

## **Biblical Spirituality in the Context of Kpele Songs: The Incarnation and Ancestral Heritage among the Gas of Southern Ghana**

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**Abstract:** *This paper is specifically aimed at reconstructing a credible Ga Christian spirituality by utilising the image of the Ga ancestral cult which has been over-shadowed by Akan belief systems and practices over the years by most of the works of Ghanaian Theologians. The contemporary Ga Christian, who has no regard for kingship as a basis for her/his ancestral heritage because she/he does not have a high profile for kinship, has difficulty in relating to the Akan ancestral heritage, while singing traditional songs that place ancestral cult within the context of sacred personalities who are not kings. This paper explores the possibilities that are there for the formulation of Christian spirituality utilizing Ga perception of ancestorship.*

*This article examined the distinction between Ga and Akan ancestral cults. It also distilled elements from the cults (through the use of the kpele songs). A model for the construction of a contextual incarnation, taking into account fundamental elements of Ga spirituality that emerges from her ancestorship was then put forward at the end of the work.*

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

According to I.D. Hulley, ‘Incarnation means that Jesus became human, he became one of us’<sup>1</sup> Incarnation is therefore concerned with the nature of Jesus the Christ, particularly with how the divine and human are related in his person. Incarnation also teaches us that Jesus had to be man so that He could die so that His death would pay for the sins of humankind.

Hulley further identified a relationship between Jesus and spirituality. He argued that while Jesus becoming human was necessary he continued to keep his spirituality by ‘maintaining an unbroken relationship with the Father, a relationship characterized by obedience to the divine will. In Jesus we find a perfect spirituality and a full human life’.<sup>2</sup> Here we see that incarnation and spirituality are intertwined in Jesus Christ. In applying this idea to the Church, ‘Christian Spirituality is concerned with the very stuff of life- the utilitarian, the commercial, social and administrative acts that we are concerned with every day of our lives’.<sup>3</sup> The framework within which this work is done is that which is referred to as Biblical Spirituality by Christo Lombaard. That is, that kind of Spirituality that is related to the historical heritage of a community or a society as explained by him by saying that, ‘As far as Biblical Spirituality is concerned, faith happens where histories meet, that is, where there is overlap between texts of Scripture and the substance of people’s lives’.<sup>4</sup> In this work therefore the ancestral heritage of the Gas, which is part of their history and how it overlaps with the incarnation in the New Testament would be looked at as matrix for the development of Ga Biblical spirituality.

### **2. IMAGES OF JESUS CHRIST**

Jaraslov Pelikan in his important study of the portrayal of Jesus Christ in different cultural contexts and epochs in his book, *Jesus Throughout The Centuries*, states that the concepts and images of Jesus Christ are constructed from specific cultural contexts shaped by the salvation concerns of each local context.<sup>5</sup> In theological terms, we can say that Jesus Christ the Son of God became the Son of man so that we can receive him according to our local customs and even give him a local name that will allow us to identify with him and his message of salvation<sup>6</sup> in welcoming and giving Jesus Christ a local name. We operate from our local cosmological and stereological assumptions as the framework within which we receive and give Jesus a name that reflects our deeper wishes and aspiration. For this reason, Pelikan asserted emphatically that the

different conceptions of incarnation across the centuries deal with existential and salvation questions constructed within specific cosmological and stereological structures.<sup>7</sup> It is within this conceptual frame work that we pursue generally the construction of the incarnation of Jesus in the Ghanaian context, particularly ancestral models.

With the perception of Jesus as an ancestor, the ancestral cult exists among the Ga people of Ghana. However; it seems there is the assumption that the portrayal of Jesus as an ancestor among the Akans is the same as that of the Gas. Because of this assumption by many, the distinctive characteristics of the ancestral cult have not been given the needed attention in dealing with the Ga belief systems and religious practices. A close look at the Akan perception of Jesus as an ancestor reveals that it appears to hinge very much on the Akan profile of the *nana nom* with reference to their traditional leaders who were either kings or chiefs and in their belief system which has enshrined in it, blackened stools that are regarded as the symbols of the great rulers who have become ancestors. However, amongst the Ga, the perception of ancestor hood is different. The reason is that Chieftaincy was a latter development which was given prominence by the British colonial government for administrative convenience. Whereas in the Akan societies, there is the combination of the sacred and the secular in the traditional ruler, in the Ga context, they are separated and given two different bodies. There is, therefore, the need to investigate and find out the roles these ancestral cults play in the Ga tradition and to what extent elements for an authentic and contextual spirituality can be found in this tradition. This research will help the Ga people to better understand the form of ancestorship that is peculiar to their culture.

