

**A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF AKAN AND BIBLICAL
CONCEPTS OF A HUMAN BEING: A STUDY TO
ILLUSTRATE A METHOD OF CROSS – CULTURAL
EVANGELISM**

BY

REV. ERNESTINA AFRIYIE

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation, with the exception of the sources which I have faithfully acknowledged in the text, is my original work. It has not been submitted to any other University for assessment.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Ernestina Afriyie", written over a horizontal dotted line.

Rev. Ernestina Afriyie

DEDICATION

Dedicated to my parents, Joshua Ernest Berko and Comfort Akosua Gyamfiwah Berko, and also to the memory of Osei Kofi Agyeman, father of my niece and nephews, Yvonne, Jonathan and David.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
Abstract	
Map of Ghana showing areas occupied by the Akan	
Chapter one: Introduction	1
Chapter Two: Akan concepts of the human being	8
Origins of the human being	11
Constitution of the human being	15
Gender and Humanness	28
Body form, age, status, moral behaviour, and humanness	34
Ethnic Affiliation and humanness	46
Communality and humanness	48
Summary and Conclusion	51
Notes	53
Chapter Three: Biblical concepts of a human being	57
Origins of the human being	58
Constitution of the Human being	61
Gender and humanness	77
Body form, age, status, moral behaviour, and humanness	79
Ethnic Affiliation and humanness	85
Communality and humanness	88
Summary and Conclusion	90
Notes	91
Chapter Four: Comparison of Akan and Biblical Concepts	94
Chapter Five: Letting the Bible Interpret the Culture	108

Chapter Six: Summary and Conclusion	125
Notes	132
Bibliography	133

ABSTRACT

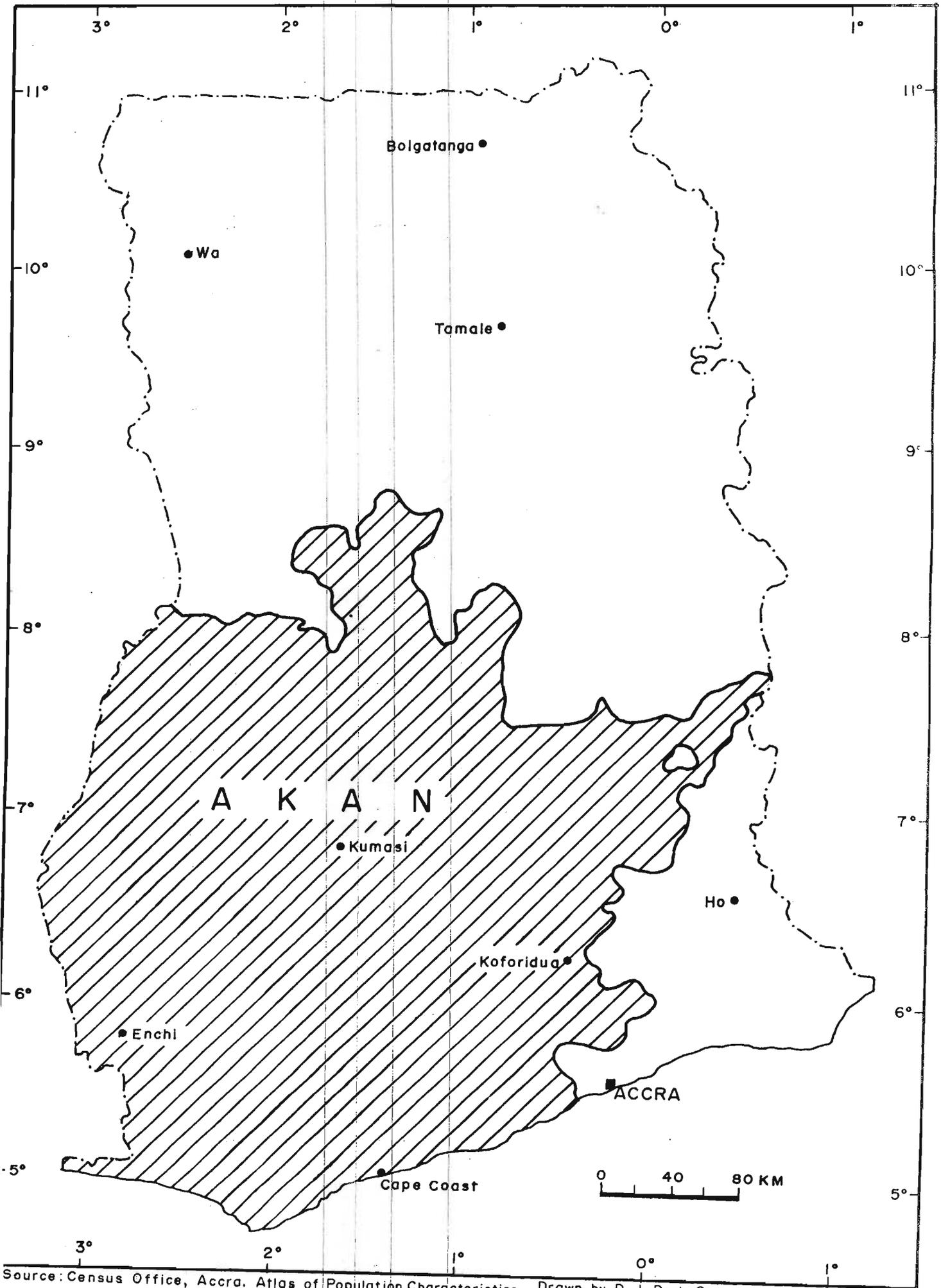
This study establishes what the Akan and Biblical concepts of a human being are in terms of origin, constitution, gender, body form, age, status, moral behaviour, ethnic affiliation, and communality. It then compares the Akan concepts with the Biblical concepts to see what the similarities are, and, what the differences are.

The findings are that in terms of origin, constitution, gender, age, status, moral behaviour, ethnic affiliation and communality, the concepts are similar even though there are some differences. For example, while in both Akan and Biblical thought, the human being consists of material and immaterial components, the Akan have five components, namely, *akra*, *honhom*, *sunsum*, *mogya* and *nipadua*, and the Biblical has three, body, soul and spirit. In terms of body form, Akan thought is completely different from Biblical thought.

The presence of such differences in thought poses a problem in evangelism as it often leads to conflict. Yet this should not be for it then affects the effectiveness of evangelism. This study therefore illustrates how Akan culture, just as it is, can be interpreted by the Bible and thus establishes that it is possible to evangelise cross – culturally without creating conflict so that the Christian faith can be integrated into the culture. This is possible only if evangelists know and understand the culture in which they try to evangelise, if they know what needs their beliefs and practices meet for them.

The study proposes that for effective evangelism to take place, the church must take up the study of cultures seriously and provide funds for it.

A MAP OF GHANA SHOWING AREAS OCCUPIED BY THE AKAN



Source: Census Office, Accra. Atlas of Population Characteristics Drawn by D. J. Drah, Geography Dept., Legon.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This study aims at examining one area of African traditional belief with particular reference to the Akan of Ghana, and comparing it with Biblical belief. It goes on to use the information obtained from the comparison to illustrate how Akan culture may be interpreted by the Bible. The study will specifically analyse the Akan and Biblical concepts of the human being. The purpose is to learn what things in Akan thought make one a human being, and how these compare with the things which according to the Bible, make one a human being.

The study sets out clearly the Akan concepts of the human being and compares them with the Biblical concepts in order to find out what similarities and differences exist between the two. It also spells out the needs that the Akan concepts meet for the Akan and tries to find out how the Bible responds to them.

The study will be limited to a comparison of Akan and Biblical concepts in order to provide us with the information needed for the Bible to interpret culture. This study is necessary because Africans need to know that the Gospel which has been brought to them does not belong to only one culture but to all cultures, they must know that the Gospel can and does meet the needs of every human being, including the African. To make this possible, there is the need, first of all, to set the Biblical and African concepts side by side. After this is done, one can then move on to show that the Gospel embraces the African culture and can be its interpreter, that the needs of the African can be met by the Bible and hence the Christian faith.

Being a comparative study of concepts, the study has implications. It has implications for evangelism. If concepts are different it is so because they belong to

different world views and they meet certain needs in the lives of the people. Evangelism must therefore be done having this in mind.

For the purpose of this study, the Akan of Ghana have been selected. There are a couple of reasons for this:

First, the Akan, made up mainly of the Ashanti, Fante, and Twi groups¹, represent about two-thirds of the people of Ghana. To consider them in this study therefore is to consider more than half of the population. This means that the findings of the study can be applied to a large number of people and could perhaps even be generalised to cover all Ghanaians.

Secondly, much research has already been done in Akan life and thought. These are the studies of academically acceptable writers who have been scientifically trained for their work. This therefore makes available to later researchers a massive stock of evidence for observation and research.

There has been other research on the Akan from the sociological, anthropological, and philosophical points of view. Little has however been done on human beings from the view point of theology. Furthermore, most of the studies that have already been made on human beings look only at the concepts of the self or person. This study therefore proposes to consider if apart from constitution, other things affect personhood in Akan thought. It also considers what needs the concepts meet for the Akan and proposes how the Bible meets the same needs by filling out the Akan concepts. This work will therefore contribute to Theology.

As has already been mentioned, a number of studies have been done in certain aspects of this present study. Among them are the following:

Th. C. Vriezen's work, *Outline of the Old Testament*², looks at the Biblical concept of the human being. It tries to show how the Biblical concepts came into being. My

study does not try to explain how any of the concepts came into being. It seeks rather to find and state these concepts and compare them without passing any value judgement.

H. H. Rowley³ and Hans Walter Wolff⁴ also analyse the Biblical concepts of man but they do not try to compare these with the African concepts.

Kwame Gyekye has written on “Personhood and community in African Thought”⁵. His work addresses the issue of whether a human being is a self –sufficient atomic individual who has no need for other people or not. This present study will be exploring how in the Akan and Biblical worlds of meaning, the idea of the one and the many are related.

Kwame Gyekye also looks at the Akan concept of a person in his work, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*⁶. In this work, he only looks at the constituent elements of the human being in Akan thought. This study looks further than the constituent elements.

J. B. Danquah in his *Akan doctrine of God*⁷ also touches on the Akan concepts of a human being. This study takes some of these concepts and compares them with some of those in the Bible.

S. G. Williamson does a comparative study of the Akan religion and the Christian faith.⁸ In the conclusion of his work, he says that Akan religion, and for that matter, Akan culture, and the Christian faith do not have any common ground of fellowship. The Christian faith can therefore not be integrated into Akan culture. This study seeks to show that contrary to this view, Akan culture and the Christian faith do have some common grounds of fellowship and that even where there are differences, they need not lead to conflict in evangelism. Although his work tries to show how both the Akan religion and the Christian faith have impacted on each other, he makes very little

comment on the Akan concepts of the human being. However his study contributes toward the comparative aspect of this study.

John S. Mbiti studied the concepts of God among some three hundred peoples in Africa.⁹ He however does not do a comparative study. Furthermore, in his study he does not explore concepts of the human being.

Birgit Meyer in her article: “If You Are A Devil, You Are A Witch And If You Are A Witch You Are A Devil”¹⁰, examines one Ewe concept of the human being: the witch. This study, rather than look at the different types of human beings that exist in Akan thought, looks at the question of who is considered a human being in Akan thought. Birgit Meyer’s study is nevertheless useful to the discussion.

Although this study is mainly theological, it will also draw from the fields of Philosophy and Anthropology.

In this study, the main problem that we try to address is whether the Biblical concepts of a human being are the same as those of the Akan. For example, can we say that the concept “soul” in the Bible as written in the Greek or Hebrew or English is the same as the concept *akra* in Akan thought? We therefore try to answer the question: When the Bible says that a being is a human being, is the meaning the same as when the Akan say that a being is a human being? We do this by answering the following questions:

- What are the Biblical concepts of a human being?
- What are the Akan concepts of a human being?
- Are there any similarities between the two groups of concepts?
- Are there any differences between the two groups of concepts?
- What conclusions can be drawn from the similarities and differences?

It is very likely that the Akan world view is different from the Biblical world view. Our hypothesis for this study is therefore that the Akan concepts are not the same as the Biblical concepts. They may be similar but a closer look is likely to show that they have different meanings.

We shall also consider the meanings of the concepts, that is, what needs they meet for the Akan and see how the Bible responds to that.

The Christian Faith has spread throughout Ghana. It would therefore have been very interesting to do a general study of all the peoples of Ghana. However to extend the study to cover all the peoples would require more time than is available and it would lead to a shallow understanding and therefore affect the quality of the research.

Again, this study is limited to only the concepts of a human being. This is because knowledge of the human being is the common concern of both secular and theological wisdom. The human being cannot be ignored. This can be seen in the fact that a favourite subject of philosophers, psychologists and poets, is the human being.

In this study two main assumptions have been made:

1. Scholars who have written on the Akan concepts of the human being have written on the traditional Akan concepts.
2. Despite the fact that the Akan are a large group of people found in different parts of the country, they have similar world views and therefore, very similar concepts.

The main source of data for this work is written documents. Data has been collected from texts and studies related to the Biblical and Akan doctrines of the human being, Akan proverbs, songs, lamentations, rituals and other relevant materials.

The work consists of six chapters. This Introduction forms chapter One. Chapter Two looks at the Akan concept of the human being. It begins with a short introduction

that gives an idea of what the Akan world is like. In Chapter Three, we look at Biblical concepts of the human being.

Chapter Four is the chapter in which the Akan and Biblical concepts are compared to show how similar or dissimilar these concepts are. Then in Chapter Five we consider the needs that the concepts meet for the Akan and how the Bible meets these needs as it fills out the Akan concepts.

Chapter six, the concluding chapter, gives a summary of the whole work and the conclusions arrived at.

NOTES

¹ According to S. G. Williamson, Christaller lists the inhabitants of Akim, Akwammu, Akuapem, Assin, Ashanti, Denkyira, and Wassaw as Akans speaking the Twi language. See footnote 3 in Sidney George Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith: A Comparative Study of the Impact of Two Religions*, Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1965, p. x.

² Th. C. Vriezen, *Outline of Old Testament Theology*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1954.

³ H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel: Aspects of Old Testament Thought*, London: SCM Press Ltd, 1956.

⁴ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1974.

⁵ Kwame Gyekye, "Personhood and Community in African Thought", in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye (Eds.), *Person and Community: Ghanaian Philosophical Studies I*,

⁶ Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme (Revised Edition)*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995, PP. 85-103.

⁷ J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God: A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion (Second Edition)*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968

⁸ Sydney George Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith: A Comparative Study of the Impact of Two Religions*, Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1965.

⁹ See John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, London: S.P.C.K., 1970

¹⁰ Birgit Meyer, " 'If you are a Devil, you are a Witch and if you are a Witch you are a Devil' : The Integration of Pagan Ideas Into the Conceptual Universe of Ewe Christians in Southern Ghana", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, XXII, 2, 1992.

CHAPTER TWO

THE AKAN CONCEPT OF A HUMAN BEING

K. A. Busia is of the view that to understand the world of a people fully, we must first know their conception of the nature of the human being and society.¹ I am also of the view that a knowledge of a people's world and the way they structure that world, helps us to better understand their conception of the human being. This is because it is from their world that the elements of concepts are taken. For this reason, we shall discuss some aspects of the Akan world before proceeding to look at the Akan concepts of the human being.

The Akan can be found in the forest region and along the coast in Ghana. The people are mainly agriculturists. Those in the forest region are farmers whilst those along the coast are fishermen and fish mongers.

According to Noel Smith, religion is the basis of Akan society and the foundation of Akan religion is social.² The whole social and political organisation is interlocked inextricably with religion with the *abusua*, the clan or kindred group at its heart. The chief characteristic of the *abusua* is that it is matrilineal, that is children belong to the *abusua* of their mother.

The *abusua* consists of the living as well as the dead and the unborn. Due to this, the rites of passage- naming a child, puberty, marriage, death- as well as the veneration of the dead, are the most important rites in Akan society. When these events are observed correctly, the life and prosperity of the clan are preserved. "This is the basic 'religion of life' of the Akan".³

Akan life is based on the welfare of the community. All that prospers communal life is its chief concern and it is a concern in which the ancestors play a very important part. At the same time the Akan live in a world that is filled with spirits.

According to K. A. Busia, the Akan see the universe as being full of spirits⁴. The greatest of the spirits is *Onyame* or *Onyankopɔn*, the Supreme Being. He is the creator of all things. Various titles are ascribed to him. From these titles we get what the Akan conception of this Supreme Being is. Titles such as *Bɔrebɔre*, *Tweaduampɔn*, *Otumfoɔ*, *Ananse Kokuroko*, show that He is conceived as the Creator of all things, the Dependable One, the Powerful One, and the Great Spider (the Wise One), respectively.

There are also the *abosom*, the pantheon of gods. These derive their power from *Onyame*, the Supreme Being, and are parts of Him. They are linguists or mouthpieces of the Supreme Being. They are therefore referred to as *Onyame akyeame*, the word *akyeame* meaning linguists. They act as intermediaries between the Supreme Being and human beings⁵. Of all these *abosom*, the spirits of the rivers are the most powerful⁶. These spirits are believed to derive from the Supreme Being, the rivers themselves being children of the Supreme Being⁷.

The *abosom* serve various purposes in the community. For example, they provide for the needs of people and also guard them from evil. They always require temporary abodes and have priests. A rock, a tree, or, as has already been alluded to, a river, may serve as the temporary abode. Sometimes the priest prepares a wooden image or a mound made from mud for the spirit of the *abosom*.

Asuman are also a class of spirits. These take different forms. They may be in the form of talismans and amulets or beads worn around the waist, wrist or neck, or hung in a special place in the house like the entrance.

The *asuman* are believed to derive their power from the *abosom* or from the spirits of plants and trees known as *sasa*. While the *asuman* are sometimes thought to be magical objects charged with impersonal forces which “can be manipulated by secret formulae”⁸, K. A. Busia says that all *asuman* derive their power ultimately from some

other supernatural beings.⁹ The ability of a *suman* to function effectively as a means of protection, or something that helps the one who wears it to gain his or her personal ends depends on the care given to it.

The next group of spirits to be mentioned is the *nsamanfoɔ*, ancestors. These are the spirits of clan, lineage, town, chiefdom or tribe members who have died nobly and qualify to be ancestors.¹⁰ They are derived from the blood of the individuals, and, Philip F. W. Bartle thinks that the word *saman* should be translated as “blood spirit”, and not “ghost”.¹¹ *Nsamanfoɔ* are believed to be capable of intervening in the affairs of human beings. This they do by either rewarding or punishing the living, depending on how these living relatives have treated traditional customs and moral codes. Not all relatives who die become ancestors. A relative upon dying may become a *samantwentwen*, an evil ghost. This happens when a person suffers *atɔfo wuo*, an evil death. Evil deaths include suicide and death through motor accidents. A *samantwentwen* is dangerous and vindictive.

Apart from these spirits, there are other spirit beings that influence the lives of human beings. One of such spirits, which is important for our discussion, is the *bayie*, witchcraft spirit.

According to Kwabena Amponsah¹², *bayie* is spiritual in its form and activities. The *bayie* spirit can take a physical form and live in the body of human beings. It can also be located in different places, for example in the farm, hearth or under the bed.

Bayie can be acquired through birth. The foetus can be removed from the mother’s womb and taken to the meeting of the *abayifoɔ*¹³ where the spirit is given to it and it is then returned to the womb.¹⁴

Some people believe that the spirit can also be transferred from the blood of the mother to the foetus in the uterus. Again, it can be transferred through food¹⁵. It can also be transferred through earrings, necklaces and beads.

A person can acquire the *bayie* spirit accidentally or intentionally. It can be acquired accidentally by buying very cheap things, or by picking things from the ground, and intentionally by a person paying an admission fee of a small amount.

Bayie is by nature evil. It is always used for selfish motives. It is at worst used to harm people ¹⁶.

Not everybody can have a *bayie* spirit transferred to him or her. It is also not everybody who can be influenced by the *bayie* spirit. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

Having discussed these aspects of the Akan world, we shall now go on to discuss the Akan concept of the human being. We shall do that under the following headings:

- (a) The origins of the human being
- (b) The constitution of the human being
- (c) Gender and humanness
- (d) Body form, age, status, moral behaviour and humanness
- (e) Ethnic affiliation or colour and humanness
- (f) Communalism and humanness

ORIGINS OF THE HUMAN BEING

The Akan conception of the origin of human beings can be known by looking at the myths of origin that exist among them. A Myth, according to Nicholas Corte, is:

A symbol which reveals certain aspects of reality, the deepest aspects which defy any other means of knowledge.¹⁷

There are different myths on the origins of the Akan. Bearing in mind that by Robert G. Tikpor's¹⁸ definition, a myth is prehistoric culture's attempt at answering the most perplexing questions posed by the supernatural and the natural in creation, we shall look at some of these myths and try to get what we need from them.

In R. S. Rattray's work *Ashanti*¹⁹, he narrates the myth of the origin of the people of the Aduana²⁰ blood clan with its six sub-divisions, Atwae, Abrade, Ada, Amoakwade, Amanwere, and Nyampasakyi, and also the Oyoko clan as follows:

A very long time ago, a worm bored its way through the ground and appeared on the surface of the earth at Santemanso. It was followed out by seven men, five women, a leopard, and a dog. This happened on a Monday night, *Nkyidwoɔ*. The names of the men were: Adu Ogyinae, Opoku Tenten, Adu Kwao, Agyapon Tenten, Kusi Aduoku, Ankora Dame, and Odehye Adjewa Sabene. The women were: Takyuwa Brobe, Aberewa Noko, Aberewa Samante, Aberewa Musu and Abrade Kwa.²¹

When they came out of the ground, the new things around seemed strange to them. They were therefore very much afraid. One of them, Adu Ogyinae, was however not afraid. He laid his hands on them one after the other and soothed them. They began to settle down and by Wednesday had started to build huts for themselves. While they were doing this, a tree fell on Adu Ogyinae and killed him.²² The dog which had come along with them went away for a while and returned with fire in its mouth. The people laid some food on the fire and when it was ready, they fed it to the dog to find out if it was safe for consumption. The dog, upon consuming the cooked food, did not die. Rather, with time, it began to grow fat. The human beings thus came to realise that cooked food was good and began to eat it.

Later while *Ɔdomankoma*, the Creator, was on His journey about the earth creating things, He came across these people already settled at Nampansa. He took one of them with him as his linguist.

Another myth of origin, which Rattray narrates, is that of the Bosommuru *ntoro*.²³ According to the myth, very long ago, a man and a woman came down from the sky. Another couple come up from the earth. Then a python came down from the Sky-God and lived in the river which is now called Bosommuru. At first the two couples did not bear children, they had no desire for copulation, and conception and birth were not known.

One day, the python told them that he would cause the women to conceive and bear children.²⁴ He asked the couples to stand face to face and then when they had done that, he plunged into the water. Rising up out of the water, he sprayed water onto their bellies with the words *kus kus*. He then ordered them to go back home and lie together. The women conceived and brought forth children. These children became the first to take Bosommuru as their *ntoro*.

Such myths do create the impression that the Akan do not believe that God created human beings. Yet there is a general creation myth which is not about how one clan or the other came to be, but about how the world and all that is in it came to be. This myth says that *Ɔdomankoma*, the Creator, first made the sky, then the earth, rivers and plants. After that he created human beings and the animals. The plants that had already been created were used as food by the animals and they, the animals, in turn served as food for the human beings. As the human beings needed protection in their environment, God created the spirits of the waters, forests and rocks.²⁵

According to Dan J. Antwi, the African experience, and as such the Akan experience, of a human being is that he or she is a creature.²⁶ He goes on to say that this

profound pre-Christian view can be encountered in many of the creation stories and the appellations of God in Africa. In fact, the African view of the human being as a creature can be encountered in many more ways than only the creation myths and the appellations. Maxims, proverbs, the lyrics of songs as well as drum language reveal this view. The philosophies of Africans are hidden in these. Quoting Kwame Gyekye, H. Odera Orika, writes:

Philosophical concepts... can be found embedded in African proverbs, linguistic expressions, myths and folktales...²⁷

The Yoruba of Nigeria describe God as Orise meaning the Source of Being. The Illa of Zambia call him Namakungwe, the Originator or, the One from whom all things come and the Ngombe of Zaire call Him Ebangala, the Beginner.²⁸

Like all these other Africans, the Akan also have appellations for God which prove that they acknowledge Him as Creator. One of the appellations that the Akan give to God is *Bɔrebɔre*. According to Sydney George Williamson, it is a name for God, in the sense of Creator.²⁹ It means, Originator. It also means Excavator. It could also mean Moulder.³⁰ Explaining this appellation, J. B. Danquah uses the words Architect, and Inventor and says that the appellation comes from the verb *bɔre* which means to dig, or *bɔ*, which means to create or to make.³¹ He goes on to say that when *re* is added to *bɔ*, it puts the verb in the repetitive or intensive form. Another appellation of the Akan for God is *Ɔbɔɔadeɛ*. This simply means Creator. To say *Ɔbɔɔadeɛ Nyame*, is to say Creator God. It would be meaningless for people to call God Creator God if they did not see Him as Creator. God to them is not just a Creator who has created the things that they see around them but the Creator who has created them, the human beings, too. An Akan maxim says: *Nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, obi nnye asase ba*. When we translate this maxim literally, it means that all human beings are children of God, no one is a child of

the earth. By saying that human beings are children of God, the Akan are referring to a relationship between God and human beings in which the existence of the latter is dependent on the former. God is the Father of all human beings in that it is through him that human beings have come to be. He is their source. God is seen as the Creator, thus even in the myths, allusions are made to the involvement of God in the coming about of human beings.

K. A. Busia³² provides a reason for looking to drum language as a source of information on Akan thought. According to him, “Akan drum language is full of riddles that conceal reflective thought and philosophy...”³³. One drum text says:

Ɔdomankoma bɔɔ adee, ɔbɔɔ 'deeben? Ɔbɔɔ ɔkyerema.

