

CREATION IN THE IMAGE OF GOD: HUMAN UNIQUENESS FROM THE AKAN  
RELIGIOUS ANTHROPOLOGY TO THE RENEWAL OF CHRISTIAN  
ANTHROPOLOGY

A Dissertation

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the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Rev. Eric Baffoe Antwi

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## ABSTRACT

# CREATION IN THE IMAGE OF GOD: HUMAN UNIQUENESS FROM THE AKAN RELIGIOUS ANTHROPOLOGY TO THE RENEWAL OF CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

By

Rev. Eric Baffoe Antwi

May 2016

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The Judeo-Christian belief, based on the bible, is that “God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1: 27). This dissertation explores the Akan understanding of the human person to shed further light on creation of human beings in the image of God and to understand and demonstrate the corresponding uniqueness of the human being among God’s creatures. With the help of the Akan context, we note that every human being possesses a spark of God. God, who is relational, shares relationality with human beings.

Through the use of Akan anthropology, we identify creation “in the image of God” to mean that every human being is created through the agency of parents, who also share in the image of God through their birth. Our interpretation is that the *okra* is the soul and is considered the “spark of God” in the human being. The *honhom*, which refers

to the breath of life, is treated as the breath that God breathed into human beings to make a human a living being (Gen 2:7). We equated the breath of God with the Holy Spirit who gives life. We propose to demonstrate the possibility of human relationships through the Holy Spirit.

At the moment of conception, every human being derives some elements from his/her father and mother and elements from God. These elements from the three sources (God, mother, and father) combine to make a person a human being. Though humanity derives certain elements from the three sources, it is the holistic person that reflects God's image in the sense that through the various elements humanity is able to relate and communicate with God, neighbor, and the world. The holistic human person enables us to clarify that humanity is both physical and spiritual.

With the help of the Akan anthropology, we successfully show that knowledge of the human being starts with the relationship between God and human beings, which extends to other humans and the universe, thus offering a further insight into the meaning of being created in the image of God.

Our conclusion is that when a Christian is asked the question, "What exactly in the human being points to the image of God?" he/she will be able to respond that there is a "spark" of God in every human being. We therefore renew Christian anthropology through the method of contextualization with the Akan culture to disclose the hidden presence of God in the human being. We demonstrate that theology functions exactly as the manner in which religion makes sense within a given culture. As the people in the culture understand their world and make meaning of it, they can also share their insight with others. Human beings have become a source of theology in addition to scripture and

tradition. Human beings are created in God's image and are relational and unique within God's creation.

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# INTRODUCTION

## 0.1 THE QUESTION

Humanity has always struggled to understand itself. Philosophers, theologians, psychologists, and scientists from every age and tradition have pursued the question of who we are as human beings and what is our origin and destiny. A constant belief throughout history is the conviction that human beings are central to God's creation. The Judeo-Christian belief, based on the bible, is that "God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1: 27).<sup>1</sup> This dissertation will explore the Akan<sup>2</sup> understanding of the human person<sup>3</sup> to shed light on creation of human beings in the image of God and to understand and demonstrate the uniqueness of the human being among God's creatures.

When speaking of human creation in the image of God, a nagging issue confronting theological anthropology is the issue of sameness and differentiation. The uniqueness of the human being can be understood in two ways. First, God creates the human being differently from other creation, such as animals, plants, water bodies, etc. Second, each human being is unique when compared to other human beings. For instance, every human being has a unique fingerprint, which distinguishes one person from the other. The fingerprint of humanity results in

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1. Scriptural texts in this dissertation will be taken from Division of Christian Education of National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A, *New Revised Standard Version*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2010), and Donald Senior and John J. Collins, *The Catholic Study Bible: The New American Bible*, (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006).

2. Akan is a word that is used to describe an ethnic or a language group in Ghana. See Chapter one, page 11.

3. The words "human person," and "human being" will be used interchangeably in this dissertation.

“equity-in-difference.” “Equity-in-difference” implies that human beings are equal and yet are different. By making use of the key tenets of Akan anthropology, this dissertation provides a tool to shed further light on human creation in the image of God. The Akan anthropology supports that which Christians confess in God who created humanity in the image of God (Trinity).<sup>4</sup>

Christian theology teaches there are three persons in one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, identified as the Trinity. The Trinity is the Christian image of God. Within the Triune God there is equality-in-difference, a characteristic that humanity shares in its nature. For Christians, the Trinitarian doctrine affirms and illustrates God’s intimate relationship with humanity through Jesus in the Holy Spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Human language has its own challenges in presenting a description of the mystery of God. The finite language of personhood is ascribed to God who is infinite. The need to use relational terms underlines the limitations of human language, for without them, God would be described in unrelated terminologies such as a principle, a source, a factor, etc.

Ancient Christians and their writers attempted to explain the meaning of the Trinity by using the language of “person”. In describing the Trinity, St. Augustine stresses that the Trinity is not three gods but one. He writes:

The Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit intimate a divine unity of one and the same substance in an indivisible equality; and therefore that they are not three Gods, but one God; although the Father has begotten the Son, and so He who is the Father is not the Son; and the Son is begotten by the Father, and so He who is

---

4. We are not going into the detail of the Christian Trinitarian theology, but we need the Trinitarian theology in defining God, and the three persons in the trinity, as well as the aspect of relationality in the Trinity to explain the image of God in which humanity is created. We will therefore, attempt to express what Christians understand by the Trinity.

5. Catherine M. LaCugna, *God for Us*, (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), 1.

the Son is not the Father; and the Holy Spirit is neither the Father nor the Son, but only the Spirit of the Father and the Son, Himself also co-equal with the Father and the Son, and pertaining to the unity of the trinity.<sup>6</sup>

It is this God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in whose image every human being is created. In this discourse, an understanding of the unitive role of the Holy Spirit will become more clearly studied. It is this role that prompts Karl Barth to observe that the Spirit unites the Father and the Son in love. He writes: “He [Holy Spirit] is the Spirit of God, God Himself, as He eternally proceeds from the Father and the Son, as He unites the Father and the Son in eternal love.”<sup>7</sup> In human life, the Holy Spirit gives life and aids humanity in their relationships.<sup>8</sup>

In this dissertation, we are using the Akan religious anthropology to shed light on Christian anthropology concerning human creation in the image of God and human relationships with God, neighbor, and the universe. Akan Christians use their own tradition to help understand the tenets of Christian faith and that is what we intend to do.

Through the use of the *Akan* terms *okra* (soul), *honhom* (the breath of life [spirit]), *mogya* (blood), *honam* (body), *ntoro* (spirit from a father), and others,<sup>9</sup> our dissertation offers an explanation about the activities and role of the Holy Spirit in the life of every human being who opens his/her life to the Holy Spirit. Our interpretation is that the *okra* (soul), which is “the spark of God,” the *honhom* (the breath of God), and the other components in the constitution of the human being help us to understand the image of God. We also interpret the *honhom* (the breath of life) as the breath that God breathed into human beings to make a human a living being,

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6. St. Augustine, “On the Trinity,” 1. Accessed October 31, 2013, <http://newadvent.org/fathers/130101.htm>.

7. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. IV., (London: T & T Clark International, 2004), 646.

8. The role of the Holy Spirit in human life will be treated in chapter four of this dissertation.

9. For the definition and detail information on the Akan words see Chapter two, page 48.



and equate the breath of God with the Holy Spirit who gives life. We propose to demonstrate the possibility of human relationships through the Holy Spirit. Following the earliest biblical translation among the Akan, we identify the Holy Spirit as *HonhomKronkron*, which keeps every human being alive.

In order to achieve what we are attempting to do, there is the need for a methodology that highlights the anthropological assumptions of Akan cosmo-religious worldview in a contextual approach.

## **0.2 THE SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY**

To demonstrate what it means to be created in the image of God, while at the same time demonstrating human uniqueness as a reflection of equality-in-difference as it exists in the Godhead, the scope of this dissertation is limited to a hermeneutical analysis of the Akan understanding of the human person. We do not intend to examine the other issues related to theological anthropology such as why humans are created as male and female or why there are different races in the world, etc. We limit our attention to what it means to be human.

Methodologically, we will use a contextual reality explaining the ethnography of the Akan people to demonstrate how it sheds light on the image of God. We have chosen to use contextualization for this dissertation because of its value in theological discourse. God-talk has become contextualized in such a way that Stephen Bevans is compelled to claim that humanity has to understand the ways of God through their own experience. He writes: "...there is no such a thing as 'theology,' there is only contextual theology: Feminist theology, black theology, liberation theology, Filipino theology, Asian-American theology, African theology, and so forth."<sup>10</sup> Reality, as we acknowledge, is not an abstract entity; rather it is negotiated by the

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10. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2002), 3.

meaning people attribute to it in a context of a culture.<sup>11</sup> Human context then influences the construction of the reality in which we live and helps humanity to understand God and express their convictions in life through their faith. The contextual method does not Christianize the Akan culture; rather, it permits the culture to throw light on the Christian understanding of the human person as created in the image of God and human uniqueness.

Some components of the Akan indigenous thought assist in our modern pursuit of the meaning in life. These elements require a critical and analytical assessment of the indigenous philosophy that helps the Akan people live their lives meaningfully. An inductive reasoning from contextual hermeneutical theology will therefore be the bedrock of this dissertation. A major feature of our method is to establish an encounter between the biblical text concerning the creation of the human person in the image of God and the context of Akan in Ghana.

In his discourse on the *Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa*, Justin S. Ukpong describes five approaches to biblical interpretation. Our method for this dissertation seeks to combine the first and the third approaches to Ukpong's description of biblical interpretation in Africa. His first approach uses the historical critical method in analyzing the biblical text. This approach is aimed at evaluating elements of African culture in terms of religion, beliefs, concepts, or practices in the light of the biblical witness. It helps us to arrive at a Christian understanding of the culture and reveal the value of the culture for Christian witness. Ukpong's third approach undertakes the interpretation of biblical themes or texts against the backdrop of African culture, religion, and life experience.<sup>12</sup> We seek to evaluate elements of

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11. Culture here is defined as the knowledge and information people use to interpret their experience and generate their behavior. See James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 5.

12. Justin S. Ukpong, "Developments in Biblical Interpretation in Africa: Historical and Hermeneutical Directions," in *The Bible in Africa: Transactions, Trajectories, and Trends*, eds. Gerald O. West & Musa W. Dube, (Boston: Brill Academic, 2001), 17-18.

Akan culture, religion, beliefs, concepts, and practices in the light of the biblical witness to arrive at a Christian understanding of them. This evaluation will reveal the value of Akan culture in arriving at a new perspective of the biblical text, especially the perspective of the human person being created in the image of God. It will be both Akan and Christian.

Our method includes the oral tradition of the Akan, which comprises the rich repository of symbols, art, proverbs, rituals, and so forth, as well as our personal experience in living the Akan worldview. We treat the Akan context as an interpretive tool, which will shed light on the Christian understanding of the human being, created in the image of God. The Akan hold the view that every human person comes from God and returns to God at death.<sup>13</sup> While on earth, human beings relate and dialogue with God, one another, and the universe.

Every theological method must make sound judgments about that which constitutes the integrity of the tradition and the practical elements of the tradition. It must reflect the background of an individual's personal situation while taking into consideration the ongoing practice and experience of the community. When a study is being conducted with a two-stage design by (1) analyzing the practical social contexts of everyday life within which Akan understand the world and the human person on the one hand, and (2) explaining and analyzing the meaning of the *imago Dei* (image of God) on the other, it becomes imperative that the contextualization provided in the first stage becomes crucial. For this reason, it is necessary to explain as thoroughly as possible the Akan worldview. The method of contextualization in this dissertation in which we explore what it means to be created in the image of God involves a broad perspective - psychological, anthropological, theological, sociological, historical, and practical.

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13. Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 34.

Contextual theology does not do away with classical theology; rather, it adds to the tenets of classical theology. Classical theology views theology as an objective science of faith and defines the two main sources of theology as scripture and tradition. Classical theology, which is above culture and experience that are conditioned by history, does not change its content. Contextual theology, however, demonstrates that culture, history, contemporary thought forms, and other disciplines are to be examined along with scripture and tradition as authentic sources for theological discourse.<sup>14</sup>

We initially proposed to use Paul Tillich's method of correlation in this dissertation. However, upon further research we decided to use the method of contextualization. We changed our method due to the weakness we identified with Tillich's method. We realized that, since we are using the Akan anthropology to shed light on Christian anthropology, it would be better to use the contextual method.

We observed two limitations about Tillich's method. First, the method overlooks the fact that there is interrelatedness between questions and answers. We do not share the view that existence itself is estrangement, since that contradicts our discourse. Tillich himself admits that existentialists do not agree with him that estrangement is total.<sup>15</sup> It is only when estrangement is viewed as total as Tillich holds can it be said that no answer can be derived from the human condition. Second, Tillich ignores the spiritual answers of the existentialists relative to the problem of estrangement. These answers are provided in philosophy. This is because of the way Tillich understands estrangement. He maintains that it is only theology that can provide answers,

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14. Ibid.

15. Paul Tillich, "Existential Philosophy: Its Historical Meaning," in *Theology of Culture*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), 103.

and philosophy can only pose the questions. Consequently, we settled on the method of contextualization.

If God is Spirit and it is the Holy Spirit who makes relationality possible, then it is necessary to clarify the question of the Holy Spirit and the human spirit. It is the Holy Spirit (*ruach*) who makes life possible. The Spirit gives and sustains life. We argue therefore, that the human spirit and the *okra* are the media through whom humanity enjoys the image of God and communes with the Triune God. The human spirit and the Spirit of God are inextricably linked with life and humanity's means of participating in or ascending to the Triune God, whose image humanity bears. Thus, through the human spirit, God vivifies humanity and relates with humanity.

This dissertation hopes to arrive at a conclusion that the *okra* (soul), the *honhom* (the breath of life), and other components derived from parents (who are also created in the image of God), indicate that there are vertical and horizontal elements in the constitution of the human person, which make humanity unique and able to relate to God, neighbor, and the universe.

### **0.3 THE VALUE OF THE STUDY**

This dissertation contributes to theological discourse in diverse ways. It provides an attempt towards promoting harmonious living among human beings amid differences that come as a result of uniqueness. For instance, human beings share this world in common, sharing geographical location, history, politics, gender, economic level, and religion. Although these provide human groupings, they also divide human beings into diverse groups, and as a result, stress the urgent need to promote solidarity in a divided and interconnected world.

The contribution of this dissertation is to reveal the dynamic nature of the human constitution through the Akan anthropology and to express the relationality to which human

nature is directed through the *okra* (soul), *honhom* (breath of life), and other constituent components in the composition of the human being. These will express the relationship that exists in the Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Spirit. Human beings are oriented towards this relationship. This is what LeRon Shults means when he writes, “humanity is intrinsically oriented to life with God in the Spirit disclosed in Jesus Christ, who is the image of God. A theology of the human explores the metaphysical conditions that render intelligible our hoping (whether anxious or peaceful) for ultimate belonging.”<sup>16</sup>

The dissertation also embraces potential for intercultural hermeneutics, economical dialogue, ecology, communion ecclesiology, human rights discourse, missiology, and feminist theology. These areas could be expanded in relation to African theology, of which this dissertation has charted the way for its potential development.

#### **0.4 THE STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION**

This dissertation is divided into five chapters. The first chapter presents a general introduction and an historical background of the Akan people of Ghana, as well as situating Ghana on the map of Africa. The cosmology of the Akan will be explored to critically analyze their worldview. Our focus will be to provide the needed background information of the Akan people so that the tools to be used in analyzing the human person will be well understood.

Chapter two presents the folk narrative of the Akan anthropology and analyzes the Akan cosmo-religious worldview, which illustrates the understanding of the human person. The articulation of the nature of humanity and human relationship with the spiritual world will be investigated, while inviting most Akan writers into the conversation in order to examine the debate between Gyekye and Wiredu. We will turn our attention to the Akan understanding of

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16. LeRon Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology: After the Philosophical Turn to Relationality*, (Grand Rapids: Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003),218.

personhood to illustrate the role of the community on the individual person and the concept of relationality among Akan. We will further explore the translation of the bible into the Akan language to clarify the issues that arise as a result of the Akan understanding of the elements<sup>17</sup> that constitute the human person such as: *okra, sunsum, honhom, ntoro, mogya, saman* and such words that have some nuances in the Akan language.<sup>18</sup>

Chapter three permits us to investigate the Christian understanding of God who is divine, whose image is represented in the human being. This will be done by analyzing the Hebrew bible with particular emphasis on the creation of the human person in God's image. This chapter draws our attention to concepts that have a link with the Akan anthropology and prove the uniqueness of humanity.

This chapter also analyzes the way in which the New Testament Scriptures present the idea of the *Imago Dei*, which cannot ignore the example of Jesus Christ, who incarnated and became the perfect image of God in human form, truly God and truly human. Jesus, the divine, shares in our humanity and invites humanity to share in his eternal life. The views of Origen (185-232 C.E), representing the views of the Church Fathers in the East, will be explored. Origen describes the human person as *trichotomy*. This is derived from St. Paul's greetings to the Thessalonians.<sup>19</sup> The views of Saint Aurelius Augustine of Hippo (354-430 C.E.), representing the Church Fathers in the West, will also be explored in this study. His postulation that the

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17. We will use the words "elements" and "components" in our discourse interchangeably to denote the various components that make up human beings.

18. For the meaning of the constituent elements see page 48.

19. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 in *Origen*, ed. Henri Crouzel, trans. A. S. Worrall, (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark., 1989), 87.

human being is a composite of body and soul, which is in “keeping with Neoplatonism,” will be investigated.<sup>20</sup>

The objective of chapter three is to present the biblical view of the phrase “created in the image of God,” which is the foundation of the Christian understanding of the human person, and how it has been interpreted over the years. This study is interested in the unique connection that God makes between God and the human person. We will not be able to exhaust the ongoing discussion throughout the centuries but certain epochs will be presented through: (1) the Hebrew Bible’s description of “created in the image of God;” (2) the New Testament treatment of the image of God; (3) Origen and the human person; (4) St. Augustine and the human person, and (5) Re-thinking the image of God in the Human Person.

Chapter four of our study aims at highlighting the discourse of the Holy Spirit to disclose the Spirit’s role in creation and in human life in particular. The intention of this chapter is not to build a theology of the Spirit, but to reveal the role of the Spirit in the life of humanity and the world. We intend to demonstrate the possibility of human relationships through the Holy Spirit, whom we identify as the *HonhomKronkron* that keeps every human being alive. God who is Spirit dwells in us through God’s “spark,” and other components of the human being. We distinguished between the *honhom* and the *okra* and how they corroborate the life-giving principle in the human person. The *okra* and *honhom* provide a point of contact between human beings and God. In Genesis we read that in the divine image God created human beings: “So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (1:27). We also read in Genesis that God formed the human being from the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils “the breath of life” and the human being became a living

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20. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “Saint Augustine,” revised Nov. 12, 2010, accessed November 27, 2012, <http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/augustine>.



being: "...then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being" (2:7). It is the breath of God that vivifies human beings. The Akan anthropology helps us to clearly understand human beings who are created in the image of God.

Through contextualization we use the Akan understanding of the human being to clarify what Christians believe about human beings and about human relationships with God, neighbor, and the universe. It is difficult for some people to point out what it is exactly in the human being that shows that humanity is made in the image of God. Our method leads those people to a clearer understanding of the image of God in the human being.

There are African authors who endeavored to explain Christian theology within the African context. Their insights indicate the relational Spirit of God as life-giver in their ancestral<sup>21</sup> Christology and pneumatology. Christology from below provides the basis for African Christology.<sup>22</sup> We discuss ancestor-Christology because Akan and Africans believe that the historical Jesus is a fulfillment of the highest "ideals" assigned to the ancestors in the African context. Jesus imparts a life-force in all its fullness by healing the sick, raising the dead, and providing for the needs of people.<sup>23</sup> We include some of them to provide the contextual

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21. Ancestors are spirits of the dead that are believed to be in a position of influence over the living. Their counterparts in Christian religion are saints, who are believed to be in heaven enjoying eternal bliss with their God. The significance of ancestors comprises of their watchfulness over the affairs of the living members of their families. They help deserving ones and punish the delinquent ones. If an ancestor was a ruler before death, the ancestor's scope of activities goes beyond his own family to the whole of his kingdom. It is not everyone who can become an ancestor. Before a person becomes an ancestor, certain conditions must be fulfilled. What is usually examined is a person's position in life, the manner of his death, the age at which he departed and so forth. For details see Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Tema, Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 33. Also Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, *Persons and Community*, (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 231.

22. Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology, African Theology*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1992), 80; also John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 129.

23. Ibid.

framework needed to shed light on creation in the image of God. The African writers we include in our discussion are: Charles Nyamiti,<sup>24</sup> David Tonghou Ngong,<sup>25</sup> Joseph Boakye Danquah,<sup>26</sup> Kwame Bediako,<sup>27</sup> John Pobee,<sup>28</sup> Abraham Akrong,<sup>29</sup> and Peter Kwasi Sarpong.<sup>30</sup> These scholars used the African worldview to shed light on the Christian faith. They have articulated their own interpretations of the Christian faith through the basic orientations that underlie most African cultures, shaped the African indigenous religions, and shaped Christian interpretations of God and Christian doctrines. Since the above named scholars have already thrown light on some aspects of the Christian faith, we engage them in this chapter to provide some basic support to our dissertation. Their contextual approach in explaining the Christian faith will enable us to use the Akan anthropology in shedding light on Christian anthropology. The *okra* (soul) will lead us to understand the image of God in the human being who remains alive through the *honhom* (breath of life) and relational through the other components of the constitution of the human being.

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24. Charles Nyamiti is a Catholic priest from Tanzania, East Africa. He is concerned with African cultures, philosophy, religiosity and sheds light on Christianity through the African worldview.

25. David Tonghou Ngong is a theologian from Cameroon. His interest is in theology and identity with emphasis on African Theology.

26. Joseph Boakye Danquah was a Ghanaian. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church. He was a scholar and historian. He studied Law and Philosophy. He became a politician in Ghana and died a Statesman.

27. Kwame Bediako was a Ghanaian. He belonged to the Presbyterian Church. He was concerned about whether or not a person could become a true Christian only by embracing the mind-set of Western Christians and reject what made him/her an African.

28. John Pobee is an Anglican priest from Ghana who specialized in the New Testament studies, Missiology, Ecumenism, Liturgy and Worship.

29. Abraham Akrong is a Ghanaian theologian. He has written significantly on African Theology.

30. A Catholic Archbishop Emeritus in Ghana. He is an Akan and a renowned anthropologist and sociologist. He is a promoter of inculturation.

Chapter five offers a framework for bringing together our discourse in understanding the human person as created in the image of God and what that means in praxis. The spark of God in the human being will be revealed as that which identifies the individual as unique and helps humanity to relate to God, neighbors, and the world. Thus, just as the Spirit aids in the relationship within the Triune God, the Spirit helps individuals to relate with God and one another through the *okra, honhom*, and the other components in the human constitution

With the help of the Akan interpretation of the human person, we can conclude that when a Christian is asked the question, “What exactly in the human being points to the image of God?” he/she will be able to respond that there is a “spark” of God in every human being and that is the image of God described in the bible. We renew Christian anthropology through the method of contextualization with the Akan culture to disclose the hidden presence of God in the human being. We will demonstrate that theology functions exactly as the manner in which religion makes sense within a given culture and, as the people in the culture understand their world and make meaning of it, they can also share their insight with others. Human beings have become a source of theology in addition to scripture and tradition. Human beings are created in God’s image and are unique within God’s creation.

## CHAPTER ONE

# THE AKAN PEOPLE OF GHANA: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND CONTEMPORARY CONTEXT: THE COSMOLOGY, BELIEFS AND PRACTICES OF AKAN

### 1.1 AN OVERVIEW OF GHANA AND ITS PEOPLE

This chapter presents and surveys the historical background of the Akan people of Ghana, and situates Ghana on the map of Africa. It also explores the cosmology of the Akan to analyze their worldview. The provision of the Akan background guides us in exploring the Akan perception of the human person, to shed light on the idea that humans are created in the image of God. Knowing the Akan worldview also enables us to demonstrate the uniqueness of the human person among God's creatures. This chapter highlights the practical social context of everyday life within which Akan understand their world as an interpretive tool, which will structure and shed light on the Christian understanding of the human person as created in the image of God. The examination of the Akan in Ghana and their cosmology will reveal a strong relationship between God and human beings.

Ghana is a country in West Africa, situated among three French-speaking African countries. As shown below (Figure 1), Ghana shares a boundary in the East with Togo, in the West with Cote D'Ivoire, in the North with Burkina Faso; and to Ghana's South lies the Atlantic Ocean. The official language of Ghana is English. The total area of Ghana is 238,533sq km (92,098 sq. miles), with a total population of 24 million.<sup>1</sup>

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1. According to July 2012 estimate of population census in Ghana, the total population is 24,652,402. Accessed October 13, 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-13433791>. Also



**Figure 1:Map showing Ghana and its neighboring Countries<sup>2</sup>**

The real growth rate in Ghana is 13.6%, with life expectancy at 60.22 years for males and 62.73 years for females. Administratively, Ghana is divided into ten main Regions as shown below (Figure 2), with 170 metropolitan, municipal, and district assemblies.<sup>3</sup> These entities

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<http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/about-ghana/ghana-at-a-glance>;  
[www.indexmundi.com/ghana/demographics\\_profile.html](http://www.indexmundi.com/ghana/demographics_profile.html).

2. "Ghana," accessed March 23, 2016, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gh.html>.

3. Ibid.

decentralize Ghana’s political administration. This brings democracy to the doorsteps of the ordinary Ghanaian, and they are encouraged to participate in the governing of the nation through grassroots mechanisms.



**Figure 2: Map of Ghana showing the Ten Regions <sup>4</sup>**

## **1.2 A SHORT HISTORY OF GHANA**

Africans enjoyed sovereignty and managed their own resources and destiny before the period of colonization. Colonization was achieved under two phases. The first lasted from 1880 to the early 1900s, and the second from early 1900s to the outbreak of the First World War in

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4. “Regions in Ghana” by Thfc, accessed September 28, 2012, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regions\\_of\\_Ghana](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Regions_of_Ghana). Licensed under CC BY-SA.

1914.<sup>5</sup> The European countries that colonized and partitioned the African continent among them are: Great Britain, France, Germany, Belgium, Portugal, Spain, and Italy.<sup>6</sup> Liberia and Ethiopia were the only African countries that did not undergo colonialism. By the 1900s, there were 40 artificially created colonies in Africa.<sup>7</sup>

A few African rulers, from areas colonized by the British, decided to use diplomacy to request Great Britain to allow them to manage their own affairs. Among these rulers were King Jaja of Opobo, in the Niger delta, and Prempeh I, a king of the Asante.<sup>8</sup> In 1900, Prempeh I's refusal to allow British control led to his arrest by the British and deportation to the Seychelles Islands.<sup>9</sup>

The country, known as the Gold Coast (modern Ghana), was a place where the gold trade was brisk. The name, the Gold Coast, became synonymous with the Akan country, because of the influence of the Akan living there.<sup>10</sup> The Asante formed an empire by ruling the people they conquered before the European colonization.<sup>11</sup> With their military might and administrative systems, the Asante ruled almost the whole of modern Ghana and parts of Cote d'Ivoire and Togo, with the exception of the Fante, whose kingdom stretched along the coast of the Gulf of

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5. A. Adu Boahen ed., *General History of Africa: Africa Under Colonial Domination 1880-1935*, Vol. VII, Abridged Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 55.

6. Albert Adu Boahen, *African Perspectives on Colonialism* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1987), 27.

7. *Ibid.*, 58.

8. The Asante is one of the linguistic groups that form the Akan. Their king is called Asantehene.

9. *Ibid.*

10. Richard Gray, *The Cambridge History of Africa From c. 1600 to c. 1790*, Vol. 4. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 296.

11. The Asante created an empire and divided it into 2 with administration centers. The first was the Metropolitan Asante, which consisted of the Kumasi (the capital town of Asante) State, which was under the Asantehene (Asante King) and other states with forty miles radius of Kumasi. The second was the provincial Asante, which consisted of all the outer states and annexed by the Asante during the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. See J. B. Webster and Adu Boahen, *History of West Africa*, (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1970), 117.

Guinea, the Atlantic coast.<sup>12</sup> The Asante were in charge of majority of the ethnic groups in Ghana at beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but at the close of the same century, the Asante and their subjects came under the rule of British imperialism.

The British, the Dutch, and the Danes traded with Ghana at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The merchants traded in gold, gunpowder, and other materials in Ghana. The merchants came with the missionaries to modern Ghana.<sup>13</sup> The British and the Danes secretly supported the coastal and southern states (the Fante and their allies), while the Dutch supported of the Asante. However, compared to the British, the Dutch and the Danes had a policy of being neutral without interfering in the local conflicts and politics.<sup>14</sup>

In April 1831, the British and their allies signed a peace treaty with the Asante. The treaty was signed because the Asante were ruling the whole of Ghana.<sup>15</sup> This treaty led to the Asantehene, a title given to the king of the Asante,<sup>16</sup> granting independence to his formal vassal states to the south. The vassal states at that time were Denkyira, Assin, Twifu, Wassa, Fante, Nzima, etc.<sup>17</sup>

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12. Ibid., 116.

13. Ibid., 199.

14. Ibid.

15. The Asante ruled the whole country around 1826. The British decided to free Ghanaians from the Asante and fought the Asante after signing the peace treaty with them. The British suffered defeat at this war. In 1826, the British avenged their defeat by defeating the Asante. After the Asante defeat the British started ruling the entire country, Ghana. They formed a three member committee in London and a council in Cape Coast (Cape Coast is the capital of the Fante state. It became the first capital of Ghana until the capital was moved to its present location, Accra). The British merchants who resided in Cape Coast and Accra elected the Council. The council was to be under a president who was elected by its members. George Maclean was elected as president of the council on October 1829. He assumed the management of the country from February 1830 until his death in 1847. See Ibid.

16. Asantehene is the title of the King of Asante. He has sub-chiefs under him. The Asantehene is a symbol of unity in the Asante nation.

17. J. B. Webster and Adu Boahen, *History of West Africa*, 201. Also Daniel Miles McFarlang, *Historical Dictionary of Ghana*, (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1985), 118.



George MacLean, a British Administrator at the Gold Coast, provided a congenial atmosphere for trading and missionary activities. He was able to maintain peace between the Fante and Asante. This resulted in the spread of Christianity in Ghana. The Basel Missionary Society, which established the Presbyterian Church in Ghana in 1828, had little success. However, during MacLean's administration, those missionaries led successful evangelization activities.

In 1897, under governor Frederick Gordon Guggisberg, two pressure groups emerged in Ghana, a group of chiefs who were local leaders and a group of western educated people in Ghana. These two groups eventually joined together to form the Aborigines Rights Protection Society. They fought for the Ghanaians whose rights were breached by the British who confiscated some of their lands.<sup>18</sup>

The event of the Second World War (1939-1945) revitalized Africans and Ghanaians to fight for their rights. The war erased the myth of white superiority that concealed the frailty of whites from Africans.<sup>19</sup> Political agitations took place in Ghana after the Second World War, and in 1946, the new governor, Alan Cuthbert Maxwell Burns, introduced a new constitution for Ghana.

Burns' constitution facilitated an African elected majority in the legislative council, but this legislative council played only an advisory role in the administration of the country. Joseph Boakye Danquah<sup>20</sup> protested against the Burns constitution in 1947. He organized a pressure group, the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), to protest against Governor Burns. The

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18. Ibid.

19. Africans began to see the whites dying and suffering, as they have never seen before. Ibid., 302.

20. Joseph Boakye Danquah (J. B. Danquah), a Ghanaian who was educated in law and philosophy also researched sociology. His views of the Akan understanding of the human person will be treated in chapter two of this study.

secretary to the UGCC was Kwame Nkrumah.<sup>21</sup> J. B. Danquah, Kwame Nkrumah, and four others, who later became known as the “Big Six,” were arrested and detained as a result of a riot by ex-servicemen who protested against the Burns constitution.<sup>22</sup>

After Kwame Nkrumah was released from prison, he broke away from the UGCC. He organized the youth of Ghana and formed a political party, the Convention People’s Party (CPP). He did not approve of the elderly elite of the UGCC.<sup>23</sup> Under Nkrumah’s leadership, the youth undertook a nationwide protest.<sup>24</sup>

In 1951, before Nkrumah was released from prison, an election took place. His party, the CPP, won the election. His party’s slogans were “Seek ye first the political kingdom and all things will be added unto it,” and “Self -government now.” When Nkrumah’s party won the

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21. Kwame Nkrumah was an Akan, born and raised in Ghana. He left the country to go to the United States and Great Britain to pursue his education. He led the independence struggle in Ghana, until Ghana became independent from the British colonial rule in 1957. He made it clear that the independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked with the total liberation of Africa. He became a symbol of freedom internationally since he became the leader who led his people to free themselves from colonial rule. Nkrumah encouraged many African countries south of the Sahara to fight for independence. Bjorn Hettne, “Soldiers and Politics: The Case of Ghana” *Journal of Peace Research* 17, no. 2, Special Issues on Imperialism and Militarization (1980): 176. Also Peter T. Omari, *Kwame Nkrumah*, (New York: Africana Publishing Corporation, 1970), and “Kwame Nkrumah: Africa’s ‘Man of the Millennium,’ accessed November 27, 2012, <http://www.guyanaundersiege.com/Leaders?Nkrumah1.htm>.

22. “The Big Six” refers to six men who fought vigorously to agitate for Ghana’s independence. These men are:

1. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah
2. Mr. E. Obetsebi Lamptey
3. Mr. Ebenezer Ako Adjei
4. Mr. William Ofori Atta (Also known as Paa Willie)
5. Dr. J. B Danquah and
6. Mr. Edward Akuffo-Addo.

After the killing of some ex-servicemen on February 28, 1948, and a riot that followed in Accra, the colonial government declared a state of emergency in Ghana. On March 12, 1948, the governor ordered for the arrest of the leadership of UGCC. Subsequently, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Dr. Joseph Boakye Danquah, Mr. Edward Akufo Addo, Mr. William Ofori Atta, Mr. E. Obetsebi Lamptey, and Mr. Ebenezer Ako Adjei were detained and exiled to the Northern part of Ghana, currently the Northern and Upper East/West Regions. It was as a result of this move that these men became known as the “Big Six” in Ghana. See Kofi Ellison, “The Big Six!” Accessed November 27, 2012, <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/photo.day.php?ID=33454>.

23. J. B. Webster and Adu Boahen, *History of West Africa*, 304.

24. The youth protested against the Coussey committee that was appointed to advise the colonial government on further political changes. Most of the Nationalist leaders, with the exception of Kwame Nkrumah, served on this committee. J. B. Webster and Adu Boahen, *History of West Africa*, 304.

elections, the British governor ordered the release of Nkrumah and asked him to name his cabinet.<sup>25</sup> On March 6, 1957, under the leadership of Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana became the first sub-Saharan country in colonial Africa to gain independence, and it changed its name from the Gold Coast to Ghana.<sup>26</sup>

On February 24, 1966, Ghana experienced its first military coup d'état. The National Liberation Council (NLC) toppled Nkrumah's government.<sup>27</sup> The reasons for the military takeover were numerous. Nkrumah's Socialist policies were a disaster for the country. His agenda for African Unity, which he thought would solve the problems of Africans, actually alienated some African states, especially those in West Africa, and he turned Ghana into a one party state.<sup>28</sup> The overthrow of Nkrumah was not only supported nationally, but internationally, with some Western nations, such as the United States, Great Britain, and West Germany, happy to witness the overthrow of Nkrumah. It is not clear, however, to what extent they actually instigated the coup.<sup>29</sup>

The National Liberation Council (NLC)<sup>30</sup> did not intend to rule the country; they promised to organize a general election to restore a multi-party democracy.<sup>31</sup> True to their words,

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25. Ibid., 305.

26. Ibid.

27. Colonel A. A. Afrifa, *The Ghana Coup 24<sup>th</sup> February 1966*, (London: Frank Cass and Company, 1966), 13. Also Bjorn Hettne, "Soldiers and Politics: The Case of Ghana" *Journal of Peace Research*, 17, no. 2, Special Issues on Imperialism and Militarization (1980): 178.

28. Bjorn Hettne, "Soldiers and Politics, Ghana," 178 and A. A. Afrifa, *Ghana Coup 1966*, 13.

29. Ibid.

30. Membership of the NLC was a combination of the military and police. They were:

1. Lieutenant General E. K. Kotoka
2. Brigadier A. A. Afrifa
3. Major General A. K. Ocran
4. Police Inspector General J. W. K. Harlley
5. Deputy Commissioner of Police Mr. B. A. Yakubu
6. Commissioner of Police Mr. A. K. Deku
7. Commissioner of Police, Administration Mr. J.E Onunoo

the NLC organized a multi-party election that brought Kofi Abrefa Busia<sup>32</sup> to power as the new leader of Ghana in 1969.

On January 13, 1972, the military overthrew the Busia administration. Under the leadership of Colonel Ignatius Kutu Acheampong, the National Redemption Council (NRC) came to power and ruled the Ghanaians. Because of previous mismanagement and as a way to reestablish credibility, the NRC changed its name to Supreme Military Council (SMC) in 1975.<sup>33</sup>

Under the SMC, Acheampong wanted to form a Union Government, where the military would rule together with some civilian intellectuals. There was some opposition to this idea, and Lieutenant General Fred Akuffo toppled Acheampong's government on July 5, 1978. The Akuffo's regime was known as the SMC II.<sup>34</sup> Akuffo's refusal to abandon the idea of the Union Government, however, led to his overthrow.<sup>35</sup>

On June 4, 1979, junior officers and corporals from Ghana Air Force, led by Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, overthrew General Fred Akuffo's government. The council that formed was named the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). The aim of the AFRC was to perform a "housecleaning exercise" and to fight corruption and illegal profits, but this led to a scarcity of goods in Ghana.<sup>36</sup>

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(Hettne, "Soldiers and Politics, Ghana," 179, and A. A. Afrifa, *Ghana Coup 1966*, 33).

31. A.A Afrifa, *Ghana Coup 1966*, 29.

32. K. A. Busia had a Ph.D in Social anthropology. He has written many books on the Akan and democracy in Ghana. His view about the Human Person will be examined in chapter two of this study.

33. Hettney, "Soldiers and Politics, Ghana," 178.

34. Ibid., 184, and Donald B Cruise O'Brien, John Dunn and Roland Rathbone, *Contemporary West Africa*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 76-98.

35. Ibid., 82.

36. Ibid.

Rawlings organized an election, and in September 1979, he handed over power to Hilla Limann, who was the leader of the People's National Party (PNC). Rawlings later overthrew Limann's government, and on December 30, 1981, power transferred to a new group called the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC).

### 1.3 MODERN TREND OF GHANA'S POLITICAL HISTORY

Ghana is currently under its fourth republic, which started in 1992.<sup>37</sup> Under this republic, Ghana has held six successful consecutive multiparty elections.<sup>38</sup>

After ruling the country as a military ruler, Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings retired from the military and formed a political party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC). He organized an election, which he won and became the president of the fourth republic. After serving his country as president from 1992 to 1996 and from 1996 to 2000,<sup>39</sup> Rawlings handed over power to John Agyekum Kuffour, the leader of the New Patriotic Party (NPP).

After eight years of ruling Ghana, John Agyekum Kuffour handed over power to the winner of a general election, John Evans Atta-Mills, who led the NDC party to victory in 2008. This was a watershed moment in Ghana. Since independence in March 6, 1957, this was the

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37. Ghana has gone through four republics. The first three republics were overthrown by the military. The following are the republics in Ghana:

1. The First Republic 1960-1966
2. The Second Republic 1969-1972
3. The Third Republic 1979-1981
4. The Fourth Republic 1992-present

Peter Arthur, "Ethnicity and Electoral Politics in Ghana's Fourth Republic," *Africa Today* 56. no. 2, (Winter 2009), 70.

38. Ibid.

39. According to the constitution of Ghana, a president is eligible to serve 2 four-year terms, after which he/she is no longer eligible to run for office again. "A Presidential Term is Four Years," accessed December 2, 2012, <http://www.myjoyonline.com/biography>.

second time a democratically elected president had completed his tenure of office and handed over power.<sup>40</sup>

Unfortunately, Evans Atta-Mills died after three years in office, on July 24, 2012. His vice president, John Dramani Mahamah, was sworn in as the president of Ghana on the same day, in accordance with the constitution of Ghana. Accordingly, Mahamah's tenure expired at the time the tenure of Mills' presidency would have expired.<sup>41</sup> On December 7 and 8, 2012, Ghana had both presidential and parliamentary elections. John Dramani Mahamah was elected president of Ghana, and he was sworn in on December 7, 2013.<sup>42</sup>

## **2.16 ETHNIC GROUPS AND LANGUAGES IN GHANA**

In 1960, Ghana had approximately 100 cultural and linguistic groups.<sup>43</sup> As time went by, less emphasis was placed on the ethnic and cultural variation as the country tried to promote national cohesiveness. This did not prevent the people from identifying themselves through their ethnic roots.

Ghana is currently made up of at least eight major ethnic groups. The Akan<sup>44</sup> form the majority. The various subdivisions of each of the ethnic groups share cultural heritage, language, history, and origin in common. The nature of all the administrative districts in Ghana is heterogeneous; people are posted to any part of the country to work based on their qualification and not their ethnic background. Furthermore, there are a number of rural-urban migrations in

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40. Peter Arthur, "Ethnicity and Electoral Politics in Ghana's Fourth Republic," 45.

41. Ibid.

42. Gilbert Ankra, "John Mahamah Sworn In As President," accessed February 21, 2013, <http://www.ghana.gov.gh/index.php/news/general-news/18971>.

43. "Ethnic Groups," accessed October 13, 2012, <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/tribes>.

44. Akan is a word that can be used to describe an ethnic group or a language group.

the country that have resulted in interethnic mixing through marriage, education, commerce and other social institutions, which help to promote national cohesiveness and ethnically homogeneous society. Under the constitution of Ghana, no political party can be formed on the basis of ethnic or cultural grouping.<sup>45</sup> As shown below (Table 1), Ghana has nine major ethnic groups.

**Table 1: Distribution of Ethnic Groups in Ghana**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Akan	45.3
Mole-Dagbon	15.2
Ewe	11.7
Ga-Dangme	7.3
Guan	4
Gurma	3.6
Grusi	2.6
Mande-Busanga	1
Other ethnic groups	7.8 <sup>46</sup>

The Akan ethnic group is sub-divided into various language sub-groupings as Asante, Fante, Boron, Akwapim, Akyem, Akwamu, Ahanta, Nzema, Kwahu, and Sefwi.<sup>47</sup> The percentage of the ethnic language distribution in Ghana is shown below (Table 2).

45. "Ethnic Groups," accessed October 13, 2012, <http://www.Ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/tribes>.

46. These figures are based on the population census of the year 2000. "Ghana," CIA World Factbook, accessed October 13, 2012, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gh.html>.

47. Daniel Miles McFarland, *Historical Dictionary of Ghana*, (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1985), 25. Also "Ethnic Groups," accessed October 12, 2012, <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/tribes/>.

**Table 2: The Ethnic Language Distribution of Ghana**

<b>Group</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
Asante	14.8
Ewe	12.7
Fante	9.9
Boron (Brong)	4.6
Dagomba	4.3
Dagarte (Dagaba)	3.7
Akyem	3.4
Ga	3.4
Akuapem	2.9

Other languages, including English, which represents the official language of Ghana, constitute 36.1%. English is a unifier in Ghana. English promotes solidarity of ethnicity and allows a shared lingua Franca. English language is the medium of instruction in all the schools in Ghana. Additionally, English is used for all official national functions in Ghana.<sup>48</sup>

The case study area where the Akan people live in Ghana is shown below in (Figure3) and the various languages and dialects in Ghana are shown below (Figure 4).

48. These figures are based on the population census of the year 2000. "Ghana," CIA World Factbook, accessed October 13, 2012, <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factsbook/geos/gh.html>.





**Figure 3: Map of Ghana showing Akan people (Case Study Area)<sup>49</sup>**

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49. "Akan Ethnic Map of Ghana," accessed October 13, 2013, [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akan\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akan_people).

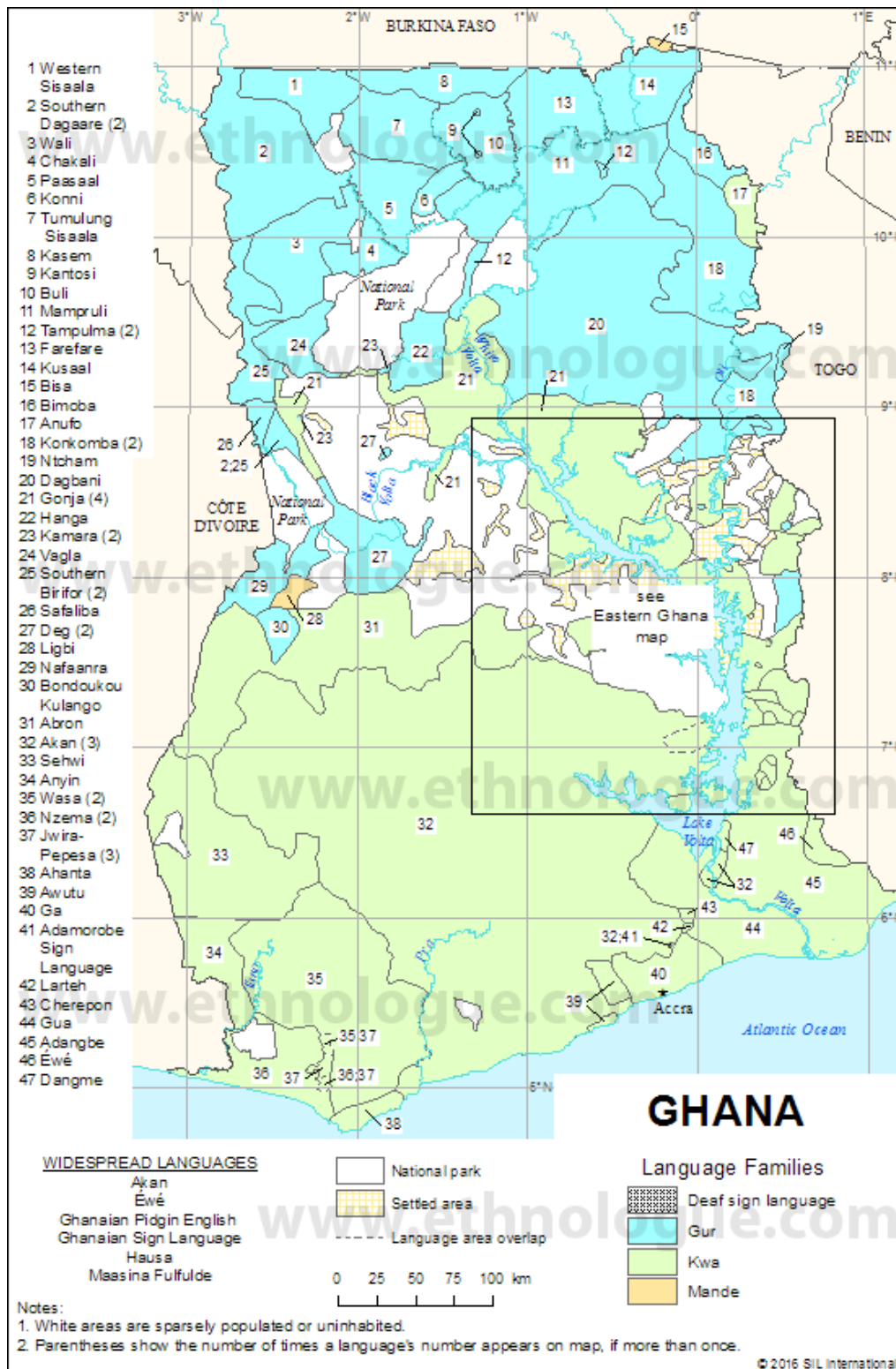


Figure 4: Map of Ghana showing the various Languages/Dialects<sup>50</sup>

50. "Ghana," accessed March 23, 2016, [http://www.ethnologue.com/map/GH\\_](http://www.ethnologue.com/map/GH_).

## 1.5 THE AKAN PEOPLE<sup>51</sup>

The Akan people of Ghana constitute almost half the population. They are also known as the Twi-speaking people and are made up of the following groups:

Asante (Ashanti)

Fante

Boron (Bono)

Akyem

Kwahu

Akwapim Gomoa

Assin

Twifu

Wassa

Denkyira

Nzema

Some Akan live in the neighboring Côte D'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), but the majority live in Ghana (See Figure 3 above). Akan are believed to be of a common origin or branches of the same family.

Akan belong to the Kwa language group of the Niger-Congo family.<sup>52</sup> There are three main arguments put forward to disclose that Akan are of the same origin.<sup>53</sup> First, according to A.

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51. The word "Akan" denotes:

1. A stock or a race.
2. A large group of people who speak those languages.
3. A State or nation.

This makes it difficult to decipher what a person means when he/she uses the word "Akan," the context will have to be examined critically to comprehend which of the meanings is in mind. Hence, the Akan people will be referred to as the Akan in this dissertation. (See D. Kiyaga-Mulindwa, "The 'Akan' Problem," *Current Anthropology* 21, no. 4 (Aug. 1980),503.

Adu Boahen, the various dialects of Twi came as a result of the Kwa speakers migrating from the Upper Guinea area and mixing with the local people in the area they settled.<sup>54</sup>

Secondly, the cosmology of Akan is identical and meaningful to all. The nature of their political institutions, their religious practices and symbolisms, their modes of socialization such as rites of passage, marriage, naming ceremonies, and funeral rites are the same.<sup>55</sup> This illustrates common practices and beliefs.

The third reason to show common origin is eight exogamous matrilineal and patrilineal groups they share in common. The eight matrilineal grouping is what they call *Abusua* (family). Successions are passed on from one's maternal uncles to the sons and daughters of the family. An elder uncle known as *Abusua Panin* (head of the lineage) is the leader of the family. He administers the family properties and helps to organize all family social ceremonies. He pours out libation at family ceremonies.<sup>56</sup> There is also a woman leader in the family known as *Obaa Panin* (older woman).

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52. The Kwa language group is a large linguistic group found in West Africa. According to B. W. Andah, the most important of the Kwa languages presently in terms of speakers are four. These are:

1. Akan (Twi, Fanti) dominant in Ghana.
2. Ewe dominant in Togo and Republic of Benin, and spoken also in South-Eastern Ghana.
3. Yoruba dominant in Western Nigeria.
4. Igbo dominant in Eastern Nigeria

B. W. Andah, *General History of Africa*, ed. M. Elfasi, Vol. III, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 539. Also Joseph H. Greenberg, *The Languages of Africa*, (Indiana: Indiana University, 1963), 8.

53. M. Elfasi, ed., *General History of Africa*, Vol. III (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 539. Also A. Adu Boahen "Fante and Fante A.D 1000-1800," in *A Thousand Years of West African History*, ed. J. F. Ade. Ajayi and Ian Espie, (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press, 1969), 165.

54. B. W. Andah, "The People of Upper Guinea (between the Ivory Coast and the Casamance)," in *General History of Africa*, ed. M. Elfasi, Vol. III (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 534 and Adu Boahen, "Fante and Fante A.D 1000-1800," 165. A detailed description will be given about the migration of the Akan from the Upper Guinea area to the present location below.

55 Ibid.

56. Libation is a form of prayer by the indigenous people where drinks are poured on the ground and words are uttered to commune with the spiritual world. Much is said about libation below on page 28.

The Akan affiliate under these eight matrilineal family groupings:

1. Ekoona and Asokore
2. Oyoko (Anona in Fante) and Dako
3. Asona and Dwum (or Dwimina)
4. Asenee and Adonten
5. Agona and Toa
6. Bretuo (Twidan in Fante) and Tena
7. Asakyiri and Amoakaade
8. Aduana and Atwea and Aberadi.<sup>57</sup>

Akan also place themselves in eight patrilineal family groupings (*ntoro*) that show one's totem.<sup>58</sup>

The main patrilineal groups are:

1. Bosommuru
2. Bosompra
3. Bosomtwe
4. Bosommaram
5. Nketia
6. Poakwa
7. Afram
8. Abankwaade<sup>59</sup>

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57. A. Adu Boahen, "Fante and Fante A.D 1000-1800," 165.

58. Totemism is a phenomenon that is difficult to explain. According to Peter Sarpong, it is the beliefs and practices, which "fall on the borderline between the notion of power in objects, or magic, and the idea of a personalized spirit in things or religion." Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corp, 1974), 59.

59. A. Adu Boahen, "Fante and Fante A.D 1000-1800," 165.

These are also known as *agya bosom* (Father's gods). It is through this that one's *ntoro*, which is responsible for one's moral upbringing, is realized. These names are the names of some major rivers. Akan believe that the spirit of the rivers work on people by protecting them. Every Akan belongs to one of the two groupings, which are conferred on them by their parents. Not only do siblings and people from the same family consider themselves as one family, but also an Akwapim, Fante or Akyim consider anyone who shares the same clan as a brother or sister. In the olden days, and even currently, there are families who will not agree to a marriage between two people who share the same clan. This is because they are seen as coming from the same family.<sup>60</sup> These clan groupings share the same animal totem.<sup>61</sup>

## 1.6 FAMILY RELATIONS

Akan have a complex family web, which connects every individual to at least two families, those of one's father and those of one's mother. This family web is what makes the extended family system an important feature among the Akan.

Ethnic groups in Ghana are divided into sub-groups called clans. Akan have divided their clans into 7 or 8.<sup>62</sup> Akan are matrilineal, meaning that inheritance, succession, and one's mother determines status in society. All other clans in Ghana are patrilineal.<sup>63</sup> When a group of people from a particular clan lives together in a community or village, they form a lineage. Every lineage has a head that organizes the group for all family ceremonies.<sup>64</sup>

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60. Ibid.

61. Totem is a term, which is derived from the North American Indian language. It has been widely used to reference objects of the animal and vegetable kingdoms, which are held to be in a special relationship with particular groups of people, or with individuals in a society. See Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 59.

62. Footnotes 26 and 28. Chapter two of this study will treat the clans in details.

63. This means they all inherit from their father. Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 36.

64. Ibid.

## 1.7 THE GENERAL DESCRIPTION OF THE AKAN LANGUAGE GROUP

Historically, the greater part of the forest zone of West Africa, which stretches from over 1000 miles of the central part of Liberia to the lower Niger area in Nigeria and beyond, is occupied by a group of people who speak a series of languages known as the Kwa language from the Niger Congo language group. The Kwa language group is related in vocabulary and in structure.<sup>65</sup> In his description of the area of settlement by the Kwa language group, B. W. Andah, indicates that according to historical-geographical evidence, the forest area the Kwa group occupied was difficult to penetrate by other people. Consequently, only a few small groups joined them, and the Kwa language groups absorbed those groups linguistically. This explains the linguistic similarities in the Kwa language groups.<sup>66</sup>

Andah further provides a list of the most important of the Kwa language group in terms of speakers, as presently these four:

1. Akan (Twi, Fanti) dominant in Ghana
2. Ewe, dominant in Togo and Republic of Benin, and spoken in the South-Eastern Ghana
3. Yoruba, dominant in Western Nigeria
4. Igbo, dominant in Eastern Nigeria<sup>67</sup>

Here it becomes apparent that the Kwa language groups are located in a vast area in West Africa, which extends from Liberia, through La Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Togo, and the area between Benin, and the Eastern Niger delta. This vast area shares similar linguistic characteristics.<sup>68</sup>

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65. B. W. Andah, "The People's of Upper Guinea (between the Ivory Coast and the Casamance)" in *General History of Africa*, ed. M. Elfasi, Vol. III., (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 540.