### 3. THE WORLD OF THE GAS

As with many ethnic groups, there is a very close relationship between their political organizations, social practices and religious observances. The history of the Gas, therefore, give vital information on their religious heritage and how they have emerged as one ethnic group but consisting of separate units, settling in different geographical locations, but inter-related as a group by certain belief systems and practices which have kept them together over the decades.

The belief system and practices will help to have some knowledge about the background of this community, how their community is setup, important offices, personalities and ceremonies that they engage in that distinguish them from other ethnic groups. In this paper, we will give a brief historical background of the Ga people so as to put our work into the Ga perspective. We will focus on Ga ancestral cult particularly placing much significance on one of the Ga religious cults which cuts across the entire ethnic group known as the *Kpele* cult. This cult has music which narrates the belief systems and practices of the Ga people, which also includes their ancestral belief systems. This will afford us the opportunity to do some studies of the Ga ancestral cult in order to make some connections with the incarnation among the Ga people. We will also cite Ga Christian Hymns and how they re-echo the Ga incarnational world view.

We will select some of the *kpele* songs that have ancestral contents and analyze their potential for the reconstruction of Ga spirituality. We will describe what *kpele* is and the possibilities that they offer in discussing ancestral incarnational spirituality among Gas.

According to Margaret Field, on the south-eastern coast of the republic of Ghana, between the *Laloi* lagoon (east) and the Densu River (west) just below the Akwapim scarp, live the Ga people.<sup>8</sup> According to her they live in the seven coastal towns -Accra, Osu, La, Teshi, Nungua, Tema and Kpone.

They make their living primarily from fishing which has increasingly become industrialized. Farming, including livestock grazing is the principal occupation of the inland villages, like Ayawaso, Amamoli, Ablekuma, Abokobi, Pantang, Amrahia, Oyibi, and Katamanso among others, each politically attached to one of the coastal towns.

### 4. THE GA RELIGION

The traditional religion of the Ga people is spiritualism. They believe that spirits dwell in all things created by the Almighty (who is called "Nyonmo"). These spirits communicate through the selected priests or ancestral cults called *Blema Wodzin*.

They celebrate "*Homowo*" which is an annual traditional agricultural festival celebrated in various ways by all the Ga Communities in Southern Ghana. The word, "*Homowo*", actually means 'making fun of or hooting at hunger.' This is stated in one of their *kpele* songs which Marion Kilson analysed.<sup>9</sup> The traditional oral history describes a time long ago when the rains stopped and the sea closed its gates. A deadly famine spread throughout the southern Accra plains, the home of the Ga people. When the harvest finally arrived and food became plentiful, the people were so happy that they celebrated with a festival that ridiculed hunger with religious rituals, social gatherings and feasting, led by their traditional priests and priestesses, particularly, the *Wulomo* or the high priest.

The high priest or *Wulomo* is an important personality in the Ga religion. Before the institution of kingship by the colonial government they (the *Wulomo*) were the rulers of Ga land (Field: 1961: 3). They are seen as both divine and human and are revered. They are chosen and trained to serve, heal and care for the people. They also speak for the ancestors who are constantly in touch with the living. They are good, practical and natural healers. *Wulomo* prescribe medicines by using the knowledge of herbal healing passed on from generation to generation. They may also prescribe rituals for the good of the individual, community or the state. They are often consulted by the Ga *mantse* (chief) and his counsellors.

The Gas also believe in life after death. The spirit or *susuma*, lives on after the person dies. Special ritual ceremonies are performed for the dead throughout the Ga year and they are held on special days in the Ga calendar.

We will like to look at some elements in Akan ancestral cult so as to enable us make a distinction between it and that of the Gas.

## **5. AKAN ANCESTRAL CULT**

I will like to cite an example from the *Odwira*, one of the annually celebrated traditional festivals of most Akans in Southern Ghana. This is basically celebrated to ritually cleanse their lands in preparation for prosperity from their ancestors. "It combines the ritual of the revitalization of the vegetational, the preservation of cosmic order, the cleansing of the society to ward off evil and the celebration of the benevolence of the ancestors".<sup>10</sup>

The *Odwira* festival prayer below expresses the message that the main player in the ancestral cult is the Chief or the King and that as the Chief ancestor, he and others are the source of the power that creates the condition for wholeness<sup>11</sup> as they are part and parcel of their incarnational spirituality