Giving a literal translation of this line, we would say, “ God created, what did he create? He created the drummer”. The drummer, everybody knows, is a human being. When the drummer strikes these words on the drum therefore, he acknowledges the fact that he, together with all human beings, is a creature of God. The word *Ɔdomankoma* is the name of God among the Akan that is generally associated with creation as distinct from *Onyankopɔn* and *Onyame*. Therefore G. P. Hagan asserts that there is no other being to whom the Akan give any role of creation beyond *Ɔdomankoma* (the Creator).³⁴

CONSTITUTION OF THE HUMAN BEING

The Akan conceive of a human being as made up of components that come from three main sources, namely, the Supreme Being, the father, and, the mother. It is not however very clear what the components are since the findings differ from one researcher to another. For example, while Kwabena Amponsah³⁵, Kofi Asare Opoku³⁶ and W. E. Abraham³⁷ say that the Akan conceive the human being as being made up of *okra*, *sunsum*, *ntoro* and *mogya*, Peter Sarpong says that the components are *bogya*³⁸,

sunsum, *okra* and *honhom*³⁹. Eva Meyerowitz for her part found that among the Akan, it is believed that the human being is made up of *kra*⁴⁰, *honhom* and *sunsum*⁴¹ while Kwame Gyekye says that the constituents of the human being in Akan thought are *okra*, *sunsum* and *nipadua* or *honam*⁴².

In an initial work⁴³, Kwasi Wiredu gives the constituents of the human being as *nipadua* (a body), *okra* (soul), *sunsum*, *ntoro* and *mogya* (blood). The *sunsum* is that which gives rise to a man's character, the *ntoro*, that which a father passes on to his children and which is the basis of inherited characteristics, and the *mogya* that which is passed on from the mother and which determines a person's clan identity. It is the *mogya* that becomes the *saman* when a person dies. However, in a later work⁴⁴ he gives the Akan constitution of the human being as *okra*, the life principle, *mogya*, the blood principle, and *sunsum*, the personality principle. It appears that this later work is an improvement on the earlier work. Having collected the views of Akan people, Kwasi Wiredu has analysed the material to clarify things and come to this conclusion. This later view of his is shared by Kofi Appiah-Kubi⁴⁵ who also gives *mogya*, *sunsum* and *okra* as the constituents of a human being.

From the foregoing, it is clear that when enquiring into the Akan concepts of the constitution of a human being, we come across six distinct concepts, namely, the *okra*, *sunsum*, *honhom*, *mogya*, *ntoro*, and *nipadua* or *honam*. We shall examine each of these entities to know what they are in Akan thought.

Okra

While there may be differences in the findings of researchers on the constitution of the human being in Akan thought, all researchers mention that one of the components of the human being is the *okra*.

The *okra* is conceptualised as the part of the human being which makes him, or her, a living being. To use Kwasi Wiredu's expression, it is the "life principle"⁴⁶. It has its origin in the Supreme Being, God, and it is therefore part of the divine in the human being. It is unique to human beings in that animals and plants do not have it. Believing that every human being comes into the world with an *nkrabea*, destiny, the Akan generally hold that the *okra* is the bearer of a person's destiny⁴⁷. It is a person's guardian spirit even though all of its actions are automatic, that is, it always acts to fulfil the individual's given destiny. The *okra* is immortal. When a person dies, his or her *okra* leaves the body to return to the Supreme Being.

Contrary to the view of Kwasi Wiredu,⁴⁸ the Akan conception of the *okra* is that it is immaterial. In Kwasi Wiredu's view because it is possible for *nnunsifofo*, medicine men, and people with extra-sensory perception to see and communicate with the *okra*, it is a quasi-physical entity. Making his point against Kwasi Wiredu's argument, Kwame Gyekye⁴⁹ says that the fact that not everybody is able to see and communicate with the *okra* shows that the phenomena that Kwasi Wiredu uses to argue his case do not take place in the ordinary spatial world. This, he continues, therefore means that what the medicine men and those with extrasensory perception see and communicate with is something which is non-spatial.

Honhom

The human being also has *honhom*. It is mentioned as one of the components of the human being by Peter Sarpong⁵⁰ and Eva Meyerowitz⁵¹. Kwame Gyekye⁵² on his part, mentions it as being closely associated with the *okra* but not a component itself.

The *honhom* is the breath. It is an immaterial entity. According to Peter Sarpong⁵³, the *okra* is accompanied by the *honhom*. Eva Meyerowitz⁵⁴ also acknowledges that the

honhom is closely bound up with the *kra*. According to her, when a person dies, the *honhom* goes back to God. This means that it is derived from God. It can therefore also be described as part of the divine in the human being.

Sunsum

Like the *okra*, there appears to be no dispute about the *sunsum* as a component of the human being. It is believed to be non-physical, that is, it cannot be seen by ordinary people. Only the *nnunsifoɔ*, medicine men, and those with extrasensory perception can see it.

The Akan generally believe that the *sunsum* comes from the father. This is, however, refuted by researchers like Kwame Gyekye⁵⁵. According to Kwame Gyekye, the *sunsum* derives from the Supreme Being. He argues that because the *sunsum* is a non-physical component, it must be derived from the Supreme Being⁵⁶. We know that character traits of a child can often be seen in that child's parents or other family members. While it is true that personality is not a physical thing, it is also true that character is inherited. We may not be able to say that all of a person's character traits are inherited from the father. The point I seek to make here, however, is that, the fact that personality, though non-physical can be derived from a human being, tells us, that even though the *sunsum* is a non-physical component it can be derived from a human being. We could say that the *sunsum* was derived directly from God in the first man. It is the part of the divine in a man which he passes down to his offspring. If human beings are conceived as consisting of both spiritual and physical elements, then it must be possible for them to pass on to their offspring something of their spiritual element unless, we are saying that that which is spiritual cannot be passed on to a human being by another human being. K. A. Busia says that one part of a human being is "the personality that comes indirectly from the

Supreme Being”⁵⁷. I agree with him. The *sunsum* is a spiritual element. It is divine and yet it comes *indirectly* from God to a person through the father.

On this point, Philip F. W. Bartle says that the *sunsum* is the individual or specific personality spirit inherited from the father.⁵⁸ He goes on to say that very little distinction is made between nature and nurture when the Akan say that the morality, training and personality of a child are the father’s responsibility. This is because it is believed that they are all passed down through the semen as *sunsum* or spiritual character and reinforced after birth by the spirit and behaviour of the father.

The *sunsum* is immortal. The Akan may generally not talk about what happens to the *sunsum* when a person dies. However, its immortality is implied in the fact that it is conceived to be spirit, and spirits, according to the Akan, do not die or disintegrate. Some writers like Eva L. R. Meyerowitz believe that it is the *sunsum* which becomes the *saman* or ghost.⁵⁹ According to her, because the *sunsum* is not of divine origin, it cannot go back to *Nyame*, the Supreme Being, when a person dies. It is therefore changed into a *saman*, that is, a ghost or spirit, that has to wander to *samandow*, literally, the place of ghosts. Peter Sarpong also says that the *sunsum*, which he refers to as the spirit, turns into a ghost or an ancestor and sets out for the world of the ancestors.⁶⁰

The *sunsum* is the part of the human being that can be affected by spirits, good and bad ones alike. The ability of spirits to affect or influence a person depends on the nature of his or her *sunsum*. A person’s *sunsum* can be *duru* (heavy or strong) or *hare* (light or weak). A heavy or strong *sunsum* cannot be attacked by any evil or witchcraft spirit while a light or weak *sunsum* can. Thus according to Kofi Asare Opoku, the saying: “*Wo sunsum ye duru a, obayifoɔ ntumi wo*”, that is “if your *sunsum* is heavy or strong, you cannot be bewitched”, reveals this belief.⁶¹ It is the concept of the *sunsum* that gives place for the concept of *bayie*, witchcraft, in Akan thought. As already

mentioned, nobody is actually born with the *bayie* spirit. It is a spirit that is always passed from one person to another and even though it is possible for a baby to come out of his or her mother's womb already having the *bayie* spirit, the spirit itself is not part of the child's constitution. According to Kwabena Amponsah, an unborn child can be taken from its mother's womb and sent to a meeting of *abayifo*, witches, where he or she will be given the *bayie* spirit and then returned to the mother's womb.⁶² A heavy or strong *sunsum* resists the *bayie* spirit. The spirit cannot be passed on to such a *sunsum*. It can also never succeed in attacking the heavy or strong *sunsum*.

The state of the *sunsum* can be changed through training, that is, it can be trained from the state of being "*hare*", (light or weak), to the state of being "*duru*", (heavy or strong).

Through precept and a system of punishment and reward, the *sunsum* can be educated. For this reason, it is the foundation for moral and personal responsibility. By this concept of the *sunsum* the Akan believe that a person is responsible for his behaviour. A person cannot misbehave and blame it on his nature. Rather, bad behaviour is the result of one's own choice. If we agreed with researchers like Kwabena Amponsah⁶³ that the *sunsum* is responsible for moulding a person into a kind or wicked, hardworking or lazy person, and so on, we would be contradicting the notion that the *sunsum* is educable as this would mean that a person's nature cannot be changed. We should rather say that the presence of the *sunsum* gives one the opportunity to choose to be one thing or another. In this it is different from the *okra* as the latter acts only to fulfil its God given destiny, and therefore acts automatically. The *sunsum* through education makes choices and thus makes individuals unique. In saying this, we are saying that it is responsible for a person's personality, hence Parrinder's reference to it as the "personality soul"⁶⁴.

The *sunsum* is able to move in and out of the body. When the *sunsum* moves out of the body, it does not mean that the person is dead. Giving an example of when the *sunsum* moves out of the body, Kwame Gyekye says that in sleep, the *sunsum* moves out of the body and fashions for itself “a new world of forms with the materials of its waking experience”.⁶⁵ It is this that results in one seeing oneself eating some delicious food, driving a car or writing an examination while he or she is fast asleep.

Among the Akan, it is held that ill- health has two sides, namely, the spiritual side and the physiological side. The spiritual side has to do with an attack on the *sunsum*. Thus according to Kofi Appiah- Kubi⁶⁶, disease is seen among the Akan as an attack by a spirit on one’s spirit, which in Akan is the *sunsum*. A person’s evil thoughts can cause the person’s *sunsum* to be burdened and thus make him ill. Evil thoughts that a person may have of another person can also make the latter ill as it can cause his *sunsum* to fret. In healing therefore, the spiritual element as well as the physical element is addressed.

Ntorɔ

Like the *sunsum*, the *ntorɔ* is derived from the father. It is often confused with the *sunsum* in that some people believe that they are the same. K. A. Busia holds the view that the *ntorɔ* is the general term of which *sunsum* is a specific instance.⁶⁷ R. S. Rattray, renders *ntorɔ* as “spirit” but then thinks that the word *ntorɔ* is a generic term that covers all those exogamous divisions to which every Ashanti belongs either to the one or the other.⁶⁸ His view on the *ntorɔ* differs from that of K. A. Busia as in this case, the *ntorɔ* includes the *abusua* too. However, he also says that the Ashanti think that the *ntorɔ* is one of the two great elements in every human being, the other one being the *bogya* (or *mogya*) for which the general term is *abusua*. This shows that R. S. Rattray does not

include *abusua* in the exogamous divisions covered by the word *ntorɔ*. For Philip F. W. Bartle, the “individual or *sunsum* spirit must be seen as a representative and a part of a more general category, the *ntorɔ*”⁶⁹.

K. A. Busia says that the *ntorɔ* and *sunsum* are synonymous⁷⁰ and he thus makes the former have the same origin as the latter. Other researchers like Kofi Asare Opoku⁷¹ say that the *ntorɔ* is derived from the father. According to Rattray, the *ntorɔ* is transmitted through the male only.⁷²

The *ntorɔ* is responsible for inherited characteristics. It is mainly related to the prescription and avoidance of certain practices. It therefore leads to the moulding of temperament through the operation of taboo. Members of each *ntorɔ* group have specific characteristics which are said to be peculiar to them. Those, for example, of the *Bosompra ntorɔ* are tough. Those of the *Bosommuru ntorɔ* are distinguished and noble, while those of the *Bosomtwe ntorɔ* are compassionate.

The *ntorɔ* are described as “children” of the *abosom* (divinities) hence the names of the *ntorɔ* groups: *Bosommuru*, *Bosompra*, *Bosomtwe*, *Bosom-Dwerebe*, *Bosomakom*, *Bosomafi*, *Bosomafra*, *Bosom-konsi*, *Bosomsika*, *Bosompo*, *Bosomayesu*, and, *Bosomkrete*. According to tradition, it dates back to a time when the clans were led by priest-chiefs.⁷³ Each clan therefore had an *ɔbosom* to which it owed allegiance. The different clans had to observe the prohibitions and the taboos of the *ɔbosom*. These *abosom* lived in the water- rivers, lakes, ocean- and their children were said to “bathe” the *ntorɔ*, hence the question: “*wo dware ntorɔ ben?*”, which *ntorɔ* do you bathe? when one wanted to know the other’s *ntorɔ*.⁷⁴

A child cannot be conceived unless the *ntorɔ* of a man cooperates with a woman’s *mogya*, another component of the human being in Akan thought. Thus even though it appears to be a spiritual entity coming from the *abosom*, it can rightly be said to be

derived from the father. Before puberty, a child's father's *ntorɔ* acts for him or her. After puberty, however, the child's own *ntorɔ* takes over, assuming greater control even though the father's *ntorɔ* does not completely cease to exert influence on the child. For this reason, there is a spiritual bond built between a child and its father which balances the relationship between the child and its mother.

Mogya

Mogya is the constituent element of the human being that is derived from the mother. *Mogya* literally translates as blood and is the basis of the mother-child bond which is a biological one. According to Kwasi Wiredu, it is socially the most important constituent of the human person as it is taken as the basis of lineage or clan identity.⁷⁵ Through the *mogya*, a person is a member of his or her mother's lineage or clan. Although *mogya* is a physical or material element, it does have spiritual connotations. Thus, according to W. E. Abraham, it is the factor of the human being which at death becomes the *saman*.⁷⁶ As the *saman*, it bears a physical resemblance to its owner. It can therefore be reincarnated, but this is possible only through a woman of the same clan. W. E. Abraham adds that it is this *saman* "which is invoked in what is miscalled ancestor worship"⁷⁷.

Nipadua

Nipadua, (body), is seldom mentioned when the Akan talk about the human being. This however, should not be interpreted to mean that the Akan do not consider it to be one of the constituent elements of the human being. The Akan take it for granted that anyone talking about the human being first acknowledges the *nipadua* (body), as it is obvious. They therefore rather talk about the elements which are not obvious. As people who believe that the world is full of spirits, that the spirits of the ancestors are always

present with them⁷⁸, it would be really difficult for one to even think that they do not see the *nipadua* as a constituent element of the human being. This is because any being without a *nipadua* will be said to be a spirit of one kind or other, and not a human being.

Nipadua is a material component and it may sometimes be referred to as *honam* (flesh). It comes from the mother⁷⁹ and consists of all the internal and external organs of the body. It is in this that the constituent elements we have already discussed are believed to be. These elements together with the *nipadua* make each person unique. Sometimes the state of the *nipadua* is used to determine whether one can be said to be a human being or not. We shall discuss this later.

From the discussion so far, we can say that in the Akan conception, the human being is made up of two basic elements, material (physical) and immaterial (spiritual).

While we may all agree to this, we cannot overlook the fact that certain things are not very clear, for example, the relationship between the *sunsum* and the *ntorɔ*, and that between the *ɔkra* and the *honhom*. There are obviously some overlaps and we shall try to clarify things before making a final statement on the constitution of the human being in Akan thought.

Sunsum and Ntorɔ

Sunsum and *ntorɔ* are two components which are said to be derived from the father. Sometimes both are mentioned as components of the human being while at other times only one of them is mentioned as a component, but even then, the other will also be mentioned. For example, when Kwame Gyekye says that the constitution of the human being is *ɔkra* (soul), *sunsum* (spirit), and *honam* (body)⁸⁰, he also mentions that in their

conception of the nature of a human being, the Akan distinguish the *ntorɔ* and the *mogya* (blood).⁸¹

It is clear that there is a relationship between the two concepts - *ntorɔ* and *sunsum*. They are believed to have the same source. In addition, both are said to have something to do with the personality of a person. Kwame Gyekye says that it appears that the *ntorɔ* is the basis of inherited characteristics.⁸² He also agrees with J. B. Danquah⁸³ and K. A. Busia⁸⁴ that the *sunsum* determines the personality and character of a person.

Looking at the description of the *ntorɔ*, one discovers that a group of people who may not be directly related, people from very different parts of Akanland may belong to the same *ntorɔ*. On the other hand, only the offspring of a man can have his *sunsum*. The males pass on their *sunsum* to their children but the females do not. This is like what pertains with the *mogya* and *abusua*. Like the *ntorɔ*, people from very different parts of Akanland, people who are not related, may belong to the same *abusua*. That which puts a person in an *abusua* is the *mogya* inherited from the mother and only the children of a woman can have her *mogya*. The females pass the *mogya* to their children but males do not. This similarity helps to clarify the relationship between the *ntorɔ* and the *sunsum*.

Ntorɔ is one of the two social kinship groups to which every Akan belongs. The other group is the *abusua*. Every Akan belongs to an *abusua* and an *ntorɔ*. A person's relationship to the *abusua* is through the *mogya* which he or she inherits from the mother, while a person's membership of an *ntorɔ* is by virtue of the *sunsum* inherited from the father. The *abusua* therefore consist of people of the same *mogya* while *ntorɔ* consist of people of the same *sunsum*. We can therefore say that "*ntorɔ* is a traditional kinship group which supplies the legitimate context within which the filial bond between the child and its father is given institutional expression."⁸⁵ This means that that which is

a component of a human being is the *sumsum* and not the *ntorɔ* just as the *mogya* and not the *abusua* is the component of the human being.

Okra and Honhom

Another area of controversy in the Akan concept of the constitution of the human being is that of the relationship between the *okra* and the *honhom*. Researchers like Peter Sarpong⁸⁶, Kwame Gyekye⁸⁷, and Eva L. R. Meyerowitz⁸⁸ are of the view that the *honhom* and the *okra* always go together. Sometimes they are both mentioned as constituent parts of the human being, at other times, only one of them, usually the *okra*, is mentioned.

Both elements are believed to come from the Supreme Being. Peter Sarpong holds that the *okra* is always accompanied by the *honhom*.⁸⁹ According to Kwame Gyekye, though the *honhom* is not identical with the *okra*, “it is the tangible manifestation or evidence” of the latter’s presence.⁹⁰ He argues that:

The conception of the *okra* as constituting the individual’s life, the life force, is linked very closely with another concept, *honhom*. *Honhom* means “breath”; it is the noun form of *home*, to breathe. When a person is dead, it is said “His breath is gone” (*ne honhom kɔ*) or “His soul has withdrawn from his body” (*ne 'kra afi ne ho*). These two sentences, one with *honhom* as subject and the other with *okra*, do in fact, say the same thing; they express the same thought, the- death- of- the person. The departure of the soul from the body means the death of the person, and so does the cessation of breath. Yet this does not mean that the *honhom* (breath) is identical with the *okra* (soul). It is this that “causes” the breathing. Thus, the *honhom* is the tangible manifestation or evidence of the presence of the *okra*⁹¹.

From this we can say that whenever the *okra* is present, the *honhom* is also present. There can never be one without the other. If this were so, there would never be the situation where there would be one without the other. This is however, not the case. One practice among the Akan is that a person is not buried as soon as the person stops breathing. Some time is allowed to elapse before burial. This is done because there is the

belief that even though a person may have stopped breathing the *okra* may still be present in the body. It is only when the *okra* has departed from the *nipadua* that death may be said to have occurred. As one of my discussants put it, “*se obi gyae home a na eno nkyere se w’awu, ebia na okra no da so wo ho*”, (“the fact that someone has stopped breathing does not mean that the person is dead, the *okra* may still be present”). If the *honhom* were embedded in the *okra*, it would not be possible to have one without the other. It is more likely that the two are separate entities in the constitution of the human being. The relationship between them is such that the presence of one calls for the other. While the *okra* may exist in the body without the *honhom*, the *honhom* may not do so without the *okra*. If the case were that there could never be one without the other, we would then have had to say that it is likely that the two are joined. As it is, however, it is clear that they are two distinct components.

Another point that we must consider where the relationship between the *okra* and the *honhom* is concerned is the fact that in Akan thought, all living things have *honhom* as they all *home*, breathe, but not all living things have *okra*. If the *honhom* were identical with the *okra*, or were its “tangible manifestation”, then animals and trees, which have *home*, would have *okra*. However, this is not the case. In Akan thought, animals and trees, even though they have *home*, have *sasa* and not *okra*. This means that it is possible for the *honhom* to be present without the *okra*. This in turn means that the *okra* and the *honhom* are separate entities. We can therefore conclude from this that in the Akan conception of the constitution of the human being, the *okra* and the *honhom* are two different components.

Okra and Sunsum

There is the need at this point to discuss the relation between the *okra* and the *sunsum*. Both the *okra* and the *sunsum* are immaterial elements. They are sometimes thought to be identical in terms of their referent. This cannot be right for at least two reasons. First, while it is true that both the *okra* and the *sunsum* are said to be different kinds of soul, they are not identical in that they are believed to have different sources. The *okra* comes directly from God while the *sunsum* comes from the father. Christian Gaba distinguishes two kinds of soul among the Ewe of Ghana: the life soul and the personality soul.⁹² From what he says, what he refers to as the life soul is what the Akan call the *okra* and what he calls the personality soul is what the Akan refer to as the *sunsum* and the two are different entities.

Secondly, there are things that are said of the *okra* which are not said of the *sunsum* and vice versa. Kwame Gyekye cites several of such statements.⁹³ He says for example that the Akan say: *Ne kra di awerehow* (His *kra* is sad), and never, *ne sunsum di awerehow* (His *sunsum* is sad). He goes on to say that a semantic analysis of *okra* and *sunsum* shows that the two are not intersubstitutable in predications.

This shows that the *okra* and the *sunsum* are two distinct components of the human being in Akan thought.

From the discussion so far, we can say that the constitution of a human being, according to Akan thought, is *okra*, *honhom*, *sunsum*, *mogya*, and *nipadua*.

GENDER AND HUMANNES

Among the Akan, when a woman gives birth to a baby boy, it is usually said that "*W'awo 'nipa*", meaning, "she has given birth to a human being". Expressions such as

this one, together with certain other practices among the Akan, make it necessary for us to consider whether to the Akan, gender determines humanness.

Feminist activists have helped in revealing the kind of treatment that society in general metes out to females. Writing on the theological basis of the decade that was set aside for women, Franklyn J. Balasundaram says:

Women as a class are treated as a distinct species and suffer genuine oppression and discrimination.⁹⁴

According to her, the discrimination that women suffer is not limited to only one sphere of their lives. They suffer discrimination at home, at the workplace and in the society at large. She continues that women do more work at home than the men and this is true even when both husband and wife are employed outside the home. Citing India as an example, she says that when a husband and wife both return home from work, it is the wife who makes tea or coffee while the man rests with a newspaper in his hand because he is tired. Where the family structure is patriarchal, the girls in the family receive treatment that is different from that received by the boys. In addition to being expected to keep quiet about their longings, they have to forgo freedom of movement, accept being discriminated against in health and health care, food, education and clothing. Sons are given more attention and importance and all the privileges.

When it comes to work, monotonous jobs like reception, typing, and assembling, are often given to women. A woman is also likely to be paid less than a man who is in the same profession even though she may do the same amount of work.⁹⁵

Among the Akan, women are treated in ways very similar to what Franklyn J. Balasundaram⁹⁶ has described. Yet this will not be enough for us to conclude that those of the feminine gender are not considered human beings. To be able to come to a

conclusion on the Akan view of the woman, we would have to consider a few other things in addition to the way they are treated.

When we look at the Akan creation myths, it becomes clear that for them, the man was not created before the woman. For example, in the myth about the origin of the people of the Aduana blood clan⁹⁷, men and women appeared on the earth at the same time. In that of the Bosommuru *ntoro*, a man and a woman came down from the sky and another man and woman came up from the earth. Thus the issue of one being made for the other does not come up. In the Akan concept, the woman was not created for the man, she was not created from the rib of the man. Writing on the place of women in Islam, Rabi'atu Ammah⁹⁸ advances an argument that holds for the woman in the Akan conception too. According to her, because the Koran does not say that the woman was created from the rib of the man but states categorically that both the man and the woman have been created from the same substance, the woman is an individual who possesses a soul and a personality of her own just like the man.

Also, the issue of original sin does not appear in the Akan conception of the human being. Addressing this issue, J. B. Danquah says that the Akan does not imagine that human beings could ever have had a fall.⁹⁹ He continues that the Akan conception of *nkrabea* and *hyebea* for every individual precludes any such possibility of one man's soft heart or one woman's indiscretion, leading to the fall of all humankind, even their countless generations. This means that in the Akan conception, neither the woman nor the man is seen as the originator of sin. The woman is not held responsible for the fall of the man. We can say therefore that in this respect, there is no claim of a male superiority over the woman. That is not to say that there is no myth of separation of humankind from God caused by the woman in Akan tradition. There is such a myth, but, as Mercy

Amba Oduyoye says, that myth is not interpreted as sin that must be paid for by women¹⁰⁰.

Another area in which we can see what the Akan concept of the human being is with regard to gender is in the rites of passage. These include birth, puberty rites, marriage, and death.

Among the Akan, birth is marked as the passage from the “Other Dimension of time and space to this one”¹⁰¹. The rituals of this stage equally apply to both males and females. When a child is born, whether male or female, it is kept from public view for seven days. On the eighth day, it is brought out and given a name. There is no significant difference between the way this rite is performed for a male child and how it is performed for a female child.