66. Ibid.

67. Ibid.

68. Ibid., 539.

Furthermore, in his description of the Kwa language groups of the Niger-Congo family, Joseph H. Greenberg, describes the Kwa family as:

#### KWA

- a) Kru: Bete, Bakwe, Grebo, Bassa, De, Kru (Krawi)
- b) Avatime, Nyango, Tafi, Logba, Likpe, Ahlo, Akposo, Lafana, Bowili, Akpafu, Santrokofi, Ahlo, Adele, Kebu, Anyimere, Ewe, Aladian, Avikam, Gwa, Kyama, Akye, Ari, Abe, Adyukru, Akan (Twi, Anyi, Baule, Guang, Metyibo, Abure), Ga, Adangme
- c) Yoruba, Igala
- d) Nupe, Gbari, Igbira, Gade
- e) Bini, Ishan, Kukuruku, Sobo
- f) Idoma, Agatu, Iyala
- g) Ibo
- h) Ijo<sup>69</sup>

The Kwa language group is the group in which this dissertation is interested, which is why it has been singled out in this dissertation from among the numerous language groups that Greenberg describes.

P. Kipre portrays the presence of the Akan in their present locations by asserting the difficulty in ascertaining an accurate scientific explanation, since it is based on oral tradition.<sup>70</sup> Notwithstanding the difficulty in the oral tradition, Kipre mentions two points worth noting. First, the relocation of some groups does not go back beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Second, there are

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69. J. H. Greenberg, *Languages of Africa*, (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1963), 8.

70. P. Kipre, "From the Ivory Coast Lagoons to the Volta," in *General History of Africa*, Vol. IV, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 330.



frequent borrowings among ethnic groups, which have confused the record. Kipre asserts that one group believes that their ancestors came down from heaven by being let down by a golden chain, while another describes being let down by means of an iron chain, and yet another group describes its ancestors as coming from an ant hill. This history, together with cross-cultural communication, makes it difficult to ascertain the accuracy of the origin of the Akan.<sup>71</sup>

According to Kipre, archeological and cultural evidence suggest that the interaction among the various Akan groups and the original people in the area in which they settled created new cultures. In 1974, researchers from Ghana and Côte D'Ivoire at a seminar in Bondukua unanimously agreed with this evidence when they assessed the different data provided by oral tradition. Kipre also explains that by the time the Akan, Kru, and Bron settled in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the village of Accra was in existence.<sup>72</sup>

Kipre describes how Professor Albert Adu Boahen, a historian in Ghana, followed the varied elements of the Akan culture and drew on the most recent linguistic studies to maintain the linguistic unity of the Akan people. He has also traced the states of migration, which brought them to their present settlements.<sup>73</sup> Through the tracing of the Akan people, Albert Adu Boahen demonstrates why there is congruence in the Akan language among Akan speakers, and he shows why there are numerous shades of meaning in the Akan language. Let us review what Adu Boahen has to say about the Akan linguistically.

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71. Ibid.

72. Accra is the capital city of Ghana. Ibid., 331.

73Ibid., 132.

## 1.8 THE MIGRATION OF AKAN AND ITS LINGUISTIC IMPACT

Adu Baohen indicates that the migration of the Akan to their present locations has brought some linguistic effects on the various sub-groups among them. As they tried to dislodge the indigenous, they ended up assimilating them and some of their other characteristics.

According to Adu Boahen, between 1000 A.D. and 1300 A.D., there was a migration southward by Akan, which brought them to their current location in Ghana. The reason given for the migration was the pressure of population growth and political disruption in the Western part of Sudan, which they inhabited.<sup>74</sup>

Akan are said not to have migrated together, but in two separate groups. The first group, which was made up of Wassa, Gwira, Ahanta and Sefwi, moved along the banks of the Tano and Ankobra rivers and settled near river Pra. It must be noted, however, that people in those days tended to build settlements near a river where they could have access to drinking water and enjoy some “sea” food. Again, the settlements near rivers might have contributed to the connections Akan have with the major rivers in Ghana, which determine the various *ntoro* groups. The second group that migrated was made up of Adansi, Asante, Fante, Akwamu, and Assin. This group probably moved along the Southeastern part of the two rivers of Pra and Ofin. They settled for some time along the confluence of these rivers and later moved further to their present locations.

In the latter part of the 13th century, when Akan migrated, there was another migration of the Ga-Adangbe and Ewe. They moved into Ghana from the areas of Dahomey or Southern Nigerian.<sup>75</sup> On arrival at the forest zone and the coastal area where they are currently settled,

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74. Adu Boahen “Fante and Fante A.D 1000-1800,” 166.

75. Ibid.

Akan met the Guan speaking people, fought them, conquered them, and subjugated them. The Akan assimilated the Guan people and culturally influenced them.

Another reason for linguistic difference among the Akan is that the Fante are not a homogenous group because they mingled with four other groups in their area of settlement. The mixture is made up of Fante, the Assin, the Asebu, the Afutu and the Etsii.<sup>76</sup> The Fante became the dominant group and imposed their culture and language on the others. Despite the dominance of the Fante, the other four groups also influenced them. Chukwukere shows this political absorption of the indigenous Effutu and other coastal communities by the Fante.<sup>77</sup>

The work of Adu Boahen gives credence to the findings of Chukwukere, when he [Adu Boahen] illustrates that between 1680 and 1750 there was a partitioning of the Gold Coast between the two principal Akan groups, the Asante and Fante.<sup>78</sup> The desire to expand their territories led the Asante to fight and conquer many of their surrounding neighbors. This led the Fante to enter into alliances with their neighboring inhabitants to prevent the Asante from taking dominance in the whole country.

The Fante managed to evolve after settling on the coast. The influence of the Fante over the indigenous people was not obtained so much by armed conquest, but by their natural character of colonization. It is believed that the Fante people showed a genius for travel and establishing themselves in places far from home. They arrived at the coastal part of Ghana

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76. Chukwukere describes two maps of the Gold Coast (Ghana) by an unknown European cartographer, which was reproduced by K. Y. Daaku in 1970. In the first map, which portrayed the Fante in 1629, they occupied a small territory that is bordered by Agona in the east and Asebu and Fetu (Effutu) in the west. In the second map, which dates 1729, revealed the Fante as absorbing all the three groups—Agona (Akan), and Asebu and Fetu (Guan). I. Chukwukere, “Akan Theory of Conception. Are the Fante Really Aberrant?” *Journal of the International African Institute* 48, no. 2 (1979): 146. Also Willem Bosman, *A New and Accurate Description of the Gold Coast of Guinea*, (London: Frank Cass, 1705), 418-42.

77. Ibid.

78. Adu Boahen, “Fante and Fante A.D 1000-1800,” 166.

sooner than the other Akan groups.<sup>79</sup> The Fante decided to generate a dialect, which would make the Fante language distinct. This language became a little different from the other Akan dialects.<sup>80</sup> They developed a culture mixed with the Indigenous Guan (Effutu) and their own, which was immigrant Fante Akan culture. With this mixture, the Fante embraced the patrilineal system of inheritance, which was a practice of the Guan. This system ensured that succession to a throne was patrilineal, which brothers and sons inherited, unlike the general Akan system of matrilineal inheritance, where inheritance is from the family line of the mother, sisters, and daughters.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Fante, together with the inhabitants of the coast, particularly the Effutu and the Anomabu, came in contact with some Europeans. This resulted in a socio-political development in the Fante State. This also resulted in the new State, Oguaa (Cape Coast), which became the capital of the Gold Coast. Schools were established and trade with Europeans became brisk, attracting the Asante to travel by foot to Oguaa to trade with the Europeans and the Fante. This commercial activity continued until the British colonized the entire country and moved the capital of the Gold Coast to Accra, 90 miles to the east, in 1877.<sup>81</sup> At that time, the Asante were a dominant force in the middle belt of the country and extended their influence to the northern parts of the country.

The Fante State continued its adopted patrilineal system of inheritance after it became the hub of the Gold Coast in terms of education, politics, overseas trade, and social advancement. It is argued that this system of inheritance continued until the authentication of the paramount king

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79. William T. Balmer, *A History of the Akan Peoples of the Gold Coast*, (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969), 65.

80. I. Chukwukere, *Akan Theory of Conception. Fante Really Aberrant?* 140.

81. *Ibid.*

Kofi Amissah in 1856, when they returned to the practice of the matrilineal system of inheritance, a practice characteristic of all the Akan.<sup>82</sup> This obviously affected the way Fante culture is practiced.

Thus far, it has been shown that the mingling of the Akan with the inhabitants they assimilated affected their cultural practices particularly in the area of linguistics. The Fante not only mixed their practices with the local inhabitants of Effutu and Anomabu, but were in turn affected by the number of Europeans who came to settle and trade with them.

Linguistic and cultural similarities can be traced among the various Akan people in Ghana. Among the Akan, they tend to follow a system of inheritance from the matrilineal line. Other ethnic groups inherit from their father's side of the family (patrilineal group). The matrilineal system of inheritance allows brothers and nephews from the maternal family to inherit family property. For instance, to become a king or a chief to rule the people, one must come from the queen mother's side of the family. Sons of a king or chief cannot succeed their father when a throne becomes vacant. Additionally, the Akan practice of marriage and naming ceremony of their children show a people from a common origin. For instance, when a young man attains the age of maturity and wants to marry, his uncles and aunts together with his parents go to the house of the girl he intends to marry and ask for the girl's hand in marriage.

Mothers play a crucial role in the anthropology of Akan. It is believed that the blood (*bogya*, or *mogya*) of every child is inherited from a mother or supplied by the mother. The blood is seen as the concrete aspect of the human person. Consequently, the mother must take care of her child bodily. The mother is responsible for providing the child's body. That is why, in terms

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82. Ibid.

of food, water, succession etc., the child acquires them from his or her mother's clan.<sup>83</sup> The various Akan sub-groups have this and other practices in common.

## 1.9 THE AKAN COSMOLOGY

The Akan cosmology depicts the indispensability of God in the affairs of human beings. For instance, Akan stress their dependence on God by expressions such as: "all people are God's children," signifying that God has an active role to play to help God's children on earth, just as parents do. *Nipanyinaa ye Onyamemma, Se Onyamepe a...* "If God wills it..." *Nyame ma kwan a...* "if God grants me..." These expressions are used when someone is talking about a future activity.<sup>84</sup> They believe that the universe is filled with spirits. The Supreme Being, who is a spirit, is believed to be the creator and sustainer of the universe. The Supreme Being (God) is known as *Onyame* or *Onyankopon*. God is believed to make God's supremacy visible through a pantheon of deities known as *abosom* and ancestors known as *nsamanfo*. The deities have some spirits below them who manifest themselves in trees, rivers, stones and charms.<sup>85</sup> God is at the apex of these spiritual beings. This reveals the pluralistic aspect of the African ontology in general, and that of the Akan in particular.

The worship practices of Akan, like that of most West Africans, led to a debate as to whether or not they offer sacrifices to God directly or to God through the agencies of deities, spirits, and the ancestors. We do not intend to go into the details of the debate; a brief summary will suffice in understanding and appreciating their worship.

Two theories emerged in Africa to explain why West African indigenous religions rarely offer sacrifices to God. These are models that explain the relationship between God and

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83. Peter K. Sarpong, *People Differ*, (Legon, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 90.

84. Robert B. Fisher, *West African Religious Traditions*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 140.

85. K. A. Busia, *African Worlds*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 191.

humanity. The two theories are: 1) God is not offered sacrifices frequently because God has left the earth and retired into the heavens; 2) The deities, spirits, and ancestors receive frequent sacrifices because they are mediators of God.<sup>86</sup>

### **1.9.1 GOD HAS LEFT THE EARTH AND RETIRED INTO HEAVEN**

Those who hold the view that God left earth and retired into heaven observe that God is not given sacrifices regularly because God has retired into heaven and left the day to day running of the world to the deities. Therefore, the indigenous worshippers do not offer regular sacrifices to God, but to the deities who are so close to them and who are administrators of the affairs of the earth. The argument is that God is in the skies and is too distant and too good to need a sacrifice or worship. God is seen as forgotten by Africans because of the distance between God and humanity. This argument started as early as the 1920s. Mircea Eliade is a proponent of this view.<sup>87</sup> Currently, this view does not have many supporters, since African anthropology and religious studies have done much to explain the understanding of worship in African cultures.

The weakness in this argument is that it takes the indigenous explanation of the transcendent nature of God literally and argues that because God is in the sky, God is easily forgotten in times of difficulties, and Africans resort to deities who are closer to them. This argument fails to recognize God's involvement or interest in the lives of human beings on earth. Those who uphold this argument take God out of the daily lives of humanity.

Through the use of a myth, Akan express the paradox of God, who is close to human beings, and at the same time, far from them. They believe that God used to dwell near the earth

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86. Justin Ukpong refers to the two models as "*Deus otiosus* theory," and "Mediumistic theory," in Justin S. Ukpong, "The Problem of God and Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 14, Fasc. 3 (1983): 187-203, also B.G. Der, "God and Sacrifice in Traditional Religions of Kasena and Dagaba of Northern Ghana," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 11, Fasc. 3 (1980): 172-187.

87. Justin S. Ukpong, *Ibid.*, 187.

and interacted with human beings. One day, an elderly woman was cooking by pounding *Fufu*.<sup>88</sup> She drove God away. Whenever she pounded the *Fufu*, the pestle she used knocked against God. God protested, but the woman did not pay any attention to God's warnings. Since God could not bear it any longer, God retreated further into the sky from the earth. According to the Akan, that is why God is near and yet far from human beings.<sup>89</sup> This does not mean that God is not involved in the lives of the people.

The meaning of the myth is to give an explanation to why the sky is up above, and why human beings cannot simply raise their hands, and touch the sky. This myth functions like any other myth that gives explanation to why things are the way they are in this world. It is not to be taken literally, but be viewed as a means of providing meaning to the universe.

The ethnographic data of the Akan contradict what Mircea Eliade proposes about the Akan and their relationship with God. This is because Akan have recourse to God in their daily activities. The compelling evidence of our argument is the presence of *Nyamedua* (God's tree) in the compound of many Akan. The *Nyamedua* is a branch of a tree with three prongs at the top with the base planted in the ground. Within the fork is placed a pot with rainwater, called "God's water," *Nyankonsuo*. This is a symbol of God's providence. It is believed that ancestors may visit at night and drink some of the water. The water is used to sprinkle family members to give them divine blessing. The tree then becomes a symbol of God's presence.<sup>90</sup> The lack of sacrifice to God therefore, cannot be a proof that the Akan do not worship God.

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88. *Fufu* is a staple food for the Asante people. It is a meal that is eaten every day, without which they claim to be fasting. It is a meal of mashed cassava or yam with plantain or cocoyam. One needs a mortar and a pestle to mash this meal.

89. Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 10.

90. Robert B. Fisher, *West African Religious Traditions*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 141. Also R.S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, (Accra, Kumasi: Presbyterian Book Depot, 1927), 23.



## 1.9.2 DEITIES, SPIRITS, AND ANCESTORS ARE GOD’S MEDIA

Proponents of this view argue that spirits, deities, and ancestors are intermediaries between God and the people on earth. This explains why sacrifices are offered frequently to these intermediaries. This view has attracted many followers including, but not limited to, Eva Meyerowitz, K. A. Busia, J. B. Dankwa, Robert S. Rattray, and Peter Kwasi Sarpong, who have written extensively about the Akan of Ghana. A quick glance at the discourse of these authors will throw more light on how the deities become a medium of God to reach out to people on earth.

According to Eva Meyerowitz, there is no temple or sanctuary erected for God (*Nyankopon*). Meanwhile thousands of temples abound for the deities, idols, and spirits, who derive their potency from *Nyankopon*. Their priests are supposed to be intermediaries between God and humanity.<sup>91</sup> Meyerowitz’s account suggests that through the agency of the deities and spirits, God relates to humanity, and their priests serve as intermediaries between God and humanity.

K. A. Busia, argues that the deities, spirits, and ancestors bridge the gap between the world of spirits and the land of the living.<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, J. B. Danquah declares that ancestors and deities mediate between human beings and the Supreme Being. He singles out ancestors as showing humanity the best way to live on this earth.<sup>93</sup>

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91. Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akan*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1942), 81.

92. K.A Busia, *African Worlds*, 191.

93. J. B. Danquah, *The Gold Coast Akan*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1945), 23.

Robert S. Rattray contends that *abosom* (gods) derive their powers directly from God (*Nyame*), the Supreme God. However, the power or spirit in a *suman*<sup>94</sup> comes from plants or trees, fairies, forest monsters, witches or unholy contact with the dead.<sup>95</sup> This shows that God is in charge of all the deities and spirits among the Akan. Additionally, Rattray maintains that at the time he was carrying out his research among the Asante people, almost every compound had a tree called *Nyamedua* (Tree of God). This tree is a symbol of the presence of God among God's children. The *Nyamedua* serves as an altar, and as God's presence. Wine, and food are placed under the tree as offerings for God.<sup>96</sup>

Peter K. Sarpong submits that God is believed to be “magnanimous, holy, a hater of evil, and creator,” who made everything in the world and sustains everything by his power. He also asserts that since God is the creator and sustainer of life, God is invoked first even if a sacrifice is being offered to deities and ancestors.<sup>97</sup> Sarpong admits that sacrifices are infrequently offered to God. He explains that individually, God comes into the limelight, whereas the ancestors and lesser gods come to the forefront in terms of lineage and ethnic worship. For this reason, sacrifices and worship, according to Sarpong, are rare occurrences. Prayers as worship are offered frequently to deities who cause more trouble. The role of the deities and spirits include giving human beings good harvest, children, rain, and everything that makes human life thrive. Some of the spirits and deities, in performing these functions, become very unmanageable.

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94. The plural of *suman* is *asuman*. A charm, talisman, fetish, or totem believed to have magical power for good or evil. In Daniel Miles McFarland, *Historical Dictionary of Ghana*, (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1985), 165.

95. R.S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, (Accra, Kumasi: Presbyterian Book Depot, 1927), 23.

96. R. S Rattray, *Ashanti*, (New York: Negro Universities Press, 1923), 142.

97. Peter K. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 11. Sarpong further maintains that he does not think that ancestors are worshipped; rather he observes that they are “venerated.” See Footnote 1 in *Ghana in Retrospect*, 1.

According to Sarpong, these are the ones who receive infrequent sacrifices. He asserts, however, that when all else fails, that is, when the deities and spirits turn their back on the people, then the people appeal to the Great God. God then serves as a justice in the Supreme Court, who has the final say on matters.<sup>98</sup> This does not suggest that God is not involved in the lives of humanity, as the first view of the debate suggests.

Other African writers, like Bolaji Idowu and B. G. Der, support the view that Africans believe that the Supreme Being exists and maintains a personal relationship with humanity. Africans worship the Supreme Being, though not frequently. This demonstrates a basic aspect of the personality of God in African thought as distant and yet near.<sup>99</sup> Bolaji Idowu reacts to the description of substituting the deities for God in worship as a “coup d’état” against God, but allows God the consolation of being approached on rare occasions.<sup>100</sup> Idowu in his statement shows that God is still in control and the lesser gods do not supplant God. Additionally, B.G. Der argues in line with Idowu, by taking the argument of the gods acting as media of God further by using the cultural norm where subjects cannot talk directly to a chief or king of a community. A member of a community approaches the king through an elder. Akan have a similar practice that B. G. Der is describing. Among the Akan, a king or chief addresses his people through a linguist,<sup>101</sup> and the people are required to address the king or chief through the linguist. A person does not speak directly to the king or chief, especially when he is sitting in state. The weakness

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98. Ibid., 12.

99. Justin S.Ukpong, “The Problem of God and Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion,” 190. Also Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, (London: SCM, 1973), 65.

100. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion*, (London: SCM, 1973), 65.

101. The Linguist is an official spokesperson of a traditional leader. People address the king through the linguist and the king addresses the people through the linguist. People do not address the king directly, in an official gathering irrespective of the person’s relationship with the king.

in this analogy is that the king or chief, who is a link between the living and the dead, is not supposed to be seen ordinarily, except on specific occasions.<sup>102</sup> God cannot be compared to this scenario because humanity is in constant communion with God.

Another weakness in the argument that deities and spirits are media, through whom God reaches out to people, is that the argument denies the deities and the spirits their rights for veneration, since they are seen in a limited sense, as means to an end, instead of an end in themselves. It becomes difficult to read the mind of an African or Ghanaian, who stands in front of a deity who is represented by a tree. How is one sure whether the worshipper is thinking of God when he or she is offering a sacrifice to God? Though the deities are creatures of God, some of them are attributed with some powers that enable them to work with God. For instance, the Yoruba of West Africa conceive that *Orisa-nla*, that is one of the Yoruba pantheons, helped God in the work of creation.<sup>103</sup>

Having discussed the two views relative to worship, we believe that a critical look must be taken in examining the meaning Africans or Akan give to the word “worship” and how it is understood in Judeo-Christian tradition. If an Akan is asked about “worship,” his or her explanation will be based on how culturally they understand the role of worship or sacrifice, which is different from the Judeo-Christian understanding of the word.

In Judeo-Christian tradition, absolute worship and sacrifice are addressed to God alone.<sup>104</sup> Sacrifice, which is the highest form of worship, should be directed only to God. In the Akan indigenous religion, or African indigenous religion, sacrifice is a means of communication

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102. R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, (Kumasi: Basel Mission Book Depot, 1956), 87.

103. Justin Ukpong, “Problem of God and Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion,” 196.

104. S. T. A. Burkill, *The Evolution of Christian Thought*, (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1971), 109.

between the physical world and the spiritual world. It opens the door for communication so the gods can be asked to perform some role in the lives of the people. Through the offering of sacrifices, the way is paved for communication with the spiritual world. Ukpong writes that cultic actions among most Africans “are not categorized in vertical terms of the higher and the lower, but in qualitative terms of the more potent and the less potent.”<sup>105</sup> He sums up the understanding of worship in African indigenous religion as Africans express it in their daily lives.

Akan, therefore, believe that God rules the earth through other deities and spirits. This is why other deities and ancestors are mentioned in their prayers. Whether or not Akan are monotheistic or polytheistic depends on the perspective of the culture one is looking at. If a person looks at the Akan understanding that there is a Creator who made everything in the world and sustains all things, then one can safely conclude that the culture is monotheistic. Conversely, if one takes note of the deities and spirits in addition to God, to whom public cult is directed, then to some extent, one can describe the religious beliefs of Akan as polytheistic. There is also a totemistic aspect of the Akan cultural life.<sup>106</sup> Because of the Akan and Africans basic understanding of God, the preaching about Yahweh (Supreme God) of the early missionaries, was meaningful to them. If the basic concept had not been there, it would have been improbable that Akan or Africans would have easily understood the missionary idea of God.

The Akan understand their relationship with God as the one who creates them and relates to them in varied ways. God is seen as the maker of the universe and is given several names, which depict God as infinite, visible everywhere, eternal, living from time immemorial. These

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105. Justin Ukpong, “Problem of God and Sacrifice in African Traditional Religion,” 200.

106. Peter K. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 12.

attributes of God show that God can be approached with empty hands, without an intermediary, and in any place. This is because Akan acknowledge God as Almighty and Omnipresent, as one who hears the voices of human beings, even the weakest.<sup>107</sup>

Akan believe that God, whom they call *Onyame* or *Nyankopon*, is the only Supreme Being. That name is never attributed to any other deity or spirit. This is revealed in the names they give to lesser gods and spirits. All the lesser gods are called *abosomby* the Akan and can never be called by the name they reserve to Yahweh alone, *Onyankopon* or *Nyame*. This is because they identify the difference between God and the gods.<sup>108</sup>

A cursory look at the attributes<sup>109</sup> of God will show the Akan description of God in the day-to-day lives of Akan.

### 1.9.3 NAMES AND ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

*Nyame* has other names and titles that express the concept of the Supreme Being. Some of the titles are:

- *Oboadee* or *Bore-bore* (Creator)
- *Odomankoma* (Infinite, Inventor)
- *AnanseKokroko* (The Great Spider, the Great Designer)
- *Onyankopon* (The Great One)
- *Tweadumpon* (The Dependable One)
- *Nana Nyame* (Grand Father God)

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107. Ibid. and J. B. Danquah, *The Gold Coast Akan*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1945), 28.

108. Peter K. Sarpong, "Can Christianity Dialogue with African Traditional Religion?" Accessed October 14, 2013, <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/sarpong.html>.

109. The attributes of God are listed here to express the Akan understanding of God to demonstrate who God is so that if human beings are created in the image of God or if humanity shares a spark of God in him or her, he/she will imitate these attributes in their daily activities.

God is sometimes personalized as *Onyankopon Kwame* (The Great One who was born on Saturday).<sup>110</sup>

God is thought of as “magnanimous,” holy, a hater of evil, and the one in charge of rain, the air, thunder, lightning, famine, drought, abundant harvest, epidemics, plagues etc.<sup>111</sup> All these attributes reveal who God is and what God does.

The belief in God is also expressed in various artistic works of the Akan. God is portrayed in songs, poetry, drumming, proverbs, and other symbols. The *Adinkra* symbols are more expressive of the Akan faith. *Adinkra* are visual symbols that are created by the Akan of Ghana and the Gyaman of Côte D’Ivoire in West Africa that represent concepts and aphorisms.<sup>112</sup>(See Figure 4.)

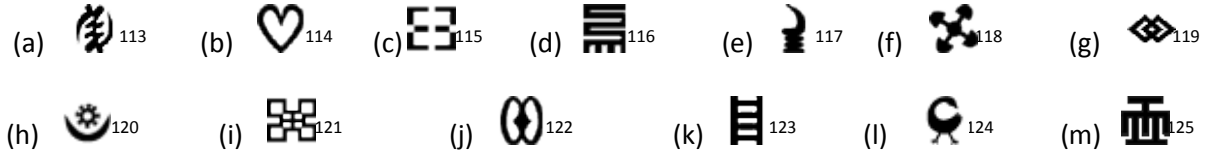
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110. There is not much said about why God is referred to as one born on Saturday, though God is believed to exist eternally, no beginning and end. Kwasi Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 192.

111. *Ibid.*, 10-11.

112. The *Adinkra* symbols date back to 1818/1817, during one of the Asante wars. “Adinkra Symbols of West Africa,” accessed February 16, 2013, <http://www.cacitches.com/general/adinkra-symbols-of-west-Africa.html>.

**Figure 4: Explanation of the Adinkra**



113. **Gye Nyame**, “Except for God.” This is a symbol of the Supremacy of God. This symbol is found everywhere in Ghana. It is found in one of the currencies in Ghana. This is the most used symbol for decoration. This symbol reveals the religious character of the Ghanaian people.

114. **Akoma**, “The Heart.” This is a symbol for patience and tolerance. A person who is said to have a heart is patient.

115. **Wofro Dua pa a**, “When you climb a good tree.” This is a symbol of support, corporation, and encouragement. The expression is *wofrodua pa a nayepia* meaning “when you climb a good tree, you are given a push.” This metaphor implies that the one who works for a good cause gets support.

116. **Nkyinkyim**, “Twisting.” A symbol of initiative, dynamism, and versatility.

117. **Akobem**, “War horn.” A symbol of vigilance and wariness. The *Akobem* is a horn that is used to sound battle cry.

118. **Akoma Ntoso**, “Linked Hearts.” This is a symbol of understanding and agreement.

119. **Epa**, “Handcuffs.” This is a symbol of law and justice, slavery, and captivity. Handcuffs were introduced into the culture during the slave trade. Later the chiefs in villages and communities handcuff offenders of law. It reminds people of the uncompromising nature of the law.

120. **Osram Ne Nsroma**, “The Moon and the Stars.” This is a symbol of love, faithfulness and harmony in the bond of marriage between a man and a woman.

121. **Nsaa**, “A type of hand woven fabric” This symbol stands for excellence, genuineness, or authenticity.

122. **Nyame Biribi wo Soro**, “God is in heaven.” This is a symbol of hope. A reminder that God’s dwelling place is in heaven or the skies, from where God listens to all prayers.

123. **Owuo Atwedie**, “The ladder of death.” This symbol is a symbol of mortality. It reminds humanity of the transitory nature of existence in this world and of the importance to live a good life to be a worthy soul in the afterlife.

124. **Sankofa**, “Return and get it.” This symbol shows the importance of the past. It demonstrates the value of history to inform the present to strategize for the future.

125. **Hwe Mu Dua**, “Measuring Stick.” This is a symbol of examination and quality control. It stresses the need to strive for the best quality, whether in production of goods or in human endeavors. “West African Wisdom: Adinkra Symbols & Meanings,” accessed February 16, 2013, <http://www.adinkra.org/htmls/adinkra/osra.htm>.



#### 1.9.4 PRAYER

Generally, traditional practices among Akan provide a shared understanding of beliefs.<sup>126</sup> Among the common practices of the Akan is the libation ritual. Akan begin every major ceremony with the pouring out of libation, which is a traditional prayer. This shows that religion is a root of the Akan culture; it forms the basis of their lives and thoughts. Libation is poured out at family gatherings, including the naming ceremony of a child, marriage, and in all the rites of passage. It is also poured at all official ceremonies with people trained to do it. Schnapps, a dry gin, water, or any other drinks, such as palm wine<sup>127</sup> or local gin, can be used for libation. The drink is poured out on the ground, while calling on the name of God, the Supreme Being, who alone is great, and the one who provides support for all people. The earth goddess, whose day of worship is Thursday, is called upon, and the spirits of their ancestors are also called upon for blessings on the living.

Libation has two parts: first, the act of pouring the drink on the ground; and second, the words that accompany the pouring of the drink. The words declare the intention of the pouring of the drink on the ground. An example of a libation poured out on behalf of a lady who brought an offering to the river deity (*nsuo Nyamaa*),<sup>128</sup> the chief (traditional ruler), and his elders is as follows:

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126. James P. Spradley's definition of cognitive anthropology sheds light on the shared practices of the Akan. He asserts that culture is the shared knowledge and beliefs a group holds intergenerationally in relatively constant manner. Or more exact culture is the knowledge and information people use to interpret their experience and generate their behavior. In James Spradley, *The Ethnography Interview*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 5.

127. Palm wine is a local drink that is made from the palm tree.

128. *Nsuo Nyamaa* is a river deity in Antoa, located in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. People swear that what they are saying is the truth, by invoking this deity. If a person invokes the name of this deity falsely, it is believed that the deity will punish that person, until he/she goes to the shrine of the deity to perform some cleansing rites.

*Onyankopon Tweduampon, nsa*

*Asaase [sic] Yaa, nsa*

*Nsuonyamaa begyensa*

*Asenie nsamanfo, nsa*

*Mo adaworoma na yeaba ha begu nsa yi.*

*Mo adomntina da keseeyiabeto yen wonkwa mu.*

*Nne da yiw'akoane w'afena aba bedaw'ase.*

*W'afenabae a wanfa ne nsa pan nammom*

*Okura ne nsam nsa ne dwan.*

*Se obisa mo mma no, se obisa sika ne nkoso*

*A mom ma no.*

*Mo mma no ahooden ne akwahosan.*

*Yesreakwahosanama Asanteman, Antoa*

*Asantehene ne Oman Panyin Rawlings ne*

*Ne fiefo*

*Mo mmegyedwan ne nsanamommoa*

*Won a wosommo*

*Onipabusuefo a ekaa no nkoa anka*

***God the Creator, come for drink***

***Earth Yaa, come for drink***

***River deity Nyamaa, here is drink for you***

***Ancestors of Asenie, we offer you drink***

***It is by your protection and blessing that  
we have been able to come and feed you.***

***By your help this sacred day has come to  
meet us in health.***

***On this day, your maidservant and  
grand-daughter has come to thank you.***

***She does not come empty handed,  
she brought drinks and a sheep.***

***When she asks for children, give her; when  
she asks for money and prosperity, give her.***

***Grant her health and prosperity.***

***We pray for long life for the Asante King,  
long life for the Asante nation and Antoa  
long life and blessings upon the Head of  
State, Rawlings and***

***his Family.***

***Receive this sheep and drink. Protect all  
who serve you.***

***Any evil person who conspires against us,***

*Yenye yiye dee, ma musuo ne adwenbone*

*let the conspiracy backfire on him/her.*

*Ntran 'apampa so.*<sup>129</sup>

This form of libation prayer indicates how the Akan perceive God and other deities. The full text is given to show the elements that are required in the pouring out of libation. The above libation was poured at a time that Jerry John Rawlings was the president of Ghana. God was being asked to bless Rawlings and his family, the king of Asante, and the chief of Antoa. Antoa is the name of the place where the libation was poured out.

### **1.10 RELIGIONS IN GHANA**

Ghana is religiously a pluralistic country. The majority of the population practices Christianity. However, some people practice Islam and African Indigenous Religion, and others do not have any religious affiliation. The percentage distribution of religions in Ghana is shown below (Table 3)

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129. Pashington Obeng, *Asante Catholicism*, (Leiden, New York: E. J. Brill, 1996), 55.

**Table 3: Distribution of Religions in Ghana**

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Percentage (%)</b>
1. Christian	68.8
1.1. Pentecostal or Charismatic	24.1
1.2. Protestant	18.6
1.3. Roman Catholic	15.1
1.4. Other	11.0
2. Islam	15.9
3. African Indigenous Religion	8.5
4. Other	0.7
5. No religious affiliation	6.1 <sup>130</sup>

The people in the Gold Coast (now Ghana) practiced the African Indigenous Religion and Islam before the arrival of the missionaries who introduced Christianity to them. It is recorded that Islam as a religion came to the present day Ghana in the 14<sup>th</sup> century from the northern part of the country.<sup>131</sup> The Islamic leaders, who were known as *malams*, wielded influence through fortune telling and prepared amulets and charms for protection from sickness and war.<sup>132</sup> The majority of the Muslims in Ghana are Sunni Muslims, who observe the Maliki legal tradition,<sup>133</sup> and a few of them follow the Shafi'i school of thought.<sup>134</sup>

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130. "Religions in Ghana," CIA World Factbook, accessed October 13, 2013, <http://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/gh.htm>.

131. John Azuma, "Muslim-Christian Relations in Ghana," accessed October 13, 2013, <http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/cd36-01.html>.

132. Ibid.

In 1482, the Eucharistic Liturgy (Mass) was first celebrated at Elmina in Ghana (then Gold Coast).<sup>135</sup> This discloses how early the Roman Catholics came to the country. Because many missionaries became sick from mosquito bites and some of them died as a result of contracting malaria, they went back home. In 1828, the Basel missionaries arrived on the Gold Coast. Dr. J. A. Urlsperger, from Germany, founded this missionary group in 1730. It was a society for the Advancement of Christian Truth and Godly Piety based in Germany and Switzerland, with Basel as its headquarters.<sup>136</sup> The Methodist Church missionaries came to the Gold Coast in 1835. These missionaries established schools and trained the elites in the country for over a century.<sup>137</sup> In 1880, Sir James Marshall made a request to the Propagation of Faith in Rome, asking for the creation of the Prefecture of the Gold Coast. Two priests from the Society of Missionaries of Africa (SMA) arrived in Ghana to fulfill that wish. A century later, beginning in the 1980s, Ghana saw the rise in the Pentecostal Churches. These include:

- a) The Apostolic Church
- b) The Church of Pentecost
- c) The Christ Apostolic Church

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133. Maliki is one of the four schools of thought within the Sunni Islam. Their religious laws are named after Maliki ibn Anas (ca. 710-95), he was a leading jurist from Medina. This school uses tradition as a guide. The Maliki is predominant in north, central, and West Africa, and Egypt. "Maliki Islam," accessed October 13, 2013, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/intro/islam-maliki.htm>.

134. The Shafii School of Islamic law was named after Muhammed ibn Idris al-Shafi'i (767-819). Imam Shafii was brought up in Mecca. He later taught in Baghdad and Cairo and followed an elastic legal path that laid down the rules for analogy adapted by other legal schools. This school is considered the easiest school in terms of social and personal rules. This school was predominant in Indonesia, Southeast Asia, Lower Egypt, and parts of Syria, Palestine, East Africa and South Africa.

135. Catholic Bishops' Conference in Ghana, accessed October 13, 2013, <http://cbcgha.org/cbc/index.php>.

136 Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 111. Also Paul Gifford, *African Christianity*, (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 57.

137. Paul Gifford, *African Christianity*, 57.

d) The Assemblies of God and

e) The African Independent Churches

These Pentecostal waves changed the religious dynamism in Ghana and continue to make a greater impact on Ghanaians. The airwaves are filled with the Pentecostal preachers, and most of the television stations broadcast great Pentecostal or Charismatic leaders such as Pastor Mensah Otabil, Bishop Charles Agyin Asare, Bishop Duncan William, and Bishop Dag Heward-Mills.<sup>138</sup> These men have become household names and are helping to educate Ghanaians spiritually and physically. Some writers, such as Paul Gifford,<sup>139</sup> George Sidney Williamson,<sup>140</sup> Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter,<sup>141</sup> and others, have also contributed in no small measure to highlight the contribution of religion in the Ghanaian cultures.

Mensah Otabil established a university in Ghana, and others are trying to follow his lead. The African Initiated Churches, which seek to combine indigenous beliefs of the people with that of Christianity, have also had impact on the Ghanaian society. Many of the people who practice the African Initiated Churches' way of worship are able to relate to their religious experiences. This relationship exists because whatever they do is born from their culture and they do not have a history of people from other countries introducing their mode of worship to them as happened in the main line Christian Churches.

### **1.11 THE AKAN THEORY OF THE COMPOSITION OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

As a result of their common origin, Akan have similar socio-political institutions and organizations. They believe in a Supreme God, *Nyame*, who created heaven, earth, human

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138. Lamin Sanneh and Joel A. Carpenter, *The Changing Face of Christianity*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 83.

139. Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004).

140. George Sidney Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1965).

141. Lamin Senneh and Joel A. Carpenter, *The Changing Face of Christianity*.

beings, and everything in the world. They hold the belief that every human being has a spark of God in him or her.

Akan believe that human beings are from God and go back to God at death. This is why they describe the composition of the human person as including both material and spiritual elements. The human person therefore has the *okra*, *honam (mogya)*, *sunsum*, *ntoro*, *sasa*, and *saman*, as their constituent elements. These elements are the “soul”, “body (blood),” “spirit,” “spirit derived from a father,” “a protective principle who causes vengeance on wrong doers,” and the “ghost” respectively.<sup>142</sup>

Akan consider that every human person is born into this world with a name that is given to him or her by God. This God-given name is identified with the day in which a particular person is born. It is what they call *Kradin* (natal names).<sup>143</sup> The seven days of the week have their names and characteristics. These are the names that a child will be called until a designated day when he or she will be *outdoored*<sup>144</sup> and given a family name.

Consequently, Akan do not wait until a year has passed to celebrate a birthday. Birthday is celebrated each week; this is called *krada*. Elderly people and wealthy ones can afford to hold their *krada* as a Sabbath day, a day where they will not do much. Many Akan fast and practice spiritual exercises on the day they are born since it is a day they cherish and believe that they are

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142. Peter K. Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, (Legon, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 91. Also Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Ethnophilosophy and its Critics: A Trialogue,” in *Readings in African Philosophy: An Akan Collection*, ed. Safo Kwame (New York: University Press of America, 1995), 85. See chapter two for a detailed description of the composition of the human person. The concept is briefly dealt with in this chapter to shed light on the Akan cosmology.

143. *Kradin* (natal names) has a relationship with the *okra*. It is called *kradin* because it a day *okra* enters the world, and the *okra* comes with his/her name.

144. An outdooring is a ceremony that is performed on the eighth day a child is born. This is a day that a child is given a family name by the child’s father. It has to be noted that even though the child belongs to his or mother’s family, it is his or her father who gives the child a name. See Peter Kwasi Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 88-89.

closer to God. They will get up early in the morning and pour out libation to their personal *okra* or *nkrabea*.<sup>145</sup> According to Philip Bartle, the *nkrabea* or destiny soul should not be understood in the Western scientific cosmology as a predetermined set of occurrences, rather it should be understood as having a personality. “It is spiritually organic and, like a person, can be bribed, cajoled, and influenced.” If the *okra* is not well treated, it will become dark (*krabiri*) and bring bad luck.<sup>146</sup> It is because of statements like this that Wiredu does not want to interpret the *okra* as the soul. How can the human soul be bribed or cajoled? This will be considered in chapter two.

The natal names and their significance in Akan life and thought are shown below (Table 4).

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145. *Nkrabea* is linked to destiny. It is the goodbye gift of God to each person at birth. Much will be said on this matter when we are discussing the *okra* worship later in this chapter. Philip F. W. Bartle, “The Universe Has Three Souls,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 14, Fasc. 2 (1983), 98.

146. Philip F. W. Bartle, “Universe Has Three Souls,” 98.



**Table 4: Natal Name Table<sup>147</sup>**

Day		Natal Name		Honorific	Child of ____	
English	Akan	Male	Female	Titular god	Akan Sense	Classic Sense
Sunday	Kwasiada	Kwasi	Akosua	Awusi	(Under) the Sun	Sun
Monday	Dwowda	Kwadwo	Adwoa	Awo	Peace	Moon
Tuesday	Benada	Kwabena	Abenaa	Abena (Ben)	Fire or Heat	Mars (War)
Wednesday	Wukuda	Kwaku	Akua	Aku (Okuning)	Fame	Mercury (Woden)
Thursday	Yaoda	Yao (Yaw)	Yaa	Aberaw	Strength	Jupiter (Thor, Jove)
Friday	Frida[sic] 148	Kofi	Afua	Afi	Growth	Venus (Freya)
Saturday	Memeneda	Kwame	Ama	Amen	Most Ancient (Seasoned)	Saturn (Amon of Egypt)

147. J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968), 47. Also Kwame Gyekye, *Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 172; Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, "Concepts of the Soul among the Akan of the Gold Coast," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 21, no. 1 (Jan. 1951), 25.

148. Friday is known in the Akan language as Fiada, and not "Frida" as it is recorded in J. B. Danquah, *Akan Doctrine of God*, 47.

The above table discloses that there is more to the natal name than one can imagine. Every Akan has a God-given name that is used to identify him or her, and one is addressed by one's name by a talking drum in ceremonies. Family and lovers use these names as terms or names of endearment. Kwame Gyekye sheds much light on the natal days when he writes that it reveals one's destiny and helps to determine one's character. Those born on Monday are known to be suppliant, humble, calm, (*okoto*). Those born on Tuesday are compassionate (*ogyam*). Those born on Wednesday are champions of the cause of others (*ntoni, atobi*). Those born on Thursday are courageous, aggressive, and warlike (*preko*). Those born on Friday are wanderers (*okyini*) and discoverers. Those born on Saturday are great (*atoapem*) and problem solvers (*oteanankaduro*, meaning one who has antidote to snake bite). Those born on Sunday are protectors (*bodua*, meaning the tail of an animal).<sup>149</sup>

The Akan conception of the human person has attracted a debate among some Akan scholars. First, Kwasi Wiredu disagrees with those who interpret the *okra* as the soul. Kwame Gyekye maintains that the *okra* is the soul. Secondly, Kwame Gyekye does not agree with those who assert that the *sunsum* is derived from a father. He maintains it is divine and comes from God and that those who claim it is from a father are confusing the *sunsum* with *ntoro*. Additionally, the use of *sunsum* and *honhom* has also become a concern in translating the Akan language.

## 1.12 CONCLUSION

In sum, we have presented the historical background of the Akan in this chapter. We started by exploring where the Akan are located in Ghana and from where they migrated. We have highlighted the context of everyday life within which Akan understand their world. Their

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149. Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 172.

cosmology, beliefs, and practices, which we have delineated, reveal a strong relationship between God (*Nyame*) and human beings (*nipa*). The Akan practical social context, which we have discussed, will serve as an interpretive tool in this dissertation to structure and shed light on the Christian understanding of the human person as created in the image of God.

This dissertation attempts to shed light on the understanding of the human person, what we share in common and our uniqueness, which reveal much about God, the creator of the universe and everything in it. We seek to clarify the issues involved in the debate between Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu by showing anthropological possibilities and demonstrate that, in spite of their disagreements, there are some constituent elements in the human person that point to the human being as created in the image of God and created as a unique being within creation.

Drawing from the contextual reality of the Akan, we intend to demonstrate that the *okra* and other constituent elements in the human person point to the image of God in the human person. In this dissertation, we will organize materials in relation to the Akan contextual reality to further explain the Christian message as a means to appreciate the human person being created in the image of God and human relationship with God, neighbor, and the universe. Through the contextual reality of the Akan and the Christian message, it will become apparent that the presence of the *okra* and *honhom/sunsum* in the human person is a demonstration of the human person being created in the image of God. The contextual reality of Akan will help to shed light on the nagging questions with which humanity is confronted. To carry out this critical reflection on contextual praxis effectively as our methodology, we must enter into a dialogue with other disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology and theology to address the

conundrums in this world. This dissertation attempts to dialogue with other disciplines to reveal the meaning of the human person being created in the image of God.

We turn to chapter two to develop the Akan understanding of the human person, so as to reveal the Akan cosmo-religious worldview as a tool to understand the meaning of creation in the image of God. It will become clearer as we explore the ethnography of the Akan language in chapter two that there is a correlation between the Akan anthropology, creation in the image of God, and the uniqueness of the human person.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE AKAN ANTHROPOLOGY AND ETHNOGRAPHY

*Aninguase nfata okani* (no Akan deserves to be disgraced)

#### 2.0 INTRODUCTION

The background of the Akan has been explored in chapter one, and their location on the map of Ghana has been shown. Their worldview has been investigated to illustrate their understanding of the human person. In chapter two, we intend to examine the Akan anthropology and ethnography. The structure of the Akan notion of the human person can enable us to describe the human person as uniquely created in the image of God. There is an ongoing debate between Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu, about the understanding of the soul (*okra*) and human spirit (*sunsum*).<sup>1</sup> This chapter unfolds our understanding of the human person and how other Akan writers will help us to describe the Akan anthropology and ethnography.

In this chapter, we present the folk narrative of the Akan anthropology to analyze the Akan cosmo-religious worldview, which illustrates the understanding of the human person according to the Akan. The articulation of the nature of humanity and human relationship with the spiritual world will be investigated, while inviting most Akan writers into the conversation in order to examine the debate between Gyekye and Wiredu. We will turn our attention to the Akan understanding of personhood to illustrate the role of the community on the individual person and

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1. The debate between Kwame Gyekye and Wiredu will be dealt with in detail as this chapter progresses. However, it must be noted that Wiredu does not want Akan to interpret the *okra* as the soul, whereas Gyekye sees the *okra* as the soul. Also for Gyekye the *sunsum* is eternal, it is of earthly origin for Wiredu.

the concept of relationality among Akan. We will further explore the translation of the bible into the Akan language to clarify the issues that arise as a result of the Akan understanding of the elements<sup>2</sup> that constitute the human person such as: *okra*, *sunsum*, *honhom*, *ntoro*, *mogya*, *saman* and such words that have some nuances in the Akan language.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.1 THE AKAN ANTHROPOLOGY: THE COMPOSITION OF THE HUMAN PERSON

According to Akan, every human being derives some elements from his/her father and mother, and some elements from *Nyankopon* (God). These elements from the three sources (God, mother and father) come together to make a person a human being. Akan believe that it is God who ultimately creates the human person. They describe the constituent elements of the human person as *okra*(soul), *mogya* (blood), *honam* (body), *sunsum* (spirit), *honhom* (breath of life), *ntoro*(spirit from a father), *saman* (ghost), and *sasa* (spirit).<sup>4</sup>

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2. We will use the words “elements” and “components” in our discourse interchangeably to denote the various components that make up human beings.

3. For the unfamiliar, we define some terms:

1. **Okra** is the soul, it is part of God's self. The *okra* is believed to be the undying part of the human person. It pre-existed the human person and it is believed to be what takes leave of God and tells God what it is going to do in the world. It is the bearer of one's destiny or mission on earth.
2. **Mogya** is the blood that is given to a child from his or her mother. This establishes the bond between them and determines one's clan. Sometimes it is referred to as *Bogya*. (This dissertation will use *mogya* to signify blood).
3. **Honam** is the human body. Sometimes in describing the physical part of the human person, some authors use *honam* instead of *mogya*.
4. **Sunsum** is the spiritual part of a person and enjoys pre-existence. It accounts for the character of a person. It can be trained from being light to heavy.
5. **Honhom** is the element in a person, which makes him or her breath and which keeps a person alive.
6. **Ntoro** is a spiritual element in a person transmitted from the father to his children.
7. **Saman** is a ghost, the spirit of a person after death.
8. **Ancessor** is a member of a family who led a good life and has died. This person is believed to be with God and helps the living. In Christianity (especially in the Catholic faith), an ancestor is a Saint.
9. **Sasa** is the protective principle, which wrecks vengeance on anybody who does abnormal harm to another person. It is also seen as a revengeful principle in the human person.

(See Peter K. Sarpong, “Health and Medicine in African Traditional Religion,” *Bulletin of the Pontificium Consilium Pro Dialoge Inter Religiones* XXXVIII, no. 3 (1993); Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect* (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974); Peter K. Sarpong, *Peoples Differ* (Legon-Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 90; and Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 85.

4. The *sunsum*, *honhom*, *ntoro*, *sasa* and *saman* are all spiritual components of the human person. See Ibid.

Akan believe that the human person is made up of material and immaterial substances in his or her constitution (body and spirit). The body can be touched and felt, but the spirit cannot be seen or touched. It is through the spiritual elements in the human person that every one communes with God and the spiritual world. A conception theory of Akan<sup>5</sup> indicates that during intercourse between couples, a father contributes his *ntoro* and *sunsum* (spirit) through his sperm, and a mother contributes *mogya* (blood) through her ovaries in the formation of the human person. God adds the *okra* (soul) to the spirit of a father and the blood of a mother to complete the creation of the human person.

The *okra* is a small particle of God in the human person; it is this *okra* from God together with the other constituent elements, which makes a human person a living being. Akan maintain that the breath of God (*honhom*) vivifies humanity and accompanies the *okra*, enabling a person to breathe. When the breath leaves a person, he/she is believed to have died and his/her *okra* leaves and returns to God. The spirit<sup>6</sup> that leaves the human person turns into a *saman* (ghost) and leaves for the world of the ancestors. The body of that person is buried in the ground, indicating that the spiritual part, which came from God, goes back to God, and the material part of the person is buried.

The *okra* has attracted many writings expressing the numerous ways Akan understand it. The *okra* is seen as: 1) a life-force, 2) a person's double, 3) operational during sleep, 4) attributed to only human beings, and 5) an object of worship.

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5. The idea of transfer of "spermatical *sunsum*" is philosophically questionable. This has also contributed to the debate about the Akan indigenous theory of conception. We state it here because there are some Akan who still hold on to this theory.

6. The spirit that leaves the human body after death is the spiritual elements in the human being. These spiritual elements are the *okra* and *sunsum/honhom*. The spiritual elements will be discussed when we treat the various Akan writers and their description of the constituent elements in the human person.

### 2.1.1 OKRA AS A LIFE-FORCE

First of all, the *okra* is seen as a life-force in the constitution of the human person. Eva L. R. Meyerowitz observes that the *okra* is present in every person as long as that person lives. She indicates that its strength varies at different times. She cites the example of a person's life-force diminishing when he/she is in shock or grieving. Akan will state: *Me kra adwane afiri me ho* (My *kra* has gone away from me), or *Me kra atu ayera* (My *kra* has flown away). When a person is bothered by his/her conscience, or when a person is getting thinner and more lifeless, Akan will describe such a person as *ne kra ayera neho* (he/she is losing his/her *kra*). Based on these statements, Meyerowitz asserts that the *okra* is "life itself". Indeed, it is the vital force or the source of energy in a person, which also provides a person's great vessel of strength and livelihood. She maintains that it is a divine spirit in the human person.<sup>7</sup>

Meyerowitz further demonstrates that the *okra* is divine and a life-force in the human person. This is the humanizing principle in the human person whose presence in the body means life, and whose absence means death. This is the life principle that Wiredu refers to in his description of the *okra* as "that whose presence in the body means life and whose absence means death and which also receives the individual's destiny from God."<sup>8</sup>

Anthony Appiah also identifies the *okra* as the life-force.<sup>9</sup> It is evident that Meyerowitz, Wiredu, and Appiah maintain the *okra* provides life in every human being. Since its presence in a person means life and its absence means death, we cannot talk about human life without the *okra*.

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7. Eva I. R. Meyerowitz, "Concept of the Soul among Akan of Gold Coast,"<sup>24</sup>.

8. Kwasi Wiredu, "The Akan Concept of Mind," *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies* 3, (Oct. 1983): 119. Also Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 86.

9. Anthony Kwame Appiah, *Readings in African Philosophy*, (Lanham, New York: University of America, 1995), 85.



According to Peter Sarpong, the *okra* originates from God and is the humanizing principle that distinguishes human beings from “brute animals, trees, rivers, ropes, and other creatures of God.”<sup>10</sup> Sarpong’s contribution indicates that the *okra* is peculiar only to human beings. God’s other creatures have life, but they do not have the *okra* like human beings do. Among Akan, animals are believed to possess *sasa*, a protective principle, which brings about vengeance on anyone who offends another and acts as their *okra*.<sup>11</sup>

Sam Akesson supports the view that the *okra* is a life-force by describing a practice among Akan where a mother will produce a glottal sound from the baby by covering the baby’s mouth when her baby starts to yawn. The sound is believed to induce the *okra* of the baby to stay, lest the *okra* leaves the baby, and the baby dies. While babies are sleeping, making noise is to be avoided because, if the sleeping child becomes scared, the child’s fright will be detrimental to a family. It is believed that shouting would scare a baby’s soul away.<sup>12</sup>

### **2.1.2 OKRA AS DOUBLE**

A second view is that the *okra* is seen as double in an individual’s life. Peter K. Sarpong, Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, Sam K. Akesson, Robert Lystad, and J. G. Christaller have all emphasized the dual nature of the *okra* in the human person.

According to Peter K. Sarpong, the *okra* is not only the soul of a person but appears also to be the custodian spirit or protector, which guards a person, and gives him/her good or bad advice. These double roles of the *okra* are what make some writers refer to the *okra* as a person’s

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10. Peter K. Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, (Legon, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 91.

