



African sacral rule and the Christian Church: An investigation into a process of change and continuity in the encounter between Christianity and African tradition, with particular reference to Cameroon and Ghana

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Dedication

**To
Emilienne, Tatouomkam Samuel, Touongbien Esaïe, Wambo Paul, Fowa Néhémie
For their expectations, support and love,
In appreciation**

Declaration

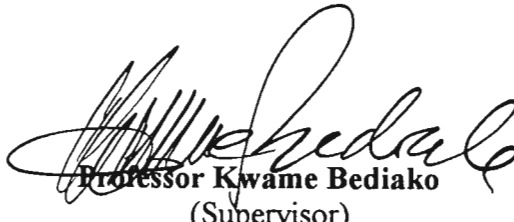
I hereby declare that this thesis has been composed by myself, that it has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree, that the work of which it is a record has been done by myself, that all quotations have been distinguished either by quotation marks or indentation and all the sources of information specially acknowledged.

Signed: 

Pascal Fossou

Supervisor's Agreement

As Supervisor, I have agreed that this thesis be submitted for examination.


Professor Kwame Bediako
(Supervisor)

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absences, their comforting prayers, encouragements and expectations were lavished on me throughout the process of realizing this work.

Glossary

A- Grassfields words and Ghomala' expressions used in this thesis

" <i>A kuipnyae mfo kuipnyae mco'</i> "	a new <i>Fo</i> with a new government
<i>Bun Dye</i>	main and biggest gathering hall facing the road
<i>Bi Mfomfo</i>	about the sacral rulers
<i>Chinda</i>	member of the immediate entourage of the ruler
<i>Cwep Sii</i>	place reserved to <i>SII</i> the Supreme God and only for him
<i>Da 'Sii</i>	only God
<i>dye kwe</i>	house of contract; initiation room at La'kam
" <i>E! Po lae ghe Fo</i> "	Yes! Make him <i>Fo</i>
<i>Fam</i>	Initiatic grove at the palace compound
<i>Fo</i>	sacral ruler
<i>Foa Jo</i>	Ruler of Bandjoun people
" <i>Fo be e fo a lu bi mkam</i> "	(<i>Fo</i> is unshakable because of <i>Mkam</i>).
<i>Fondom</i>	group, kingdom, political unit
<i>FopouSii</i>	ruler and God
<i>FoSii</i>	ruler who comes from God
<i>Geve</i>	an artist
<i>Ghomala'</i>	spoken language
<i>GhomSii</i>	word of God
<i>Gu' Je</i>	<i>year of Je</i> , 9 months period opens for public joy
<i>Gu' Ke</i>	<i>year of Ke</i> , 9 months period for people's initiation
" <i>Hue Yam</i> "	leaf of <i>Yam</i> , to speak of bank cheque
<i>Hyala'</i>	palace area with its activities
<i>Je</i>	Xylophone, to speak of "joy"
<i>Ji'tae</i>	learn, teach
<i>Jie</i>	name of a secret association
<i>Jiomghuo</i>	name of an important quarter in a Grassfields community
<i>Jo</i>	buy
<i>Juikam</i>	second wife of the ruler during his initiation at La'kam
<i>JwiSii</i>	Woman of God
<i>Ke</i>	ceremony of the religious purification of sacral every other year
<i>Kem</i>	naming ceremony of a male born
<i>Koummanchi</i>	commoner
<i>Kuipou</i>	Vice
<i>Kung</i>	first lady for public appearance
<i>Kya</i>	fence made of raffia bamboo
<i>La'kam</i>	place for ruler's initiation
<i>Mafo</i>	mother of the ruler
<i>Mafo cushue</i>	first wife of the ruler during his initiation at La'kam
<i>Mave Kung</i>	first lady for public appearance
<i>Mcosi</i>	angels or servants of God
<i>Mfomfo</i>	Sacral rulers
<i>Mkam</i>	members of a secret society
<i>Mkam Vu'u</i>	the 9 high ranking nobles

<i>MNyeSii</i>	God
	“ <i>Mo bae la' po bae o lo mu mnue ne shyie dze Fo</i> ” when one has fulfilled all the requirements in his father’s compound, one is always satisfied in front of the ruler
	“ <i>Mo bock mao bun wae</i> ” If your mother hates you, who can love you
<i>MoSii</i>	Man of God
<i>Mueguoju</i>	ancestors, plural of “ <i>PfeSii</i> ” an ancestor
	“ <i>Mueguoju' ghom gae po lae e ghe Fo</i> ” Our ancestors say make him <i>Fo</i>
	<i>Mue La'</i> , <i>Mue Mkem</i> , and <i>Kwo'si Shyie</i> names of three secret associations
<i>Mukam</i>	next to the throne during the 9 weeks of initiation
<i>Na</i>	mother of the <i>Fo</i>
<i>Nae tsu dyie</i>	succession
<i>Nemu</i>	traditional gathering hall
<i>Ngkap</i>	money, the father in-law
<i>Nwala</i>	minister, member of the executive
<i>Nye</i>	secret society for princes
	<i>Nye, Nyoi, Noi, Nya, Nyi Nyi, Nye Kob</i> name of God in some dialects
	“ <i>O ma'ga to cwep</i> ” one who shot his gun to the sacred place reserved to God
<i>Pae</i>	people of
<i>Pfe Sii</i>	an ancestor
<i>Pfuekeng</i>	tree of peace
<i>Sa'ssi mo</i>	self-achieved noble
<i>Shyiefo</i> or <i>Shetfon</i>	above <i>Fo</i> ; Title of the mother of the <i>Fo</i>
	“ <i>Sii bae bi mo o cu' so Fo</i> ” when God is with someone, he becomes a friend of the ruler
<i>SiibaFo</i>	God is ruler
<i>Sii, Chi, Shi, Nsi,</i> and <i>Nsie</i>	name of God in some dialects
<i>SiiJye</i>	God knows
<i>SiiLa'Com</i>	God will have mercy
<i>SiiMo</i>	God of someone
<i>SiiPuWa</i>	who is like God?
<i>SiiTouok</i>	God intervened in one’s favour
<i>SiiTamDze</i>	God took the lead
<i>Shua'</i>	financial cooperation
<i>Ta</i>	father
<i>Tabue</i>	The cook who signs a life contract with the <i>Fo</i> at <i>La'kam</i>
<i>Tafo</i>	maternal grandfather of the <i>Fo</i>
<i>Talom</i>	blacksmith
<i>Tseke</i>	familial ceremony for an ambitious male born
<i>Tso Kwemteng</i>	elephant dance performed in complete silence
<i>Wafu</i>	royal title given to a prince, uterine brother of the acting ruler
<i>Wambo</i>	High ranking noble
<i>Ya</i>	mother of the <i>Fo</i>
<i>Yam</i>	tree for individual prayers to the Supreme God
<i>YumSii</i>	listen to God
<i>Youmbissi</i>	listen to God
<i>Zudie</i>	successor
<i>Zumafo</i>	maternal uncle of the <i>Fo</i>

B- Akan words and expressions used in this thesis

<i>Abooduru</i>	manliness
<i>Abosom</i>	superhuman spirits
<i>Abosua</i>	family lineage
<i>“Abosua bako mogya bako”</i>	one clan one blood
<i>Abrafo</i>	executioners
<i>Adabra</i>	eunuchs
<i>Adaduanan</i>	Akan month of 40 days
<i>Adae</i>	monthly religious ceremony at the palace
<i>Adonten</i>	front guard wing
<i>Adukromonsu</i>	water for libation
<i>Adwempa</i>	intelligence
<i>Afonasofo</i>	sword-bearers
<i>Agwareyefo</i>	bathroom attendants
<i>Ahenfie</i>	palace
<i>Ahobrease</i>	humility
<i>Ahoprafo</i>	fan-bearers
<i>Akonnuasofohene</i>	the head of the stool-carriers
<i>Akoa didi me a, na no wura, okom de no a, ne die no afu bye</i>	(a slave may eat to repletion while the master remains hungry, but what the slave has is, after all, only wind in his stomach)
<i>Akokwafo</i>	floor polishers
<i>Akonuasofo</i>	stool-carriers
<i>Akragwa'fo</i>	<i>Ohene's</i> soul-washers
<i>Akwesidae</i>	monthly ceremonies of the ancestral cult of the ruling family at the palace organised on Sundays
<i>Akyemfo</i>	shield-bearers
<i>Akyiniyekyimfo</i>	umbrella-carriers
<i>Ankobeahene</i>	leader of the personal bodyguard of the <i>Ohene</i> .
<i>Apesemankahene</i>	State traditional office in the Akan structure of leadership
<i>Asantehene</i>	ruler of Asante
<i>Asoamfo</i>	Hammock-carriers
<i>Asokwafo</i>	drummers, horn-blowers
<i>Asase Yaa</i>	Female view of the Supreme God
<i>Atumtufuo</i>	gun –bearers
<i>Awukudae</i>	monthly ceremonies of the ancestral cult of the ruling family at the palace organised on Wednesdays
<i>Bamwuhene</i>	head of the executioners
<i>Bayeyere</i>	favourite son
<i>Benkum</i>	left military wing
<i>Brimfo</i>	caretakers of the Royal Mausoleum
<i>Dabrefo</i>	Members of the <i>Ohene's</i> household
<i>Dehye</i>	the one who knows the land and the boundaries