1)

*Here is food: all of you ancestors receive and eat*

*The year has come around again*

*Today we celebrate it.*

*Bring blessing; Blessing to the*

*Chief who sits on your stool;*

*Health to all the people*

*Let women bear children*

*Let men prosper in their undertakings*

*We thank you for good harvest;*

*For standing behind us (guarding and protecting us).*

The analysis of the Akan worldview as a representative worldview has led many to the conclusion that their ancestral concept is what exists among the other ethnic groups in this country. Analogically, in the Akan context, the ideal fulfillment of all the functions and roles of our parents, elders and ancestors related to empowerment and wholeness, God the great ancestor is believed to be present in Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup> As an ancestor, Jesus could be designated as the first-born of all creation and the pre-eminent Son of God who has become our ancestor (Col: 15-16) through his incarnation and exemplary spirituality. Therefore, Jesus Christ, the first-born of all

creation then becomes the ancestor in whom all human beings are related to God, as children of God (John 1:12-13). As the first-born of all creation, Jesus Christ is our elder brother on account of whom all human beings are related to one another as relatives. Jesus Christ is portrayed by African scholars interested in Christology by arguing that in his capacity as our first ancestor and elder brother could be the ideal representative of humanity and thus can define for humanity what it means to be human. To be human on the pattern of Jesus Christ our first ancestor, *Edikan Brempong* (the first ancestor whose life benefits all human beings), means we could, in Trinitarian terms, state that God our ultimate ancestor lives his ancestral life in Jesus Christ our first ancestor, *Edikan Brempong*, in and through the life of the Holy Spirit who is God at work in the world and in us.<sup>13</sup>

Again, Jesus Christ as the first-born of all creation and our first ancestor is the Son of God (Mk 1:1) who inherits the functions and the personality of God. And as the Son of God, He becomes our chief (*nana*) who rules in the shoes of God, the ultimate ancestor of the human race. The incarnation becomes for us, the divine enstoolment of Jesus Christ by which he manifests the personality and performs the functions of God in the flesh. Therefore, in Jesus Christ, our chief, we experience the abiding presence of divine life of God himself which empowers and brings wholeness.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is perceived traditionally as chief because he has been appointed by God as our ultimate ancestor to sit on the divine stool from eternity. As our chief who rules with God our ultimate ancestor, the source of all stools from eternity. He is our chief who rules with God our occupant of the divine stool is the one in whom God manifest the power and functions for our salvation. In Jesus Christ the occupant of the divine stool God is at work for our sustenance and preservation. Jesus can therefore, be given the title *Ananse Kokuroko* (the great spider) that spins the wheels of creation.<sup>14</sup>

The functions and roles that Jesus Christ performs in the fashion of the Akan concept of ancestorship qualifies him to be called the saviour – *Osagyefo and Agyenkwa* – because his work of salvation brings us wholeness. The whole concept of Akan ancestorship is inherent in the corpus of kingship (*nananom*). In dealing with the salvation work of God in Jesus Christ, the chief (*nana*), the nature and characters of God is revealed to the people. God, the ultimate ancestor of the human race meets them in Jesus Christ as the source of all life, *Twirediapong*, (the one on whom all life depends). In the creative, sustaining and providential functions of Jesus Christ, God (*Nana Nyame*) is revealed to the people as a caring parent who is deeply concerned about human well-being and wholeness is manifested through the ancestral cult which is embodied in the close association of religious (sacred) authority in the ancestral cult of the Akans. These are the ones that they fall on in times of crisis. In the same vein, according to Akrong, ‘Jesus Christ, like our ancestors, points us to the omnipresence of God, the ultimate ancestor of the human race whose benevolent care sustains all human beings.’<sup>15</sup>

## 6. AKAN ANCESTRAL SPIRITUALITY

The main hob of the Akan incarnation is the concept of *nananom* (*forefathers*) which we mentioned earlier. The blackened stools of the Akans are ancestral stools which link the living with their dead chiefs as ancestors who are venerated. The chiefs who are regarded as ancestors have distinguished themselves as heroes in battle and have also demonstrated their commitment in the areas of living a sacrificial life in leading them to battle and even sometimes, sacrificing their very lives for their people. The concept of kingship is very paramount to the ancestral Christology of the Akans. If you take the Akans for instance they have a kingdom which is based on heroes who have been deified as ancestors who are the *nananom* ‘*nsamanfo*’ or ‘spirit fathers’ that they make libation and prayers to<sup>16</sup> as part of their spirituality.