The stage of puberty is however different. There is, for example, among the Ashanti, an elaborate nubility rite for females whilst there is almost no rite at all for the males. According to Peter Sarpong, it does not seem as if any initiation rites have ever taken place for boys.¹⁰² A father may present a cutlass, a gun, a tool or an instrument of trade to a son who was mature enough to be able to marry. He goes on to say that the simplicity of the “initiation” for boys as compared to that for the girls is perhaps partly due to the fact that there are no worldly motivations for it. It would not be right for us to say that this is a sign that the female gender is discriminated against. It should rather be seen as a sign of the fact that females are held in high esteem among the Akan. Writing on the attitudes of the Ashanti to the sexes, Peter Sarpong says that although all children are very precious in Ashanti, the value of girls is almost inestimable. This is because the matrilineage puts its hope in them for its future existence.¹⁰³ According to Brigid Maa Sackey, it is through the puberty initiation or rites that in the context of African culture, both men and women are educated, formally, in the political, social, religious and

economic norms of the community.¹⁰⁴ With an initiation rite for boys being non-existent among the Akan, it is clear that in traditional Akan society, females have more access to formal education than males.

When it comes to marriage, it appears that it becomes the sole responsibility of the man to present gifts in the form of drinks and monies to the family of the woman being married. While it may seem that this practice gives the man the opportunity to see the woman as his possession, as less human than himself, I am of the view that this is not so. The main interest of the Akan in marrying off a daughter, as Mercy Amba Oduyoye says, is in the duty and capacity of the daughter to become a channel through which their ancestors can return.¹⁰⁵ The woman is therefore gladly given out in marriage as the marriage will ensure the continuation of the lineage.

It is likely that the man is required to give gifts to the woman's family mainly because through the union he gets the opportunity to give the names of his ancestors to people who are not his ancestors thus perpetuating his family names. Rather than seeing the presentations made at Akan marriage ceremonies as means of "buying" the woman, they should be seen as tokens of appreciation. This is because the value of the gifts presented is nothing compared to the value of the woman herself. In addition to this, as the union eventually becomes a channel through which the woman's ancestors are reborn, the man becomes the one who helps the woman to make this possible. This means that the woman's family gains from the union just as the man's does.

Also, even though the rites of marriage are fully performed, the woman does not belong to the man as she does not become a member of his *abusua*. Usually at the marriage ceremony, the statement: "*Wo nya adee a fa bra fie, wo nya eka a eye wokunu dea*" (If you make any gains in the marriage, bring it home, if you incur any debt, it belongs to your husband), is made to the woman. This statement clearly shows that

although the woman may be married to the man, she is still a member of her *abusua*. This would not be the case if by the performance of the marriage rite she were sold to the man. Equality in marriage is guaranteed under traditional Akan customary law¹⁰⁶. A woman who is aggrieved can initiate a divorce just as a man who is aggrieved can. Also, wife battery, as well as impotence, are causes for divorce just as infertility in the woman is.

While a person can look at the way women are generally treated and conclude from that that women are treated as second-class citizens or as people who are not fully human, this is not actually so. According to Brigid M. Sackey, in pre-colonial times, there were both symmetry and asymmetry in gender relations in African and North American societies with each gender going about its duties.¹⁰⁷ She goes on to say that these cultural arrangements did not necessarily make women “dumb, speechless or passive”¹⁰⁸. Using the Ghanaian woman as an example, she says that women have long been conscious of their socio-economic and political situation, making the best out of their material and ideological resources:

I argue that African women, particularly Akan women, do not need feminism since the main goals of feminism- equity and equal opportunities in most sectors of life- are available to them.¹⁰⁹

The point that Brigid Maa Sackey seeks to make is simply that what is being interpreted as ill treatment or inhuman treatment is actually just a matter of the roles that people are expected to play. Graham Sergeant defines a role as:

The acting out of expected behaviour in any given situation relating to the status of the actor.¹¹⁰

According to J. E. Goldthorpe, we can regard a role as a bundle of expectations.¹¹¹ The role of a wife consists of all the things she is expected to do for her husband, and the role of a husband consists of all the things he is expected to do for his wife. Within

the family, the different members have different roles which together make for its proper running. Roles do not have anything to do with superiority or inferiority. The fact that the wife is expected to cook meals does not in any way mean that she is inferior. The one who cooks meals should be considered a very important person as that person also holds the lives of the people she feeds in her hands. An Akan maxim says: *Ye de ayaasee na ehyen aben*. This maxim means that if one is to be able to blow a trumpet, one must have a full stomach. What is a man when he is hungry? Thus the one who feeds the man is very important. In addition to this, food could easily be poisoned.

On the issue of roles, something that makes the point clearer is the way slaves were treated. In a household, the slave played his or her role. This however did not make his or her masters think of him or her as being less human. If this were so, members of the household would never be allowed to marry them. Capt R. S. Rattray however writes:

It was the custom in Ashanti for male members of a clan to purchase slaves by whom they had children. These children had of course no *abusua* but had the father's *ntoro* just as a legitimate son or daughter.¹¹²

The slave only played the role of slave. The role did not affect his or her humanness.

At the beginning of this section, I mentioned that when a baby boy is born, a statement is made to the effect that a human being has been born while nothing is really said if the baby is a girl. This statement is usually made by men. Women on the other hand are happier when the baby is a girl.

It is clear that the Akan do not consider the woman as being less human than the man. Both sexes are seen as human beings.

BODY FORM, AGE, STATUS, MORAL BEHAVIOUR AND HUMANNES

In this section, we shall be considering whether in Akan thought humanness is acquired or not. We shall be trying to find out whether the form of a person's body or

age affects his or her humanness, and also, whether the Akan believe that people become human beings by rising to certain positions in the society or by doing certain things.

Body form

In the Akan conception of a human being, the *nipadua* is very important. The kind of body a person has to some extent determines the views of the community on the person. Children born with certain deformities, like Down's Syndrome¹¹³, are considered to be spirits. When such a child is born, people would normally say, "*w'awo biribi*" meaning, "she has given birth to something". What has been born cannot be called a human being. Relatives quickly go to see the diviner to ascertain the origin of the child. This is to enable them to know what rites to perform. It is believed that to keep such a child is to keep him or her in captivity. The spirit must be set free. The child is therefore taken to an appropriate place and left there. The appropriate place is determined by the diviners and could be at the riverside or the forest. When the ritual for the freeing of the child is going to be performed, the expression used is "*Wɔreko ako gyae no*" and it literally means they are going to free him or her. If the child is an "*asuoba*", that is a child or a spirit from the river, he or she will be taken to the riverside where after the performance of certain rites, he or she will be left for the spirit of the river to claim.

Another form of deformity that must be mentioned has to do with the number of fingers and toes that a person has. For the Akan, every human being must have ten fingers, five on each hand, and ten toes, five on each foot. If a child is born with more than five digits on each hand or foot, that child is considered a thief. Such a child is not considered a spirit as is the case with those discussed above. He or she is just considered a thief even though that child cannot even reason. The possession of extra digits is an abomination.

Sometimes, people who are deformed are said to be *abayifoɔ*, witches, just because of their deformities. In the view of most Akans, certain deformities are signs of the presence of the *bayie* spirit.¹¹⁴

In cases where the deformity does not make the community come out to say that the being is a spirit, it becomes difficult to tell whether the community accepts him or her as a human being or not. However the ideas that people have about witches, and thieves, help in the debate. We shall consider these when we come to examine the issue of morality and humanness.

Among the Ashanti, a person who is deformed in any way is unfit to perform any religious rite.¹¹⁵ One of the criteria for qualification to be a chief therefore is that the person should have no deformity¹¹⁶. The chief is the representative of his people and he must be truly human to represent them.

From the above discussion we can say that among the Akan, body form affects humanness. This could account for the fact that people who have relatives who are deformed tend to hide them from the public.

Age

As noted earlier, when a baby is born in the Akan society, it is not given a name immediately. It is kept indoors for seven days and given a name on the eighth day. During the seven days before its naming, it is referred to as *ɔhɔho* meaning stranger or guest. After the naming ceremony has taken place, the child is no longer referred to as *ɔhɔho*, and everybody calls him or her by the name given. According to Kofi Asare Opoku, the reason for the seven day period of waiting before the child is named is to enable the family to determine if the stranger has come to stay or not.¹¹⁷ He says that if the child survives for seven days then it is a sign that the child has come to stay and

therefore deserves to be made a member of the family. Philip F. W. Bartle goes further and says that a child, when born, is not considered a human being until each day spirit has seen it and not claimed it.¹¹⁸ Every one of the days of the week is believed to have its own spirit. If a child is a human being, it must be able to live through all the other days of the week which are not his or her own *krada*, that is, the day of the week on which he or she was born. By naming the child on the eighth day, the family shows that they are certain that the child is a human being and deserves to be a member.

Philip F. W. Bartle, interprets the waiting as a sign that the newly born child is not considered a human being. To him, when a child has been able to survive the first week of life, it becomes a human being. This however cannot be accepted. It is not the fact that the child is able to live through the first week of life that turns him or her into a human being. The waiting has to do with the uncertainty surrounding the nature of the child who has been born. The family is not certain whether the child is a human being or a spirit. This is ascertained by waiting to see if the child can live through the first week, to see if none of the seven “day spirits” claims him or her. A child who survives the waiting days is a human being, the one who does not is not a human being.

Arguing that newly born babies and children are not considered to be human beings, Ifeanyi A. Menkiti says that the neuter pronoun is used when reference is being made to them.¹¹⁹ According to him, this shows that personhood has not yet been conferred on them. Kwame Gyekye says that the inference drawn by Ifeanyi A. Menkiti would most probably be incorrect for a number of African languages.¹²⁰ This is true especially where the Akan language is concerned. He goes on to say that the pronoun “it” does not exist in the Akan language for animate things. For example, when we want to say “He (or she) is in the room” in Akan, we say “*Ɔwɔ dan no mu*”, and when we want to say “It (the dog) is in the room”, we also say, “*Ɔwɔ dan no mu*”. When however, an inanimate

thing, like a book, is being referred to, the pronoun “*ɛ*” is used. Thus to answer to the question: “Where is the book?” we shall say, “*Ɛwɔ dan no mu*” meaning, it is in the room. According to Kwame Gyekye¹²¹ since “*ɛ*” is used as the neuter pronoun for only inanimate objects it is never used for children and newly born babies. The Akan pronoun “*ɔ*” applies to all the three genders- feminine masculine and neuter. With the neuter gender though, it applies only to the animate part. He therefore argues that if Ifeanyi A. Menkiti wants to depend on the pronoun used for newly born babies and children to say that they are not regarded as human beings, then even adults are not regarded as human beings since the answer to the questions: “Where is the old man?” and “Where is the baby?” will both be “*Ɔwɔ dan no mu*”- “he/she is in the room”.¹²²

Another argument that Ifeanyi A. Menkiti advances in support of his view that new born babies and children are not regarded as human beings in African societies is based on the relative absence of ritualised grief over the death of a child.¹²³ According to him, when we compare the way a funeral is held for a child with the elaborate burial ceremony and ritualised grief that takes place when an older person dies, we cannot help but see that age does determine humanness.¹²⁴ Kwame Gyekye again disagrees with this argument.¹²⁵ According to him, the type of burial, as well as the nature and extent of grief that is expressed over the death of an adult depends on a number of factors. First, the community’s assessment of the dead person’s achievements in life, then the person’s contributions towards the welfare of the community, and finally, the respect he or she commanded in the community. He therefore concludes that the type of funeral organised for a person on his or her death does not depend on his or her personhood.¹²⁶

On the absence of ritualised grief on the death of a child, Kwame Gyekye¹²⁷ holds that it has no connection whatsoever with the African view of personhood. Rather, he says, it stems from beliefs about the possible consequences for the mother of the dead

child if she showed excessive grief. He cites the example of the belief among the Akan that if a mother shows excessive grief at the loss of her child, she could become infertile or drive the dead child too far away to make reincarnation possible.¹²⁸

We also need to understand that, as J. H. Nketia¹²⁹ points out, there are limits to which any funeral may be taken. Limitations are dictated by birth and social relationships and by circumstances of death. Adding to this, Kofi Asare Opoku says that the many variations in the celebration of funerals are due to the fact that the rites that are performed are dictated by such considerations as the age, social position, and status of the deceased person.¹³⁰ Thus the funeral of a child is different from that of an adult as it is characterised generally by less wailing and by simpler rites and ceremonies. Funerals of kings are also different from those of ordinary people. The fact that a dead person is being described as *kukuba*, that is one who was never married and so had no children, does not mean that the community does not regard him or her as a human being. If this were the case, no rites at all would be performed. Such people would be buried like animals but this is not the case at all. Kwabena Amponsah says that no funeral rites are performed when an infant dies.¹³¹ He however goes on to describe something that is a form of rite and which may be called a funeral rite for an infant.¹³² According to him, the parents of the deceased infant are obliged to put on white clay signifying joy and happiness. A woman who herself has suffered the death of a child before, touches their lips with mashed yam and eggs prepared specially for the ceremony. Even though Kwabena Amponsah does not give any reasons for this rite, there is a good reason for this. It is said that if on the first experience of the loss of a child parents show grief, *Owuo*, Death, will be happy and would want to come and take another child. By portraying joy therefore the parents show *Owuo* that they are not affected. This puts *Owuo* to shame.¹³³ So in addition to keeping the parents from

excessive wailing and thus driving the child so far away that he or she cannot be reincarnated, it also keeps Death from coming for another child.

The Akan believe that people come into the world with some set work. If a person is unable to complete the work before dying, that person will come back to the world to finish it¹³⁴. When children die, they are not considered to have finished their work and are therefore expected to come back again. Anything that will keep the child from returning must be avoided, hence the nature of the funeral for a child.

So far, we see that none of the arguments put up by Menkiti to prove that children are not regarded as human beings holds. The Akan have a saying that “*Obi nnim obrempon ahyease*”, that is, nobody knows what the beginning of a great person is like. For this reason, children are accorded respect even though they may sometimes be treated harshly by adult relatives. What would be interpreted as maltreatment or inhuman treatment in other societies would be interpreted as training for the child in order to prepare him or her for life. The Akan believe in the discipline of children and wholly endorse the right of age to instruct youth.¹³⁵ The reason why it may sometimes appear that adults are treated with more respect than children therefore has nothing to do with being or not being human. As Peter Sarpong puts it:

Old age is sacred as the older person is thought to be in closer proximity to the ancestors- he is likely to die before others- than the young...It is in relation to the sacred that a respectful attitude should be shown towards...old age...¹³⁶

Status

In the communal setting of Akan life, social status is measured, according to Kwame Gyekye, in terms of what a person has been able to achieve through his or her own physical, moral and intellectual exertions, his or her sense of responsibility expressed, in turn through his responsiveness and sensitivity to the needs and demands of the group,

and, the extent to which he or she fulfils certain social norms, like having marital life and raising children.¹³⁷ People in the community, therefore strive to achieve these things so as to attain some social status. Not everybody, however, is able to achieve this. A person who fails in all his or her strivings to achieve the things that give social status may be judged as “*onipa hunu*”, a useless person. Thus it is common to hear family members refer to a member who does not do well in the family as “*Onipa hunu*”. Such a person is still considered a human being even though he or she may not be very useful. This stand is expressed in the maxim, *efie a onipa hunu wɔ muu ye kyen efie a nnipa nni mu*, that is, it is better to have a house with a worthless person in it than to have a house in which there are no people.

Wealth gives a person a certain status in Akan society. Poverty is usually frowned upon. Thus the Akan have maxims like *Sika ye mogya* (money is blood), and, *Ohia ye adammɔ* (poverty is madness). Such maxims give the impression that a person who is rich is considered to be a human being while the poor person is not. This cannot be true. A poor person is not considered non-human, neither is a poor person necessarily an *onipa hunu*. This is because a rich person may isolate himself or herself from the community, be miserly, and make sure that the community does not benefit in any way from his or her money. Of such a wealthy person the community may not say the he or she is *onipa hunu*, a useless person, but they will say, “*ɔnnye nipa*”, he or she is not a human being. On the other hand, of a poor person who is involved in the community and shares what he or she may have, however little, it will be said: “*ɔye nipa*”, he or she is a human being. The maxims usually have to do with the importance of money and not just the importance of people who have money. In Akan society, money is money only if the community benefits from it.

Certain positions in the community need particular attention at this point; positions like the chief and the slave. In Akan tradition, a chief or queen mother is enstooled by being placed three times on the consecrated stool of his or her most renowned predecessor. From that time onwards, he or she is addressed as *Nana*. This is because through the enstoolment process his or her person becomes sacred. Such a person may not walk with bare feet, may not sit on the floor, and may not strike or be struck by anyone.¹³⁸ One wonders if the sacredness being referred to here means that the chief or queen mother ceases to be a human being.

The view that after the enstoolment ceremony, the person of the chief becomes sacred, is generally held by a number of scholars, K.A. Busia¹³⁹, for example. However, none of them explains the extent of the sacredness, whether it means that the chief ceases to be human or not. I would like to argue here that the sacredness of the chief is due to the special relationship that he is believed to have with the ancestors. While the chief does not cease to be a human being, he becomes a human being with another dimension. He communicates with the ancestors on a deeper level than the ordinary people do. Chiefs and traditional priests share this special attribute.

Slaves were people who were not blood relations of the people they lived with even though they were considered to form part of households. They came into communities through several channels. According to W. E. Abraham¹⁴⁰, there were three ways by which people became slaves. First, there were slaves who became slaves by placing themselves voluntarily under a master for protection, food and shelter, or for payment. Then there were those who became slaves because they were pledged or pawned by their relatives to settle debts or as security for debts. Some of the people in this group were forcibly seized in surety for debts. Lastly, there were those who became slaves by virtue of being born to slaves, children of slaves.

R. S. Rattray adds to this by giving five separate terms that were used to describe the various degrees and conditions of voluntary involuntary servitude in Ashanti.¹⁴¹ The terms he gives are, *akoa*, *awowa*, *ɔdɔnkɔ*, *domum* and *akyere*.

An *akoa* may be defined as “a person born into a natural condition of subjection in relation to someone who is termed *wura* (master)”¹⁴². *Awowa* designates the status of an *akoa* who becomes the pawn of a person or group outside the circle to which he or she owed natural subjection. When a non- Ashanti man or woman was purchased with the express purpose of making him or her a slave, that person was referred to as *ɔdɔnkɔ*. If an *ɔdɔnkɔ* was a prisoner of war from a foreign country or was received as a form of tribute from a subjugated foreign power he or she was known as *domum*.

A slave was the lowest member of the household. Slaves were however “not treated with cruelty and contempt”¹⁴³. Thus people who treated their slaves badly were asked if the big and heavy drum would be good for Kobuobi to carry if he were the child of the master’s mother. Some slave masters did treat slaves badly but that was not the expected behaviour and slaves could, theoretically, regain their freedom on grounds of cruelty.¹⁴⁴ What underlies this stand toward slaves is found in the maxim, *nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma, obiara nnye asaase ba*, all people are God’s children, no one is a child of the earth. From this, we gather that in Akan thought, a slave is also considered a human being. This does not however cancel out the fact that sometimes slaves were killed at funeral customs.¹⁴⁵ Yet we must also mention that only the chief could give permission for this to be done- *ɔhene nkoa na ɔwɔ sekan* (only the chief has the knife). Slaves enjoyed striking rights. For example, a slave could sue through his or her master.¹⁴⁶ A slave was legally without responsibility. Any acts he or she committed, whether in pursuance of his or her master’s bidding or not, were seen as the master’s acts. The

master was responsible for the slave's debts and for compensation for any injury inflicted by him or her.¹⁴⁷

Also, as R. S. Rattray says, it was the custom in Ashanti for male members of a clan to purchase female slaves by whom they had children¹⁴⁸. If Ashanti men, wanting children, bought female slaves and had children with them, then definitely, the Ashanti men saw the female slaves as human beings. What man would want to have children who would not be human beings? It is true that slaves were sometimes treated with disdain. Sometimes things that human beings would not want to do were given to slaves to do and this could easily be interpreted as a sign that slaves were not considered human beings. The discussion so far shows that this is not the case. In Akan thought, slaves were considered to be human beings.

Moral behaviour

Among the Akan, it is believed that the pursuit or practice of moral virtue is intrinsic to the conception of a human being. They hold that there are certain basic norms and ideals to which a person's behaviour is supposed to conform if he or she is a human being. They also hold that there are moral virtues that every human being is capable of displaying. These norms include kindness, benevolence, generosity, compassion, concern and respect for others- any behaviour that helps the welfare of others. These are the norms of personhood. In any given situation, it is expected that a person will display the virtues in his or her conduct and act in conformity with the accepted moral values and standards. A person who fails to exhibit these expected moral virtues in his or her behaviour, is said to be non-human. That is when the expression: "*Onnye nipa*" is used.¹⁴⁹

When a person is peaceful, that is, not troublesome, but is kind, respectful and humble, he or she is considered a real human person, and it will be said of that person:

“*Dye nipa*”. From this, we gather that a person of high moral standards is seen to be a real human being while a person of low moral standards is not. The use of the expression “*Dye nipa paa*”, meaning he or she is a real human being, shows that to the Akan, being human is in “grades”, especially where morality is concerned- some people are more human than others. Commenting on the Akan view of personhood with respect to morality, Kwame Gyekye says that it means that in Akan culture, human nature is considered to be essentially good.¹⁵⁰ The human being has within himself or herself the ability to be virtuous, to perform morally right actions and should therefore be treated as a morally responsible being. The human being is not seen in Akan culture as being depraved or warped by original sin. The Akan hold that “*Onyame bɔɔ obiara yie*”- God created everyone well, and well here means that everyone is endowed with the ability to do good. It is because of this view that acts of people are judged and where necessary, condemned in Akan societies. Everybody has a choice- we can choose to do what is right or choose to do that which is not. A human being in the true sense of the word, is one who chooses to use the God-given capacity for virtue. A human being can therefore be defined in terms of moral capacities or qualities as “a being who has a moral sense and is capable of making moral judgements”¹⁵¹. Kwame Gyekye who makes this statement also makes it clear that the fact that children are not able to exercise moral sense, does not mean that they are not considered human beings in Akan societies. He says that while it is true that a child or an infant is not morally capable in actuality, he or she is morally capable in potentiality. He uses the analogy of a colt to clarify his point. He says children and infants are not like colts. Colts never come to possess a moral sense even if they grow into adults. Children however do grow up to become *moral* agents on reaching adolescence. When they reach this stage, they are capable of exercising their moral sense and thus of making moral judgements.¹⁵²

In view of the fact that in Akan communities, a person is defined in terms of moral qualities, people who are wicked like thieves and also witches are said to be non-human even though they have human form. It follows from this therefore that people born with deformities that lead to their being counted with the wicked are not considered human beings.

ETHNIC AFFILIATION AND HUMANNES

The attitudes of human beings toward people of other ethnic groups or body colour raises the question as to whether or not affiliation has something to do with being a human being. The Akan maxim: “*nnipa nyinaa ye Nyame mma*”, could easily be taken to mean that since the Akan believe that all human beings are God’s children, they recognise all people, regardless of their ethnicity, as human beings. There is however a problem with thinking in this way. In the first place, we cannot say that when the Akan say “*nnipa*” it includes, in their minds, people of other ethnic and racial groups. This maxim will therefore not be a good starting point for this discussion. A better starting point would be the history of the Akan.

In the history of the Akan, there have been intermarriages that have not been forced. Sometimes even royals have been allowed to marry slaves who have been brought in from other ethnic groups. Thus for example, K. A. Busia writes about an incident involving a chief who married the daughter of a slave.¹⁵³ R. S. Rattray¹⁵⁴ records, as noted earlier, that it was the custom in Ashanti for male members of a clan to purchase female slaves and have children with them. Even though such children had no *abusua* they had their father’s *ntoro*. The mention of the fact that such children had no *abusua* is significant. This is because by saying that such children have no *abusua*, R. S. Rattray

lets us know that he is talking about slaves bought from non-Akan areas like Northern Ghana.

Children born to Akan women belong to the *abusua* of their mother. *Abusua* is the term for the clan inherited through the matrilineage. If a child's mother does not have *abusua* then the child also has no *abusua*. The children of such slaves and all their descendants lived and grew up with their father's family. They were treated as members of the family and looked upon the home of their master, who is also their father, as their domicile.

In addition, Akans have readily gone to the aid of people of other ethnic affiliations in times of war. Thus Christine Oppong writes that during the eighteenth century, Dagbon became an Ashanti 'Protectorate'.¹⁵⁵ The Ashanti trained the personnel of the Dagomba army and introduced guns into it. Thus an army which had consisted only of bowmen and cavalry armed with spears now had gunmen. It could be that the Ashanti had other motives other than just helping the people of Dagbon as fellow human beings. Those motives are however not important here. That Ashanti entered into a treaty with Dagbon shows that they considered them as human beings as it is only human beings who can enter into treaties with each other.

Having established this fact, we can now use the maxim: *nnipa nyinaa ye Nyame mma* and say that it is because the Akan see all peoples as humans created by God that these transactions take place. It is true that intermarriages are not much favoured, but this has nothing to do with humanness. It usually has to do with distance and inheritance.

Inheritance, in particular, posed a problem. The Akan are matrilineal. The children born to a woman belong to her and her matrilineal family. When a woman marries a

man from an ethnic group in which the inheritance is patrilineal, her family loses as her children belong to the man who is their father.

It is basically for reasons like these that the Akan have been against inter-ethnic marriages. The above discussion does not however rule out the fact that the Akan have the tendency to feel superior to people of other ethnic groups. According to Ivor Wilks¹⁵⁶, it is true that the native-born Asante- the *Akanniba*- were contemptuous of the people from its northern hinterlands who belonged to what are now referred to as segmentary lineage societies. This was because they perceived them as having a low culture and not because they considered them to be non-human. Thus the Dagomba, though also non- Akan culturally, were held in very high regard. The saying: *Asante Kotoko, Anwaa Kotoko*, in effect, extols the Dagomba as ‘the Asante of the north’.

From the above discussion, we can say that ethnic affiliation does not affect humanness in Akan thought.

COMMUNALITY AND HUMANNESS

John Mbiti has written that:

To be human is to belong to the whole community, and to do so involves participating in the beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals of that community.¹⁵⁷

From this, John Mbiti derives his conclusion:

I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am.¹⁵⁸

A similar view is held by Dan J. Antwi who has written:

Being born alone does not make one human; one’s humanity is through a relationship with other persons. So to be human means to be in relation with others, not with those who are present here and now, but also with those who lived in the past as well as those who will come after us. It means therefore that one’s humanity, in the fullest and deepest sense, is not realised until one is in COMMUNITY!¹⁵⁹

These statements are true of the Akan whom we are discussing. Ideas of the relationship between humanness and communality among the Akan can be seen in the number of maxims that exist on the theme.