<i>Dem biara nni ne ho</i>	physical fitness
<i>Duabini</i>	keeper of the bedchamber door
<i>To</i>	mashed yams
<i>Fa ma Nyame</i>	take it and give it to God
<i>Gyase</i>	centre military wing
<i>Krontihene</i>	president of the council of Elders in the absence of the
ruler	
<i>Kwadwumfo</i>	minstrels
<i>Kyidom</i>	rearguard wing
<i>Mena</i>	an elephant tail
<i>Me Nyankopong me sere wo nkwa, na me sere wo ahooden</i>	(My God I pray you for life
	and I pray you for strength
<i>Mmusua kese</i>	matriclans
<i>Mpanineni</i>	rulers
<i>Mpanyimfo</i>	members of the ruling class
<i>Na Ahene som Kristo</i>	sacral rulers worship Christ
<i>Nana</i>	sacral ruler
<i>Nananom</i>	sacral rulers
<i>Ne yamye</i>	generosity
<i>Nhengua</i>	thrones
<i>Nifa</i>	right military wing
<i>Nyame</i>	Supreme God
<i>Nyame adom</i>	God's favour
<i>Nyame akuma</i>	God's axe
<i>Nyame asem</i>	God's word
<i>Nyame boa me</i>	God help me
<i>Nyame Dan</i>	Temple to the Supreme God
<i>Nyame Dua</i>	tree of God
<i>Nyame Osofo</i>	ministers or owners at the temple
<i>Nyankopong Kwame wo hyire ni o</i>	God whose day of service is Saturday- this is your
	white clay, life to our master
<i>Obi nkyere obe fra Nyame</i>	no one shows the Supreme Being to a child
<i>Obi nkyere obi ase</i>	no one must disclose the origin of another
<i>Obirempon</i>	big man
<i>Obosom</i>	sanctuary
<i>Odehye</i>	title given to the sacral ruler
<i>Odwira</i>	yearly religious ceremony of purification at the palace
<i>Odikuro</i>	head of a non-Akan group
<i>Ofiepanyin</i>	lineage elder
<i>Bohemia</i>	queen mother
<i>Ohene</i>	sacral ruler
<i>Okanni</i>	a nice, civilised or cultured person
<i>Okofonafo</i>	the sword-bearer
<i>Okoman</i>	Akan original fighters who won the war and freed the
	Guans from Akwamus in Akuapem
<i>Okomfo</i>	priest
<i>Okyeame</i>	linguist

<i>Okyenhene</i>	ruler of Akyem
<i>Omanhene</i>	sacral paramount ruler
<i>Onyame</i>	Supreme God
<i>Onyankopong</i>	Supreme God
<i>Osagyefo</i>	valiant liberator or valiant redeemer
<i>Oseadeeyo</i>	one who fulfils his promises
<i>Osene</i>	the herald
<i>Otumfuo</i>	the Almighty ruler
<i>Samanfo</i>	ancestral spirits
<i>Sanahene ne Afotuosanfo</i>	treasurers and sub-treasurers
<i>Seniefo</i>	heralds
<i>Sika Dua Kofi</i>	the golden stool
<i>Sika mena</i>	elephant stool
<i>Sodofo</i>	cooks
<i>Sunsum</i>	soul
<i>Tumidi</i>	authorities
<i>Tumutufu</i>	the gun-bearer
<i>Wirempefo</i>	group of unknown young and strong boys
<i>Wuradi</i>	powers
<i>Yempe Apo</i>	we do not want bullying
<i>Yempe Asekyere</i>	we do not wish that he disclose the origin of any person
<i>Yempe Asodene</i>	we do not wish you to be stubborn
<i>Yempe Atendidie</i>	we do not wish that he should abuse us
<i>Yempe Atim'sem</i>	we do not wish you to be imprudent
<i>Yempe Ayamonyono</i>	we do not wish selfishness
<i>Yempe ebe ba se, 'kwan nni ho, 'kwan nni ho</i>	we do not wish that it should ever be that he should say; I have no time, I have no time
<i>Yempe Kumasesem</i>	we do not want things done as in Kumase
<i>Yempe Kwaseabuo</i>	we do not wish you to cheat
<i>Yempe Popo'</i>	we do not want personal violence

Abstract

This investigation into a process of transformation was intended to explore the institution of African sacral rule in its relation to the Christian church and to provide a theological model, which could be used to establish a new mission field. The bulk of the work has been conducted through anthropological and historical methods crossing international boundaries and cultures within both sacral rule and the Christian church in Africa. The specific case studies have been the sacral rule of Grassfields people in Cameroon and the Akan in Ghana with focus on the Basel Mission and resulting churches. On the one hand, this comparative approach brought to light in-depth knowledge of the sacral ruler's encounter with the institution of the Christian church and its representatives. On the other hand, the investigation shows that with some preconceived ideas of sacral rule inherited from the missionaries who had established themselves in deliberate rejection of the existing system of government and the people involved, the African church leaders were put at a disadvantage. However, it has been demonstrated that in the process of struggle for survival and change, each institution has been partially assimilated by the other. Those who have helped these two institutions to deepen their relationship through a genuine dialogue are outstanding Christians who occupied the position of sacral rulers in both Cameroon and Ghana. They have provided historical material on which an understanding of the cultural changes within sacral rule as well as the Christian church was based. The previous religious experience and knowledge of the sacral rulers are invariably used as a frame of reference for their understanding and interpretation of the Bible and their relationship with Christ. In the area of worship and membership, the church had also

Mbinyéfa'

Mntámnyé mókpa, ká bá ná zhyá pá' nabo po sósé pú a dyási nukrite m' póm'té n'ny ntám'tá tá' lá' shwá á á. S3' m ná yap n'cwá p' t'nta yap ná ku'nyá pú a yap ná ponyé n'ny dá'té májya yé mkríté gha ná cya m ná dá mkám guj pú a mfomfo ná ga po Krísto á á.

Mzhoj pá' mye a kwíté wókpa ná cú'te guj zhyänwe ná pá' pá' fo fo pé gentém Yésó Krísto ntám guj á, ntám ná lè nkunyo dínté mko mye p'dunèj, meú'tá, mdyé ankam pú a n'fò na gwim lá' lo. Bín kwí' ntám ná t'nta mwódzú pú a mwópo pye pú lè nuj guj ná bú máp á á. P' píj ntám'té tsé jya puá m' té ná kwíté mthé zhyänwe ná ywé yé dyási pú a n'fò wé ba báyá l'á p'wé shé' yá ná dzé 'yá' o lo. P'fop dyási pú a n'fo yé p' dínté á sin ná guj po sósé awé t' kyak p' lá' kí' k' p' lá' sók lá'. Á n'nyé gaá p' Grafí ntám Kamerún pú a p' Akán ntám Gána, pye wáp lè ná zhojta yap ná zhyé Sí ná Yésó Krísto shyé m ná p' mghentóm Pase á, wé ná m'kuj guj m'wé awé.

Fo' pá' p' Pase l'á lo nwe Sí nkó ntám m'guj m'okpa á l'á ghé papún gwyé kwí' g' ba cwəpuj t' a yóm. Mhonyé pú a ntám ná ghéj kwyáp, zhyänwé, f' pú a ná zhyé Sí msá'ss ná ghéj n'wé, l'é cyá mfa' p' Pase ntám Kamerún ba ntám Gána. Pá zhyänwé gwyé bvl' m'nté t'nta tá' ywé ná m'tse' baó á wé ba á kwíté wókpa. ná zhyé kwishwé pú a m'she mye á b' c'caá dyási pú a n'fo áá. Ná pá' shaá m'gheg'mnwé Pase l'á ná so' ba wáp cwadzé shé' p'om zhyé ko' gaá n'fo po sósé bá p' ywé n'ónó l'á m'á'pá'nyé ntám guj bín g' gaá m'tsédýá p'ap m'zhojm'zhoj kókó t' ná m'fa' má' dyási. T' ba m'p'ó'o, n'fò ná vok t' t'ám tyé' o d'á shaá ma pú a mfa' k'rite g' ywé é. Ba dyási mkríté ná c'om'je ntám guj d'á shaá ná ma pú a mfa' n'fo g' ywé é. P' p' wáp l'á kwíté gaá dyási mkríté pú a n'fo ntám'té dyé shwá á, l'á ná p' mkríté t'bye bín bá p' pye n'fo l'á bá ná bú máp lo. P' ná t'nta vok tsáp j'ó pá' wáp l'á g' tá ná kwyé'nyé ma pú a k' ntám dyási ba m ná n'ghwim guj.

Ná pá' m'tá p'okpa l'á ná j'ú' Sí á l'á kwíté m'ghe g'omnwé sí ná ná t'ú. bín j'it' pomnèj mo yé Yésó bá é á pú a nkhué papún yé Krísto l'á n'ós' áá. P' Pase l'á y' gaá m'ghom m'okpa pú a m'kwó'si g'om ná nu'p'w'ó' bí Sí l'á bá t'bya. P' Pase p' l'á kwí' j'ó gaá m'zhoj m'okpa, m'nyé m'okpa, m'kám guj pú a m'fo p'okpa bá dá' jya yé p' nwe Yésó Krísto cyé m ná t'é go d'z' ntám guj áá.