11. Sam K. Akesson, “The Akan Concept of the Soul,” *African Affairs* 64, no. 257 (Oct. 1965), 287.

12. *Ibid.*, 281.

double. The *okra*, according to Sarpong, may fail to guide and protect a person. He states that in such a situation, the Akan will say: *Ne kra apa n'akyi* (his/her soul has deserted him/her).<sup>13</sup>

Sarpong states that the *okra* (soul) is a small particle of God that makes a person a living being. As mentioned earlier, when the breath of life (*honhom*) and the soul (*okra*) leave a person that person stops breathing and is considered dead.<sup>14</sup> Since, according to Sarpong, the *okra* is “a part of God Himself,” then the *okra*, after leaving the *mogya* or the body, continues to live in the netherworld. He also discusses the issue of the *okra* bidding God farewell before birth, and God giving the *okra* its destiny.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to Sarpong, who describes the *okra* as protective to the human person, Sam K. Akesson describes the double role of the *okra* as the soul and advisor who gives good or bad advice.<sup>16</sup> A question arises in this view. If the *okra* comes from God and its duty is to guard and protect a person, why then does it fail in guiding or protecting a person? None of the Akan writers answers this question.

Eva L. R. Meyerowitz also discusses the dual role of the *okra*. Besides describing the *okra* as a life-force of divine origin, she ascribes a protective role to the *okra*. She maintains that the *okra* is a person's instinct, which protects a person from danger. She describes it as a person's “guardian spirit.” Since Akan can make a statement such as: *Ne kra na edii n'akyi ntira anka owui* (But for his/her *okra* he/she would have died), she visualizes the *okra* as a person's

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13. Peter K. Sarpong, “Health and Medicine in Africa Traditional Religion,” *Bulletin of the Pontificium Consilium Pro Dialoge Inter Religiones* XXVIII, no. 3 (1993), 95/80-1.

14. Peter K. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 37.

15. Peter K. Sarpong, “Health and Medicine in Africa Traditional Religion,” 95/80-1.

16. Sam K. Akesson, “The Akan Concept of the Soul,” 281.

twin or double. This indicates that, for the most part, an individual's fate depends on unconscious impulses.<sup>17</sup>

Robert Lystad also maintains the double roles of the *okra* and adds that the *okra* was given to the first parents who in turn transmitted it to their children.<sup>18</sup> He does not indicate which first parents he means, whether Adam and Eve or one's first ancestral parents. Lystad brings to the double aspect of the *okra* the idea that God gave the *okra* to the first parents and permitted them to transmit it to their children. This opinion is not widely accepted among the other Akan anthropologists. The majority of those who study the Akan assert that God puts the soul in the human person in the process of conception, thus each person receives the *okra* directly from God.<sup>19</sup>

In the Asante and Fante Dictionary, J. G. Christaller writes about the double role of the *okra* and the Akan understanding of it. He states that the *okra* is the soul or spirit of a person. He continues that it is partly seen as a separate being, distinct from the person. It advises a person by giving either a good or bad counsel, which makes an endeavor to prosper or snub. In the case of prosperity, the *okra* is giving a thanksgiving offering.<sup>20</sup>

The above discussion on the *okra* as playing two roles in a person's life indicates that the *okra* is a vitalizing principle in the human person, which also protects and advises the human person. These roles make it difficult to compare the *okra* to the human soul, as Wiredu suggests, particularly when the *okra* is portrayed as offering either good or bad advice. How can the *okra*,

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17. Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, "Concept of the Soul among Akan of Gold Coast," 24.

18. Robert Lystad, *The Ashanti*, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1958), 155.

19. I. Chukwukere, "Akan Theory of Conception," *Journal of the International African Institute* 48, no. 2 (1978), 138.

20. J. G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language*, (Basel: Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, 1933), 262. The practice of giving a thanksgiving offering to the *okra* is what others refer to as the worship of the *okra*. This will be treated in details below.

which is a part of God, give bad advice? Is it comparable to the human conscience? As mentioned earlier, the Akan writers we have treated so far do not deal with these questions.

Eva Meyerowitz adds a further note to the role of the *okraby* indicating that the *okra* is the unconscious impulse in every person, whereas the *sunsum* becomes the conscious impulse, and the two make a whole. Her explanation implies that the *okra* and the *sunsum* are two elements in one soul.<sup>21</sup>

### 2.1.3 OKRA AS OPERATIONAL DURING SLEEP

A third description given to the *okra* is that it is operational during sleep. According to Meyerowitz, the *okra* is a divine spirit to which inspirations, dreams, visions, and fantasies are attributed.<sup>22</sup> The *okra* is believed to leave the body and be wandering everywhere during sleep. That is why nothing can hinder a person when he/she is dreaming. A person can dream while he/she is standing on top of a mountain and jumps to the ground without hurting himself or herself; one can also fly in a dream. All these possible scenarios are as a result of the *okra* being active in a dream. One may be tempted to ask Meyerowitz whether it is the *okra* that operates in dreams or whether it is the *sunsum*, or both, since she describes the *okra* as the unconscious impulse and the *sunsum* as the conscious impulse in the human person.

Robert Rattray counteracts Meyerowitz's view of the *okra*'s involvement in dreams. According to Rattray, it is untrue that during sleep the *okra* leaves the body and later comes back. Rattray indicates that the only time the *okra* leaves the body is when a person dies. He states: "When you sleep your '*kra* does not leave you, as your *sunsum* may."<sup>23</sup> Asserting that the

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21. Eva Mereowitz, "Concept of the Soul among Akan of Gold Coast,"<sup>27</sup>.

22. Ibid.

23. Robert Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti* (Accrea: Presbyterian Book Depot, 1959), 154.

*sunsum* and the *okra* are two elements in one soul, as Meyerowitz does, means that what is said of the one implies the other. The *okra* can be spoken about when in fact one means an operation of the *sunsum* in the *okra*. If this is true, then Meyerowitz and Rattray are both right in their statements, and that the *sunsum* operates in the *okra*, since there are some constituent elements in the human composition that work in the *okra*.

Kwame Gyekye observes certain things that the *sunsum* does with the *okra* and draws the conclusion that the *sunsum* is divine. He affirms what Rattray asserts about the role of the *okra* in dreams and maintains that the idea of the *okra* being operational in a dream is not only limited to the African cosmology, but also present in the Western world. He cites Plato's allusion to it, in referring to it as the lowest part of the soul.<sup>24</sup>

In his *Republic*, Plato describes the three-part soul. He first cites calculation. The soul calculates and is concerned with the good, i.e. with the best course of action. Second, he cites the desire, which desires. The desire is concerned with pleasure. Third, he cites the spirit. This soul gets spirited and reacts to perceived wrongs. The three parts of the soul do not meddle with one another but are managed to provide harmony. Plato compared them to the harmony in musical notes.<sup>25</sup> Plato however, acknowledges that there are some "terrible, savage, and lawless form of desires," like a wild beast in every human being, even those who are cultured. These desires manifest themselves in dreams.<sup>26</sup> What Plato is referring to as the "wild beast" in every human being is, according to Gyekye, not necessarily equivalent to the Akan *sunsum*, but just as Plato's desire or "wild beast" (which, like the *sunsum*, experiences dreams) is part of the soul

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24. James Adams, *The Republic of Plato*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 571c,14; see Book IX.

25. G. R. F. Ferrari, *Ibid.*, 123.

26. G. R. F. Ferrari, *Ibid.*, 123-5

and thus not physical object, so is *sunsum*.<sup>27</sup> Gyekye describes the activities of the soul and everything associated with it as spiritual.

In analyzing the issue of dream in Plato's *Republic*, there is an indication that the theory of dream suggests that while a person is dreaming, the part of the soul that is involved is not asleep, "but awake, and goes out to seek the object of its desire."<sup>28</sup> Here we get to observe that there is a part of the human soul that acts during sleep when a person is dreaming. Plato does not identify the part of the soul that is referred to here. This is where Meyerowitz's characterization of the conscious (*sunsum*) and unconscious (*okra*) elements in one soul can become relevant and resolves the confusion that arises as a result of what is operational when a person is asleep and is dreaming.

The issue of dreams and the role of the *okra* give credence to some of the elements associated with the *okra*. The elements of *sunsum* and *honhom*, which are associated with the *okra*, reveal the activities of the *okra*. The *honhom* that provides the breath, which vivifies the *okra*, is not disputed, but other aspects of the *okra* are. Since the leaving of the *okra* from the human person means death, it would not make sense to argue that the *okra* leaves the body during sleep and returns. It is because of these instances that the double nature of the *okra* was propounded.

#### **2.1.4 ONLY HUMAN BEINGS POSSESS OKRA**

A fourth view of the *okra* is the Akan belief that the *okra* is attributed to the human person alone and not to animals. Animals possess *sasa*, which human beings also possess. The attributes of the *sasa* differ from those of the human soul. The *sasa* is an invisible spiritual

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27. Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 92.

28. James Adams, *The Republic of Plato*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 571c, 17.

power, which “disturbs the mind of the living or works a spell or mischief upon them, so that they suffer in various ways.”<sup>29</sup> The *sasa* is believed to be a protective principle in the human person and causes vengeance on anyone who harms another.<sup>30</sup> Since Akan do not use the word *okra* for animals, the *sasacan* be referred to as the “soul” of animals, but not of humans.

### 2.1.5 THE *OKRA* AS AN OBJECT OF WORSHIP

Akan do not look at the days of the week as a means to calculate weeks into months, and months into years. Days are means by which the *okra* enters into the world as living persons. This is why each day has a specific name and characteristics. Each day is sacred because it is the day *okra* enters the world by taking leave of God and is born into a human family. The soul is worshipped, not as worship of oneself, as it seems to suggest, but as the element of God in the person who is given the worship. Every individual is expected to make his/her *okra* happy so that the person lives longer. It is because of the desire to live longer and prosper in life that the *okra* is worshipped. God, the gods, and the ancestors know the day the *okra* (soul) comes into this world.<sup>31</sup>

Peter Sarpong indicates that the *okra* is worshipped because a person’s *kra* can either guide and protect him/her or fail to guide and protect him/her. This belief leads Akan to say, *ne kra apa n’akyi* (his/her soul has deserted him/her), and to say to a lucky person, *ne kra di n’akyi* (his/her *kra* is behind him/her).<sup>32</sup>

Sarpong further demonstrates that the Akan worship their *okra* so that the *okra* can continue to protect them and bring them luck. The worship of *okra* is done because, if the

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29. Robert S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, 153. Also Daniel Miles McFarland, *Historical Dictionary of Ghana*, (Metuchen, NJ: The Scarecrow Press, 1985), 159.

30. Peter Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, 91.

31. Sam K. Akesson, “The Akan Concept of the Soul,” 282.

32. Peter Sarpong, “Health and Medicine in African Traditional Religion,” 95/81.

*okra* becomes dissatisfied, the result will be fatal. Since death is the moment the *okra* leaves the body, then it makes sense, according to Akan, to worship the *okra* and make the *okra* stay with one as long as possible.

In his research among the Akan, Sam Akesson, identifies seven different souls among Akan. According to him, there are seven human souls in the Akan world for either sex.<sup>33</sup> The seven souls are postulated here to signify the characteristic traits that each day of the week confers on those who are born within a week. Though it can be said that those born on a particular day exhibit certain traits in their lives, it must be noted that it does not take away their uniqueness. Philip F. W. Bartle puts this beautifully when he maintains, “These *kra* destiny-souls are not only separated individual spirits. There is a notion of shared destiny in that all persons born on the same weekday are considered *anuanom* (brothers and sisters).”<sup>34</sup>

The *okra*, therefore, is partly the soul or spirit of a person and is linked with *honhom* and *sunsum*. It is partly considered distinct from a person that advises, protects and guides an individual to be prosperous in life. If the *okra* is able to help one to prosper or succeed in performing any activity, the *okra* is thanked by making a thanksgiving offering.

There is another view of the *okra*, which indicates that the *okra* can reincarnate. Akan concept of reincarnation is symbolized by the idea and meanings assigned to the *okra*. The idea of reincarnation of the Akan must be distinguished from that of the Hindu religion. Akan understand that some of their ancestors come back to life in the form of babies born into their own families. Sam K. Akesson sheds light on this notion when he writes that the *okra* existed in

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33. Sam K. Akesson, “The Akan Concept of the Soul,” 283.

34. Philip F. W. Bartle, “The Universe Has Three Souls,” 99.



*Nyame* (God) long before it becomes “incarnated.” He maintains that the *okra* may be the *okra* or “spirit of a kinsman or sometimes of another person, but one who belongs to the same tribe.”<sup>35</sup>

We will now examine the *sunsum*, a third element of the constitution of the human person to ascertain its role in the human person.

## **2.2 SUNSUM**

The third constituent element is the *sunsum*. It is a spiritual pre-existent constituent element in the human person that can be trained to be “heavy” instead of “light” to resist evil spirits.<sup>36</sup> The *sunsum* is the individualizing principle in the human person that makes every individual unique in his/her life.

The *sunsum* as a constituent part of the human person is described in diverse ways. Among them are: 1) the *sunsum* as *okra*, 2) the *sunsum* as from God, 3) the *sunsum* as basis of character, 4) the *sunsum* as a shade or shadow, 5) the *sunsum* as strong or weak (that can be attacked spiritually), 6) the *sunsum* as earthly (that is, it is derived from a father), 7) the *sunsum* as pre-existing a person, 8) the *sunsum* as *ntoro* (father’s spirit) and as distinct from *ntoro*.

### **2.2.1 THE SUNSUM AS OKRA**

In the dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language, J. G. Christaller describes the *sunsum* “the soul or spirit of man.” He describes the various ways in which the *sunsum* is used. Akan say, *ne sunsum so* (he/she is influential). This way of describing someone brings out the aura that surrounds people. He describes the *sunsum* as a spirit, or a ghost.<sup>37</sup>

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35. Sam K. Akesson, “The Concept of the Soul,” *African Affairs* 64, no. 257 (Oct. 1965), 280.

36. By becoming “heavy” the *sunsum* cannot be attacked by any evil spirit, and by becoming “light” means that an evil spirit can attack the *sunsum*.

37. J. G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante language* (Basel: Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, 1933), 484.

Some writers describe the *sunsum* as the soul. For instance, Eva Meyerowitz, maintains that the *sunsum* is a personal soul.<sup>38</sup> Meyerowitz describes the part of the *okra* that bids God farewell as the *sunsum*. She asserts that the *sunsum* is the conscious part of the *okra*. According to Meyerowitz, before a child is born, he/she “receives the *sunsum* from the hands of a patrilineal ancestor, also as representative of *Nyame*, in the *samandow* or nether world.”<sup>39</sup> She further shows that the unborn child receives a *sunsum* after the child has indicated how he/she wishes to live life in this world.

Christaller’s definition of the *sunsum* as a ghost indicates the diverse ways spirit is described in the Akan language. *Sunsum* is usually used for an unknown spirit in the Akan ontology. For instance, Akan say, *Sunsum bi te fie ho* (There is a spirit in the house or the house is haunted). This expression indicates the use of the word *sunsum* as a ghost, or an unperceived spirit; otherwise, a ghost is described as *Saman*. *Sunsum* and *saman* can be used interchangeably in Akan to denote a ghost.

### 2.2.2 THE *SUNSUM* AS DIVINW

Kwame Gyekye disagrees with those who maintain that the *sunsum* is derived from a person’s father. He asserts that the *sunsum*, like the *okra*, is from God, and is spiritual and immaterial.<sup>40</sup> He gives an example of a dream as the operation of the *sunsum*, where a person can sleep and be at a different location. According to him, this dream traveling is an indication that the *sunsum* is spiritual and also of divine origin. He admits that the relationship between the *okra* and the *sunsum* is difficult to distinguish. To support his view of the divine origin of the *sunsum*,

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38. Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, “Concept of the Soul among the Akan of Gold Coast,” 26.

39. What Meyerowitz is expression is the idea of the Akan reincarnation, where ancestors are believed to come back to life in the form of children born into a family. See Ibid.

40. Kwame Gyekye, *Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 94.

he cites Rattray as indicating the role of the *sunsum* in dreams and Rattray's statement that the *sunsum* is perhaps the more volatile part of the whole *okra*.<sup>41</sup>

Gyekye can be grouped with those who associate the *okra* with the *sunsum*. However, he indicates in his writing that the *sunsum* cannot be the *okra*, since what is said of the *okra* cannot be attributed to the *sunsum*. He gives examples of Akan statements:

- A. (1) "His 'kra is worried or disturbed" (*ne 'kra di awarehow*); never, "Hissunsum is sad."
- (2) "His 'kra is worried or disturbed" (*ne 'kra teetee*).
- (3) "His 'kra has run away" (*ne 'kra adwane*), to denote someone who is scared to death.

In all such statements the attributions are made to the *ōkra* (soul), never to the *sunsum*.

On the other hand, the Akan say:

- B. (1) "He has *sunsum*" (*ōwō sunsum*), an expression they use when they want to refer to someone as dignified and as having a commanding presence...
- (2) "His *sunsum* is heavy or weighty" (*ne sunsum yē duru*), that is he has a strong personality.
- (3) "His *sunsum* overshadows mine" (*ne sunsum hyē me so*).

In all such statements the attributions are made to the *sunsum* (spirit), never the *ōkra* (soul).<sup>42</sup>

Here, Gyekye wants to distinguish between the *okra* and *sunsum*. As we have already seen, what he says is not different from what others have said about the *okra* as having a constituent element attached to it.

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41. Ibid., 95. Also Robert S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, (Accra, Kumasi: Presbyterian Book Depot, 1959), 154.

42. Kwame Gyekye, *Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 96-7.

### 2.2.3 THE *SUNSUM* AS THE BASIS OF CHARACTER

According to Meyer Fortes, Peter Sarpong, J. B. Danquah, and others, the *sunsum* is what sustains a person's character or individuality, making that person unique among other human beings. The *sunsum* is seen as manifesting itself in the handiwork of a person. The manner in which a person speaks, behaves, and acts are all indications of his/her *sunsum*. All the above-mentioned scholars agree that the *sunsum* individualizes a person and that it is derived from a father.<sup>43</sup>

It is the *sunsum* that enables an individual to realize his/her innate capabilities in life. According to Peter Sarpong, the *sunsum* molds a child. It is what makes him/her gentle, dull, well-expressed, smart, glib in speech, lazy, or assiduous, as the case may be. He further asserts that the *sunsum* makes a person respectable and provides business acumen in an individual.<sup>44</sup>

### 2.2.4 *SUNSUMAS* A SHADE OR SHADOW

Among Akan, *sunsum* is seen as a shade or a shadow. J. B. Danquah describes it as what one sees when a person stands in the sun. The shadow that is reflected when a person stands in the sun is called *sunsumor sunsuma*. He asserts that the personality or the shade of a person is like a shadow that the sun casts on all creatures. Just as in the absence of the sun, the shadow cannot be seen, so Danquah also thinks that in the absence of a person, there will be no shade or shadow. By this statement, Danquah is asserting that it is a living being who possesses a *sunsum* (personality).<sup>45</sup>

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43. Meyer Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order*, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 199; Peter K. Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, (Legon, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 91; J. B. Danquah, *The Gold Coast Akan* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1945), 22.

44. Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 37.

45. J. B. Danquah, *The Gold Coast Akan*, (London: Lutterworth Press, 1945), 22.

Since a shade or shadow is *sunsum*, a person's *sunsum* is that person's reflection. This reflection can be spiritual or physical. The *sunsum* is perceived to be spiritual in the sense that it is a person's *sunsum* that turns to a *saman* (ghost) when a person dies. Both *sunsum* and *saman* are spiritual aspects in the constitution of the human person. The physical aspect of the *sunsum* is seen in the way children behave. It shows forth in the way a father trains his children. The character trait of human beings shows the physical nature of *sunsum*. If they are well behaved, then the father has done a good job. If they are not well behaved, then the father has not capitalized on his *sunsum* to train his children well.

### **2.2.5 SUNSUMAS STRONG OR WEAK**

According to Peter Sarpong and Meyer Fortes, the *sunsum* is changeable. This is because the *sunsum* can be trained to develop from being weak or light (*ne sunsum ye hare*) to being strong or heavy (*ne sunsum ye duru*).

It is because of the *sunsum*, which can be weak or strong that spiritual attacks are believed to affect the *sunsum* of the human person. A person can develop his/her *sunsum* to withstand all spiritual attacks. Some sickness are said to be spiritual and require spiritual antidote. Therefore, when Akan realize that someone is suffering from a spiritual sickness they consult a priest, either one of a church, or one for a traditional healing and not a medical doctor.

### **2.2.6 SUNSUM AS EARTHLY**

Meyer Fortes, Eva Meyerowitz, Peter Sarpong, and J. B. Danquah, agree that the *sunsum* is derived from a person's father, thus making the *sunsum* earthly and not divine, as Gyekye posits. J. B. Danquah describes the distinction between the *honhom* and the *sunsum* by stating that the *honhom* is the inner spirit, while the *sunsum* is the outer spirit or personality.<sup>46</sup>

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46. Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 93.

### 2.2.7 SUNSUM AS PRE-EXISTENT

Peter Sarpong describes the spiritual nature of the *sunsum* as enjoying an independent pre-existence.<sup>47</sup> The idea that the *sunsum* independently pre-exists a person presents two main interpretations. First, the independent pre-existence of the *sunsum* means that the *sunsum* precedes an individual. This indicates that the *sunsum* that is derived from a father obviously precedes both the father and his children, since it is the father who transmits the *sunsum* to his children as Sarpong holds. The pre-existence of the *sunsum* means that it precedes human beings.

Secondly, the independent pre-existence of the *sunsum* can also mean that the *sunsum* is divine and pre-exists humanity. Sarpong does not hold or reference this view, but it is a view Kwame Gyekye holds. Gyekye holds the view that the *sunsum* is divine and comes from God.<sup>48</sup> If the *sunsum* enjoys independence, then the *sunsum* is powerful among the constituent elements in the human person.

### 2.2.8 SUNSUMAS NTORO

According to Akan, the *sunsum* accounts for the character of the human person. The *sunsum* can also leave the body and becomes open to spiritual attacks.<sup>49</sup> The *sunsum* performs two functions. First, it is a specific personality spirit that is inherited from a father; second, it is a person's morality. The moral formation of children is the responsibility of fathers whose *sunsum* cover their children.<sup>50</sup>

The *susnsun* is the part of the human body that can leave the body and return when it has accomplished its aim. The leaving of the *okra* is realized when the *honhom* (the breath of life)

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47. Peter Sarpong, "Health and Medicine in Africa Traditional Religion," 95/81. Also J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968), 111.

48. Kwame Gyekye, *Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 89.

49. Peter Sarpong, "Health and Medicine in Africa Traditional Religion," 95/81.

50. Philip F. W. Bartle, "The Universe Has Three Souls," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 14, Fasc. 2 (1982): 96.

leaves the human person. This is why it makes sense to associate the *okra* (soul) with the *honhom* (spirit-that keeps a person alive). Whether it is the *sunsum*, which is linked to the *okra* that leaves a person during dream, or the *okra* that leaves the person at a time a person is dreaming, is not clear. We believe that it is because of this confusion that it makes sense to associate some spiritual constituent elements with the *okra*. Consequently, those elements could leave the body and come back while the *okra* remains and only leaves once when a person dies.

In his contribution to the understanding of the human being, Danquah postulates that the prime genetic basis of the human person is the *e-su*. According to Danquah, the *e-su* is the “fundamental bio-physical nature of the human person.”<sup>51</sup> For him the *e-su* “...is conscious without having, at the same time, a fully developed mental life.”<sup>52</sup> He does not envisage the *e-su* disappearing when the human person receives a soul and becomes a human being. He maintains that it is when this *e-su* enters into the world of understanding that it acquires the name *sunsum*, thus advocating that the *sunsum* pre-exists human beings in the form of *e-su*.

Danquah observed that the constituent element of the human person develops from the *e-su* to *sunsum*, and from the *sunsum* to *okra*, and then the *okra* becomes *honhom*, “a fully developed spirit or mind, an individuality which becomes God’s...an *e-su* which, through individual experience, has earned participation in divine immortality.”<sup>53</sup> Danquah’s views about the constitution of the human person are much more complex. He is the only one who develops the idea of *e-su*, which he identified with the Greek *physis*, the physical origin of life.<sup>54</sup> In using

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51. J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968), 111.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid., 113.

54. Ibid.

this approach, he is attempting to prove the privileged position of the human person among God's creation, the only creature that is unique and shares the image of God.

### **2.3 NTORO**

The *ntoro* is an intangible spiritual element in the human person and is transmitted by a father to his children. Akan believe that before a person reaches puberty, he/she relies on their father's *ntoro*. After puberty their own *ntoro* displaces that of their father. In the case of a girl, when she marries, she relies on the *ntoro* of her husband and that of her father.<sup>55</sup>

Meyer Fortes describes the notion of *ntoro* as one of the many "metaphysical and ritual concepts" that illustrates the Ashanti or Akan theory of human personality and its development and pattern relative to the Akan worldview in terms of political, social, and cultic or religious practices.<sup>56</sup> Although the *ntoro* has been part and parcel of the Akan worldview, some educated youth and city dwellers do not know much about the *ntoro*. This lack of knowledge is because they do not witness the ceremonies associated with the *ntoro*, as those who live in the rural areas do. When they visit rural villages, they have to be taught certain customary ways of doing things. Living in cosmopolitan areas makes city dwellers forget about some of their traditions in Ghana.

What makes the *ntoro* vivid in everyday conversation is response to greetings. For instance, when a person enters a house and greets the people in the house or when a priest starts the Eucharistic Liturgy by greeting the people, he exclaims "*mema mo Akye oo!* (Good Morning!), then he adds, *wogye me Anyaado oo!* (My response is *Anyaado*). Here he indicates the *ntoro* group to which he belongs that enables the people to respond appropriately to his greetings. The responses *ayaado*, *eson*, *amu*, *abrau*, *abiriw*, etc., are indicative of which

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55. Ibid., and J. B. Danquah, *The Gold Coast Akan*, 39. Also Meyer Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order*, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 198.

56. Meyer Fortes, *Kinship and the Social Order*, (Chicago: Aldine Publishing Company, 1969), 198.



*ntoro* group one belongs, and its knowledge is an important element of etiquette, especially among priests, chiefs and elders.<sup>57</sup>

According to Bartle, the concept of *ntoro* pre-dates the Akan era. The concept was in existence in the area where they are presently located. He writes that the notion originates from the patrilineal Guan clans that were led by priest-chiefs. The influence of the Guan clans dwindles when the Akan imposed their matrilineal practices to submerge the patrilineal practices that the Guan people were practicing. However, traits of the *ntoro* cults survived and occupied their land.<sup>58</sup>

In his description of the *ntoro*, J. B. Danquah writes that a child learns how to behave and live a good life from his/her father through the *ntoro*.<sup>59</sup> The *ntoro* is not *sunsum*, but what is asserted of the *sunsum* is also ascribed to the *ntoro*.

The bond between a father and his child is a spiritual one. An Akan child inherits a *sunsum* from the father.<sup>60</sup> This spirit relates to the non-physical aspect of a person's life such as personality and character. According to Busia, the *ntoro* and *sunsum* are terms that are used interchangeably.<sup>61</sup> The *ntoro* is the broad term of which *sunsum* is a precise example. This molds the character of an individual. This is why among the Akan, a father is responsible for the character of his children. He has to make sure that they acquire good character traits.

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57. Philip F. W. Bartle, "The Universe Has Three Souls," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 14. Fasc. 2 (1982): 97.

58. Ibid.

59. J. B. Danquah, *The Gold Coast Akan*, 39.

60. The idea of receiving a *sunsum* from a father is why every child is required to respect his/her father. It does not contradict the inheritance scheme, which makes Akan matrilineal. Sarpong notes that the *sunsum* of a father molds a child, making him/her what he/she is, kind, hardworking, stupid, eloquent, lazy etc. In Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 37.

61. K. A. Busia, "Ashanti," 197.

Eva Meyerowitz has dealt with the *ntoro* extensively in her research, which reveals that the people in Bono, through king Takyi Akwamo (1431-63), introduced the *ntoro* cult.<sup>62</sup> According to her, the *ntoro* is a fluid or semen from a man that has a spirit of its own. This is why an inquiry to a person's *ntoro* is "what *ntoro* do you wash?" or "which river do you worship?" Every *ntoro* has a sacred river with which it is associated.<sup>63</sup> Since washing involves water, the *ntoro* naturally has to do with water. Meyerowitz maintains, "*Ntoro* is water, 'water that procreates', 'the fluid by which birth comes about'."<sup>64</sup>

Meyerowitz points out the uncertainty that exists between the *okra* and the *ntoro*. She notes that because of the spiritual nature of the *ntoro*, there is a ceremony of purifying the *ntoro*, which is known as the *asumdware* (washing or cleansing). Some people, she reports, do it weekly, on the day that is considered sacred to their *ntoro*, while others do it because they are told by priests that their *ntoro* god requires it from them. This purification is required because the *ntoro* is regarded as a spiritual power, and each of the *ntoro* groupings is accordingly associated with *akyiwade* (avoidances or taboos); there are certain prohibitions that every individual is expected to observe. It may be a kind of food or drink that certain people are not allowed to eat or drink.

Since people do the same washing to their soul because of which we have *kra dware* (the washing of the soul), the washing of the *okra* and *ntoro* have led many to think that the two are one. She writes, "This *asum dware* is now generally combined with the *akra dware*, the

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62. Eva Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akan*, (London: Faber and Faber Limited, 1942), 115.

63. Ibid. Also Chapter One footnote 16 for the various Sacred Rivers, which provide the various *ntoro* groupings.

64. Ibid., 116.

‘washing’ or ‘cleansing’ of the *kra*, with the result that many no longer familiar with their tradition believe that *kra* and *ntoro* are the same.”<sup>65</sup>

The *ntoro* cult requires of the high priest, the father, to discipline his children so that they will control their impulses in order to be well behaved in society.<sup>66</sup> This is why Sarpong writes that children are expected to be extra respectful to their fathers.<sup>67</sup>

If the *sunsum* accounts for the character of a person and the *ntoro* explains the characteristics that are inherited from a person’s father, then the distinction between the *sunsum* and the *ntoro* becomes a difficult knot to unravel. Though the *sunsum* and the *ntoro* are closely linked and seem to be doing the same thing in the human person, the *sunsum* is the individualizing principle in a person. The *ntoro* is never said to be an individualizing principle in the human person or a person’s *ego*. It is mysterious to notice that the *sunsum* is derived from a father, and yet children born to the same father exhibit different character traits. The *sunsum* then reminds us of the uniqueness of every human being. Even twins who are born by the same father and on the same day are unique in their own ways.

It is because of the similarity in the traits of the *sunsum* and the *ntoro*, that K. A Busia explains that the *ntoro* and *sunsum* are synonymous and used interchangeably with *ntoro* being generic while *sunsum* is specific.<sup>68</sup>

Another difficulty with which the Akan language is confronted is the distinction between the *honhomand* and the *sunsum*. These two spiritual elements in the human person are used interchangeably.<sup>69</sup>

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65. Ibid., 117.

66. Ibid., 118.

67. Peter Sarpong, “Health and Medicine in Africa Traditional Religion,” 95/81.

68. K. A. Busia, “The Ashanti,” in *African Worlds*, ed. Daryll Forde, (London: Oxford University Press, 1954), 197.

## 2.4 HONHOM

The *honhom* is the vitalizing constituent element part of the human person. This is what makes the human person able to breathe and stay alive, the breath of God that keeps the human person alive on earth. It is the vivifying part of the human person. The name is derived from the Akan word for breath (*home*).

The *honhom* is attached to the *okra*. It is the *honhom* that keeps a person breathing, and therefore, when the *honhom* is functional, the *okra* is believed to be in a person, indicating that the person is alive. As soon as the *honhom* ceases to operate, the *okra* leaves a person and he/she is believed to have died. According to Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, the *honhom* indicates the presence of the *okra* (soul) in the human being. He further indicates that Akan people believe that the continuous movement of inhaling and exhaling is indisputably God's activity in the human being. He writes, "No matter how deeply one exhales, there remains within a residual breath, attesting to the fact that the soul is eternally seated in the individual."<sup>70</sup>

Akan believe that at death, the *honhom* leaves a person, the *okra* goes back to God to be judged, and the *sunsum* then becomes a *saman* (ghost), and the *bogya* or *honam* (body) is buried.<sup>71</sup> The difference between the *honhom* and the *sunsum* become difficult to determine.<sup>72</sup>

## 2.5 SAMAN

The seventh element in the human person is the *saman* (Ghost). It is the form a person assumes after death. The *sunsum* in the person turns into *saman*. It is the ghost or ancestral spirit.

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69. The use of *sunsum* and *honhom* and the confusion they create will be discussed below.

70. Anthony Ephirim-Donlor, *African Spirituality*, (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1997), 73.

71. Peter K. Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, (Legon, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 91.

72. The difficulty became glaring in most of the Akan writings, especially, in the Akan Bible, particularly, the Twi or Akuapim Bible as against the Fante Bible. This will be treated very soon in this chapter of our discussion.

The *saman* lives with other *saman* in *asamando* (the spirit world). All the Akan anthropologists agree in their writings about the *saman* and its role in human lives.

## **2.6 SASA**

Another element in the human person is the *sasa*. The *sasa* is the revengeful spirit that lives in every human person and causes a person to confess an evil he/she has done. The *sasa* seems to be the remorse of conscience, but Peter Sarpong discusses that it should not be seen as such, since Akan do not explain the *sasa* to be a person's conscience. The *sasa* is an element that animals are believed to possess. Some animals have strong *sasa* that affects or haunts human beings that kill them.<sup>73</sup>

## **2.7 MOGYA**

A mother gives the *mogya*, which literally means blood, to a child. It is the *mogya* that forms the basis for physiological bond between a mother and a child. It also becomes the basis for the clan system of the Akan. The *mogya* is believed to be the physical part of a person that can be seen, felt, touched, smelt, or held. It is sometimes referred to as *honam*, the "body" or the physical part of the human person. Akan believe that the *mogya*, which is the physical part of a person, originates from the mother that is why it forms the basis of the social structure of the Akan a matrilineal people.

## **2.8 SUMMARY OF AKAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

The Akan theory of conception is described as the *ntoro* of the father cooperating with the *mogya* of the mother before a human person is formed. In this same process, God sends the *okra* to make the baby human; the *okra* comes with the *honhom* to make the baby a living being. At death, the *honhom* and the *okra* will leave the body, and the person will be declared dead and turns to *saman*.

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73. Peter Sarpong, "Health and Medicine in Africa Traditional Religion," 95/81.

The Akan notion of the human person indicates that every human person who lives on earth is linked with the spiritual world; the human person is linked with ancestors, which provides grounds for the pre-existence of an element in the human person, particularly the *sunsum* which is said to pre-exist the human person. Furthermore, every human being is endowed with an aspect of spirit that comes from *Nyame* (God) and returns to *Nyame* (God) after death.

The aspect of spirit that comes from God and returns to God is crucial in the Akan understanding of the human person and links every human person to God. This notion is also crucial to us in this dissertation, since it helps us to establish the idea of the human person being created in the image of God. The spirit that comes from God humanizes a person and guides a person through life. That is why the *okra* is said to protect and counsel the human person. The spiritual connection between God and the human person provides for communion with God and the environment.<sup>74</sup>We maintain that the human being is understood in psycho-anthropological and social dimensions. The vertical components, *okra* (soul), *honhom* (the breath of life), *sunsum* (spirit), and the horizontal components, *mogya* (blood), and *ntoro* (spirit from the father) work together. The spiritual components help in human relationships with God and the neighbor. The horizontal components also help in human relationships especially the *ntoro* from a father connects the individual to the ecology. The ecological relationship becomes clear in our discussion of the *ntoro*, which links every human being to some major rivers.<sup>75</sup> The spirits from the rivers play a role in the lives of human beings, and connect people to the ecology. Thus,

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74. The spiritual connection between God and humanity and what makes that communion possible, in the form of the role of the Holy Spirit, will be fully treated in chapter three of this dissertation.

75. Chapter one page 17 for the discussion on the major rivers that link a person to his/her father's family and provide protection to people.

taken together and separately, the vertical and horizontal dimensions have a major impact on the reinterpretation of the human being, who relates to God, neighbor and the universe.

Every human being is unique and individual. The uniqueness and individualism is understood in the practice of the worship of the *okra*.<sup>76</sup> The day a person enters into the world is sacred to the individual. It makes the person unique and therefore, the *krada* (the day a person is born) becomes an important occasion for an individual. The *okra* plays a vital role in the human being since the Akan people believe that before the *okra* enters the world, the *okra* discusses the fate of the individual with God. The *okra*'s role in providing guidance, blessing, good luck and bad luck is the reason for providing sacrifices for the *okra*. The sacrifice helps the *okra* play its role efficiently.

## **2.9 SOME AKAN PHILOSOPHERS AND THEIR VIEWS ON THE COMPOSITION OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

In the study of their beliefs, two Akan philosophers, Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu differ.<sup>77</sup> Kwame Gyekye maintains there is a dualistic undertone involved in the understanding of the human person as understood by Akan.<sup>78</sup> He posits that Akan distinguish between *ntoro* and

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76. Page 56.

77. Kwasi Wiredu is a philosopher who taught at the University of Ghana for twenty-three years. He is a professor at the University of South Florida in Tampa. He opposes ethno philosophy and wants to distinguish folk beliefs from philosophy. Wiredu and Gyekye present two different accounts of the concept of the human person, particularly with regard to the relationship between social recognition and inner properties of a person. "Akan Philosophy of the Person," accessed October 15, 2013, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/akan-person>. Gyekye's conception of a person is dualistic with Descartes' influence while Wiredu interprets the human person to be quasi-monistic, not endorsing the ontological duality of material and immaterial but only differences in degree of materiality between the body and the other entities that make up the human person. In Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, *Person and Community* (Washington DC: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 8. But only the *honam* is really material: it gives what is tenable or not in Gyekye and Wiredu. It may also suggest the differentia specifica between them or why it matters. For this reason we reduce our principal discussion between them to the nature of the *okra* and *sunsum* in the Akan conception of a person.

78. Kwame Gyekye's dualism is based on the idea that human beings are both physical and spiritual beings, who live here on earth, and prepare to live in the spiritual world after death. Thus whatever Akan do they have two worlds in mind. This is the reason why they invite their ancestors to their ceremonies through libation prayers. This is because they believe that there is a lasting relationship between the living and the dead.

*mogya*, which are physical or earthly, in contrast to the *sunsum* and *okra*, which are “definitely” of divine origin.<sup>79</sup> He acknowledges that all other elements, which constitute the human person, fall under the two categories. He attempts to show that human beings are physical/material and spiritual/immaterial. This duality is shown below:

<i>Okra</i> (soul)	}	Immaterial
<i>Sunsum</i> (“spirit”)		
<i>Honam</i> (body)		Material (Physical) <sup>80</sup>

Gyekye disagrees with those who present the Akan conception of the human person as tripartite, especially with Kwasi Wiredu. Wiredu understands the human person to be constituted of three categories instead of two as Gyekye claims.<sup>81</sup> The tripartite view is presented as follows:

<i>Okra</i> (soul)	Immaterial
<i>Sunsum</i> (“spirit”)	Material
<i>Honam</i> (body)	Material <sup>82</sup>

Wiredu does not consider the *okra* as equivalent to the soul and considers the *sunsum* as material and not immaterial as Gyekye proposes.<sup>83</sup> Not only does Kwame Gyekye disagree with Kwasi Wiredu over the tripartite conception of the human person, he also disagrees with those

79. Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 94.

80. *Ibid.*,

81. Kwasi Wiredu, *Readings in African Philosophy*, (Lanham, New York: University Press of America, 1995), 145.

82. Kwame Gyekye, *Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 94.

83. The reason for Wiredu’s rejection of the translation of the *okra* as soul is that there are many things that Akan attribute to the *okra* that are not attributed to the soul as understood by the Western world. The elements attributed to the *okra* are treated on page 11 of this chapter. In Kwasi Wiredu, *Readings in African Philosophy*, 145.



who consider the *sunsum* of the human composition as material and having its origin in a person's father.<sup>84</sup>

Kwabena Oguah agrees with Kwame Gyekye on the dualistic presentation of Akan conception of the human person.<sup>85</sup> Their impulse is based on the two main natures of the human person as physical/material and spiritual/immaterial. Their underlying motivation is the Akan cosmology, which indicates that human beings are on this earth temporarily and will join their ancestors at *asamando* (Land of the dead).

Following the lead of Plato's world of ideas,<sup>86</sup> Gyekye and Oguah, assess the Akan cosmology to disclose the two world-views, which help Akan to live good lives. There is no indication that those, who propose the tripartite understanding of the human person, disagree with Gyekye and Oguah's view that Akan have two worlds in mind. Actions of Akan demonstrate that they believe in human life here on earth and life with the ancestors after death. That is why Akan pour out libation and offer sacrifices so that they can communicate with the spiritual world while on earth. They also solicit help from their ancestors who live in the spiritual world, to demonstrate the communion between the living and the dead.

Proponents of the tripartite understanding of the human person do not propose three worlds. Instead, they accept the Akan cosmology, which recognizes the dual nature of Akan worldview. Besides Kwasi Wiredu, those who categorically mention the tripartite nature of the constitution of the human person are Sam K. Akesson,<sup>87</sup> and F. W. Bartle.<sup>88</sup> The only difference is that many of them do not consider the *sunsum* as divine, but originating from a person's father.

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84. Kwame Gyekye, *Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 94.

85. Kwabena Oguah, *Readings in African Philosophy*, (Lanham, New York: University Press of America, 1995), 67.

86. Plato describes two worlds, where the world in which we live is a replica of the ideal world. In *Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy*, ed. Simon Blackburn, (Oxford: University of Oxford, 2008), 279.

87. Sam K. Akesson, "The Akan Concept of the Soul," *African Affairs* 64, no. 257 (Oct. 1965), 288.

Gyekye and Wiredu disagree with each other on the translation of the *okra* as soul, and the *sunsum* as of divine origin.<sup>89</sup> Gyekye maintains that the *okra* is the human soul, while Wiredu disagrees with that translation. A critical assessment of what is said about the *okra* by Akan convinces Wiredu that the *okra* cannot be the soul in the human person. He cites the example that indicates *okra* as a person's companion, who guides and protects a person, of which Akan say *Ne kra apa n'akyi*, meaning someone's soul has failed him/her. He does not agree with the *okra* as a principle in a person, which makes him/her a living being, and at the same time a separate entity, which can choose to go its own way. He therefore, maintains that the *okra* and the soul are two "nonidentical concepts."<sup>90</sup>

He further cites the Akan usage of *okra* as having a mind, which is revealed in the belief that before a person is born, his/her *okra* meets with God to take a leave of God, and then it is given its "message" of destiny. He continues to argue that if this is true, then the *okra* must have the capacity to understand a message and transmit one.<sup>91</sup> Wiredu expects the *okra* to be explained with the phrase, "That whose presence in the body means life and whose absence means death and which also receives the individual's destiny from God."<sup>92</sup> Wiredu describes the *okra* as having "quasi-physical" properties, especially in its role as guardian and its conception as suggestive with material analogies.<sup>93</sup>

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88. F. W. Bartle, "The Universe Has Three Souls," *Journal of Religion in African* 14, Fasc. 2 (1983), 99, 103.

89. The *okra*, *sunsum* and the other elements constituting the human person will be analyzed below.

90. Kwasi Wiredu, *Readings in African Philosophy*, 133.

91. Ibid.

92. Gyekye, *Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 86.

93. Kwasi Wiredu, *Readings in African Philosophy*, 134.

It is strange that in trying to disagree with Wiredu, Gyekye asserts that the concept of destiny is not central in the Akan definition of the soul. In all the discourse of the *okra* as soul, writers of Akan anthropology refer to the *okra* as having its name derived from the soul's farewell to God and God's giving of a person's destiny.<sup>94</sup> It is therefore, incorrect for Gyekye to state that the idea of destiny is not central to linking the soul to destiny.

In showing his disapproval with Wiredu's description of the *okra* as having physical and para-physical properties, Gyekye plays down the reasons Wiredu offers to support his view that people with extrasensory perception in Akan communities are capable of communicating with the *okra*. According to Gyekye, since this communication does not take place in the ordinary physical world, which indicates that it is a spiritual experience, the *okra* is purely spiritual in the human constitution.<sup>95</sup> Gyekyenotes that by characterizing the *okra* as quasi-physical makes nonsense of the talk of the departed souls continuing to exist in the world of spirits.

Gyekye links the *okra* with *honhom* (breath of life), which is the nuanced form of Akan verb *home* (to breath). When a person dies, the Akan will say: *Ne honhom ko* (his/her breath is gone) or *Ne kra afiri ne mu* (his/her soul has left him/her). Based on these ways of speaking among Akan, Gyekye concludes that the departure of the soul from the body means that death has occurred, so also is the cessation of breath in a person's life. Therefore, "it is the *okra* that 'causes' the breathing." The *honhom* then becomes the tangible, or evidence, of the presence of the *okra*.<sup>96</sup>

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94. Philip F. W. Bartle, "The Universe Has Three Souls," 98; Sam K. Akesson, "The Akan Concept of the Soul," 280; Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, "Concept of the Soul among the Akan of Gold Coast," 24; Peter K. Sarpong, "Health and Medicine in Africa Traditional Religion," 95/80, and a host of others. They all refer to the soul as linked with a person's destiny.

95. Kwame Gyekye, *Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 86.

96. Ibid.

The reason for the debate between Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu is their approach to philosophy. Gyekye's aim is to develop modern African philosophy by using folk beliefs and ethno philosophy. This makes Gyekye use the concepts of Akan and how Akan understand them to propound his philosophical discourse. Wiredu, however, opposes ethno philosophy and attempts to distinguish folk beliefs from philosophy. We observe that René Descartes influences Gyekye in his understanding of the human person. His dualistic view makes him observe the human person as consisting of material and immaterial elements. Wiredu, on the other hand, interprets the human person to be quasi-monistic.<sup>97</sup> He does not approve of the ontological duality of material and immaterial, but only differences in degree of materiality between the body and other elements that make up the human person. The divergent views between Gyekye and Wiredu stem from their approach to philosophy. So long as they continue to stick to their approach to philosophy, they will continue to disagree on issues in their own culture.

After a look at the views of Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, it is appropriate to state our position on the Akan understanding of the human person and examine in detail what other scholars have to say about the very controversial constituent elements.

Whether the human person is dualistic or tripartite, the holistic elements making up the human person remain the same. These elements are: *mogya* (blood which also stands for the body), *okra* (soul), *sunsum* (spirit), *honhom* (breath of life), *ntoro* (spirit from one's father), *saman* (ghost), *sasa* (a protective principle which causes vengeance on anybody who does wrong).

Every human being is made up of both physical and spiritual elements. Every human person enjoys some elements from God and their parents. We identify seven elements as the

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97. Kwasi Wiredu views the Akan understanding of a person as if the variety of the constituent elements can be explained under one (*okra*, which is quasi-monistic for him).

constituent elements of every human person. These elements are crucial to who we are as human beings and help us to commune with God, our neighbors and our environment.

First, we believe that the *mogya (bogya)* (blood), or *honam* (body), is the element in a person that is derived from a mother. This element becomes the physical element of a person. While in a mother's womb, the fetus relies heavily on the mother. The fetus shares the blood of the mother and the food of the mother. After birth, the baby continues to enjoy the mother's milk, and when the child is able to eat solid food, mothers provide for the child's nourishment. These factors, coupled with their system of inheritance, are what prompts the Akan to alignment of every Akan to the person's mothers' clans. Akan, who are matrilineal, believe that a mother contributes to the physical or bodily part of human beings. This matrilineal part of a person is believed to die and be buried. At death the human body is buried and it is believed that this is the end of a person's body. There is no controversy over the *mogya, (bogya)* or the *honam* (human body) among Akan writers. They all agree to what we have expressed above about the human body or the physical part of the human person.

Secondly, *okra* (soul) is a guardian personal spirit. It is what Akan believe to be the "spark" of God in every human being. The *okra* is the humanizing element in the constitution of the human person and the undying part of the person. At death the *okra* goes back to God. The *okra* comes into this world with a person's destiny. Since the *okra* comes from God, it tells God what its mission on earth will be before it enters a person. Since God is all knowing and the *okra* is a spark of God in the human person, the *okra* probably is aware of what life it is getting itself into before a person is born into the world. This awareness explains the Akan understanding of the *okra* since the *okra* is believed to have had a meeting with God and had declared to God what its mission on earth will be before it enters into a person to be born.

The third element of a person is the *sunsum*, which we believe is a spiritual aspect of the dualism that the human person enjoys, being physical and spiritual at the same time. The *sunsum* also distinguishes one person from another and ensures human uniqueness. It is that which reveals the status of an individual, which makes Akan state, *ne sunsum ato meso*, to mean his /her personality has overpowered me. This statement is usually made when the presence of a person is overbearing.

The fourth element, which is the *hohnom*, is that which enables a person to breathe and be kept alive. The *hohnom* is another spiritual element in the constitution of the human person. We believe that the *hohnom* works with the *okra* to keep a person alive. When a person dies, that person stops breathing and the soul of the person is said to have gone back to God. We, therefore, see a link between the *hohnom* and the *okra*. The *hohnom* is the breath of life which comes from God without which a human being is dead.<sup>98</sup>

The fifth element of the human person is the *ntoro*. We believe that *ntoro*, which is spiritual, originates from a father and gives the human person the father's spirit and links an individual to his/her father's patrilineal group. The *ntoro* is responsible for the individual's characteristic such as toughness, compassion, nobility etc.

The sixth element is *saman*. The *saman* is that which a person turns into when he/she dies. The *saman* becomes the ancestral spirit that dwells with ancestors if a person lives a good life. Among Akan, they hope to be able to dwell among their ancestors when they die and it is the *saman* that goes to live with the ancestors.

The seventh element is *sasa*. This element is a revengeful aspect of a human being, which causes vengeance on anybody who does wrong to a neighbor. It can cause a person to confess a sin or heinous crime he/she commits.

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98. The relationship between the *hohnom* and the *okra* will be discussed in detail in chapter four.

The idea of the human person possessing an element of God in him or her is not peculiar to the Akan. The human person is a complex being; as a result, there is a complex notion of the human person in Ghana and extends to some West African States. This complexity becomes a hermeneutical device that reveals human destiny, which is made possible by divine providence.<sup>99</sup>

The various elements that form the human person seek to emphasize the notion that relationality in the form of duality and or multiplicity becomes the norm of humanlife in the world. This explains the Akan worldview and the worldview of many West Africans.

We will now examine views of some neighbors of the Akan to show that it is not only the Akan of Ghana who hold the above discussed views of the human person.

## **2.10 VIEWS OF SOME NEIGHBORS OF THE AKAN ON HUMAN CONSTITUTION**

A glance at the understanding of the human person according to some of the Akan neighbors, 1) the Ga, 2) the Ewe, 3) the Yoruba, and 4) the Kotoko, will indicate that God uniquely creates the human person in God's image (though not with elaborate explanation concerning the role of the parents as Akan propound). This unique creation enables the human person to communicate with God, other human beings, and their environment.

### **2.10.1 THE GA**

Among the Ga people of Ghana,<sup>100</sup> the human being (*gbomotso*) is constituted by *sunsuma* and *kla*. There is an ontological distinction between the *sunsuma* and the *kla*. The Ga people believe that the *sunsuma* has some physical properties, while the *kla* is non-physical.<sup>101</sup>

The Ga people, like the Akan, believe in the soul as coming from God and inhabiting the human

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99. People in West Africa demonstrate similar traits in their understanding of the human person as composed on diverse elements and having a divine element in every human person. For more on this see Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, And Human Wholeness*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publication, 2012), 151-167.

100. The Ga people are the ethnic group who live in Accra, the capital city of Ghana.

101. Joyce Engmann, in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, *Person and Community*, (Washington, D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 157.

person. This is why the soul (*kla, okra*) becomes non-physical and dwells in the physical human bodies.

### 2.10.2 THE EWE

The Ewe people are an ethnic group located in the Volta Region of Ghana. Their understanding of the human person reveals some of the confusions with which Akan have to contend. The German Pietist missionaries who settled among the Ewe aimed at representing the Ewe ideas in a European language. They established the superiority of Christianity over the indigenous religion of the Ewe. Based on the categories given to them, the Ewe began to explain their religion to the ethnographers just like the Akan, as we have revealed in this dissertation.<sup>102</sup> They believe that the human person (*ame*) is born into life (*agbe*) with a body (*nutila*). According to the Ewe, the human person consists of the cheekbone of an ancestor, and three invisible, spiritual entities, *aklama* (also *kla, kra*) or *dzogbe, luvo*, and *gbogbo*. When they have all left the body a person is said to have died (*ku*).<sup>103</sup> Among the words, which describe the spiritual entities in the human person, *gbogbo* is the spirit that designates breath, like the *honhom* of the Akan. The role of *gbogbo* in humanity is to keep people alive.

The *luvo* is a shadow of a person. According to Birgit Meyer, the *luvo* is the human soul. The person was informed of two souls, *luvoagbeto* (soul of life) and *luvokuto* (soul of death). *Luvo* in general is what is operational when a person is dreaming. There is no indication that a person's *luvo* has any direct influence on a person in the course of his or her life. It is the *aklama* that determines a person's character and enters a person on the day of the person's birth. The role

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102. The categories that are described in the indigenous belief of the Ewes to the missionaries have much in common with the Akan. We present them to show the understanding of the human being based on the vocabulary of the semantic field to explore the link between the visible and the invisible realms. See Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, (London: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 62.

103. Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 63.



of the *aklama* is to ensure the well-being of an individual; it could also punish a person with sickness if the person acts in a way contrary to the person's character. The *luvo* turns into a spirit and joins the ancestors if the dead person lived a good life or else it will remain here on earth to frighten people. The Ewe people believe that the *aklama* leaves the human body at the moment of death; however, it is not clear what happens to it when it leaves. Meyer mentions that after a study among the Ewes, Jacob Spieth has suggested that the *aklama* goes back to God at death and returns later in another person.<sup>104</sup>

The Ewe people have a more complex understanding of the human person than Akan. They have three complex spiritual entities in the human person, *aklama* or *dzogbe*, *luvo*, and *gbogbo*. According to Birgit Meyer, Ewe Christians believe that it is *gbogbo* that is responsible for the fate of a person, and not the *aklama*. This belief is a result of the influence of Christian missionary reworking of Ewe cosmology. However, *gbogbo* is not believed to be a separate independent entity. Instead, it is conceived as an open space in the mind, which can either be filled by *Mawu's* [God's] spirit or an evil one.<sup>105</sup> Meyer further shows that the same term is used to express possession by the Holy Spirit or an evil spirit. The statement, "the spirit is upon a person" is *gbogbo le ame dzi*.<sup>106</sup> The Ewe people divulge the difference between the human spirit and the Spirit of God and encourage themselves that God's Spirit will fill them and act through them. This belief reveals how their cosmology is a spirit filled one.

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104. Ibid., 64.

105. Ibid., 145.

106. Ibid.

### 2.10.3 THE YORUBA

According to Peter Sarpong, the Yoruba people of Nigeria share a similar belief of the constitution of the human person with Akan. For the Yoruba, the human person consists of the *ara*, *ojiji*, *okan*, *emi*, and *ori*.<sup>107</sup> Sarpong further explains by comparing the various entities with their Akan ones. He asserts:

The *ara* is like the *bogya* or *mogya* (blood) of the Asante.

The *ojiji* is the heart. Like the *sunsum* of the Asante, it is the personality principle to the Yoruba.

The *emi* is like the *okra*, the part that God gives to us to humanize us.