One of these maxims says: *Onipa na ɔma onipa ye onipa*, that is, A person is a person only through persons. If a person lives in isolation, that person is not really a human being. It is clear that there is a dimension of inter-relatedness and inter-dependency of humanity in Akan thought. A human being in the true sense of the word is connected to other human beings. In the view of Dan Antwi, when the Akan speak of humanness in this way, they are not denying the individuality of a person, nor are they ignoring or rejecting one's personhood. Rather it suggests that personhood and individuality, can only be realised "in a mutuality of relationship".¹⁶⁰ Quoting Augustine Shutte to buttress his point he says:

If I gain my humanity by entering into a relationship with other Members of the family, both living and dead, then it follows that my humanity comes to me as a GIFT. This does not mean that it is not mine, that my being is part of the group, so that I have no individual value or destiny. It means rather that it is not something that I can acquire, or develop, by my own isolated power. I can only exercise or fulfil my humanity as long as I remain in touch with others, for IT IS THEY WHO EMPOWER ME.¹⁶¹

The necessary relationships complete the being of the individual person who, before entering into those relationships, would not be self-complete for, according to an Akan maxim, *onipa nye abe na ne ho ahyia ne ho*, meaning a human being is not a palm tree to be self-sufficient. In the social context, we see that when it comes to flourishing or just functioning in a human community, the capacities, talents and dispositions of an individual person are not adequate for the realisation of his or her potential. This same view is emphasised in the maxim: *dua baako nye kwaee*, meaning, one tree does not make a forest. Suggesting more than the notion that one person does not constitute a community the maxim in fact has to do with the realisation of the full potential of a

person as a human being. The forest stands for wholeness or completeness. A single tree is not whole until there are other trees with it forming a forest. In much the same way, a human being is not a full or complete human being until there are others with him or her.

The Akan also show regard for personal independence. Thus the clan had a negative and conditional responsibility for looking after individual members. According to W. E. Abraham, Akan communalism was like the Social Welfare State.¹⁶² Every person has an individuality, personal will and identity that must be exercised. Thus there are maxims like, *abusua te se kwaee, wo ben ho a na wo hunu se dua biara wo ne sibre*, (The clan, or family, is like a forest; when you go nearer, you will discover that each tree is on its own). The branches of the trees in the forest may touch one another but each tree is individually rooted and is not completely absorbed in the cluster. In much the same way, while the community is very important in an individual's life, yet individuality is also very important. A person must be responsible for his or her own actions.

The fact that communality forms an essential part of the Akan conception of the human being does not mean that the individual has no value. If the community is to be successful and achieve anything it will depend on how the individual members exercise their unique talents and qualities. These talents and qualities belong to the community as a whole.¹⁶³

Both individuality and communality have a place in the Akan conception of the human being. Thus while to the Akan, to be human is to belong to the community and to participate in "its beliefs, ceremonies, rituals and festivals",¹⁶⁴ it is also to be able to exercise individuality.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The discussion so far shows us that in Akan thought, human beings are created by God and consist of *okra*, *sunsum*, *honhom*, *mogya* and *nipadua*. Some of these constituents are material others immaterial. It also shows that even though the different genders are treated differently, both are equally considered human. The same can be said of age. Children may be treated differently from adults but they are considered to be just as human as the adults. The same may be said of slaves. A slave may be looked down upon and even maltreated but he or she is still thought of as a human being.

In addition, the discussion shows that the physical body, that is, the body form, is very important in the conception of the human being. This is because the type of body a person has goes a long way in determining how society views that person. From a person's looks it may be determined whether he or she is a human being or a spirit, a witch or a thief and so on.

On the issue of status, we have seen that financial standing does not affect humanness. However, one who is a chief or a traditional priest may be considered to be more than human to a certain extent. Such people may not be divine but they are considered sacred and their sacredness goes beyond the fact that they are closer to the ancestors by virtue of their age as Peter Sarpong says.¹⁶⁵ For such people, their closeness to the ancestors is on a spiritual level and they communicate with them on a deeper level.

In the discussion on moral behaviour and humanness, we found that moral behaviour goes a long way in determining humanness. The Akan believe that every human being is intrinsically good. Therefore anyone who fails to show forth goodness is not a human being.

Ethnic affiliation or colour, like gender and being a slave, does not affect, in Akan thought, humanness. However, it does lead, to a large extent, to scorn. People of other ethnic affiliations are often looked down upon by the Akan.

On communalism, it has become clear that even though the community is important in the individual's life, individuality is also equally important. A whole community may suffer for the mistakes of an individual but it is also possible for the individual to suffer alone for his or her mistakes. Usually however, because of the strength of the relations between the individuals in the society, when one person suffers, he or she does not suffer alone.

Having examined the Akan concepts of the human being, we now move on to examine the Biblical concepts.

Notes

- ¹ See K. A. Busia, "The Ashanti" in Daryll Forde (Ed.), *African Worlds: Studies in the Cosmological Ideas and Social Values of African Peoples*, London: Oxford University Press, 1954, p. 196.
- ² See Noel Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835- 1960: A Younger Church in a Growing Society*, Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1960, p.65.
- ³ Noel Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835- 1960*, p. 66
- ⁴ See K. A. Busia, "The Ashanti", p. 191.
- ⁵ See E. W. Smith (Ed.), *African Ideas of God*, London: Edinburgh House Press, 1950, p. 195.
- ⁶ See K. A. Busia, "The Ashanti", p. 193.
- ⁷ See K. A. Busia, "The Ashanti", p. 193.
- ⁸ Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, *Mmusuyi and Deliverance: A Study of Conflict and Consensus in the encounter between African Traditional Religion and Christianity*, Unpublished M. Phil Dissertation, University of Ghana, Legon, 1995, p. 3.
- ⁹ See K. A. Busia, "The Ashanti", p. 195
- ¹⁰ See Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974, p. 34.
- ¹¹ See Philip F. W. Bartle, "The Universe has Three Souls: Notes on Translating Akan Culture", *Journal of Religion in Africa* Vol XIV, No. 2, 1983, p. 95.
- ¹² See Kwabena Amponsah, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion: Religious Studies*, Vol. Two, Legon: Adwinsa Publications, 1988, p. 55.
- ¹³ *Abayifo* is the plural for *abayifo* the Akan word for witch.
- ¹⁴ See Kwabena Amponsah, *Topics in West African Traditional Religion*, Vol. Two, p. 86.
- ¹⁵ The food through which the *bayie* spirit is usually transferred is palm nut soup. See Kwabena Amponsah, *Topics in West African Traditional Religion*, Vol. Two, p. 86.
- ¹⁶ See Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, p.45.
- ¹⁷ Nicholas Corte, *The Origins of Man*, New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961, p. 12.
- ¹⁸ See Robert G. Tikpor, "Myths", in E. A. Adegbola (Ed.), *Traditional Religion in West Africa*, Nairobi: Uzima Press, 1983, p. 367.
- ¹⁹ See R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923, pp. 123- 125.
- ²⁰ Every Akan belongs to an *abusua* or clan which he or she gets through his or her mother. There were originally seven clans in Akan tradition. However, as at now, it is only the Fanti group that has kept this number, the rest now have eight principal groups. The Fante clans are: Nsona, Anona, Twidan, Aboradze, Ntwea, Konna and Adwenadze. The clans of the other Akan groups are: Oyoko, Bretuo, Aduana, Asakyiri, Asenee, Agona, Asona and Ekoona. See Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, Accra: FEP International private Limited, 1978, pp 98-99.
- ²¹ See R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 123.
- ²² This is the origin of the *Wukuda* oath. This is the *Ntamkese*, the great oath of Ashanti.
- ²³ See R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti*, pp. 48-49.
- ²⁴ The python first asked them if they had any offspring and when they answered in the negative, he told them he would cause the women to conceive.
- ²⁵ See Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, Accra: FEP International Private Ltd., 1978, pp. 21-22.
- ²⁶ See Dan J. Antwi, "Koinonia in African Culture: Community, Communality and African Self-Identity", *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, Vol. VI, No. 2, 1996, P.67.
- ²⁷ Kwame Gyekye in H. Odera Oruka (Ed.), *Sage Philosophy: Indigenous Thinkers and Modern Debate on African Philosophy*, Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1990, p. xxvi
- ²⁸ See Dan J. Antwi, "Koinonia in African Culture: Community, Communality and Self- Identity", p. 67.
- ²⁹ See Sydney George Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith: A Comparative Study of the Impact of Two Religions*, Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1965, Appendix.
- ³⁰ See Dan J. Antwi, "Koinonia in African Culture; Community, Communality and Self- Identity", p. 67
- ³¹ See J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1944, p. 201.
- ³² See K. A. Busia, *The Challenge of Africa*, New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1962, pp.11-13
- ³³ K. A. Busia, *The Challenge of Africa*, p.11.
- ³⁴ See G. P. Hagan, "Black Civilization and Philosophy: Akan Tradition of Philosophy," a paper presented at the festival of African Culture (FESTAC) held in Lagos, 1976.

- ³⁵ See Kwabena Amponsah *Topics on West African Traditional Religion* (Vol. One), Legon-Accra: Adwinsa Publications (Ghana), 1977, pp. 25-29.
- ³⁶ See Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, pp. 94- 100
- ³⁷ See W. E. Abraham *The Mind of Africa*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1962, pp. 59- 74.
- ³⁸ *Bogya* is the same as *mogya*, *bogya* being the Ashanti variant. It literally means blood. The pronunciation differs from dialect to dialect.
- ³⁹ See Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, p. 37.
- ⁴⁰ *Kra* is the same as *okra*. It is just a difference in the way it is pronounced from one dialect to another, *okra* being the Ashanti variant.
- ⁴¹ See Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akan*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, [1949], pp. 84-87.
- ⁴² See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Revised Edition), Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995 p. 85.
- ⁴³ See Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980, p. 47.
- ⁴⁴ See Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 57.
- ⁴⁵ See Kofi Appiah- Kubi, *Man Cures, God Heals*, New Jersey: Allanheld, Osmun & Co, 1981, p. 10.
- ⁴⁶ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, p.157.
- ⁴⁷ According to Eva Meyerowitz, when a child is about to be born a ghost or shadow without a soul or *kra* leaves the *asamandow*. When it is leaving, it states the way in which it would want to express itself, the plans it would want to put into action, and what it wants to do through its *sunsum*. If , as she says, a human being has a *sunsum*, a shade or shadow, then she is also saying that it is the *sunsum* and not the *kra* which bears the *nrabea*.. In that sense then we cannot say that all Akan hold that it is the *kra* which bears the *nrabea*.. See Eva Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State if the Akan*, p. 87.
- ⁴⁸ See Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, p. 126
- ⁴⁹ See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p. 86.
- ⁵⁰ See Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, p.37
- ⁵¹ See Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akan*, p. 85.
- ⁵² See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p. 88
- ⁵³ See Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect, Culture*, p. 37.
- ⁵⁴ See Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akan*, p. 85.
- ⁵⁵ See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, pp. 88- 94.
- ⁵⁶ See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, pp.88- 94.
- ⁵⁷ K. A. Busia, "The Ashanti", p.200. It is interesting to note that while K. A. Busia acknowledges here that a person gets his, or her, personality indirectly from the Supreme Being, yet he says on p. 197 of this same work that a person's *sunsum* which is his or her personality, distinctive character, is not divine.
- ⁵⁸ See Philip F. Bartle, "The Universe has Three Souls: Notes on Translating Akan Culture", *Journal of Religion in Africa*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, 1983, p. 97.
- ⁵⁹ See Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akan*, p. 86.
- ⁶⁰ See Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, p. 37.
- ⁶¹ See Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 97.
- ⁶² See Kwabena Amponsah, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion* (Vol. Two), p.86.
- ⁶³ See Kwabena Amponsah, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion* (Vol. One), p. 43.
- ⁶⁴ See E. G. Parrinder, *West African Psychology*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1951, pp. 32, 46, 70.
- ⁶⁵ See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay African Philosophical Thought*, p.91.
- ⁶⁶ See Kofi Appiah- Kubi, *Man Cures, God Heals*, p. 12.
- ⁶⁷ See K. A. Busia, "The Ashanti", p. 197.
- ⁶⁸ See R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 45.
- ⁶⁹ See Philip F. W. Bartle, " The Universe has Three Souls, p. 97.
- ⁷⁰ See K. A. Busia, "The Ashanti" p. 197
- ⁷¹ See Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 98.
- ⁷² See R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 46.
- ⁷³ See Philip F. W. Bartle, "The Universe has Three Souls", p. 97.
- ⁷⁴ See Philip F. W. Bartle, "The Universe has Three Souls, pp. 97- 98.
- ⁷⁵ See Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, p. 127.
- ⁷⁶ See W. E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, London, p. 61.
- ⁷⁷ W. E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, p.61.
- ⁷⁸ See K. A. Busia, "The Ashanti", p. 191.
- ⁷⁹ See Philip F. W. Bartle, " The Universe has Three Souls" p. 93.

- ⁸⁰ See Kwame Gyekye *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p. 93.
- ⁸¹ See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p. 94.
- ⁸² See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p. 94.
- ⁸³ See J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, pp. 75, 205.
- ⁸⁴ See K. A. Busia, "The Ashanti", p. 200.
- ⁸⁵ See Abamfo Ofori Atiamoh, *Mmusuyi and Deliverance*, p. 11
- ⁸⁶ See Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, p. 37
- ⁸⁷ See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p. 88.
- ⁸⁸ See Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akan*, p. 85.
- ⁸⁹ See Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, p. 37.
- ⁹⁰ See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p. 88.
- ⁹¹ Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, p.88.
- ⁹² See Christian Gaba, "An African People's Concept of the Soul", *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, Vol. 3, No 10, June 1971, pp. 1 – 8.
- ⁹³ See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought*, pp. 95-96.
- ⁹⁴ Franklyn J. Balasundaram, "The Theological Basis of the Decade", *The Ecumenical Review*, Vol. 46, No. 2, April 1994, p. 142.
- ⁹⁵ See Franklyn J. Balasundaram, "The Theological Basis of the Decade", p. 143.
- ⁹⁶ See Franklyn J. Balasundaram, "The Theological Basis of the Decade", pp. 143- 144.
- ⁹⁷ See R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti*, pp. 123-124.
- ⁹⁸ See Rabiatu Ammah, "Paradise Lies at the Feet of Muslim Women", in Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (Eds.), *The Will To Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, New York: Orbis Books, 1992, pp. 74- 75.
- ⁹⁹ See J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 82.
- ¹⁰⁰ See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Women and Ritual in Africa" in Mercy Amba Oduyoye and Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro (Eds.), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*, p. 20.
- ¹⁰¹ See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Women and Ritual in Africa", p. 11.
- ¹⁰² See Peter Sarpong, *Girls' Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1977, p.11
- ¹⁰³ See Peter Sarpong, *Girls' Nubility Rites in Ashanti*, p.8
- ¹⁰⁴ See Brigid Maa Sackey, *Women, Spiritual Churches and Politics in Ghana*, Unpublished dissertation Submitted to the Temple University Graduate Board in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, August, 1996, p. 51.
- ¹⁰⁵ See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Women and Ritual in Africa", p. 13.
- ¹⁰⁶ See Brigid Maa Sackey, *Women, Spiritual Churches, and Politics in Ghana*, p. 50.
- ¹⁰⁷ See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Women and Ritual in Africa", p. 13.
- ¹⁰⁸ Brigid Maa Sackey, *Women, Spiritual Churches, and Politics in Ghana*, p.49.
- ¹⁰⁹ Brigid Maa Sackey, *Women, Spiritual Churches, and Politics in Ghana*, p.51.
- ¹¹⁰ Graham Sergeant, *A Textbook of Sociology*, London: Macmillan Education Ltd., 1974, p. 87.
- ¹¹¹ See J. E. Goldthorpe, *An Introduction to Sociology*, (2nd Ed), London: Cambridge University Press, p.10.
- ¹¹² R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 43.
- ¹¹³ Down's syndrome is a condition in which there is an extra chromosome on pair 21 of the 23 pairs of chromosomes which make up the human being. See Ernest R. Hilgard, Richard C. Atkinson, Rita L. Atkinson, *Introduction to Psychology* (Sixth Edition), New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc, 1971, p. 61.
- ¹¹⁴ See Kwabena Amponsah, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion* (Vol. Two), p. 91.
- ¹¹⁵ See Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "Women and Ritual in Africa", p. 12.
- ¹¹⁶ This is the reason why heirs to the throne, or stool, in Akanland, were not circumcised as it was believed that it would leave them deformed.
- ¹¹⁷ See Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p. 108.
- ¹¹⁸ See Philip F. Bartle, "The Universe has Three Souls", P. 99.
- ¹¹⁹ See Ifeanyi Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought", in Richard A. Wright (Ed.), *African Philosophy, An Introduction*, Lanham, Md.: University Press of Americas, 1984, p. 173.
- ¹²⁰ See Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", in Kwasi Wiredu and Kwame Gyekye, *Ghana Philosophical Studies*, p.107
- ¹²¹ See Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", p.107.
- ¹²² See Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", p.107.
- ¹²³ See Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought", p. 174.
- ¹²⁴ See Ifeanyi A. Menkiti, "Person and Community in African Traditional Thought", p 174.
- ¹²⁵ See Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", p. 108.
- ¹²⁶ See Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", p. 108.

- ¹²⁷ See Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", p. 108.
- ¹²⁸ See Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", p. 108.
- ¹²⁹ See J. H. Nketia, *Funeral Dirges of Akan People*, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1955, p.3.
- ¹³⁰ See Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Traditional Religion*, p.135.
- ¹³¹ See Kwabena Amponsah, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion* (Vol. Two), p. 64
- ¹³² See Kwabena Amponsah, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion*, (Vol. Two), p. 64
- ¹³³ This explanation was given by two women for whom the rite had been performed when they had lost their children. According to them, they were often told: *Ensu mma Owuo ani nnye*, that is, "do not cry lest death be happy".
- ¹³⁴ See Kwabena Amponsah, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion* (Vol. Two), p. 64.
- ¹³⁵ See W. E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, pp. 70-71.
- ¹³⁶ Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, p. 65.
- ¹³⁷ See Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", P. 111.
- ¹³⁸ See K. A. Busia, *The Position of the chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti: The Study of the influence of Contemporary Social Changes on Ashanti Political Institutions*, London: Oxford University Press, 1951, p.
- ¹³⁹ See K. A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, p.
- ¹⁴⁰ See W. E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, p. 74
- ¹⁴¹ See R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, New York: Negro Universities Press, 1969, p. 34.
- ¹⁴² R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, p.35.
- ¹⁴³ W. E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, p. 74.
- ¹⁴⁴ See W. E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, p. 74.
- ¹⁴⁵ See R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, pp. 37- 38.
- ¹⁴⁶ See R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, p. 39
- ¹⁴⁷ See W. E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, p. 75.
- ¹⁴⁸ See R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 43.
- ¹⁴⁹ See Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", pp. 108- 109.
- ¹⁵⁰ See Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", p.109.
- ¹⁵¹ Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", p. 110.
- ¹⁵² See Kwame Gyekye, "Person and Community in African Thought", p. 110
- ¹⁵³ See K. A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, p.25.
- ¹⁵⁴ See R. S. Rattray, *Ashanti*, p.43.
- ¹⁵⁵ See Christine Oppong, *Growing Up in Dagbon*, Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1973, p. 14.
- ¹⁵⁶ See Ivor Wilks, *Asante in the Nineteenth Century: The Structure and Evolution of a Political Order*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, pp. Xxiv-xxv.
- ¹⁵⁷ John Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heinemann, 1969, p. 2.
- ¹⁵⁸ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp.108-109.
- ¹⁵⁹ Dan J. Antwi, "Koinonia in African Culture: Community, Communalism and African Self- identity", *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, Vol. VI. No.2, 1996, p.68.
- ¹⁶⁰ Dan J. Antwi, "Koinonia in African Culture: Community, Communalism and African Self-identity", p. 68.
- ¹⁶¹ Augustine Shutte in Dan J. Antwi, "Koinonia in African Culture: Community, Communalism and African Self-Identity", p. 68.
- ¹⁶² See W. E. Abraham, *The Mind of Africa*, p. 73.
- ¹⁶³ See Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996, pp. 49- 50
- ¹⁶⁴ See John Mbiti *African Religions and Philosophy*, London: Heineman, 1969, p. 2.
- ¹⁶⁵ See Peter Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, p. 65.

CHAPTER THREE

BIBLICAL CONCEPTS OF A HUMAN BEING

Whenever we begin to look at Biblical concepts, we must first look at the Biblical world, that is the world in which the Bible was written. There is a world and culture behind the Bible. While the people of Israel themselves had their culture, they were also affected by the culture of the Ancient Near East. As Kwame Gyekye¹ says, there is no human culture that is absolutely unchanging, that totally refuses to take advantage of possible benefits that usually accompany encounters between cultures. Israel borrowed from the peoples surrounding them. It is therefore very likely that the contact that the people of Israel had with the surrounding cultures affected their philosophical assumptions. We must however not think that it was a situation where the people of Israel just gave up their culture and took those of their neighbours. This is not what usually happens. In such situations there is almost always a critical appropriation of the new. So that, even though there is a shift, it is never a shift without an examination². Out of the critical examination comes a new way of thought.

In this chapter, we shall look at the Biblical concepts of a human being bearing in mind that, the culture of the Biblical world, like any other culture was not static but dynamic. It must be said at this point that the term “Biblical” refers to the whole of the Bible, that is both the Old and the New Testaments as well as the Books of the Inter-Testamental period.

Just as we did for the Akan concepts of the human being, we shall in this chapter discuss the Biblical concepts under the following headings:

- (a) The origins of the human being
- (b) The constitution of the human being
- (c) Gender and humanness

- (d) Body form, age, status, moral behaviour and humanness
- (e) Ethnic Affiliation and humanness
- (f) Communalism and humanness

(a) THE ORIGINS OF HUMAN BEINGS

Based on the creation stories recorded in the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis, it is held that the Biblical view on the origins of human beings is that all human beings were or are created by God. According to the accounts, God created man, *Adam*, from the dust of the earth and then breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, thus turning him into a living being³. God then made the woman from a rib He had taken out of the man. Whether the woman was also formed out of the dust of the earth or not, we are not told. We can however speculate on this and say that even if the whole of the woman was not made from the dust of the earth, the rib from which she was made was and therefore she too was made from the dust. In Psalm 103: 14, we read:

For he [God] knows our [human beings] frame;
He [God] remembers that we [human beings] are dust.

The view that the origin of human beings is through creation by God is supported by the several references in other parts of the Bible. For example, we read:

I created the earth, and created man upon it.⁴

Have we not all one father? Has not the same God created us?⁵

Paul, to whom most of the books in the New Testament are attributed, does not state directly that the presence of human beings in the world is the result of an act of God's creation. However the idea is implied in his writings. For example, in Romans 9, he insists on God's right as sovereign Creator.

Also in Paul's letter to the Ephesians we find the statement:

...to make all men see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things...⁶

The writer alludes to God's creation of human beings by using the encompassing phrase "all things" For him human beings are by nature part of the created order.

The allusion to the presence of human beings on earth being due to Divine creation can also be seen in non- Pauline New Testament writings. Thus we find in the book of Revelation the statement:

Worthy art thou, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honour and power,
for thou didst create all things and by thy will they existed and were
created".⁷

These references make it possible for us to say that in Biblical thought, the presence of human beings on this earth is believed to be the result of an act of Divine creation.

Commenting on the presence of human beings on earth, H. H. Rowley argues that both accounts of creation with which the Bible opens, proclaim the faith that the human being is a creature of God.⁸

The Bible relates conception and birth to creation as shown in Genesis 1: 28 where the propagation of human beings is absorbed into the concept of creation. The writer in Psalm 139 brings old concepts about creation into his view of an individual's birth. He shows that "the Creator of mankind is also the Creator of every individual person".⁹ The author begins the Psalm by arguing that God has searched him out and that God knows him intimately. He is certain that no human being can ever hide from God. To make this clear, he uses his personal history of creation as proof. Thus he says:

For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
your works are wonderful, I know that full well.
My frame was not hidden from you
when I was made in the secret place.
When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my
unformed body.
All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them
came to be.¹⁰

Another passage in which we find conception and birth being related to creation is

Job 10: 8- 12.

Your hands shaped me and made me.
Will you now turn and destroy me?
Remember that you molded me like clay.
Will you now turn me to dust again?
Did you not pour me out like milk
and curdle me like cheese,
and clothe me with skin and flesh
and knit me together with bones and sinews?
You gave me life and showed me kindness,
and in your providence watched over my spirit.¹¹

As in Genesis 2: 7 and 3: 19 Job perceives God as a potter forming the human being out of clay; this human being will later decay to dust. He also uses similar images of “clothing” as in Psalm 139: 13, 15. Job speaks of God knitting him together. However Job’s confession differs from Psalm 139 as it introduces the idea of “poured-out milk that curdles like cheese”. The analogy draws our minds to the pouring out of the seminal fluid, which is a milky substance, into the female organism and the subsequent development of the firm embryo.

Commenting on the relation of conception and birth to creation, Hans Walter Wolff points out that a human being’s time begins with his or her creation and birth¹². He strengthens his argument by referring to the fact that in addition to the creation stories in Genesis, there are confessions of individuals. In these confessions, the individuals bring their own birth into conjunction with God’s act of creation. He further argues that the births of these individuals and God’s act of creation relate to one another in the way that the first article of the creed: “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth”, relates to Luther’s declaration: “I believe that God has created me...”. By this, Hans Walter Wolff means that the fact that people are born does not cancel the fact that they have also been created by God.

(b) CONSTITUTION OF THE HUMAN BEING

A discussion of the Biblical view of the constitution of the human being calls first for the establishment of the components of the human being. It is only after the components have been established that we can proceed to talk about what each of them is or does.

Two schools of thought exist where the constitution of the human being is concerned.¹³ We shall therefore not try to prove that the human being is composed of any other components than those on which the debate has been going on for a long time, namely, body, soul and spirit.