Ná kwí'nyé pú a ná kwyé'nyé ma ba k' ntám dyási ba m ntám n'fò ba á ghé gaá wáp p' tyé' o h'wányé t' m'thédz' máp j'yé. N'fo p' m'úhwé dyási ; dyási p' m'úhwé n'fò. P' é t' m'ghe nyap k' dyási pú a m'ghe nyap ma mkríté ntám guj s'énwé há ná pá' p' m'kám pú a m'fomfo pye wáp nyápt' k' guj á p' m'ghecyanyenwé Krísto á ba á ba yap ná f'ú'té ná há b'nyé Yésó, n'ny nún ná sá' guj ná bú Sí ba á p' papún bí i guj po awé. Y'ny n'í ná tam'té msá' guj pú a m'kám'sí t' n'wosí sé wé bá m' s'é yé pú go ná ghé gaá dyási pú a n'fo ná cya p' lo. Y'ngáá ma s' c'ange ná Kosé tsu' yé Yésó bá fo shyé m'fomfo áá (Kol. 1 : 15- 17). P' kwí' nké yá y'ny ntám Kosé tsu' yé Yésó ntám p'khá pyé gaá wáp l'á m'gun'gun' awé pú a m'fo p'ap ná g' m'ghez'hí'té nwe é áá (Mat. 28 : 18 - 20). Bín n'ém'nyé, pá' m'fomfo pú a m'kám'sí g' p'óm'té l'á nwe Yésó Krísto c'ímnyé l'á'á du m ná tsu' yé Yésó geg'ú' awé nkim ywé ná há bí msá' guj gaá l'á wáp ná ku'j Sí dá n'fo pú a p' p'ap n'ógám'té é (Rom. 13 : 1).

Názhyé k'è, n'á't'nta mwódzú pú a mwópo ntám n'fo ba ntám dyási, bín g' ná k' nkhué papún Yésó Krísto ntám Kosé ma' fápt' ná yokpa ná kwé gaá cwa yé m'kám guj pú a m'fomfo go t'ám'té dyé pú a m'ghecyá dyási t'ám'té d'á nwe Yésó Krísto gwim lá'á wé ba á k'ú'.

African sacral rule and the Christian Church: An investigation into a process of change and continuity in the encounter between Christianity and African tradition, with particular reference to Cameroon and Ghana

Chapter One: General Introduction

Introduction and motivation

The study of the African sacral system of government as a new mission field for the Church has been a growing interest, as the position of royals in Christianity and the role of Church officials serving in the sacral ruling system remain problematic. There are various relationships within the sacral ruling system that bring together the ruler, his elders, and the institution itself. Similarly, the church is not easy to handle, for it is made of various components: White missionaries, African clergy, church elders and the foreign mission. It will be extremely difficult to analyse exhaustively the extensive relationship and consequences of the encounter between sacral rule and Christian mission, since such analysis requires a huge array of facts and inventories of data. Our objective here is to examine some specific consequences of a situation where a full blooded royal and converted Christian who becomes a sacral ruler while a member of the church, is able to play this dual role of sacral ruler and Christian, thus opening the way for sacral rule to be perceived a new mission field. The arguments on both sides, as to the acceptability of sacral rule in Christian mission, have been both intra-institutional as well as inter-institutional. Thus, any attempt to pursue the ongoing debate may fail to offer a holistic approach to the solution of the problems involved. Without going into detail it suffices to say that the problems of agreement and disagreement within a particular system where a royal becomes a Christian or even a clergyman, should not be too difficult to resolve, since in some contexts of African sacral rule, an educated clergyman who becomes a ruler, is considered an asset. It is often desirable. However,

the presence of a sacral ruler who is an ordained minister may prove disruptive and uncomfortable in the church. This is the aspect that will form the focus of this thesis.

The choice of this particular study has not been easy. By settling on the topic: “African sacral rule and the Christian Church: An investigation into a process of change and continuity in the encounter between Christianity and African tradition, with particular reference to Cameroon and Ghana”, this thesis will have to tackle in detail the justifications for this topic, verify its claims through case studies and, above all, offer pointers into the future.

Some principal ideas of the thesis

Any general idea generated from particular cases tends to be difficult to defend; I may be permitted to be autobiographical here. I am of noble birth and an ordained minister by profession. I have been appointed among my relatives to the highest familial position of authority. I have not yet been enthroned because the Church has no clear response to my present situation. How can the Church amend its attitude and participate somehow in the enthronement of its members and hence empower them for the transformation of the people and structures under their authority for Christ’s work?

Emmanuel Martey¹ has shown through the study of works of selected African theologians that the current opposition between the champions of Inculturation and Liberation theologies in Africa, can be overcome. Adopting his approach, we have discovered that there is a fusion of politics, culture and religion in the institution of traditional leadership. The ensuing discussion of African Christian sacral rulers in

¹Martey, Emmanuel, *African theology: Inculturation and liberation*, New York, Orbis Books Mary knoll, 1993.

relation to Christ and his Gospel, will be dealt with in the thesis, so as to describe the process of change and continuity both in the Church and in some of the contexts of sacral rule in West Africa.

Today, in the traditional ruling system, there are Christians who hold traditional leadership roles. These custodians of the sacral traditional ruling system are working to transform and save the institution which has been troubled by the new democratic trends in African politics and which is being illuminated by the presence of Christ proclaimed by the Christian churches. There are also in the Christian church royals, subjects and potential leaders who want to revise the regulations and practices of their spiritual community both before and after they assume sacral authority. This struggle within both institutions leads to part of the main argument of the thesis on the reality of sacral rule.

Before the beginning of the Basel missionary work in Ghana (1828), and later on in Cameroon (1886), African rulers, through multiple rituals, sacrifices and prayers, experienced a genuine relationship with God, the Supreme Being in African religious tradition. The variety of God's dealing in the world he created, as Bediako² affirmed, could be seen in the spiritual life of sacral leaders. They had not been given ways to acknowledge the link between their rituals and the Gospel of Jesus Christ, as some theologians like Kä Mana³ are suggesting today. The latter has presented Christ as the one integrating principle linking the pre-Christian phase and later Christian phase in the African consciousness. The sacral rulers' experience of God as we will observe it among the Grassfields in Cameroon and the Akan people of Ghana, will provide

² Bediako, Kwame, *Theology and Identity: The impact of Culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa*, Oxford, Regnum Books, 1992. p. 76.

³ Kä Mana, *Christ d'Afrique: Enjeux éthiques de la foi africaine en Jésus-Christ*, Yaoundé, Karthala, CETA, CLE, HAHO, 1994.

empirical evidence to confirm the views of Ka Mana and Bediako about Christ's continuous presence in Africa.

"The Christ-against-culture"⁴ attitude of the first missionaries, on the one hand, and the commitment of the local rulers to African values, on the other, created a gap between them. The first preachers of the Gospel could not stand what they perceived as the exploitative nature of sacral rule. They championed the economic welfare of the community and the desacralisation of rulers without making any effort to find out what was going on within traditional leadership. The traditional authorities found this missionary project a threat to social organisation, to their power and to their knowledge of the spiritual realm. The missionaries and the African leaders respectively found it impossible to compromise without betraying the Gospel and without betraying the ancestors.

The traditional rulers found the Christ of the Gospel so close to them that from their African religiosity, they could easily let themselves be illumined by him. And yet, Christ, who seemed not to be alien to them was made distant by the missionaries. African traditional leaders are, therefore, in a state of confusion. This thesis will show how the closest Church context, where Christ's deeds can be acknowledged and confessed, is the area of sacral rule. By the same token, it will be shown how in essence the religious practices of the Church were close to the expression of African religious images, attitudes and thoughts as developed in sacral rule.

The specific cases where the custodian of African sacral government selects a Christian as the highest cultural head will lead this thesis to explore whether there could be an understanding between the African churches which have grown out of the Basel

⁴ Niebuhr, Richard, *Christ and Culture*, New York, Harper-Colophon Books, 1957, reprint, 1975. p. 50.

Mission and the sacral rule in Cameroon and Ghana, that could enable them to develop a common, credible discourse based on the biblical injunction “to disciple all nations (*matheteusate ta ethne*).”⁵ Since the two institutions deal with the same population and share the common goal of leading the people of God, we want to appreciate the contribution of the traditional rulers in the Church’s project of “*évangéliser son propre nombril et s’occuper de ses propres dénuements*” (evangelising one’s immediate environment and being concerned with one’s own trajectory).⁶

Justification of the case studies

For comparative purposes, a thesis needs at least two case studies. This is why Cameroon and Ghana have been selected: Beninois, Ugandan or Zulu sacral rules could have been equally chosen. However, since the proponent is from Cameroon and the training institution which has nurtured this work is established in Ghana, the historical evolution of Grassfields and Akan groups may provide us with the necessary contrasting views for this thesis despite certain similarities.

Organisational Similarities:

On the Grassfields Mountains of Cameroon as well as among the Akan of Ghana, people lived within a pyramidal social organisation. Subjects acknowledged the authority of officials who, while sharing some powers in the sacral government, paid allegiance to one head who embodied the whole community. The head of a leading institution was also perceived as the religious leader. As head, he is “*Fo*” in Grassfields

⁵ Matthew 28:18-20.