The *ori* is one's destiny.<sup>108</sup>

The Yoruba ontology of the person reveals the human head as the abode of the divine power (*àse*) of the Supreme Being (*Olódùmarè*) in the individual. The *orí* then constitutes a person's life-source and controlling personality and destiny. It determines what one is going to do in this world. According to Babatunde Lawal, a lecturer at the Department of Fine Arts of the University of Ife in Nigeria, the Yoruba has three modes in which they represent the head in their sculpture: first, the naturalistic which signifies the external, or the physical, head (*orí òde*); second, the stylized which hints at the inner, or spiritual head (*orí inú*), third, the abstract which signifies the primeval material (*òkè ìpòrí*) from which the inner head was made. He further maintains that the Yoruba believe that the fate of each individual is predetermined in heaven before they are born into this world. A successful life here on earth depends on how well a

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107. Peter Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, 92.

108. *Ibid.*

person makes use of his/her head.<sup>109</sup> The Yoruba place a higher premium on the metaphysical significance of the head as the source of life and the essence of the human personality.

According to the Yoruba mythology, when the Supreme Being (*Olódùmarè*) wants to create a person, the Supreme Being asks one of the lesser divinities (*òrìsà*), known as *Òbàtálá*, to mold the physical form from the divine clay. Once the molding of the image is done, *Olódùmarè* breathes life (*èmi*) into it through the head and makes it a living human being. The living being then goes to another *òrìsà* who is a porter to mold the inner head of the individual.<sup>110</sup> As has been demonstrated, the *Orí*s seen as the coordinating center of the human existential struggles and reveals a divine locus in the human person.

#### 2.10.4 THE KOTOKO

According to Jean-Paul Lebeuf, the Kotoko,<sup>111</sup> believe that the human person is made up of eight constituent elements. These elements are:

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|--|------------------------------------|
| 1) <i>Une force male</i>                       | [A male force/strength]            |
| 2) <i>Le double, qui est une force femelle</i> | [A double which is a female force] |
| 3) <i>Le cœur immaterial</i>                   | [The immaterial heart]             |
| 4) <i>Le soufflé</i>                           | [The Breath]                       |
| 5) <i>L'ombre (qui est double)</i>             | [A Shade which is a double]        |
| 6) <i>Le corps</i>                             | [The Body]                         |
| 7) <i>Le caractère</i>                         | [The Character]                    |

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109. Babatunde Lawal, "Orí: The Significance of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture," *Journal of Anthropological Research* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 91-103.

110. Ibid., and Omosade J. Awolalu, *Yoruba Beliefs And Sacrificial Rites*, (London: Longman Group, 1979),12.

111. The Kotoko is an ethnic group in Chad, a landlocked country in Central Africa. The Kotoko kingdom, reached its height in the 9<sup>th</sup> century. It extended its frontiers to cover large portions of northern Cameroon and Nigeria, particularly in the Lake Chad region. "Kotoko," accessed October 16, 2013, <http://www.britannica.com/Ebchecked/topic/322877/Kotoko>.

The understanding of the human person by the Kotoko people is similar to that of the Akan. They believe that the first element, *une force male* is good and gives strength that can be compared to an electric current. This current, according to Lebeuf, signifies the brain. Secondly, *le double, qui est une force femelle* is believed to be a gentle force. This force is sometimes designated as peaceful and invisible and works against reprehensible acts. The third element, *le cœur immatériel* is what assures that a person is able to breathe. It helps the human person breathe in and out and be kept alive. Fourth, *le souffle* is believed to represent the breath and soul of the human person. This breath in the person is believed to leave the body and wander during sleep. The fifth element, *l'ombre (qui est double)*, is what the Kotoko people maintain as designating two shadows, one visible and the other invisible. The invisible shadow is what people use in witchcraft.

According to Lebeuf, the sixth element, *le corps*, is the body of the human person and is believed to consist of 160 bones.<sup>113</sup> How they came by the 160 is not explained. However, the human body is believed by the Kotoko people to be held together by bones.

Lebeuf does not expand on the seventh element, which is *le caractère*. He does not describe how the character comes about; he only makes his readers aware that it is also a constituent element of the human person according to the Kotoko people.

The final element is *le bronze*. According to the Kotoko people, bronze becomes parts of the elements that constitute the human person. They believe that there is a mixture of metals in

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112. We cannot transcribe the exact words that are used, so we rely on their interpretations. See Jean-Paul Lebeuf, *La Notion De Personne En Afrique Noire*, (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1973), 373.

113. Ibid.,174-5.

every human person.<sup>114</sup> Bronze is mentioned by the Kotoko because of the role bronze has played in their culture. Bronze is a cherished heritage in their culture. Their tradition has made use of bronze for a long time and they can trace it as part of their heritage.

From the above discussions, it becomes clear that it is not only the Akan who believe that the human person does not consist of flesh and bones that we see, but is also made up of varied elements that cannot be seen with the human eyes. Apart from the idea of the bronze that the Kotoko people have as part of the constituent element of the human person, they seem to share a lot in common with the Akan elements.

The composition of the human person has similar elements in many ethnic groups in West Africa. The complexity of the human person reveals itself in the details of the explanations the people provide in terms of the constituent elements in the composition of the human person. The “spark of God” in the human person that humanizes them is known in the following words: *kra* or *okra* (Asante), *chi* (Igbo), *ori* (Yoruba), *aklama* (Ewe), *se* (Adja-Fon). This humanizing principle provides a means for every human person to commune with God, the neighbor, and the world.<sup>115</sup>

It is apparent, according to the above ethnic groups that every human person is from God and goes back to God at the moment of death. Every human person is made up of both physical and spiritual elements. These elements make the human person whole. Every human person is believed to share an aspect of God in him or her that places humanity on a unique pedestal among God’s creation.

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114. Ibid.

115. Elochukwu Uzukwu argues that the humanizing principle in the human person is the human *pneuma*, which is equivalent to the *ruach* (breath) in the Hebrew Scriptures. This will be treated further in chapter three of this dissertation. Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, and Human Wholeness*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 140.

The wholeness and uniqueness of the human person are expressed in various languages and help their speakers to act accordingly by communing with God, their neighbors, and their environment. For instance, the Asante or Akan, Igbo, Yoruba, Ewe, Adja-fon, and Kotoko have unique ways of expressing who they are to encourage them in their relationship with God and one another.

## **2.11 THE HUMAN PERSON AND COMMUNITY**

There is a relationship between a person and his/her community. This is what we call relationality. There is a connection between the human person and the community, and a connection with our prior discussion of the components that constitute the human person. Not only do human beings relate to God and one another, they also relate to their environment. This discussion is a prolongation of the multiple components of the human person, the conjuncture of the horizontal and the vertical dimensions of the human person.

We turn to analyze the Akan concepts of communality and individuality, as they exist in Akan communities in order to articulate the Akan idea of the relationship between the individual and the community or society. First of all, let us examine an Akan paradox of a person as being individual and at the same time a community or whole. Akan emphasize that a human person or a thing is seen as both a whole and part of the whole at the same time.<sup>116</sup> An instance of how Akan describe situations where a person can be a whole and part of the whole at the same time is seen when a king, chief, or an elder is describing an event. The king uses the personal pronoun “I” to talk about what he did last year, and the same personal pronoun “I” to describe what his predecessor who had died a century ago did. Akan explain the use of “I” in the present, and the

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116. Philip F. W. Bartle, “The Universe Has Three Souls,” *Journal of Religion in Africa* 14, Fasc. 2 (1983), 93.

same “I” in the past to mean that a person is an individual and simultaneously a representative of a larger community of people.

There is an ongoing discussion about the relationship between an individual and the community in which the person lives by African philosophers. Ifeanyi Menkiti observes that in Africa the human person is defined in terms of the person’s environment and community. He cites an enlightening statement of John Mbiti as the summation of the African view of the person as: “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am.”<sup>117</sup> Menkiti draws a conclusion that the interest of a community takes precedence over the individual in the community. He asserts, “...as far as Africans are concerned, the reality of the communal world takes precedence over the reality of individual life histories....”<sup>118</sup> In effect, Menkiti observes that in Africa, personhood is defined by the communal structure and not by “...some isolated static quality of rationality, will or memory.” A human being therefore becomes a person after a process of “incorporation.” Personhood, according to Menkiti, is not given at the beginning of one’s life; it is attained in a society after an individual partakes in the life of a society. He observes an ontological progression in the attainment of personhood. He states that personhood has to be achieved, and it is not something one simply acquires for being born of a human seed.

By means of an illustration of his conviction about the ontological progression on personhood, Menkiti references the use of the pronoun “it” to refer to a child until the child attains full personhood later in the child’s years on earth.<sup>119</sup> There is some truth in Menkiti’s claim on the treatment of children in most African societies. For instance, when a child dies,

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117. Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, “Person and Community in African Traditional Thought,” in *African Philosophy*, ed. Richard A Wright, (Washington D.C: University Press of America, 1979), 157.

118. Ibid.

119. Ibid., 158-9.

many African societies do not perform elaborate funeral rites for a child as they would do for an adult. Peter Sarpong describes how the dead are treated among Akan by maintaining that the corpses are treated in a manner befitting the age, sex, and social status of the deceased.<sup>120</sup> A person's social status determines the person's honor in many African societies.

Kwame Gyekye disagrees with Menkiti's view that personhood is achieved by society alone. He argues for a more moderate view of communitarianism in African cultures. He criticizes Menkiti's view as radical communitarianism. Gyekye insists that moderate communitarianism gives accommodation to the communal values and those of the individuals.<sup>121</sup> Gyekye cites the Akan understanding that the pursuit of moral virtue is an intrinsic element to the conception of a person. For instance, when a person fails to exhibit an expected moral virtue in that person's conduct, Akan will state, "*onnye nipa*" which means 'he/she is not a human being/person.'" This use of personhood, according to Gyekye, is not descriptive judgment. Conversely if a person does something good, the person is described as: "*oye nipa*" which means "he/she has good character," "peaceful," "not troublesome." These examples are a normative form of judgment as Gyekye points out.<sup>122</sup> Gyekye admits that there is a tension between individuality and communality; however, he opposes any attempt to make communality absorb individuality completely. He reasons that every society is a community of individuals, and every individual is an individual in a society.

Polycarp Ikuenobe offers a critique on the positions of Menkiti and Gyekye. He agrees with Gyekye's position when he asserts, "In a broad sense, Gyekye is correct that the practical

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120. Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 72.

121. Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, *Person and Community*, (Washington D.C: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 121.

122. *Ibid.*, 109.



and moral relationships between individuals and community in African thought are mutual and that they are placed on an equal moral standing.”<sup>123</sup> Ikuenobe asserts that the relationship between the individual and the community must not be a “one-way” course. There must be cooperation between individuals for the community to function well, and the community has to function well and orderly for the individuals to thrive. Therefore, there must be collaboration between individuals and their communities for the well being and flourishing of any society.

Ikuenobe further demonstrates that, theoretically, there may be a problem if the interest of an individual conflicts with that of the community. He does not envision that happening in practice because principles are framed in communities to the degree that through socialization these principles are ingrained in the individual so that it will be difficult to find a conflict between individuality and communality.<sup>124</sup>

We agree with Gyekye’s moderate view that a person is only partly constituted by the community. Every human person is uniquely made and exhibits that uniqueness within a community. The idea of uniqueness is enshrined in the Akan concept of destiny. Destiny, according to Akan, determines the uniqueness and individuality of a person. This means that within the Akan culture there is a clear recognition of the idea of individuality.<sup>125</sup>

Based on the Akan paradox that a thing can be a whole and part of the whole, we will examine some Akan maxims to articulate the uniqueness of an individual person and also the relationality aspect of the human person. The support Akan give to the importance of community in a person’s life is reflected in the following maxims:

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123. Polycarp Ikuenobe, *Philosophical Perspectives on Communalism and Morality in African Traditions*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006),77.

124. *Ibid.*, 77.

125. The idea of destiny among Akan indicates that every human person receives a special mission from God before coming to live on earth; hence every human person is unique and contributes to his/her society in their own unique ways. In Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, 104.

1. *Dua koro gye mframa a ebu* (The only tree in a forest falls when there is a storm, but when they are many they will survive)
2. *Benkum dware nifa, na nifa atware benkum* (The left hand washes the right and the right washes the left)
3. *Enam dua so na ahoma duru soro* (It is the tree that makes a wire hang)
4. *Tikoro nko agyina* (Two heads are better than one)

These maxims illustrate the value of communal living. The community is needed since a person alone cannot do it all. Most Akan will quote these sayings to show the value of community life or relationality.

In order to show the uniqueness of every human person, and to prove that it is not the community that necessarily confers personhood, Akan have the following maxims:

1. *Kwae wo ho yi, se wowo akyire a ebom, nanso woben a dua biara wo dee esie.* (When you look at a forest from afar, the trees are together, but when you get into the forest, every tree is separated from the others)
2. *Ewo me ne ewo yen nse* (There is a difference between it is mine and it belongs to us)
3. *Nsemmone nti na yekyee din* (It is because of bad people that each person has a name)
4. *Woforo dua pa a na yepia wo* (It is the one who does a good deed that gets the support of the community)

The above maxims indicate the role of individuals in a community; however, the mutuality between individuality and communalism becomes apparent in these maxims. It becomes clear that the individual needs the community and that individuality is not diminished by communality. However, communality becomes the basis on which an individual person can develop a normative sense of identity, rights, and interest, and the role the identity of an

individual plays in that person's rational choices in life. Every human person is born into a community whereas the person is socialized either formally or informally. This socialization helps to shape the individual so that with that individual's uniqueness, the person will contribute to the community or society.

The discourse by the philosophers we have discussed above emphasizes a core element in all African societies, namely communalism or relationality. Human beings are social beings. Humanity relates to God, neighbor and the environment. Relationality is engrained in human nature. Elochukwu Uzukwu has demonstrated that this notion is common in the whole of West African regions when he states that there is a popular saying in Igbo: *ife kwulu ife akwudebe ya* ("When something stands, something else will stand beside it").<sup>126</sup> He further maintains that this promotes "flexibility, collaboration, dialogue across religions and cultures and could bring together or correlate the gospel ideal and the ideal of secularism."<sup>127</sup> At this juncture, we come to understand some truth in the Akan understanding that a thing can be an individual and part of a whole at the same time.

Furthermore, the statements: "when something stands, something else will stand beside it," and "a thing can be an individual, and part of a whole at the same time," indicate that duality is the basis of relationality in the West African worldview. We are convinced that these African notions about reality can be used to shed light on the gospel ideal. This idea reveals the collaboration between African and the Hebrew understanding of the human person, which forms the basis of biblical worldview of the creation narrative in the book of Genesis.

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126. Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, And Human Wholeness*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 12.

127. *Ibid.*, 2.

Christianity maintains that Jesus Christ is both God and, at the same time, human and the Son of God, with more distinction than two natures. Jesus is both God and human simultaneously, a typical exemplification of a person or a thing being a whole and a part of the whole at the same time. This is professed in the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed, when Jesus is described as, "...true God from true God...and by the Holy Spirit was incarnate of the Virgin Mary, and became man."<sup>128</sup> In the creed, the two-fold nature of Jesus is professed and believed. Jesus is the true image of God (1 Col. 1:15). This image is what humanity shares in/with Jesus.<sup>129</sup>

Deducing from the above premise of a person being whole and part of a whole at the same time, we proceed to demonstrate that the human person is both physical and spiritual. The physical entities in the human person are portrayed by *mogya*, *bogya* (blood) and *honam* (flesh). The mother feeds the fetus in the mother's womb; after birth the child is fed by the mother's milk and continues to eat from the mother's kitchen. This makes Akan link a child's lineage to his or her mother.

Besides the physical elements in the composition of the human person, there are spiritual elements in the human person. Some of the spiritual elements come from the father and others are from God. The elements from a father are the *sunsum* and the *ntoro*. The *okra* (soul) and the *honhom* (breath of life) are both from God. The Akan conception of the human person seems to be parallel to the Hebrew conception of the human person. Let us examine briefly the Hebrew view of the human person.<sup>130</sup>

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128. Committee on Divine Worship, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *Order of Mass*, (Chicago, Illinois: GIA Publications, 2011), 7.

129. This idea will be fully treated in Chapter three of this dissertation.

130. We are treating briefly the Hebrew understanding of the human person. This will not delve deeply into all the parts of the human person, as the Hebrews understood it, rather we are referencing the vital parts that are relevant to this dissertation.

## 2.12 THE HEBREW VIEW OF THE HUMAN PERSON

The Hebrew culture, which influenced the writing of the Hebrew bible, understands the human person as being created by God. The human person, according to the Hebrews, enjoys some elements from God. The two words that have connection with God are: *rûah* (*ruach*) and *nepesh* (*nephesh*).<sup>131</sup> We will focus our attention on these in order to reveal their collaboration with the Akan understanding of the human person.

### 2.12.1 RÛAH (RUACH)

*Rûah* denotes an action, the “blowing” of the wind or “respiration.” It later came to mean “breathing” as a sign of life and hence “spirit” and “life.” In addition to *rûah*, the semantic understanding of “breathing/spirit/life” also includes *hâyâ*, “live,” with the noun *hayyîm*, “life.” Like this word, *rûah* can also denote physical vitality. For instance, the *rûah* of Jacob revived when he realized that Joseph was not dead, “...But when they recounted to him all that Joseph had told them, and when he saw the wagons that Joseph had sent for his transport, the spirit of their father Jacob revived.” (Gen 45:27); After Samson lost his *rûah*, he restored it by drinking the water that came from the cavity of Lehi, “...Then God split the cavity in Lehi, and water issued from it, which Samson drank till his spirit returned and he survived...” (Jgs 15:19); David was revived when he ate, after going for three days and three nights without food, “...a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of pressed raisins were also offered to him. When he had eaten, he revived; he had not taken food nor drunk water for three days and three nights.” (I Sam 30: 12). It also means the “breath of Life,” which distinguishes what is living from what is not. For instance, when God instructed Noah to make the arc, he revealed the aspects of the breath of life, “I, on my part, am about to bring flood [waters] on the earth, to destroy everywhere all creatures in which there is the breath of life; everything on earth shall perish” (Gen 6: 17);

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131. The Hebrew words *rûah* (*ruach*) and *nepesh* (*nephesh*) will be treated in detail in chapter three below.

“...Everything on dry land with the faintest breath of life in its nostrils died out” (Gen7: 22).

Here *rûah* hayyîm refer to humans and animals. Idols do not have *rûah*, “...Everyman is stupid, ignorant; every artisan is put to shame by his idol: He has molded a fraud, without breath of life” (Jer 10: 14; 51:17).<sup>132</sup>

### 2.12.2 *NEPESH* (*NEPEŠ*)

The word *nepesh* relates etymologically to the throat. The concept shows how the throat serves as a channel. Its basic function is to link the outer world – with its oxygen, water, and food – to our inner world, which demands all the elements we need to survive.<sup>133</sup> The function of the throat indicates that without the throat (*nepesh*), no life exists, or as long as the breath [*rûah*] continues to flow through a person’s throat (*nepesh*), a person continues to live. Again, *nepesh* serves as a channel of verbal communication, which is vital to the survival of human groups or communities. *Nepesh*, thus signifies a physical body infused with life.

The Hebrew concept of *nepesh* converted into the western concept of the “soul.” However, the meaning of the “soul” does not make sense in the worldview of the Hebrew bible, where the material and nonmaterial aspects of a person never separate or oppose one another this way. When thinking of a human person, the Hebrew bible pictures, not a soul in a body, but rather the person as a *nepesh*, an animated or ensouled body.<sup>134</sup>

According to the Hebrew tradition, “The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life [*rûah*], and so man became a living being [*nepesh*].” (Gen 2:7). The Hebrew word, *nepesh*, shares with *rûah* the meaning of “life” and

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132. Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinze-Josef Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 13, ed. David E. Green, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 375.

133. Sandra L. Gravett, Karla G. Bohmback and F.V Greifenha, *An Introduction to the Bible*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 171.

134. *Ibid.*, 172.

“breath.” *Rûah* is associated with Yahweh in the majority of Hebrew texts, whereas such association is comparatively rare in the case of *nepeš*. *Nepeš* is used for living beings (Gen 2:7) or person.<sup>135</sup> The difference is that among Akan, the human body into which the *okra* enters is from a mother’s womb, whereas in the Hebrew bible, God made the human person out of clay. Though both theories are argued as not scientific, they demonstrate that human beings are created with some elements from God, thus enforcing creation in the image of God.

Notwithstanding the difficulties in explaining the Akan understanding of the human person, Akan understand the human person and maintain that every human person is made up of physical and spiritual elements, with God providing some spiritual elements in the human person. Akan know that every human person reflects God, since all persons are created with a “spark of God,” *okra* (soul) in them. Akan further understand that every human person is uniquely created which is shown in the *sunsum* in the human person.

Furthermore, a comparative analysis among the Akan and their neighbors establish similar understanding of the human person and the relationship between God and humanity, as well as the relationship between humans and their environment.

We turn to examine the role bible translators played in the Akan understanding of the human person and how to relate it to the Christian faith.

## **2.13 THE ROLE OF BIBLE TRANSLATORS IN AKAN UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN PERSON**

Christianity as a religion has a story to recount to the world. Since the Christian Church has a story to tell, the use of language as a tool for communication becomes vital; hence, every ethnic language and dialect became very important tools in the Christian mandate to proclaim the

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135. Johannes G. Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinze-Josef Fabry, *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 375.

gospel of Salvation.<sup>136</sup> Therefore, in order to analyze the impact of languages in the lives of a people, particularly among Africans and Ghanaians, the activities of missionaries who came to spread the gospel of God's kingdom must be carefully examined.

In explaining the importance of language and language interpretations, Lamin Sanneh, maintains that there is interconnectedness between language and culture in traditional societies. This interconnectedness results in being "intertwined" in religion and in promoting integrated and dynamic ways of using language and culture.<sup>137</sup> The obligation to interpret scriptures and make it a living faith among indigenous people required of those who did translations to appeal to the core of societies. The Akan language was used to interpret the Christian message to Akan people; therefore, the difficulties of interpretations surface in the bid to introduce Akan to Christianity.

In view of the importance of language, we can link our discussion with the hypothetical question of Lesslie Newbigin, "What if, instead of trying to explain the gospel in terms of our modern scientific culture, we tried to explain our culture in terms of the gospel?"<sup>138</sup> Many attempts were made by missionaries to express the word of God in the languages of the people to whom they ministered, so that their flock would relate to the gospel message.

The Christian ability to translate the message of the bible into various languages has helped in the spread of Christianity. Translatability of Christian Scripture helped Akan and Africans to relate closely to the Christian faith, which their primal religion had prepared them.

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136. Language as a tool in evangelization has helped Akan in understanding the gospel message in their own language. However, those who translated the bible into the Akan languages have created some confusion in the use of certain words. Those words will be treated later in this chapter. The use of language is a *sine qua non* in the Christian missionary activities. See William E. Welmers, "Languages and Christian Missions," *Civilizations* 3, no. 4 (1953), 545-564.

137. Lamin Sanneh, *Encountering the West*, (Maryknoll, New York: William B. Eerdmans, 1993), 141.

138. Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986), 41.



Let us now examine the power of translatability of the Christian message in Ghana and demonstrate that the Akan terminologies we use are the true translation of what we have in the bible.

## **2.14 THE POWER OF TRANSLATABILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN MESSAGE (BIBLE-THEOLOGICAL TERMS)**

Language plays an important role in communication. It remains a vital conduit of theology. The issue of using vernacular in worship became a bone of contention for a number of years. Keith Pecklers, a professor of Liturgy, demonstrates how liturgical language has become a means of testing doctrinal orthodoxy. Beginning with the Christian Scriptures, he studied the history of vernacular in worship to uncover the authority of a living language to transform lives in communities of faith.<sup>139</sup> Language in worship is a dynamic reality that provides the proper context for appreciating God's word and expressing one's self to God and neighbor and living meaningfully.

Lamin Sanneh observes that the truth of God is greater than the words and languages in which it may be conveyed, meaning that all languages have their limitation in expressing the reality of God. However, all languages and cultures are endowed with intrinsic merits for conveying the truth of God.<sup>140</sup> Sanneh demonstrates three consequences that flow from the fundamental role of language in bible translation. He first shows that there is no language or culture that is so superior as to claim exclusive access to the truth of God. Second, he shows that no language is so inferior as to be excluded from access to the truth of God. Third, he

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139. Keith Pecklers traces the history of vernacular in Liturgical celebrations with a special attention to the twentieth-century Vernacular Society in the United State and issues at the Second Vatican Council. In Keith F. Pecklers, *Dynamic Equivalence*, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2003).

140. Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2009), 110.

demonstrates that translation needs to be accompanied by explanation.<sup>141</sup> Sanneh maintains that even the general sense of scripture is a matter of explanation. Language, therefore, remains an indispensable channel of theology. He sums up the importance of the power of translatability when he writes:

The fact of Christianity being a translated religion places God right at the center of the universe of cultures, with the effect of all cultures denied the center, becoming thereby equal in their status as historical bearers of Scripture. For the purposes of Bible translation, all languages have merit and are necessary, yet none is indispensable in its particularity.<sup>142</sup>

When the early Western missionaries arrived in Ghana in the 1800s, they preached a gospel that was understood by Ghanaians because Ghanaian indigenous religions helped them to translate the gospel message into their own language. For the Ghanaians to understand the concepts that were used to explain the faith, we can infer that their prior knowledge about God helped them to understand the gospel message of the missionaries. We are certain about the Twi language we use in this dissertation and how accurate the language is in explaining the biblical theological terms. Two theologians, Lamin Sanneh and Kwame Bediako, have discussed the issue of language and translatability in detail. We invite them in our discussion on translatability and theological terms.

The missionary enterprise in Africa sometimes gets colored with the colonial environment within which it took place. In Lamin Sanneh's discussion about missionary enterprise in Africa, he attempts to dissociate the colonial enterprise from that of the missionary. He addresses the value of African cultures and the principle of translatability of the Christian

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141. Ibid.

142. Ibid.

religion. He writes: “The subject of Western missions needs to be unhinged from the narrow colonial context and placed in the much wider setting of African culture, including the religious background of African societies.”<sup>143</sup> Sanneh’s concern is what Africans did with the message they received from the Western missionaries and not the context within which the missionaries spread the message of God. After the gospel message was preached to Africans, they showed their understanding of it by living lives that are shaped by love for God and neighbors in the African context

Sanneh emphasizes the value of the bible translation in the missionary enterprise. He espouses two vital ideas about bible translation in order to make an essential theological point. According to him, the enterprise of translation advanced on two main notions concerning importance of the local cultures. On the one hand, the importance of bible translation and its priority in missionary work is a clear indication that God had already prepared Africans for the Western missionaries. He writes: “God was not disdainful of Africans as to be incommunicable in their languages.”<sup>144</sup> It is clear that the local cultures were endowed with eternal significance and the African languages were also endowed with divine reach.

On the other hand, the God whom the Western missionaries came to Africa to preach had already preceded the Western missionaries.<sup>145</sup> Sanneh maintains that it is the hidden reality of the divine presence in the African cultures that authenticates external mission and necessitates translation a *sine qua non* for witness. He shows the value of the African cultures by indicating that the main classifications of Christian theology were adequately foreseen. He writes: “the

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143. Lamin Sanneh, “The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission: An African Perspective,” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 7, no. 4, (October 1983): 165. Also Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 119.

144. Lamin Sanneh, “The Horizontal and the Vertical in Mission: An African Perspective,” 166.

145. Ibid.

central categories of Christian theology- God, creation, Jesus Christ, history- are transposed into their local equivalents, suggesting that Christianity had been adequately anticipated.”<sup>146</sup>

The concrete reality of theology is a local one that is achieved by indigenous assimilation and the agency of African religious experience with a critical role played by translating Scripture into the African languages. Sanneh observes the crucial role that African Initiated Churches (AICs) played in assimilating the Scriptural message in the local environment, and how they hold the prospects for the future of Christianity in Africa more than any external factor did in the history of religion in Africa.<sup>147</sup> The possibility of bible translation is a clear indication that the African understanding and expression of the Christian faith is valid. Based on the value of translatability of the Christian faith we are convinced that our use of words such as *okra* to translate the soul, and *Honhom Kronkron* to translate the Holy Spirit, is the right interpretation. It also gives credence to our contextual method in explaining what it means to be created in God’s image.

For the purpose of training Ghanaians to be well versed in scriptures and its interpretation, English, Greek, and Hebrew languages were taught in the fourth year of the schools the Western missionaries established in Ghana.<sup>148</sup> According to S. K. Odamtten, Elias Schrenk reported that because of the primary aim of education in Ghana by the missionaries, Latin was not taught in the middle schools. Rather they taught Greek and Hebrew so that students could read from the bible in the original language. The aim was to produce independent ministers who would be able to read from the source.<sup>149</sup>

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146. Ibid.

147. Ibid., 170.

148. The middle school was a four-year schooling, which followed a six-year primary education.

149. Elias Schrenk reported this to the House of Commons Select Committee that was appointed to investigate whether or not the British colonial masters were to abandon Ghana (Gold Coast) as a result of the second invasion of

The translation of the bible in Ghana was diligently done to convey the exact concepts and expressions from the Akan culture. The Twi and Ga languages were the two “mission” languages that the Basel missionaries, who were the early missionaries in Ghana, devoted their time in studying, so that Twi and Ga Christian minds would be linked to the universal horizons.<sup>150</sup> Johannes Christaller, who developed the Twi dictionary, worked hard to find, as far as possible, a Twi term for every thought and communication. His approach was influenced by his belief that whatever could be conceived of in Twi should find expression in Twi.<sup>151</sup> Translating the bible into Twi language served to enable the Akan people to have access to the divine truth in the bible for which their culture and indigenous religion had prepared them.

Kwame Bediako affirms the solid work of translation by Christaller when Bediako maintains that the translation did not lose sight of the theological task that lay upon Christaller and his associates. Bediako writes:

This vernacular achievement, by its very character, also ensured that deep foundations were laid for a meaningful theological dialogue to take place between the Gospel and culture, meaningful in so far as the dialogue would be in terms of categories, not of a foreign language and an alien culture, but rather of the local language and the local culture...Christaller never lost sight of the theological-and we might say in our time, missiological- task that lay upon him and his associates...”<sup>152</sup>

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the coastal regions by the Ashanti who were very powerful in Ghana politically. In S. K. Odamtten, *The Missionary Factor in Ghana's Development 1820-1880*, (Accra, Ghana: Waterville Publishing House, 1978), 210. Cited in Kwame Bediako, *African Christianity*, 50.

150. Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995), 51.

151. Ibid.

152. Ibid., 54. Lamini Sanneh also describes the masterpiece work of Christaller's Twi dictionary. She describes it as “an Encyclopedia of Akan Civilization.” She explains how scriptural translation has helped Africans to preserve

From our discussion so far about translatability of the Christian message in Ghana, we feel confident and justified in expressing the divine presence in human beings and communities and how human beings participates in the divine life through the *okra* and *honhom*. Let us turn to consider factors that influenced translations.

We identify three factors as influencing interpretations or translations in almost all cultures in the world. These factors are: 1) Colonialism 2) Intercultural hermeneutics and 3) The Challenge of what counts as a single language. Let us now examine these factors.

### 2.14.1 COLONIALISM

Colonialism was a framework that guided the operations of the early missionaries in Africa. The missionaries, who came to Ghana and worked among the Akan and other ethnic groups, intended to introduce Christianity as a superior religion to the indigenous religion. The missionaries were forced to link the two religions for the sake of communication and translation. Though they did not accept the two religions to be equal, they were forced to use concepts and terminologies from the indigenous religion to introduce their form of worship to the indigenous people. Among the Ewe in the Volta region of Ghana, the missionaries emphatically taught the people to accept Christianity as superior to their indigenous religion. They (Ewe) were persuaded to abandon their religion for Christianity because their religion was devil worship.<sup>153</sup> The teaching of the missionaries was aimed at ending the way the indigenous people worshipped

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their name for God and the religious and social worlds that depended on that. She also writes that the Christian Akan have a much better preserved pre-Christian heritage than their Muslim counterparts in some African countries. She cites the Muslims in Nigeria as an example. In *Translating the Message*, ed. Lamin Sanneh, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 181.

153. Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, (London: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), 56.

before their arrival. It is because of this mentality that we claim the missionaries arrived in Africa with colonial mentality.

The ethnography of the missionaries echoed the prejudices of their mission. The ethnography of the missionaries failed to shed sufficient light on the actual religious practices of the Akan. They had to develop vocabularies in the semantic arena relative to the link between the perceptible and imperceptible realms, material and spiritual. The missionaries had to link the two religions. Though they did not view them as equal, they had to convert the religion of the indigenous people, which was preserved in oral tradition into the written fixity of Christianity so that they (missionaries) could control the ideas of the indigenous people. The idea of giving the indigenous people a permanent text brought another problem that the missionaries did not envisage. They did not realize that the meaning of translated terms might not be identical with the original ones. The missionaries made translations by separating the content of terminologies from their forms.<sup>154</sup>

As a result of evangelization, Akan Christians have appropriated Christian terms on the basis of their own ideas. This appropriation has produced shades of meanings in religious terminologies. As the missionaries think of Akan terminologies relative to the Christian concepts they taught, the Akan Christians have different meanings for the same terminologies and concepts. In practice, the nuances such as that of the Akan in terminologies and concepts make it difficult to get people from the same language group to agree on certain terminologies. Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu are prime examples of this regarding the meaning of *okra* and *sunsum*.

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154. Birgit Meyer discusses the effect of translation by separating terms from their forms among the Ewe. In *Ibid.*, 80.

In the Akan language, the word for Holy Spirit<sup>155</sup> is translated as *Honhom Kronkron* in the Asante or Twi bible and *Sunsum Kronkron* in the Fante bible. However, when an Asante speaks of the *Honhom kronkron* or composes a song with *Honhom Kronkron*, a Fante understands that it is the Holy Spirit that is being described. In singing Christian hymns, depending on who the composer is, the words *honhom* with *sunsum* are used interchangeably.

The perennial question that confronts Akan is why did the Bible translators use words interchangeably? An attempt will be made in answering the interchangeable use of the two words, *sunsum* and *honhom*, to denote the Holy Spirit. The translators of the bible to Asante (Twi) and Fante languages were those who made the first attempt to commit the languages into writing. This means that as pioneers in the literary works regarding the Asante (Twi) and Fante languages, they used the tools that were available to them to make their translations. If there is confusion in the use of words among the people with whom the missionaries settled, the confusion would be reflected in their handiwork. Those who were interviewed by the translators were confronted with the problem of nuances in the Akan language and the effect of Christianity on them.

#### **2.14.2 INTERCULTURAL HERMENEUTICS**

Two things are revealed in the intercultural hermeneutics discussions. First, the speaker or preacher (missionary) and the listener (convert) do not share exactly the same goals in the art of communication. The speaker becomes engrossed in getting the message to the hearers in a manner that will let the hearer come to understand the message in the same way as the speaker does. The speaker is concerned in transmitting the message in its integrity. The hearer, on his/her part, occupies himself/herself with trying to make sense of the message. The hearer tries to relate

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155. The Holy Spirit plays a vital role in the human person to aid human communion with God. This role will be further discussed in chapter three of this dissertation.



the message to his/her knowledge within his/her universe. While the speaker tries to present the message in its integrity, the hearer tries to make the message fit into his/her worldview. This mode of intercultural hermeneutics affects the message of God to which the hearers, like the Akan, will relate.<sup>156</sup>

Secondly, due to the dynamic nature of culture, the Akan adopted certain concepts of the missionaries, which affected the way they explained their indigenous beliefs and their newly found belief (Christianity). The explanations they give to the constituent parts of the human person are an example of this factor. The disagreement between Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu over the meaning of the *okra* in the human person is again a prime example.

### **2.14.3 WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR A SINGLE LANGUAGE**

Another factor that contributed to the confusion occurs in areas where those committing a language into writing are faced with the challenge of looking for that which counts as a single language. According to William Welmers, those who translated the bible into the Twi and Fante worked from different locations in Ghana, a wide area that had two major language groups, the Asante (Twi) and the Fante languages. These language groups were involved in intra-tribal conflicts. The Fante were located along the coast of the Gulf of Guinea, while the Asante (Twi) people occupied the interior of Ghana.<sup>157</sup>

Welmers describes the congruence of the Twi and Fante languages, and how he was able to maneuver his way through the area with his little Fante, which was widely understood by people even up to a hundred miles into La Côte d'Ivoire, and about three hundred miles in the

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156. Robert Schreiter discussed this in relation to *Religious Identity: Synthesis and Syncretism*. His findings are similar to the problem of translation that missionaries and their converts experienced. See Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 62-71.

157. William E. Welmers, "African Languages and Christian Missions," *Civilisations* 3, no. 4 (1953), 558.

heartland of the Ghana. Welmers describes Twi and Fante as dialects of Akan language when he maintains, “All the dialects of both groups are pretty much mutually intelligible and the main orthographic differences between the two written forms do not represent structurally significant differences in the spoken dialects.”<sup>158</sup>

Similarly, in the bid to translate the bible to an indigenous language, a determinant factor that guides translators is to look for a language that is spoken in a socio-cultural, political, and commercial center. In the case of the Fante dialect, the translators used the Fante spoken in Anumabo. Cape Coast, which is the center of the Fante kingdom, was not the center of the Fante people, so the Fante as spoken by the people in Anumabo, the then center of the Fante, was used to translate the Fante bible.<sup>159</sup>

The Fante fought and annexed the Effutu kingdom in the coastal areas when they migrated to their present settlement in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Before the Fante state assumed its centrality and importance, Anumabo was the social, economic, educational and political capital of the Gold Coast colony as a whole in the 15<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>160</sup> The people in Anumabo were influential, and their dialect was widely spoken by the people in the surrounding area.

J. Christaller indicates that the Fante dialects are part of the Akan language that is not regarded as pure by Akan. This is because there are many differences “in sound, forms, and expressions” within the three dialect groups of Twi (Asante), Bron and Fante. Nevertheless, there

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158.Ibid., 559.

159. Ibid.

160. William Bosman, *A New And Accurate Description of the Description of the Coast of Guinea*, (London: Frank Cass, 1967), 413-422; Also I. Chukwukere, “Akan Theory of Conception,” *Journal of International African Institute* 48, no. 2 (1978), 140, and Footnotes 16, 17.

is congruence in the Akan language. The variations are not so great as to prevent people of the one group from readily understanding those of the other. <sup>161</sup>

In his dictionary, Christaller defines *honhom* as “a spirit; the spirit of man [ah. = *osaman* a. s. *sunsum*...*onipa wu a, ne honhom fi no mu ko soro* (When a person dies his/her *honhom* goes to heaven)]. He further made use of the word *honhom* by writing, “ *Onyame honhom, the Spirit of God; Honhom kronkron, the Holy Ghost*.<sup>162</sup> Here, we see the meaning of *honhom* as spirit. For some reason, apart from the Fante, the Asante or Twi, Akyem, Bron, Akwuapim and the other Akan language groups refer to the Holy Spirit as *Honhom Kronkron*. He also defines *sunsum* as, “pl. a- [con. *né sùnsum*’] the **soul** or **spirit** of man; *ne s. sō*, he is influential; - a spirit, ghost; F. pl. n-, Mt 8, 16. Mk. 1, 27; cf. *sunsumã, okarã, honhom*.<sup>163</sup>

Christaller does not indicate that the Asante use *honhom* for Holy Spirit and the Fante use *sunsum* for Holy Spirit; he only explains what they mean. He ascribed soul to the *sunsum*, but does not refer to the *honhom* as the soul. His dictionary was widely used by those who translated the bible to the Akan language, so his influence cannot be overemphasized. The person with whom the missionaries settled and translated the bible influenced their evangelization work. However, because of the congruence in the Akan language in general, this difference does not affect the understanding of the Asante and the Fante people when they read a bible that does not originate from their area.

The missionaries, who came to Ghana to proclaim the Good News of God’s kingdom, explained their understanding of God and how God saved the world by establishing a

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161. J. G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante And Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi)*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., (Basel: Basel Evangelical Missionary Society, 1933), XIV.

162. *Ibid.*, 185.

163. *Ibid.*, 484.

relationship with humanity. Let us review the Christian understanding of God and God's relationship with humanity.<sup>164</sup>

## **2.15 THE CHRISTIAN UNDERSTANDING OF GOD AND GOD'S RELATIONSHIP WITH HUMANITY**

Christians believe that God is a Trinity of persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. God, who is the divine Mystery, is worshipped and proclaimed as creator and savior of the world.<sup>165</sup> The God, who was experienced as Yahweh by the Hebrews in the Hebrew bible, is the same Yahweh (God) whose reign Jesus proclaimed in the New Testament. Jesus referred to Yahweh as Father (Abba) (Mk 14:36; Rom 8:15; Gal 4:6). The Holy Spirit, who is the Hebrew bible's Spirit of God (*rûach* YHWH), was the very reality of God, empowering the creature with life. "When you take away their breath, they perish and return to the dust from which they came. When you send forth your breath, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth" (Ps 104:30).

The missionaries proclaimed that God made heaven and earth and everything in the world. Christians believe that God created the human person in the image of God, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen 1: 27). The bible demonstrates that God's image is in every human person. God has established a relationship with humanity and this relationship goes on until a person dies and either goes back to God or, if a person fails to live as God expects, is condemned.

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164. We do not intend to discuss in detail the Christian understanding of God and God's relationship with humanity because we will discuss this relationship in chapter three below. We are giving a brief explanation here so that we can make reference to it.

165. Joseph A. Komonchak, Mary Collins and Dermot A. Lane, *The New Dictionary of Theology*, (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1987), 1047.

## 2.16 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have highlighted the context of everyday life within which Akan understand their world. Their cosmology, beliefs, and practices, which we have delineated, reveal a strong relationship between God (*Nyame*) and human beings (*nipa*). The Akan practical social context, which we have discussed, will serve as an interpretive tool in this dissertation to structure and shed light on the Christian understanding of the human person as created in the image of God.

This dissertation attempts to shed light on the understanding of the human person, what we share in common and our uniqueness, which reveal much about God, the creator of the universe and everything in it. We seek to clarify the issues involved in the debate between Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu by showing anthropological possibilities and demonstrate that in spite of their disagreements, there are some constituent elements in the human person that point to the human being as created in the image of God and created as a unique being among creation.

Drawing from the contextual reality of the Akan, we intend to demonstrate that the *okra* and other constituent elements in the human being point to the image of God in the human person. In this dissertation, we will organize materials in relation to the Akan contextual reality to further explain the Christian message as a means to appreciate the human person being created in the image of God and human relationship with God, neighbor, and the universe. Through the contextual reality of the Akan and the Christian message, it will become apparent that the dimensions of the person that is made up of the *okra*, *sunsum*, *honhom*, *ntoro*, *sasa*, *mogyia* demonstrate that the human person is created in the image of God.

To carry out this critical reflection on contextual praxis effectively as our methodology, we must enter into a dialogue with other disciplines such as philosophy, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and theology to address the conundrums in this world. This dissertation attempts to dialogue with other disciplines to reveal the meaning of the human person being created in the image of God.

We now turn to chapter three to examine the biblical understanding of creation in the image of God and examine the views of two Church Fathers, Origen and Saint Augustine.

## CHAPTER THREE

### BIBLICAL FOUNDATION AND EARLY CHURCH FATHERS ON WHAT IT MEANS TO BE CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

*When I see the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars that you set in place—What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them(Ps 8:4-5)*

#### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

In the foregoing chapter, we investigated the Akan culture and anthropology in order to grasp its contextual understanding of the human person. Among other things, we established that Akan anthropology posits a unique relationship between God and the human person, a relationship that fosters the uniqueness of the human person. The dimensions of the human person, which ontologically links the person to God, namely the *okra* (soul) and the *honhom* (*sunsum*)<sup>1</sup> (spirit), *mogya* (blood), and *ntoro* (father's spirit), give credence to the image of God in the human person.

The anthropological examination we undertake in this chapter will start from the biblical perspective concerning who a human being is and how God creates humanity in God's image. We shall examine the biblical foundations concerning the specific meaning of the concept of being created in God's image (Gen 1:27), which is central to this dissertation. In this process, the various interpretations given to the image of God in the Hebrew bible will be analyzed, following Marc Cortez's lead of the four main interpretations of the image of God, namely the

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1. The *sunsum* and *honhom* are used interchangeable particularly when it comes to the Akan reference to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is known as *Honhom Kronkron* or *Sunsum Kronkron*. See chapter two, page 109.

structural image, the functional image, the relational/existential image, and the image of God as wholeness.<sup>2</sup> These interpretations have their limitations, as they do not satisfy all inquiries. Consequently, we will do a synthesis of the various interpretations to demonstrate an interpretation that encapsulates the four main interpretations of what it means to be created in the image of God.

We intend to focus on aspects that resonate with Akan anthropology by following the chosen methodology in order to further clarify the uniqueness of the human person. Biblical theology looks at the human person only in the person's relationship to God, whose image he/she is. The bible encompasses an account in which the main actor is God who created human beings and became human in order to redeem them. This theological anthropology necessarily involves Christology,<sup>3</sup> which will become evident in this chapter.

An investigation of the Patristic views of the human person will follow this biblical investigation. We shall first explore the thought of Origen (185-232 C.E) as a representative of the Greek Fathers (Eastern Fathers). The views of Origen describe the dimensions of the human person in terms of "trichotomy."<sup>4</sup> While the root of this conception is traceable to the Pauline greetings in his Letter to the Thessalonians,<sup>5</sup> Plato's influence on Origen cannot, however, be overemphasized. Origen's *trichotomic* conception of the human person appears as a manipulation of Plato's anthropology.

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2. Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology: A Guide for the Perplexed*, (New York: T & T Clark International, 2010), 18-30.

3. The New Testament description of the image of God cannot be understood without examining who Jesus Christ is: the true image of God in whose image humanity shares. See "Man" in Xavier Léone-Dufour, *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., trans. Joseph R. Sweeney, (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books & Media, 1995), 328.

4. *Trichotomy* is a tripartite view of humanity. It maintains that humanity is a composite of three distinct components, namely, body, soul and spirit.

5. I Thes 5:23. Quoted in Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A. S. Worrall, (Edinburg: T. & T. Clark Ltd., 1989), 87.



We will then examine the thought of St. Aurelius Augustine of Hippo (354-430C.E) as a representative of the Latin Fathers (Western Fathers). Particular attention will be paid to his postulation that the human being is a composite of body and soul, which is in “keeping with Neoplatonism.”<sup>6</sup>

Following our study of the Fathers, we shall survey some modern trends in Christian theological anthropology with regard to what it means to be created in the image of God.

### **3.1 THE HEBREW BIBLE CONCERNING “CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD”**

No one on earth can claim to have seen God. In the Gospel of John, the author tells us that it is the Son of God who has revealed God (cf Jn 1:18). Before God revealed God’s-self in the perfect image of God’s Son, Jesus Christ, God’s glory was revealed to human beings under the longstanding covenant found throughout the Hebrew bible. Human beings, who were created with the power of ruling over nature and who were gifted with immortality, already constituted a living image of God (cf Gen 1:27). According to Paul Lamarche, “the prohibition of images in Israelitic worship was a hollow expression of the seriousness of this title given to man [humanity] and was a negative preparation for the coming of God-Man, the only image in which the Father revealed Himself fully.”<sup>7</sup>

In order to elucidate the meaning of the “image of God” in the Hebrew bible, some biblical experts caution that discussions about the image of God must be done without the numerous theological speculations associated with it. For instance, it must be done by analyzing the texts as they appear in the Hebrew bible without the New Testament thoughts that have been

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6. *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, s.v. “Saint Augustine,” revised Nov. 12, 2010, <http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/augustine>.

7. Paul Lamarche, “Image,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Xavier Léon-Dufour, trans. Joseph R. Sweeney, (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books & Media 1995), 252.

associated with it (or superimposed on it).<sup>8</sup> Though we will analyze the text in the Hebrew bible, we will use it to demonstrate how Christians understand it, and we will relate it to the Akan understanding of the human person.

The P (Priestly) narrative found in Genesis describes the creation of the human person in the image of God. The primary aim is to describe the concrete resemblance of God. The writer did well to convey an abstract idea by describing the human person in his or her relation to God. The image of God is an element which the priestly writer judges to be characteristic of all human persons and not characteristic of a king as was understood in Egypt.<sup>9</sup>

The principle that Yahweh is not to be depicted in the form of an image is fundamental to true worshippers of Yahweh, the basis of which is found in the commandment, “You shall not carve idols for yourselves in the shape of anything in the sky above or on the earth below or in the waters beneath the earth” (Ex 20:4). The idea of prohibition of images in the Hebrew bible is indisputable. In spite of this prohibition, Yahweh made human beings in God’s image. Gerhard Kittel maintains that the ancient prohibition of the making of the image of God on earth as we read in Exodus 20:4ff and other texts has three practical implications: first, the avoidance and removal of cultic images of alien gods. This implication appears in Judaism and Christianity in every age. The violation of such an injunction is considered apostasy. The second implication is the lack of images in the native culture. This principle was strongly emphasized in Judaism. The third implication is the avoidance of any representations of human beings. In art, the principle used was that pictures were permissible except the pictures of human beings. Because human beings are created in the image of God, human pictures were not permitted. Orthodox Jewish

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8. N. W. Porteous, “Image of God,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. E-J, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), 682.

9. Ibid., 683.

art, therefore, avoids biblical scenes that include human beings.<sup>10</sup> Since the use of the image of God was prohibited under all circumstances, it placed emphasis on the importance of the human person as created in the image of God in the creation story in the bible.

One of the creation accounts in the Hebrew bible gives us a description of the creation of man — *'adham* (Gen. 2:7). The use of the name *'adham* is not intended to refer particularly to the Israelites; rather, it reveals an “ancient Israelite universalism.” The name is an indication that the God of Israel is the creator of the universe and all that is in it, including human beings. The creation of the first man is an indication of the relationship between God and humanity.<sup>11</sup>

The Hebrew bible gives two accounts of the creation of human beings. The first is Genesis 1: 1-2:4a, and the second is Genesis 2:4b-25. The second account of creation (Gen. 2:7) presents God as creating man first and later creating the woman. The narrative indicates that Yahweh forms mankind from the dust and makes him a living being (*nephes chayyah*) by breathing into the man the breath of life (*nishmath chayyim*). Yahweh then commands the man to do certain things and prohibits him from doing others. The man is asked to name the animals that Yahweh creates. The woman is created from the rib of the man. Yahweh punishes humans according to their transgression. The narrative in Gen. 6:3 presumes that Yahweh's *ruach* (spirit) abides in the human person even after the transgression. However, Yahweh decides to take the

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10. G. Kittel, “Eikōn,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. II, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 383-384.

11. Maass, “ādham,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, Vol. 1, trans. John T. Willis, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1974), 84.

*ruach* from the human person so that human beings will be mortal.<sup>12</sup> It is when the *ruach* (spirit) of God is taken from a person that that person experiences death.<sup>13</sup>

Having said that, let us now focus our analysis on the creation of the human person as presented in the first account of creation (Gen 1:26-27). There are four factors, according to the creation of humans that indicate that humankind is the crowning achievement of God's creation. These factors are: 1) the creation of humankind is put at the end of creation as a place of climax and emphasis; 2) the creation of humans is a personal act of God, who creates humans in God's image and likeness; 3) God explicitly states the purpose of creating humankind, as having dominion over creation, and 4) the representation of divine counsel taken before the creation of humans. God states: "Let us make." With whom did God take counsel since the narrative is purely monotheistic? The plural, "Let us make," has been explained as a plural of majesty as it is used in contemporary royal protocol, although in the Hebrew world, the royal plural does not appear. Another suggestion has been made that God could be represented as taking counsel with the heavenly court of angels as we read in Job 1 and Isaiah 6. Some suggest that it is to express the fullness of God's being that God uses the plural. This supposes that God possesses such fullness that God deliberates with God's-self in the same way several people deliberate among themselves.<sup>14</sup>

By examining the idea of the image of God, the question that arises is what, in the author's mind, did humankind's God-likeness consist of? In our time, according to psychology, we understand the likeness to consist of the human being's spiritual nature, human intellect and

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12. Ibid., 79.

13. It is when the *ruach* (spirit of God) or the *honhom* and *okra* are taken away from a person that Akan also aver that death has occurred. This will be further elaborated in chapter four.

14. B. Vawter C. M., "Genesis," in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. Reginald C. Fuller, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1975), 175.

will, which separate humanity from animals and makes humanity analogous to God. Our psychology, however, is not that of the author of the Genesis narrative, who did not have our conception of the rational soul and its spiritual faculties. It must be noted that, for the author, it is human beings and not the nature of human beings that is in the image and likeness of God.<sup>15</sup>

In order to adhere to form criticism, Genesis 1:26-27 will be analyzed in its broader context, as well as Genesis 1-3; 5:1-3 and Genesis 9:6. In the view of Jürgen Moltmann, the idea of being created in the image of God is found outside of Genesis only in the Priestly writings included in Psalm 8, Wisdom 2:23, and Ecclesiastes 17:23. These biblical texts have the image of God as their underlining factor.<sup>16</sup>

It is important to appreciate the full explanation of the idea of being “created in the image of God” provided in the book of Genesis. Paul Lamarche highlights the idea of the image of God by writing that some texts in the Hebrew bible (Psalm 8; Sirach 17) develop the theme of “dominion” and the state of “glory” and “splendor,” which are slightly “inferior” to the divine being. At the same time, according to him, “the notion of the image of God, whether used implicitly as in these texts or not, is enriched by clarification and addition.”<sup>17</sup> He further writes that in Genesis 2:23, humanity is no longer created only in the image of God, an imprecise expression which leaves the meaning open to certain rabbinic interpretations, but humanity properly is the image of God.<sup>18</sup>

Since our purpose in this section is to reveal the relationship that God intends to establish with humanity and reveal the persons in the Godhead, we will not exhaust the different

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15. Ibid.

16. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, trans. Margaret Kohl, (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1991), 215.

17. Paul Lamarche, “Image,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Xavier Léon-Dufour, trans. Joseph R. Sweeney, 253.

18. Ibid.

interpretations of the biblical texts we have referenced above. We will limit ourselves to: 1) the structural image, 2) the functional image, 3) the relational/existential image, and 4) the image of God as wholeness.

Before discussing the various interpretations of texts in the Scriptures concerning the image of God, we will examine these significant words: “let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness” (Gen. 1:26).<sup>19</sup> The words “in our image, according to our likeness” are translated *tselem* (image) and *D<sup>e</sup>muth* (likeness). According to Anthony Hoekema, the Hebrew text shows clearly that there is no “essential” difference between “in our image” and “after our likeness.”<sup>20</sup> He comes to this conclusion by examining this passage and two other passages where the same words are used. According to Hoekema, both words, *image* and *likeness*, are used in Gen. 1: 26. However, in Gen. 1:27, only the word *image* is used, and in Gen. 5:1, only *likeness* is used. In Gen. 5:3, both words are used, but in a different order than Gen. 1: 27: *in his own likeness, after his image*. Moreover, in Gen. 9:6 only the word *image* is used. Hoekema concludes that if these words were intended to describe different aspects of the human person, the words would not have been used in the way they have been analyzed. The explanation given by Anthony Hoekema will be the one followed in this thesis.