First, there is the “bipartite” school. According to this school, there is a soulish, or spirit element in the human being. This soulish or spirit element is one with the ultimate life- principle of the universe. The human being is therefore a unity of body and this *élan vital*.

This school is of the view that looking through the Bible, we find that the nature of the human being is generally presented as essentially twofold- material and immaterial; a human being is a unity of “dust and deity”. Thus it can be said that the Bible shows the human being as consisting of two principles, namely, the cosmical, and, the holy. These “unite the individual into a free and personal oneness of being”¹⁴.

The dualism of matter and spirit is authenticated in the creation account given in the Book of Genesis. In Genesis 2: 7, the distinction between the body, made from the dust of the earth, and the soul- principle of life as breathed out by God is clearly made. A human being’s body is made from the earth¹⁵ while his spirit is of God¹⁶. Thus in Daniel 7: 12, Daniel confesses that his spirit is anxious in the midst of his body¹⁷. Jesus Christ also refers to the destruction of body and soul in hell¹⁸. Paul refers to the body as a

tabernacle, or house or garment of the soul¹⁹. This however does not mean that Paul is suggesting that the human being is complete without the body, or that he or she can finally be separated from his body. He teaches uniformly that the human being is constituted of a unity of these two entities.

In the view of the tripartite school, the New Testament uses two terms for the non-material part of a person's being. These are *psychē* and *pneuma*. These two words are translated soul and spirit respectively. Sometimes the words are used interchangeably. The higher exercises of religion are attributed to the soul thus making it the essential component of the human being, the seat of an individual's personal identity. In a human being there is nothing higher than the soul. This therefore means that when a person loses his soul, he loses his essential being.

In the Old Testament, the words *nepeš* and *rûah* meaning *soul* and *spirit* respectively are often interchanged. Sometimes animals are credited with *rûah* while God himself is credited with *nepeš*²⁰.

There are times when the two words, soul and spirit, are distinguished and contrasted, but this is always with reference not to two separate substances, but to two specific functions of the psychical nature of the human being. Holding that soul and spirit are two aspects of a human being's inner nature, proponents of the bipartite school say that spirit stands for life as having its origin in God and soul for life as constituted in the human being. Thus, according to H. D. McDonald:

spirit is the innermost of the inner life of man, the higher aspect of his personality; while soul expresses man's special individuality. Soul is spirit modified by its union with body. The *pneuma* is man's non-material nature looking Godward; and *psychē* is the same nature looking earthward and touching the things of sense.²¹

The second school of thought is the tripartite school. The theory of this school is that the human being consists of three parts, namely, spirit, soul and body²². The spirit is the

immortal and rational element, the soul the principle of animal life, and the body, the material part of the human being's constitution.

Supporters of this school of thought refer to the three separate occurrences of the Hebrew word *bārā*, that is, to create in Genesis chapter one. In this chapter, the word *bārā* occurs in verses 1, 21 and 27 and it refers in each case to a separate creative activity of God. It is therefore argued that these relate to three distinctive elements in the constitution of the human being.

In addition to this, there are texts in the New Testament to which a more confident appeal is made by this school of thought as in 1 Thessalonians 5: 23:

May the God of peace sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.²³

In this passage, Paul mentions spirit, soul and body.

Another passage that the tripartite school uses in its argument is Luke 1: 46- 47

And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit Rejoices in God my saviour,..."

Yet another passage is Hebrews 4: 12

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double- edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

Another passage is Matthew 10: 28

And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

Each school of thought appears to have a backing from the scriptures. It is necessary therefore for us to seek to determine where the stress of Biblical teaching lies.

In trying to determine what the Biblical view is on the constitution of the human being, we will have to look at the historical background of the people of Israel, as well as the recipients of the various epistles. This is because, as has already been mentioned, the people of Israel had a history of exiles, where they were moved from their country

into other countries. For example John Bright²⁴, writing on the history of Israel, says that after the destruction of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, in about 587 B. C. many of the Jews were deported to Babylon where they stayed for a long time. In addition to that, they had neighbours whose ways of life influenced theirs. It is for this reason that the faith of Israel is sometimes given prefixes like Hellenistic and Palestinian. According to Erik Sjöberg, Palestine was not an isolated territory in the Hellenistic world. It was influenced by the Hellenistic culture around it.²⁵ This means that it was possible for new anthropological ideas to attach themselves to the ancient Hebrew and Jewish concepts. For example, with the development of the idea of a resurrection and a real life after death, it was natural that the thought of a divine element of life in man should be worked out further. There was already the ancient Hebrew and Jewish concept that there is in the human being the spirit which comes from God and which is the vital force in the human being. At this point therefore, specifically Jewish and Hellenistic ideas were interwoven. The Jewish legacy however prevented a complete “Hellenising of anthropology”, especially through the exclusion of the Hellenistic view of the body as the seat of evil.

Judaism did not keep to the Old Testament views about the spirit of man. According to Erik Sjöberg, later Jewish anthropology strongly underlined the idea of the spirit of man and went far beyond what is found in the Old Testament in this respect.²⁶ It developed the distinction between spirit and body. This led to a kind of dualistic anthropology with a belief in the pre-existence of the soul, as well as its immortality. These were ideas which were full-fledged in Rabbinism- man is made up of spirit and body. The spirit is of heavenly derivation while the body is of earthly derivation.

In ancient Greek literature the soul is seen as combined with the body. The body loses its life when the soul leaves it. Soul may therefore simply stand for life. The Greek

word *psychē* can also refer to the inward part of a human being, that is, his personality. This means that the soul can be equivalent to the person. Bound as it is to the body, the soul is so much a personal force that instead of the personal pronoun, the word soul may be used. Thus the expression “my soul” is equivalent to “I”. Depending on the inner attributes of a person, his soul may be described as strong or wise. It is therefore possible to categorise people according to the strength of their soul. According to Plato, “if a man is anything at all, he is his soul.”²⁷ The soul is the seat of perception, of desire and pleasure, and of enjoyment. Its properties are movement, observation, perception and above all, incorporeality.²⁸ It is therefore possible to assess the soul morally, according to its powers. The duties of the soul are to care, rule and advise. *Sophia*, wisdom, and *nous*, understanding, would have no chance to develop if the soul is not there as the foundation. Furthermore, according to Plato, the soul can be deprived of its body²⁹. Also, he says that the soul does not come into its own fully until it has been separated from the body and that the soul is immortal.

On the body, the Greeks generally regarded it as a grave or chain. It was distinguished from the soul in that it was mortal while the soul was immortal and was only the abode of the pre-existent soul. When death comes, it frees the soul from the body. According to Aristotelian thought, the body is primarily that by which the soul becomes something particular³⁰.

Knowing that Biblical thought is a synthesis of all these ideas, we move on to discuss some Biblical passages in which the words spirit, soul and body are used.

Soul

The word *nephesh*, which is translated as soul, is first used in Genesis 2: 7. According to this passage, God created the human being from the dust of the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils. This made the human being become a living soul. According to Edmond Jacob, this passage affirms clearly that the *nephesh* is not given to the human being as a soul which might be considered as deposited in a body, but rather as the final result of divine activity which is a reality that is at once physical and spiritual.³¹ There are however passages in the Bible which point to the fact that the *nephesh* may be considered a soul deposited in the body.

Some of the passages in the Bible which give the idea that the soul is an entity which can be said to be one of the components of the human being are, Luke 1: 46- 47, I Thessalonians 5: 23, Hebrews 4: 12, and, Matthew 10: 28.

Luke 1: 46-47

And Mary said: "My soul [*psuchē*] glorifies the Lord and my spirit [*pneuma*] rejoices in God my Saviour.

This passage uses soul as parallel to spirit. We could therefore say that Mary is here referring to two distinct components of the human being. However, G. Harder³² does not see it that way. According to him, the parallel usage of the two words in the same passage gives them the meaning of the whole inner person, "in contrast to the outward aspect of his lips and speech". He also says that in the passage under discussion, the soul is spoken of in a sense that goes beyond Greek thought. It is the place where a human being's religious life as well as his or her relationship with God is. The word used in this sense is found in Luke 2: 35 and 3 John 2.

While we may want to agree with G. Harder, his interpretation leaves us with the question as to why he would rather see the parallel usage of the two words as referring

to the whole inner person and not also see it as meaning that there are two components of the inner person. The presence of the conjunction “*and*” shows that Mary is referring to two entities.

I Thessalonians 5: 23

...May your whole spirit [*pneuma*], soul [*psuchē*] and body [*sōma*] be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

On this passage G. Harder³³ says that the two words, soul and spirit, are used in contrast. The contrast is between spirit, soul and body, and soul here means life, that is, the fact of being alive and the aspect of the human being which has to do with willing and emotion.

H. D. McDonald³⁴ agrees with G. Harder on this. He says that even though this passage seems to demand a tripartite view of man, Paul does not seem to be interested here in giving a scientific analysis of the structure of the human being. His concern is rather to call the people to a spiritual dedication of their total lives.

This, however, does not mean that Paul could not have been referring to the constituents of the human being. Why did he not just say: “... and may your whole being...” when he was not interested in making the people believe that they have a body, a soul and a spirit? Why would Paul write to people in Thessalonica, a Greek city, and use terms which have a specific meaning to Greeks when he did not intend them to understand them the Greek way and not even try to clarify what he meant

Hebrews 4: 12

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul [*psuchē*] and spirit [*pneumatōs*], joints and marrow;..

This passage talks about the dividing asunder of soul and spirit. It would be easy for us to conclude from this that there is a soul and there is a spirit in the human being, but G. Harder³⁵ says that we are to think of it in purely conceptual terms. According to him, the statement just means that God's word probes the inmost recesses of our spiritual being and reveals the subconscious motives.

We could also say that the emphasis of this passage is on the sharpness of the Word of God. If we look at it in this way, the passage would be saying that as impossible as it is to divide the soul and the spirit, the Word of God is so sharp that it could divide them. This verse would therefore bring up the idea that even though there may be two different components, spirit and soul, they are closely bound together and therefore cannot be separated.

Matthew 10: 28:

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body [*sōma*] but cannot kill the soul [*psuchē*]. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul [*psuchē*] and body [*sōma*] in hell.

On this passage, G. Harder says that the soul in the sense in which it is used in the passage, only exists because it is called by God and because it allows itself to be called and be filled with power that is divine³⁶. It is only God, therefore, who has power to let it live or to destroy it.

It would however not be easy to accept this explanation unless we are sure that Jesus did not believe that a human being consists of body, soul and spirit. It is only when we have been able to establish beyond every doubt that the Biblical view of the human being is not a body in which dwells a soul, a soul which is a substantive entity, a being that is conscious, that we can agree with G. Harder's interpretation. Unless we are able to do that, we have to interpret Jesus' words as meaning that the body can be killed by

just anybody, as we see happening all the time; but when it comes to the other component, that which is immaterial, only God can destroy it by sending it into eternal punishment. This passage would therefore be a good one in support of a soul that can be separated from the body on the “death of the body”.

Revelation 6: 9

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls [*psuchē*] of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained.³⁷

Revelation 20: 4

...And I saw the souls [*psuchē*] of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God.³⁸

G. Harder explains the “soul” in Revelation 6: 9 and 20:4 as being a sort of imagery based on the fact that the blood of the sacrifice was poured out on or before the altar³⁹. According to him, there is a comparison of the martyrs who have shed their blood with the sacrifices, and, since the life, that is the soul, is in the blood, the souls of the martyrs are said to be under the altar. What G. Harder means is that the mention of the souls of the martyrs does not actually mean a soul that is an immortal entity which separates from the body upon a person’s death.

So far, we gather that in the view of G. Harder, the Bible does not present the soul as a substantive entity. It appears that soul is just the term used for certain functions of the human being and cannot be said to be a component as such.

James Oliver Buswell says that the word soul is often used in the Bible for the non-material ego of man in its ordinary relationships with physical and earthly things⁴⁰. He goes on to say that the soul, if regenerate, goes to paradise or heaven, or, to the abode of

the wicked. In his view, the soul is one of the two substantive entities that make up the whole human being. He makes his point by saying:

It is reasonable to see that, in this created world, Whenever movement in space occurs, there is something that moves; and similarly, whenever consciousness occurs, there is something, the soul or mind, that is conscious.⁴¹

Going by this argument, we can say that even if there does not appear to be any outright reference to the soul as a substantive entity, it is alluded to in the functions attributed to it.

Spirit

The next element believed to be a component of the human being is the “spirit”. In the Greek Old Testament, the Septuagint, the Hebrew word *rûah* is almost always translated *pneuma*. The basic meaning of *rûah* is “blowing”. According to Edmond Jacob, the *nepheš* or soul is the result of the animation of the *basar* (flesh) by *rûah* (spirit), which comes from God⁴². Without spirit, says Edmond Jacob⁴³, there is no life.

In reference to human beings and animals, *pneuma* refers to breath and denotes the individual’s life-force. It is, as Friedrich Baumgärtel puts it, the principle that gives life to the body⁴⁴. It denotes that which is lacking in idols. It is given and protected by God and He, God, is also free to take it. As a life force, it shows itself in varying degrees of intensity, the dominant idea being not that of breathing, but that of its accompanying vitality. Emotions like grief, utter despair, anxiety and anger or jealousy can affect it adversely.

According to E. Kamlah when speaking of the human being, the writers of the Old Testament take a person as he is and assess his attitude towards God’s law as well as his behaviour towards his fellow human beings⁴⁵. He goes on to say that the implicit

thought in *rûah* is that breathing is the outward expression of the life force inborn in all human behaviour. We can say this especially of behaviour that requires some energy; behaviour in which a person's energy has to be directed along certain lines, like bringing a person to a decision or, stirring up the person's spirit. In such a case, spirit is synonymous with intention or plan. Behaviour towards other people whether proud or humble, impatient or patient, can also be said to be the outward expression of this life-force, just like behaviour towards God.⁴⁶

Spirit is usually found standing alongside heart and the ideas behind the two words are very similar. However, there is a difference. The difference is that the heart has been created by God and is within the human being. It is not like the breath of a human being's spirit in that it is not a fleeting oscillating gift. It stands for a person's aims, resolves, and courage. Spirit, on the other hand, can be said to stand for the direction in which a human being's vitality flows, 'the self-expression involved in his behaviour-including ecstatic behaviour'.⁴⁷

As spirit is essentially of God, a human being's spirit is a gift of God.⁴⁸ The term is never used, according to E. Kamlah, to depict that higher quality in human beings that distinguishes them from animals⁴⁹. Spirit is often referred to as the spirit of God. It is the power of God and is inescapable and present universally. Its presence in a person's life makes that person able to perform 'ecstatic, supernatural deeds. For example, when the power of God came mightily upon Samson, he tore a lion apart with his bare hands⁵⁰.

E. Kamlah concludes therefore that there is nothing, according to Biblical thought, like the spirit which is a substantive entity in the human being's make-up⁵¹. He says that it is only under the influence of its Hellenistic environment that Judaism saw the spirit as a vital force breathed divinely into the human being and forming a distinct part of his

being. This spirit was not distinguished from the soul. It was rather contrasted with the body: the spirit comes from heaven, the body is of the earth.⁵²

It is very interesting that E. Kamlah mentions that it is only under Hellenistic influence that Judaism saw the spirit as a vital force breathed divinely into the human being and forming a distinct part of his being⁵³. This means that Hellenistic thought influenced Jewish thought when there was an encounter between the two cultures. The encounter must have led to a synthesis of some sort. This is a point that Erik Sjöberg⁵⁴ makes. According to him, there was a point at which Jewish and Hellenistic ideas were interwoven but the Jewish legacy prevented a complete Hellenising of anthropology⁵⁵. This synthesis then became Jewish thought. From that point onward Jewish thought followed the line of the synthesis. It is in the light of this that we must examine the use of this word, spirit, in the New Testament.

One of the ways in which *pneuma*, spirit, is used in the New Testament is to denote the human spirit, that is, the human being, in so far as he or she belongs to the spiritual realm and interacts with the spiritual realm.⁵⁶ It denotes the power which human beings experience as relating them to the realm of reality which lies beyond their ordinary observation and control. This means that a person's spirit is that aspect of him or her through which an encounter with God is most immediate. It is that dimension of the whole human being wherein and whereby he or she is "most immediately open and responsive to God"⁵⁷. It is that part of human awareness that is most sensitive to matters of the spiritual realm.

When we begin to discuss the spirit, there is a difficulty in knowing whether we are referring to the spirit of the human being, or to a particular force experienced through this dimension of being, or to a power or spirit that comes from without.

There are scholars, like J. D. G. Dunn⁵⁸, who claim that that the Biblical thought of the human being does not see the spirit as a component of the human being as such. These scholars go on to say that passages like Mark 14: 38 are ambiguous. According to them, even though in the New Testament we see the human spirit being referred to as something possessed by the individual, it should not be taken to mean that the New Testament writers saw the spirit as “a divine spark incarcerated in the physical”⁵⁹. In addition, they say that it is likely that that kind of language was used because it is a natural and easy way of talking about the human being in his or her belongingness to the spiritual realm. What seems to be happening is that the New Testament is being interpreted in the light of the Old Testament.

One thing that keeps coming up is the fact that concepts like soul and spirit begin to appear in Jewish writings after the Jews came into contact with the Greeks. The notion is therefore that these concepts were copied from the Greeks and did not originally belong to the Jewish tradition. Th. C. Vriezen⁶⁰ says that the Old Testament is not one-sided in its conception of the soul or of life after death. There is, on one hand, the ancient popular belief where reference is made to the spirits and *she'ol*-, and on the other hand, the theology of Yahwism which places emphasis on the decay of the body and the return of the breath to God. He goes on to say that this latter conception could be due to the fact that Yahwism always had to fight against the ancient Eastern belief in spirits, the worship of the dead and the raising of spirits, and this conflict accounts for the fact that the Old Testament speaks very little about life after death.⁶¹ If this is anything to go by, we could then say that the fact that the Old Testament seems silent on the concepts of spirit and soul does not actually mean that the concepts are not Biblical.

The history of Judaism shows that it was influenced both by Hellenism, as has already been noted. Jesus came at a time when Judaism had been influenced by

Hellenistic culture. The beliefs of the people were therefore a synthesis of Judaism and Hellenistic beliefs. It was among such people that he lived and taught. When he used the terms spirit and soul, he could not have used them in a way that was not meaningful to the people. If at the time the people understood spirit and soul in the “Hellenistic” way, Jesus would have given an explanation to them of what he meant if he did not intend them to understand him in the Hellenistic way. He would not have left them with ambiguous statements. One may cite for example, Jesus’ words to the disciples:

...The spirit [*pneuma*] is willing but the flesh [*sarx*] is weak.⁶²

How were the disciples expected to interpret it other than that Jesus was making a kind of comparison between the spirit and the flesh or body of the human being.

Again as Jesus was dying on the cross, he said:

Father, into your hands I commit my spirit [*pneuma*].⁶³

Clearly Jesus meant here his “spirit” as the vital force within him. He gave that to God but his body remained on the cross. Once the spirit was gone, there was no life in the body. The Jews of the time understood it this way.

Whenever the Holy Spirit is being referred to in the English Bible, a capital letter is used to spell spirit while in other instances it is not so. The fact that there is a Holy Spirit does not mean that it is impossible for there to be a spirit of human beings which they obtain from the breath of God that is breathed into them. The Jewish Rabbis often gave expression to the understanding of the spirit as the vital force. When human beings make an image, they are not able to put a spirit into it. What they make can therefore not move and it is not alive. God however, blows the spirit into human beings and they live. Every living creature has spirit.

The fact that Jesus accepted and used these concepts makes them Biblical. When he told one of the thieves crucified with him that they would be together in Paradise that

day, those around must have understood that he was not talking about a physical meeting but a spiritual one, one which would involve a spiritual aspect of the human being, perhaps the soul. Th. C. Vriezen says that the immortality of the soul is not mentioned anywhere in the Old Testament, yet, in daily life, the people took account of “a continuation of life after death in the underworld”.⁶⁴

Body

In addition to the spirit and the soul, there is the body which is also held to be one of components of the human being. The word, “body”, is used in several ways in the Bible and usually refers to things other than the body as a component of the human being.⁶⁵ However the fact that the word is used in many other ways should not lead us to think that the Biblical concept of a human being does not include the body.

The body as the seat of passion is first seen in the book of Sirach⁶⁶. The books of the Maccabees show Hellenistic influence. They draw a distinction between the soul and the body. In the book of Wisdom it is said that a good soul and an undefiled body belong together. With the soul being the particular gift of God, the body can be given up in persecution, and even though the relationship of body and soul is seen here in relation to God, the Greek dichotomy of the immortal soul and the mortal body is also present. The Jewish background of the New Testament times shows that these ideas were further developed. The significance of death stands out more sharply in the light of the connection between body and soul as it is that which separates the two. The soul is then taken to heaven while the body remains on earth. In Jewish thinking however, the body representing the whole person comes under judgement and is raised from death. This way of thinking approximated more closely to the Old Testament. Thus this concept of the body was common during the New Testament period. On the one hand there is the

sense of body or person, and on the other hand there is the distinction drawn between body and soul, spirit or mind.

In the New Testament, *sōma* means several things. Sometimes it means corpse. Sometimes too it is used with the physical aspect of the body being uppermost. When Paul uses the word *sōma* it has a specialised meaning in the sense of person. “Human existence even in the sphere of the spirit is a bodily, somatic existence.”⁶⁷ Thus one cannot see the body merely as a figure or form. *Sōma* is not just the outer form but the whole person. In some of his writings Paul uses *sōma* for the general physical sense of body. He speaks of the human being only once in a tripartite way⁶⁸. He also speaks of bearing the marks of Jesus in his body. These marks we can see as the scars he received in Jesus’ service. Again Paul writes:

I pommel my body and subdue it, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.⁶⁹

The thought here is of a body that is a member of Paul. It is therefore not surprising that in the same letter he says:

If I give up all that I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.⁷⁰

Paul also uses *sōma* in connection with sexual acts. In some passages he warns against unchastity and these warnings show that there is a wider significance here than just the physical. He makes it clear that bodily acts affect the whole person.⁷¹ He goes on to say that to some Bible scholars a human being does not have *sōma* but is *sōma*. *Sōma* stands for the whole human being as a person and can be understood as the object of an action, and also as the subject of an action. When Paul says that he treats his body severely and subjects it, he does not just mean that he is treating only his body severely but his whole being, that is himself.⁷² In Romans 8: 13, Paul mentions *sōma* as the subject of an action. He says:

If by the spirit you put to death the deeds of the body you will live.

This statement suggests action by the body. The body is here equivalent to the self, the human “I” in its sinfulness.

Sōma is also used by Paul to refer to a group, the body of Christ. Taking up the picture of the body, he expresses the essential character of the Christian church.

The fact that *sōma* refers to other things in addition to the individual human body does not mean that we cannot say that in the Biblical conception of the human being the body is seen as a component. In actual fact we can say that in certain parts of the Bible as we have already shown, the body is seen as one of the components of the human being.

From the discussion so far, we can say that while it is true that the human being consists of material and immaterial substances, these substances can be named as the body, which is the material part, and the soul and spirit, which are the immaterial parts. These different components exist together in such a way that it is not possible to separate the human being into the different parts.

GENDER AND HUMANNES

Several passages in the Bible have led to much debate on the issue of gender and humanness. These passages will be discussed in this section.

The first passage we shall look at is Genesis 2:21-22:

So the Lord God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the Lord God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man.⁷³

This passage deals with the creation of Eve, the woman. The argument that is often raised with this passage is that because the woman was created from the man, she is a subordinate being to the man. Thus some of the Early Church Fathers like Chrysostom, Tertullian, Augustine and, later, Aquinas, taught that women were here as “defective

men”, or “not in God’s image”, or just as agents in procreation.⁷⁴ This can however not be accepted as the Bible makes it plain that God created male and female in His image. According to Paul K. Jewett⁷⁵, the statement: “male and female created he them”⁷⁶ is an exposition of the statement: “in the image of God created he him”⁷⁷. That which distinguishes human beings from the other creatures is the presence of the image of God. If the image of God is equally present in the woman as in the man then the woman is also a human being.

Another point made by those in this group has to do with the fall of humankind. According to the Biblical narrative, the woman was deceived by the serpent and she in disobedience to God ate the forbidden fruit and convinced the man to do the same⁷⁸. When Paul writes to Timothy, he instructs him not to let women teach or have authority over the men. One of the two reasons he gives for this instruction with regard to women is that it was the woman who was deceived thus becoming a sinner and not the man.⁷⁹

Writing on Women in the New Testament, Kenneth E. Bailey acknowledges that there appear to be two opposing attitudes in the New Testament towards women in the church.⁸⁰ He is however of the view that these seemingly opposing attitudes can be reconciled. He establishes the fact that in the Early church there were female disciples, teachers, prophets, deacons, (one) apostle, as well as the possibility of female elders. According to him, when history is taken seriously, passages like 1Corinthians 14: 34- 35 and 1 Timothy 2: 11- 15 tell the women to be silent when they do things like disrupting worship and teaching heresy. He continues that for the sake of the up-building of the body of Christ in Corinth and Ephesus, the special problems of these places were firmly dealt with. In conclusion therefore, he submits that the admonitions in 1 Corinthians 14: 34- 35 and 1 Timothy 2: 11- 15 can be understood to be in harmony with the presence of women in positions of authority in the church. He ends by saying:

In this manner all NT texts considered can be seen as supportive of the great vision in Gal. 3: 28 where 'in Christ ...there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus'.⁸¹

The fact that right at the beginning of the Old Testament the humanness of the woman is established by the mention of male and female being created in the image of God tells us where the emphasis lies in Biblical thought on gender issues. Even Paul who is often quoted in arguments on the place of women acknowledges that men come into the world through women⁸². By making this statement, he draws attention to the fact that women are just as human as men.

BODY FORM, AGE, STATUS, MORAL BEHAVIOUR, AND, HUMANNES

Body form

In the Biblical conception, a human being has a body. That which has no body is not seen as a human being but a spirit. However bodies may be deformed. In this section, we look at how a person with a deformed body is perceived.