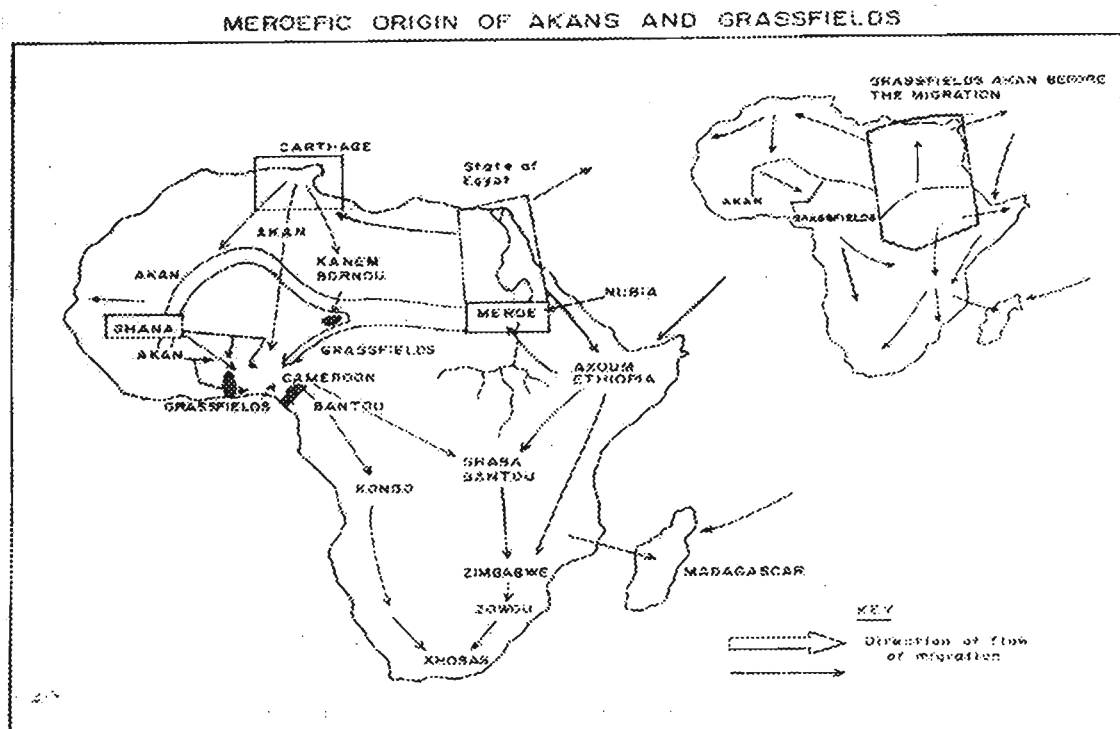
⁶ Kä Mana, *Christ d’Afrique*, p. 134.

or “*Ohene*”⁷ in Akan - a king- but of a different kind as compared to the European ones. He refers to himself as holder of ancestral power and high priest, or as transcendent ruler according to the qualification and titles by which his people address him. He is a sacral ruler. He claims his power and mandate from the Almighty God and the ancestors. As the community grew in number with the integration of new comers and the conquest of new ethnic groups, the Akan people as well as Grassfields people, developed a military system to defend themselves against intruding neighbours. The need for more land and an unlimited sense of exploring new areas transformed sacral rule into a military organisation. The *Fo* and the *Ohene* became both a religious and military figure. Thus, he became basically a warrior.⁸

⁷ In the Volta Region of Ghana, *Efo* means father, head of a house or a leader in patrilineal inheritance. Discussion with Henry Amoako, at Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, 1st March 2002 at 14h 25.

⁸ Iniesta, Ferran, *L'univers africain; approche historique des cultures noires*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 1995. p.59. “*Les coïncidences historiques de la majorité des sociétés africaines se trouvent plus dans la pensée sociale par laquelle elles se sont gouvernées que dans les techniques tangibles*”.

Migration stories



This map had been reshaped from the proposed one in Ferran Iniesta, p. 34.

The migration story of African people within the continent provides us with some historical elements which suggest that the current common features of the sacral rule in Ghana and Cameroon are of Meroetic origin. Meroe and Nubia are two different names of the same area of the upper Nile. Presenting the results of his research on cultural centres in Africa, the Spanish Africanist Ferran Iniesta, describes the unspoken reality as follows: "*Tous les centres africains diffuseurs de culture proviennent d'un noyau impulseur externe* (all major African centres of cultural diffusion started from an external initiative)".⁹ He agreed with Cheikh Anta Diop¹⁰ that the highest leadership in ancient Egypt was Black. From Nubia, Black people established the first Pharaonic

⁹ Iniesta, Ferran, *L'univers africain*, p. 34.

¹⁰ Diop, Cheikh Anta, *The African Origin of Civilisation; Myth or Reality*, Chicago, Lawrence Hill Books, 1974.

dynasty and led the most powerful State of Antiquity for more than three thousand years. Accordingly, the notion of sacral rule as practised in Egypt had spread into Africa. A slightly different claim of a Nubian origin of the sacral rule in Africa and in Egypt seems more credible. According to that account, a small group of Blacks from Nubia went to create Egypt. However, those who remained and others who followed different directions retained the same basic cultural principle of sacral leadership.

According to Nana Addo-Birikorang, the most recent *Apesemankahene*¹¹ of the Akuapem Kingdom in Ghana and a local expert on Akan history, the remaining Meroe group who inspired the Egyptian Black sacral rule, were pushed out by those who later on lost power in Egypt and started to migrate westward.¹² As they moved, they kept the language. When they reached Kanem Bornu near Lake Chad, there was strong opposition which resulted in a division. The two antagonistic groups took two different directions: the main group, the Akan, continued westwards while the other group in search of unity, the Grassfields, went southwards. In 1954, looking at the origin of the Grassfields, the Australian anthropologist Phyllips Kaberry could say that “according to their own traditions, the various groups of Grassfields came to Bamenda from places called Tibati, Banyio, Ndobu, and Kimi, north and north-east of present Tikar territory.”¹³ Jeffreys identifies Kimi as present-day Bamkim in the French Cameroons. It is suggested that they came to this area from Tibati, Banyio, Ngaoundere and ultimately perhaps from Bornu (Lake Chad).¹⁴ Nana Addo-Birikorang and Kaberry hypothesised a similar migration history for these two groups. Grassfields and Akan

¹¹ *Apesemankahene* is a traditional adviser and political critic in the Akan structure of leadership.

¹² Nana Addo-Birikorang, Interview, Akropong-Akuapem Ghana, 23 August 1999, 10h-13h.

¹³ Kaberry, Phillips, *Communication*, No. 3, 1952, p. 4.

¹⁴ Jeffreys, P., in Forde, Daryll (ed), *Ethnographic survey of Africa, part IX, West Africa*, London International African Institute, 1954. pp, 12-13.

people seemed to have shared the same culture of structuring society. The Akan group maintained the Meroe language¹⁵ as they migrated while the Grassfields cared only for leadership and economic possessions. They adopted the customs and language of the existing population. The leadership style, language and names of state officials kept their Meroetic links. Both scholars maintained that the social structure of the Grassfields and Akan are similar to that of the early Black Egyptian Civilisation from Nubian origin.

The Basel Missionary Society working in Cameroon and Ghana

In their religious and political itinerary, sacral ruling systems in Cameroon and Ghana would encounter the Gospel of Jesus Christ through the work of the Basel Mission in Africa. The Evangelical Basel Missionary Society started working in Ghana in 1828 and was later invited by the newly formed German state to work in Cameroon. With its Pietistic background and its genuine type of education, the Basel Mission struggled with the *Fo* and his population as with the *Ohene* and his people. The constant exchange of personnel from one Mission field to the other¹⁶ by the same sending body to encounter the same reality, underlines our interest in both Cameroon and Ghana. "Due to his experience in the Mission field in Ghana (Gold Coast), where he worked from 1880 till 1883, Munz was appointed the first Field Secretary in Cameroon".¹⁷ Munz was a Basel missionary who after working in Ghana was sent to Cameroon as the head of mission team. In Cameroon he made use of his experience in

¹⁵ Nana Addo-Birikorang, before his sudden death in July 2002, was translating the old Meroe scripts with the British Museum London.

¹⁶ Christaller, Johannes, the father worked in Ghana, and the son G. Christaller worked in Cameroon. Dieterle who worked in Abokobi would later on work in the sacral Bandjoun kingdom of the Grassfields.

¹⁷ Brutsh, Jean-René, *The history of the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon*, Press Book, Victoria, 1969. p. 21.

Ghana, as he embodied the two realities.

The interaction between Cameroon and Ghana was not only with the exchange of personnel but it was also through the exchange of Mission Magazines. The story of a missionary meeting with an African monarch was reported in the *Heidentbote* missionary magazine from both Cameroon and Ghana, thus, demonstrating a perceived link between the two mission fields. For instance, the publication of missionaries' first meetings with King Fonyonga,¹⁸ of their relationship with Bamun ruler Njoya¹⁹ in Cameroon, as well as the publication of Ramseyer's experience in Asante,²⁰ Riis's or Christaller's attitude to the Okuapehene in Ghana, influenced missionary attitudes to traditional leadership at home and on the field, in Cameroon and in Ghana.

Cameroon and Ghana: A common theological agenda

If theology is the answer to questions Christians face in their daily commitment to Jesus Christ, in Cameroon and in Ghana people are struggling on the one hand with their relation to sacral rule as Christians and, on the other hand, with their relation to Christianity as traditional rulers. To deal with this matter, churches in Cameroon and Ghana have developed a kind of south-south Christian relations. When Jeremiah Kangsen the Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon became the sacral ruler of his hometown in 1977, he later attended the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana the following year. At that forum, he shed some light on the creation of a cultural committee within the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. His experience is often quoted when Christians in royal positions among the Grassfields and among the Akan

¹⁸ *Heidentbote*, January 1903.

¹⁹ *Heidentbote*, March 1906.

²⁰ Ramseyer, Fritz, *Dark and Stormy Days at Kumasi, 1900; Missionary experience in Ashanti*, London, Paternoster, 1901.

claim full membership in the Christian church. His case is also quoted as evidence that the clergy could take up a position within sacral rule without changing its ancestral heritage. Christians in royal positions among the Grassfields and the Akan claim full church membership. Traditional princes among the clergy also quote Kangsen to support their argument that sacral rulership is an ancestral legacy to be handed down to future generations. This common religious problem needs a common theological reflection for the benefit of Cameroonians and Ghanaians who share the same kind of sacral rule.