This idea is put forth very strongly by Ghanaian theologians as if it is the same in all the ethnic groups in Ghana as so much work has been done on it by Ghanaian theologians like, Pobe, Bediako, Sarpong, Asare Opoku, Pashington Obeng and Akrong.

It is an assumption by all the theologians that when you talk of ancestral incarnation, you are referring to the king who combined religious or divine roles with political roles whilst on earth and attained the status of ancestorship after their death. So when Kwame Bediako says in his article ‘The Unique Christ’ which appeared in the book, *The Unique Christ In Our Pluralistic*

*World* that ‘Jesus Christ is the only real and true Ancestor and Source of life for all mankind fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors’ (Bediako: 1994: 54)<sup>17</sup>, he has in mind the *nananom nsamanfo* (spirit fathers) concept which he explained fully in his exposition on Hebrews in his book, *Jesus in African Culture*. In another work of his entitled *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African Experience*, Bediako expresses his concern about the close intertwining of political power and spiritual authority in kingship by saying that,

By the close association of religious (sacred) authority and political power in the person of the traditional ruler, African traditional societies were ‘ontoracies’, sacralising authority and power with the effectual integration of altar and throne (Bediako: 2000: 102).<sup>18</sup> Here Bediako made one of his famous proposals that Christianity has the responsibility engineering a *de-sacralization* of political power because that is what Jesus put across in the New Testament. Bediako’s work is done with the assumption that all traditional rulership in Africa have the kingship idea, like the Akans which has the embodiment of both political and religious aspects together in the same person. This is what is used in formulating the ancestral spirituality.

However, a closer look at the Ga concept of kingship indicates that the understanding of a king among the Gas is different from that of the Akans. The Akans see kingship as the major ancestral cult and so whenever the theologians are using it for the formulation of incarnation through Christ, they centre on the *nananom* idea which focuses on the kings or chiefs and builds up the profile of divinity, incarnation, redemption, mediation and atonement on it.

## **7. GA ANCESTRAL SPIRITUALITY**

As already indicated earlier, Gas do not have such high regard for kings or chiefs when it comes to the ancestral cult. Gas do not venerate kings, keeping their blackening stools and making prayers or libation to them as the Akans do, during festivals like *Adae* and *Odwira*.

In the Ga context it is rather the priests and their shrines and the High Priest, that is, the *Wulomo* and their shrines which are important in such matters particularly, related to their spirituality.

A typical example is the following *Kpele* Song<sup>19</sup>:

2)

<i>Obli jija</i>	<i>Obli is confused</i>
<i>Wo fee wo he nkpokpo</i>	<i>we are all shaking</i>
<i>Yaa kwe Obli musu kuntun</i>	<i>Go and look at Obli’s big stomach</i>
<i>Ni eke yeo mantse</i>	<i>which he is ruling with as a king</i>
<i>Mantse Aponsa</i>	<i>king Aponsa</i>
<i>Omusu agbo</i>	<i>your big stomach</i>
<i>Ayikaile ji yoo bi</i>	<i>Ayikaile is the sibling of the woman</i>

This song is part of the *kpele* ritual during the *Homowo* (annual hooting at hunger festival)

of the Ga people. It is sung to disgrace or insult a lazy king who is not doing his work well. The king is described as ‘having a big stomach’ or ‘a pot belly’ which means he is fat and not looking attractive. I must emphasise that in the Ga community, this is done with no consequences as against the Akan tradition where it is an abomination to insult the king. In the same way, an insult to the *Wulomo*(priest) is unheard of and punishable by death. In Ga spirituality, unlike that of the Akans, the king is not revered and therefore not given a sacred status.

Furthermore, when one looks at the entire Ga area in modern times, there are so many chieftaincy disputes and most of the Ga areas have no kings or chiefs at the moment. If you pass through Nungua, Teshie, Osu which are key Ga areas, there are no chiefs or kings. However, when it comes to the priests for the various shrines and particularly the *Wulomo* (priest), there have never been any dispute whatsoever and they are remembered and venerated always. Whenever they are in difficulties they call on their ancestral priests the (*wulomei*) for help.