Karl Barth, on the other hand, does not view the two terms *tselem* and *d<sup>e</sup>muth* as synonymous. He observes that *tselem* “which is used to describe plastic or painted representations and even idols, emphasizes more the character of the image as a completed work (in contrast to its subject), whereas *d<sup>e</sup>muth* in some sense analyzes the concept and origination of the image and means a ‘copy’ or ‘duplicate’ or ‘imitation’ (in contrast to an original). Barth

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19. For inclusive language, we use *The Go-Anywhere Thinline Bible with the Apocrypha*, New Revised Standard Version, (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 2001), 3.

20. Anthony Hoekema, *Created in God's Image*, (Grand Rapids: William B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986),13.

maintains that man (used in a generic sense as humanity) is not created to be the image of God, but created in correspondence with the image of God.<sup>21</sup>

James Barr observes that what the priestly writer was attempting to do in the “image of God” passages “was to call attention to the God/man similarity without specifying the nature of this similarity any more than was absolutely necessary.”<sup>22</sup> Maxwell Miller agrees with James Barr’s interpretation of the Image of God. Jürgen Moltmann maintains that *tselem* means a concrete representation whereas *demeuth* is used to represent similarity.<sup>23</sup> These are but few examples to show that biblical scholars on this subject matter give varied explanations to the image of God passages in the Scriptures.

The idea that the image of God was lost by Adam in the Garden of Eden is difficult to accept. Being human means that one shares in the image of God. Because the image of God, which is a constituent element of the human being, is the mystery and unique gift that God has given to humanity over all creation, it is problematic to think of a human being without this image. James Mays is right when he observes that the image of God “...is a given, a sign of the mystery and majesty of human life itself, a sign borne by every individual of the species. To be human is to be created in the image of God, irrespective of age, condition, or character.”<sup>24</sup> This is why every human being must be respected and must enjoy the dignity that God has bestowed on him or her, irrespective of a person’s material and physical circumstances. At this point, let us return to the different interpretations of the image of God.

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21. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, Vol. III.1, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 197.

22. Maxwell J. Miller, “In the ‘Image’ and ‘Likeness’ of God,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 91, no. 3 (Sept. 1972), 289-304.

23. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, (New York: Harper, 1991), 218.

24. James L. Mays, “What is a Human Being? Reflections on Psalm 8,” *Theology Today* 50, no. 4, (January 1994): 530.

### 3.1.1 THE STRUCTURAL INTERPRETATION OF THE IMAGE OF GOD

The structural interpretation of the image of God holds that there is something in the human person that is essential and unique to the human person alone among God's creation. This uniqueness is characterized by some kind of attitude that only the human person possesses. Proponents of this view maintain that human beings image a wise and rational God. Thus humans are the only ones among God's creation who rationalize in their daily activities. This idea of human beings alone being capable of rational thought and thus imaging God is believed to have been a view that was held by the early church until the Middle Ages. This is evidenced by some of the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas as he describes the image of God and whether or not irrational creatures possess the image of God.<sup>25</sup>

Proponents of the structural interpretation of the image examine Gen. 1:26 and declare that the image of God can only be found in human beings because humanity alone is capable of rationality. Those who propose this interpretation believe that humanity will continue to take care of God's creation through rational activities. They do not consider human rationality to be equal to that of God, but they argue that humanity has the capacity to rationalize. They argue that animals and other creatures are irrational and not capable of conceiving God. And they contend that human beings did not lose the image of God after the fall, but that human beings continue to use their Godlike rationality, but often in a sinful way after the fall.<sup>26</sup>

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25. Saint Thomas Aquinas treats the image of God and the likeness of God as recorded in Gen 1:26 in *Summa Theologica* Iq93a9. Aquinas maintains "Not every likeness, not even what is copied from something else, is sufficient to make an image; for if the likeness be only generic, or existing by virtue of some common accident, this does not suffice for one thing to be the image of another...But the nature of an image requires likeness in species; thus the image of the king exists in his son." In Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, (New York: T. & T Clark International, 2010), 18.

26. Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, (New York: T & T Clark International, 2010), 18-19.



Many scholars reject the structural interpretation of the image of God, in spite of the fact that it enjoys historical backing. Scholars reject this view for its lack of exegetical backing from the scriptures.<sup>27</sup> The argument of the rationality of the human person is not supported by scripture texts in revealing the uniqueness of the human person among creatures. For instance, Wentzel Van Huyssteen<sup>28</sup> argues for an interdisciplinary approach to interpret the image of God texts in the bible. He writes, “The biblical idea that human beings are created in the image of God and that *Homo sapiens* are therefore placed more or less at the center of the created universe seems to be challenged in our time.”<sup>29</sup> He quotes Michael Welker as arguing that these concepts “now function as codes or symbols” that were in existence in a world that is no longer a reality.<sup>30</sup>

Furthermore the discovery of the Babylonian creation myth, *Enuma Elish*,<sup>31</sup> by George Smith in 1876 sustains therejection of the structural interpretation of the image of God.<sup>32</sup> The conspicuous resemblance between the creation story in the bible and the myth of creation in the

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27. Ibid.

28. Wentzel Van Huyssteen J., *Alone in the World?* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006).

29. Ibid., 116.

30. Michael Welker quoted in Ibid.

31. The *Enuma Elish* is a Babylonian or Mesopotamian myth of creation, which recount the struggle between the cosmic order and chaos. It is a myth of the cycle of seasons. It is named after its opening words and was recited on the fourth day of the ancient Babylonian New Year’s festival. This version was written out of the basic stories that exist in various forms in the area, it was written in Akkadian dialect, which is an old Babylonian dialect. This version was written around the 12<sup>th</sup> century BCE in cuneiform on seven clay tables. They were found in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the ruins of Ashurbanipal in Nineveh. George Smith first published these texts in 1876 as *The Chaldean Genesis*. The publication was because of parallels George Smith identified between the *Enuma Elish* and the Genesis narratives. Some historians argue that the Genesis account is a rewriting of the Babylonian story. Many who want to maintain the uniqueness of the bible argue that the Genesis accounts were written first and the Babylonian myth borrowed from the biblical accounts in Dennis Bratcher, accessed October 16, 2013, <http://www.cresourcei.org/enumaelish.html>.

32. LeRon F. Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 230.

*Enuma Elish*, coupled with the later theory of Darwin on the descent of human being in 1871,<sup>33</sup> poses a challenge to the structural interpretation of the image of God texts. According to LeRon Shults, the challenge posed by the *Enuma Elish* is because the similarities between the Babylonian story and the Genesis account have led to the claim that this similarity was due to a response by Babylonian Jews to creation myth of their conquerors.

The arguments against this structural approach to interpreting the image of God texts in the bible is so overwhelming that other ways of explaining the account of human creation became necessary. We now turn to the functional interpretation of the image of God in the human person.

### **3.1.2 THE FUNCTIONAL INTERPRETATION OF THE IMAGE OF GOD**

The functional interpretation of the image of God in the Genesis accounts of the human person places emphasis on what the human person accomplishes and not who humans are. Scholarship through the historical-critical method of biblical interpretation led to the rejection of the structural image interpretation and to the acceptance of the functional image interpretation, which places emphasis on the dominion of the human person among God's creation.

The human person, according to this interpretation, is God's sovereign insignia on earth, created in God's image and placed in this world to ensure the sovereignty of God. It is noted that the idea of a human person being made in the "image of" a divine being was popular in the Ancient Near East. It was more of a royal representation and a very important idea. Marc Cortez maintains that in Egypt, the idea of a king being the incarnation of the divine was held. In

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33. Darwinism poses a challenge to all biblical interpretations given to the creation story; however, we cite it here due to the fact that Darwinism and the *Enuma Elish* are attempts to explain the origins of the world and humanity.

Mesopotamia, the idea of a human being representing the divine was upheld.<sup>34</sup> These views existed because these figures of “king” exercised dominion over the earth and over their subjects.

Moltmann legitimizes human dominance on earth by maintaining that God, who created the human person in his image, allows the human person to be a representation of God’s divine image on earth.<sup>35</sup> He further writes:

So as God’s image and appearance on earth, human beings are involved in three fundamental relationships: they rule over other earthly creatures as God’s representatives and in his name; they are God’s counterpart on earth, the counterpart to whom he wants to talk, and who is intended to respond to him; and they are the appearances of God’s splendor, and his glory on earth.<sup>36</sup>

Moltmann observes that it is only the human person who is created in the image of God and not angels, nor animals nor any other creatures.

The idea of dominion, which is emphasized by proponents of this view, is a dominion with conscientiousness, stewardship, and nurturing towards the creation that God loves.<sup>37</sup>

Towner emphasizes the extraordinary importance of the human person and describes humanity as the culminating achievement of God’s creative work.<sup>38</sup> This view portrays the unique role that God gave to humanity in the creation account.

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34. Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, (New York: T & T Clark International, 2010), 21.

35. Jurgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 220.

36. *Ibid.*, 220-21.

37. Sibley W. Towner, *Genesis*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 28.

38. *Ibid.*

The image of God, according to this interpretation, was not lost after the fall. Instead, human persons execute their responsibility in this world in a “twisted” form.<sup>39</sup> This view becomes important in our modern state as human beings are reminded that there is a responsibility entrusted to humanity to ensure that the world, which was created by God and loved by God, is kept going as God intends it to be. There is exegetical support to this interpretation unlike the structural approach that has limited exegetical support. However, this approach employs extra biblical evidence to support its views of the royal representation.

Akin to Gen. 1:26-27; 5:1-3; and 9:6, biblical scholars analyze Psalm 8 and delineate its importance in the interpretation that is given to the Priestly account of creation found in the Hebrew bible. This psalm becomes important because at its hub stands the anthropological investigation, “what are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them” (Ps 8:5). Psalm 8 can be connected to the creation accounts in Genesis since they both give an account of the universe as the work of the creator God, and they both portray the unique role of the human person among creation.<sup>40</sup> In verse 5, “What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortal that you care for them?” we see the emphasis on the fragility and mortality of humankind to whom God has given great dignity. In verse 6, we read, “Yet you have made them little less than a god.” The Hebrew word *'elohim* is the ordinary name for “God” or “the gods” or members of the heavenly court. It has to be noted that the Greek version translated *'elohim* by “angel” or “messenger.” Several ancient and modern versions translate *'elohim* as the Greek does. The meaning apparently is that God created human beings almost at the level of the beings

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39. Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 22.

40. Phyllis A. Bird, “Bone of My Bone and Flesh of My Flesh,” *Theology Today* 50, no. 4, (January 1994), 521.

in the heavenly world. In Hebrew 2:9, we find the well-known fulfillment of verse 6 in Jesus Christ, who was humbled before being glorified.<sup>41</sup>

For those who interpret the image of God as functional or dominant, the telling part of this Psalm is verse 7: “You have given them [the human beings] rule over the works of your hands, put all things at their feet.” This verse is used to support the dominant role of humans in God’s creation. God’s other creatures are mentioned in the following verse, which are to come under the care of human beings. Thus, human beings alone have been created in the image of God.

The functional interpretation of the image of God in the human person is to be viewed as a responsibility that God gave to the human being to respect and protect creation, not a privilege to abuse or destroy creation. The image of God in humanity is a Godlike power that allows a human person to create his or her own environment and culture. As human beings seek to expand their existence, they must act responsibly and create a congenial atmosphere for the other creatures of the world as well.

James Tubbs describes the human dominance in the world as a humble dominion. He maintains that humans are dependent on God and, to a limited extent, are responsible for the other creatures in the world.<sup>42</sup> Thus, the human being is given the capabilities to responsibly manage God’s creation to some extent. Tubbs writes that humans are given a responsibility for the natural world and that “Like other created beings, humans are dependent upon God. But, like

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41. Footnote of Psalm 8 in *The Catholic Study Bible: The New American Bible*, ed. Donald Senior and John J. Collins, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 687-8.

42. James B. Tubbs Jr., “Humble Dominion,” *Theology Today* 50, no. 4, (January 1994).

God, humans are, to some extent at least, capable of rational, purposive attitude and actions toward other created beings.”<sup>43</sup>

Finally, Gilbert Meilaender sheds light on the functional image interpretation of the *Imago Dei*. He asserts that the human dominance must be seen as a gift that God has given to the human being, and that this dominance is unmerited. Meilaender emphasizes that this dominance should give honor and glory to God.<sup>44</sup> Readers of Psalm 8 are reminded to read the psalm as every exegete would. The Psalmist starts saying, “O Lord, our God, how awesome is your name through all the earth!” and ends with the same words. (Ps 8:1, 10). These words show that the description that is given to human’s dominance is a humble one to give glory to God.<sup>45</sup>

There are objections against the functional interpretation of the image of God in the human person. Proponents of this interpretation are accused of a false anthropocentrism in their presumption that the human being is the crown of the world and are charged to control all things. James Mays explicates that it is an illusion to think of the human person as unique; therefore, human beings should come to terms with their “animal identity.”<sup>46</sup> Mays invites humanity to reflect on the fact that they are “rational” animals, which puts humanity in the category of animals. He believes that this will help humanity avoid usurping the powers of God.

Environmentalists are against the functional interpretations that are given to the *Imago Dei* texts in the scriptures. They argue that it is because human beings presume that they are in charge of the world and have dominion over God’s creation that we have an ecological crisis and callous treatment of animals in the world. According to Lynn White Jr., unless Christianity

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43. Ibid. 549.

44. Gilbert Meilaender, “Touched by the Eternal,” *Theology Today* 50, no. 4, (January 1994): 551.

45. Ibid.

46. James L. Mays, “What is a Human Being? Reflections on Psalm 8,” 514.

changes the functional interpretation they give to the image of God passage in the creation story and until Christians stop interpreting their dominion in this world and avoid the thought that whatever is created is to serve humans, they will continue to bear the brunt of causing an ecological crisis in this world.<sup>47</sup>

Tubbs suggests that the word dominion in Genesis 1 refers to that which God permits human beings to use for their nourishment: “only seed-yielding plants and trees” and “every green plant” (Gen. 1: 29-30).<sup>48</sup> He continues that animals live their lives in constant fear of human beings after the story of the flood (Gen. 9). Human beings are, therefore, being counseled to be vegetarians in those passages. We believe that if this point is overstressed, humanity will not be allowed to eat at all. By eating plants, as it is being suggested here, humanity will be destroying the plants that God created. We will have to starve or wait for God to provide us with nourishment.

Since the functional interpretation of the *Imago Dei* has also run into a problem of non-acceptance, largely because of its inability to satisfy the environmentalists in particular and some other scholars in general, there was the need for another form of interpretation. We turn to the Relational / Existential interpretation.

### **3.1.3 RELATIONAL / EXISTENTIAL INTERPRETATION OF THE IMAGE OF GOD**

The unsatisfactory nature of the structural and functional analysis of the image of God in the human person has led to the relational or an existential interpretation of the image.

Proponents of the relational / existential interpretation of the image rely on those properties of God that the human person images. They describe God as relational/existential by assessing the

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47. Lynn White Jr. “The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis,” *Science* 155, no. 10, (March 1967): 1203-7, cited in James B. Tubbs Jr., “Humble Dominion,” 544, 546.

48. James B. Tubbs Jr., “Humble Dominion,” *Theology Today* 50, no. 4, (January 1994), 547.

relational nature of the triune God. This makes relationality an essential quality in the image of God in the human person. The human person relates to God, who is the creator of the world and all in it and to God's creation, including the environment, other creatures, and one another. This makes relationality a fundamental quality of the human person.<sup>49</sup>

The relationality of humanity imaging God is not to be interpreted as a characteristic that only Adam and Eve had. It is to be seen as God's gift to humanity in general; it is the core of who the human person is made to be. Proponents of this view support their claim of relationality by appealing to the divine plural in the book of Genesis. Karl Barth, for instance, sheds light on this reality when he describes the divine command "Let us" in Gen. 1:26 as "the plurality in the divine being" which is being attested to in this verse. He identifies the divine nature as being the "differentiation and relationship, the loving coexistence and cooperation, the I and Thou, which first takes place in the God Himself."<sup>50</sup> This is the image of God that humanity shares in to relate to God, who is relational, and to other human beings, and to the world in general. This implies that human nature images God, whose nature surpasses "solitariness."<sup>51</sup>

Gilbert Meilaender sheds light on the impracticality of thinking about humanity without God. He writes: "No human being exists, or can exist, outside of or apart from relation to God. To try to think of human beings apart from the God-relation is, therefore, an exercise in metaphysical deception. To try to live as if that relation did not encompass us on every side is to

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49. World Council of Churches emphasizes the relational aspect of the image of God when it states among other things that human beings share a special relationship with God who created the human being in God's image. They write: "Human beings are not like their own kind, but are to be like God. Here it is clear that being made in God's image is foundational for all human beings, male and female (Gen 1:26-27). They link this relationship with the trinity as well. In World Council of Churches, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*, Faith and Order Paper 199(Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), 35.

50. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics III.I*, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1958), 196.

51. Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 24.



fly in the face of reality, to live a lie.”<sup>52</sup> At this point, it becomes apparent that it is impossible to think of humanity without a relationship with God. The relationship that exists between males and females is also seen as a mirror of the divine relationship that humanity shares. The human relationship composes sexual distinctiveness that humans share in the image of God.<sup>53</sup>

In order to appreciate the meaning of the image of God and the relationship that it invokes, one has to look at the broader narrative of Genesis chapters 1 and 2 as complementary to each other. The first chapter of Genesis introduces the human person as created in the image of God, and the second chapter shows the relational aspect of this image of God.<sup>54</sup>

The three fundamental relationships are underscored in Gen. 1:26-28. However, the development of these relationships is not highlighted in chapter 1; it is delineated in chapter 2. By reading these two chapters together, we find the full import of the image of God in humanity.

The first relationship is portrayed in the relational enterprise between humanity and God the Creator. This relationship is initiated in Genesis chapter 1 with the statement: “Then God said: Let us make humankind in our image, after our likeness...” (Gen. 1:26). In the second chapter of Genesis, this relationship matures into communication and partnership. The human being is the only creature whose existence starts with the breath of God (Gen. 2:7) and is the only creature that enjoys a special relationship with God (Gen. 2:8-17). W. Riedel highlights this

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52. Gilbert Meilaender, “Touched by the Eternal,” 535.

53. This reflects the human uniqueness and sameness that this study is geared towards revealing. It is believed that God is a Spirit and no one can assign any gender to God, however, this point is made to reveal that through our sexuality, humanity is able to relate to one another in a special way. This study does not go into the details of sexuality that is linked with the image of God. For more information see Ibid 25. And Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* III.I.

54. John Sailhamer discusses this idea in detail by emphasizing that “It seems apparent that the author intends the second chapter to be read closely with the first and that each chapter be identified as part of the same event...It is likely that the author’s central theological interests in chapter 1 would be continued in chapter 2 as well – the theme of humanity’s creation in the ‘image of God.’ Thus we may expect to find in chapter 2 a continuation of the theme of the ‘likeness’ between humankind and the Creator.” In John Silhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 97.

relationship between God and humanity by writing that through the image of God, the human being is enabled to have a direct dealing with God. He maintains, “It [the image of God] consists in this, that God and human beings can have dealings with each other, that God can speak to humans and that they can understand him and answer him, in short their disposition towards religion.”<sup>55</sup>

All other relationships that human beings have are regulated and influenced by the relationship they have with God. Loving God affects all that a person does. Since God is love, the vertical relationship that one has with God affects one’s horizontal relationships with the rest of creation. It is this love that every human being strives for as the future expectation. This relationship is what prompted St. Augustine to describe the human desire to praise and relate to God by writing: “for you [God] have formed us for Yourself, and our hearts are restless till they find rest in you.”<sup>56</sup> St. Augustine underscores the indispensable relationship that exists between God and humanity in this statement.

The second relationship is described as the one between the human being and creation in general (Gen. 1: 26-28; 2: 15, 18-20). In those passages, the human being rules and has dominion over God’s creatures. For instance, “The LORD said: ‘It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a suitable partner for him.’ So the LORD GOD formed out of the ground various wild animals and various birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each of them would be its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be the suitable partner for the man” (Gen 2:18-20). Humanity settled in the Garden of Eden and interacted with nature,

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55. W. Riedel, *Die Gottesebenbildlichkeit des Menschen*, 1902, cited in Westermann, *Genesis 1-11*, trans. John J. Scullion, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), 151.

56. Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, I.1. Accessed October 16, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110101.htm>.

naming the animals to establish a relationship with them. Animals receive their names from the human being and they had a good relationship.

The third level of relationship is portrayed in the one that exists between the man (Adam) and the woman (Eve). We read: “God created man [humankind] in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1: 27). Critical analysis of this verse reveals something greater than sexual differentiation in human beings since other animals also share in the male/female sexual differentiation without being created in the image of God. This verse reveals that God intends to show, through the creation of humankind, that humanity is multifaceted, not an island of only “maleness” or “femaleness,” but a cooperative relationship between both.

We have discussed relationships in Genesis 1, which is the Priestly (P) source of the book. The writer aims at describing the creation of humankind on the sixth day along with the animal. Humankind is set apart by a special decree of God as we read in verses 26-27. Humankind is created in the “Image of God,” blessed and given dominion over the earth with a command to multiply. The central theological interest in chapter one of Genesis by the priestly source is continued in the second chapter, which has the Yahwistic (J) as its source. Let us turn to the Yahwistic (J) source to analyze how God formed human beings while the earth was still in its unfruitful state. God animates a human being by breathing into the human being the breath of life.

The Yahwistic source discloses human relationship in the marriage bond that exists between males and females. For instance:

So the LORD God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The LORD God

then built up into a woman the rib that he had taken from the man. When he brought her to the man, the man said: ‘This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called ‘woman,’ for out of ‘her man’ this one has been taken. That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body. The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame. (Gen.2: 21-25).

This relationship of unity and love between a man and a woman points to the relational nature of the image of God. Adam and Eve symbolize the relationship that exists in the Godhead. “God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27). This text reflects the plurality that exists in the Godhead; the one in three.<sup>57</sup>

Chapter 3 of the book of Genesis portrays the impact on human relationships through the story of the fall. Three main impacts on relationships are identified in chapter 3 of Genesis. The impacts on relationships are: 1) the impact on relationship between God and human beings, 2) the impact on relationship between human beings, and 3) the impact on relationship between human beings and creation. Let us examine the relationships that chapter 3 of Genesis discloses.

### **3.1.3.1 THE IMPACT ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS AND GOD**

The impact on the human relationship with God is portrayed when the man and his wife attempted to hide themselves from God. We read, “When they heard the sound of the LORD God moving about in the garden at the breezy time of the day, the man and his wife hid

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57. John Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative*, 95. Also Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 222. The two narratives by the Priestly and Yahwistic sources concerning creation have a connection between them. Both sources point to showing the uniqueness of the human person among God’s creation and show that God is the one who created the entire universe.

themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Gen 3:8). The ease and familiarity with which the man and his wife lived with God is gone as they attempted to hide themselves from God. Human beings became ashamed in the presence of God and attempted to flee from the “sound” of the Creator’s approaching steps.

### **3.1.3.2 THE IMPACT ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS**

The impact on the relationship between human beings is portrayed when the serpent withdrew after deceiving the woman to give into his temptation and the woman seduced her husband to give into the same temptation. After giving into the temptation, they started to pass on blames to the “other.” We read,

The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves... The man replied, ‘The woman whom you put here with me – she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it’ (Gen 3:6-7, 12).

The half-truth the serpent had uttered had been revealed in an ironical way; they have not become like gods as they were promised, but they have experienced good and evil. The consequence of it became apparent immediately. They were no longer innocent; they recognized their nakedness and all that it entails. Further, the man tried to place the blame on the woman and even on God when he said, “The woman whom you put here with me.” The woman in turn blamed the serpent, which also was a creature of God. God did not inquire any further, but it became apparent that a work of disorder had taken place.

### 3.1.3.3 THE IMPACT ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HUMAN BEINGS AND CREATION IN GENERAL

The effect of the relationship between human beings and creation in general is revealed when God cursed the ground because of what human beings have done and informed human beings how they would struggle to feed themselves. We read, “Thorn and thistles shall it bring forth to you, as you eat of the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return” (Gen 3: 18-19). The land is cursed as a result of the disobedience of humanity. The land will yield fruits reluctantly. God has threatened death as a result of human beings eating the fruit of the tree. The mercy of God is seen when death is not instantly inflicted on human beings. Nevertheless, human beings die, after a life-long struggle to survive from the toils of the earth.<sup>58</sup>

The articulation of the relational approach to explain the meaning of the human being created in the image of God has also suffered its share of criticisms. A major criticism against the relational approach is that it does not have exegetical foundation on which to build its arguments. Karl Barth made use of the relational approach to describe the image of God in the human being. His approach is attacked as lacking exegetical basis.<sup>59</sup> Some biblical scholars do not find this approach satisfactory; however, we believe that the image of God and the unique relationship that humans have with God cannot be split. The actual problem that some biblical experts seem to have is more of using the New Testament revelation to interpret the Hebrew bible, which is a problem of interpretation. Despite the accusation of its being exegetically unfounded, the

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58. Reginald C. Fuller, *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1975), 180.

59. Nathan MacDonald, “The Imago Dei and Election: Reading Genesis 1:26-28 and Old Testament Scholarship with Karl Barth,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 10, no. 3 (July 2008): 303-27.

relational approach remains the best way to express God and God's relationship with human beings.

### 3.1.4 THE IMAGE OF GOD AS WHOLENESS

Some biblical scholars are apprehensive regarding the interpretation given to combining the two chapters of Genesis. They want them to be interpreted separately, not as a continuous whole.<sup>60</sup> However, there is the need to seek a combination of all the interpretations that have been given to the image of God in humanity. Because a single interpretation does not satisfactorily reveal the meaning of the *Imago Dei*, one has to look critically at all the explanations accepted by the majority of the people and decipher the truth that comes from all of them in combination. As a result, the need to interpret the *Imago Dei* as human wholeness arises.

A critical analysis of the creation of the human person in the bible reveals wholeness in human beings (Adam) who were created by God: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1: 27). Eve was not created from the dust of the ground as were animals, but from Adam, symbolizing a share in the *Imago Dei* and equality with Adam (Gen 2:21-24).

There are several arguments that support the image of God as the whole human being. F. K. Schumann elaborates on wholeness when he writes: "The *Imago Dei* does not consist in any particular detail of the person but describes the human being as a whole without limiting itself to anything taken in isolation."<sup>61</sup> Here there is a revelation that, though it is good to analyze the

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60. Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 28.

61. F. K. Schumann, *Von Geheimnis der Schöpfung: Creator spiritus imago Dei*, (Gutersloh: Der Rufer Evangellifcher, 1937), cited in Westermann, *Genesis*, 150. The reference of human wholeness is critical to this dissertation, since the human being is a complete being and not truncated parts. The dissertation places emphasis on this interpretation, to show that it portrays the Akan understanding of the human person as holistic, despite the demonstration of the component parts of the human person as inherited from God and parents.

corporeal and spiritual aspects of the human being, it is necessary to identify the human being as representing God's image in the totality of the person.

The interpretation of the image as wholeness, therefore, seeks to achieve three factors: first, it shows that due to the complexity of the human person one approach to interpret the nature of human beings is not adequate; second, the human being is created in the image of God as male and female; and third, the human person must not be considered from isolated dimensions, but a person must be viewed holistically as both corporeal and spiritual. All these dimensions allude to the complex nature of the human person. Since God's attributes are many and human beings reflect God through God's image, a single way of looking at the image interpretation will not be satisfactory; therefore, the wholeness approach becomes necessary.

By referring to this approach as a "multifaceted" approach, Marc Cortez asserts that some theologians draw a distinction between wider and restricted aspects of the image. In a broader sense, this interpretation refers to human capacities for rationality, will, and love. In a narrow sense the image of God is revealed when human beings "corporately" make use of their God-given talent to manifest the glory of God.<sup>62</sup>

Though the wholeness approach enjoys some level of support and popularity, it has not yet demonstrated that it is sufficiently coherent to serve as a satisfactory proposal for the interpretation of the image of God. Since the bible does not explain exactly what this image of God really means and there are numerous explanations being advanced, some will find faults with whatever explanation is advanced. The functional view that some theologians have proposed to explain the wholeness interpretation in a broader and narrower sense brings us back to the criticisms leveled against the structural view of the image of God. In order to relate, the

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62. Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, (New York: T & T Clark International, 2010), 28.



human person will have to function. No matter how this approach is viewed, one cannot help but read modern categories into the ancient text, which is a weakness in interpretation.

We admit that the structural and relational nature of the image of God in its original intention and in its significance in understanding humanity continues to be a contested issue. However, we identify the image of God in the human capacities to reflect the glory of God through these approaches, under which we can place the other interpretations. In our understanding, the wholeness can be understood when the vertical and horizontal components in the constitution of the human person are examined. The understanding of the wholeness in this argument is that the whole human body reflects the image of God.

The complexity of the human person discloses the mystery of God in whose image the human being is created. It is evident that the human being is complex. Humans are composed of different parts and the function of each part becomes vital to human behavior. The human brain, however, controls and effects human actions. Our approach embraces all the approaches discussed above, particularly the structural and relational approaches. The holistic approach, as used in this dissertation, describes the whole human being representing the image of God. The original context within which to understand Gen 1:26-28 discloses that our approach underscores God's intention for creating human beings in God's image. Human beings reveal God's glory by the dominion God gave humanity over creation. The structural and relational nature of the human being clarifies and helps in understanding God's creation and ensures harmonious living. It also enjoins human beings to procreate other images of God. Procreation is why God created human beings as male and female. Adam "procreates" Seth in his image (Gen 1: 27; 5:1-3).

We synthesize the structural and relational interpretations of the image of God to provide a theological framework in understanding the image of God and human uniqueness. Though the

relational interpretation is said to be weakened by its lack of exegetical support, we argue that through human capacity to think and reflect God's image, humanity is able to provide actions that bring about and affect relationships. We place the wholeness interpretation, which seems to enjoy acceptance among many theologians, under our approach. We argue that the complexity of human nature requires a synthesis of interpretation.

Let us analyze the theological significance of the Genesis narratives we have cited above to articulate the aim of the writers, which is to reveal that life is sustained by the spirit of God and is to be lived in communion with God. We will realize that our capacities enable us to commune with God, our neighbor, and our environment. The theological significance of creation of the human being supports our approach to interpret creation in the image of God.

### **3.2 THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE GENESIS NARRATIVES OF THE IMAGE OF GOD**

The etiological accounts in Genesis are aimed at revealing the power of God as a creator and sustainer of life on earth. The biblical writers intended to present the universal history of humanity. For instance, the Priestly author uses a generic term to describe Adam, which is an indication that he is not describing a single man, but is presenting a common history of humanity. The history of humanity is linked to God as a source and sustainer.

The Yahwistic author on his part is concerned about the presentation of a theological interpretation of the plight of humanity relative to the disobedience of Adam. The author is not presenting a philosophy of the human being, but the story of human history in relation to God's revelation. The Yahwistic author moves from the generic human being, as did the Priestly author, to a particular one, Adam, as an indication that reality is revealed in a historical form.<sup>63</sup>

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63. B. S. Childs, "Adam," in *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. George Arthur Buttrick, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), 43.

Both Priestly and Yahwistic authors demonstrate that humanity is set apart from God's other creatures. The Priestly account brings out the unique position of humanity. Only human beings are created in the image of God to rule the earth. Humanity performs a role in this world that links humans to God. The linkage of humanity to God enables humans to sustain the world and to procreate. Procreation continues God's creation in the world. The Yahwistic author infused in the human being the spirit of God in a special way. The permission to name the animals enables humanity to interpret and order God's creation. In spite of the dominion humanity possesses, humanity is not a miniature god, but an earth-bound creature. Humanity is created as the animals and both depend on the life-giving breath of God. According to B. S. Childs, despite the naïve language of the Yahwistic author, his narrative provides an important theological interpretation of God's purpose for humanity. He writes, "In spite of the fresh, naïve language of the J, his account offers a highly theological interpretation of God's purpose for mankind. It is life sustained by his spirit, lived in fellowship with God, found in a created community which issues in obedience."<sup>64</sup> God created human beings to have a special relationship with God, and charged humanity to take care of God's creation.

Having looked at the Hebrew bible's understanding of what it means for humans to be created in the image of God, we now turn to its development in the New Testament.

### **3.3 THE NEW TESTAMENT ON "CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD"**

As in Judaism, the early Christians objected to any form of representation of God. However, the issue of depicting God or human beings or animals did not become an issue in the New Testament.<sup>65</sup> The idea of the image of God is understood in the New Testament in a

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64. Ibid.

65. "Eikōn," in G. Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 387.

different light. Anthropological ideas in the New Testament are rarely explicit. Instead of a direct reflection on human nature, there are varieties of actions, interactions, and teachings that point to presuppositions of human nature. We note that the lack of direct description of human nature in the New Testament makes it difficult to develop any coherent New Testament anthropology.<sup>66</sup> However, like many New Testament writers, Saint Paul charts a path to understanding “Created in the image of God” in the New Testament. Paul’s theology is centered around the impact of divine revelation or grace in the human being. We chart Paul’s understanding of “created in the image of God” to develop the New Testament understanding of the human person. He indicates that in the New Testament, theology and anthropology are linked inseparably to Christology. The linkage is a result of the incarnation; God became human in the person of Jesus. Thus, through Paul we can affirm that the New Testament invites humanity to share in the divine image through life in Jesus Christ, who is the perfect image of God.

The New Testament theology depicts Jesus, not as one created in the image of God, but as God’s image who appears in creation. In 2 Corinthians we read about the mind of the unbelievers being veiled. The author writes, “. . . in whose case the god of this age has blinded the mind of unbelievers, so that they may not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God” (2 Cor. 4:4). The Greek word *eikōn* translates the word “image,” which is the equivalent of the Hebrew *tselem*.<sup>67</sup>

*Eikōn* is a feminine noun from *eikō*, which means *to be like, resemble*. It is a representation, an image, such as that of a man, made of gold, silver, or other material. In the letter to the Romans we read, “While claiming to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the

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66. Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu, eds. *Anthropology in the New Testament and its Ancient Context*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), VII.

67. Anthony A. Hoekema, *Created in God’s Image*, 21.

glory of the immortal God for the likeness of an image of mortal man or of birds or of four-legged animals or of snakes” (Rom 1:23); The likeness of the monarch is impressed on a coin, which is a legal tender under the monarch’s jurisdiction. In the gospels, when the Pharisees wanted to entrap Jesus about the payment of taxes, Jesus asked a question to show how images were used on money. We read, “He said to them, ‘Whose image is this and whose inscription?’” (Matt 22:20; Mark 12:16; Luke 20:24).

*Eikōn* also means *image*, *resemblance*, and *likeness*. For instance, God conformed believers to the image of Jesus. In the book of Romans we read, “For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son....” (Rom 8:29). Paul indicates that because a man is made in the image of God, he does not have to cover his head. He writes, “A man on the other hand, should not cover his head because he is the image and glory of God” (1 Cor 11:7). Here, Paul is using image by alluding to the text of Gen 1:27, in which mankind as a whole, male and female as a couple, is created in God’s image and commanded to multiply and together dominate creation. However, Gen 1:27 is interpreted here in the light of the second creation narrative in Gen 2, in which each of the sexes is created separately. The woman was seen as a helpmate (Gen 2:20-23). The later influence of the fall results in the husband ruling over the woman (Gen 3:16). The interpretation Paul gives in the quoted text splits the single image of God into two, at different degrees of closeness. The impact of Paul’s degree of closeness on theological anthropology is found in the description of Jesus as the image *par excellence*, thus linking anthropology to Christology. Let us examine the anthropology of Paul to guide us in appreciating the New Testament understanding of the human person.

### 3.4 THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF ST. PAUL

As early as the first century C.E, there were Jewish and Jewish-Christian authors such as Philo of Alexandria (40 C.E), Paul of Tarsus (50 C.E), and Flavius Josephus (75-95 C.E), who studied and reworked tripartite anthropology, which distinguished between mind, soul, and body. It is believed that a feature of tripartite anthropology already exists in Plato's dichotomy.<sup>68</sup> The tripartite anthropology reshaped the anthropologies of Philo and Paul of Tarsus by strongly coloring their understanding of the human person.

Paul's anthropology is relational and not a form of individualism; human beings are social beings who are defined as persons by their relations. It is because of the relational aspect of Paul's theology that James Dunn maintains that according to Paul, human beings are as they are by virtue of their relationship with God and the world. Dunn continues that Paul's gospel is of God in Christ reconciling the world to God's-self. His doctrine of salvation is of man and woman being restored to the image of God in the body of Christ. He identifies relationships – God in Christ reconciling the world to God's-self, and the image of human beings restored in the body of Christ — as the context within which to understand Paul's anthropology.<sup>69</sup>

Paul's anthropological view of the human person is noted in a difficult chapter of his First Letter to the Corinthians, especially the passage on the nature of the post-resurrection body (1 Cor 15). He had earlier briefly expressed his view on humankind's trichotomy in his First

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68. Van Kooten writes that perhaps the best-known expression of philosophical anthropology in antiquity is Plato's differentiation between the body and the soul. He continues to reveal that it is perhaps not known that already in Plato the features of a tripartite anthropology shine through alongside his dichotomic anthropology. For instance, the differentiation of soul into soul and mind already takes place in Plato. In several passages Plato points out that mind (nous) is a quality of the soul (psyche): mind is one of the good aspects of the soul, together with other virtues such as courage and self-restraint. See George Van Kooten, "The Anthropological Trichotomy of Spirit, Soul and Body in Philo of Alexandria and Paul of Tarsus" in Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu, eds., *Anthropology in the New Testament and its Ancient Context*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 87.

69. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 53.

Letter to the Thessalonians: “May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blamelessly for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thes 5:23). However, it is in 1 Corinthians 15 that he expounds his views. In 1 Corinthians 15, we grasp the full range of Paul’s thought. He provides insights into his anthropological view by distinguishing between “the first human being” (*Ho protos anthropos*), Adam, and “the second human being” (*Ho deuterios anthropos*), Jesus Christ.

In his anthropology, it becomes clear that we human beings have worn the image of the earthly human being, and only after the resurrection that humanity shall fully wear the image of the heavenly human being:

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual one. So, too, it is written, “The first man, Adam, became a living being,” the last Adam a life-giving spirit. But the spiritual was not first; rather the natural and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, earthly; the second man, from heaven. As was the earthly one, so also are the earthly, and as is the heavenly one, so also are the heavenly (1 Cor 15:44-49).

It has to be noted that in the above passage Paul alludes to the first creation narrative (Gen 1:26-27), which speaks about the image (*eikōn*) in which humankind was created, and not to the second narrative (Gen 2:7). Though Paul’s main concern in this section on the resurrection is the bodily status of human beings before and after the resurrection, his anthropological views could be discerned.<sup>70</sup>

Paul’s reading of the second narrative of the creation of humankind in Genesis 2 tells of God blowing the breath of life into the man by which “man became a living soul.” “Then the

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70. George Van Kooten, “The Anthropological Trichotomy of Spirit, Soul and Body in Philo of Alexandria and Paul of Tarsus,” 89.

LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7). Paul identified the “first human being” as “soul” (psyche) for which reason the first human being belongs to the sphere of “that which is psychic.” Paul, however, identified the “second human being” as “spirit” belonging to “that which is pneumatic.”<sup>71</sup>

In the New Testament, image is not to be understood as greatness, which is alien to the reality and present only in the conscience. *Eikōn* does not imply a weakening copy of something. It implies the illumination of its inner core and essence. This line of thinking took on a strong monistic and optimistic character in the Greek and Hellenistic world.<sup>72</sup> In this interpretation, when Jesus is described as the true image, it could be understood since he is the second person of the Trinity. Apart from Jesus, all human beings – males and females – are created equally in the image of God.

Paul cites the analogy of Adam, the first man, by using Gen 2:7 to describe the image we bear as human beings. He contrasts the image of Adam and that of Christ. Adam and Christ represent the two epochs of salvation in terms of the “earthly man” (Adam) and “the heavenly man (Christ)” (1 Cor 15:45-49). Paul describes the futuristic and transforming action of God in the human being when he writes, “Just as we have borne the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one” (15:49). George Van Kooten sheds light on 1 Cor 15 when he writes that it is not about the *psychic* and the *pneumatic* in general that Paul is referring to in the text, but he is referring to the *psychic* and *pneumatic* body. Van Kooten writes: “In

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71. Ibid.

72. Kleinknecht, “The Greek Use of *Eikōn*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. ed. Gerhard Kittel, 389.



Paul's view, it is not that the pneumatic reality (*to pneumatikon*) as such belongs to the future, but rather that the pneumatic body only becomes a reality after the eschatological resurrection."<sup>73</sup>

Consequently, what we can draw from the image in Pauline theology is that whereas theoretically every human being has a *pneuma*, only Christians will have their *pneuma* truly and well restored. Paul in effect, demonstrates that there will be a restoration of the *pneuma*. We learn from Paul that the image of God, which we have identified with the *okra* and the other constituent elements in chapter 2, will end up in God. Though Paul writes that it is only Christians who will be truly and well restored, we emphasize that everyone who lives "humanly" as God intended when creating humanity in God's image, will eventually end up in God.

The text in Colossians 1:15 is part of an early Christian hymn that was known by the Colossian community and also known as the doctrinal teaching of Paul. Verses 15-20 represent the high point of Paul's Christology. In this hymn Paul suggests a number of themes, which appear in his previous letters: Christ is the image of God, God created the world through Christ, the Church is the body of Christ etc.

Colossians 3:10 designates that Christ presides at the creation of the new human person. As a result of the conjunction of the old elements and new, the notion of the image of God as Paul applies it to Christ, especially in Colossians 1:15, becomes crucial. According to Paul Lamarche, there is a resemblance, but that resemblance is a spiritual and perfect resemblance, because of the Sonship of Jesus Christ, which is prior to creation. Jesus, in the strongest sense of the word, is the representation of the invisible God. He is the first-born from the dead, "the one

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73. George Van Kooten, "The Anthropological Trichotomy of Spirit, Soul and Body in Philo of Alexandria and Paul of Tarsus," in *Anthropology in the New Testament and its Ancient Context*, eds. Michael Labahn and Outi Lehtipuu, 115.

and only image who assures the unity of all beings and the unity of the divine plan. He is the principle of creation and the principle of its restoration by a new creation.”<sup>74</sup>

The meaning Christians give to Jesus Christ as an image is that there are so many forces at work in human beings who have become an imperfect and sinful image of God that human beings need the perfect image of Christ to rediscover and accomplish humanity’s original destiny. It is at the resurrection that a Christian puts on once and for all the image of the heavenly Adam (1Cor 15:49). Christ shares this new nature with those who are baptized and redeemed (Col 3:10-11).

The New Testament texts concerning the image of God do not ignore the text in Genesis; nonetheless, the use in the New Testament is applied to Christians and their baptism into Christ. Christian baptism sets Christians aside as living lives of people made in the image of God, who will enjoy salvation through Christ. For Paul, Christianity is Christ. According to James Dunn, the centrality of Christ in Paul’s theology is always evident. Christ becomes the thread which runs through all in this world, the lens through which everything comes into focus; he is the glue which bonds the parts into a coherent whole, the beginning and ending of all things. The role of Christ is always expressed in Paul’s letters.<sup>75</sup>

The Colossian hymn is crucial to our discussion in the sense that it makes use of the creation of the human being account in Genesis 1: 27, and describes Jesus as the true image who invites humanity to be transformed according to his image.

More than any other writer, Paul, in his theology, shows that the Risen Lord, Jesus Christ, is the true image of God (Col.1:15). According to Kleinknecht, Jesus, being the image of God, is

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74. Paul Lamarche, “Image,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Xavier Léone-Dufour, trans. Joseph R. Sweeney, (Boston, MA: St. Paul Books & Media, 1995), 254.

75. James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, 726.

related to an ancient concept, which does not limit image to a functional representation. He writes, “The peculiarity of the expression is related to that of the ancient concept, which does not limit image to a functional representation present to human sense but also thinks of it in terms of an emanation, of a revelation of the being with a substantial participation [...] in the object”<sup>76</sup>

Image is indeed a reality. *Eikōn* does not mean a weakened form of a copy. It is indeed the illumination of inner core and essence of something. This is the sense in which the image of God that Jesus represents and humanity shares in must be understood. Therefore, the presentation of the being of Jesus as the image of God is another way of describing him as the Son of God.<sup>77</sup>

Jesus becomes the one in whom all things were created (Col 1:16). He is also portrayed as the one in whom “new creation is found” (2 Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15).<sup>78</sup> All creation is found in Jesus, which makes all creation saved through Him as well. The depiction of Jesus as the “first born of all creation” (Col. 1:15), connects well in the portrayal of him as “the new Adam,” which makes Jesus, one who was expected to come and save God’s children (Rom. 5:14).

There are numerous anecdotes in the New Testament, which reveal Jesus’ attributes, who he is, and the role he played in our salvation history. Jesus is the image of the invisible God and the firstborn of all creation (Col. 1:15). This is because he is the mediator between God and humanity and reconciles humanity to God. It is written in the book of Romans “all have sinned and are deprived of the glory<sup>79</sup> of God” (Rom. 3:23).

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76. Kleinknecht in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, 389.

77. *Ibid.*, 395.

78. James B. Tubbs, Jr., “Humble Dominion,” 551.

79. Jürgen Moltmann describes the glory of God by using Psalm 106:20 where the “glory” means “the power to know and understand God as God. For more on the “glory of God” See Jürgen Moltmann, 226, 230.

In order to appreciate Paul's anthropology, his usage of *psychē*, the "soul," and *pneuma* must be examined. The use of *psychē* and *pneuma* explain how Paul understood the line between the divine and human. Paul's use of *psychē* is in contrast to the classical Greek usage. According to Dunn, in classical Greek, *psychē* is "the essential core of man [humankind] which can be separated from his [her] body and which does not share in the body's dissolution."<sup>80</sup> The origin of the concept of "immortality of the soul," which is the continuous existence of an inner hidden part of the human being after death, is seen in the word *psychē*. In contrast, *nephesh* denotes the whole human person in Hebrew thought as in Genesis, "The LORD God formed man [mankind] out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man [mankind] became a living being" (Gen 2:7). Dunn reveals that Paul's usage of *psychē* reflects a clear Hebrew mind-set. *Psychē*, denoting the human being, is obvious in several passages that are attributed to Paul. For instance in Romans, afflictions and distress are said to come on people as God's judgment. We read, "Yes, affliction and distress will come upon every human being who does evil" (Rom 2:9). When Paul invites everyone to subordinate himself/herself to higher authorities, he writes, "Let every person be subordinate to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been established by God" (Rom 13:1). Again, citing Gen 2:7, Paul contrasts Adam with Christ. He writes, "So too, it is written, 'The first man, Adam, became a living being,' the last Adam a life-giving spirit" (1Cor 15:45). Here, Paul describes the first Adam as becoming a life-principle transcendent with respect to the

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80. James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), 76.

natural soul (*psychē*). In contrast, the Second Adam (Christ) is not just alive, but a life-giver, a source of life for others. Thus Jesus, being God, becomes a source of life for human beings.<sup>81</sup>

The question we can raise relevant to the overall interest of this dissertation is: Did humanity lose the image of God with which they were created through the Fall of Adam and Eve? Even in human weakness or sinfulness, humanity still enjoys the image of God. This becomes a contentious issue in the history of theology. Nowhere in the scriptures is it recorded that humanity lost its image at the fall. It would have been evident in at least one of the texts that deal with the fall or immediately after the fall (Gen. 3: 6, 9; 5:2). God established a personal relationship with humanity by creating the human being in God's image. Sin may pervert this special relationship between God and humanity, but sin does not erase the image of God with which God graced the human being.

Human dignity remains in spite of human sinfulness. The Akan understanding of the human being will later help in clarifying this issue, as the Akan believe that sin is a perversion, but does not affect human nature. Akan understanding of the human person is that humanity is created good by God, so it is not human nature to sin. However, since humans have a free will, they can choose to go against their nature. This runs counter with the Reformed theology, which starts with justification and not human innocence.<sup>82</sup> According to Moltmann, the Reformers believe that the human being is totally sinful and cannot be justified in any way by their own "works." It is only through faith in Christ that humanity can be justified and become righteous.<sup>83</sup>

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81. Footnote on I Cor 15:45 in *The Catholic Study Bible: New American Bible*, eds. Donald Senior and John J. Collins, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1538.

82. *Ibid.*, 231.

83. *Ibid.*

What Paul and other New Testament writers aim at doing is to provide elements that constitute so many forces of attraction in the human being, who is an imperfect and sinful image, in need of the perfect image of Christ, to be restored into humanity's original destiny: After human beings put on the likeness of earthly Adam, humans now need to put on the image of the heavenly Adam (cf 1Cor 15:49).<sup>84</sup> Jesus thus becomes the true image of God and invites humanity to be transformed according to his image.

Paul's concern in his anthropology is that while the man and the woman were originally created in the image and likeness of God (Gen 1:26), Christ is the image (2 Cor 4:4) of the invisible God (Jn 1:18). The incarnation portrays Christ as the true image. The tripartite anthropology, which distinguishes between mind, soul, and body shaped Paul's anthropology and colored his interpretation of the human person. We have discussed Pauline anthropology in detail because of its affinity with the Akan anthropology we discussed in chapter two of this dissertation. His use of *psychē* and *pneuma* underlines Paul's understanding of the line between the divine and human. His anthropology is relational. He demonstrates that human beings are social beings who are defined as persons by their relationships, especially their relationship with Christ. He further shows that human beings have a strong relationship with God and the world. The difference we observe is that for Paul, humanity lost the *pneuma* and it is only Christ who restores it by means of humanity's unification with him.

Let us further examine some other New Testament books that describe Jesus as the true image and support our discussion.

The prologue of John's gospel tells us that the Word who "was with God in the beginning" (Jn 1:1), now "became flesh" in history, the whole man in his weakness (Gen 6:3; Isa 40:6; Jn 3:6) in contrast with God, (cf Phil 2:5ff). It is argued that John may be refuting the

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84. Paul Lamarche, "Image," in *Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. Xavier Léone-Dufour, 254.

Docetists, (cf 1 Jn 4:1ff; 2 Jn 7). God's presence, referred to as *shekina*, which has the same consonants as John's Greek word for "dwell in a tent," is now realized in magnificent fullness by the humanity of Jesus who becomes God one with his people (cf Lk 1:35). The Word revealed God's glory by becoming a man of flesh like other human beings. In the person of Jesus Christ the nature of the eternal and invisible God, in all its fullness of his love and truth, has been known.<sup>85</sup> Further, the prologue of John's gospel presents the major Christological beliefs of Christianity. The Word became flesh, shares in the divinity of God, yet has taken on the human condition totally. Jesus Christ is the unique, once and for all, revelation of God in the human story. What the prologue states about Jesus depends primarily on what the author wants to say about God's having been made known in and through the person of Jesus Christ.<sup>86</sup>

Finally, using the idea of image, the author of the letter to the Hebrews describes the sacrifice in the Hebrew bible as prefiguring the one perfect sacrifice offered by Christ. The author writes, "Since the law has only a shadow of the good things to come, and not the very image of them, it can never make perfect those who come to worship by the same sacrifices that they offer continually each year" (Heb 10:1). In this passage it means a prefiguration of what is to come in Christ. This is what Paul uses in Colossians, "These are shadows of things to come, the reality belongs to Christ" (Col 2:17).<sup>87</sup>

*Eikōn* could also mean naturally a reflection, apparition, in a metaphysical sense of a mental image, a living image, a likeness, an embodiment, or a manifestation. *Eikōn* is sometimes

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85. Conleth Kearns, "St. John," in *A New Catholic Commentary on Holy Scripture*, ed. Reginald C. Fuller (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1975), 1038-39. See also Massey H. Shepherd, "The Gospel According to John," in *The Gospels*, ed. Charles M. Laymon, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1983), 288.

86. Francis J. Moloney, "The Gospel of John," in *Sacra Pagina*, ed. Daniel J. Harrington, (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 41.

87. Footnote 10,1-10 of Hebrews 10 in *The Catholic Study Bible: The New American Bible*, eds. Donald Senior and John J. Collins, (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 2006), 1629.

used as a synonym for *homoíōma*, and the two may refer to earthly copies and resemblances of the archetypal things in the heavens. However there is a distinction in that *eikōn*, image, always assumes a prototype that which it not merely resembles but from which it is drawn. For instance, in the book of Revelation, we read about the practice of emperor worship, which forced Christians to either worship the images of the emperors or face persecution. The author writes, “It deceived the inhabitants of the earth with the signs it was allowed to perform in the sight of the first beast, telling them to make an image for the beast who had been wounded by the sword and revived” (Rev 13:14). Life was breathed into the image of the beast so that the image could speak: “It was then permitted to breathe life into the beast’s image, so that the beast’s image could speak and [could] have anyone who did not worship it put to death” (Rev 13:15). The first beast was not only an image of evil, but also received a power that emanated from the evil one, enabling the beast to speak and put some to death (Ex 15:1-18). We read, “Then I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire. On the sea of glass were standing those who had won victory over the beast and its image and the number that signified its name...and they sang the song of Moses, the servant of God, and song of the Lamb” (Rev 15:2-3a). The important thing for the first believers was not the worship of an image, but listening to the Word. It was later in the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries that there developed catacombs which were decorated with images and paintings.<sup>88</sup>

The mystery of the human being cannot be understood without examining the life of Jesus Christ. The Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches reveals this mystery of human life when it writes:

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88. “*Eikōn*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. II, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 387.



Our attempts to investigate and understand human nature cannot exhaust the worth, the depth and the dignity which belong to each person as created and loved by God. As we acknowledge, with faith and awe, the holy mystery of God, we see and reverence that same mystery in the person of Jesus and we must also see and reverence a reflection of that same mystery in every person.<sup>89</sup>

This statement connects the idea of the image of God in the Hebrew bible with the image of God in the New Testament. Jesus Christ, in whose life humanity shares, connects humanity to the image of God in the New Testament. In Jesus it becomes apparent that human life starts and ends in God, through the Spirit, revealed in Jesus Christ. LeRon Shults refers to this when he writes: “humanity is intrinsically oriented to life with God in the Spirit disclosed in Jesus Christ, who is the image of God.”<sup>90</sup> Jesus here becomes the true image of God in whom humanity lives and shares in the divine life of God.

In the book of James, we find a direct quotation from Genesis regarding humanity being made in the image of God: “With it [the tongue] we bless the Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings who are made in the likeness of God” (James 3:9). Here, James indicates that if a person is cursed, it is God who is cursed by extension, since every human being is made in the image of God. Hence, the inconsistencies of praising and cursing with the same tongue must stop. The broader meaning is that human beings cannot tame the tongue, which is “a restless evil, full of deadly poison” (James 3:8b).

The image of God, in which humanity was created, has undergone numerous interpretations, from the Hebrew bible to the New Testament. Various attempts have been made to construe the texts concerning the image of God to reveal the uniqueness of the human being.

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89. World Council of Churches, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology*, 33.

90. LeRon F. Shults, *Reforming Theological Anthropology*, 218.

Having looked at the scriptural treatment on “created in the image of God,” we turn to how the early Christian writers understood the image of God. The writings of St. Augustine as a representative of the Latin Fathers of the Church and Origen as a representative of the Greek Fathers of the Church will be discussed to reveal how some of the Church Fathers explained the image of God.

