup>4</sup>

In July 2018 an officer (a pastor) of The Salvation Army was installed the sub-chief of development, *Nkosuohene* at Akim Asuom in the Eastern Region. However, the Salvation Army Headquarters in Ghana on hearing that requested the pastor to choose between being a pastor and being a chief. The pastor who was installed the chief indicated that he knew if he had sought permission from the head office of The Salvation Army, he would not have been granted so when it came that he was the rightful heir to the seat he went to be enstooled.

The Salvation Army headquarters called the pastor to question him why he had accepted the position.

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<sup>4</sup> The lead researcher for this paper was present at the palace.

He responded that he was not the main chief, he was a sub chief with the responsibility of spearheading development of the town. He insisted that he was not going to practise anything against the Bible. There will be no libation and no animal sacrifice. He mentioned examples of good kings from the Bible like King David who were also men of God. He was of the opinion that being a pastor he would ensure fair treatment of issues in the traditional area.

However, The Salvation Army insisted that he could not be their pastor and a chief of any sort. He was to choose either to be a pastor or a chief. In his own words he said, "God first, I cannot put my calling as a pastor aside to be a chief". He really be mourned the lack of understanding of The Salvation Army that it is possible to be a traditional chief without practicing African Traditional Religion.<sup>5</sup> He therefore went back to the elders at Asuom and informed that he was stepping down for his nephew to step in due to lack of understanding of the Salvation Army. He took video coverage of his stepping down procedures and showed to the headquarters of The Salvation Army in Accra otherwise he was to be suspended from the pastoral duties.

### **Conclusion:**

This paper set out to find the thin line between cultural and religious practices of the Ghanaian with the aim of bringing to the fore that the generally accepted view that the African is notoriously religious and that religion permeates all facets of the African and it is impossible to separate the African from religion is not always the case.

By reviewing existing literature, participant observations and interview we identified that there are practices in Ghana which are purely cultural and not religious. Certain practices which were previously deemed religious and fetish liking drumming, putting or certain clothing could be

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<sup>5</sup> The Salvation Army Officer (pastor), who was sworn in as *Nkosuohene* at Asuom and asked to step down as was interviewed on 18<sup>th</sup> July 2020.

purely cultural and not religious. Though most cultural practices are associated with religious practices, the cultural practices can stand on their own without religion. It was also found out that with time Traditional religious practices are giving way to Christian or Islamic religious practices. We also found out that atheism is emerging in Ghana, so the Ghanaian, (for that matter African) can be separated from religion.

Further studies can look at the emerging atheism in Ghana, how did it start, is it only the educated and urban dwellers that are becoming atheists in Ghana or the rural folks are also involved.

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