The following is an example<sup>20</sup>:

3)

<i>Ao, Naa Nyonmo ee!</i>	<i>Oh God</i>
<i>Naa Nycnmo ee!</i>	<i>Oh God</i>
<i>Nai ee! Sakum ee! Oh</i>	<i>Nai High Priest! Osu Klcte priest</i>
<i>Naa Kccle oo! Osu Klote oo!</i>	<i>Naa Koole priestess Osu Priest</i>
<i>Naa koole oo! Osu Klote oo!</i>	<i>Naa Koole priestess Osu Priest</i>
<i>Nyonmo jiemo mi ei, jiemo mi ei!</i>	<i>God deliver me! deliver me!</i>

This is the cry of a hunter who is being attacked by a wild animal as recorded by E.S.T .Ababio in his book *Blema Kakaloi* (Ancient Heroes). He started from asking for help from God, then the high priest and then the other priests in the Ga area which is Osu, where he comes from. So if there is the need to think of a redemptive figure or a Messianic figure, then it has to be looked for in the Nai Wulomo, who is designated by God to see to the affairs of the Ga person. At both minor and major celebrations, it is the High Priests who are located to Ga Shrines who matter and in times of crises, people run to them for help, as illustrated above. The similarity here is that God is the ultimate ancestor (*Naa Nyonmo*). He works through other ancestors. The difference here is also that while in Akan it is through the *nananom* (kings), among the Ga, He works through priests like *Nai, Korle* etc.

## 8. GA SPIRITUALITY AND THE INCARNATION

The traditions venerating ancestors in a religion are strong and well-known among the Ga people. This is part of Ga spiritual heritage. More attention needs to be given to its form of ancestorship so as to better understand what role Jesus can play in their religion. The concept as applied to Jesus, however, needs to be qualified. Jesus is not just one of the Ga ancestors, but ancestor par excellence, a unique ancestor, priest ancestor, as also seen in the Akan culture. It is clear that Jesus for Ga Christians is not just like all the other ancestors (High priests and local priests), but it is also clear that He is not totally unlike the ancestors.

To the Ga people, the divine beings called *jemawoji* are referred to as “ancestral spirits”. Modupe Oduyoye quote Joshua Kudadjie in reference to this and writes:

The sons and daughters of *Naa Nyonmo* (God) are as *jemawoji* ‘the gods of the world’.” They are powerful and intelligent beings that walk about the world but they have their abodes in the sea, lagoons, mountains and other natural objects. Having been delegated by *Naa Nyonmo* to be his [sic!] vice-regents they are in active contact with the world of nature in [humans].<sup>21</sup>

In a similar vein, having been delegated by *Naa Nyonmo* to be his vice regents (*the Wulomo*), who are also in active contact with the world of nature in humans (the priest deals with both the world of gods and humans). This is seen in the lives of the people. In the proceeding paragraphs therefore, this paper will look at the place of the incarnation of Jesus as an ancestor in the everyday lives of the Ga people.

In the process of redefining Jesus to the people and in their culture, we need to identify him in what is most important to the Gas, what they see as the source of divine power and humanity. The spiritual backbone of everything they hold strong as believers. And this we can find in the *Wulomo* (priest). He heals the sick and brings *wala* (life or well being) to the community; he settles disputes and brings peace in the community.

The song below depicts the theocratic rule of the priest from the past. This song is still sung to him although kings and chiefs are now rulers,<sup>22</sup>

4)

<i>Atseo mi woyoo kronn</i>	<i>I am called a pure priestess</i>
<i>Medi sofo</i>	<i>I rule as priest</i>
<i>Medi hene</i>	<i>I rule as king</i>

The songs below illustrate the use of anthropomorphic imagery to characterize the physiological attributes and relations of the divine nature of the *Wulomo*. He is seen as the father of all Gas. He

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is God's representative in charge of the daily life of the people. Here, the most important thing is the *Wulomo* is referred to as '*Amralo*' which means he is not just priest but one who actively gets involved in the day to day issues related to his people. As the incarnational figure, he is the source of life, the fountain of well being as seen in song no. 4 above.<sup>23</sup>

5)

<i>Bosobro</i> [Nai] <i>mi kafo mi ye de;</i>	<i>Nai I do not praise my sweetness</i>
<i>Bosobro</i> [Nai] <b><i>amralobi</i></b> ;	<i>Nai is the ruler</i>
<i>Bosobro</i> [Nai] <i>woye seetenge</i>	<i>Nai we have many children</i>
<i>Bosobro</i> [Nai] <b><i>amralobi</i></b>	<i>Nai is the ruler</i>
<i>Bonso wodiri mang</i>	<i>The whale rules the town</i>
<i>Bosobro</i> [Nai] <b><i>amralobi</i></b>	<i>Nai is the ruler</i>
<i>Amralo bi wodrii</i>	<i>The ruler rules the town</i>
<i>Bosombro</i> [Nai] <b><i>amralobi</i></b>	<i>Nai is the ruler</i>
<i>Kingbi wodiri mang</i>	<i>The king rules the town</i>
<i>Bosobro</i> [Nai] <b><i>amralobi</i></b>	<i>Nai is the ruler</i>
<i>Shitse wodiri mang</i>	<i>The land owner rules the town</i>