Purpose of the thesis

What arguments can draw the attention of the Christian clergy and that of sacral rulers to what is going on in the daily life of the ordinary people in the Church and in the traditional society? What changes in sacral rule can demonstrate the action of Christ and his Gospel within the sacral institution? What events testify that new steps have been taken by the Christian Church beyond the missionary regulations to bring it closer to the traditional centre of power? Through the examination of the religious itinerary of the sacral ruling system and the examination of the Christian Church's struggle with the successive challenges in Cameroon and Ghana, we intend to:

- 1- Explain the major changes and present the surviving elements in the two institutions.
- 2- Analyse and interpret both the attitude of the representatives of the Church and the attitude of the custodians of sacral rule in order to discover whether the ordinary people could serve as the common ground where a dialogue between the two institutions could be established.

- 3- Use empirical evidence from case studies of existing rule in Cameroon and Ghana to show how Christ and his Gospel are present in African palaces and in church beyond the intentions of the representatives of the two institutions.

Hypothesis

The encounter between African sacral rule and the Christian Church resulted in partial mutual rejection but also in interaction which led to the transformation of both institutions with each being partially assimilated by the other.²¹

Sub-hypothesis

- 1- The agents of transfer of the cultural and spiritual elements from the Christian institution to the African governing institution were the ordinary people within the church and within sacral rule. Among these ordinary people we will focus on the case of those who end up as Christians serving in the sacral ruling hierarchy.
- 2- The process of transformation and assimilation has taken place mostly through unintended rather than intended results.
- 3- The unintentional exchange and transformation of both institutions has led to a situation where the two institutions are closer in nature and identity than either are consciously aware of, and, had it been formally planned, mutual strengthening would have taken place.

²¹ In 1933, at Akropong, the African ruler Ofori Kuma the educated Christian, tried courageously to Europeanise the sacral ruling system of the Akuapem. Simultaneously, the seminary teacher Ephraim Amu in church wanted everything to be African. Intra-debate went on in both institutions and the two leaders suffered rejection. The teacher was dismissed and was forced to leave the Christian college while the ruler was destooled and another traditional leader took over.

Background to the study

This study is a reciprocal investigation into the potential impact of the Christian faith on traditional African leaders, and their potential encouragement by the Church towards self-transformation, self-propagation and self-theologising under the dynamic power of Christ and the Gospel.

The Evangelical Church of Cameroon where the author serves, as an ordained minister is the result of missionary activities of the following societies: London, Basel and Paris Missionary Societies. The other African churches planted by the Basel Mission are the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. At independence from the mission in 1957 and in 1929 respectively, foreign missionaries were replaced by local church leaders who in their training did not follow a classical study of mission. The European missionaries had been trained in day-to-day occupations like theology, pedagogy, medical science or technical skills. Secondly, they all underwent at least six months' training course in mission. Once in the mission field, they slowly but skilfully converted the Africans who became their collaborators in the evangelisation of local people. The first converts working with the missionaries were informally trained on how to persuade non-Christians to embrace the new faith. With subsequent generations of converts, the need for theologians and Church administrators overshadowed the need for missiologists. As a result, today, pastors, teachers, nurses, laboratory technicians and church workers in general seem to be less trained in disciple-making than their predecessors from the West in the 19th and 20th centuries.

While the Mission aimed at the conversion of people, the resultant Church has

become an institution for the edification and organisation of the converts. The African church leaders focused on the organisation of the Church. However, the Presbyterian structure of the Reformed Churches which they adopted seemed to be very similar to the organisational structure of African sacral rule in the societies in which they found themselves. But the churches have not investigated the meaning of African ruling systems in order to initiate a possible transformation and conservation of native culture. The near uniform attitude of converts towards their pastors and their church elders was probably deeply affected by the usual attitude towards the rulers and nobles of traditional society. The converts have the same attitude towards the missionary and the traditional leaders. It will be interesting to discover to what extent the converts are the couriers of integration and assimilation.

While a strict boundary was observed between Christianity and African culture in relation to the governing system in church regulations, that was not done in relation to liturgy. The missionary songs, rites and attitudes were generally maintained but enriched with new cultural elements. The Bamoun "Yaya" and the Bamileke "Tambour", the Christian dances initiated by the indigenous leaders around 1914, and accepted by the French missionaries, were improved by the movement for the "Africanisation of the Church" championed in the Evangelical Church of Cameroon by the Reverends Tétoum Abraham and Nkwindji Abel in the 1970s. This movement resulted in introducing African traditional instruments and rhythms into Christian worship by the people who stand at the intersection of Christian worship and African spiritual heritage.

As far as African rule is concerned, some native church leaders crossed the

boundaries of missionary regulations. In Ghana, the successive claims for full membership from the sacral rulers led the Church to grant full membership to a Paramount Chief: the late *Osagyefo* Agyeman Badu, the ruler of Dormaa Ahenkro, in 1969. The Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon was enthroned sacral ruler without his church's official consent. When he retired from church service, he moved from the heart of the Christian church to the heart of sacral rule. The general synod of the Evangelical Church of Cameroon has encouraged the inculturation of the Gospel by giving freedom of initiative to ministers, for specific cases, "*à la sagesse du Pasteur* (at the discretion of the minister)". This study will examine whether any guidelines can be developed from such positive experiences between the Christian church and African liturgy for engagement with African traditional leadership as the specific arena where African views are articulated and where Christ's influence could be acknowledged.

Nevertheless, with all such genuine and courageous evangelistic forays into African structures, it is still uncertain why the Church exiled itself to the periphery of society. The Church seems not to be aware of the changes undertaken by the custodians of traditional government in the management of their political and spiritual power. Those changes which have occurred on both sides, constitute the main issue to be investigated in this thesis.

Scope of the study

1- What is sacral rule?

The expression "sacral rule" will be used for political and social organisations where the leader is invested with spiritual power and religious duties. The forms of

leadership vary from one society to another. Kingship, or Chieftaincy, is the term used for the cultural manifestation of leadership in societies headed by an individual or a group of persons. This is in contrast to acephalous societies where leadership is shared among elders. Leadership is centralised or decentralised according to the culture of a community. One of the structures human beings have created to facilitate collective life, is a pyramidal organisation of society. At the top of the hierarchy of such societies, there is a ruler whose power is believed to emanate from God. He may be a priest and, therefore, controlling a theocratic society like the Ga in Ghana. Or, he may be a warrior and administrator with some religious functions which legitimise his high position as with the Akan in Ghana and with the Grassfields in Cameroon. The notion of sacral rule is, therefore limited in this investigation to the latter kind of leadership.

The organisation of people is the main concern of politics. Sacral rule is the field for learning about African culture but even more for finding out about an African style of government. Thus it is the common ground for cultural and political investigation in Africa. The survival of traditional systems of government in modern politics in Africa is a sign of the dynamic power of the authentic African way of organising people. This contribution to the socio-political and spiritual culture of Africans deserves our attention.

Ruling systems in Africa have spiritual connotations. Rulers and nobles are religiously empowered by the sacral character of the African ruling system. The religious practices and the spiritual experience which an African ruler undergoes and undertakes when he is in authority, links his office to God and gives a theological dimension to sacral rule. African kings claim their power from God. The success of

their government depends on the spiritual forces with which they interact. The sacral ruling system is thus the major structure of theological thinking and religious practices in these types of society. In this way the study of sacral rule in Africa will be a part of both inculturation and political theology.

2- What is the Christian Church?

The expression “Christian church” is generally used for any group of believers well organised to be at the service of the society for the sake of Jesus Christ. The arguments of this thesis will therefore follow the general doctrine of Christianity because Christ is not limited to the ideas of him held by any one denomination. This basic concern for the well-being of the universal church of Christ needs some limitation for the empirical establishment of Christian principles. Therefore, the term “Christian Church” is used in this work to describe the African churches which emerged from the Basel Mission enterprise. Since 1828, the Evangelical Mission Society of Basel, otherwise known as the Basel Mission, has been present in West Africa. The first missionaries were sent to Ghana, then called Gold Coast. Later on, when Cameroon became a German colony, the Basel Mission extended its evangelistic activities to Cameroon, and in Cameroon as well as in Ghana, it met an already established sacral rule. The Basel Mission heritage developed into three autonomous churches: the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon and the Evangelical Church of Cameroon.

3- Sacral rule as a mission field

The missionaries' first contact with Africa was through the rulers of the African society in which they were to work. Through them people were gathered to hear the biblical message and mission lands were acquired. But before long, a crisis arose between the missionaries and the rulers. The African traditional politico-religious system with its attendant aspect of polygamous marriage on the one hand, and the structure of kingship which accords apparently unlimited power to rulers on the other hand, challenged missionary notions. Perhaps the most disagreeable elements of African culture such as blood sacrifices, discreetly performed rites of passage, and the belief in ancestors were not initially accommodated by the preachers of the Gospel of Jesus. The Basel Mission therefore sought a type of leadership which competed with the existing one. The Mission thus gained popularity among the marginalized. Therefore, the Gospel ceased to be one of the transforming forces which shaped the traditional leadership in Africa. Due to the European understanding of established power, the missionary lost an opportunity to bring sacral rule to the worship of Jesus Christ. The zealous missionary activities did not achieve the conversion of the structure of African leadership. This thesis attempts to respond to this situation by investigating the extent to which sacral rule can become a new "mission field" for the Gospel.