The first person mentioned with a deformity in the Bible was Isaac⁸³. In his old age, his eyes were so weak that he could not see. He was virtually blind. The Bible does not however mention that this affected the way he was perceived.

The next person mentioned with a deformity was Jacob⁸⁴. In the account, after Jacob struggled with a stranger all night and would not stop until he was blessed, the stranger touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched and he started limping after that. This however did not affect the way Jacob was perceived. In fact from the account, we see that on the very night that he was deformed, he was also blessed.

There are, apart from deformities that had to do with the Patriarchs, other deformities mentioned in the Bible. Among them are leprosy, blindness, lameness, and paralysis, to mention but a few⁸⁵. People who suffered from leprosy were isolated⁸⁶. They had to

move away from the society. They were considered dead. If however, they got cured they performed certain rites and then joined the community again. People with other forms of deformities were allowed to live in the community.

It appears that generally, deformities were connected with sin. A person with a deformity was believed to have sinned against God. In John 9, the disciples of Jesus asked Him to tell them whose sin was responsible for the blindness of a man who was born blind. In response, Jesus told them that it was due to no sin that the man had been born blind. By saying this, Jesus showed that it is possible for a person to have a deformity even when that person has not broken any law of God. In this Jesus makes a move from what had always been the belief and practice of the people.

Generally, we cannot say that deformity affected humanness in Biblical thought. Relatives and friends were allowed to deal with people with deformities, helping, where possible to find a cure for the afflicted. People with deformities were not just left to die but were cared for as human beings deserved.⁸⁷ We cannot however say the same for a deformity like leprosy. In the case of this disease, the afflicted person was treated with some form of disdain. He or she was banished from society. Jesus came and made a break with this tradition by communicating with lepers, even touching them. In doing this, Jesus showed that lepers were also human beings who needed to be cared for.

Age

The phases of an individual's life are put into three, four or five divisions in the Bible.⁸⁸ Where there are three divisions, the divisions are: children, young but fully grown men and grown-up girls, and mature, elderly men and women.⁸⁹ Where the divisions are four, they are children, youth, younger married adults and the elderly⁹⁰ and

where there are five, they are the small child, the youth, man and woman, the elderly and the aged⁹¹.

Different values were put on the different ages and the different sexes⁹². For a child in the first month of life no value was set upon it regardless of its gender. This was because it was believed that during the first month of a child's life, he or she could die at any time. It was therefore a matter of waiting to see if the child was capable of living. Between the ages of one month and five years, the value of the child was five shekels of silver for a male child and three shekels for a female child. This value was set in expectation of later usefulness. The value was therefore set at a tenth of the full working power. Between the ages of five and twenty years, the value for a male was twenty shekels and a female, ten shekels. For males between the ages of twenty and sixty years the value was fifty shekels and for females in the same age group, the value was thirty shekels. People who were over sixty years old were valued at fifteen shekels for males and ten shekels for females.

It is clear that what mattered for the value placed on a person was how productive the person was. Thus even though it was held that:

Wisdom is with the aged, and understanding with the length of days⁹³,

the highest value was not placed on the oldest people but rather on those who were most productive.

That children as well as adults were seen as human beings is seen in the fact that most of the time when God called for an assembly of the people, children were included.⁹⁴ Also in the history of Israel, we find that a child as young as eight became king.⁹⁵ In addition to this, David though the youngest among his father's sons was chosen above his elder brothers to be the king of Israel.

All these point to the fact that children were also considered to be human beings in the Biblical tradition. However, by the actions of the people of the Bible, we get the impression that children were treated as minors. One incident that gives this idea has to do with the attitude of the disciples of Jesus towards the women who brought their children to Jesus⁹⁶. According to the account, the disciples of Jesus rebuked the women, but Jesus accepted the children and even acknowledged their value in the kingdom of God. He went on to tell them, that is, his disciples that in order to enter the kingdom of heaven, they would have to accept it like children. This is not the only passage in which Jesus brings out the value of children as human beings. When the disciples asked Jesus who was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven, He called a child and set him in their midst and told them that if they did not become like children they would not enter God's kingdom.⁹⁷ Considering the teachings and sayings of Jesus, it is clear that children are of great importance in the Bible. Jesus actually puts them up as symbols of "true humanity".

status

In the Bible people differed in station. There were kings, there were slaves, there were widows, there were orphans, there were the rich and there were the poor. There were also the priests and the Levites. Each group of people was treated differently.

Kings, in Biblical tradition, were appointed by God. They were then anointed by the priests to set them apart for duty as the leaders of God's people. This did set them apart from the people making them special. Thus when there was a conflict between David and Saul, David always gave as his reason for not harming Saul, the fact that he was God's anointed.⁹⁸ Yet we cannot say that it made them anything more than human beings. While the New Testament acknowledges that kings have authority in the land, it

also acknowledges that they are just as human as their subjects. In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke gives an account of the end of King Herod⁹⁹. According to the story, after Herod had made a speech, the people said that he was not a man but a god. This made God smite him and let worms eat him up to death. Luke says that the reason for the smiting is that he took glory for himself and did not give it to God. Herod was a king but he was still a human being and not a god.

Slaves were owned, like property, by their masters. Abraham had a slave, Eliezer of Damascus¹⁰⁰. In Leviticus instructions are given on the way a fellow Israelite who sold himself to another Israelite should be treated. The instruction is to allow the poor Israelite to be as a hired servant or sojourner. They should not be treated as slaves. They are not to be ruled with harshness. In the case of people who are not Israelites, the instruction is different. Israelites were allowed to buy slaves from among the nations that surrounded them and also from among the strangers who sojourned in their midst. Of such people God said:

...and they may be your property. You may bequeath them to your sons after you, to inherit as a possession forever; you may make slaves of them, but over your brethren the people of Israel you shall not rule, one over another, with harshness.¹⁰¹

This passage gives the impression that the slaves bought from among the other nations could be treated harshly. However passages like what we have in Deuteronomy 5: 15, give a different impression. According to this passage, the people of Israel were to remember in their dealings with slaves that they too had been slaves in Egypt. The implication of this is that just as they had wished for good treatment, they should also treat the slaves well. God demanded humane treatment of slaves of the Israelites.

In the New Testament, Believers who owned slaves are called upon to remember that they have a master in heaven who is also the master of the slaves. They are therefore to treat the slaves with respect and not threaten them.¹⁰²

All these prove that God regards slaves as human beings. In Biblical thought therefore, slaves are full human beings.

In the Bible, there is also the class known as “the Poor”. Widows and orphans as well as the oppressed and the underprivileged belonged to this group. These people had the special sympathies of Yahweh. For example, in the intercession for the king in the book of Psalms¹⁰³, the main task of the king appears to be the care of the oppressed. People who were not wealthy were to be helped by those who were.¹⁰⁴ An Israelite who was not wealthy was not to be made to work as a slave.¹⁰⁵

In the New Testament, the value of “the poor” is enhanced. James, for example, cites looking after orphans and widows together with keeping oneself from being polluted by the world as religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless.¹⁰⁶ Clearly, being poor did not make one less human.

Priests and Levites represented the people before God, yet they too were seen as human beings. Thus whenever they went to do atonement for the nation, they had to make sacrifices for themselves first seeking their own forgiveness, before making the national atonement.¹⁰⁷

Nowhere in the Bible is any human being regarded as non- human because of his or her social position.

Moral behaviour

According to the Bible, humankind was created sinless, in the image of God. However, when the first couple, Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they caused sin to enter

the world and infect all human beings. All humanity is therefore considered to be sinful, even new born babies who do not know the right from the wrong. According to Shirley C. Guthrie however, the basic truth is not that human beings are sinners but that human beings are created in the image of God¹⁰⁸. He continues that although all human beings are sinners, sinfulness is something unnatural. At creation, God gave us a humanity, a humanity free from sin. This implies that in Shirley C. Guthrie's view, true humanity is humanity without sin.

Yet, writing to the Church in Rome, Saint Paul says that sin is in the human being and it is this sin in us that makes us sin¹⁰⁹. It takes special grace for a person to stay free from sin. According to Saint Paul, sin entered the world through one man Adam and because of that, every human being is a sinner. He continues that all human beings have sinned and fall short of the glory of God¹¹⁰. This means that everyone who is a human being is also a sinner. Human beings are born sinners¹¹¹. Confessing his sin after he had been confronted by Nathan the prophet, David says:

Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me;¹¹²

While sin is within the human being, yet every human being is endowed with moral freedom, and can use that freedom either to resist or obey the will of God – to sin or not to¹¹³. It is not sin that defines a human being but the image of God in the human being. However, “true” humanity is a human being who is free of sin.

ETHNIC AFFILIATION AND HUMANNESS

The creation story in the Bible teaches that all human beings have one source, God. This is echoed throughout the Bible with God being referred to as the Creator of all things. He is the one who names all the families of the earth.

The issue of ethnicity first comes up in Genesis 11: 1-9. In this passage, an account is given on how human beings began to speak different languages and to live in different parts of the world. The confusion of the languages came up as a punishment for humankind. The relationship between God and human beings has since the beginning of humanity, been characterised by “an increasing sinfulness, disobedience and rebelliousness”¹¹⁴ on the human side against God. In the story of the Tower of Babel, humanity sought to become autonomous, self reliant and famous without reference to God. This was rebelliousness and God punishes it by confusing the languages.

God however, does not reject humankind forever. He makes a way by which He would make a new people, a new humanity that will conform to His original intention. He does this by the election of Abraham.¹¹⁵ God calls Abraham out of the multitude of nations that He has brought about by confusing the languages, loosens him from ethnic ties, and makes him the beginning of this new humanity. Abraham thus becomes the recipient of great promises of salvation that are meant for all the families of the earth.

For the Jews, the election of Abraham and thus the Jewish nation, is a sign that Israel is deemed superior to the other nations by God. Looking at the New Testament however, one realises that this is not so. In fact the rest of the Old Testament after the election of Abraham becomes as Kwame Bediako puts it:

The constriction in the hour glass, the process of the formation and training of the covenant people to the nations, till the time when, from that covenant-people, God will manifest His Saviour for all the nations of the world.¹¹⁶

That this is the case can be seen in the story of the encounter between the apostle Peter and the centurion Cornelius recorded in Acts 10. In this encounter, Peter, being Jewish and holding on to the belief that Jews are superior to the non- Jews, is shown a vision by God to make him realise that non- Jews are just the same as Jews in the sight

of God. In the light of this revelation, he says, when he finally visits the home of Cornelius:

I now realise how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right.¹¹⁷

Peter realises that contrary to his earlier view, all human beings are acceptable to God. This becomes even clearer to him when God gives to Cornelius the gift of the Holy Spirit, the special Gift who had been promised to the apostles who at the time of the promise had all been Jews.

That all human beings are equally human and therefore important to God is seen in that God specifically selected Paul, a Jew through and through, revealed Christ to him, and made him the apostle to the non- Jewish world. It is Paul who wrote to the Church in Galatia saying:

There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.¹¹⁸

Before making this statement, Paul mentions how he had rebuked Peter for refusing to eat with the non- Jews, when certain men, Jews, came from James¹¹⁹. Paul had been a Pharisee before his conversion. He knew the Jewish scriptures very well. He himself had been one of those who had interpreted it to mean that the Jews were superior to the non- Jews and yet when God called him to be the apostle to the Gentiles, he got the true interpretation of the scriptures. Paul had come to the realisation that non- Jews are also human beings just like the Jews.

The strongest evidence of the fact that the Bible views all people, regardless of ethnic affiliation, as human beings is what happened on the day of Pentecost. On that day, as the Holy Spirit came upon the Church, the Gospel was preached in different languages¹²⁰ and all the people who were present, heard the message in their own

languages. This was a sign that salvation, though coming through the Jews, belonged to all human beings. Pentecost demonstrated that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the Father of all people regardless of their ethnic affiliation, that God speaks all languages. No ethnic group is superior to another.

In Biblical thought, therefore, all people, regardless of their race, tribe, or ethnic group, are human beings and have only one source- God.

COMMUNALITY AND HUMANNES

In this section, we shall discuss the issue of whether in Biblical thought, a human being is only a part of the community carried along in its life and involved in the changes that occur in its fortunes, or an individual who is responsible to God for his or her own life.

According to Hans Walter Wolff,¹²¹ the individual's life in ancient Israel was always integrated firmly in the bonds of that individual's family and therefore of his people. For a person to be set apart or isolated was a sign that something unusual was happening even though isolation was also "ultimately something essential if a man was truly to become a man"¹²². Neither extreme collectivism nor extreme individualism can be found in the life of Israel. What can be found, according to H. H. Rowley, is a combination of both.¹²³ He continues that both collectivism and individualism "belong to the wholeness of Biblical thought in all periods"¹²⁴.

According to Th. C. Vriezen, looking at the way the collective thoughts and ideas of Israel are treated by most scholars, it would appear that before the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel a person was thought of only in terms of the society to which he or she belonged. This is however not so.¹²⁵ Long before the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, individual sin and piety as well as individual punishment and reward existed. Thus we

find that people like Enoch and Noah who belonged to primeval history, testify to the fact that the worth of the individual was important and also to the fact that an individual's relationship to God was real. Enoch walked with God in individual piety and was taken by God,¹²⁶ Noah at a time when human sin cried out and God destroyed the world with a flood, was saved, and Abraham, the founding Patriarch of the nation of Israel, "stands out for the nobility of his individual character"¹²⁷. There are others like Hannah who can be mentioned to show that God was not indifferent to the individual. That individuality had always been part of the society is seen in the fact that in Exodus chapters 21, 22 and 23, the earliest Israelitic book of the Law, the death penalty is only inflicted on the offender himself or herself.

This does not however mean that communality did not exist. Just as there are passages showing that individuality existed, so are there passages showing that communality existed. Many times in the Old Testament a whole people is indicted. For example, in the opening chapters of the Book of Amos, there are a series of indictments in which the neighbouring peoples are denounced for being guilty of sinning against the principles of humanity and thus against the law of God.¹²⁸ The Books of Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel contain oracles directed against foreign peoples. Also, in the sacrificial law, there is provision for daily sacrifices on behalf of the people and for the yearly sacrifice of the Day of Atonement for the community's sin during the preceding year.

The New Testament uses the human body to show the relationship between individuality and communality. In I Corinthians 12: 12- 31, Paul says that the body is made up of different parts each dependent on the other and yet each is an individual entity with its own individual responsibility. Every person in the community is an

individual with his or her own individual responsibility, yet each individual is responsible for the whole community.

What seems to be coming up is the fact that one cannot make a statement as to whether or not it is communality or individualism that defines the human being. Both appear to do so. What should be done may be determined by the situation. The individual needs the community to be fulfilled and yet at the same time he or she needs isolation too.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

So far, we have examined the Biblical concepts of the human being and know what the Bible says about the origins and the constitution of the human being.

According to the Bible, human beings were created by God and that a human being is made up of soul, spirit and body.

We have also found out that while in the Old Testament gender, body form, age, status, moral behaviour and ethnic affiliation are portrayed as affecting humanness, in the New testament, it is different. For example, the status of women is elevated to an equal stand with that of men in the New Testament. The same can be said for body form. In the Old Testament, a person suffering from leprosy was not to be touched but Jesus, in His day, touched a leper and healed him.¹²⁹ He communicated with a number of lepers and brought healing to them.¹³⁰ By doing this, Jesus showed that a person's body form does not affect his or her humanness.

We shall now move on to do a comparison of the Biblical concepts with the Akan concepts.

NOTES

- ¹ See Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity: Philosophical Reflections on the African Experience*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, pp. 217- 218.
- ² This compares well with how Kwame Gyekye believes that traditions come to be formed. See Kwame Gyekye, *Tradition and Modernity*, p. 221
- ³ Genesis 2: 7.
- ⁴ Isaiah 45:12.
- ⁵ Malachi 2: 10a
- ⁶ Ephesians 3: 9
- ⁷ Revelations 4: 11
- ⁸ See H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel: Aspects of Old Testament Thought*, London: SCM Press Ltd. 1956, p.74.
- ⁹ Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* London: SCM Press Ltd 1974, p. 96.
- ¹⁰ Psalm 139: 13- 16.
- ¹¹ This quotation is taken from the NIV.
- ¹² See Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p.93.
- ¹³ See H. D. McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, London: Marshall Morgan and Scott, 1981, pp. 75-78.
- ¹⁴ H. D. McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, p. 78.
- ¹⁵ See Genesis 3: 19
- ¹⁶ See Ecclesiastes 12: 7
- ¹⁷ See Daniel 7: 15, AV.
- ¹⁸ Matthew 10: 28
- ¹⁹ See 2 Corinthians 12: 3, 5: 1 ff
- ²⁰ See H. D. McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, p. 79.
- ²¹ H. D. McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, p. 79.
- ²² See H. D. McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, p.76.
- ²³ This quotation is from the RSV.
- ²⁴ See John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Third Edition), Philadelphia Westminster Press, 1981, pp. 343-345.
- ²⁵ See Erik Sjöberg, “Ruach in Palestinian Judaism”, in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Vol. VI), Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1977, Pp.380-381. In the text, Ruach is written in Hebrew letters.
- ²⁶ See Erik Sjöberg, “The Spirit of Man”, pp.380-381
- ²⁷ See G. Harder, “Soul” in Colin Brown (Ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Vol. 3), Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978, p. 677.
- ²⁸ See G. Harder, “Soul”, p. 677.
- ²⁹ See G. Harder, “Soul”, p. 679.
- ³⁰ See S. Wibbing, “Body” in Colin Brown (Ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* Vol. 1, 1978, p. 232.
- ³¹ See Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, (ET by Arthur W. Heathcote and Philip J. Allcock) London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1958, p.159
- ³² See G. Harder, “Soul”, pp. 683- 684
- ³³ See G. Harder, “Soul”, p. 684.
- ³⁴ See H. D. McDonald, *The Christian View of Man*, pp. 75-79
- ³⁵ See G. Harder, “Soul”, p. 685.
- ³⁶ See G. Harder, “Soul”, p. 686.
- ³⁷ The Greek ψυχάς (psuchas) is ψυχή (psuchē) in the accusative plural form.
- ³⁸ The Greek ψυχάς (psuchas) is the accusative plural form of ψυχή (psuchē)
- ³⁹ See G. Harder, “Soul”, p. 686.
- ⁴⁰ See James Oliver Buswell, Jr., “Soul”, in J. D. Douglas and Merrill C. Tenney (Eds.), *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, Hants, U.K.: Marshall Pickering, 1987, p. 959.
- ⁴¹ James Oliver Buswell, Jr., “Soul”, p. 959
- ⁴² See Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 161
- ⁴³ See Edmond Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, p. 161
- ⁴⁴ See Friedrich Baumgärtel, “Spirit in the Old Testament”, in Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. VI., 1977, p. 360.

- ⁴⁵ See E. Kamlah, "Spirit" in Colin Brown (Ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978, p. 691.
- ⁴⁶ See E. Kamlah, "Spirit", p. 691.
- ⁴⁷ See E. Kamlah, "Spirit", p. 691.
- ⁴⁸ See E. Kamlah, "Spirit", p. 691.
- ⁴⁹ See E. Kamlah, "Spirit" p. 691
- ⁵⁰ See Judges 14: 6.
- ⁵¹ See E. Kamlah, "Spirit", pp. 691-692.
- ⁵² See E. Kamlah, "Spirit", pp. 691-692
- ⁵³ See E. Kamlah, "Spirit", p. 692
- ⁵⁴ See Erik Sjöberg, "Ruach in Palestinian Judaism", 1968, p. 380
- ⁵⁵ See Erik Sjöberg, " Ruach in Palestinian Judaism", p. 380.
- ⁵⁶ See J. D. G. Dunn, "Spirit", in Colin Brown (Ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978, p. 693.
- ⁵⁷ See J. D. G. Dunn, "Spirit" p.693
- ⁵⁸ See J. D. G. Dunn, "Spirit", p.694.
- ⁵⁹ J. D. G. Dunn, "Spirit" p. 694.
- ⁶⁰ See Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970, p. 409.
- ⁶¹ See Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, p. 409.
- ⁶² Mark 14: 38b
- ⁶³ Luke 23: 46b.
- ⁶⁴ See Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, p. 408.
- ⁶⁵ The Bible uses body to refer to a community. For example, the Body of Christ.
- ⁶⁶ The book of Sirach is an Intertestamental book.
- ⁶⁷ See S. Wibbing, "Body", p. 234.
- ⁶⁸ I Thessalonians 5: 23.
- ⁶⁹ I Corinthians 9: 27. (RSV)
- ⁷⁰ I Corinthians 13: 3
- ⁷¹ See I Corinthians 6: 15, 19f.
- ⁷² See I Corinthians 9: 27.
- ⁷³ This quotation is taken from the New International version (NIV) of the Bible.
- ⁷⁴ See Elaine Storkey, "The Feminist Case Against God" in Kathy Keay (Ed.), *Men Women and God*, Basingstoke, Hants: Marshall Pickering, 1987, p. 11
- ⁷⁵ Paul K. Jewett, *MAN as Male and Female*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986, p. 33.
- ⁷⁶ Genesis 1: 27b.
- ⁷⁷ Genesis 1: 27a.
- ⁷⁸ See Genesis 3: 1-7.
- ⁷⁹ See 1 Timothy 2: 14.
- ⁸⁰ See Kenneth E. Bailey, "Women In the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View", *Anvil*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 1994, p. 7.
- ⁸¹ Kenneth E. Bailey, "Women In the New Testament: A Middle Eastern Cultural View", p. 24.
- ⁸² See 1 Corinthians 11: 11- 12.
- ⁸³ See Genesis 27: 1
- ⁸⁴ See Genesis 32: 22- 32.
- ⁸⁵ See Deuteronomy 28: 22ff., I Samuel 4: 4.
- ⁸⁶ See Leviticus 13.
- ⁸⁷ Passages like Luke 4: 38ff, Luke 5: 17ff show that sick people were taken care of by relatives and friends.
- ⁸⁸ See Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 120.
- ⁸⁹ See Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 120.
- ⁹⁰ See Jeremiah 51:22.
- ⁹¹ See Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 120.
- ⁹² See Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 121.
- ⁹³ See Job 12: 12.
- ⁹⁴ See 2 Chronicles 20: 5,13 ; Joel 2: 15-16.
- ⁹⁵ See 2 Kings 22:1.
- ⁹⁶ See Mark 10: 13- 16.
- ⁹⁷ See Matthew 18: 1- 4.
- ⁹⁸ See 1 Samuel 24: 6, 9; 1 Samuel 26: 11.

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- ⁹⁹ See Acts 12: 21- 23.
- ¹⁰⁰ See Genesis 15: 2- 3.
- ¹⁰¹ See Leviticus 25: 45b-46.
- ¹⁰² See Ephesians 6: 9; Colossians 4: 1.
- ¹⁰³ See Psalm 72.
- ¹⁰⁴ See Leviticus 25: 35- 38.
- ¹⁰⁵ See Leviticus 25: 39.
- ¹⁰⁶ See James 1: 27.
- ¹⁰⁷ See Hebrews 5: 2- 3.
- ¹⁰⁸ See Shirley C. Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine* (Revised Edition), Louisville/ Kentucky: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1994, p. 213
- ¹⁰⁹ See Romans 7: 14 ff.
- ¹¹⁰ See Romans 3: 23.
- ¹¹¹ There are different views on the doctrine of original sin. Some people are of the view that our sinful nature is inherited, others claim that it is imputed to us.
- ¹¹² Psalm 51 : 5
- ¹¹³ See H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel*, p. 88.
- ¹¹⁴ Kwame Bediako, "What is the Gospel?", *ATF Bulletin* No 1, October 1995. p. 6
- ¹¹⁵ See Genesis 12.
- ¹¹⁶ Kwame Bediako, "What is the Gospel?", p. 6
- ¹¹⁷ Acts 10: 34
- ¹¹⁸ Galatians 3: 28.
- ¹¹⁹ See Galatians 2: 11- 13.
- ¹²⁰ See Acts 2: 1-11
- ¹²¹ See Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament*, p. 214.
- ¹²² Hans Walter Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* , p. 214.
- ¹²³ See H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel*, p. 100.
- ¹²⁴ See H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel*, p. 100.
- ¹²⁵ See Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, pp. 419- 420.
- ¹²⁶ See Genesis 5: 24
- ¹²⁷ H. H. Rowley, *The Faith of Israel*,p. 101.
- ¹²⁸ See Amos 1-2.
- ¹²⁹ See Luke 5: 12-13.
- ¹³⁰ See Luke 17: 11- 14.

CHAPTER FOUR

COMPARISON OF BIBLICAL AND AKAN CONCEPTS

In chapters two and three, the Akan and Biblical concepts of the human being were examined. In this chapter, we shall be comparing the concepts to find out if there are any similarities between them, and also if there are any dissimilarities.

CONCEPT OF ORIGIN

The Akan concept of the origin of the human being acknowledges that the human being is a creation of God. The substance from which human beings are created is however not specified. We can only infer from sayings like maxims or proverbs or from the lyrics of dirges and other sources.

The seeming absence of information on the substance from which human beings were created may be due to the fact that not much is said about the human body when the Akan consider the human being. This is obvious even from looking at the research that has been made on the Akan concept of the constitution of the human being. Of all the works so far referred to, only Kwame Gyekye¹, Noel Smith², and Kwasi Wiredu³ mention the *nipadua* as a component of the human being. Kwasi Wiredu, for example, under the sub-heading: The Concept of a Person as both Descriptive and Normative, in the work being referred to, says:

Here it might be of greater immediate interest to see what, in addition to mind, the Akans conceive to be involved in the constitution of persons. There is most visibly, the assemblage of flesh and bones that form the body (*nipadua*, literally, person tree).⁴

Most of the time, when the Akan say that the human being consists of material and immaterial substances, they do not mention the *nipadua* (body) as the material part but rather, the *mogya* (blood). They therefore speak more of the *mogya* than of the *nipadua*.