6)<sup>24</sup>

<i>Nai kote ni a mi</i>	<i>Nai's penis brought me</i>
<i>Nai , Ogbe dada, efo mi</i>	<i>Nai , you kill always brought me</i>
<i>Nai , Ogbe dada, womi</i>	<i>Nai, you kill always brought me</i>

Again, in formulating Jesus for the Ga Christian, the office of the *Wulomo* has to be understood as an undoubted necessary condition for their communal constitution. As a Christian living in the Ga community, there should be the realization that the office of the high priest is an important component that cannot exist other than in the fellowship with him who has the gift and the power of sacramental action. It is through the priesthood that communications with the gods are made possible. There is no doubt among the Gas that the community is fulfilled and integrated through the priestly office and this cannot be ignored by Christians. Their communal being was precisely transformed into an ecclesial being through and in priesthood.

In this sense, the office given to an individual is not a praxis of an ordained individual alone but that of a community, i.e., performed by the priest together with the people. But Ga Christians should take note that in the final analysis, the author of life is God, through Christ Himself, through the priest and the community. This leads us to the point that the priest does not possess in him an indelible mark as if it were a magical seal which grants him a private efficacy to perform religious duties or any other action, without taking into consideration the community. The priestly ministry is rather a charismatic gift to serve and edify the service of God.

In order to re-construct a unique Ga spirituality, there is the realization of the importance of the *Wulomo*. So the idea of a priestly incarnation of Jesus can be taken into consideration in doing this. Suggestions from Ekem and Laryea would be useful in doing this. In his book, *New Testament concepts of atonement in an African pluralistic setting*, Ekem starts his priestly incarnational formulation based on Hebrews by stating that Christ becomes the perfect *archiereus* (high priest) who appears in God's presence on our behalf (Hebrews 9:24). He, thereby transcends, so as to speak, every institutional priestly endeavour to approach God. H. Wenschkewitz also wrote that "the priesthood of all believers" emerging from Christ's perfect priesthood is a factor that influences theology. (Wenschkewitz: 142-145: 1932.). Ekem draws heavily on insights from the Christian tradition to develop this form of priestly incarnation. He looks at the conscious challenges emanating from his *Mfantse* community that called for constructive dialogue aimed at enlightening those that sought clarification about the Christ event.

In trying to link this priestly incarnation and Ga spirituality which is based on *Wulomo* concept, the first point we have to firmly stress is that priesthood cannot exist apart from the Ga community. Priesthood is not an authority or a power above the community, nor a function or an

office parallel or outside it. Priesthood is indeed intrinsically related to the sacrifices, which are the central empowering event and the source of unity of the community. This means that the local community finds its unity in the priest, in the sense that through him it forms a body, sacramentally linked and conjoined with the fullness of the society.

What makes Ga spirituality based on the office of priesthood feasible is that the Ga society was originally a theocracy in which the fore-telling priests exercised enormous authority. Above all, considerable authority and sanctity came to be attached to the word of the high priest. In this way a number of distinguished high priests of forceful personality and high moral standing have acquired a special place in the socio-cultural set up of the Ga community. Ga priests are concerned about the social and moral condition of their people; and sought to enforce a severe moral ethic as a way of ensuring religious purity based on the codes of the *kpele* cult. The office of the High Priest or *Wulomo* is the most important. He is the spiritual head of the community and in charge of all communications between the dead and the living. Without his approval a king can never be installed. This is because he has to consult the gods on the rightful choice for the people. He leads all *kpele* ceremonies, accompanied by the *Woyei* (high priestesses). He is in charge of all religious activities; he is considered as both human and divine. Human because he lives in the community and does everything that the average person does, like eating, sleeping and divine because he is able to communicate with the gods.

## 9. SOCIAL WELFARE AND HEALING

The *wulomo*'s home which is comprises of a shrine, clinic and counselling space as well as a Oplace for the congregation of elders is very important in the Ga tradition.

With reference to Christianity among the Gas, there are resemblances in the songs they compose and sing in Church. Examples of this can be found in some of the Ga hymns of the *Presbyterian Church of Ghana* which were composed along priestly incarnational lines.