19th century missionary zeal to disciple the nations according to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ²² was heightened by the assurance of being sent by a transcendent God, to transform people and to make African nations followers of Jesus Christ. However, their spiritual worldview was limited to an exclusive God who did not tolerate the presence of other deities and spiritual powers. Considering Jesus as the

²² Matthew 28:16-20.

enemy of all other spiritual forces, Christian missionaries were not disposed to engage with the spiritual world where the Almighty God patronised lesser gods and allowed sacral rulers to worship him. Therefore, the exclusive Christian theology which modelled this missiological attitude could not help to bring African sacral rule under the lordship of Jesus Christ. The criteria for church membership were worked out within this limited spiritual worldview which favoured the spiritual abdication of the sacral ruler if he desired to join the community of those who worship Christ. This was the result of the desire to discontinue and eliminate the previous African religious experience and to institute new spiritual life. However, it was detrimental to the increasing role of the sacral ruling system in the work of the Mission. In Cameroon as well as in Ghana, the spiritual aptitude of African sacral rule was ignored. By ignoring sacral rule, the Mission lost the opportunity to enter a fertile area to which it had been commissioned. Fresh missionary ventures need to be taken.

The bases for fresh missionary venture are available as one looks closely at the catechism from the Evangelical Church of Cameroon and the *Twí* hymnbook of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. The existence of the Grassfields sacral rule forced the Basel Missionaries to introduce a section on sacral rulers “*Bi Mfomfo* (about the sacral rulers)” in the catechism. The best ruler, according to this teaching, is the one who obeys and worships Christ. One could observe that the Grassfields Christian surrenders to Christ with the hope that one day his ruler will join him in the Christian worship of God. The third verse of the Presbyterian *Twí* hymn 146 ends with the following words: “*Na Ahene som Kristo* (sacral rulers worship Christ).” This hymn is so popular that its daily use by people who believed in a hospitable God who reigns over lesser spirits

points to the acceptance of sacral rulers as those who could also learn from Christ how to worship the Almighty God. For the people, becoming Christians maintains the link with the African understanding of the spiritual realm as there is only one God worshipped by both the Christians and the non-Christians. The name of that God, Maker of heaven and earth, is the same in church and in society. Therefore, the spiritual worldview in which African people operate is shared by Christians and non-Christians alike. This is why they never ceased to hope that their rulers would also join them in the worship of Jesus Christ. Our task in this thesis, therefore, is to articulate a possible solution to this problem and to arrive at a Christian theology which has in view Christian formation and church acceptance of African sacral rulers. The salvation of Africa requires the participation of its rulers. Therefore, it is time that African churches ministering in a context of this shared spiritual worldview, go beyond missionary precedent and make Jesus' disciples among the indigenous leaders in Africa. Equipped with Jesus' teaching about the "Kingdom of God", the personnel of African churches could initiate a socio-religious relationship with the custodians of traditional ruling systems, which would enhance African Christianity and increase Christian influence within the traditional system.

The limit of our study as far as leadership is concerned is the pyramidal style of leading people where the ruling system and its head are both sacral. From a theological perspective, we work within the scope of African Christian Theology. On the area of missiology, we focus on disciple making among the holders of African sacral power. Geographically, we are concerned with West Africa especially Cameroon and Ghana. The scope will also involve a discussion on sacral rule and mission work so far as they

relate to the new political leaders of modern African nation states.

Methodology

The intention here is to use empirical data and historical evidence to illuminate the following rationale: Christ and the ordinary people have always been present in sacral rule's religious experience and in the Christian Church history. The study will also consider the African-American struggle against slavery which favoured the launching of 18th-century modern Protestant missionary societies, and the reports of what happened in America and Europe as Christians became more and more aware of their responsibility for the evangelisation of the African continent. Close attention will be paid to the West African system of social organisation. As much as possible, data from archives in Ghana, Cameroon, Oxford and Basel, as well as anthropological writings on West African society and politics, will be analysed for relevant insight into the understanding of the nature and purpose of African sacral rule.

In particular, historical facts will be articulated according to the methodology used in sociology, politics and systematic theology. Relevant books on Christianity in West Africa up to 1994 have been carefully exploited in gathering the case studies we need for the thrust of the argument in this thesis. The nature of the encounter with sacral rule was obtained from oral sources such as interviews, conversations and discussions with the leaders of the Christian church. Custodians of the sacral ruling system of leadership interested in sharing their spiritual experiences have given us a picture of Christ and the Gospel from their "non-church" perspective. As the clergymen responded to the structured interview and discussed freely about how they related to African sacral rule, these church representatives pointed out various ways in which they

understood Christ' relationship to sacral political power. As oral sources constitute an important part of our evidence, special attention will be paid to them and literary sources will be given due weight.

My position as clergyman and member of a leading sacral institution facilitated my participation in church events and debates as well as royal affairs and struggles. Literary sources and sometimes contrasting oral opinions helped me to weigh data and to be as objective and academic as possible. International experience as I travelled in West, East and southern Africa and the knowledge gained from the local sacral rules, became a source of inspiration. This experience significantly provided the thesis with larger basic elements for comparative studies even though the necessity for academic rigour forced me to limit the presentation of empirical facts to Cameroon and Ghana as samples for the understanding of African sacral rule.

Literature review

The examination of studies on culture in Africa showed me that the area of the engagement of Christianity with traditional leadership has not been explored even though many aspects of the relationship of Christianity to African culture have been studied. Starting with the results of the African-American project against slavery for the history of the Christian church on the one hand, we start with 1957²³ when the first book on African theology was published by a group of African Roman Catholic priests who raised questions about areas of African life uncovered by the Christian teaching, practices and rituals.

²³ 1957 is the date when the first systematic book on African theology was published under the title *Les Prêtres noirs s'interrogent*, Paris, Cerf, 1957; written by a group of French-speaking Roman Catholic priests studying in Europe.

Anselme Titianma Sanon analysed the cultural conversion of a pagan community in a doctoral thesis he presented at the Catholic Faculty of Paris in 1970.²⁴ For him, conversion is about the individual and his structural environment. A personal conversion can be at any point in time. But the spiritual transformation of a politico-religious system like kingship is an ongoing process. Cultural change in an African society is the result of daily interaction. The conversion of both individuals and structures is what Sanon called "cultural conversion". It is when the transformation of people as well as the basic means of their collective life has occurred, that we can talk of a "community conversion". It takes time for a community to be transformed by the Gospel. Sanon, later to become Bishop of Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina Faso (then Upper Volta), combined the latest methods in ethnology with his experience in traditional African life and the Roman Catholic Church to interpret Jesus as the "Master of initiation".

How do the people and their spiritual traditional rulers perceive Christ? Before he became a Christian, Sanon was like any other child or teenager of his community. He went through the young men's traditional initiation with his age mates. When he became a Christian, he left the village life and spent more than two decades in a Roman Catholic seminary. Because he left for his sacerdotal training after his traditional teenage initiation, Sanon failed to undergo the adulthood rites of passage normally required of his age mates. However, though his work focused on the community, he considered his priesthood only as a form of community leadership. He failed to let people express their personal perception of Christ. He did not address the work of

²⁴ Sanon, Titianma Anselme, *Tierce Eglise ma mère ou la conversion d'une communauté paënnne au Christ*, Thèse de doctorat en théologie présentée à la faculté de théologie de Paris, 1970.

traditional leaders of the Bobo in Burkina Faso who have a genuine sense of the lordship of Christ and his place in their spiritual and cultural experience far away from the church image of Christ.

Allison Howell, like Sanon, presents conversion as an ongoing process. Unlike the Bishop, Howell is not a native of the community which she studied in her missiological investigation. She considered Kasena society as a whole from children to the elderly people. She started in the sequence of the chapters with the existing Christian group and penetrated the traditional society. Howell expressed in her book²⁵ the view that the Kasena spiritual experience is more the people's business than that of the clergy, who tend to control any expression of the new convert's faith. The Christian basic group on which Howell focused her activity is an illustration that conversion has occurred among those who are peripheral to traditional positions of power. This study shows that rulers in the traditional Kasena society have not largely gone through the experience of conversion. The custodians of pre-Christian Kasena government have not been reached directly by the Gospel. They read the Gospel and see Christ in the lives of their Christian subjects. How has the people's ability to reciprocally transfer spiritual and cultural values from the church to African tradition affected Christianity and sacral rule? How far have African kings transformed from within, their spiritual heritage by providing a place for Christ?

According to Sanon and Howell, the conversion of individuals and communities constitutes a daily interaction between the Gospel and culture. Their research applies

²⁵ Howell, Allison, *The religious itinerary of a Ghanaian people: The Kasena and the Christian Gospel*, Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 1997.

the "Christ-transforming-culture"²⁶ patterns as discussed by H. Richard Niebuhr. Niebuhr demonstrated that "Christ-against-culture" is a position expressed by some Christians at different periods of Christianity, from John the author of the fourth Gospel to the 19th-century missionary movement born of Protestant Pietism. The missionaries and the first Africans converted to Christianity demonstrated this exclusive attitude towards African culture. How could the "Christ-transforming-culture" position as seen in the work of Sanon and Howell, be applied to the sacral rulers who see Christ differently?

Later generations of African Christians claim their culture as an unquenchable force for life. Some African theologians have reacted strongly through theories of indigenisation, incarnation, adaptation, contextualisation and inculturation which exalted the local culture. How can we appreciate African pre-Christian values if the glory is given to Christ and not to our culture? Eboussi Boulaga²⁷ and Jonas Dah²⁸ are two Cameroonians who, while taking the cultural element very seriously in evangelism, are interested in the results of missionary Christianity in the African context. As part and parcel of the Basel Mission heritage, Jonas Dah critically evaluated the missionary activities of Basel in Cameroon through his doctoral thesis. He paved the way for us to further the missionary impact on the marginalised field of sacral rule. As for Eboussi Boulaga, he produced a scholarly comprehensive book which is a philosophical reflection on the African re-appropriation of the Christian faith. From his own

²⁶ Niebuhr, Richard, *Christ and Culture*, p. 196.