It could however be that because the *nipadua* is physical, so obvious, the Akan take it that it does not need to be mentioned. Being a people who are very much aware of the spiritual world, one would expect that they would know that without the *nipadua*, what exists is a *saman*, an ancestral spirit or a ghost. Perhaps for the Akan, with or without the *nipadua* a human being is a human being. This could account for the fact that there is the belief among them that whatever one does during a life- time one continues to do in *asamando*. A chief continues to be a chief even when he dies. People move on from this physical world into the spiritual holding the same social positions they held in the physical world. This belief is quite confusing as it gives the impression that to the Akan with or without the other components of the human being a person is still the same person. We shall discuss some of the implications of this belief further when we come to discuss the *okra*.

The Akan are very much aware of the fact that the human body, *nipadua*, disintegrates upon death, but to them it is not a matter of “Earth to earth, dust to dust, ashes to ashes”. Drum texts used at funerals give us an idea of what the thought is concerning the disintegration of the human body upon death. For example there is a text that says:

Nkanka bedi wo nam

Nkanka is the Twi word for termites. The message here is “termites will eat your flesh”. The playing of this message is to remind all human beings of what eventually happens to the body. This could mean that to the Akan, the body is not just dust that goes back to dust, but flesh that is eaten by termites. What needs to be ascertained is the substance from which the flesh is made.

Kwasi Wiredu⁵ points out that the Akan word for create, *bɔ*, means to fashion out something. The Akan title for God, *Bɔrebɔre* also, according to Dan J. Antwi⁶, means

Architect, Excavator or Hewer. From these terms, we gather that in Akan thought, God did not create out of nothing- *creatio ex nihilo* does not exist in Akan thought on creation. On the specific issue of the creation of human beings, we can say straight away that the Akan believe that human beings are created from something. According to one of the myths of creation, the Akan came out of a hole in the ground⁷. In the view of Nicholas Corte, a myth is:

A symbol which reveals certain aspects of reality, the deepest aspects of which defy any other means of knowledge.⁸

Without going too far, we could say that the implication of the myth that was just referred to is that human beings came out of the ground, they were created from the soil of the ground. We can therefore say that the substance used in the creation can be inferred from the myth.

The Biblical concept of the origin of the human being is that human beings are creatures of God. God created human beings from the dust of the earth. After making the form, God breathed the breath of life into its nostrils and the form He had made became a living being- a human being.⁹ When mankind sinned against God, God said as part of the punishment to Adam,

By the sweat of your brow
you will eat your food
until you return to the ground,
since from it you were taken;
for dust you are
and to dust you will return.¹⁰

This passage makes it clear that the Bible teaches that human beings are made from the dust of the earth. The statement may not have been made to the woman but that the woman is also made from the dust of the earth is implied.

Both Akan and Biblical thought hold that human beings are creatures of God. Both also hold that human beings were created from the dust of the earth.

CONSTITUTION

On the constitution of the human being, the Akan see the human being as being constituted of material and immaterial substances. The Bible also holds that the human being is made up of material and immaterial substances. There is however a difference in what constitutes the material and what the immaterial in both cases. In the case of the Akan, the material is basically the *nipadua* and the *mogya* while the immaterial is made up of the *ɔkra*, *honhom*, and *sunsum*. In the Biblical view on the other hand, the body is the material part while the *pneuma*, spirit, and the *psuchē*, soul, are the immaterial parts.

Normally in the Akan Bible, the English word *soul* is translated as *ɔkra*. We shall therefore compare the two entities, that is, soul and *ɔkra*.

The soul and the *ɔkra* are both conceived as being immaterial. They are entities that cannot be seen with human eyes. As has already been said¹¹, Kwasi Wiredu is of the view that the *ɔkra* is not immaterial but quasi-physical as it can be seen by certain categories of people, people such as *nnunsifoɔ*, medicine men. Against this view of his, Kwame Gyekye argues, saying that since only people with special abilities, extra-sensory perception, can see the *ɔkra*, it cannot be described as physical, regardless of the adjective used to qualify the word physical.¹²

Both entities are also conceived as immortal. The Akan say that when a person dies, the *ɔkra*, which is a spark of life from God, does not disintegrate with the body. Rather, it leaves the body and goes to *asamando*, the land of the dead¹³.

Writing on the Biblical concept of the soul, G. Harder¹⁴ cites Philo's doctrine of the soul in which he says that at a certain time, the soul leaves the body, which is mortal, and goes into the world of things imperishable and incorruptible. He continues that it is in the divine world that it is really at home. Passages like James 1: 21 and 5: 20 mention

the salvation of the soul which is in danger. The souls will be saved from eternal death. If the soul needs to be saved from eternal death, then it means that the soul is not immortal. However eternal death may not mean an end of existence but a separation from the presence of God. We can think of eternal death in this way when we consider the story told by Jesus about the rich man and Lazarus¹⁵. Eternal death may mean eternal banishment from God and torture of the soul forever. If this is what it is, then we can say that the soul, like the *okra*, is immortal.

Both the *okra* and the soul are conceived to be conscious entities. Thus G. Harder says that sorrow is experienced in the depth of the soul¹⁶. In Akan, there is an expression to the effect that a person's *okra* can be sad. It is said: *Ne kra were ahow*, that is his or her *okra* is sad.

The Biblical soul is closely related to the spirit, which is the breath. The association is so close that sometimes one is taken for the other. Like the soul, the *okra* is closely associated with the *honhom*, which is the breath. The association is so close that sometimes the two are thought to be the same just as in the case of the soul and the spirit.

It could also be said that the *okra* upon the death of a person becomes the representative of that person and takes responsibility for all that he or she did while on earth. This would compare well with the Biblical view of the soul as it is the soul which becomes the representative of the human being after death and takes responsibility for the person's life and acts. There is however some difference in that there is the Biblical belief in the resurrection of the dead where the souls will be joined to resurrection bodies for judgement. Before the day of resurrection however, the soul may be said to be quite comparable to the *okra*. The souls of those who have pleased God in this physical world will be with the Him and enjoy bliss while the souls of those who have

not pleased God will be in a place of pain. With the Akan it is those who have met the societal norms who enjoy life at *asamando* while those who have not, do not.

There are however some differences in the two concepts which show that translating one as the other may not be very right.

In the Akan conception, the *okra* is the life principle. Its presence means that there is life while its absence means death. In the Bible, on the other hand, the soul's presence does not mean that there is life. This means that the soul is not the life principle in Biblical thought. The life principle is some other entity, the *pneuma*, spirit.

Also, *okra* is spoken of only where human beings are concerned. Animals and plants do not have *okra*, but *sasa*. The same cannot be said of the word soul. In the Bible, the word soul is used of animals too. Animals, just as human beings, have souls.

In addition to the differences already cited, the *okra* is the part of the human being that bears the *nkrabea*, destiny. Bearing the *nkrabea* is a characteristic of the *okra*. It is not possible to have an *okra* without a *nkrabea*. The soul is never mentioned in connection with destiny in the Bible. While some people may, based on certain texts in the Bible, argue that the issue of coming into the world with a destiny is Biblical, there is no way that destiny is connected to the soul. It is based on the fact that the *okra* is conceived as the bearer of human destiny that Kwasi Wiredu argues that the soul in the Western sense is not the same as the *okra*¹⁷. His argument stands in the case of the soul in the Biblical sense too. The Biblical concept of the soul is not of an entity that receives a destiny from God before coming into the world. Here it must be mentioned that the *okra* is conceived to be pre-existing, that is, it does not come into existence with the coming into existence of the body which it occupies. Whether the Biblical soul can be said to be pre-existing or not is difficult to tell. As was mentioned in chapter three, in Rabbinic teaching, the soul was thought to be pre-existent. We cannot however say that

Rabbinic thought is Biblical thought as Jesus in his teaching found some things to be wrong with the Rabbinic teaching.

Yet another difference between the Akan *okra* and the Biblical soul has to do with the belief in reincarnation. According to the Akan, when a person dies, he or she can be reincarnated. That which is involved in reincarnation is the *okra*. The concept of the reincarnation of the soul does not exist. The Jews believed that Elijah would come back into the world. Their belief was however based on the fact that Elijah never died.

Another entity that is used in the Akan Bible is the *honhom*¹⁸. This is translated from the Greek *pneuma*, and refers to the breath of life that in Biblical tradition was breathed by God into the nostrils of human beings to make them living souls.

There are a number of similarities between the spirit and *honhom* which make it right to translate one as the other. For example, both are believed to come from God. In Biblical thought, the spirit is the breath of God which he breathes into the human body to make it a living soul. In Akan thought, it is not mentioned how the *honhom* comes from God to become part of the human person but it is said that it comes from *Onyame*, God. Also, just as in Akan thought the *honhom* has a close association with the *okra*, so in Biblical thought, the spirit has a close association with the soul. Yet another similarity is the fact that in Akan thought, when a person dies, the *honhom* goes back to God from whom it came and in Biblical thought too the spirit goes back to God who gave it when a person dies.

The word *honhom* does not however translate the word *pneuma* or spirit fully. This is because there are some differences in the two concepts. For example, in Akan thought, life does not depend on the presence or absence of the *honhom* as such. A person is said to be alive not because the *honhom* is present but because the *okra* is

present. In Biblical thought, the spirit is the life principle. It is the spirit's presence in the human body that makes it a living soul.

Sometimes, the word *pneuma*, translated *honhom* in the Akan and spirit in English refers to that which is known as the *sunsum* in Akan thought. It refers to a person's psychological make up or personality. This could mean that the Biblical spirit is a combination of the Akan *okra* and *sunsum*.

Another entity that forms part of the Akan concept of the constitution of the human being is the *mogya*. This is a very important constituent as the Akan practice matrilineal inheritance. Without the *mogya* a person is not complete. *Mogya* is blood but the way it is conceived in Akan thought is different from what it is in Biblical thought. While it is true that the Bible teaches that the life of a being is in its blood¹⁹, the blood does not form part of the essential components of the human being. In Akan thought, parents are important in the composition of the human being. The source of a human being's composition is three-fold, *Onyame*, God, the father and the mother. This fact is never overlooked. Each supplies something in the making of the person. *Onyame* gives the *okra*, and the *honhom*, the father gives the *sunsum* and the mother gives the *mogya*. These components unite to form the unique human being. With the Biblical conception the only One who is important in the making of the human being is God. He supplies all the components of the human being. The parents become only the vehicle through which the human being comes into the world. God in Genesis 1: 28 says:

...Be fruitful and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it...²⁰

In spite of this, none of the "essential" components of the human being comes from the parents.

The discussion so far shows that where the constitution of the human being is concerned, there are similarities as well as differences in the concepts.

GENDER AND HUMANNESS

In the Akan conception of the human being, as was discussed in chapter two, the issue of the man coming before the woman does not come up. This is because, all the myths of creation or the coming into being of humans, show that both males and females appeared on the world scene at the same time. We gather from this that the Akan see the woman as an individual who has a personality of her own, a human being in her own right. Also as was mentioned earlier, the issue of “original sin” does not exist among the Akan. The woman is therefore not held responsible for the fall of humanity. She is not seen as being less human because she is less moral compared to the man. A human being is essentially a moral being. Both men and women are punished equally by the society for moral failures.

From the Biblical creation story some people would argue that because the woman was created out of the man she cannot be of equal standing with the man. The Bible however does not teach that that which was created from the rib of the man Adam was not a human being. The equality issue that would arise even from looking at the creation story recorded in Genesis chapter 2: 21-23²¹, would not be based on who is more human than the other, but rather, on who appeared on the scene first. Saint Paul addresses this issue in his first letter to the Corinthians²². He argues that while the man did not come from the woman but the woman rather from the man, and while the man was not created for the woman but the woman for the man, yet in the Lord, woman is not independent of man nor is man independent of woman. He continues that as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman.

Again in his letter to the Galatians²³, he tells them that in Christ Jesus all people are equal. Paul who knew the Jewish scriptures well, interprets the scriptures in the light of Jesus Christ and shows that Biblically, females and males are human beings and equal.

The use of a term such as “weaker vessel” to describe the woman, in the Bible, should not be interpreted as “sub- human being”.

In both Akan and Biblical thought, gender does not determine whether a person is a human being or not. It is true that in Akan society there are practices that may prompt a questioning of the human status of females but as has already been discussed, this is likely to be due to a misunderstanding of societal roles. The same may be said about the Biblical doctrine of the human being. It would be easy for anyone to conclude, after reading a few texts from the Bible, that the Bible teaches that women are not fully human. We can only dare to make a statement on the status of women in the Bible after we have studied the Bible extensively. Every text in the Bible must be interpreted in the light of the whole Bible.

BODY FORM, AGE, STATUS, MORAL BEHAVIOUR AND HUMANNESS

In Akan thought, age and status, do not influence a person’s humanness. Moral behaviour, and, to some extent, body form, however, do affect humanness. This is because the Akan conceive the human being as one who is intrinsically good. It is for this reason that J. B. Danquah says that the issue of original sin does not exist in the Akan conception of the human being.²⁴ For the Akan therefore, one who does not meet the moral standards of the society is not considered a human being. Of such a person, it is said: *Ɔnnye nipa!*, meaning, he or she is not a human being. By this expression the Akan show that the person is not behaving like a human being. Thus morality does affect humanness in Akan thought.

Also, children born with deformities are not considered to be human beings. As was mentioned in Chapter Two, a child born with a disease like Down's syndrome is considered to be a spirit from either the river or the forest. In addition to this, a child born with extra digits on his or her hands is considered a thief. A thief is seen as one who falls short of the moral standards of the society. Among the Akan, it is said that it is better to own only a few things than to be a thief.²⁵ This is because to fall below the moral standard by being a thief, is to fail to be human. A child born with extra digits is therefore not considered to be a human being. Thus body form, especially if it is congenital, also affects humanness in Akan conception.

In the Biblical conception, unlike in Akan conception, a person's body form does not affect humanness. This means that Biblically, a person with bodily defects, whether from birth or acquired here on earth is just as human as a person without any bodily defects.

Also, a person's age did not qualify him or her to be, or disqualify him or her from being, a human being. Children as well as adults are human beings. The stages of infancy and childhood were glorified by the Lord Jesus Christ coming into the world as an infant and passing through childhood to become the "man" who died to save all humankind.

Another thing that does not affect a person's humanness in Biblical thought is social status. The rich and the poor, the noble and the ignoble are all seen as human beings in the sight of God. God declares himself the defender of the oppressed in the society. Thus in Matthew 25: 31- 46, Jesus identifies with people who are of very low standing among the Jews. It may have been that the Jewish people themselves believed that social status affected humanness but Jesus believed otherwise. He believed that social status had nothing to do with humanness.

Morality also, according to Biblical thought, does not determine humanness. While “true” humanity signified in Jesus Christ, the Bible acknowledges the inability of the human being to be sinless by having the concept of “original sin”. Therefore while the Bible demands human beings to be sinless, it also accepts that human beings are not sinless. Due to this, whether a person is morally good or bad has nothing to do with his or her being a human being. Righteousness is imputed to human beings, not because they do not sin, but, because they believe in Jesus Christ. In the Biblical sense a human being is a sinner, one who within himself or herself does not have the power to do that which is morally right. Although Shirley Guthrie says that sinfulness is something unnatural to the human being²⁶, yet, to be human is to be sinful. Only the Lord Jesus Christ lived a sinless life. He stands for true humanity. Apart from Him, all humanity is sinful.

From the above discussion, we see that with regard to age, social status and moral behaviour, Akan and Biblical conception of the human being are similar while with regard to body form, they are different.

ETHNIC AFFILIATION OR COLOUR AND HUMANNESS

In both the Akan and Biblical conceptions of the human being, ethnic affiliation or colour does not affect humanness. The Akan say that *Nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma*, that is, all human beings are God’s children. This means that all people come from God. There is therefore no difference between them. People who belong to one ethnic group are no less human than those of other ethnic groups.

The Bible in the creation stories, shows that all human beings are from one source. It goes on to show how people became divided into different language groups in Genesis chapter 11. In the episode of the coming of the Holy Spirit to the Church on the Day of

Pentecost²⁷, God showed that all languages belong to, and, are from Him. This He did by letting the Disciples speak “in other tongues” so that the different peoples who had gathered in Jerusalem, each heard them speak in his or her own language. All people regardless of ethnic affiliation are His children, they are all human beings who need to hear the salvation story so as to be saved and brought back into His kingdom.

COMMUNALITY AND HUMANNESS

In both the Akan and Biblical conceptions of the human being, communality goes a long way to define humanness. A person who does not conform to the norms of the society is considered an outcast in both Akan and Biblical conceptions. In both cases however the fact that communality is important does not mean that there is no room for individuality. Individual responsibility is important in both situations. Thus while the community may be said to define a person, it is not always the case. A human being is a being who lives in community with others and yet is responsible for his or her actions.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

So far we have seen that in many ways Akan and Biblical thought of the human being are comparable. However they are not totally comparable. This is because there are some very significant differences. These differences make it clear that the Biblical world and the Akan world are different.

The presence of the differences have implications for evangelism as the concepts of the Akan meet needs in their lives. They will therefore not simply give them up for others which may not meet their needs. We shall consider how the differences should be dealt with in the next chapter.

Notes

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- ¹ See Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Revised Edition), Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995, p. 85.
- ² See Noel Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835- 1960: A Younger Church in a Changing Society*, Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1966, p. 70.
- ³ See Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture*, Cambridge: Cambridge University press, 1980, p. 47
- ⁴ See Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996, p. 126.
- ⁵ See Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, p. 122
- ⁶ See Dan J. Antwi, "Koinonia in African Culture: Community, Communality and African Self- Identity", *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, Vol. VI, No. 2, July 1996, p. 67.
- ⁷ See R. S. Rattray MBE. *Ashanti*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1923, pp.
- ⁸ Nicholas Corte, *The Origins of Man*, New York: Hawthorn Books, 1961, p.12.
- ⁹ See Genesis 2: 21-22.
- ¹⁰ Genesis 3: 19.
- ¹¹ See Chapter Three, the section on the *akra*
- ¹² See Chapter Three, section on the *akra*.
- ¹³ See Pashington Obeng, *Asante Catholicism: Religious and Cultural Reproduction Among the Akan of Ghana*, New York: E. J. Brill, 1996, p. 92. See also Eva L. R. Meyerowitz, *The Sacred State of the Akan*, London: Faber and Faber Limited, [1949], pp. 85- 86.
- ¹⁴ See G. Harder, "Soul" in Colin Brown (Ed.), *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Vol. 3), Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978, p. 681
- ¹⁵ See Luke 16: 19- 31.
- ¹⁶ See G. Harder, "Soul", p. 683.
- ¹⁷ See Kwasi Wiredu, "The Akan Concept of Mind", *Ibadan Journal of Humanistic Studies*, No. 3, Oct. 1983, pp. 119-120.
- ¹⁸ In the Fante Bible, the word *pneuma* is translated as *sunsum*, thus Holy Spirit becomes *Sunsum Kronkron*, as against the *Honhom Kronkron* found in the other Akan versions of the Bible.
- ¹⁹ See Leviticus 17: 11
- ²⁰ Genesis 1: 28
- ²¹ Gen. 2: 21-23: So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman' for she was taken out of man.
- ²² See 1Corinthians 11: 8- 12.
- ²³ See Galatians 3: 28.
- ²⁴ See J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1944, p.
- ²⁵ See Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996, p. 68
- ²⁶ See Shirley Guthrie, *Christian Doctrine*, Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 1994, p. 213.
- ²⁷ See Acts 2: 1-12.

CHAPTER FIVE

LETTING THE BIBLE INTERPRET THE CULTURE

In a comparative study of Akan religion and the Christian faith, Sydney George Williamson points out that:

...The Christian faith and Akan religion reveal themselves as basically different. They meet without a common viewpoint and with fundamentally different emphases. They constitute two different levels of religion, able to view each other from afar but finding no common ground of fellowship.¹

He is however of the view that there must be a way of integrating the Christian faith with Akan society. I am of the view that, if Akan religion and the Christian faith would cease to view each other from a distance, a common ground of fellowship could be found.

In Chapter Four, we tried to bring the two face to face with each other by comparing Akan and Biblical thoughts on the human being. Through the comparison, we have found that there are many similarities. Such similarities take our minds to assertions of African Christian theologians like John S. Mbiti that African Traditional Religions are largely compatible with Christianity.² We have also found that there are some very significant differences.

The findings of this study, have implications for evangelism among the Akan and thus for Africans in general.

The presence of the similarities give to anyone seeking to do evangelism a place from where to start. In teaching it is always good to start from the familiar to the unfamiliar. In much the same way, evangelism, which is also a form of teaching, is better done when the beginning concepts are familiar.

For example, the belief that human beings are created by God is common to both worlds, with the Akan having a saying: *nnipa nyinaa ye Nyame mma* (all human beings are children of God). It therefore makes sense to the Akan when God is referred to as Father in the Christian faith. The concept of fatherhood may be different but at least there is common ground.

The problem comes when we have to deal with the differences. Over the years, when Biblical concepts have come face to face with African concepts, people have had to choose one as against the other. Yet it is not an issue of which concept is right and which is wrong. What we should rather do is to find out what each concept means to the people and what needs they meet in their lives. Concepts help people to cope in the world as they understand it. Once a concept meets a need, it cannot just be judged and condemned without another means of meeting that need being put in its place. When we have examined the concepts and know what purposes they serve, what needs they meet, we can then let Scripture interpret them by finding out how the Biblical concepts fill out, - fulfil, correct, re-direct, or modify, these concepts which are not Biblical ones.³ Unless the Christian faith meets the needs of the Akan they will not fully embrace it.

Every evangelist has a task to perform. His or her task is to proclaim the good news of Jesus Christ. This task must be performed in the right perspective. According to David J. Hesselgrave, in the New Testament, when the apostles communicated the Gospel to people who were not Jews or Christians, the communication involved filling in the information these people already had concerning God, His world, man and history with that which the Old Testament affords.⁴ An example of this is when Paul stood before the Areopagus in Athens⁵. Commenting on Paul's address, F. F. Bruce says that Paul does not quote the Hebrew scriptures which the Athenians are not familiar with, but rather he quotes from the Greek poets. However, instead of arguing from "first

principles”, as any Greek philosopher would do, he bases his argument firmly on the Biblical revelation of God, echoing throughout the thought, and sometimes the very language of the Old Testament scriptures. His argument begins with God the Creator of all and ends with God the Judge of all, just like the Biblical revelation itself.⁶

Paul did not compromise his Christian stand but he also did not create a conflict between his faith and the Greek culture. He was aware of the concept of an unknown God among the Athenians. As the name suggested however, the Athenians did not know anything about Him. He therefore set out to fill in the needed information for them. The question that may be asked is whether it is possible to let the Bible interpret Akan culture.

Christianity may be seen as a fulfilment of African Traditional Religion. The work of fulfilment includes saying “yes” where it must and “no” where it ought to. Based on this, we shall proceed to consider how the Biblical concepts of the human being fill out the Akan concepts. We shall consider first, the needs that these concepts meet and then we shall go on to see what the Bible says to them.

THE ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN BEING

The Akan concept of the origin of the human being as we have found is that *Onyankopɔn*, God, is the source of human life and thus the Father of all human beings, hence the maxim: *nipa nyinaa ye Nyame mma*- all human beings are God’s children. By this the Akan is saying that he or she did not just come into being, but is the special creation of One who is beyond him or her. The Akan knows that he or she does not own his or her life. Life is God’s and that is why it is a taboo to take one’s own life or to kill another person. The Bible affirms this concept and further fills it out by supplying the substance that was used in the creation. The Akan believe that human beings were not

created out of nothing but they are not clear on the substance that was used. The Biblical view that mankind was made from the dust of the earth clarifies what the Akan mean by saying that they came out of the ground.

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE HUMAN BEING

The Akan concept of the constitution of the human being is one that depicts the human being as both a physical and spiritual being. Human beings have connections in both the physical and spiritual realms. The Akan believe that the human being consists of material parts, *nipadua* and *mogya*, and immaterial parts, *okra*, *honhom* and *sunsum*. The *okra* together with the *honhom* link the human being to the Divine, *Onyankopɔn*. The *mogya* forms the link between the individual and the *abusua*, and hence the ancestors, while the *sunsum* provides the link between the individual and the *ntoro*, and therefore, the *abosom*.⁷ This essentially means that the human being is a product of the spiritual world.

The first implication of this is that there must always be a link between the human being and the spiritual world. The human being cannot exist apart from the spiritual world. Life consists not just of the physical, but also the spiritual. The human being must always ensure that a good relationship is maintained with the spiritual world.

Being a people who believe that the world is full of spirits, some good and some evil, this concept helps the Akan to link the human being with the good spirits and so ensure protection from the evil spirits. *Onyankopɔn* is the greatest of all spirits and if the human being is linked with Him, then the human being can enjoy protection.

From our study on the constitution of the human being, we have seen that scripture affirms the fact that the human being consists of both material and immaterial elements. The body is the material element while the soul and spirit are immaterial elements. In

chapter Three, we found that the Biblical concept of the soul is that it is the part of God in the human being, even as the spirit. From this we realise that the human being, according to the Bible, has links with the Divine. This means that the human being cannot exist apart from God. Anything that tampers with a person's relationship with God tampers also with the person's being. A good relationship with God is very important for the well being of the human being. This also affirms the Akan concept.

However, in Biblical thought, there is no relationship with the *abosom* and the *nsamanfoɔ*. The relationship with the *abosom* and the *nsamanfoɔ* ensures that human beings have communication with *Onyankopɔn*, the Supreme Being or God. This difference is because in the Biblical view, one can relate directly with God through Jesus Christ. According to the Bible, there is now only one mediator between God and human beings- Jesus Christ⁸. Since the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, the need for other mediators has ceased. A human being therefore does not need to maintain relationships with the divinities and ancestors to ensure a good relationship with *Onyankopɔn* and thus enjoy a successful life.

With the Akan concept, children whose fathers were not known, or whose mothers were not Akan could not relate with *Onyankopɔn* as they would either not know their *ntorɔ* or have an *abusua*. With the Biblical concept one's parentage does not affect one's being. This gives meaning to the lives of foundlings and people who cannot boast of good parentage. Our being does not depend on who our parents are but rather that we are related to God.