For instance, part of a hymn in the *Presbyterian Church of Ghana Hymn Book* says,<sup>25</sup>

7)

*Osofo Nukpa ni yoo nwei le*

*wo nuntsc Yesu Nyonmo bi*

*The High Priest who is in heaven*

*Our Lord Jesus the son of God*

This is the kind of mind set possessed by most Ga Christians which is an indication of their spirituality, that is, perceiving Jesus as high priest from God. Secondly, Laryea has used the *kpele* song that talks about the *Nai Wulomo* as *Amralo* which we looked at earlier in this paper and related it to another hymn which has a clear indication of the relationship between Jesus and *Wulomo* (priest).

8)

*Yesu, mi-nuntso, mikpolo ke minaanyo kpakpa*<sup>26</sup>

*Mada o shi daanee ye heshibaa tsui mli, ni mala*

*Maha ogbei keaatee beni keje njwei*

*mi-nuntsu Yesu le aaba*

*wonda oshi, Yesu, bo jielo wala amralo*

*beni bo dientse oshe awala le ofo*

*afu o mon, leelen, ona gbele hon*

( The comparism can be done between this song and the fifth song (Song no.5)

The English translation is:

*Christ my Lord, my deliverer and my good friend*

*I will thank you always in humility of heart and in songs*



*In your name from heaven forever*

*Until you come*

*We thank you our redeemer and life and well being 'Amralo'*

*When you yourself sacrificed your life*

*Yet you overcame death*

For the Ga spirituality, the relationship between Christ and the Ga Christian is like that of the *Wulomo* who is considered also as *Amralo*. Laryea, here stresses that Jesus has been perceived as *wala amralo*, that is a eternal High Priest who is divine and yet sees to the day to day affairs of his people. This is very meaningful in the Ga perspective and a good contextualization which makes Christ available to the Gas who have had this word and used it earlier than other ethnic groups.

The song above signifies the past rule of the priest before the institution of kingship. This *kpele* song is still sung today to indicate the importance of the priest or *Wulomo*.

Laryea commented on this by saying that before the Ga townships were established, as we see it today, there were families and the heads of the families were *Wulomei* (priests) and the head of the *Wulomei* ( the High Priest) was in charge of all the others. The High Priest was also the one who took care of the entire township.

As simply put by him in Ga,

*"Wulomo nukpa le ji lumo dientse ni kweo man le no.*

*La Kpa Wulomo ji moni kweo La man le no,*

*ni Gbobu Wulomo ji moni kweo Nungua man le no* <sup>27</sup>

**This translates as:**

*The High Priest is the one who takes care of the town*

*La Kpa High priest is the one who is in Charge of the La Township*

*and Gbobu High priest is in charge of the Nungua township.*

This reaffirms the point that kingship and its connotations in Akan which is worked into the development of the incarnation of Jesus Christ in Akan ancestral cult cannot work in the Ga areas. The ones who are custodians, trustees and take charge are actually the *Wulomei*, in all the Ga townships and not the kings or *mantsemei*.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this paper tries to formulate a spirituality unique to the Ga people. This is because even though a number of incarnational models have been developed, it would not be of much help if the Ga people would just accept any of these. Instead, they can take it as an encouragement to follow the examples of people from different cultures and times and do their own local Ga spirituality, especially in our Ghanaian context where the Akan culture is dominant and there is the misconception that Akan culture encompasses all others.

We have argued for a distinctive spirituality that is deduced from Ga ancestral heritage to be formulated among the Gas based on priesthood rather than kingship. The key ingredients of this spirituality is the functionality of the *Wulomei* in the Ga context as both divine representations of the *jeimawodzin* (traditional gods ) and ultimately their relationship to *nyonmo* the almighty God. Also, they are being perceived as *amralo*, that is, the rulers of the world. This then leads to the re-contextualization of it to Christ who is the eternal High Priest from heaven, forever and ever. Therefore, Christians can only rely on him in his unique display of high priestly functions universally in the self sacrifice and atonement for sins. I agree with Laryea that Christ is *Wala amralo* or incarnational figure who care so much for humankind. This gives the mandate for us to re-contextualize it in the Ga perspective as we gather from the *kpele* literary materials that we have looked at. Perhaps in these days where priestly contribution to spirituality is under serious threat due to the scandals being reported in the Ghanaian media concerning ministers of the