²⁷ Boulaga, Eboussi, *Christianisme sans fétiche*, Paris, Présence Africaine, 1981.

²⁸ Dah, Jonas, *Missionary Motivations and methods: A critical examination of the Basel Mission in Cameroon 1886-1914*, University of Basel, 1983.

-Dah, Jonas, *Jeremiah Chi Kangsen: Pastor – Politician – Chief*, Nyassosso, Easter, 1985.

-Dah, Jonas, *Chieftaincy, widowhood and Ngambi in Cameroon*, Pforzheim-Hohenwart, Germany, 1995.

reflection on the African re-appropriation of the Christian faith. From his own experience in church and in academy, he found that the major unexpected result of the missionary Christianity made of fixed and repeatable doctrine, attitude, language and vocabulary is that, it limits itself and will die from her own victories because, when it is confronted with new situations in a continually changing world, it has nothing to offer.

Nevertheless, he said:

“L’Esprit souffle là où il veut, faisant du christianisme un élément constitutif de la conscience et de la sensibilité de l’homme en devenir, pénétrant là où les milices sacrées munies d’écritures, de dogmes et d’impériales vérités ont échoué à faire des brèches. Après les vociférations des prédicants, le cliquetis des armes des guerriers de l’Eternel, l’éclat criard des trompettes sacerdotales, c’est Dieu lui-même qui vient dans le murmure de la brise, la chanson de l’eau de source et le gémissement interminable d’un spiritual (The Spirit blows where he wills, making Christianity the fulfilment of the future of a conscious and sensible person, penetrating further in areas where the sacred writings of biblical experts, dogmas, and imperial truths failed to impact. After the sermons of preachers, the gun shots of the warriors of God, the trumpet sounds of the priests, then, God himself comes through the music of the fresh air, the song of the flowing stream and the constant spiritual thirst of an individual.)”²⁹

By affirming that the Holy Spirit and God himself go beyond human services, Boulaga points to God’s dynamic presence in African community and cultural life prior to the missionary preaching, during and after the western evangelistic enterprise. We want to use our case studies from Cameroon and Ghana to test the validity of such a claim by showing how Jesus Christ and his Gospel were perceived by people involved in the hierarchy of sacral rule which survived at the margin of missionary concern.

Bediako has led theologians to discover that the Gospel is anterior and posterior to culture.³⁰ Our thinking has been shaped by his interpretation of the Pentecost event

²⁹ Boulaga, Eboussi, *Christianisme sans fétiche*, pp. 199-200.

³⁰ Bediako, Kwame, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a non-Western Religion*, New York, Edinburgh University Press, Orbis Books Mary knoll, 1996.

application of the text of Hebrews 1:2 to the *Odwira* festival of the Akuapem of Ghana. However, instead of examining issues of religious culture as Bediako did, we want to find out how far his hypothesis of the anteriority and posteriority of the Gospel to any culture, can be confirmed if the cultural element becomes that of African traditional leadership.

Jean Marc Ela³¹ has analysed the situation of the Christian Church and has proposed a "theology under the tree" which is "worked out as brothers and sisters sit side by side wherever Christians share the lot of peasant people who seek to take responsibility for their own future and for their living conditions".³² More than Sanon, Ela acknowledged the theological contribution of the Christian peasants; the very people who have never studied classical theology but for whom theology is the expression of day-to-day life. Ela focuses his analysis on social classes and spoke out in favour of the poor, the peasant and the under-privileged. What would happen if kings and rulers were also there "under the tree"? Who would speak for them? What could be the content of the message of the Christian church to rulers? If they were given the chance to speak for themselves, what would they say about Christ? Is it possible for the representatives of the Church and the traditional leaders to embark on a common discourse for the welfare of the people Christ placed under their authority? The absence of sacral rulers "under the tree" weakened Ela's commitment to speak for the people. This thesis seeks to enlarge the population "under the tree", for the theological enterprise under the Lordship of Christ, who is also the Saviour of sacral rulers.

³¹ My former teacher in Yaounde-Cameroon (1985-1988).

³² Ela, Jean Marc, *My faith as an African*, London, Geoffrey Chapman, U. K. and, New York, Orbis Books Mary knoll, 1988, p. 180.

Engelbert Mveng, one of the fathers of African theology taught the "history of civilisation" at the National University of Yaoundé for more than three decades. His intellectual contribution is that of a builder of an African Christian civilisation. He concentrated on African art as the most important expression of genuine religious culture. Through Mveng's achievement, Black Art has today made a great impact on Church liturgy as well as on Church theology. When he argued for political liberation, he found the "Church exiling herself at the periphery of the African centre of decision"³³ to be the main obstacle preventing the work of theologians from having an impact on African society. He may have discovered the problem, but he died too soon to propose a solution. From a Protestant point of view, I hope to bring the Church to the centre of power through the missionary empowerment of the Christian members of the decision-making committee. I also hope to bring sacral kingship to the heart of the Christian Church where African Christianity is articulated. The current development of African Christianity at the margin of the custodians of sacral ruling system needs some revision.

What we are trying to demonstrate has been tackled by the Cameroonian theologian Sagne in his recently published doctoral thesis.³⁴ In his analysis, he considered sacral kingship as people living under a specific system of government and not as the centre of decision-making for political and spiritual purposes. He provides us with first-hand material because some of the key informants we needed to interview had died. We will, therefore, rely on Sagne's material to demonstrate how the sacral

³³ Mveng, Engelbert, "The historical background of the African Synod" in Mowra Browne (ed), *African Synod Documents, reflections, perspectives*, S.N.P. New York, Orbis Books Mary Knoll, 1996, pp.20-31.

³⁴ Sagne, *L'évangile à la rencontre des chefferies*, thèse de doctorat, faculté de théologie catholique de Paris, septembre 1996.

rulers make use of Christ and Christianity in their spiritual experience and in their government for a better future for their communities.

Kä Mana, the champion of the theology of Reconstruction, like Mveng, is very much concerned with the salvation of Africa as civilisation. His theological contribution as a philosopher, starts from the realm of ideas, descends to meet people shaped by the current situation of African society and produces theological reflection in the discipline of ethics, thus providing guidelines to those who carry the future of Africa. He rightly discovered that Christ is present in the Church and in African tradition. With a fresh interpretation of African mythology, which modelled the traditional spiritual life, Kä Mana in his theological investigation, shows how Christ who came through missionaries, could find his place in the spiritual itinerary of African people.³⁵ He found African spiritual imagery so illuminating since the proclamation of the Gospel that he can talk of the "Christ of Africa."³⁶ What he conceived and articulated out of the realm of imagery, we shall attempt to use empirical evidence from African sacral rule to demonstrate and so to test the relevance of his conclusions.

The interesting theological contribution of Kwesi Dickson summarised in the "Theology of Selfhood" gives an undoubtedly biblical basis to African theology. For him African Christianity must be also rooted in the Old Testament.³⁷ His book, *Theology in Africa*, which exposed an interpretative method of Bible reading from the original texts and culture to the African way of understanding God and Life, provides significant insight into the study of religions. African religion is one of the major

³⁵ Kä Mana, *Chrétiens et Eglises d'Afrique: penser l'avenir*, Yaoundé, Clé, 1999, also issued in English as *Christians and churches of Africa: Envisioning the future*, Akropong, Regnum Africa, 2000.

³⁶ Kä Mana, *Christ d'Afrique*, 1994.

³⁷ Dickson, Kwesi, *Theology in Africa*, New York, Orbis Books Mary knoll, 1984.

activities in sacral rule. We will use Dickson's method to understand the priestly function of the African ruler and combine it with that of Kā Mana as we seek to empower the traditional leaders to express their faith in Christ.

Ethnologists, anthropologists and historians have explored the nature of African traditions. In general, they have recorded cases that we need to analyse and use as illustrations in our arguments. As far as our study is concerned, we have also consulted the following authors:

1- On Cameroon

Jaap Van Slageren's book on the making of the Evangelical Church showed how European and Cameroonian Christians collaborated in the mission field. In this documented piece of work,³⁸ he presents situations where there was positive and negative interaction between the preachers of the Gospel and the traditional leaders. Interested in the key events which gave birth to the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, Slageren provides us with facts that point to the need to analyse the relationship between the Church and genuine Grassfields system of government.

Fiona Bowie wrote her doctoral thesis on a particular English-speaking Grassfields group, the Bangwa of Fontem division.³⁹ She used the same method as Slageren but dealt with the Roman Catholic Missions. The weakness of Van Slageren, who limited his work to the Protestant missions, became her strength as she concentrated on Roman Catholic Missions. Both researchers help us to have recorded Protestant as well as Catholic cases of tension and peace between Christ, the Good

³⁸ Slageren, Jaap van, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun: Missions Européennes et Christianisme autochtone*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1972.

³⁹ Bowie, Fiona, *A social and historical study of Christian Missions among the Bangwa of South-West Cameroon*, PhD Thesis, University of Oxford, 1986.

News and the day-to-day life on the Grassfields Mountains. Unfortunately, none of them went deep into the nature of the traditional system of government to find the reason for the opposition or of the agreement between the missionaries and the rulers.