Origen’s analysis of the pre-existent soul shows a parallel between him and the Akan, who believe that the human soul pre-exists the human being and is a spark of God in the human person. As mentioned in Chapter Two of this dissertation, the human person according to Akan tradition is made up of physical and spiritual elements. These elements are: the *okra*, *honhom*, *sunsum*, *honam*, *mogya*, *ntoro*, and *sasa*. We will briefly investigate the anthropology of Origen and Augustine who spoke of the spirit, soul, and body of the human person and the role of these elements in the life of a person in our quest to understand the human person. We observe a parallel understanding of the human person in both Origen and Saint Augustine, which helps us to clarify our understanding of the human being as made in the image of God.

### **3.5 ORIGEN (185/186 – 253/254 CE) ORIGEN’S CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH IN ALEXANDRIA**

We discuss Origen in this dissertation, based on his doctrine of humanity as trichotomy (spirit, soul, and body) and humanity’s share in the image of God. It is with the help of Eusebius and a few others that we learn about the life and some of the works of Origen (185-232 C.E).

Eusebius chronicles Origen’s life in his “Ecclesiastical History.”<sup>91</sup> Origen was born in

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91. The Collection of Origen’s letters helped Eusebius to write the “Apology for Origen.” Details about the life and work of Origen are also found in the “Farewell Address” of St. Gregory Thaumaturgus which he sent to his master over the controversies of St. Jerome and Rufinus, in St. Epiphanius (Haeres., LXIV), and in the work of Photius. Origen’s life and work are divided into two: one in Alexandria and the other in Caesarea. See John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2004), 1. See also Origen and Origenism, accessed October 16, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11306b.htm>.

Alexandria, a large center of Hellenistic learning, in the year 185/186. Throughout his life, he endured persecutions involving his defense of his faith and against those within the Church who censured a good portion of his writings.

Origen loved the works of Plato and the Stoics. His quest for knowledge led him to learn the Hebrew language, which helped him to dialogue with some Jewish people about the Hebrew Scriptures. Despite those who censured his writings, Saint Jerome defended him, writing that Origen was not condemned on any point of doctrine.<sup>92</sup> Some wealthy benefactors helped to preserve some of his manuscripts. Ambrose, a friend and wealthy government official, paid for seven stenographers to take down and preserve Origen's orally delivered discourses.<sup>93</sup> Because of his many writings, he was honored as a confessor of the faith rather than a martyr. However, those who closely scrutinized his works censured him, leading to the unfortunate destruction of a large number of his writings. He died in 253/254 CE.<sup>94</sup>

### 3.5.1 ORIGEN'S WORK ON CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

Although Origen has many works to his credit, this study will consider only his doctrine of humanity as trichotomy (spirit, soul, and body) and humanity's share in the image of God, since that is the topic being discussed in this dissertation. We identify a connection between Origen's anthropology and the thesis we are developing, "Created in the Image of God." As mentioned earlier, Origen's analysis of the pre-existent soul becomes clear to us from reading Genesis 1:27, it shows a connection between him and the Akan, who believe that the human soul pre-exists the human being and is a spark of God in the human person.

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92. Ibid.

93. Ambrose was a wealthy official who was attracted by Origen's teaching, and was converted from Valentinian Christianity. He became a major financial supporter for Origen. Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.23.2. Accessed October 16, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/250106.htm>.

94. Eusebius, *Church History*, 6.23.2, VII. 2. Also John A. McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 22-3.

Origen indicates that the soul facilitates human contact and dialogue with God. Origen shares with the Akan the idea of the *psyche* (soul) as intermediate between the weak flesh and the *peuma* (Spirit). We identify a connection between Origen and Paul in the sense that they both discuss the image of God that humanity share. They both agree that humanity shares in the image of God through Christ Jesus, who is the true image of God. We infer that it is through the image/spark of God in the human person that humanity is able to connect to God. There is a similar thread that runs through the trichotomic understanding of the human person as body, spirit and soul by Paul, the Akan, and Origen, which shows that the human being shares in the image of God.

It is in the doctrine of trichotomy that Origen identifies the composition of the human person that facilitates humanity's contact and dialogue with God. This section is divided into the following four segments: (1) Origen's view of the image of God as presented in the Hebrew bible, (2) Humanity's participation in the image of God, (3) The doctrine of a human being as a spiritual being, and (4) Origen's discourse on the doctrine of the soul.

### **3.5.2 THE IMAGE OF GOD ACCORDING TO ORIGEN**

Origen proposed a belief of pre-existence in creation. He spoke of God first creating a large number of rational beings without bodies who had free will and were dedicated to eternal contemplation and love of God. They were created with a beginning, but not in time. At a certain point, most of them became bored, and their contemplation and love for God waned. Those whose love declined the least became the angels. Those whose dedication and devotion waned moderately became human souls that were eventually born in human bodies. Those whose spirit declined the most became the evil spirits. Only one person freely chose to remain faithfully dedicated to the contemplation and love of God. This person became one with the

Word of God, and eventually became flesh in Jesus Christ. The conditions encountered by the embodied souls on earth depended on the extent of their devotion to God in their pre-existence.

Referring to the first chapter of Genesis, Origen finds an exposition of the image of God in two distinct accounts. In the first account, the author writes: “Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness” (Gen. 1:26). Origen views this first account as referring to the pre-existent soul and its embodiment of flesh. In the second account, he writes: “God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). This second account he views Jesus Christ as true image. This account takes into consideration the message of Paul the Apostle who identifies the role, functions, and attributes of Jesus as the true image of God.<sup>95</sup>

Origen invites Christians to distinguish between the biblical ideas of “image” and “likeness.” Likeness, according to him, is the perfect condition that every human being hopes to reach. Likeness is the perfect condition that makes one like God and so, the likeness can be reached after being refined. The image, on the other hand, is a less perfect state. The image is therefore fashioned by God to be in potency of communion with God. The image of God can be understood as a foundation of relationship between God and human beings. He links the image to the idea of moral integration. According to Origen, with spiritual discipline, the image, which is affected by the fall, can help the soul become illumined. The illumination of the soul will lead to the reformation of the soul so that it becomes the likeness of God.<sup>96</sup>

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95. Pauline texts that are associated with the image of God include the following: 2 Cor 4:4; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3; 1 Cor 11:7. Ibid.

96. John Anthony McGuckins, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 133.

The idea of the doctrine of “divinization” is employed by Origen to reveal the human relationship with God. Although the exact word “divinization” is not explicitly stated in his works, he uses the Greek verb *theopoieo*, which means, “to make into a god.” He does not use the Greek nouns *theopoesis* and *theosis*, which mean, “making divine.”<sup>97</sup> He uses humanity’s participation in the image of God to explain how a human being becomes divine.

### 3.5.3 THE DOCTRINE OF THE HUMAN BEING AS A SPIRITUAL BEING

The *trichotomic* doctrine reveals three constituent elements in the human person: the Spirit (*pneuma*), the soul (*psyche*), and the body (*Soma*). Every human being possesses these in his or her constitution. It is these, which help every individual relate to God, to his or her neighbor, and to the environment. The presence of the Spirit is the divine in the human person. Origen cautions that the Spirit cannot be blamed for human sinfulness. The presence of the Spirit in the human being is to prevent sin from affecting the soul, which is pure and by which every human being communes with God.<sup>98</sup>

The Spirit, according to him, is the divine element that is present in the human person. He contends that the *pneuma* is absolutely immaterial. Among the Greeks, however, it connotes a subtle form of material existence. It has continuity with the Hebrew *ruach*. Origen explains that the Spirit is not responsible for the sins of human beings. He calls it the “pedagogue” of the soul or of the intellect that trains a person in the practice of virtues. According to him, the soul or intellect is trained in the knowledge of God and in prayer.

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97. Divinization and Deification are synonymous terms that are used to describe humanity’s sharing in the divinity of God. “It is a powerful all-encompassing image in Origen’s theology: it refers to God the Father’s bestowal of divinity on the Son and Spirit, as well as on the cosmos; that is, it describes God’s gracious relationship to everything in the cosmos.” John Anthony McGuckin, *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, 91; De Principiis IV. 4.10.

98. Ibid.

The soul, according to him, contains higher and lower elements. He identifies the higher elements with the intellect as constituting the whole of the soul at the pre-existence. The lower element was added to the soul after the fall. It is after the fall that the soul is faced with the temptation to either give in to the Spirit or yield to the attractions of the body. Crouzel maintains that we should call Origen's elements "tendencies" because element is not appropriate considering that his usage is more dynamic than ontological, though it has an ontological basis.<sup>99</sup>

According to Origen, the soul in humanity pre-exists the human being, and it is that which permits humanity to connect and commune with God. In addition to the doctrine of creation in the image of God, his doctrine of the human person, *trichotomy*, reveals what in the human being makes it possible to relate to God.

Origen distinguishes the human spirit from the Holy Spirit and uses that which later became known as sanctifying grace. According to Crouzel, the concept of sanctifying grace of Origen differs from the scholastic understanding of it for two reasons: first it differs because it is found in every human person and not only in the baptized, and second, it continues to stay with a person when the person commits a sinful act. It stays in an inactive state and provides a possibility of conversion.<sup>100</sup>

The concept of *trichotomy* of the person has as its foundation the Pauline greetings to the Thessalonians. Paul writes: "May the God of peace himself make you perfectly holy and may you entirely, spirit, soul, and body, be preserved blameless for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thes 5: 23). This concept was well synthesized by Origen and became a doctrine that runs through his entire work.

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99. Ibid 88-89.

100. Ibid.

Henri Crouzel asserts that “it is possible to assimilate Origen’s *trichotomy* to Plato’s: the latter about man [sic] alone, the former about the whole man [sic]”<sup>101</sup> Crouzel describes the difference in the terminologies used by both Plato and Origen. The following are their terms and meaning:

Plato made use of these terms:

*Nous* – Intelligence

*Thymos* – Anger

*Epithymia* – Covetousness

Origen uses these terms:

*Pneuma* – The Spirit

*Psyche* – The Soul

*Soma* – The Body

Origen uses these tripartite elements to describe the human person. He is influenced by his biblical foundation, which testifies to the role of the Spirit in human life. He uses *pneuma* for the Spirit, which he derived from the Pauline corpus in the Bible. Paul on his part was influenced by the Hebrew usage of *ruach* as the spirit, which describes God’s action in creation.<sup>102</sup>

### 3.5.4 ORIGEN’S DOCTRINE OF THE SOUL

Origen seems to equate the “soul” with “life.” With the help of the biblical account in Genesis 2, he describes the human person as the “living soul.” He describes creatures in the sea as also possessing souls. He calls them living creatures. In his discourse about the soul, he

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101. Henri Crouzel, *Origen*, trans. A. S. Worrall, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1989), 87.

102. See *Ibid.*, 88.



inquires whether or not angels have souls. He declares that scripture does not inform us anywhere that angels and other spiritual beings who serve God have souls, and yet, they are filled with life.<sup>103</sup>

Not only did Origen think that human beings and other living creatures possess souls, he also describes the soul of God as he can see it testified in the scriptures. He writes about the soul of God and that of Jesus as follows:

And I will put My soul upon that soul which has eaten blood, and I will root him out from among his people; and also in another passage, ‘Your new moons, and Sabbaths, and great days, I will not accept; your fasts, and holidays, and festal days, My soul hates.’ And in the twenty-second Psalm, regarding Christ – for it is certain, as the Gospel bears witness, that this Psalm is spoken of Him – the following words occur: ‘O Lord, be not far from helping me; look to my defense: O God, deliver my soul from the sword, and my beloved one from the hand of the dog;’ although there are also many other testimonies respecting the soul of Christ when He tabernacles in the flesh.<sup>104</sup>

Here we realize that God is life, and God shares life with creatures. Jesus, who is God, also has a life and transmits life to creatures.

According to Origen, the soul is the immortal part of the human being, which communicates or participates in God.<sup>105</sup> He links the soul to God and reveals that the soul is the undying part of the human being. He, however, does not recognize the human soul as pure. He maintains that as a result of the fall, the soul has fallen from its original state and is capable of

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103. Origen, *De Principiis*, 2.8.1. Accessed October 17, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04122.htm>.

104. Ibid.

105. Ibid. 2. 4. 5.

committing sin. He identifies the soul as the source of sin since he connects the soul to the human mind from which every thought flows.<sup>106</sup>

Origen contends that the soul is not considered to be capable of committing sin because it is found in the human body, rather, it becomes sinful because it chooses to sin. If on the other hand the soul decides to do the right thing all the time, it will reflect its original light. Nonetheless, as a result of the fall, human choices are affected negatively. He admonishes that matter should not be seen as evil in itself. He maintains that the human body can be influenced spiritually to reveal the light of God.<sup>107</sup> He has demonstrated that the soul could be in harmony with God if it acts virtuously. The idea of the soul being in harmony with God occurs because the soul is superior to the body; it can direct the body either to God or to sin and alienate God.

The idea of the superiority of the soul over the body sometimes connotes the idea that the spirit is antithetical to the body or matter. At one time, Augustine, like Origen, held this same view that the soul is entrapped in the body.<sup>108</sup> Augustine later changed his view on the body being a trap for the soul. Because of Origen and Augustine's quest to explain that the soul is from God or a spark of the divine in humanity, their writings unfortunately later led to some amount of polarization.

It was out of the idea of the superiority of the soul that austere mysticisms were born in religious life.<sup>109</sup> The human body was tortured for the sake of the soul. This practice was supported by scriptural passages such as, "We know that our old self was crucified with him, so

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106.Ibid., 1. 5. 5.

107.Ibid., 2. 3. 2.

108. We mention the effect of seeing the soul as superior to the body here to refresh our memory on the unintended consequences that came as a result of such teachings in Christianity. See Augustine, *Tractate* 39.8. Also Roland J. Teske, *Augustine through the Ages*, 808.

109. Margaret R. Miles, *The Word Made Flesh*, (Malden, M.A: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 188-98.

that our sinful body might be done away with, that we might no longer be in slavery to sin.” (Rom 6:6). The bible describes our glorified bodies as that which we will take into God’s kingdom. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes that God will glorify human bodies after death. He writes, “He [God] will change our lowly body to conform with his glorified body by the power that enables him also to bring into subjection to himself” (Phi 3:21). If God has deemed it fit to dwell in us through the soul, then the whole body must be respected as the wholeness interpretation of the image of God suggests.

Origen employs his spiritual method in describing the soul to reveal the connection between the soul and scriptures. Henri De Lubac describes how Origen connects scripture with the soul “symbolizing” and informing each other when he writes that he believes that the soul and scripture are connected, since both of them have the same “inspiration.” He identifies the breath of God as giving birth to them and vitalizing them.<sup>110</sup> He maintains that by reading scriptures, an individual’s self is revealed to him or her, since reading the scripture is interiorized, and in the interior of every human being, one comes to terms with the self.<sup>111</sup>

According to Henri De Lubac, Origen understands the image of God as imprinted on the human soul. This image is found in every human being. It is not found outside a person but was imprinted inside when God created the human person.<sup>112</sup> The Christian mystery, according to De Lubac, must not be considered with curiosity like scientific theories, but must be reflected deeply within the human being since “it finds its fullness in the coming to completion in souls.”<sup>113</sup>

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110. Henri De Lubac, *History and Spirit*, trans. Anne Englund Nash, (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2007), 397.

111. Ibid.

112. Henri De Lubac notes that Origen maintains that Christ, the logos, is the one who makes it possible for us to reflect the image of God as Christ cleans our “dirt” or our sinfulness. Christ who removes sinfulness from the human soul makes the image bright. Ibid., 399.

113. Ibid., 446.

### 3.5.5 ORIGEN ON THE CREATION OF THE HUMAN PERSON IN GENESIS

Origen presented a commentary on the first account of the creation of the human being which reads, “And God said: ‘Let us make man according to our image and likeness, and let him have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of heaven and the animals and the whole earth and everything which creeps upon the earth’” (Gen 1:26). According to him, God wished that such a being would have dominion over the beasts, birds, creeping creatures, four-footed creatures, and the rest of creation. He interpreted this creation account allegorically. He explained that the human mind is ordered to bring forth a spiritual sense, while the earth is to bring forth a carnal sense. He asserted that the mind was made to rule everything God had made.<sup>114</sup>

Origen identified the uniqueness of the human person as the only creature that was created differently from every other creature. He writes, “And God made man [humans] according to the image of God he made him [them]” (Gen 1:27). He maintained that this attribution was made neither to heaven, nor the earth, nor the sun or the moon; it was only attributed to the human person, which explains the superiority of the human person. Origen further asserts that he did not want to believe that the person who was created in the image of God was corporeal. Origen rightly described the two accounts of creation, but in his explanation he seems to suggest that the human body cannot contain the image of God. He writes,

We do not understand, however, this man indeed whom Scripture says was made “according to the image of God” to be corporeal. For the form of the body does not contain the image of God, nor is the corporeal man [person] said to be

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114. Origen, *Homilies on Genesis and Exodus*, trans. Ronald E. Heine, (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press 1982), 61-2.

“made,” but “formed,” as is written in the words which follow. For the text says: “And God formed man [mankind],” that is fashioned, “from the slime of the earth.”<sup>115</sup>

In Origen’s estimation, it is only the inner man, who is invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible, and immortal, that is made according to the image of God. His reason for believing that the inner being is what corresponds to the image of God is that if anyone supposes that the being who was made according to the image and likeness of God is made of flesh, that person will be supposing that God is made of flesh and in human form. He sees this as a form of blasphemy. He writes, “It is most clearly impious to think this about God.”<sup>116</sup>

In Origen’s homily on the creation of humankind in the image of God he describes the two main accounts of creation and gives an interpretation, which could sound like he is describing dualism in the creation of the human person. He stresses the “spiritual” in Genesis 1, and places emphasis on the literal or bodily in the second account of the creation of the human person in Genesis 2. Stephen Thomas blames later commentators of Origen’s work as those who mistakenly view it as dualism. According to Thomas, the commentators have been too quick to attribute Platonic dualism to Origen according to his understanding of the two accounts of creation of the human person. He maintains that Origen’s solution to the difference in styles of Genesis 1 and Genesis 2 is a subtle one and these chapters play a complementary role in the narrative. Thomas writes that Origen offers as a solution that, “the inspired biblical writers present complementary accounts, prioritizing the two different aspects of humankind, the

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115.Ibid., 63.

116. Ibid.

psychic and spiritual, on the one hand, and the psychical and historical, on the other hand.”<sup>117</sup>

Origen does not present a duality, but rather a complementary unity between the two accounts of creation.

The creation of male and female is understood by Origen as spiritually representing the harmony between two parts of souls, the *pneuma* and the *psyche*; the spirit (*pneuma*) representing the higher power. He believed that sin occurs when this harmony is broken. The body as such is not the source of sin, but rather the soul’s inner disharmony.

Origen’s literal interpretation of the creation of humankind in Genesis 2 should not be understood without reference to the soul. He defined human beings as souls in the sense that the soul is owned solely by human beings but has God as its origin and its nature is from above. In his homily about Exodus, Origen describes human beings as the many “souls” that went down into Egypt.<sup>118</sup>

Origen’s understanding of the human person, which stems from *trichotomic* anthropology, is more of moral value than mystical. He seeks to describe the spiritual battle of the soul in the human person. He identifies the spirit as engaging in warfare of spiritual and earthly tendencies. The free will of the soul allows it to decide whether to give in to the spirit or to the body. However, it is through the soul that humanity communes with God.

The Spirit (*pneuma*), according to Origen, represents the active aspect of grace, which is a gift from God. The intellect, which is a passive aspect of grace, receives and accepts the divine gift, thus making the human person both physical and spiritual, being capable of communing with God. His view of the body is that of having the tendency to give in to worldly things that may lead to sin. According to his treatment of the image of God, Christians will understand that

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117. Stephen Thomas, “Grace,” in *The Westminster Handbook to Origen*, ed. John Anthony McGuckin, 55.

118. *Ibid.*, 56.

the image of God we read in the bible has two fold meaning: first, the image is a principle of God's self-manifestation on earth, and second, the image becomes a foundation of relationship between God and human beings.

Origen's teaching of the *psyche* (soul) as intermediate between the weak flesh and the *pneuma* (Spirit) is similar to the Akan understanding of the *okra* as double. The higher and lower elements or tendencies reflect the dual nature of the soul, which is postulated to show that (1) through the soul the human person is capable of communicating with God and (2) due to the free will of humanity, the soul could do certain things that are unforeseen, for better or worse. In this way, the human being cannot be like an automaton that acts without free will, though there is a divine presence in humanity through the *pneuma* or *honhom* (breath of God).<sup>119</sup>

Despite the condemnations against him in future centuries, Origen was a creative and highly intelligent theologian and exegete. In his anthropology, he attempted to find answers to humanity's relationship to God in a world where evil and goodness exist together. He believed everyone would eventually return to the glory they had before the fall, including the devil. His anthropology becomes a helpful foundation in understanding the human person. Origen's doctrine of humanity as *trichotomy* (spirit, soul, and body) indicates how humanity shares in the image of God. He identifies the *trichotomy* as the composition of the human person that facilitates humanity's contact and dialogue with God. He provides insights to the human person as relational beings that run parallel to what Akan believe of the human person, which enables humanity to relate to God, the neighbor and the world. We now direct our discussion to Saint Augustine, who represents the Western Church Fathers, and whose understanding of the human person helps us to clarify our understanding of the human person.

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119. Chapter two, page 51 for the discussion on the *okra* as double for the similarity.

### **3.6 ST. AURELIUS AUGUSTINE OF HIPPO (354 – 430 CE) AND THE HUMAN PERSON**

Through his writings, Saint Augustine demonstrated views similar to those of the Akan, Saint Paul, and Origen. Like St. Paul, Augustine taught that through Christ human beings are reformed in their image through the grace of baptism. He would show that there is a spark of God in the human being. He shows that the human person cannot be spoken about without God, just as the Akan people show that God is reflected in humanity. The Akan demonstrates through the constituent elements in the human being that humanity is created in God's image to relate to God, neighbor, and the world.

Saint Aurelius Augustine was born on November 13, 354 CE, in Thagaste (North Africa) of a pagan father who eventually embraced Christianity and a saintly mother, Saint Monica, who prayed consistently for the conversion of her husband and son. Augustine, a highly gifted and intelligent student, lived with a mistress in his youth, whom he refused to name in his writings and who bore him a son out of wedlock. In his earlier years, he embraced Manichaeism, but in later years met Saint Ambrose, bishop of Milan, who had a positive impact on Augustine's life and eventually baptized him. In 390, Augustine was ordained into the priesthood and in 396 he was chosen as the bishop of Carthage and Hippo Regius. He wrote his major work, *Confessions* (*Confessiones*), between 397 to 401. He died in 430 CE.<sup>120</sup>

#### **3.6.1 AUGUSTINE'S WORK ON ANTHROPOLOGY**

St. Aurelius Augustine greatly influenced the history of intellectual pursuit in philosophy and theology in Western Christianity. His anthropology concerning the image of God and humanity, which influenced Western thought for centuries, is what this study seeks to unveil

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120. William Harmless, *Augustine in His Own Words*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 440-46.



through an African lens. Augustine influenced the church in the West in the Church's understanding of the human person. Since his writings span a period of more than four decades, some conflicting assertions are found in his work. For instance, he originally taught that the image of God in humans was lost in paradise. He also viewed the body as being a cage for the soul.<sup>121</sup> These beliefs would change later in life. The anthropology of Augustine encompasses human history starting with God's creation of the universe and ending with Jesus, through whom all of creation was gathered, united, and presented to his father (God).

Two factors shaped Augustine's anthropology. On the one hand, the influence of Stoicism, Neoplatonism, Manichaeism, Jewish and Christian Scriptures and the earlier Catholic writers appear in his discussions, while on the other hand signs of cultural and maturing influences become more noticeable. The changing phases and experiences of his life as well as his developing personal temperament had a subtle influence on his life and writings.

He wanted to investigate human nature and that which constitutes a human being. He finally settled "...on mathematical certitude." (Conf. 6.4.6). In the worldview of Augustine, the world was a hierarchical unity. All living beings are interconnected. Following the lead of earlier Christian writers, he understood and taught that everything comes from God and depends on God for sustenance. God is the first principle on whom all things depend in varied degree of participation.<sup>122</sup>

His philosophical foundation was influenced greatly by Neoplatonic philosophy, which differed from the Aristotelian notions of his contemporary Pelagians and those of later Christian Aristotelians. In line with his Neoplatonic influence, he perceived the universe as being

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121. Sol. 1.14.24. Quoted in Stephen J. Duffy, "Anthropology," in *Augustine Through the Ages*, ed. Allan D. Fitzgerald, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009), 26.

122. J. Patout Burns, "Grace," *Augustine Through the Ages*, 391.

hierarchical. He based his ideas on the principle of emanation, which indicates that beings, power and operations are a continuous communication from the highest to the lowest levels of the universe. This thought pattern maintains that the lower forms of life live and work by developing on the leadership and power derived from the superior forms. Augustine teaches that the Holy Spirit inspires angels and human beings to love God, who is the highest good for all creatures.<sup>123</sup>The role of the Holy Spirit indicates that the Holy Spirit makes relationality possible.

### 3.6.2 AUGUSTINE ON THE IMAGE OF GOD

Augustine's anthropology makes it obvious that human beings cannot be spoken about without God. He maintains the importance of grace in creation. Grace is the operation of God in this world, particularly in spiritual creatures that hold a central role among God's creatures. Augustine describes the work of grace as the activities in angels and humans through which they are gifted to know and love God.<sup>124</sup> His view on humanity, as being created in the image of God or as the beauty of God being represented in the human being, permeates every aspect of his thinking.<sup>125</sup> He defined the human being as mysterious, and whose composition is self-transcendent. He found the divine image as encompassing rationality, free will, and the ability to move beyond one's self.<sup>126</sup>

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123. Ibid. 391.

124. Ibid.

125. Stephen J. Duffy, *Augustine Through the Ages*, 25.

126. Reinhold Niebuhr explores the influence of the image of God in humanity by writing: "It will suffice to assert by way of summary that the biblical conception of 'image of God' has influenced Christian thought, particularly since Augustine..., to interpret human nature in terms which include his rational faculties but which suggest something beyond them. The noblest non-theological analysis of human nature in modern times, by Heidegger, defines this Christian emphasis succinctly as 'the idea of transcendence,' namely that man [sic] is rational creature." Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, Vol. 1, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 161-62. Cited in Noreen L Herzfeld, *In Our Image*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 17.

The understanding of dualism had an influence on Augustine who embraced Manichaeism for nine years.<sup>127</sup> He analyzed the relationship between the body and soul based on his dualistic view of the human person.

Augustine's view of human nature led him to postulate that original sin resulted in a destruction of love of human goodness and of human dominion over the material world. According to him, as a result of original sin, human love was ruined as well as everything humanity did; hence, perfect love is only realized in God's kingdom. Following the lead of St. Paul, Augustine explains the Spirit-flesh dichotomy to denote the two natures in the human person: physical and spiritual.

At Augustine's earlier quest to understand the nature of the human being created in the image of God, he held certain thoughts, which he refined in his later life. Several obvious changes of his view are easily perceived. For instance, he once taught that the image of God in humans was lost in paradise, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God.<sup>128</sup> He maintained that Adam and Eve, by losing the image of God, could no longer contemplate God, therefore the divine image that God created in them with was lost. Later when debating with the Pelagians, he argued an opposite view, stating that the human being's creation in the image of God was never lost. In speaking about the effects of sin, he writes that there still exists the spark of God, as it were, by

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127 This form of dualism describes the relationship between the soul and the body. This theory reveals that the body is vivified by the soul and elaborates on the extent to which the soul influences the body. See Roland Teske, "Augustine as Philosopher: The Birth of Christian Metaphysics," *Augustine Studies* 23 (1992): 7-32; reprinted in *To Know God and the Soul: Essays on the Thought of Saint Augustine* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008), 3-25 cited in *ibid*.

128. Saint Augustine, *Eighty-Three Different Questions*, trans. David L. Mosher, (Washington, D. C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982), 85.

virtue of which a human being was made in the image of God. That spark has not been utterly quenched.<sup>129</sup>

Augustine further taught that God gave original likeness to humanity at creation with the gift of knowing and loving God. This likeness was lost in paradise when Adam and Eve sinned. Its restoration comes through Jesus Christ who reforms the human image in the grace of baptism with the gift of faith, hope and charity, and indwelling of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>130</sup>

In Augustine's era, there was a popular androcentric understanding of the image of God in humanity that held only the man was made in the image of God, and since the woman was made from the man, she is a helper and does not possess the image of God by herself alone. The woman, therefore, became an image only under the man's headship. In his discourse *On the Trinity*, he writes,

When I was treating of the nature of the human mind, that the woman together with her own husband is the image of God, so that that whole substance may be one image; but when she is referred separately to her quality of *help-mate*, which regards the woman herself alone, then she is not in the image of God; but as regards the man alone, he is the image of God fully and completely as when the woman too is joined with him in one.<sup>131</sup>

This notion that only men were made in the image of God was popular in the early church before him and continued to be popular after Augustine era up to the Middle Ages. He joined the androcentric understanding of the image of God to the message of Paul who stated that

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129. Augustine, *City of God*, 21.24. Accessed October 17, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120122.htm>.

130. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 14.16.22. Accessed October 17, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/13014.htm>.

131. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 12.10. Accessed October 17, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130112.htm>.

women, not men, should cover their head in worship. Paul writes, “A man on the other hand, should not cover his head, because he is the image and glory of God, but the woman is the glory of man” (1Cor 11:7). In this text Paul is essentially referring to Gen 1:27, which underscores that “man”, the male-female couple, is created in the image of God and given the command to multiply. Paul uses a rabbinic procedure when he uses “man” ( *'iš*) in a specific sense whereas in its original context it was used in a generic sense.

In Augustine’s earlier period of life, he rejected the attempts made to interpret Gen. 2:7 as the action of God breathing God’s life into Adam. He did not want to endorse the view that God dwelt in the human person (Adam), since Adam lost that presence of God in him. Notwithstanding this interpretation, he learned from the Manicheans that the human soul was spiritual and a divine particle or the spark of God, which is entrapped in the human body as a result of the ancient conflict between good and evil.<sup>132</sup> Being a Manichean for nine years, he held for a period of time the view, which he later rejected, that it was not his real self that sinned. When he led an immoral life before his conversion, he believed as Manichaeism did that it was the evil nature in which he was entrapped that committed those sins.<sup>133</sup>

The fall of Adam became the point of departure for Augustine’s anthropology over a period of time. His major discourses were centered on the effects of Adam’s fall on humanity. He maintained that after the fall, human beings could not do anything good for themselves. As time passed by, instead of Adam becoming the basis of Augustine’s discussion on anthropology, he applied his Trinitarian understanding of God to explore human beings as created in the image of God. We turn to his understanding of the human person as reflecting the Trinitarian bond.

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132. Augustine, *Tractate*, 39. 8. Accessed October 18, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1701039.htm>. Also Roland J. Teske, *Augustine through the Ages*, 808.

133. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 5.10.18. Accessed October 18, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110105.htm>.

### 3.6.3 AUGUSTINE ON THE HUMAN PERSON REFLECTING THE TRINITARIAN BOND

As he aged, he became skeptical of his earlier youthful convictions about life. He realized that a person could not acquire the knowledge of the boundless mystery of human nature unless Christian faith illumines the way, “though even then the mystery remains intact.” He is amazed how God who knows the feelings of humanity easily counts a human’s hair. He wonders what sea can be deeper than the human mind and heart.<sup>134</sup> The mystery of the human mind reveals something more mysterious that humanity visibly represents. This belief became the foundation on which his future view would be generated.

The Trinitarian theology of Augustine provides a deeper insight into his anthropology. He observed that the Spirit is a bond of communion between the Father and the Son. The Spirit became the Father’s gift to the Son, and the Son to the Father. After he identified the Spirit as a bond of love and communion, he proceeded to establish that the relationship between God and humanity is made possible through the Spirit. The Spirit therefore, provides an ontological bond between God and humanity. Without the Spirit humanity cannot commune with God. He links the Spirit with the soul or intellect.<sup>135</sup> He did not stop at the idea of the image of God as only memory or intellect in humanity, but also as the image of the Spirit in humanity.

Augustine’s view of the human being created in the image of God is that the human being is a reflection of the Trinity-- God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. He identified the bond of the Trinity in the human soul, which he described as a rational or intellectual entity. He

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134. Stephen J. Duffy, “Anthropology” in *Augustine through the Ages*, (Grand Rapids: Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 1999), 25.

135. After Augustine described the Spirit as a bond between the Trinity and between God and humanity, he went further to develop this bond in his discourse on the Trinity. Augustine, *Of Faith and the Creed*, 10.23. Accessed October 18, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1304.htm>.

writes: “but we must find the soul of man [sic], i.e., the rational or intellectual soul, that image of the Creator which is immortal.”<sup>136</sup> He argues that if the soul is made in the image of God then it possesses reason and intellect so that it can comprehend and regard God.<sup>137</sup> Augustine is rationalizing the human ability to relate to God through the Spirit and he identifies this ability for relationality as the image of God. The idea or capacity to relate to God is the image humanity shares with God. The Trinitarian representation in the human being as God’s image is described by Augustine as “memory, understanding and will.” Augustine identifies the true image of God with these three crucial qualities of humanity.<sup>138</sup>

Regarding the human soul, Augustine imparted that the soul is of one substance with God. This view became fundamental in his understanding of the nature of the soul in human life. He further observes that the soul must be purified in order that the individual can see God. According to him, when it is purified, the soul will have the ability to perceive God, who is light, and to rest in that light. The purification is a journey on which humanity embarks.<sup>139</sup>

Augustine rejects the interpretation of social likeness to God that Gregory of Nazianzus propounds. Gregory observes that the Trinity is reflected in the primal family of Adam, Eve, and Seth. In the social likeness interpretation Gregory explicates that it is not the human being by himself or herself who reflects the Trinity but the primal nuclear family. He writes: “it is not even the first couple, Adam and Eve; it is the family as the nuclear cell of every human society. Just as the three divine hypostases form a unity, by virtue of the common being, so these three

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136. Augustine, *On the Trinity*, 14.4. Accessed October 18, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130114.htm>.

137. Ibid. Also Augustine, *City of God*, 11.25. Accessed October 18, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120111.htm>.

138. Ibid., 10.11.

139. Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, 1.10. Accessed October 18, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/12021.htm>.

human persons also share the same flesh and blood, and form a single family. In the primal human community of husband, wife, and child, the Trinity sees itself reflected and appears on earth.”<sup>140</sup> Here, the community of father, mother, and child represents the Trinity. This social interpretation of the doctrine of the Trinity prioritizes “threeness” over numerical identity of substance. It infers a notion of unity of the personhood of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

According to Gregory Nazianzen, the thesis of the social interpretation of the Trinity is that within the Trinity, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are persons in the full sense of the word, and not substances or modes of being. Each person within the immanent Trinity possesses a distinct attribute of divinity. Hence, the unity of the Trinity is social in nature.<sup>141</sup> According to Marc Ouellet,<sup>142</sup> the social interpretation of the Trinity discloses the relationship between the Trinity and the family. The background of the social interpretation of the Trinity depends upon whether or not the relationship between a man and a woman is included in the idea of the image of God. Ouellet maintains that the analogy of the family and the Trinity builds itself around the reading of Genesis 1:26ff where God stated, “Let us make mankind in our image, according our likeness....” The first meaning of the social interpretation of the Trinity “appeared during the 4<sup>th</sup> century to illustrate the divine personality of the Holy Spirit and the consubstantial unity of the Trinity.” This illustration was founded on the fifth theological discourse of Gregory Nazianzen.<sup>143</sup>

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140. Gregory of Nazianzus cited in Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 235.

141. Carl Mosser, “Fully Social Trinitarianism,” in *Philosophical and Theological Essays on the Trinity*, eds. Thomas McCall and Michael C. Rea (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 133.

142. Marc Ouellet is a Cardinal Archbishop of Quebec in Canada. He produced his work as a means to retrieve and renew Catholic thought.

143. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oratio XXXI* (Theol. V) *Patrologia Graeco* 36, 144, cited in Marc Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward Trinitarian Anthropology of the Family*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 22.



The social interpretation of the Trinity is rebuffed by Augustine who thought that the social interpretation of the image of God falsely reveals that humanity was created on the blueprint of single individuals in the Godhead. He saw the danger of tritheism in the social interpretation of the Trinity. Augustine opted for the psychological imagery of the Trinity. He underscores that there is just one divine being or substance called God. Although God constitutes three persons, all three are fundamentally God. Christians profess three persons and not three substances.<sup>144</sup> Just as the danger in emphasizing the social interpretation leads to tritheism, the danger in overemphasizing the psychological interpretation leads to modalism.<sup>145</sup>

Marc Ouellet examines Augustine's understanding of the social analogy of the Trinity. According to Ouellet, Augustine cannot conceive of a valid analogy of the Trinity unless the analogy reveals a Trinity of terms that are distinct from one another and yet forms a true unity. He maintains that the family does not seem to offer this possibility to Augustine because of Augustine's understanding of the human person, which according to Ouellet is "imprecise." Ouellet cites André Malet to critique the positions of Augustine and Thomas Aquinas after him when he writes, "sometimes Augustine makes of a person an absolute which excludes any idea of relativity. Sometimes he makes of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit pure relatives which exclude any idea of substance."<sup>146</sup>

We maintain that Augustine located the image of God in the soul and, by illustrating that males and females possess the soul and therefore possess the image of God, he corrected the impression he gave about the "imprecise" understanding of the human person Ouellet describes

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144. Brain Leftow, "A Latin Trinity" in Ibid.171-2.

145. On the one hand, Tri-theism emphasizes the separateness of the Persons as to end up affirming three separate Gods, not three persons in one God. On the other hand, Modalism emphasizes the unity of God so as to end up affirming one God who has three modes of appearing or of dealing with humanity, not one God in three Persons.

146. André Malet, *Personne et Amour dans la théologie trinitaire de Saint Thomas Aquinas*, (Paris, 1956), 22, cited in Marc Ouellet, *Divine Likeness: Toward Trinitarian Anthropology*, 22.

above. Thus Augustine no longer held the view that it was only Adam who was made in the image of God. He corrected his view to arrive at the image of God being possessed by both Adam and Eve because every human being is made in the image of God. Though he changed his views, he continued to present a more personalistic, psychological, and existential account of the image of God. For him the image of God in the human being has a Trinitarian structure, which reflects either the tripartite structure of the human soul (spirit, self-consciousness, and love) or the threefold aspects of the psyche (memory, intelligence, and will). According to Augustine, the image of God orients human beings to God in “invocation, knowledge, and love.”<sup>147</sup>

On the issue of Augustine making a person an absolute, Augustine’s use of the social analogy only reveals itself in his treatment of human love. He maintains that there are three things in love, as it were a trace of the Trinity. He writes, “Behold, then, there are three things: he that loves, and that which is loved, and love...so let it suffice to have said thus much, that we may have, as it were, the hinge of some starting-point, whence to weave the rest of our discourse.”<sup>148</sup> It is his discourse on love that brought him closer to the social analogy of the Trinity.

Augustine could not understand the analogical description of the Holy Spirit as a woman who marries the Father. He accepted that both Greek and Latin languages describe wisdom/Spirit as a wife or woman, but did not want to accept the analogy. He writes:

For I pass over such a thing, as to think the Holy Spirit to be the mother of the Son of God, and the wife of the Father; since perhaps it may be answered that

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147. Augustine, *Confessions*, 1.1, cited in The Theological Commission, “Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God,” 15. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm>.

148. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 7.14. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130108.htm>.

these things offend us in carnal things, because we think of bodily conceptions and births...For no one ever blushed to choose for himself wisdom as a wife, because the name of a wife puts into a man's thoughts the corruptible connection which consists in begetting children; or because in truth wisdom itself is a woman in sex, since it is expressed in both Greek and Latin tongues by word of the feminine gender.<sup>149</sup>

We observe that Augustine had issues with referring to the Holy Spirit as the wife or woman who fosters the bond of marriage. He however, agreed that the Holy Spirit is the bond of communion between the Father and the Son and as a gift of the Father to the Son and the Son to the Father, but was not prepared to use the marriage analogy. He accepts the fact that the word for the Holy Spirit, "Wisdom," is feminine in gender but does not want to describe the Trinity by referring to the Holy Spirit as a woman. We are convinced that the feminine attributes of the Holy Spirit are to explain the bond between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and not to be taken as literally as Augustine took them. His understanding of the *filioque*<sup>150</sup> has prevented him from understanding the marriage model that the Greek fathers propounded.

The psychological and social interpretations of the Trinity have been endorsed by the West and East respectively. The two interpretations have their own special appeal. On the one hand, the psychological interpretation reveals that human beings reflect the Trinity in the sense that human beings are the same and yet different in our uniqueness. On the other hand, the social interpretation indicates that each person within the immanent Trinity possesses a distinct

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149. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 12.5.5. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130112.htm>.

150. Augustine's understanding of the generation of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son made him take the line he took to explain the role of the Holy Spirit in the Godhead. He saw the Spirit as a bond of communion between the Father and the Son and between God and humanity. The bond between humanity and God is an ontological bond without which humanity cannot unite with God. This understanding led Augustine to develop further the image in his writings, from *Of Faith and the Creed*, and developed it further in the *De Trinitate* 12. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1304> and <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130112>.

attribute of divinity. It also emphasizes the Trinity as a prototype of communal living, which reflects the relationship between God and us (human beings), and us (human beings) and our (fellow) other human beings. We observed the Akan contextual reality as operational through the Trinity as a prototype of communal living. The constituent elements in the human being from God and parents help to understand the human being who communes with God, neighbor and the universe.

Augustine in his earlier writings placed the image of God in the human mind and stated that the woman together with her husband (primal parents) enjoys the image of God. He writes, “so that the whole substance may be one image.” He supported the notion that the woman who is without a husband is assigned as a helpmate and then is not made in the image of God.<sup>151</sup> This earlier psychological interpretation of the image by Augustine led many to reject his interpretation. As mentioned earlier in this treatise, Augustine came to this conclusion through the writings of St. Paul who states in 1 Corinthians 11:7 that men are not to cover their head because they are made in the image of God, but women are to cover their head because they are the reflection of the male. We assert that since Augustine corrected this notion and located the image of God as engraved on the human soul, this confusion is settled on the assertion women have souls just as men do.

Augustine reflects on Gen. 1: 26ff to reveal how he understands the image of God in humanity. According to him, the divine commands “let us make’ and “after our likeness,” show that human beings are created in the image of God, who is Trinity of persons, and one true God.<sup>152</sup> He explains that since God is Trinity of persons, there should be a Trinitarian dynamic in

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151. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 12.10. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130112.htm>.

152. Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 12.6. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130112.htm>.

the composition of the human being to reflect the true image of God. Augustine maintains that the image of God is engraved on the human soul, which shows each person is in himself or herself an image of God and which defies the popular notion of his era.<sup>153</sup> He maintains that, if the social interpretation is accepted as true, a man must marry a wife and have a child with her before he could be the image of God. This would mean that many unmarried men or women or children who die before adulthood or a childless couple would not reflect the image of God. Instead, he notes that a couple with or without children must live in a relationship based on love. They are all made in the image of God.

Since it takes time before a change can occur, especially when it comes to correcting a popular notion, even after Augustine corrected his initial androcentric position on who possesses the image of God, it still prevailed into the Middle Ages, long after Augustine.

Augustine espouses that since likeness to God is imprinted on every soul, each individual, male and female alike, represents God's image. Here, he reveals the location of the image of God in the human soul, not on the physical/animal being. The image becomes a stamp, which is given to every individual. It is the soul that controls the human person. The question that follows is: How does Augustine understand the human soul?

#### **3.6.4 AUGUSTINE'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE SOUL**

In regards to the soul, Augustine had his earlier and later views. In his earlier writings he makes a startling comment about the soul when he writes that, though the soul is immortal, it can die if God deserts it.<sup>154</sup> How can the soul be immortal and die at the same time? This is what he leaves his readers to ponder. Augustine defines death as being experienced when the soul leaves

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153. Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation*, 236. Also Augustine, *De Trinitate*, 14.3.6 and 14.8.11. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130114.htm>.

154. Augustine, *The City of God*, 13.2. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120113.htm>.

the body. At death, the soul, which is immortal, leaves the body and goes to God. According to him, sin will make God desert a soul. This means that the soul has its own way of experiencing death. To support his claim, Augustine cites Matthew's gospel. Jesus states: "... And do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul;" (Matthew 10: 28). God is the only one who can kill the soul, and so God alone must be feared. The souls that God kills, according to Augustine, are those of wicked people. He asserts that those who live wicked lives are persons who live in the body and not of the soul.<sup>155</sup>

In the *Confession*, Augustine writes that God cannot change in any way. Everything, other than God, is subject to change, with bodies changing in place and time and the soul changing only in time.<sup>156</sup> In his basic hierarchy of being, he maintains that God is immutable and stands at the top; the soul which changes only in time occupies the middle position so that it can either turn to God for happiness or to the body for sin, and the body, at the bottom, changes in time and space.<sup>157</sup>

Later on in life, Augustine postulates that the soul is the nature of God given to the human being by God. In his reaction to the "errors" in the book of Vincentius, Augustine maintains: "There is an actual something made out of the nature of God by the self-same God, for the making of which the material of which He makes it is His own very self who makes it."<sup>158</sup> The breath of God makes the human soul out of nothing.<sup>159</sup> After his conversion, he indicates that

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155. Augustine, *The City of God*, 13.2. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120113.htm>.

156. Augustine, *The Confessions*, 7.1.1. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110107.htm>.

157. Augustine, *Letter*, 18.2. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/1102018.htm>.

158. Augustine, *On the Soul and its Origin*, 1.4. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/15081.htm>.

159. Ibid.

there is nothing closer to God than the rational soul, which is the image of God in the human person.<sup>160</sup> Augustine locates the image and likeness of God, which human beings reflect in the incorporeal soul, not in the body. He held on to this view consistently in all his writings, especially in the last eight books of the *Trinity*. He highlights the various ways in which the soul reflects the Triune God. He identifies the body and soul as the two constituent elements that make up the human being. The body and soul of human beings demonstrate that humanity is both physical and spiritual.

Augustine demonstrated what it means to be created in the image of God by analyzing some scriptural texts in the New Testament. Commenting on the Divine command to love God and one's neighbor, Augustine remarks that when God and a neighbor are loved, human beings love their own selves. When Jesus was asked by a Pharisee which of the commandments is the greatest, Jesus replied: "You shall love the Lord, your God, with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind... You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22: 37-40). Augustine's interpretation of this text is that the underlying meaning of this command is "love." This love is divided into two: the first is love of God and the second is love of neighbor. As a human being is made of body and soul, Augustine asserts that to love one's neighbor in his or her complete self is the same as loving one's self. This means that, after loving God, the love of the body and the soul is next, which can be one's neighbor and one's self.<sup>161</sup>

Augustine notes the scriptural revelation that, "The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7), should be well analyzed in order to understand the breath of God, which vitalized the

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160. Augustine, *City of God*, 11.26. Accessed October 19, 2013, <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/120111.htm>.

161. *Ibid.*, 10.26.

human being. He does a comparison between the Greek text “created” and the Latin text “formed.” He reveals that some people prefer to use the word “formed,” thinking it is a better rendering than “created.” But others prefer to use the word “created” to avoid the ambiguity that arises when, according to Augustine, some Latin literatures use the word “formed” to frame fake and “fictitious things.”<sup>162</sup>

Augustine taught that human beings are made into living souls with the breath of God. The likeness to God is imprinted on a rational soul. In the soul the inner nature of God is revealed. At the end stage of his life, Augustine described the destiny of the soul. He held that every soul desires happiness and the soul’s happiness can be found in the possession of God.<sup>163</sup> But the happiness that the soul seeks is made possible through a living relationality encapsulated in the love of God and love of neighbor.

Having looked at Augustine’s anthropology, we are convinced that his postulations reveal the complex nature of human beings. His views, which are more of an ongoing project than a task he brought to closure, show how he refined his earlier radical views about human beings and their relationship with God and neighbor. He affirmed the two-fold nature of the human person - physical and spiritual – with the image of God engraved on the soul. Augustine demonstrates that human beings, of all God’s creatures, are closest to God. He maintains that human beings eventually go back to God. The return to God, however, is a daily journey proceeding by the love of God and neighbor, which is a reflection of the peace and harmony of the Trinity (Trinity 4.17.23).

The anthropologies of Origen and Augustine help us in examining the biblical view of the human being. They show the communion human beings have with God. Their anthropologies

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162. Ibid.

163. *On the Happy Life*, 2.12, cited in Allan D. Fitzgerald, *Augustine through the Ages*, 811.



run parallel to the understanding of the human being of the Akan people. The Akan people clarify and shed light to the doctrine of the human person by demonstrating the various constituent elements that make a human person whole, and enable humanity to relate to God, the neighbor, and the universe.

### **3.7 CONCLUSION: RE-THINKING THE IMAGE OF GOD IN THE HUMAN PERSON**

We contend that there is a similarity among the Akan, the bible, Origen, and Augustine in terms of the human person sharing in a divine nature. There is a similarity in their understanding of the human person as unique among God's creation, and consisting of both physical and spiritual elements. It is our argument that the *okra*, *honhom*, *mogya*, *ntoro*, *sunsum*, and *sasa*, are the elements in the human person that facilitates human communion and dialogue with God, with one another, and with the universe.

The interpretation of the image of God has become a way to underpin the value of humanity on earth. However, contemporary scholarship and modern trends in theological anthropology have affirmed the idea that humanity comes from God, keeps an intimate relationship with God, and will eventually end up in God in the eschaton.

The Second Vatican Council affirmed in *Gaudium et Spes* the dignity of the human person as it is taught in Genesis 1:26 and Psalm 8:6. According to the vision of the council, the image of God consists of humanity's fundamental orientation to God, which is the basis of human dignity and of the "inalienable rights of the human person." Also no human being "should be made subservient to any this-worldly system or finality." The council also underscores the Trinitarian structure of the image.<sup>164</sup>

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164. *Gaudium et Spes*, 12; 22, quoted in "Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God," 21-22.

Modern trends of theology emphasize the importance of the image of God in the human person. For instance, Marc Cortez maintains that the human person remains in God's "unconceivable love and unbreakable covenant" as humanity continues the divine-human relationship through the history of redemption. This relationship ultimately draws humanity, he continues, "...more closely into the divine life itself."<sup>165</sup> According to Hans Balthasar, humanity is able to share in the "substantial infinitude" of Jesus' divine person through his shedding of blood. He observes that Jesus draws humanity to God and gives humanity the opportunity to share in his divine life.<sup>166</sup> Humanity is given a unique opportunity to share in God's divinity. Human beings are created in the image of God to share in this divinity, but the sharing in the fullness of God comes gradually through the eschaton. Christoph Schwöbell asserts that human beings are called into communion with God, which is performed as a conversation between God and human beings.<sup>167</sup> Though Christian writers agree that human beings participate in God's divine nature, some ambiguities are detected in the way the image of God has been interpreted over the years. These ambiguities and a way to resolve them call for a critical analysis of the whole idea of the *Imago Dei*.

Our discussion in chapter three has enabled us to advance the contribution of Christian anthropology. The anthropological examination we undertook in this chapter started from the biblical exposition of who a human being is and how God creates humanity in God's image. The various interpretations that have been given to the image of God in the Hebrew bible have been

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165. Marc Cortez, *Theological Anthropology*, 136.

166. Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Theo-Drama*, Vol.IV, trans. Graham Harrison, (SanFrancisco: Ignatius Press, 1994), 363.

167. Christoph, Schwöbell, *God and Human Dignity*, eds. Kendall R. Soulen and Linda Woodhead, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 50. Only these are cited here to show that humanity stands in a special relationship with God.

analyzed. We reviewed the four main images of God interpretations: the structural image interpretation, the functional image interpretation, the relational/existential image interpretation, and the image of God as wholeness. These interpretations have their limitations, as they do not satisfy all inquiries; however, the holistic interpretation encapsulates the other three interpretations and what it means to be human and be created in God's image. The New Testament understanding of the image cannot be understood without examining who Jesus Christ is: the true image of God in whose image humanity shares. The New Testament describes the being of Jesus as the true image to emphasize Jesus' being as the Son of God.<sup>168</sup>

The structural and relational interpretations of the image of God are in line with the Akan understanding of the human being. The *Imago Dei* is ontological and reveals something fundamental in human nature. The Hebrew bible and the New Testament, Origen, and Augustine, have all proved that the image of God makes human beings unique and enables them to commune with God, to interact with the environment, and relate to one another. Human beings are exceptional among God's creatures, which places humanity in a special position; this special and exceptional position lies in human beings having a relationship with God, which is peculiar to human beings alone.

This third chapter is central to the dissertation as it emphasizes the Christian anthropology to which the Akan anthropology will shed much light. After our analysis of the Christian anthropology, we arrived at a conclusion that God created humankind in God's image and likeness. Our discussions in chapter two ended by concluding that every human being possesses a spark of God. Chapter three indicates paths to the Akan clarification of the Christian anthropology. We have investigated the Akan culture and anthropology in order to grasp its

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168. Gerhard Kittel, "Eikôn," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 395.

contextual understanding of the human person. Among other things, we established that Akan anthropology posits a unique relationship between God and the human person, a relationship that fosters the uniqueness of the human person. The dimensions of the human person, which ontologically links the person to God, the *okra* (soul) and the *honhom* (the breath of life), *sunsum* (spirit), *mogya* (blood), and *ntoro* (spirit from the father), give credence to the image of God in the human person, and ensure human relationships.

We now turn to trace the activities of the Holy Spirit. We intend to demonstrate the possibility of human relationships through the Holy Spirit, whom we identify as the *HonhomKronkron* that keeps every human being alive. The Holy Spirit connects to the key dimensions of the Akan perception of the human being. The work of the Holy Spirit is highlighted by the activities of the African Initiated Churches (AICs). We move on to the next chapter to discuss the Spirit and how the AICs illustrate the role of the Holy Spirit in communities.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HUMAN IDENTITY

“...I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life...”

(Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed)

#### 4.0 INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapters we have established the anthropological framework of the Akan and Christian understanding of the creation of the human person in the image of God. We established through the Akan understanding of the human person that every human being is created with a spark of God through the *honhom-okra*. We ascertained through the Akan that the *honhom* is the spirit in the human person, and the Holy Spirit works with *honhom* to vivify the human person. The *honhom* is the principle of life in the human person. The Holy Spirit works within every human being. It is the Spirit of God that keeps humanity alive.

Akan Christians use their own tradition to understand the tenets of their faith. We intend to explore the Akan understanding of the human person to shed light on creation in the image of God. We have already treated the power of translatability of the Christian message as a way of providing the certainty about the Twi language we use in this dissertation and how accurate it is in explaining the biblical theological terms.<sup>1</sup>

In chapter two, we observed a link between the *honhom* and the Holy Spirit. It is the link that compelled those who translated the Holy bible into the Twi language to describe the Holy

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1. See chapter two, page 101.