gospel, a critical reflection on Ga ancestral heritage have a few things to teach us in this direction as we seek for exemplary models in the development of Biblical spirituality.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup>L.D. Hulley, 'Spirituality and Ethics: Do they Belong together?' in (eds), Cela Kourie and Louise Kretzschmar *Christian Spirituality in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2000) 55-65.
- <sup>2</sup> I .D. Hulley, 'Spirituality and Ethics: Do they Belong together?' in (eds), Cela Kourie and Louise Kretzschmar *Christian Spirituality in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2000) 55-65.
- <sup>3</sup> I.D. Hulley, 'Spirituality and Ethics: Do they Belong together?' in (eds), Cela Kourie and Louise Kretzschmar *Christian Spirituality in South Africa* (Pietermaritzburg: Cluster, 2000) 55-65
- <sup>4</sup> Christo Lombaard, 'What is Biblical Spirituality? Perspectives from a Minor Genre of Old Testament Scholarship' in *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 135, 2009, 85-89.
- <sup>5</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Christian Tradition (100-600)*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1971, p. 203
- <sup>6</sup> A.A. Akrong, *An Akan View of Salvation from the Perspective of John Calvin's Soteriology*'. (PhD Dissertation, Lutheran School of Theology: Chicago) 1991, p. 129.
- <sup>7</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *The Emergence of the Christian Tradition (100-600)*.( Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 1971, p. 203
- <sup>8</sup> M.J. Field, *Religion And Medicine Of The Ga People*, (London:Oxford University Press), 1961, p. 1.
- <sup>9</sup> Marion Kilson, "Ga And Non-Ga Population Of Central Accra." *Ghana Journal Of Sociology*, 1966, 2, pp. 18-25.
- <sup>10</sup> A.A. Akrong, 'Jesus With the face of An Ancestor' in *Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, New Series 1,1: 2006, pp. 20-36.
- <sup>11</sup> A.A. Akrong, 'Jesus With the face of An Ancestor' in *Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, New Series 1,1: 2006, pp. 20-36.
- <sup>12</sup> A.A. Akrong, 'Jesus With the face of An Ancestor' in *Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, New Series 1,1: 2006, pp. 20-36.
- <sup>13</sup> John Kirby, (ed.), *Efua Kuma Ayeyi ne Mpaebo*. Asempa: Accra, 1980, p.17.
- <sup>14</sup> A.A. Akrong, 'Jesus With the face of An Ancestor' in *Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, New Series 1,1: 2006, pp. 20-36.
- <sup>15</sup> A.A. Akrong, 'Jesus With the face of An Ancestor' in *Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, New Series 1,1: 2006, pp. 20-36.
- <sup>16</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective* (Accra: Asempa Publishers), 1990 reprinted in 1998, p. 10.
- <sup>17</sup> Kwame Bediako, 'The Unique Christ in the Plurality of Religions'. In *The Unique Christ In Our Pluralistic World: Christ Unique In Relation To Other Lords*. Bruce J. Nicholls (ed.), Carlisle: Paternoster Press. 1994, 47-56.
- <sup>18</sup> Kwame Bediako, *Jesus In Africa: The Christian Gospel In African History And Experience*. Calisle: Paternoster Press (Regnum Africa) 2000, p. 102.
- <sup>19</sup> Marion Kilson, *Kpele Lala, Ga Religious Songs And Symbols*,(Massachussetts: Havard University Press 1971).
- <sup>20</sup> E.S.T. Ababio, *Blema Kakaloi*. (Accra :Bureau of Ghana languages 2000).
- <sup>21</sup> Modupe Oduyoye, *The Sons of the Gods and the Daughters of Men: An Afro-Asaitic Interpretation of Genesis 1-11*. Maryknoll: Orbis, 1984, p.30.
- <sup>22</sup> Marion Kilson, *Kpele Lala, Ga Religious Songs And Symbols*,(Massachussetts: Havard University Press 1971)
- <sup>23</sup> Marion Kilson, *Kpele Lala, Ga Religious Songs And Symbols*,(Massachussetts: Havard University Press 1971)
- <sup>24</sup> Marion Kilson, *Kpele Lala, Ga Religious Songs And Symbols*,(Massachussetts: Havard University Press 1971)
- <sup>25</sup> *Ghana Presbyterian Asafo Solemo Lala Wolo*. Accra: (Waterville Presbytrian Press, 2000), p. 119.
- <sup>26</sup> Philip Laryea, *Yesu Homowo Nuntso*. (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2004).
- <sup>27</sup> Philip Laryea, *Yesu Homowo Nuntso*. (Akropong-Akuapem: Regnum Africa, 2004), p. 75.