The Akan also differentiate between the *okra* in human beings and *sasa* in animals and plants. Thus human beings are treated differently from animals and plants. There is an Akan saying that *nipa nnye aboa*, meaning, a human being is not an animal. The Akan are aware of the fact that the human being is essentially different from non human

creatures of God. This is due to the *akra* which is peculiar to human beings alone. The Bible affirms that the human being is essentially different from the other creatures. That which differentiates human beings from animals in the Bible is the fact that God created human beings in His image. Soul and the breath, or spirit, exist in all creatures⁹. It is only the human being that God created in His image. To be in the image of God, according to Th. C. Vriezen is the token of the human being's intimate relation with God.¹⁰ The close relationship that exists between God and human beings does not exist in the case of animals. God gives to the human being dominion over the world. Thus Th. C. Vriezen writes:

As far as matter is concerned man is merely material but because he has been called by God and stands in communion with Him he is a different being.¹¹

This Biblical view makes the human being not just different from the other creatures but also gives to him or her the right to directly commune with God, something that in Akan thought cannot be except through the ancestors. In this sense the Biblical concept modifies and enriches the Akan concept.

The Akan maintain that when a person dies, the *akra* goes back to God. Then depending on whether the *nkrabea* has been fulfilled or not, it may or may not be reincarnated. This belief gives hope to the living in that we know that even if we are unable to make it now, there will always be another chance. Yet with this concept, there is likely to be a problem for a person who is experiencing difficulties. Such a person is likely to dread the idea of having to live this life over again. Also for those who would have fulfilled their *nkrabea*, the Akan view is that they remain as intermediaries between the living and the Supreme Being. These spirits are not where *Onyankopon* is, they are not with Him. They are in *asamando*. With this view, the *nsamanfo* are not passive or

ideal beings but very active and busy. However, they can never enjoy life with *Onyankopɔn*.

Instead of a reincarnation, the Bible speaks of a resurrection of the dead. At the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, all believers in Him who have died, together with those who will still be alive will be with Him forever.¹² Thus while both the Akan and the Biblical concept of the human being acknowledge life after this life, the Biblical view is more comforting.

The concept of *nkrabea* can be seen as a way by which the Akan seek to explain why some people, without much effort, make it in life while others do not, why two people may have equal opportunities but one will make it and the other will not. It is a concept that enables people to accept their lot in life, even the kind of death they die. P. Sarpong adds that the concept is invoked to explain personal traits that a person may want to do away with but does not seem able to do anything about.¹³ With the *nkrabea* tied to the *ɔkra*, an entity that comes from *Onyankopɔn*, the Akan who believe that *Onyankopɔn* does not and cannot commit evil against His creation, show that whatever a person's *nkrabea* may be, once it comes from God, "... then God must have decided on it for a good reason"¹⁴. Human beings may not understand it or know it fully but they can rest assured it is for good reasons. It is therefore a concept that helps people to look at the successes or failures of others without envying or looking down on them.

The same belief that *nkrabea* comes from *Onyankopɔn* makes it possible for personal accountability to be imputed. This is because the *nkrabea* given by *Onyankopɔn* must always, even if it has to go through difficult times, lead to a joyful end. Therefore if a person's *nkrabea* leads to misfortune or calamity, then it must be interpreted as punishment for misbehaviour.

This concept of *nkrabea* is in a way affirmed by the Bible. There are statements in the Bible to the effect that before certain people were born, God had already decided what would be their lot. Thus for example, between Jacob and Esau, God, even before they were born, loved Jacob and hated Esau¹⁵. Passages like this one give the impression that God knows what we will be like in the world even before we are born. He decides what our lives will be like before we come here. However like the Akan belief about *Onyankopɔn*, God is love. There is in the scriptures the concept of grace, of having good things which we do not deserve. God loves His creation so much that He willingly gave up His only Beloved Son for its salvation. With such love, it is impossible for God to plan a person's life in a way that will make the person suffer on earth without a good reason. Whatever God has planned for us unfolds with time and it will surely end well. With the Bible, the end does not refer to cessation of this present life for then many would say that it does not always end well for believers as Paul writes:

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men.¹⁶

In the Bible, a person's life is not only that which is lived in the flesh now but also, that which is lived after death. When the whole of life is considered, God's plan for the individual stretches from life in the flesh to life after death. The story of Lazarus and the rich man¹⁷ show this. Lazarus' life would never have been described as ending well without considering what happened to him after he died, and, the rich man's life would have been good throughout without a considering what happened to him when he also died.

This Biblical view therefore keeps the individual from being envious of others. Scripture thus fills out the concept of *nkrabea*.

From the discussion so far, we see that the Bible also provides an explanation for occurrences in the lives of human beings for which they cannot give reasons. It goes further to deal with the despair that could come out of experiencing difficulties most of the time that one lives in the flesh by showing that this life does not constitute the whole of life. In this way, the scriptures fill out the Akan concept of *nkrabea*.

The concept of *nsamanfoɔ* is one that shows that the Akan believe that after this life a human being is held accountable for his or her life. When a person lives an acceptable life, and dies, his or her *saman* joins the *nananom nsamanfoɔ* at *asamando*. Here the *nsamanfoɔ* continue to live in the same status they had while on earth. For example, a person who was a slave continues as a slave in *asamando* and a chief continues as a chief. The *saman* of a person whose earthly life was not acceptable to the community and therefore to the Supreme Being does not join *nananom nsamanfoɔ*.

According to this concept, the destiny of the human being is to enter the spirit world, to continue existing in the next life as a spirit, a life which is an almost monotonous continuation of life beyond the grave. This concept does not promise paradise for those who do good neither does it threaten hell-fire for evil doers. This natural immortality is cherished by the Akan in spite of what it is.

The Bible affirms accountability after life. In the Bible, the part of the human being that is held accountable for the human person's deeds is the soul¹⁸. A good life results in the soul enjoying eternal bliss in the presence of God before the "resurrection of the dead" occurs, while an unacceptable life results in eternal banishment from the presence of God. In Biblical thought, the souls of people whose lives have been acceptable do not continue in the same status they had while on earth. All people become equal with God treating all well. We can therefore say that the Biblical concept can enrich the Akan concept as it holds that the human being in Christ is destined to be God's child and to

share in Him. The human being is deified to receive a share in God's nature.¹⁹ This according to J. S. Mbiti, is the true immortality of man, a positive participation in the being of God, in the very source of being, in the eternal life that Jesus Christ manifested.²⁰

Before ending this discussion on the Akan concept of the constitution of the human being, we shall look at the concept of the *sunsum*. The *sunsum* is held to be the part of the human being that can be affected by the *bayie* spirit. With this concept, the Akan, a people who believe strongly in *bayie* and its operations deal with the whole concept of *bayie* and how it operates in a person's life. The *sunsum* is also a concept that helps them to explain the phenomenon of dreams.

While the Bible does not teach the concept of the *sunsum*, it does affirm that a human being can be tormented by an evil spirit²¹. It also affirms that it is possible for a human being to have an evil spirit living in him or her.²² The part of the human being that can be attacked or inhabited by the evil spirit is not stated in the Bible.

Also the phenomenon of dreams exists in the Bible. In the Bible however, dreams are usually seen as one of the means by which God communicates with human beings. Exactly how the individual is involved in the dream does not come up.

GENDER AND HUMANNES

The Akan concept of the human being as far as gender is concerned is that both male and female make up humanity. This is made very clear when we consider that both male and female are believed to contribute towards the formation of a foetus, and therefore a human being. Both male and female are equal as both appeared on the world scene at the same time. The woman is however always put under the man as depicted by the maxim: *ɔbaa to etuo a etwere ɔbarima dan mu*, meaning, "when a woman buys a

gun, she keeps it in a man's room". It is very likely that this is meant to maintain order in the home and in the society.

Women are expected to do certain things and not others. There are reasons for this as we have already discussed. From the discussions we realise that the differences in treatment have nothing to do with humanness but rather with a general belief that the woman is not strong. For example, a woman may weed but may not fell trees. That is considered a task that needs greater strength. A man may therefore not waste his energy doing what a woman can do. He must keep his strength for the heavier tasks. Roles are therefore clearly defined and though some people may misinterpret them, these are there to ensure that energy is not wasted in doing the things that another is expected to do.

That both male and female constitute humanity, and that both are human beings is affirmed by the Bible. The Bible declares that in Christ male and female are equal²³.

The Bible also places the woman under the man by referring to the man as the head of the woman²⁴. By qualifying the kind of head that the man is, the scriptures provide a kind of measure for the role of head of the woman. The Bible supplies the details of what is expected of the man as head and what is not simply by saying that the man is the head of the woman AS CHRIST IS HEAD OF THE CHURCH²⁵.

The scriptures can therefore be said to fill out the Akan concept on gender by spelling out the details of the relationship that should exist between males and females, husbands and wives.

BODY FORM, AGE, STATUS, MORAL BEHAVIOUR, AND HUMANNESS

Body form

In Akan conception, the form of a person's body does to some extent determine whether the person is a human being or not. Thus as has already been said, people born

with certain deformities are said to be spirits from the river or from the forest. Such babies do not deserve to live among human beings and are therefore sent back to the river or to the forest.²⁶ Also people who have certain looks are considered to be witches and are therefore shunned. While in the Old Testament discrimination was made between the able-bodied and the disabled with God calling for only able-bodied people to perform certain tasks at the altar²⁷, the story is quite different in the New Testament. By interacting with people who were disabled, Jesus showed that there is no difference between the able-bodied and the disabled in terms of humanness. In this way, Jesus makes them also *Nyame mma* and thus people who should be treated humanely.

Age

The Akan society, even though it may treat a child in a way that is different from an adult, considers a child to be a human being. Children are disciplined and trained to grow to become good members of the community. Training may take different forms and may depend on the stage of growth of the individual.

The Bible also considers children to be human beings. In fact, Jesus said that if any adult would enter the kingdom of God, he or she would have to become like a child. By statements such as this, Jesus exalted childhood. In Biblical thought, discipline of children is upheld. In the Wisdom Literature, there is a call for training children in the way they should go²⁸. The intention of this is to enable them to live in the fear of God. Apparently, if children are not taught early enough, they will not be able to learn to live in the way that is desired by God and the community. The Wisdom Literature also mentions the need for children to be disciplined by saying:

Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.²⁹

According to the Bible, discipline is a sign of a father's love for his son as a son who is not disciplined is an illegitimate child³⁰. It is a father who loves his son who disciplines him. The Bible also calls on fathers to refrain from provoking their children³¹. By this, the Bible acknowledges that children being human beings do have emotions. This therefore shows that disciplining must be done with the emotions of the child in mind. The Bible through this sets the standard for disciplining a child. Thus through the Bible, children can accept discipline as an act of love.

Moral behaviour

The issue of morality in Akan thought is a very important one. This is because, as has already been mentioned³², the Akan conceive the human being as being intrinsically good. It is part of human nature to be morally good. Therefore, anyone whose life cannot be described as morally good cannot be a human being. In the Bible also, the "true" human being is morally good. Jesus Christ in whom no sin was found, signifies "true" humanity. Human beings ought to be as sinless as Jesus Christ is. The concept of "original sin" however, shows that though to be truly human is to be without sin, human beings are prone to sin. The concept therefore accounts for the inability of human beings to be sinless. Provision is made for human beings to be truly human by imputing righteousness to them through Christ. Due to original sin, no human being measures up to the standard of God. Paul, quoting from the scriptures, writes:

There is no one righteous,
not even one;
there is no one who
understands,
no one who seeks God.
All have turned away,
they have all become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one.³³

The righteousness of Jesus Christ is imputed to human beings who believe in him thus making them truly human not because they are sinless but because they believe in Jesus Christ. The Bible therefore provides a way by which the Akan can attain that which makes one truly human. Every Akan knows that he or she continually misses the moral standards of the society. No Akan can say that he or she is truly human even though that is what they would want to achieve. The Bible makes it possible for this to be achieved through faith in Jesus Christ. In this sense therefore, the Bible enhances the Akan concept of morality.

Status

A person's status does not in any way determine humanness in Akan thought. A chief is considered to be sacred, so is a traditional priest. This means that they are regarded with great respect or reverence. The chief "sits" on the stool of the ancestors, and the priest is the medium through which the people receive messages from the ancestors and the deities. They themselves are however, not deities. They are given the sacred status to ensure that, regardless of their age, they will receive the respect needed for them to be able to rule their people. The knowledge that the chief or the priest is not just an ordinary human being makes it easier for the people to accept their leadership.

In the Bible, status is acknowledged and the king is even called "God's anointed"³⁴. Yet everyone is the same before God. In Biblical thought, the rich and the poor, the priest and the worshipper, the king and the common people are all human beings. The Bible makes it clear that God himself chooses and sets up chiefs and priests.³⁵

The knowledge that the chief sits on the stool of the ancestors makes his subjects respect him. In Biblical thought, the king is chosen and enstooled by God Himself. This

thought enhances the position of the chief as it gives a stronger reason for people to accept and respect their leaders.

ETHNIC AFFILIATION AND HUMANNESS

In Akan thought, ethnicity does not affect a person's humanness. A person is a human being regardless of his or her ethnic affiliation or colour. People of other ethnic groups may be looked down on but this may be for reasons other than that they are not human beings.

The same is true in the Biblical conception of the human being. A person is a human being regardless of the person's ethnic affiliation or colour. In Genesis 11: 1- 9, the account of how the different languages came to be. According to this story, God made the different languages. The same story can be interpreted to mean that God made the different ethnic groups.

On the day of Pentecost, the message of the disciples was heard in the different languages that were present³⁶, a sign that God speaks all languages. Every language, and therefore, every ethnic group is regarded by God. The Bible affirms Akan thought on ethnicity and supplies to it, the source of the different ethnic groups.

COMMUNALITY AND HUMANNESS

The concept of communality is the same in both Akan and Biblical thoughts. The community defines the individual and yet there is also individual responsibility. In Akan society, communality ensures that people do not live selfishly but always have others in mind. In this way, a situation of someone having more than he or she can eat while another goes to bed on an empty stomach is avoided. Individual responsibility also ensures that people do not take the communality that exists in the society for granted. In

the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, Luke reports that the followers of Jesus Christ shared whatever they had with each other so that there was no needy person among them. Communality had to do with everyone seeing the other person as his or her responsibility. Yet in the same report, individuals Ananias and Saphira are held responsible for their offence and not the whole community.

From the above discussion, the Biblical thought on communality affirms Akan thought.

CONCLUSION

The discussion so far shows that it is not every aspect of Akan thought that is endorsed by scripture. Yet scriptural concepts are not always in conflict with Akan concepts. It is possible, as we have seen, to let the Bible interpret the Akan concepts. By so doing, the Bible will meet the needs of Akan Christians. Thus the Akan who embrace the Christian faith will find that every part of their lives is covered by the faith. They will therefore not want to revert to their traditional religion when certain situations arise. They will find the Christian faith meets their needs whatever that need may be.

Notes

- ¹ Sydney George Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith: A Comparative Study of the Impact of Two Religions*, Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1965, p. 151.
- ² See John S. Mbiti, "Christianity and Traditional Religion in Africa", *International Review of Missions*, Vol. LIX., No. 236, Oct. 1970, p. 435.
- ³ At the Gospel and Culture Workshop III, 9- 13 August 1999, held at the Akrofi- Christaller Memorial Centre, Akropong, Ghana. The theme of the workshop was "Scripture as the interpreter of culture and tradition." Among the questions that participants applied to their individual projects was this question: What might be needed from the perspective of the Christian faith to "fill" out the meaning? ("Fill" can mean – fulfil, correct, re-direct, modify, throw out, etc). I am using this question to help me examine the Akan concepts and their relation to scripture.
- ⁴ David J. Hesselgrave, *Communicating Christ Cross-Culturally: An Introduction to Missionary Communication*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978, p. 135.
- ⁵ See Acts 17: 19- 31.
- ⁶ See F. F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Book of the Acts*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987, pp. 352- 363.
- ⁷ See Abamfo Ofori Atiemo, *Mmusuyi and Deliverance: A Study of Conflict and Consensus in the Encounter Between African Traditional Religion and Christianity*, Unpublished Thesis presented to the University of Ghana, Legon, 1995, p. 12.
- ⁸ See I Timothy 2: 5.
- ⁹ See G. Harder, "Soul" in Collin Brown (Ed.) *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* Vol. 3, Exeter: Paternoster Press, 1978, p. 680, and Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970, p. 407.
- ¹⁰ See Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, p. 63.
- ¹¹ Th. C. Vriezen, *An Outline of Old Testament Theology*, p. 424.
- ¹² See I Thessalonians 4: 13- 17.
- ¹³ P. Sarpong, "Aspects of Akan Ethics", *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, Vol. 4, No. 3, December, 1972, p. 42.
- ¹⁴ P. Sarpong, "Aspects of Akan Ethics", p. 42.
- ¹⁵ See Romans 9: 13.
- ¹⁶ 1 Corinthians 15: 19
- ¹⁷ See Luke 16: 19- 31.
- ¹⁸ We are here referring to the time between death and the resurrection of the dead.
- ¹⁹ 2 Peter 1: 4.
- ²⁰ See J. S. Mbiti, "Our Stand Towards African Traditional Religion", *Journal for Christian Writers in Africa*, 1973, pp. 16-17.
- ²¹ See I Samuel 16: 14.
- ²² See Acts 16: 16- 18.
- ²³ See Galatians 3: 28.
- ²⁴ See Ephesians 5: 23.
- ²⁵ See Ephesians 5: 23. The way the husband is expected to relate to his wife as her head is spelt out in Ephesians 5: 25- 29.
- ²⁶ These days it is not done as many people through education have changed this way of thinking. However there are some who would, but for the long hand of the law on human rights, continue to throw such babies away.
- ²⁷ See Leviticus 21:16- 23.
- ²⁸ See Proverbs 22: 6.
- ²⁹ See Proverbs 23: 13- 14.
- ³⁰ See Hebrews 12: 8.
- ³¹ See Ephesians 6: 4
- ³² Akan thought on morality and humanness was first mentioned in chapter two.
- ³³ Romans 3: 10- 12.
- ³⁴ See I Samuel 24: 6, 26: 11
- ³⁵ See Romans 13: 1-2.
- ³⁶ See Acts 2: 1- 13.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

So far, we have looked at Akan concepts vis-à-vis the Biblical concepts of the human being. We have found that there are similarities and differences between the concepts. We shall now summarise the findings of the work.

The similarities that exist between the Akan and Biblical concepts are that in both Akan and Biblical thought,

- (a) The human being is a creature of *Onyankopɔn*, or God, and thus a child of *Onyankopɔn* or God. In both Biblical and Akan thought, the human being is believed to have been created by God. Coming from God therefore makes God the Father of all human beings. The Akan say: *nnipa nyinaa ye Onyame mma*.
- (b) The human being consists of both material and immaterial substances. In Biblical thought, the human being consists of a body which is material and a soul and spirit. These two are immaterial. In Akan thought, the human being consists of *nipadua* and *mogya*, which are material and *okra*, *honhom*, and *sunsum* which are immaterial.
- (c) There are components that come directly from the Creator, and there is a body that is created by God and which is material. According to Biblical thought, the soul and the spirit come directly from God. The body on the other hand, is created from the dust of

the earth by God. In Akan thought, the *ɔkra* and *honhom* come directly from God while the *nipadua* is created by God.

- (d) After death, a human being is held accountable for his or her deeds on earth. In Biblical thought it is the soul which when a person's life has pleased God gets to rest in the bosom of Abraham, or when the life has not pleased God, languishes in everlasting fire. In Akan thought it is the *saman* who gets admission into *asamando* when he or she has lived a morally good life, or becomes a *saman twentwen* who wanders around with no resting place when he or she has not lived a morally good life.
- (e) Gender, age and ethnic affiliation do not influence or affect humanness. In both Akan and Biblical thoughts, being male or female does not affect humanness. Neither do age and ethnic affiliation. Male and female are equally human, the young and the old are equally human and so are people who belong to different ethnic groups.
- (f) Communality is very important when it comes to defining the human being. However, in the final analysis it is individuality that counts as it is the individual's deeds that determine whether one becomes an ancestor in the Akan view or enjoys eternal bliss in the Biblical view.

The differences are:

- (a) In Akan thought, there are five constituents of the human being. These are, *nipadua*, *ɔkra*, *honhom*, *sunsum*, *mogya*. In Biblical thought there are three, the body, the soul and the spirit.

- (b) The Akan words or concepts used to translate the Biblical concepts do not really translate them. For example the word *okra* is used to translate soul, *psuchē*, but the concepts are not really the same.
- (c) That which is held accountable after death for the deeds of a person in Akan thought is the *saman* derived from the *mogya*, blood. That which is held accountable after death for the deeds of a person is the soul.
- (d) In Akan thought, body form can affect humanness while in Biblical thought it never does. Among the Akan, a person with a deformity may or may not be considered a human being depending on the nature of the deformity. This is however not the case in Biblical thought.
- (e) A person's status can affect humanness in Akan thought while in Biblical thought it never does. For example, among the Akan, the chief is believed to be sacred because of his status. When people occupy positions in which they act as intermediaries between the community and the ancestors the former are deemed sacred. This is not so in Biblical thought.
- (f) Morality affects humanness in Akan thought but it does not in Biblical thought. The Akan believe that to be human is to be moral. It is part of the human beings constitution to be moral. Therefore, anyone who fails in morality is not a human being. The Biblical view also holds that to be truly human is to be morally good, to be without sin just as Jesus was. However, the idea of original sin comes in thus making all human beings sinners prone to sin. In this way, morality does not actually influence humanness in Biblical thought.

Letting the Bible interpret the concepts, we came out with the following points.

- (a) The Bible affirms the Akan concept that human beings are creatures of God and supplies for Akan thought the material that was used in the creation of the human being.
- (b) The Bible affirms the Akan thought that the human being has divinity within himself or herself as there is a part of the Creator in him or her.
- (c) The Bible affirms that whatever we do in this life we will be held accountable. In Biblical thought however, it is the soul which is held accountable. A good life will result in the soul remaining in bliss with God the Creator while an unsatisfactory life will result in total banishment from the presence of God. This concept fills out the Akan concept by bringing in the fact that one does not continue in the same status in which one was while living in the body. According to Akan thought, the chief is a chief in *asamando* and a slave is also a slave there. In Biblical thought, all become equals.
- (d) In Akan thought, what happens to a person while the person lives determines whether the person's life is pleasing to God or not. In Biblical thought, a good person may have difficulties in this world and may even die without having his or her dreams being fulfilled, but since life stretches into eternity, the reward of a good life is always assured. If it does not come in this life, there is still the reward of eternity with God. In this way, the Bible maintains that a good life will be rewarded.
- (e) The Akan maintain that *mogya*, and *sunsum* are components of the human being. These are important because they produce the links with the *nsamanfoɔ* and the *abosom*. These links are needed for protection and for relating with God. The Bible affirms that there is the need for

protection and for relationship with God. The Bible however makes provision for people who because of who their mothers are, do not have *abusua*, and also for those who may have fathers who are not known or who do not have *ntorɔ* because of where they come from. In Biblical thought, there is Jesus Christ through whom God protects all people. He is also the only mediator between God and human beings.

- (f) The Akan concept on the issue of gender is that both male and female constitute humanity. However for the sake of order in the society, roles are very defined to the extent that the woman is always placed under the man. The Bible affirms that both male and female constitute humanity. Like the Akan view, the woman is always placed under the man. The Bible however spells out, and thus fills out the Akan concept, how the relationship between the man and the woman ought to be by saying that the man is the head of the woman AS Christ is head of the Church.
- (g) On body form, the Bible modifies Akan thought by letting Jesus interact with people who were disabled. Jesus treated such people like human beings and showed that they too are *Nyame mma*.
- (h) The Bible affirms the Akan view that children are human beings. It also affirms that though children are human beings they need to be trained through discipline. According to the Bible, fathers, and for that matter, adults should not provoke children. Thus the Bible acknowledges that children being human beings have feelings. In this way, the Bible provides a measure that can be used in training and disciplining.
- (i) The Akan view that to be moral is to be human is affirmed by the Bible. The Bible however makes provision for the shortcomings of human

beings as it gives an explanation of why human beings are not able to maintain the moral standard expected of them.

- (j) The Bible modifies the Akan concept that certain people, for example, the chief and the priest, are sacred by saying that regardless of position all human beings are human beings. This view enables people to make allowances for the shortcomings of people in these positions.
- (k) Ethnic affiliation or colour does not affect humanness in Akan thought. The same is true in Biblical thought. The Bible provides for Akan thought the source of the different ethnic groups by showing that God caused people to speak different languages at the time when people tried to build a tower reaching to the sky.
- (l) In both Akan and Biblical thought, community is important. The community may suffer for the misdeed of an individual. However at certain times, the individual faces the consequences of his or her offence. In both worlds, in the final analysis, it is the individual who faces the consequences of his or her behaviour after death.

Taking the view of S. G. Williamson¹ regarding the relationship between Akan religion and the Christian faith as a challenge, we have brought the two closer to each other and we have found that there is a common ground of fellowship. The Christian faith could easily be integrated into Akan thought making it possible for the Christian faith to make a real impact in the lives of Akan Christians. This is however dependent on how the concepts of the Akan are treated. A proper examination leading to an understanding of concepts will make it possible for the Bible to interpret them and fill

them out. In this way the needs of the Akan will continue to be met by the Christian faith.

IMPLICATIONS

These findings have implications for personnel for evangelism. People who evangelise among people who have strong cultural beliefs and practices must have a knowledge of the culture, including the language, of the people among whom they work and also know what needs they meet in the lives of the people. This means that if the Church would do any real evangelisation, she has to train personnel for it. The training must include a serious study of cultural beliefs and practices and their significance in the lives of people. The Church must be ready to fund studies into language and cultural beliefs and practices of people among whom they desire to do evangelism.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The Church should train people for evangelism and not take it for granted that any Christian can do effective evangelism.
- The Church should have a department for the study of culture which will fund studies in cultures.
- A study of any culture must include a study of its language, as this will make the concepts more meaningful.

If these recommendations are taken, future evangelism will lead to the Christian faith making a stronger impact in the lives of converts and keep people from hovering between the traditional religion and the Christian faith.

Notes

¹ See Sydney George Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith: A Comparable Study of the Impact of Two Religions*, Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1965, p. 151.

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