Spirit as *Honhom Kronkron*.<sup>2</sup> The *honhom* is known as the “breath of life’ in the human person and signifies the presence of the *okra* (soul) in the human being. In our discussion of the *honhom* in chapter two, we distinguished between the *honhom* and the *okra* and how they collaborate to signify the life giving principle and presence or image of God in the human person (spiritual aspect of the human person).<sup>3</sup> The *honhom* is what makes a person able to breathe and stay alive. The Akan people consider the continuous movement of inhaling and exhaling to be the presence of God. They understand that no matter how deeply one exhales, there remains within a residual breath, which attests to the soul being in the individual.<sup>4</sup> *Honhom* is derived from the Akan word *home*, which means to breathe. *Honhom* therefore is what vivifies a person and keeps humanity alive.<sup>5</sup>

The Akan people describe death as the cessation of *honhom*, which signifies the departure of the *okra* (soul) from the body. The *honhom* is the tangible manifestation of the presence of the *okra*.<sup>6</sup> In describing the *honhom*, Peter Sarpong writes: “When the *honhom* leaves me, I am dead. The *okra* goes back to God to be judged, and the *sunsum* then becomes *saman* (ghost), and the *bogya* or *honam* (body) is buried.”<sup>7</sup> We read in Genesis that it is the breath of God that brought

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2. *Honhom Kronkron* is the Holy Spirit. The *honhom* is the breath that gives life to the individual human being. The absence of the *honhom* in the human being means that death has occurred. Biblically, after God created the human being, God breathed the breath of life into the human being to make the human being a living being (Gen 2:7). See chapter two, page 112.

3. The *honhom* is not the *okra*. They are two separate constituent elements in the human person. However, the presence of one is a signification that the other is always around. Through the *honhom*, human beings are able to breathe and that shows that the *okra* is in the person as well. The *honhom* is the manifestation of the presence of the *okra*. Once the *honhom* stops operating, a person is said to have died and the *okra* is believed to leave a person. Peter Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, (Legon, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 91.

4. Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality*, (Trenton, NJ: African World Press, 1997), 73.

5. Chapter two, page 25.

6. Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987), 88.

7. Peter Sarpong, *Peoples Differ*, (Legon, Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 91.

the human being to life: “The LORD formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being” (Gen 2:7). The Psalmist describes death as occurring when God takes away God’s breath. Human beings then die and return to the dust from which they came (Ps 104:29). In these passages, we can detect a connection between the *honhom* and the Holy Spirit. It is because of this mutual relationship that Akan bible translators translate the Holy Spirit as *Honhom Kronkron*.<sup>8</sup>

Chapter three provided the Christian framework for understanding creation in the image of God through the investigation of factors pertinent to our study as found in the Hebrew bible, the New Testament, and the writings of Origen and Saint Augustine.

In chapter four, we intend to demonstrate the possibility of human relationships through the Holy Spirit, the *HonhomKronkron* that keeps every human being alive. In this chapter we intend to disclose creation in the image of God with the second account of the creation narrative in Genesis. In the second account we read that God formed the human being from the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils “the breath of life” and the human being became a living being: “...then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (2:7). We identify the “breath of life” (*ruach*) with the Holy Spirit that gives life to human beings.

In chapter four we propose to demonstrate that the Holy Spirit mediates relationships. We have already shown how the Holy Spirit works with the human spirit to give and sustain life.<sup>9</sup>The Akan anthropology helps us to further clarify our understanding of the mediation of the

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8. Chapter two, pages 101 where we discussed the power of translatability of the Christian message (Bible theological terms).

9. James D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans, 2006), 77 and Chapter four, page 239.

Holy Spirit in the lives of human beings. The Akan people believe that God is with every human being, and at the same time is in every human being.<sup>10</sup>

Through a method of contextualization, we use the Akan understanding of the human being to clarify what Christians believe about human beings and human relationships with God, neighbor, and the universe. We will use expressions and terminologies such as: “God is with, and in every human being,”<sup>11</sup> “Vital participation,”<sup>12</sup> “ancestors,”<sup>13</sup> “ancestor-Christology,”<sup>14</sup> “the spark of God in every human beings,”<sup>15</sup> and “the breath of God in every human being”<sup>16</sup> to organize our thoughts in demonstrating that humanity shares in the image of God and that the Holy Spirit mediates human-divine communication as well as human communication with other human beings and the universe. There are African authors who have endeavored to explain Christian theology within the African context as we are doing. As we discuss the spark of God in us to disclose that the Holy Spirit mediates our relationship with God who is with us and in us, we include some of these authors to provide the contextual framework needed to shed light on creation in the image of God. The African writers we include in our discussion are: Charles Nyamiti,<sup>17</sup> David Tonghou Ngong,<sup>18</sup> Joseph Boakye Danquah,<sup>19</sup> Kwame Bediako,<sup>20</sup> John

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10. Kofi Appiah-Kubi, *Man Cures, God Heals*, (New Jersey: Allanheld, Osmun Publishers, 1981), 83.

11. Ibid.

12. John Mbiti, “Christianity and Traditional religions in Africa,” *International Review of Mission* 59, no. 236 (October 1970): 438. Cited in *Christianity in Africa*, ed. Kwame Bediako, 103.

13. Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Tema, Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 33. Also Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, *Persons and Community*, (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 231.

14. Charles Nyamiti, “Contemporary African Christologies,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 72-3.

15. Chapter two, page 78.

16. Ibid., 69.

17. Charles Nyamiti is a Catholic priest from Tanzania, East Africa. He is concerned with African cultures, philosophy, religiosity and sheds light on Christianity through the African worldview.



Pobee,<sup>21</sup> Abraham Akrong,<sup>22</sup> and Peter Kwasi Sarpong.<sup>23</sup> These scholars articulated their interpretations of the Christian faith through the basic orientations that shaped the African indigenous religions and shaped Christian interpretations of God and Christian doctrines.

In studying the functions of the *okra* and the *honhom* (*sunsum*)<sup>24</sup> in the Akan ethnography, we can help clarify the truth Christians confess in the Trinity. Within the Triune God there is equality-in-difference, a characteristic that humanity shares in its nature. The “equity-in-difference” in the Triune God is understood in the sense that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit are three persons in one God.<sup>25</sup> It is in the image of this God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, that every human being is created.

The concept of the Trinity is one that enriches communion and relationships. Human beings are unique, yet encompass in their uniqueness relationships with God, other human beings, and the universe, a quality, which is *sine qua non* for being human.

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18. David Tonghou Ngong is a theologian from Cameroon. His interest is in theology and identity with emphasis on African Theology.

19. Joseph Boakye Danquah was a Ghanaian. He was a member of the Presbyterian Church. He was a scholar and historian. He studied Law and Philosophy. He became a politician in Ghana and died a Statesman.

20. Kwame Bediako was a Ghanaian. He belonged to the Presbyterian Church. He was concerned about whether or not a person could become a true Christian only by embracing the mind-set of Western Christians and reject what made him/her an African.

21. John Pobee is an Anglican priest from Ghana who specialized in the New Testament studies, Missiology, Ecumenism, Liturgy and Worship.

22. Abraham Akrong is a Ghanaian theologian. He has written significantly on African Theology.

23. A Catholic Archbishop Emeritus in Ghana. He is an Akan and a renowned anthropologist and sociologist. He is a promoter of inculturation.

24. The *okra* discloses that everyone comes from God and goes back to God when a person dies. The *honhom* is the breath in the human being. If God breathed the breath of life into the living being in Genesis 2:7, and the breath of life became identified with the Holy Spirit who gives life, the Holy Spirit works through the *honhom* to give life to humanity. Page 192.

25. We are not discussing the Trinity in detail in this work but using some aspects of Trinitarian understanding to support our argument about the Christian God who is a trinity of persons; Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is in the image of this God that human beings are made.

Within the context of the Akan anthropology, we will now briefly trace the activities of the Spirit from the Hebrew bible to the New Testament to emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit as a healer and giver of life.<sup>26</sup> In human life, the Holy Spirit gives life and aids humanity in their relationships.<sup>27</sup>

#### **4.1 THE ROLE OF THE SPIRIT IN HEBREW SCRIPTURE AND THE NEW TESTAMENT**

The vital role of the Spirit in both the Hebrew bible and the New Testament is to give life. At creation we read of the breath of God that vivified the human being [Adam] to become a living being (Gen 2: 7). The breath (*ruach*) and its life-giving nature are revealed in the creation of the human beings (Adam). In the New Testament, an Angel told Mary at the annunciation that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her in the conception of Jesus: “And the angel said to her in reply, ‘The holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God’” (Lk 1: 35). On the day of Christ’s resurrection, when the disciples locked themselves up in a room for fear of the Jews Jesus appeared to them and “breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the holy Spirit. Whose sin you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained’” (Jn 20:22-23). The action of Jesus recalls Genesis 2:7, where God breathed on Adam and gave him life. Just as Adam’s life came from God, so the new spiritual life of the disciples came from Jesus.<sup>28</sup>

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26 We trace the Holy Spirit as the Spirit is presented in Scriptures. Detailed description has been done in chapters two and three. We are providing highlights here to refresh our memories and build our theses that the Holy Spirit provides life and is the presence of God on earth.

27 The role of the Holy Spirit in human life has been treated in chapter three of this dissertation.

28 The life-giving role of the Spirit recalls the revivification of the dry bones (Ezekiel 37). See footnote on Jn 20:22 in *The New American Bible*, eds. Donald Senior and John J. Collins, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 1440.

Just as the Holy Spirit gives life to human beings, the Holy Spirit directs human beings to live well with God and neighbors. The presence of the Holy Spirit helps to serve the human community and to maintain a constant relationship between God and the children of God, between human beings, and between human beings and the world. The individual uniqueness of human beings is reflected in the diversity of gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to make human life meaningful since relating to others is the reason for the diverse gifts necessary to vivify human communities.

Let us now discuss the Holy Spirit (*Honhom Kronkron*) as a giver of life to underscore the life giving nature of the *Honhom Kronkron*.

#### **4.2 THE HONHOM KRONKRON OR THE HOLY SPIRIT AS LIFE-GIVER**

Among the Akan, the vivifying principle in the human being is the *honhom*, which is an element in the constitution of the human being that makes a person breathe. The *okra* (soul) is the small particle of God and it is the *okra* that makes a person a human being. The breath of life (*honhom*) is a tangible manifestation of the *okra* (soul)<sup>29</sup>, which enables the person to breathe, making the person a living being.<sup>30</sup>

Karl Barth describes the Holy Spirit, who works in communities with and through believers, as a Spirit of God and not of the world, proceeding eternally from the Father and the Son.<sup>31</sup>

Barth's concern is to disclose that the Holy Spirit is not an individual's personal Spirit, but God's Spirit working through the spirit of humans to reveal a God who "reconciles" the world and

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29. The *honhom* is not *okra*. The *okra* is the divine nature in the human being, and the *honhom* is the breath yet we must not identify the *honhom* as the *okra*. When a person is breathing the *okra* is in the person, but when a person stops breathing, the *okra* is said to have gone and that means death has occurred.

30. Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect* (Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 37. Also Peter Sarpong, "Health and Medicine in African Traditional Religion," *Bulletin of the Pontificium Consilium Pro Dialoge Inter Religiones* XXVIII, no. 3 (1993), 95/81.

31. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, IV.I, trans G. W. Bromiley, (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004), 646.

humanity to God.<sup>32</sup> The human person exists in relationship and is directed by an inherent striving towards God. It is the Spirit that makes all relationships possible and guides every human being towards God.

The Akan Christians or Africans understand the identity of the Holy Spirit by identifying what the Holy Spirit does. By identifying the Holy Spirit as a “person” in the Trinity and portraying the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of human beings and the world, the Holy Spirit is recognized as God, the Lord and Giver of life.<sup>33</sup> The Spirit as Lord and life giver recalls the phrase “the spark of God” in the human beings, “God with us and God within us,” as well as the phrase, the Spirit of God “poured out on all flesh.”<sup>34</sup>

The work of the Spirit as life-giver demonstrates a theological truth about human nature and the uniqueness of the human being. Sibley Towner points out that we cannot talk about human nature without God’s nature. He asserts that biblically, as a consequence of the human nature joined to God’s, all anthropology is theology.<sup>35</sup>

The divine presence in the human being is expressed in the Akan proverb *Nipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma; obiara nnye asase ba* (All people are children of God; no one is a child of the earth).<sup>36</sup> God creates human beings equally in God’s image; however, human beings are unique in their own ways. The uniqueness of the human person is understood in two senses. First, God uniquely creates the human being in God’s image when the human person is compared to the

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32. Ibid.

33. We highlight this discussion below with our discussion of David Ngong. Page 203.

34. For the statement, “The spirit of God ‘poured out on all flesh,’” Joel 3:1. Also Amos Yon, *The Spirit Poured Out in All Flesh* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2005). And David Tonghou Ngong, *The Holy Spirit and Salvation in African Christian Theology*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2010), 122.

35. Sibley W. Towner, *Genesis*, (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001).

36. Veli-Matti Käekäinen, *The Doctrine of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 253. Also Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1995), 85

other creatures of God. For instance, human beings are different from animals, plants, water bodies and all of God's creation. Secondly, each human being is unique when compared with other human beings. For instance, every human being has a unique fingerprint, which distinguishes one person from the other.

The spirit that is the vivifying principle in humanity leaves the human being when he/she dies; when this occurs the *okra* (soul), which comes from God, and is the presence of God in human beings goes back to God. The spark of God in humanity (*okra*) is what prompts us to explain that human beings are created in the image of God. Akan people believe that before the soul (*okra*) enters human beings, the soul discusses his/her mission with God.<sup>37</sup> The etiology of the *okra*'s discussion with God before entering a human being theologically means that God is a giver of life.

As mentioned earlier, it is the Holy Spirit that gives life to human beings. We here employ St. Paul's analysis of the human personality to explain the relationship between the *honhom* and the Holy Spirit. According to Paul, the spiritual nature of human beings is what God has bestowed on every human being and it makes it possible for the Spirit of God to dwell in human beings. The spirit of human beings (*honhom*) provides a basis for the continuing conversation between human beings and the divine Spirit that comes to dwell within humanity (Rom 8:9-17).<sup>38</sup>

If the Holy Spirit gives life and the *honhom* is the life-giving principle in the human being, then the *honhom* becomes the one of the dimensions of the human being that interacts with the divine, or "the breath of life." The *honhom* helps us to demonstrate that human beings

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37. Peter K. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 34.

38. S.V. McCasland, "Spirit" in *Ibid.*, 434.

possess a spirit from God that vivifies humanity. The “breath” is vital to human life. Through the *honhom*, we can understand clearly what God breathed into human being in Genesis 2:7.<sup>39</sup> Human existence is a participation in a constant interaction of divine-human encounter, which is aided by the Holy Spirit.

According to the Christian faith and theology, the God who created heaven and earth and all within them is a Trinity of persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have attempted to highlight the discussion of the Holy Spirit, who is a person in the Godhead, to disclose the Spirit’s role in creation and in human life in particular. By stating that God created human beings in God’s image, we have demonstrated that human beings possess some spiritual components in their constitution that come from God and help humanity relate to God and others.

We now turn to explore the attitude of some African theologians and writers regarding God and the understanding of God in the African culture. These theologians clarify through their writings that the African context can be a useful hermeneutical tool to shed light on the Christian faith.

#### **4.3 FROM ANCESTRAL CHRISTOLOGY OF AFRICAN THEOLOGIANS TO CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY**

African theology largely existed in an oral form before the 1950s. Among Catholic theologians, Vatican II prompted a number of African theologians to publish their theological responses to the changing African realities through seminars and international conferences.<sup>40</sup> African theologians are increasingly using their indigenous cultures to understand and explain Christian theology within the African context.

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39. Footnote 7 in chapter four, when we talked about death.

40. F. A. Oborji, “African Theology, Roman Catholic,” *Global Dictionary of Theology*, eds. William A Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, 2008), 15.

There are a number of insights from African theologians that indicate the relational Spirit of God as life-giver in their ancestral<sup>41</sup> Christology and their pneumatology. Christology from below provides the basis for African Christology.<sup>42</sup> We discuss ancestor-Christology because Akan and Africans believe that the historical Jesus is a fulfillment of the highest “ideals” assigned to the ancestors in the African context. Jesus imparts a life-force in all its fullness by healing the sick, raising the dead, and providing for the needs of people.<sup>43</sup> We summarize the helpful insights from the African theologians as follows:

First: By describing Christ as an ancestor, African theologians speak of a relational God, the one from whom all life flows. The relationship between the Akan (Africans) and their ancestors is seen in their prayer life, as no ceremony will commence without imploring the assistance of the ancestors. They believe that, without the ancestors, they will not succeed in anything they do, so they always invite their ancestors into their activities. Their reference to Christ as an ancestor means that there is an unending communication between God and human beings. The ancestors, like God, are believed to be immortal and endowed with “omniscience

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41. Ancestors are spirits of the dead that are believed to be in a position of influence over the living. Their counterparts in Christian religion are saints, who are believed to be in heaven enjoying eternal bliss with their God. The significance of ancestors comprises of their watchfulness over the affairs of the living members of their families. They help deserving ones and punish the delinquent ones. If an ancestor was a ruler before death, the ancestor’s scope of activities goes beyond his own family to the whole of his kingdom. It is not everyone who can become an ancestor. Before a person becomes an ancestor, certain conditions must be fulfilled. What is usually examined is a person’s position in life, the manner of his death, the age at which he departed and so forth. For details see Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Tema, Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 33. Also Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, *Persons and Community*, (Washington D.C.: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 231.

42. Bénédet Bujo, *African Theology, African Theology*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1992), 80; also John Parratt, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 129.

43. Ibid.

and ubiquity.”<sup>44</sup> By referring to Christ as an ancestor, African theologians disclose the nature of Christ and God’s permanent relationship with human beings. Since human communication with ancestors is spiritual, ancestor-Christology demonstrates the spiritual nature of human communication with God.

Second: Since the ancestor is a symbol and source of life and power,<sup>45</sup> it is appropriate to use that title in describing God’s relationship with people on earth. Because ancestors are believed to help in procreation and protection from harm, and serve as intermediaries between God and the living, Akan people invite the ancestors to help married couples at marriage ceremonies, to protect children at naming ceremonies and at other initiatory rites. Ancestors are viewed as channels and part of the great creative power of life. African theologians want their people to understand that it is in God that all these roles are played. Thus they proclaim Christ as relevant to the African people, and as one who brings continuity to the African pre-Christian past, as one who fulfills Africans’ deepest quest, and as one who answers their spiritual needs.

Third: Ancestors serve as examples of behavior in communities. By referring to Christ as an ancestor, African theologians disclose the role Christ plays in the moral formation of Christian life. The individual is not required to unite with others to honor an ancestor, for ancestors are honored in every good deed a person performs.<sup>46</sup>

Fourth: By using ancestor-Christology, African theologians illustrate the meditational role Christ plays in human lives. All the roles attributed to ancestors are seen in Christ. Using that title for Christ becomes meaningful to Africans, since they can easily relate to Christ in this

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44. The ancestors must not be confused with God. They did not create the world as God did; they have lived and resurrected to achieve immortality. Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, Inc., 1997), 139-140.

45. Kwasi Wiredu, and Kwame Gyekye, *Persons and Community*, (Washington D.C: The Council for Research in Values and Philosophy, 1992), 232.

46. Bénézét Bujo, *African Theology*, (Eugene Oregon: Wipf & Sock Publishers, 1992), 23.



ancestor-Christology as it makes Christ relational. Akan people believe that life must be in relation to God, ancestors, and neighbors. Ancestors who are spirits are part and parcel of Akan life just as God is.

Ancestor-Christology discloses the relationship between God and human beings and demonstrates that God is the giver of life. Since the Akan (Africans) are familiar with the role of the ancestors, most Africans more easily understand Jesus and his salvific role in the ancestor-Christology. We stated that most Africans relate to ancestor-Christology because some Africans are not comfortable using the African indigenous religious terminology to describe the Christian faith. Other Africans prefer an elevation when using the indigenous terminology in reference to Christ or God. For instance, Bénézet Bujo, a theologian from Democratic Republic of Congo, endorses ancestor-Christology, but advocates for Christ to be seen as an ancestor *par excellence*.

We will discuss a few of the African theologians such as Charles Nyamiti from Tanzania, a pioneer of inculturated African Theology and a proponent of ancestor-Christology. He provides categories in doing African theology under which we will discuss some Akan theologians and theologians who are not Ghanaians.

#### **4.4 CHARLES NYAMITI**

The pneumatic relevance in Charles Nyamiti lies in his demonstration that the Holy Spirit is a vivifier, a bond of love in the cosmos, and a seal of the being of God. According to him, anyone who loves is fully human.<sup>47</sup> He also describes human relationship with God and neighbor as enhanced through Ancestor-Christology.<sup>48</sup> We observe a clear relationship between his Ancestor-Christology and the Holy Spirit as source of life and relationships. Through his

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47. Charles Nyamiti, "Contemporary African Christologies," in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 72-3.

48. Ibid.

discourse, we identify the role of the *honhom*, *okra* and other spiritual elements as helping humanity to commune with God. He maintains that the Holy Spirit is needed to safeguard the sacred communication between ancestors and their descendent. We use his insights to highlight the spiritual components of human beings.

Nyamiti notes that Africa is rapidly moving from an indigenous mode of life to a technological and scientific age. Therefore, he proposes that African theology should move beyond using African hymns, prayers, and other forms of spirituality. He is convinced that Christian theology has always been inclined to be systematic and uses philosophical discourses and other means to present a coherent explanation to its beliefs. He recommends an interaction between the African cultural context and the tradition of the Catholic Church and its interpretation of the gospel message.<sup>49</sup> He employs the category of ancestor in three interrelated ways: God as ancestor,<sup>50</sup> Christ as ancestor or brother ancestor,<sup>51</sup> and the communion of saints as ancestors.<sup>52</sup> Out of the three categories the most commonly used among African Christians is the communion of saints as ancestors. We will, however, limit our discussion to Christ as ancestor to discuss ancestor-Christology.

Nyamiti maintains that ancestor-Christology is one of the themes that fits in most African cultures and has worked extensively on ancestor-Christology in his work, *Christ as Our Ancestor*.<sup>53</sup> He examines the African belief concerning the role of ancestors in the lives of human beings and identifies some basic similarities and differences that exist between it and Jesus

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49. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 254.

50. Charles Nyamiti, *The African Tradition and the Christian God*, (Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1978), Chap. 8.

51. Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor*, (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mombo Press, 1984).

52. Charles Nyamiti, "Uganda Martyrs: Ancestors of All Mankind," *African Christian Studies* 2, no. 1 (1986): 37-60.

53. Charles Nyamiti, *Christ as Our Ancestor*, (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Mambo Press, 1984).

Christ's role as an ancestor. In this type of Christology, the historical Jesus fulfills the ideals that are attributed to African ancestors such as healing, curing, protecting, and raising the dead. Christ bequeathed these powers to his disciples after his death. Jesus transcends the ancestors in the soteriological meaning of his death and resurrection.<sup>54</sup>

Nyamiti discusses four Christologies in African Theology: African Traditional (non-Christian) Christologies, African Nonsystematic Christologies, Inculturation Christologies, and Christologies of Liberation. Let us briefly describe these Christologies.

First, he describes the African Indigenous (non-Christian) Christologies that involve a rigorous systematic research in the indigenous religion and cultures of black Africa. It discloses the "latent forms of African theologies, and even christologies, which were in existence long before the advent of Christianity in this part of the continent."<sup>55</sup>

Second, he identifies the African Nonsystematic Christologies that involve a simple understanding and presentation of the Christian teachings on Christ, so as to "adapt them to the problems, needs, and ways of thinking of the African people."<sup>56</sup>

Third, he maintains that Inculturation Christologies utilize a method of employing African cultural themes in theology. They involve the identification of the African cultural categories with the Christian mysteries.<sup>57</sup>

Fourth, he describes the Christologies of Liberation, which are by method similar to those of Latin America. Nyamiti identifies the problem of lack of originality in these types of

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54. F. A. Obojri, "African Theology, Roman Catholic," in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, 19.

55. Charles Nyamiti, "Contemporary African Christologies," in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 66.

56. Ibid., 67.

57. Ibid., 70.

Christologies. He invites proponents of these types of Christologies to use African indigenous and modern wisdom to produce authentic African Liberation Christology.<sup>58</sup>

In Nyamiti's writings, he promotes the use of the African context in expressing the Christian faith. In his exposition on the Trinity, he maintains that the Three Persons come from communion. Therefore, the deeper a person communes with others, the more fully a person he/she will be. He emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in the Trinity as the crown or seal of the being of God. He writes:

“[T]he Father cannot be what he is (and thus have his power) unless he begets the Son; and the power of the Father and the Son cannot be had without ‘spirating’ the Holy Spirit in oneness of love. Hence we may conclude that in God, power is based on the intrinsic unity and plurality of shared life. Without this divine Persons can do nothing, they cannot exist... Thus the African Philosophy of power applies also to God in his inner life.”<sup>59</sup>

Nyamiti therefore maintains that the Holy Spirit is a vivifier and the bond of love in the cosmos. He underscores the life-giving and unifying roles of the Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit provides means by which human beings commune with God and one another.

According to Nyamiti, the sacred communication human beings have with God is made through the Holy Spirit. He notes that the communication that exists between ancestors and the descendent occurs through the Spirit, and based on that observation he concludes that the Spirit appears to be the expression of their mutual love “in as much as love is expressed by mutual giving to each other of the divine gift, that is, the Holy Spirit.” He also adds: “Since in God, this

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58. Ibid., 72-73.

59. Charles Nyamiti, *African Tradition and the Christian God*, cited in Mika Vähäkangas, “African Approach to the Trinity,” *African Theology Today*, Vol. 1, (Scranton: University of Scranton Press, 2005), 82.

sacred communication can only be made through the Holy Spirit, divine ancestorship and descendency demands by their very nature the presence of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>60</sup> There are a few African theologians who insist that Nyamiti and others who write about ancestor-Christology should not put Jesus and African ancestors on the same level, since Jesus is God. Bénézet Bujo is one of those who want to address Jesus as a super ancestor.

Bénézet Bujo advocates for pursuing African theology in a new way. He insists that African theology should be done differently from the European method of doing theology. He does not place Christ on the same level as biological lineage ancestors as Nyamiti and some African theologians do. Instead, Bujo recommends that Christ is the ancestor at a transcendental level. Christ, therefore, should be referred to as “Ancestor par excellence” or “Proto-Ancestor.” He notes that it is the death and resurrection of Jesus with its soteriological meaning that makes Christ transcend the ancestors.<sup>61</sup> Bujo demonstrates that when the ancestor concept is used as a basis of Christology, it refers only to those God-fearing ancestors who exercise a good influence on their descendants and help their descendants to live as God wishes them to live, and not to those whose names cause fear and panic. He writes that it is only the good ancestors who can leave behind their “last will and testament” for the benefit of their descendants.<sup>62</sup>

Bujo explains how the last wish of a dying mother or any dying person is of significance to the living. He writes: “These words are words of life, setting the seal on the experiences and example of one who, while withdrawing from the community, yet truly lives on within it, along with the other ancestors. The final event in the life of a dying person is normative for those he or

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60. Charles Nyamiti, *African Tradition and the Christian God*, (Kenya: Gaba Publications, 1978) 49. Also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 256.

61. Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1992), 35. Also F. A. Oborji, “African Theology, Roman Catholic,” in *Global Dictionary of Theology*, eds. William A. Dyrness, and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, (Illinois: Inter Varsity Press Academic, 2008), 17.

62. Bénézet Bujo, *African Theology*, (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1992), 79.

she is leaving behind.”<sup>63</sup> He interprets Jesus of Nazareth as one who not only lived the African ancestor-Ideal in the ultimate degree, but the one who brought that ideal to a new completion. He therefore, recommends that Christ should be referred to as the “Proto-Ancestor.” In Jesus’ earthly life, he exhibited all the qualities and attributes that Africans attribute to their ancestors and which lead them to invoke the ancestors in their daily life.<sup>64</sup>

We agree with Bujo about raising Jesus above the level of other ancestors, however, we do not think that we have ancestors who can be referred to as “bad ancestors.”<sup>65</sup> Ancestors are believed to be good people, just like the Christian Saints. They are believed to reward good acts and punish bad acts. Anthony Ephraim-Donkor, an Akan writer, states: “The ancestors are thus a distinct group of eternal saints apart from other spiritual personalities who are also endowed with immortality but are not ancestors.”<sup>66</sup> Ancestors are spirits whose role in human life guides Africans to understand the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of humanity. Through Nyamiti’s description of the role of the Holy Spirit as bond of love in the communication between God and humans and between humans and ancestors, we observe that his discourse shows the Holy Spirit as source of life and relationship. Since humans share in the bond of divine love, humans share

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63. Ibid.

64. The life, works, suffering, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus make him an ancestor *par excellence*. His testament guides his disciples in their daily living and they invoke his name any time and every place for his assistance. Ibid., 79-81.

65. Among Akan of Ghana, not all the dead can become ancestors. Ancestors are regarded as part of the community, and express their solidarity with the community. The ancestors use their power for the well-being of the community. This is consistent with the fact that not all the dead become ancestors but only those who lived a good, virtuous life or served as leaders of the community. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 251.

66. Anthony Ephirim-Donkor, *African Spirituality*, (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press Inc., 1997), 129.

something with and of God, thus disclosing the Akan belief that “God is with us, and God is in us.”<sup>67</sup>

As we saw earlier, Charles Nyamiti endeavored to use the African cosmology to shed light on the Christian faith. Another African theologian, David Tonghou Ngong, critiques him by demanding more, just as Bénézet Bujo did. We will now discuss Ngong and his approach to African theology.

#### 4.5 DAVID NGONG

David Ngong appreciates the pneumatological dimension of African theology. He critiques, however, the approach of overemphasizing the Holy Spirit and salvation, which suggests endorsing the African cosmology. Ngong questions why the role of Jesus Christ in African theology is emphasized less while so much emphasis is placed on the Holy Spirit. He advocates for the Trinity to be taken into consideration when discussing salvation in African theology and not to dwell on the Holy Spirit alone. He wants Christology, Soteriology, and Salvation to be discussed without overemphasizing a single one of them to the detriment of the others. According to Ngong, the approach of some African theologian in endorsing African cosmology is detrimental to the progress of Africa. He maintains that their approach to African theology undermines the scientific imagination in Africa.<sup>68</sup>

Ngong argues that the African inculturation theology in particular baptizes the African cosmology. He contends that this emphasis is dangerous in the sense that it undermines the scientific imagination of Africans. He cites the example of the spiritualized cosmology of Africa, with special emphasis on the concept of salvation, identified by many Africans as freedom from

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67. Kofi Appiah-Kubi, *Man Cures, God Heals*, (New Jersey: Allanheld, Osmun Publishers, 1981), 83.

68. David Tonghou Ngong, *The Holy Spirit and Salvation in African Christian Theology*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishing Inc., 2010), X.

the numerous spiritual powers, that limit the capacity of individuals and society from enjoying the fullness of life that encompass the material wellbeing in the present.<sup>69</sup> He maintains that the approach of the African writers that we discussed above is limiting because it does not make sufficient inquiry into the Christian idea of salvation. For instance, he criticizes the theology, which according to him, looks only at the function of the Holy Spirit in Pneumatological soteriology. Instead, he proposes that the person of the Holy Spirit must be understood in the Trinitarian taxonomy. His view is that the Spirit of God is poured out on all human beings, which must show that the Spirit does not operate only in miraculous ways, but also in ordinary rational and scientific ways of life. He further writes that the pre-modern imagination was helpful to religions, particularly to Christianity that used it as a fertile ground for the growth of the Church, but harmful to the material wellbeing of Africans.<sup>70</sup>

On the issue of African understanding of the Holy Spirit, Ngong lauds the portrayal of the Holy Spirit as the power that overcomes all other adversarial powers. He argues that theologically no power can compete with God's Spirit. He continues to express, however, his concern that many African theologians place too much emphasis on the Spirit overcoming other malevolent spirits, while suppressing the other ways through which the Holy Spirit could be experienced. His proposal is that the Holy Spirit should be seen as the Spirit of love, unity, and reconciliation.<sup>71</sup>

We appreciate David Ngong's observation concerning African imagination and the need for scientific analysis in the African approach to tackling the challenges that come the way of the African people and that in Africa there is a lot of emphasis placed on the functions of the Holy

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69.Ibid., 121.

70.Ibid., 130.

71.Ibid., 33.



Spirit rather than who the Holy Spirit is. We note that the Akan reference to the Holy Spirit is always indicative of the Spirit of God (*Nyame Honhom or Honhom Kronkron*). Africans are very much aware of the spiritual realm and its effects in human relationships.

#### **4.6 OUR CONTRIBUTION TO SHOW WHERE WE STAND WITH NGONG IN HIS CRITIQUE**

First, the approach used by the missionaries who came to Africa to spread the Gospel was their cultural approach with which they were familiar. One would not expect a European to come to the African continent and employ the African cosmology to propagate the Gospel. Like every culture on earth, there are certain elements that can bring about progress and other elements that are not progressive. It is true that we cannot baptize the entire African cosmology, but there are many elements in the African cosmology that could make the Gospel message more relevant to the African people. As Ngong rightly pointed out, even at the beginning of Christianity, there were difficulties in understanding God, who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. God was understood in the post-New Testament Christianity in a binitarian way. At that time the place of the Holy Spirit was hardly stressed. It took the Council of Constantinople in 381 to place the Holy Spirit in the Spirit's rightful place. We profess in the Creed that the Holy Spirit is: "Lord and giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who with the Father and the Son is adored and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets."<sup>72</sup> The Creed was to lead Christians to the understanding that the Holy Spirit is divine and is rooted in the Trinitarian God. Our dissertation sheds much light on the divine nature of the Holy Spirit, and we identify the Holy Spirit as the breath of life that God breathed into the human being to keep humanity alive as we read in Gen 2:7.

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72.Ibid., 131. Also "Pew Card for Mass: Responses and Prayers from the Third Edition of The Roman Missal," (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 2010), 3-4.

Second, it is true that some people in Africa live in fear of evil spirits. Those, who use the African cosmology to propose the power of God, have the responsibility of proposing means by which God will completely take away that fear and the responsibility of proclaiming the freedom that comes from God. It is unfortunate that some religious leaders in Africa take advantage of the fears of the people and continue to lead them by building on these fears. The approach of these misguided religious leaders is not a sufficient reason to condemn the entire African approach to theology.

Third, Ngong rightly points out that we cannot understand the Holy Spirit if we do not understand the person of the Holy Spirit. We argue that as a person in the blessed Trinity, the Spirit vivifies humanity and aids the divine-human relationship, which enables human beings to communicate with God, neighbor, and the universe. We do not see the Holy Spirit solely as the power that overcomes malevolent spirits, but the power that gives life and all that Ngong suggests, i.e., as the enlightener, the one who grants humanity the ability to question accepted norms and ideas in our societies.<sup>73</sup>

Our contribution to our knowledge of Christian anthropology from the Akan perspective can be summarized in three facts:

First, there is a spark of God in every human being. God who is Spirit lives in every human being. Through the *okra*, whose presence is signified by the *honhom* in every human being, God's spiritual presence in human beings becomes clearer through the use of Akan anthropology.

Second, created in the image of God means that we human beings share an aspect of God's nature, which shows how human beings are both physical and spiritual beings. Our spiritual nature helps us to communicate with God and other human beings. The Holy Spirit aids

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 37.

the communication between God and humans. The mediation of the Holy Spirit helps us to realize that God is with, and in every human being.

Third, we identify the Holy Spirit as divine and life-giver through the Akan anthropology, which has not been used in any discussion of Christian anthropology before. Through the Akan anthropology we observe that the Holy Spirit works with the human spirit to give life and sustain human life.

Ngong contributes immensely in our discourse on the Holy Spirit and the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of humanity. The Akan understanding of the spark of God in every human being, and the belief that God is with us and God is in us demonstrate that the Holy Spirit mediates between God and humanity.

Let us now discuss some Akan theologians who have also written about ancestor-Christology to disclose the meditational role of the Holy Spirit to show that God is with, and in, every human being. They show that the relationship between the living and the ancestors take place in the spiritual realm. These Akan theologians who have written about the ancestor-Christology are: Joseph Boakye Danquah, Kwame Bediako, John Pobee, and Abraham Akrong. Due to the strong ancestral acknowledgement among the Akan indigenous religion, these four Akan Christian writers have chosen to apply the role of ancestors in the lives of the living to define African Christology. They demonstrate the role of Christ and the Holy Spirit in African communities.

We will apply the four models of Christologies in African theology as Chalres Nyamiti identifies them in our discussion of the Ghanaian theologians who have written about the ancestor-Christology. We will start with Joseph Boakye Danquah.

#### 4.7 JOSEPH BOAKYE DANQUAH

Joseph Boakye Danquah was a leading Ghanaian to hypothesize about the idea of God (*Nyame*) as *Nana* or Ancestor. He fits into the first model of Nyamiti, which is, the African Traditional (non-Christian) Christology. He researched in the indigenous religion to disclose the African theologies that were in existence long before the advent of Christianity on the African continent. He explained that the title *nana* means grandfather or grandmother. The title *nana* was later applied to an elected chief or queen who, because of his or her integrity, honesty, and impartiality in their dispensation of justice, become deified at their death.<sup>74</sup> In Danquah's *Akan Doctrine of God*, he demonstrated that the Akan religious doctrine knows only one God. He presented a discussion of the Akan worldview to demonstrate that the Akan religious doctrine knows only one God (*Nyame*). He also shows that the Akan people perceived a relationship with God before the European missionaries came to Ghana to preach about God. He observed that the divine was already known as *Nyankopon Kwame*,<sup>75</sup> and noted that the Akan believed in a God they considered the Great Ancestor. God (*Nyame*), according to him, has always existed and will always exist. He shows that the Akan leaders and elders who model themselves on God become ancestors.<sup>76</sup> He sets the tone for other Ghanaian theologians to reflect on the role of ancestors and the role of Jesus in communities through the Holy Spirit.

In his discourse of the human person, J. B. Danquah presents the human beings in terms of their relationship with God and the spiritual world. He presents pneumatology-anthropology in the sense that he discloses the Akan understanding that God and the ancestors play a vital role

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74. J.B. Danquah, *Akan Doctrine of God*, (London: Lutterworth, 1944), 30-42. Also Clifton R. Clarke, *African Christologies*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 38.

75. J. B. Danquah, *Akan Doctrine of God*, 130-3.

76. *Ibid.*,30-42.

in human life and activities. He shows that there is a constant communication between the living and the dead and that this communication is a spiritual one. Ancestors, who are spirit, become the medium through whom God communicates with the living. Based on Danquah's view of the role of the ancestors, we can state that ancestor-Christology discloses the vital role of Christ through whom humanity has access to God.

We can identify a difference in Nyamiti's application of the category of ancestor to God and that of J.B. Danquah. According to Nyamiti, God is the Parent-Ancestor, while Danquah maintains that God is the Great Ancestor and the original progenitor of the human species. Nyamiti identifies God as the source of all things, who enters into a personal relationship with human beings. He asserts that what is important is that Parent-Ancestors may either be a father or a mother and that God shows qualities of both fatherhood and motherhood.<sup>77</sup> By virtue of the spark of God in the human being, we note that God can be addressed as the progenitor of the human species as Danquah observed about God. Whether we refer to God as Great Ancestor or Parent Ancestor, we contend that human beings come from God and will return to God. God created human beings who later become ancestors. Therefore, God is the God of both the living and the dead.

Since J. B. Danquah presents human beings in terms of their relationship with God and the spirit world, we are convinced that he provides a model that helps in our discourse of the Holy Spirit as source of life and as an aid in understanding human relationship with God and the universe. We now turn to Kwame Bediako and his views regarding ancestor-Christology and the relationship among Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and Christians.

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77. Fulljames, *God and Creation in Intercultural God*, 115, cited in *The Doctrine of God*, ed. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 255-6.

#### 4.7.1 KWAME BEDIAKO

Kwame Bediako becomes relevant to our discussion because he has demonstrated that the center of Christianity has shifted to allow Africans to play a significant role in Christian faith. His anthropology discloses God's original revelation and covenant with humanity. From the insight of his anthropology, he underscores that African indigenous religions have biblical bases for discovering more about God within the framework of God as creator and sustainer that is deeply rooted in the African heritage.<sup>78</sup> Bediako discusses that Jesus infuses his Spirit into human beings to dwell, protect, reveal truth, and sanctify human beings.<sup>79</sup> His relevance to our discussion rests on how he considers the African indigenous experience as providing a unified and organic view of truth, thus restoring the ancient unity of theology and spirituality.<sup>80</sup> He affirms that there is an obvious Christological element to any consideration of the place of ancestors in the spiritual world of Christian consciousness. He observes that ancestor-Christology shows that by virtue of Jesus' incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, he becomes a Supreme Ancestor. He maintains that from the standpoint of the Gospel, the saving activity of God towards human beings is focused on Christ, through the mediation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>81</sup> Bediako falls into the three models of Nyamiti. The first model being that the African indigenous religion prepared the way before the arrival of Christianity. In the second model he shows a Christology that presents a simple understanding and presentation of the teachings of Christ so as to adapt them to the needs and ways of thinking of Africans. He also fits the third model because he makes use of African cultural themes in his theology. Bediako

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78. Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 25.

79. Ibid. 27.

80. Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 104-5.

81. Ibid., 217.

observes that, within Akan tradition, the only basis for the meeting of religious ideas and religious forces is in the realm of the spirit.<sup>82</sup>

Bediako notes that the African indigenous religion has been a preparation for the Gospel in Africa and forms a “major religious substratum for the idiom and existential experience of Christianity in African life.”<sup>83</sup> He describes African theology or Christianity as being in Africa to stay in a foreseeable future. He discusses African theologians taking the challenge to make Jesus meaningful to the African context by treating the doctrine of Christ under the figure of ancestor.<sup>84</sup> He examines how to understand Jesus Christ authentically in the African world, and he emphasizes that in order for Africans to accept Jesus as their Savior, they have to make Jesus at home in the African spiritual universe and in terms of African religious needs and longings. He adds, “So an understanding of Christ in relation to spirit-power in the African context is not necessarily less accurate than any other perception of Jesus.”<sup>85</sup>

Bediako maintains that the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ must be done in such a way as to bring continuity to Africa’s pre-Christian past, so as to answer the religious quest of Africans and fulfill their aspirations. He applies the power of the Christ as Savior to the Akan worldview and observes that Christ should be proclaimed as the Supreme Ancestor in this context. According to him, it is only when we give this title to Jesus by developing an Ancestor-Christology can Christ be the answer to the needs, aspirations, and fears of African people, which compelled Africans to consult their clan-ancestors in their indigenous practices.<sup>86</sup>

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82.Ibid., 81. We will turn to this view later to explain the issue of possession in African Christianity.

83. Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 82-3.

84.Ibid., 83.

85. Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 22.

86.Ibid., 16-28.

According to Bediako, the Akan understanding of the spirit-world provides greater meaning to the paschal mystery. He maintains that the resurrection and ascension of Jesus disclose that Jesus becomes the only one who has been to the ancestors and returned to us on earth before he ascended. Power and resources for living are believed to come from that realm (the world of the ancestors), as well as misfortunes which could threaten and destroy human existence. Therefore, if Jesus had gone to the realm of the ancestors, he has gone there as Lord over them just as he is Lord over the living. Jesus is Lord over the “living-dead,” a title that is given to ancestors. Jesus, being Lord, summons all the power and authorities as well as cancelling all the terrorizing influence the spirit world might assume to have over the living.<sup>87</sup>

The assurance that Jesus is Lord over the living and the spirit realm means that Jesus has sent his own Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to dwell within us to protect, sanctify, and reveal all truth to us. He describes the relationship between Jesus and the Holy Spirit as providing believers an insight into the realm of spirits. He writes: “Our Lord therefore, entering the region of spirits, sends the Holy Spirit to his followers to give them understanding of the realities in the realm of spirits.”<sup>88</sup> We connect this view of Bediako to the Akan understanding of *okra*, *honhom*, *sumsum* and other constituent elements. Since these spiritual elements come from God, they give humanity the understanding of the realities in the realm of spirits.<sup>89</sup>

We use Kirsteen Kim to shed further light on Bediako’s statement that Jesus sends his Spirit (Holy Spirit) to his followers and that the Holy Spirit will lead believers to “understand the realities in the realm of the spirits.” Kim explains what the bible and Christian tradition teach us

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87.Ibid., 27.

88. Ibid.

88. The spiritual connection human beings have with God or the realm of the spirit is discussed in page 76.



about the Spirit and the other spirits. She notes that biblically, the terms “Holy Spirit” and “Spirit of God” are ways of describing the presence of God and God’s activities in the world. She describes the presence of God as being influenced by the cultural use of “spirit” in biblical times to reference life, breath, and wind. Further, the meaning of these terms was also understood against the backdrop of awareness of a spirit-world that we read about in many biblical stories. Kim observes that some Christians in some parts of the world understand the Holy Spirit in light of their distinctive cultural understanding of “spirits.”<sup>90</sup> The Akan world is no exception to the cultural understanding of the spirit realm that Kim describes. Akan theologians explain that the Holy Spirit conquers all evil spirits and leads human beings to appreciate the world of spirits.

Bediako observes that the Christologies that have emerged in African theology are predominantly “pneumatic” by nature and represent Christ as a living power in the spiritual world. He notes: “African Christological titles like ‘Elder Brother’ (H. Sawyer), ‘Ancestor’, ‘Great Ancestor’ (J. S. Pobee, C. Nyamiti, K. Bediako), are neither ‘from below’, nor strictly ‘from above’; rather they are indicative of the way the primal imagination grasps the reality of Christ in terms of life in which all life is essentially conceived – as spiritual.”<sup>91</sup> The pneumatic Christologies that Bediako argues about are the key to our discourse concerning Christian anthropology from the Akan perspective. The pneumatic Christologies connect the human person through the *okra*, *honhom*, *sunsum*, *ntoro*, *mogya* and *sasa*; which also connect ancestors, Christ-ancestor, mediator, and God as life-giver. We note the interconnecting power of the Spirit that highlights the contribution of our thesis.

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90. Kirsteen Kim, *The Holy Spirit*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2007), 2.

91. Philip Curtin, *The Image of Africa- British Ideas and Actions, 1780-1850*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), cited in *Christianity in Africa*, ed. Kwame Bediako, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 176.

Kwame Bediako portrays the role of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. He does not describe the role of the Holy Spirit as life-giver as such, but shows how the Holy Spirit empowers and protects Christians. Bediako does not state categorically that the Holy Spirit plays a role in giving life to human beings. He describes the divine destiny of humanity as “an abiding divine-human relationship.”<sup>92</sup> Bediako describes Jesus Christ as the mediator between God and humans through his incarnation. He describes Jesus as the true image of God in whose image humanity shares.<sup>93</sup>

We agree with Bediako that our physical world and spiritual world merge as we human beings are constantly participating in divine-human relationship, and that the Holy Spirit, as we have maintained, aids this relationship.<sup>94</sup> We approve Bediako’s view that Christ opens the way to communities to participate in the transcendence, and that our communities are constituted in Christ and actualized through the Holy Spirit.<sup>95</sup> Bediako provides a model that supports our view of the Spirit as source of life and relationships. He also helps us in advancing our argument about how the Akan culture sheds light on the Christian faith.<sup>96</sup> We now turn to John Pobee to examine his views on ancestor-Christology and human relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

#### **4.7.2 JOHN POBEE**

John Pobee carries on a dialogue between Christianity and the Akan culture. He advocates a process of adaptation to assimilate the best of African and Christian religions to ensure that both survive. His anthropological theory is driven by and connected to the human

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92. Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2004), 93.

93. Ibid., 24.

94. Ibid., 101.

95. Ibid., 103.

96. We shall return to Kwame Bediako to explore further the idea of possession by the spirit.

and divine spirit. He displays an interconnection between the human spirit and divine spirit in the realization of the human being as an image of God, even within the idiom of ancestral Christology. His Christology is a Spirit Christology. According to him, human beings are spiritual beings who share in the nature of Jesus. He maintains that God and ancestors are the twin pillars of the Akan religion.<sup>97</sup> John Pobee stressed the importance of the ancestors in the Akan religious worldview as a fundamental focus of piety. Pobee also uses the second and third models of Nyamiti's Christologies to underline how the Akan culture can help Akan people better understand and relate to God through Christ in the spirit. Pobee believes that, while the gods<sup>98</sup> may be treated with contempt among the Akan people if they fail to perform their duties of providing for the people, the ancestors just like the Supreme Being (God), are always revered and worshipped.<sup>99</sup> Pobee maintains that an ancestor is essentially clan or lineage ancestor. Therefore, ancestors have to do with the community or society in which their progeny relate to one another. He poses this question: "Why should an Akan relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe and nation?"<sup>100</sup> In answer, he calls for an ancestor-Christology. Neither Pobee nor any of the other Akan theologians see Jesus Christ as a stranger. The incarnation is for all people and all cultures. Kwame Bediako corrects the wrong impression

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97. John Pobee, *Towards an African Theology*, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), 48, 51.

98. The gods are minor deities. They do not need formal proof. They range from tribal gods to little private gods. They fall under four main categories:

1. The gods who are generally worshipped by one tribe. These gods are few in number. An example is Tano River for the Ashanti.
2. The gods that are worshipped by people in a certain town or localities. They are numerous. Every traditional locality has several of them.
3. Those worshipped by the smaller sections of the community such as by special lineages or village companies. Every lineage or family has its own deity of this class.
4. Those worshipped each day by an individual or his/her household. Practically, since the individual is a member of an ethnic group, a community, a lineage and a family, is subject to gods from all the groups.

Peter K. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, (Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 14.

99. *Ibid.*, 48.

100. *Ibid.*, 23

some people may have by writing, “Yet by insisting on the primacy of Jesus’s universality, we do not reduce his incarnation and its particularity to a mere accident of history. We hold on to his incarnation as a Jew because by faith in him, we too share in the divine promise given to the patriarchs and through the history of ancient Israel (Ephesians 2:11-22).”<sup>101</sup>

Pobee notes that the New Testament states its Christology in terms of the activities of Jesus. He identifies a link between this approach and that of the Akan people. He uncovers several christologies in the New Testament, and observes that they all agree on one essential fact about Jesus – that Jesus is truly human and truly God. He writes: “The humanity and divinity of Jesus are the two non-negotiables of any authentic Christology... The divinity of Jesus is to some extent mirrored through his humanity. In Jesus the disciples saw what man is meant to be; i.e. Jesus is the *imago dei*.”<sup>102</sup>To show that Jesus was truly human and truly divine, Pobee, using the Akan constituent elements in the human being, describes the incarnation as Jesus being born with a “*heavy kra*.” He explains this by noting that the *kra* of a person is received directly from God and signifies the presence of the divine in the human being.<sup>103</sup>Pobee describes Jesus as having a heavy *kra* because Jesus is the son for God; it is the same way of thinking that prompts Bénézet Bujo to describe Jesus as ancestor *par excellence*.

Pobee views Jesus as the Greatest Ancestor, with an Akan name *Nana*. He explains that *Nana* is a title used of the illustrious ancestor as well as of the Supreme Being, called *Nana Nyame* (God). That may indicate that the ancestors live in the court of God and exercise some authority under God. The incarnation means that Jesus had *okra* in him; otherwise he would not

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101. Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa*, 24.

102. John Pobee, *Towards and African Theology*, 82, 85.

103. *Ibid.*, 93. Also Veli-Matti Käekäinen, *The Doctrine of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 253.

have been truly human.<sup>104</sup> Jesus, who is Nana, is superior to the other ancestors by virtue of being closest to God and being God with authority over human beings and all spiritual beings.

Pobee observes that the concept of community provides a ground for explaining the meaning of God and the incarnation in the Akan framework. He describes the Akan understanding of the constituent elements in the human being. He identifies two elements; one has a direct relation to human family lineage and the other has a direct link with God. The elements that are directly related to the family lineages are *mogya* (life-blood) from the mother, and *sunsum* (spirit or character) from the father. These are the elements that have a direct link to family ties. The other constituent element in the human being is the *kra* (soul, destiny), which is received from God.<sup>105</sup>

John Pobee affirms what we say about the human being as being made up of physical and spiritual elements. The spark of God, which helps human beings enjoy the divine element, is the *okra-honhom*. He describes the Akan explanation of the moment of death, which is the *okra*(soul) and *honhom* (spirit) leaving the body when he writes: “Jesus, being a man, had a spirit, without which he was dead. And so it was that ‘Jesus cried...with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit’ (Matt 27:50). And he was dead. By having a spirit, he was a living human being, and without it he was dead.”<sup>106</sup> Akan understanding of Jesus shows that by dying, Jesus became a Great Ancestor who provides and protects the living.

The Akan believe that ancestors play a role in healing the sick. Jesus, by wielding the power of God through healing, shows that he has the power of God in him through being

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104. See explanation to for note 17 in John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 94.

105. John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 83-88. Also Veli-Matti Käekäinen, *The Doctrine of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 253.

106. John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, 83-4.

“ensouled with God.”<sup>107</sup> The concept of healing is part of African spirituality and the doctrine of God.<sup>108</sup> While humans are on earth, God works to keep humanity well and alive through the Holy Spirit. By relating that Jesus being a chief is the soul of the nation or nations, Pobee shows that Jesus symbolizes a people’s identity, unity, and continuity.<sup>109</sup> Pobee demonstrates Jesus, through the Spirit, becomes the source of life and relationships. Let us now turn to analyze the views of Abraham Akrong.

### 4.7.3 ABRAHAM AKRONG

Abraham Akrong provides pneumatic relevance to our discourse by describing the Akan anthropology as encompassing both physical and spiritual elements. He maintains that Jesus, being truly human, enjoyed physical and spiritual elements. Through Ancestor-Christology he discloses the pneumatic importance of Akan life and the Akan relationship with God and their ancestors. He falls under the second and third models of Nyamiti. Like Bediako and Pobee, he notes that there are elements of the Akan culture in the AICs. Building his argument on the idea of a family, he argues from the viewpoint of the universal family of God and maintains that God is the Ancestor of the entire human race. He sees Jesus as the Elder Brother of all people. He observes:

Our ancestors can now be viewed from the position of Jesus Christ, the Ideal Ancestor of the human race. The relationship between the Ancestor and the living is founded on the family line that binds the ancestors and the living into children-parent relationship. Jesus, the Ideal Ancestor of the human race, has broadened

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107. Ibid., 92

108. Veli-Matti Käekäinen, *The Doctrine of God*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2004), 253.

109. The chief is a symbol of the living and the dead, he stand for continuity. John Pobee, *Toward an African, Theology*, 96.

the scope of the family to include all human beings in order to remind us of the reality of God's family that embraces all human beings.<sup>110</sup>

The pre-eminence of Jesus compels us to give him the revered titles we give to the chiefs or royalty and ancestors in our human communities. Jesus is the redeemer who rescued humanity from the bondage of evil and death. He is the warrior, God-man, who became the visible presence of God. The appellations that are given to Jesus are found in the songs and worship of the AICs.<sup>111</sup>

John Pobee and Abraham Akrong are not specific about the role of the Holy Spirit in humans; however, it is implied in their Christology, which provides the path for human beings to commune with God and the ancestors through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Since ancestors are spirits, humanity's communications with them are spiritual. This helps in understanding the spiritual communication that Christians have with Jesus and the Holy Spirit. Their positions in the discourse about ancestors and their role in communities capture the spiritual relationship that exists between God and human beings. They help to advance our view that there is constant communication between God and human beings, and that this communication is made possible spiritually through the Holy Spirit and Jesus Christ, thus disclosing the view of "God is with us and God is in us."

It is because of the closeness of West Africans to their ancestors that ancestor-Christology makes more sense to many West African Christians. Ancestor-Christology identifies Christ as close to them and more involved in their lives through the spirit.

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110. Abraham Akrong, "Christology from an African Perspective," ed. John Pobee, *Exploring African Christology*, 119-36. *Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentum* 79 (Frankfurt: Lang, 1992), cited in Clifton R. Clarke, *African Christology*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 41.

111. Clifton R. Clarke, *African Christology*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 41.

A major Ghanaian who has significantly demonstrated the value of culture in evangelization is Peter Kwasi Sarpong. We will now examine his contributions to the study of the role of ancestors and the spiritual relationship among the living, the ancestors, and Jesus.

#### **4.7.4 PETER KWASI SARPONG**

Peter Sarpong is a promoter of inculturation in evangelization. He writes that there are 3 points of reference in the practice of evangelization namely, the situation, the agent, and the message. Sarpong maintains that inculturation takes its inspiration from the incarnation of Jesus, which would be the situation. He cites Jesus as the one (the agent) who knew the best way to evangelize. Jesus became a human being to lead us into the kingdom of God. He cites Philippians 2 to support his claim. Although Jesus could have saved us without becoming human, he became human so that he could use the principles of evangelization to save humanity.<sup>112</sup>

According to Sarpong, the message of Jesus was meant for all cultures, but every culture has to make the message its own.<sup>113</sup> He explains the Christian faith in Akan culture and highlights what Akan people have in common with other Africans. His aim is to make the gospel message more meaningful to Akan people (Ghanaians). He has written about ancestors and shown how relevant they are in the lives of people. He does not talk about Jesus as an ancestor, but describes ancestors as the Akan understand them and their role in the lives of the living.<sup>114</sup> Following the insights of Sarpong, we can infer that it is appropriate to talk about Jesus using the

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112. Peter K. Sarpong, *Peoples Differ: An Approach to Inculturation in Evangelization* (Legon, Accra-Ghana: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2002), 17, 22.

113. *Ibid.*, 22

114. Peter K. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture* (Accra-Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 31-44; Peter K. Sarpong, "Health and Medicine in African Traditional Religion: The Ashanti Model," *Bulletin of the Pontificium Consilium Pro Dialogo Inter Religiones* XXVIII, no. 3 (1993), 95/82.



concept of ancestorship to describe the role of Jesus as a *Proto-Ancestor*. Peter Sarpong's works enrich our discourse as they have charted a path for us in using the Akan culture to shed light on creation in the image of God.

The above-discussed writers have indicated the value of applying the African cultural context to shed light on the Christian faith and how the Christian faith can be lived and practiced.

At this juncture, let us take a look at how the Spirit is manifested in human communities. To help us accomplish this, we shall investigate the manifestation of the Spirit as a healer in the New Testament and presently in AICs and main line churches in Ghana.

The African Initiated Churches (AICs) help us to understand the Holy Spirit and the role of the Holy Spirit in human lives and communities. The AICs do not reinvent the Holy Spirit but reinterpret the Holy Spirit in our lives. Christian Baëta, an African theologian, is right in pointing out about the AICs that in using their worldview they shed light on the understanding of Christianity.<sup>115</sup> The AICs preserve their understanding of the universe, the forces in the universe, and the modes of the forces in the universe in their Christianity. They give meaning to the Christian message and Christian doctrine in their daily lives. The description C. G. Baëta gives of the AICs as a way of defining them, sums up the activities of all AICs. He notes:

...in their worship, the groups concerned engage in various activities which (by their own assertion) are either meant to invoke the Holy Spirit of God, or are to be interpreted as signs of his descent upon the worshippers... These activities and 'signs' include rhythmic swaying of the body, usually with stamping, to repetitious music (both vocal and instrumental, particularly percussion), hand-clapping, ejaculations, poignant cries and prayers, dancing, leaping, and various

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115. Christian G. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana*, (London: S.C.M Press, 1962), 135.

motor reactions expressive of intense religious emotion; prophesying, ‘speaking with tongues’, falling into trances, relating dreams and visions, and ‘witnessing’, i.e. recounting publicly one’s own experience of miraculous redemption.<sup>116</sup>

With this definition, Baëta provides a way of identifying the AICs. Their worship includes what Baëta has described above. This way of worship provides free movement of the Spirit among communities and invites all to be part of their worship. The nature of the AICs helps in understanding the strict sense of African Christian theology as defined by Charles Nyamiti. According to Nyamiti, in a narrow sense, “African Christian theology is the systematic and scientific presentation or elaboration of the Christian faith according to the needs and mentality of the African peoples.”<sup>117</sup> He further elaborates that before Christianity came to the African continent, Jesus Christ was already at work among the African people by revealing himself to them and “drawing them to the Father through his Spirit in ways known only to himself.”<sup>118</sup> Here we can infer that there were already traces of Christian teachings in African religion and cultures, which is why we want to use the Akan culture to throw light on the Christian faith. Let us consider the African Initiated Churches.

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116. C. G. Baëta, *Prophetism in Ghana*, (London: SCM Press Ltd. 1964), 1.

117. Charles Nyamiti, “Contemporary African Christologies Assessment and Practical Suggestions,” in *Paths of African Theology*, ed. Rosino Gibellini, (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1994), 63.

118. *Ibid.* 66.

## 4.8 THE AFRICAN INITIATED CHURCHES<sup>119</sup> AS ILLUSTRATION OF AKAN CLARIFICATION OF CHRISTIAN ANTHROPOLOGY

### 4.8.1 THE AICS AS A THEOLOGICAL MOVEMENT

The AICs are churches that are founded by Africans for Africans in special African situations. Their membership is all-African with an all-African leadership. Africans in relation to Christian missionary societies founded some of the churches.<sup>120</sup> In Ghana, the AICs are known as Spiritual Churches or *Sunsum Sore*. Their name portrays their activities. *Sunsum* means Spirit and *Sore* is the Akan word for prayer or a church. The AICs provide a pragmatic way of disclosing the Akan understanding of the spark of God in humanity and the fact that God is with, and in every human being. The AICs illustrate the connection between human beings and the Holy Spirit. Kofi Appiah-Kubi contends that spiritual hunger is the cause of the emergence of the AICs. The hungers that are fulfilled in these AICs are: healing, divining, prophesying, and visioning. Popular thinking shows how the healing rituals of the AICs do not introduce a new kind of Holy Spirit, but the same Spirit that dwells within human communities and leads humanity to God.

Among the Akan, there is a conscious effort to revive some aspects of the Akan culture to provide a dignified cultural identity.<sup>121</sup> Thus the AICs are part of the Pentecostal churches, which place more emphasis on the activities of the Holy Spirit in communities. Pentecostalism is

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119. These Churches are referred to by any one of the following names: African Initiated Churches, African Independent Churches, African Instituted Churches, and African Indigenous Churches. Henceforth we will refer to the Churches by the acronym AICS.

120. Kofi Appiah-Kubi, *Man Cures, God Heals*, (New Jersey: Allanheld, Osmun Publishers, 1981), 85.

121. *Ibid.*, 86.

the transformative current that blew through the orthodox or mainstream churches<sup>122</sup> to draw people into a personal relationship with the Holy Spirit. It brings about a pneumatic experience of an individual believer with emphasis on salvation through Jesus Christ. The phenomena of pneumatic experiences in these churches emphasize prophecies, healing, speaking in tongues, and any revelatory relationship with the Holy Spirit, which is akin to the experience of the early Christians as documented in the Acts of the Apostles. God's presence is experienced through the Holy Spirit in human communities. The Holy Spirit mediates and unites.

The AICs share some characteristics with African indigenous religions. There is a strong belief in the Holy Spirit in the AICs, while the African indigenous religions also believe in a universe full of spirits, both good and bad. The prophet healers in the AICs are successful in their activities because they are believed to draw their powers from God. These powers are manifested in the Holy Spirit. Appiah-Kubi illustrates how the Holy Spirit affects healing through the prophets and the church members who are healed; he writes that their belief is not only "God is with us" but even more, "God is in us."<sup>123</sup> God's presence in humanity is spiritual; therefore, through the Holy Spirit, humanity experiences that God is with us and God is in us. We will examine some characteristics of the AICs as a theological movement and how they illustrate our theological anthropology to show that God is with, and in, every human being.

#### **4.8.1.1 SOME CHARACTERISTICS OF THE AICS**

A major characteristic of the AIC theologies is the consciousness of the sinfulness of human life and the need for an urgent conversion and baptism to renew human life through the Holy Spirit. The new commandments of the churches are justified by attributing them to the

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122. By the main line churches in this work we mean the Roman Catholic Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church, the Methodist Church, and the Lutheran Church etc.

123. Kofi Appiah-Kubi, *Man Cures, God Heals*, (New Jersey: Allanheld, Osmun Publishers, 1981), 83.

inspiration of the Holy Spirit.<sup>124</sup> The AICs emphasize the need for a better relationship between human beings and between human beings and God. These relationships are made possible through the Holy Spirit, who is present in human communities. The message of the AICs is about salvation. As among all Pentecostals, when members are asked what has changed in their lives since joining the church, most of them give the answer that they have come to “know God better.” Knowing God better means that members of the church confess their sins, accept Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior, and dedicate their lives to God by inviting Jesus into their lives, which calls for a new intimacy with God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu describes the changes that a member experiences when he/she joins the church as a non-negotiable transition that involves conscious commitment known as “being born again.” He writes: “This new intimacy therefore results from what the Charismatic message presents as a non-negotiable critical transition involving conscious commitment that transforms all loyalties. The transition made from ‘the world’ to Christ is what is often referred to in testimonies as being born again.”<sup>125</sup>

Let us now observe the issue of possession, which enables a person to exhibit deeds of the Holy Spirit.

#### **4.8.1.2 SPIRIT POSSESSION**

Within Akan tradition, the basis for the meeting of religious ideas and religious influences is in the realm of the spirit.<sup>126</sup> The same can be said about the AICs. Spirit possession is one major phenomenon in the African indigenous religious experience that has been translated

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124. V.M Kärkkäinen, “Comparison Between Traditional and Contemporary Pneumatologies,” in *Global Dictionary Of Theology*, eds. William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, (Downs Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press Academic, 2008), 667.

125. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics*, (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 137.

126. Footnote 52.

into African Christianity. We now discuss the anthropological porousness, which allows for a human being to be opened to be possessed or touched by either God's Spirit or an evil spirit in a spirit filled universe. In an environment where the universe is filled with spirits, the AICs connect with the Akan (African) tradition to provide access to spiritual healing in order to make people whole again by preventing evil spirits from attacking them.

In the African indigenous religion, scholars describe the phenomenon of spirit possession in terminologies such as spiritualism, spiritism, and spirit medium.<sup>127</sup> According to Appiah-Kubi, Spiritualism is the most common term used by many writers, and they use it in two senses. He writes: "first, to describe a metaphysical theory that asserts the reality of a nonmaterial, spiritual world – a view common to many religions; second, to identify a system of beliefs and practices having the objective of communicating with the supposed spirits of those who have died."<sup>128</sup> With this definition we get to understand why there is no dichotomy between the spiritual and physical in the African religious imagination. There is a constant communication between the physical and spiritual realms.

In the African indigenous spiritual experience, we argue that a preparation is made for articulating the Christian theological discourse. This view helped many African theologians to explain clearly the Christian message to their people. Kwame Bediako describes two personalities who relied on their African indigenous imagination to make an impact on evangelization in Africa. He declares that Prophet Harris Wade<sup>129</sup> and former Cardinal

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127. Koffi Appiah-Kubi, *Man Cures, God Heals*, (New Jersey: Allanheld, Osmund Publishers, 1981), 18.

128. *Ibid.*, 18.

129. William Wade Harris (1865-1929) was a Liberian itinerant prophet. He was the first independent African Christian prophet. See Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 91.

Milingo<sup>130</sup> of Lusaka, Zambia, used their primal imagination to propagate the Christian gospel. Bediako describes former Cardinal Milingo as one who considers the spiritual universe of the African primal world as offering valid perspectives for articulating Christian theological commitments.<sup>131</sup>

Bediako discusses the human participation in common life through the resources and powers of a community that V. Mulago calls “Vital participation.” “Vital participation” becomes the fundamental category for understanding communal life.<sup>132</sup> The idea of “Vital Participation” provides an explanation for sharing in the image of God, disclosing that God is with, and in every human being as well as the view that human beings have the spark of God in them. It is through the vital participation that we become relational by relating to God, our neighbor, and the environment. “The divine presence in the community of believers constitutes it into a ‘transcendent’ community in which the human components experience and share in divine life and nature.”<sup>133</sup>

Prophet Harris believed he was grafted into the holy root of the life and faith of Israel through vital participation. He participated in the life of the living and the dead in Israel and their God through participation. There is a pattern of African participation in the truth that Harris and many leaders in the AICs exhibit. Life in a community is a participation in something bigger than an individual. Since human beings share in divine life, life on earth is not just physical but a

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130. Emmanuel Cardinal Milingo is a former Roman Catholic archbishop from Zambia (1930- ). He has been laicized. While he was an archbishop in Lusaka, Zambia, he was practicing exorcism and faith healing that became unapproved by the church authorities.

131. Koffi Appiah-Kubi, *Man Cures, God Heals*, 93.

132. John Mbiti, “Christianity and Traditional religions in Africa,” *International Review of Mission* 59, no. 236 (October 1970): 438. Cited in Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 103.

133. Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 103.

combination of what is physical and spiritual. The AIC prophets make use of the combination of their physical and spiritual experiences. They are enabled by the vision they experience frequently to enter into the problems of individuals to predict by divining or warning them about their lives as well as providing healing for them. Leading prophetic figures in the AICs embody features associated with the Hebrew prophets like Elijah, and Elisha.<sup>134</sup> As a result of possession in the AICs, the prophets sometimes claim to be possessed by Moses, Amos, Elijah, and Jeremiah. These Hebrew Scriptural figures become involved in the lives of leaders in the AICs. Their spirits enter the prophets to enable them guide the people in their churches.

In most African indigenous religions, particularly among the Akan, there is a multiplicity of divinities and ancestors that are found together in their religious imaginations. Whereas divinities are inherited and acquired and can be dropped should they prove to be ineffective, ancestors belong to a person's lineage and are irreplaceable.<sup>135</sup> Bediako maintains that in Africa ancestors present a more enduring problem than divinities theologically. This is because, through the impact of Christianity, divinities eventually fade away. The fading away of divinities in Africa happens as a result of demonization of these divinities in the Christian religious consciousness. In the AICs they have successfully reinstated a new and a Christian or biblical multiplicity by incorporating angels such as Gabriel and Michael, the patriarch, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, as well as the prophets such as Elijah, Elisha, and finally Jesus.<sup>136</sup> It is the unification and organic view of the knowledge of truth that occurs as we reformulate the Christian faith by drawing on the indigenous imagination of Africa that led Bediako to write:

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134. Kā Mana, "La Nouvelle Évangélisation En Afrique," 122ff, cited in Elochukwu E. Uzukwu, *God, Spirit, And Human Wholeness*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2012), 184.

135. Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 98.

136. Ibid.



...It was no longer a question of what Moses saw, or what Elijah did, or the words and works of Jesus as reported in the Bible. It became a question of involvement as with the ancestors, the living dead – with Moses, with Elijah, with the Archangel Gabriel, and supremely with Jesus Christ.<sup>137</sup>

Because of the involvement of ancestors, whatever we do in a community takes place in the spiritual realm as well. Hence, there is no dichotomy between what is spiritual and what is physical; there is unity in theology and spirituality. God is indeed with, and in every human being.

We acknowledge that by having the spirit of the prophets, Prophet Harris is demonstrating that he possesses a spirit that comes from God, and through that spirit he relates to God or the prophets so that he can teach God's children who are not living as they should. The Holy Spirit mediates to help God's children lead good lives. The communication that existed between Harris and God, or the prophets in Akan worldview, would be considered as a communication between a person and an ancestor, or between a person and God. This communication is made possible through the spirit. We identify a migration of a person being possessed or communing with ancestors and God from West African indigenous religion to the AICs, Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, and the mainline Churches through the understanding of the workings of the Holy Spirit. The act of communing with God and the prophets or ancestors enhance our argument that the human person is created in God's image by having some spiritual constituent elements coming from God that provide human beings access to God. Let us turn to analyze how evil spirits can also possess a human being.

Birgid Meyer, a cultural anthropologist, discloses in her book, which is essentially on the anthropology of evil, the phenomenon of spirit possession. She examines the appropriation of

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137.Ibid., 104.

Christianity in an African context with specific attention to the Ewe of Peki in south-eastern Ghana.<sup>138</sup> She also describes the attempt that was made by German missionaries from Norddeutsche Missionengesellschaft (NMG) to make the beliefs in divinities fade away by demonizing the Ewe indigenous religion and tradition. Though the missionaries observed that there were several divinities in the indigenous religion, they did not want to use any belief of their indigenous religion. Meyer notes that there is no documentation about the discussion of the Holy Spirit by either the missionaries or their native mission workers. The silence was intentional since they wanted their preaching to center on Christian behavior and the observance of Christian rules. The teaching of the missionaries was that the word of God was revealed through the bible, and they did not want to provide any avenue for an unpredictable Holy Spirit.<sup>139</sup> According to Meyer, the missionaries apparently did not fully introduce the Holy Spirit to the Ewe people for fear that the Ewe might confuse the Holy Spirit with the possession cases familiar to them in their primal religion.<sup>140</sup>

Due to the failure of the mission church to articulate a pragmatic response to the problem and reality of evil, which has been an enduring phenomenon in the African religious imagination, a schism broke out that resulted in two major churches from the mission church.<sup>141</sup> The two churches were both of Pentecostal orientation, and they reaffirmed the African imaginative

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138. Birgit Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

139. Ibid. 77.

140. Though the German Pietist missionaries who came to the Ewe land had an approach to the world that divided the world that was driven by a dualist conception of the world. They divided the world in two, between God and the devil. Soberness and good conduct are associated with God, and associated with the devil are pleasure and worldliness. They thought that by not introducing the Holy Spirit alone would help their converts in Ghana not to think about the devil. See Ibid., 35.

141. The missionaries came in 1847, and the two churches that seceded were in 1961 Agbelengor, which later became the Lord's Pentecostal Church; and in 1991 the formation of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) of Ghana.

appropriation of Christianity. Meyer contends that the Ewe people expanded the semantic range of a secular term *gbogbo* to lay a linguistic foundation and to attribute a supersensory meaning to *gbogbo*. By doing this, they paved the way for “the theory of spirit possession” by God’s Holy Spirit and by an evil spirit. The Ewe people were taught that there is a constant battle between God’s Holy Spirit and an evil spirit that requires the practice of exorcism.<sup>142</sup> The Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) explained to their members that the term *gbogbo* was not only used to translate the Holy Spirit and “evil spirit,” who were represented as opposition forces, but also to designate an individual’s personal spirit. According to Meyer, the EPC taught its members: “one’s *gbogbo* is not conceived as a separate, independent entity, but rather an open space in the mind which can either be filled by *Mawu*’s [God’s] spirit or an evil spirit.”<sup>143</sup> This teaching shows that a person can be filled either by God or an evil spirit, which means that if a person wants to remain a good Christian he/she must do something virtuous, or good.

Meyer maintains that the Evangelical Presbyterian Church (EPC) of Ghana provided a religious space within which to respond to the problem and reality of evil in the indigenous context. The EPC taught its members about the power of prayer, which is an intense communication with God, whose Spirit merges with a person who prays anywhere the person finds himself/herself.<sup>144</sup> The EPC teaches that through prayer good Christians attempt to situate themselves permanently on the boundary between the world and the divine realm. When a person is filled with God’s Spirit, that person is supposed to ward off danger, bring about

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142. Birgid Meyer, *Translating the Devil*, 146.

143Ibid., 145.

144. Ibid., 144. Also Emmanuel Lartey, review of *Translating the Devil*, in *African Affairs*99, no. 394 (Jan. 2000), 135.

healing, and exorcise others from evil spirits.<sup>145</sup> Possession helps us to explain the idea of God's Spirit dwelling in the human being. It guides us to understand how humanity can realize that there is a divine-human relationship that makes human beings unique.

Through the Holy Spirit who mediates between God and humanity, we are able to understand God is with us and God is in us. God made the human being unique by infusing the Spirit of God into humanity in order for human beings to commune with God, neighbor, and the environment so that humanity will do well and end up being with God at death. God bestowed upon human beings free will so that humanity can choose to do what is right, but since humanity is not a machine, some human beings sin.

When the AICs heal through the Holy Spirit, they are implying that through the Holy Spirit God restores human beings back to normal life. Because of the role of the Holy Spirit in restoring human beings to the original nature God intended that the AICs and Charismatic movements focus so much attention on healing. They also believe that sin can lead to both physical and spiritual sickness, hence whenever a person is brought to them, they have to heal that person for the person to enjoy the freedom that the Holy Spirit provides. The AICs live their enthusiasm and practical appreciation of the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. We will now examine healing, which is another characteristic that the AICs share with the Akan indigenous religion.

#### **4.8.1.3 HEALING**

Healing is a major phenomenon among Akan people and the AICs. The Akan and AICs concepts of health and diseases differ from what modern technology offers. According to the Akan and AICs, health is an indication of a correct relationship with a person's environment. Appiah-Kubi describes their view of health as being connected to goodness and blessing. He

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<sup>145</sup>. Ibid.

writes: “Health, therefore, is associated with goodness, blessing and beauty – all that is positively valued in life. Illness, on the other hand, shows a falling away from this delicate balance, a condition normally attributed to some antisocial act held as a taboo.”<sup>146</sup> Sickness or disease becomes a relationship issue. Lack of good relationship between a person and God and between a person and the environment can cause sickness. They also believed that a malevolent spirit and a witch could cause sickness.

Another cause of sickness is diagnosed by looking at social behavior and moral conduct. This view of causes of sickness helps to avoid aggressiveness. Sometimes, a person may become sick as a result of an offense of his/her kinsman. This way of viewing offenses shows why a whole community or family becomes concerned with the sickness of a member after everything possible has been done to cure the sick person. The AICs and Akan do not make a distinction between religion and medicine. What causes sickness lies beyond the physical world. It cannot be seen, felt, or touched. Healing therefore is person centered. A person’s sickness may be a result of a broken societal norm, making the society a vital point in diagnosing sickness.<sup>147</sup> Sicknesses are believed to be caused by many factors: God, ancestors, the divinities, destiny, a person’s own behavior, witchcraft, magic, and natural degeneration of the body. The more dangerous diseases and more inexplicable health issues are attributed to the spirits who inflict people with sickness whenever they are offended, or in the case of evil spirits, they inflict people with sickness out of malice.<sup>148</sup>

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146. Kofi Appiah-Kubi, *Man Cures, God Heals*, 14.

147. *Ibid.*, 14-15.

148. Peter K. Sarpong, “Health and Medicine in African Traditional Religion: The Ashanti Model” in *Bulletin of the Pontificum Consilium Pro Dialogo Inter Religiones* XXVIII, no. 3 (1993), 95/83-4.

The AICs believe that things will not go well for people unless there is good relationship between them and God, their fellow human beings, the universe, and the powers that control the universe (God, ancestors or spirits). Broken relationships may result in sickness or even death. They believe that human beings cure others, but it is actually God who provides the healing.<sup>149</sup> Both healers and patients are aware that God gives life and causes death; consequently, God is a healer *par excellence*.

Healing and deliverance from sickness provide the ritual context for salvation among the AICs. Because healing and deliverance aim to restore everyone afflicted with sickness or sin to proper health as God intended, these actions of healing and deliverance become a form of pastoral care for members of the church. Though sin does not make a person less human, healing is emphasized in the AICs because once a person is healed of his/her infirmities that person is restored to wholeness, and the person's relationship between him/her and God is assured.

Some pastors of the Charismatic churches do not believe that demons can deprive a person of his/her new identity as a child of God. These pastors argue: "whether Christians may be possessed or not, the bottom line in healing and deliverance theology is that demons can exercise considerable influence on the lives and endeavors of people until such lives are brought fully under the control of the Spirit."<sup>150</sup> Salvation thus comprises healing and deliverance; human beings are made in the image of God and they enjoy this unique nature by virtue of being humans.

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149. Ibid.

150. Ibid., 168.

Indeed, it is worth stressing that the prophet healers in the AICs are successful in their activities because they draw their powers from God; these powers are manifested in the Holy Spirit. Appiah-Kubi is right in pointing out how the Holy Spirit effects healing through the prophets and the church members when he writes: “Their belief is not only ‘God is with us’ but, even more, ‘God is in us.’”<sup>151</sup> The statements that “God is with us” and “God is in us,” underscore the thesis of this dissertation; human beings are created in the image of God. Therefore, God can be said to be with us, and in us. The issue of “God is with us,” and “God is in us” raises an anthropological question of possession. Let us now examine how a good spirit or an evil spirit can possess a human being.

Though the AICs have more pragmatic appreciation of the Holy Spirit, it is not helpful to approve of everything that goes on in the AICs; neither is it helpful to disapprove of whatever these churches do. The difficulty in ascertaining the truth of the activities of the prophets or prophetesses makes it critical to analyze these churches. An analysis must be done with caution so as not to draw hasty conclusions. Many Christians agree that there are areas in the AICs that the main line churches have to emulate. Areas such as the enthusiasm in church activities, faith healing, worship, and the evangelistic zeal of these churches are worthy of emulation.

The AICs draw our attention to the holistic nature of human beings and the need to seek for a holistic cure when a person is sick. Since human beings are both physical and spiritual, both aspects of human nature must be taken into consideration when a person becomes sick. It is a fact that sicknesses are caused by germs and bacteria. However, when prescribing a treatment for a sick person, the social, cultural, religious, and economic realities of the person must be

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151. Kofi Appiah-Kubi, *Man Cures, God Heals*, (New Jersey: Allanheld, Osmun Publishers, 1981), 83.

considered.<sup>152</sup> Since our interest lies in the fact that since human beings are made in the image of God, the whole nature of the human being must be taken into consideration whenever a person is being examined. The spiritual and the physical must be attended to, hence the need for prayers for the sick so that the Holy Spirit will effect healing in the sick person. The AICs emphasize the role of the Holy Spirit in human communities and guide everyone to pay attention to the presence of the Holy Spirit among human beings.

One basic commonality between the AICs and the Charismatic Churches or Movements is their pneumatic experience. Their claim to the Holy Spirit brings them closer to the Akan culture, which believes in human relationship with the spirit world. The Akan people in their culture believe that there are good spirits and malevolent spirits in the world therefore; everyone has to strive for the protection of the good spirit against the malevolent ones who can cause sickness and misfortunes in life. Among the Akan this belief helps them to live good lives so that they do not invite evil on themselves. The AICs and the Charismatic movements imbibe this belief to guide them in their daily living.

At the moment of baptism, we believe that every believer becomes more aware of the presence of God in him/her and begins to have a change of life. The believer strives to live life as God intends for every human being; the believer becomes more aware of what leads to sin and does everything possible to avoid the occasion of sin. All these responses are able to happen because every human being is made in the image of God. The Spirit of God dwelling in every human being makes human relationships possible.

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152. Ibid., 145.



## 4.9 CONCLUSION

In the Introduction to this dissertation, we declared that the dissertation would explore the Akan understanding of the human person<sup>153</sup> to shed light on creation of human beings in the image of God and to understand and demonstrate the uniqueness of the human being among God's creatures. Earlier in chapter two, we presented the Akan anthropology in detail by describing the Akan theory of conception as the *ntoro* (spirit) of the father cooperating with the *mogya* (blood) of the mother before a human person is formed. In this same process, God sends the *okra* to make the person human; the *okra* comes with the *honhom* (breath) to make the person a living being. At death, the *honhom* and the *okra* will leave the body, and the person will be declared dead and turns to *saman* (ghost).<sup>154</sup> The aspect of spirit that comes from God and returns to God is crucial in the Akan understanding of the human being and to our discussion, since it links every human being to God. The spirit that comes from God humanizes a person and guides a person through life. That is why the *okra* is said to protect and counsel the human being.<sup>155</sup>

We established the framework of this chapter by recalling the biblical foundation of our claims concerning God's creation of human beings in the image of God and God's gift of life to human beings. In Genesis we learned that in the divine image God brought humanity into being. We read: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (1:27). We also read in Genesis that God formed the human being from the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils "the breath of life" and the human being became a living being: "...then the LORD God formed man from the dust of the ground, and

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153. The words "human person," and "human being" will be used interchangeably in this dissertation.

154. Chapter two, pages 60 and 63, where the roles of the *okra* and *honhom* and *sunsum* are highlighted.

155. Chapter two, page 51, where the dual nature of the *okra* is discussed.

breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being” (2:7). The second creation account Genesis 2:7 enables us to demonstrate the activity of the spirit of God, which mediates between God and humanity. The Akan anthropology helps us to more clearly understand what the bible says about the creation of the human person in the image of God and what it entails.

Being born in the image of God entails a number of characteristics proper to human beings. In this fourth chapter we demonstrated the possibility of human relationships through the Holy Spirit, whom we identify as the *HonhomKronkron* that keeps every human being alive. We have shown that the Holy Spirit works through our human spirit to provide life. The spiritual connection between God and the human being provides for communion with God and the environment.<sup>156</sup> It is because of the role of the Holy Spirit in the human communities that relationships are enhanced. Human beings are able to relate to God, fellow human beings, and the universe. Human communion with God places humanity in a unique position among God’s creation.

In this chapter, we highlighted the importance of the Holy Spirit in human life. We demonstrated that the Holy Spirit works through our human spirit to provide life, and we started from the Hebrew bible’s understanding of the Spirit as *ruach*. *Ruach* denotes “blowing” of the wind or “respiration,” and by analogy meaning “breathing.” *Ruach* later became *pneuma* in the New Testament. *Ruach* and *pneuma* become a powerful force that signals the presence of God and provides easy access to God. *Pneuma* is a word that signified both the divine Spirit and human spirit, especially in Pauline anthropology. We noted that James Dunn demonstrated that

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156. The spiritual connection between God and humanity and what makes that communion possible, in the form of the constituent elements in the human being have been treated in this dissertation.

the references to the divine Spirit in Pauline anthropology overshadow those of the human spirit.<sup>157</sup>

We have discussed some African theologians in this chapter to illustrate through their writings that the African context can be a useful hermeneutical tool to shed light on the Christian faith. Their writings about ancestral-Christology portray how Jesus is understood, his role, and the role of the Holy Spirit in helping to restore life, enabling human beings to live well with God, neighbor, and everything else in the universe. We noted that the Holy Spirit is God and dwells in every human being to provide life and enhance human relationship with God, neighbor, and the universe. We investigated the role of the Holy Spirit in the African Initiated Churches (AICs), especially the role of healing and restoring life through the Holy Spirit when human beings fall sick. AICs illustrate the work of the Holy Spirit in human communities and help human beings to live well and commune with God.

We have therefore, achieved what we proposed to do in chapter four in showing the role of the Holy Spirit in human beings and communities and how Akan anthropology can help in the renewal of Christian anthropology.

We now turn to the concluding chapter to conclude our discourse on the image of God in the human person through the *okra* (soul), *honhom* (breath of life), *ntoro* (spirit from the father), *mogya* (blood from the mother), *sumsum* (individualizing principle), *sasa* (the protective principle which brings about vengeance on anyone who offends another person). These constituent elements in the human person enable us to demonstrate what exactly in the human person points to the image of God in distinguishing human beings from the rest of God's creatures and sets the tone for human relationships in the world.

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157. Chapter three, page 151.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### UNDERSTANDING THE HUMAN PERSON AS CREATED IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

*Gloria hominis est Deus – St Irenaeus*

#### 5.0 INTRODUCTION

Our task thus far has been to retrieve the resources of the biblical tradition to articulate the Christian claim that the human person is unique and created in the image of God and to demonstrate the impact of the Akan anthropology on Christian anthropology.

In this concluding chapter, we underline the results of our discourse and show their impact on creation in the image of God. We will also draw attention to the possible areas where further research needs to be undertaken.

#### 5.1 HIGHLIGHT OF THE RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH AND ITS IMPACT ON THIS DISSERTATION

Our research has led us to disclose that God creates every human being in a unique way to occupy a unique position in this world in order to relate with God, neighbor and the universe. Human uniqueness is demonstrated by the circumstances surrounding the birth of every human being. Through the Akan people we understand creation in the image of God to mean every human being is created into this world through the agency of parents, who also share in the image of God through their birth. At the moment of conception, every human being derives some elements from his/her father and mother and some elements from *Nyankopon* (God). These elements from the three sources (God, mother, and father) combine to make a person a human

being. Though humanity derives certain elements from the three sources, it is the holistic person that reflects God's image in the sense that through the various elements humanity is able to relate and communicate with God, neighbor, and the world. The holistic human person enables us to clarify that humanity is both physical and spiritual. If human beings were only bodies, they would have been instinctive animals, and if they were only spirits, they would have been considered angels and not human beings.

We highlight the constituent elements that help to explain what we are doing in this dissertation.

Let us now look at the divine component in the constitution of the human being. The divine constituents in the human being enable us to understand that God is in, and with, every human being. It is the Holy Spirit who mediates human relationships. The Holy Spirit works through our human spirit to facilitate human relationships, thus expanding our understanding of the spiritual aspect of humanity. The *honhom*, which is the breath of life, is that constituent element through which the Holy Spirit works to give every human being that breath which keeps human beings alive. The *okra*, which we identify as the soul, works with the Holy Spirit to keep human beings alive and leaves humanity at death, which explains why a person stops breathing when he/she dies.

The description of the life-giving nature of the Spirit and humanity going back to God at the point of death shows the humanizing principle that originates from God and goes back to God. The Akan people explain the fact that human beings come from God and go back to God at death through the *okra*. The Spirit is here revealed as aiding in that human ascent to God.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See chapter four, page 207.

Another element that helps to explain human relationship is the *ntoro*, which a person derives from the father. Humanity is able to relate well with the ecology through the *ntoro*, which links every Akan child to the father and a major river in Ghana. It demonstrates how creation is supposed to work together to reveal God's glory and the role God wants humanity to play in caring for God's creation. Human uniqueness is expressed in how humanity is able to care for the world and able to share interpersonal relationships. The human being is the only creature in God's creation endowed with this gift.

The composition of the human being enables humanity to play a vital role in this world by taking care of the world and relating with God and other human beings. We observe a parallel understanding of the role of human beings in this world in Pope Francis' encyclical letter, *Laudato Si*. Pope Francis encourages every human being to care for the world (ecology), which he called the common home of every human being. He draws the attention of every human being to commit himself/herself to the care of the ecology by inviting everyone to emulate the life of Saint Francis of Assisi, who lived a simple life in harmony with God, with others, and with nature. Through the encyclical letter, Pope Francis is demonstrating that the discussions about the ecology are grounded in the bible and the tradition of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the spiritual elements in the composition of the human person, the Akan, who practice the matrilineal system of inheritance, place premium on the physical elements in the human person that are believed to be derived from a mother, one of the sources of human life.

Let us look at the physical aspect of the human being, which connects the human being with the world and the community, which is represented by the mother.

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2. Francis, *Laudato Si* [Encyclical Letter on Care for our Common Home], accessed September 29, 2015, [http://www.w2.vatican.va/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_encyclical-laudato-so.html](http://www.w2.vatican.va/papa-francesco_20150524_encyclical-laudato-so.html).

The Akan concepts of communality and individuality, as they exist in Akan communities have been discussed in order to articulate the role of a mother in the life of a person, which demonstrate the idea of the relationship between the individual and the community or society. First, there is an Akan paradox of a person as being individual and at the same time a community or whole. The Akan emphasize that a human person or a thing is seen as both a whole and part of the whole at the same time.<sup>3</sup> Inferring from the proposition that a person can be a whole and a part of a whole at the same time, we demonstrate that the human person is both physical and spiritual. The physical entities in the human person are portrayed by *mogya*, *bogya* (blood) and *honam* (body). A mother gives the *mogya*, which literally means blood, to a child. It is the *mogya* that forms the basis for physiological bond between a mother and a child. It also becomes the basis for the clan system of the Akan. The *mogya* is believed to be the physical part of a person that can be seen, felt, touched, smelt, or held. It is sometimes referred to as *honam*, the “body” or the physical part of the human person. Akan believe that the *mogya*, which is the physical part of a person, originates from the mother. That is why it forms the basis of the social structure of the Akan a matrilineal people.

We contend that a person is only partly constituted by the community. Every human person is uniquely made and exhibits that uniqueness within a community. The idea of uniqueness is enshrined in the Akan concept of destiny. Destiny, according to Akan, determines the uniqueness and individuality of a person. This means that within the Akan culture there is a clear recognition of the idea of individuality.<sup>4</sup>

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3. Chapter two, page 87.

4. The idea of destiny among Akan indicates that every human person receives a special mission from God before coming to live on earth; hence every human person is unique and contributes to his/her society in their own unique ways. Chapter two, page 90.

There must be cooperation between individuals for the community to function well, and the community has to function well and orderly for the individuals to thrive. Therefore, there must be collaboration between individuals and their communities for the well being and flourishing of any society. Based on the Akan paradox that a thing can be a whole and part of the whole, there are some Akan maxims to articulate the uniqueness of an individual person and also the relationality aspect of the human person. The support Akan give to the importance of community in a person's life is reflected in their maxims.<sup>5</sup>

The Akan maxims indicate the role of individuals in a community; however, the mutuality between individuality and communalism becomes apparent in the maxims. It becomes clear that the individual needs the community and that individuality is not diminished by communality. However, communality becomes the basis on which an individual person can develop a normative sense of identity, rights, and interest, and the role the identity of an individual plays in that person's rational choices in life. Every human person is born into a community whereas the person is socialized either formally or informally. This socialization helps to shape the individual so that with that individual's uniqueness, the person will contribute to the community or society; therefore the constituent element from the mother plays a role to demonstrate how a person becomes an image of God in creation and the human community.

In summary let us look at the possibilities of human relationships. The Holy Spirit helps in human relationships, such as the relationship between God and humanity, the relationship with human beings, and the relationship with the world.

Ontologically, human beings are constituted in a way that makes a relationship with God possible. It is the relationship between God and human beings that promotes other relationships in human life. Human persons are fundamentally relational beings, related to God, to other

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5. Chapter two, page 91.



humans, and to creation, and it is this relationality that makes human beings the image of God who is relational. Through the constituent elements of the Akan anthropology we clarify that human beings commune with God. Human beings are able to relate to God the Father, to Jesus, who is the paradigm of true humanity (Col 1:15), and the Holy Spirit. This relationship is a key to all other relationships.

Another kind of relationship that is made possible through the Spirit is the relationship with other human beings. This relationship helps to promote love and respect among human beings. Human beings are able to communicate through languages and signs. Human relationship is what led Karl Barth to express that the relationship with God is the *sine qua non* of every relationship of human beings. Thus human relationship finds its basis and origin in the relationship between God and humans.<sup>6</sup>

A third kind of relationship that the Spirit and *ntoro* promote in human life is the relationship between human beings and the material world. By connecting every human being with the major rivers in Ghana,<sup>7</sup> the Akan stress the relationship between human beings and the ecology. This relationship is a key to the dominion interpretation of the image of God, which is emphasized in the Psalms, “You have given them rule over the works of your hands, put all things at their feet” (Psalm 8: 7). By relating to the world, humanity is able to relate to the ancestors<sup>8</sup> (saints), who relate constantly with the living.

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6. Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of Creation*, vol. 3, part 2, *Church Dogmatics*, eds. G.W. Bromiley and T.F. Torrence, trans. J. W. Edwards, O. Bussey, and Harold Knight, (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1958), 243.

7. Chapter one, pages 17-18.

8. Ancestors are part of the Akan daily lives. The Akan believe that by relating well with nature, the ancestors will bless them and ensure their safety in life.

## 5.2 CREATION IN THE IMAGE OF GOD IN PRACTICE

As already mentioned, human beings, according to the Akan, are created with a spark of God. The spark of God in the human being and other elements help us to locate the image of God in humanity. Since animals and trees do not possess *okra*, the spark of God, human beings become unique among God's creatures.

The image of God is testified to in the bible to reveal the uniqueness of the human person (Gen 1: 27). God created everything good, including the human person. This is revealed in the book of Genesis, which reads: "God looked at everything he [God] had made, and he [God] found it very good" (Gen. 1: 31a). We have shown that the human person by nature is good. This is what Akan illustrate through their anthropology.

Akan call the human body *nipa dua* and a human being is called *onipa*. *Nipa* means human being, a person. *Nipa* can also mean a notable person, respectable person, or reputable person. For the Akan to say that someone is a good or worthy person, they will state, *Oye nipa*. Thus *John ye nipa*, meaning John is a worthy person.<sup>9</sup> For the Akan, as a result of the spark of God in every human being, every human being is expected to be good. On the contrary, a bad person is described as *onnye nipa*, meaning he/she is not living up to their expectation as a human being.

The creation of the human person in the image of God is what Akan portray in the nature of human beings as endowed with a special vocation or mission in life.<sup>10</sup> It is a mission in communion with God in which human beings glorify God and reveal God to other human beings and creation in general. This emphasizes the uniqueness of the human person.

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9.Ibid., 331.

10. Chapter two, pages 49-57 for the discussions on the *okra*.

Though human beings are created in the image of God and are by nature meant to be good, not all human beings live their lives as they should. By not living as expected, a person does not lose the image of God or the spark of God. This shows that the dignity of every human person remains in spite of a person's way of life.

If all *akra*<sup>11</sup>(souls)are from God, then it means that all people are created equal. According to the Akan all *akra* are equal in quality, in substance, and in form since all come from God as their source. As we read in the Hebrew bible, God created human beings in the image of God. The image is equally given to every human being irrespective of a person's race, color, gender, religious, social and political situation. The image of God is what makes a person a human being distinct from the other creatures of God. The beauty of human life is that the underlying principle, which makes a being human, is given to all human persons.

The reality of the creation of human beings in the image of God provides the basis for Christian human affirmation. Every human being, irrespective of one's social circumstances, has a special dignity that must be respected and protected. This provides protection and security, which are enshrined in almost all constitutions of every country that practices the rule of law. As a result, protection is given equally to all, from the weakest to the strongest, and from the poorest to the richest. The nature of the human constitution as created in the image of God informs the United Nations' declaration of Human Rights. This declaration reaffirms the faith in fundamental human rights and in the dignity and worth of the human person. It also informs the Second Vatican Council's Declaration on Religious Freedom, *Dignitatis Humanae*. This declaration focuses on the inviolable rights of the human person. It also spells out the Roman Catholic Church's support for the protection of the religious liberty of every individual. *Humanae Vitae* and other encyclicals by Popes emphasize the dignity of every human being.

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<sup>11</sup>*Akra* is the plural of *okra* (Soul) *Akra* means souls.

Our discourse demonstrates a theological truth about human nature and the uniqueness of the human being among God's creation. We illustrated the claim that anthropology is theology, since we cannot talk about the human person without God.

We adopt in this discourse the holistic understanding of the human being as shown by Akan and Christian theology. They both speak of life here on earth and its fulfillment in God, from whom humanity comes and hopes to go. As a result, the dualism of Kwame Gyekye and the Akan become relevant, though we do not endorse the sharp distinction of the body-soul dichotomy of Descartes. We maintain that there are spiritual components in the human being, which help humanity commune with God, neighbor, and the universe. Let us now assess the conflict between Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu.

In this discourse, the differences between Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu provided the thesis to be proven as we researched the meaning of creation in the image of God. By the highest standards of contemporary scholarship, our intention in this discourse has been to mediate between the views of Kwame Gyekye and Kwasi Wiredu with regard to the nature of *sunsum/ntoro* and *okra* in the Akan understanding of the human person.

Our discourse was intended to establish that the better argument falls on the side of Gyekye in terms of his explanation of *sunsum*, *ntoro* and *okra*. This is because Gyekye better explains the difference between the spirit from one's father (*ntoro*) and the spirit from God (*sunsum*). Like Gyekye, we conclude that the *okra* is human soul.

Wiredu's attack on Gyekye's dualism is centered on a linguistic as well as pragmatic ground. We question whether or not we should consider a single conception when we speak of

the conception of the human person, and whether or not western philosophy should be used in appraising African philosophy or the philosophies of the non-western world.<sup>12</sup>

In order to resolve the debate, we have to acknowledge that linguistic interpretations are socially based. The meaning of terms is derived culturally and is socially influenced. This informs the way people think and act. We acknowledge that there is duality in the Akan cosmology; human beings live here on earth and will join God when they die in their nature as physical and spiritual beings. However, we have to understand the human being as a holistic being, not a truncated being. There is the need to concentrate on life here on earth while doing what is right so that a person will live with God when he/she dies.

Using the Akan understanding of the human person as an interpretive tool, we have successfully demonstrated that human beings are unique and created of in the image of God. We made use of the Akan understanding of the “spark” of God in every human being, to throw light on the scriptural understanding of the human being created in the image of God. Our interpretation is that the *okra* and the other constituent elements help us to identify the image of God in the human being.

God is a Trinity of persons, a mystery which human beings are not able to fully comprehend. If the nature of God is mysterious and God created the human persons in God’s image, then human persons must in some manner reflect the mystery of God’s nature. Let us now consider human life as wholeness.

The idea of wholeness is prominent in African indigenous religions and in African thought. This is reflected in the Akan understanding of the human person. Peter Sarpong underscores the Akan understanding of human wholeness when he observes that there is an

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12. Samuel Olusegun Steven, “Cartesian Dualism: An Evaluation of Wireduan and Gilbert Ryles’s Refutations” *Kritike*5, no. 2 (Dec. 2011): 162.

artificially rigid dichotomy between the sacred and profane, religious and secular, or material and immaterial.<sup>13</sup> The idea of wholeness is vastly theological; Jesus Christ was God and human at the same time. He was God made visible and he was human. The Akan worldview proves that the idea of wholeness is found clearly in the African indigenous religion. If human beings were only bodies, they would have been instinctive animals, and if they were only spirits, they would have been considered angels and not human beings.

It is demonstrated in the practices of Akan that religion is part and parcel of human life. The Akan view of human nature compels many Akan writers to observe that if health personnel want to bring total healing, surgery and drugs alone are simply not enough. The Akan mind is such that the root cause of sickness has to be tackled in order to provide complete healing to a sick person. Therefore a doctor must examine the root cause of the sickness of a person, which may be family relationships, interaction with the natural, supernatural, physical, and spiritual environment. He concludes that the true sickness may be worry, fear, anxiety, jealousy, envy, strife, bitterness, guilt feeling, or a feeling of rejection.<sup>14</sup> In effect, according to the Akan, a person is more than a physical being.

The idea of the holistic nature of every human being is demonstrated in Akan beliefs and practices regarding healing, which is why some of them move to the African Initiated Churches when they are sick. Human composition is therefore the basis for holistic healing. Human beings are whole and their wholeness reflects that of Jesus. The image of God in our understanding is that the wholeness of the human person discloses the image of God.

We have drawn attention to the reality that every human being receives life from God and communicates with God and the environment through this same principle in life. This discloses

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13. Peter Sarpong, "Can Christianity Dialogue with ATR," accessed November 13, 2013, <http://www.africanworld.net/afrel/sarpong.htm>.

14. Kofi Appiah-Kubi, *Man Cures, God Heals*, (New Jersey: Allanheld, Osmun Publishers, 1981), 143.

the role of the Holy Spirit in the world in terms of relationships and how God uniquely creates the human person.

In this dissertation, we have attempted to shed light on the uniqueness of the human person. Human beings must relate to God, one another, and the world in their sameness and in their unique ways. Unity in diversity and uniqueness of human beings reflects the unity in diversity within the Trinitarian Godhead, Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, three persons in one God.

We used the contextual reality of the Akan of Ghana with particular reference to the human person to shed light on creation in the image of God. When a Christian is asked the question, “What exactly in the human being that points to the image of God?” he/she finds it difficult to respond. With the help of the Akan interpretation of the human person, we can conclude that there is a “spark” of God in every human being. In addition to scripture and tradition, human beings have become a source of theology. At this juncture, we maintain that through the method of contextualization through which the Akan culture has revealed the hidden presence of God in the human being, theology functions exactly as the manner in which religion makes sense within a given culture. Human beings are unique among God’s creation by being created in God’s image.

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

This dissertation explored the contributions made to a further understanding of being “created in the image God” when viewing this message in the context of Akan anthropology as well as classical and scriptural theology. We identified God in the context of Trinity to show that God is relational, three persons in one God. Using concepts from the Akan, we showed that God, who is relational, created and shared a spark of himself with human beings. This spark of God enabled human beings to share in relationality. Just as God relates within the Trinity and with a sharing of Godself with human beings and the world created by God, so human beings, created in the image of God, are created in relationship with God, neighbor, and the universe.

We organized our materials by using the method of contextualization. The method of contextualization explored the Akan anthropology, which demonstrated the knowledge and the information the Akan people use to define themselves and interpret their experience.<sup>15</sup>

The value and results of this dissertation are five-fold. Namely: 1) Epistemological, 2) Imperfect transfer of knowledge, 3) Language as a conceptual framework of theology, 4) The image of God and human relationships, and 5) Our emic experience balanced with an etic discourse.

First, we invite a wider consideration of the epistemology of the Akan religion. The Akan religion, like all indigenous religions, has a simple way of expressing the complex philosophical and theological discourses about God and God’s relationship with humanity. This dissertation helps to avoid what led some Africans to consider the Gospel message as foreign.

It becomes clear that the God of our redemption is the same as the God of creation who made humanity in God’s image. Thus, with contextualization as our method, the discourse seeks

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15. For the definition of culture, see James P. Spradley, *The Ethnography Interview*, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1979), 5.



to reveal the value of inductive reasoning in the philosophical and theological discourse in our modern world. Nevertheless, care is taken not to romanticize the Akan culture, or cultures and religions in Africa as a whole. Our discourse seeks to bring to the fore for critical evaluation that which has stood the test of time in these cultures.

Second, this dissertation cautions against imperfect transfer of Western philosophy to African context and Religious studies. It is always enlightening to do a comparative analysis but one has to be careful not to forge concepts to suit what they want to say. It is not justifiable to use Western philosophical categories in appraising the philosophy and theology of Africa. For instance, Kwasi Wiredu's philosophical training led him to refuse to describe the *okra* as the soul.

Third, our discourse reveals the evidence of language as conceptual framework for theology. We need language to describe human relationship with God and others, so the language used as a tool must be accurate in describing its meaning exactly. The meaning of the Akan word for spirit, for instance, has to be understood properly before one can apply it in any proposition. *Sunsum*, *honhom*, and *ntoro* are used to denote the spirit.<sup>16</sup> This sometimes creates confusion in the exercise of interpretation. The *sunsum and honhom* can be said to come from God and thus are eternal but the *ntoro* is always from one's biological father and dies with the individual who possesses it.

We argued about the importance of noting the semantic evolution of terms used in Akan anthropology in order to appreciate their creativity. We observed that *sunsum* and *honhom* are used interchangeably, which create problems with translation and interpretation. For instance, the translators of the bible into Asante and Fante used *Honhom Kronkron* and *Sunsum Kronkron* to

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16. Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press), 88.

denote the Holy Spirit respectively.<sup>17</sup> Once this linguistic understanding is clarified it will lead to errors being avoided in delineating the presence of the spirit in human life.

Fourth, we have argued that it is the presence of God in the human person, i.e., God in and with us, that helps the individual to relate with God, neighbors and the environment. Every human being is unique and also created to live in a community. The uniqueness of each person is seen in various aspects of an individual's life. For instance, every human being has a unique finger print which identifies him or her. Even twins who are born by the same parents and on the same day have different finger prints. Human beings are to balance their uniqueness with interpersonal relationships, which make community living *a sine qua non* for being humans. This is demonstrated by the mother as a source of life.

Finally, our discourse discloses an emic discourse, which enjoys a substantial overlap of etic views of the issues discussed. Thus the semantic analysis in this work, which provides a guide to the realistic Indigenous definitions of terminologies, is fixed to cross-cultural concepts to test the validity of the propositions about human behavior and activities. We have presented valid views of the Akan people to shed sharper light on Christian anthropology.

We recommend further research into the following areas, which are outside the range of this current dissertation.

First, the effect of sin on the individual and the community, and salvation: It was not the intention of this dissertation to delve more deeply into the issue of sin. We accept that God is within and without humanity; however, as a result of free will, God allows humanity to make choices in life, which sometime lead human beings to sin.

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17. John D. Ekem, "Spiritual Gifts or Spiritual Persons? 1 Corinthians 12:1a Revisited," Bible Society of Ghana, accessed May 22, 2012, <http://www.axbe40.dsl.pipex.com/archive/381/381/sample-ekem.pdf>.

Second, the role of sacrifice and Worship in human life: Human beings offer sacrifices and worship to God. These impact humanity and human behavior and need to be further investigated.

Third, the effects of interpersonal relationship and community on what it means to be human: The issue of how interpersonal relationship and community identify what it is to be human, and how to assess the individual and communal aspects of humanity also need further investigation.

Fourth, the Trinity and the human person: The concept of three persons in one God that explains the Christian God, needs further investigation in relation to the human being. We could not discuss the Trinity in detail and recommend a full discussion on the Trinity in relation to the human being.

These four areas should be studied in addition to economic dialogue, ecology, communion ecclesiology, human rights discourse, missiology, and feminist theology. The importance of theological anthropology as a tool to better understand God and humanity will guide the discourse in the above-mentioned areas.

In summary, the aim of this dissertation has been to disclose and shed further light on the meaning of “Created in the image of God,” in relation to the Akan contextual reasoning to articulate what it means for human beings to be unique and created in the image of God. Using the Akan context, we noted that every human being possesses a spark of God. God, who is relational, shares relationality with human beings.

Through the use of Akan anthropology, we further identify the creation “in the image of God” to mean every human being is created through the agency of parents, who also share in the image of God through their birth. At the moment of conception, every human being derives some

elements from his/her father and mother and elements from God. These elements from the three sources (God, mother, and father) combine to make a person a human being. Though humanity derives certain elements from the three sources, it is the holistic person that reflects God's image in the sense that through the various elements humanity is able to relate and communicate with God, neighbor, and the world. The holistic human person enables us to clarify that humanity is both physical and spiritual. If human beings were only bodies, they would have been instinctive animals, and if they were only spirits, they would have been considered angels and not human beings.

As stated in the introduction to this dissertation, the dissertation had as its goal to explore the Akan<sup>18</sup> understanding of the human person<sup>19</sup> to shed light on creation of human beings in the image of God and to understand and demonstrate the uniqueness of the human being among God's creatures. Through the use of Akan anthropology, we have successfully shown that knowledge of the human being starts with the relationship between God and human beings, which extends to other humans and the universe, thus renewing Christian theological anthropology and offering a further insight into the meaning of being created in the image of God.

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18. Akan is a word that is used to describe an ethnic or a language group in Ghana. See Chapter one, page 11.

19. The words "human person," and "human being" will be used interchangeably in this dissertation.

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