P.R. Albert has presented to the public the first missionary interpretation of beliefs and customs of the Bandjoun kingdom where I come from and which will serve as one of the case studies for this thesis.⁴⁰ As an ethnologist, he described Bandjoun governing system as a sacred one. At the top of the hierarchy there is a spiritual monarch who holds his divine powers from the mythical ancestor-founder of the kingdom. According to him, people gradually moved from the worship of the Supreme Being to the worship of the lineage ancestor. They intended to increase their political power by ascribing religious honour to the first king. By so doing the belief in ancestors has completely replaced the primitive worship of the Supreme Being. Pradelle de La Tour,⁴¹ Claude Tardits,⁴² Emmanuel Ghomsi⁴³ and Jean-Pierre Warnier⁴⁴ in their later approaches to the authentic Grassfields leadership institution confirmed, amended and gave more insight into the understanding of the nature of sacral rule in Western Cameroon. The office is sacred, the ruler is divine, but he is not worshipped and no prayer is directed to him. The children and grandchildren of any head of family will

⁴⁰ Albert, P.R., *Bandjoun; Croyances, coutumes, et folklore*, Paris, Dillen, 1937.

⁴¹ Pradelle de la Tour, Charles Henri, "Le palais du chef dans une chefferie Bamiléké: Bangwa" in Franz Steiner (ed), *Paideuma, Mitteilungen zur kulturkunde: Palaces and chiefly households in the Cameroon Grassfields*, Stuttgart, pp. 31-47.

⁴² Tardits, Claude, *Les Bamiléké de l'Ouest Cameroun*, Paris, Edition Berger-Levant, 1960.

- Tardits, Claude, "Le palais royal de Foumban" in *Paideuma, Mitteilungen zur kulturkunde*, pp. 65-83.

- Tardits, Claude, "Le royaume Bamoun" in *Princes et serviteurs du royaume: cinq études de monarchies Africaines*, Paris, Société d'ethnographie, 1987.

⁴³ Ghomsi, Emmanuel, "Organisation et fonction de résidences royales dans les Grassfields du Cameroun L'exemple de la chefferie de Bandjoun", in Franz Steiner (ed), *Paideuma, Mitteilungen zur kulturkunde*, pp.49-63 and, pp. 313-317.

⁴⁴ Warnier, Jean-Pierre, *Echanges, développement et hiérarchies dans le Bamenda précolonial*, Franz Steiner (ed), 1985.

accord him the religious attention when he dies. But not all children are priests and only the chosen successors have religious responsibilities. The African belief in ancestors is familial and not communal.

Sally Chilver,⁴⁵ Phyllis Kaberry,⁴⁶ Verjikina Fanso⁴⁷ and Paul Nkwi⁴⁸ have studied the nature, evolution and religious practices of the Grassfields groups in English-speaking Cameroon. Their work complements what Pradelle and others have done on the French-speaking side. The belief in ancestors, the priestly duty of the ruler, the secret societies with their hidden agenda and the presence of slavery could explain the tension between the Church and the native society. The ruler's authority on land needed by the missionary, his power over the Gospel hearers, his will to open his area of jurisdiction to modernity through mission schools and hospitals may explain why the custodian of cultural leadership and the makers of Jesus' disciples often supported each other.

From this work on the nature of leadership in the Grassfields groups, we want to investigate whether sincere dialogue can take place between church representatives and sacral rulers who are cultural as well as political leaders. This dialogue, which is not confined to human relationship, is the interaction of the Gospel and culture. This interaction could qualify a Christian to be a monarch and could make the Church accessible to an African.

⁴⁵ Chilver, Sally, "Zintgraff's explorations between the Coast and the Grassfields 1886-1889", Printed in Oxford by friends of Buea, 1997.

- Chilver, Sally, "The Bangwa and the Germans: A tailpiece" in *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria*, Volume 4, No 1, December, 1967.

⁴⁶ Kaberry, Phyllis "Traditional politics in Nsaw" in *Africa* XXIX, No 4, October 1954, pp. 366-383.

⁴⁷ Fanso, Chilver, and others, "Nto Nso' and its occupants: Privileged access and internal organisation in the old and new palaces" in Franz Steiner (ed), *Paideuma, Mitteilungen zur kulturkunde*, pp.152-178.

⁴⁸ Nkwi, Paul, *Traditional government and social change: A study of the political institution among the Kom of Cameroon Grassfields*, Studia Ethnographica, Fribourg Switzerland, University Press, 1976.

2- On Ghana

If the preceding literature review on Cameroon has been presented from the point of view of church writers, we want to consider lay people's point of view as we proceed with Ghana. Robert Addo-Fening, a historian, has produced a detailed and comprehensive history of Akyem-Abuakwa with particular reference to the political and religious events which dynamically shaped the encounter between the external and internal forces.⁴⁹ The Basel missionary activity on religious matters and the British Governor on the political side "intruded" significantly on the ongoing spiritual and political experience of Akyem Abuakwa. It is obvious that the religio-political history of a community concentrates, as Addo-Fening shows, on the leaders and their subjects, and on the agreements and disagreements between missionaries and the sacral rulers as well as between the colonialists and the traditional leaders of this Akan people.

It appears from the historical evidence that the planting of Christianity in the Akan area in general and in Akyem Abuakwa in particular has been the business of rulers. Christ and the Gospel have become part of the people's culture. Like Bede's writing of the History of the English church and people, Addo-Fening shows how Christianity has positively revolutionised the economic, social and spiritual life of the area. His work is a case of social history and is not a church based work. What may result through the combination of Addo-Fening's academic achievement and of Ka Mana's struggle to draw the Christian church's attention to the changes which are taking place in the religious practices of African traditions since the "intrusion" of the

⁴⁹ Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943: from Ofori Panim to Sir Ofori Atta*, Trondheim, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, 1997.

missionary?

Agyeman Badu and K.A. Busia, both Oxford scholars, respectively BA and PhD in political science, became great leaders in modern and traditional Ghana. In their writings, they investigated the nature of the traditional rule of Akan people with particular reference to the Asante and the Brong respectively. They favour in their analysis a transition from an African system of rule to the English type of government. They both demonstrated how they might respect the sacral rule they inherited from their ancestors while modernising the society to meet the requirements of their time. Although Busia was not a traditional leader, Agyeman Badu was already a paramount Chief of Dormaa Ahenkro when he presented his dissertation.⁵⁰ Enthroned on April 12, 1950, he wrote his dissertation on his past, present and future role in Ghana's politics, and followed in the sequence of chapters in Busia's thesis on *The position of the Chief in the modern political system of Ashanti*, published in 1951. In his unpublished dissertation, Agyeman Badu deals at length with Christianity and his function as head of a strong African ruling system.

His entire life would become a consistent struggle for full church membership. For him and his people, the biggest achievement of his life as Paramount chief was in 1969 when the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, acknowledged that the sacral paramount chief Agyeman Badu was qualified to participate in the Holy Communion service. He presented a successful challenge to the *Otumfuo*, the Asante ruler. His brilliant political career was a continual promotion from the colonial government to that of President JJ Rawlings. The high point of his career came under the government of Kwame Nkrumah

⁵⁰ Agyeman, Badu, *The position of traditional authority in modern Ghana*, Dissertation submitted for the degree of Bachelor of Letters in the University of Oxford Lincoln College, Oxford, Michaelmas Term 1963.

who helped him to free the Brong Ahafo territories from Asante domination. But what gave sense to the life of *Osagyefo Osyeadeo* Agyeman Badu was the full membership the Presbyterian Church of Ghana granted him on October 29, 1969.

The Dormaa Ahenkro community is proud to have a full African Christian king who struggled internally and externally with the kingmakers and the Church to become a full communicant member of the Presbyterian Church and also member of the Dormaa Ahenkro traditional council. The process of his struggle, which follows the patterns of oral tradition, will be used to gain an insight into the perception that African sacral rulers have of Christ and how they perceive him to relate to them. We intend to evaluate this courageous action taken by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana with a view to articulating guidelines for dynamic interaction between Christianity and African traditional system of government. Agyeman Badu's contribution to the argument of this thesis is therefore substantial.

The organisation of the thesis

The thesis is organised in three parts. The first part entitled "Patterns of the African sacral rule" presents the empirical description of the functions and the religious experience of the traditional government on the Grassfields mountains as well as among the Akan groups while highlighting the roles of people who share power with the paramount ruler in Cameroon and Ghana. This first part is intended to present the two case studies so that changes and continuity in the basic components of both sacral ruling systems become apparent in their encounter with the Christian Missions.

The second part concentrates on the encounter with the Basel Mission, its introduction into the African system of government and the subsequent reactions based

on agreements and disagreements between the two religious institutions. An analysis of those reactions, the historical events as well as the spiritual encounter, provides insight into the areas of transformation and continuity as regards both African rule and the Christian church. These interactions are further subjected to the various positive and negative effects of colonialism and subsequent African independence.

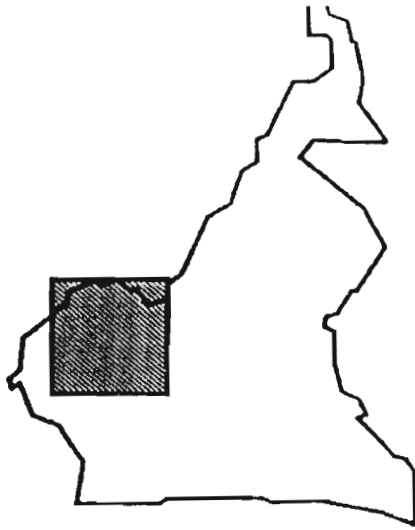
Part Three focuses on the ordinary people as common ground between African sacral rule and the Christian Church and on the articulation of a Christian theology which leads the African sacral rule to worship Christ in continuity with its past as an ongoing religious experience. How can those who are both members of the African society and of the Christian community, stand at the intersection point where common discourse can be prepared and delivered by theologians with a view to bridging the gap between the Church and the traditional leadership? In the general conclusion, personal comments on the major arguments of the thesis open the way for royals to be considered missionaries as they head African communities and raise questions regarding the spiritual credentials of modern African patterns of government.

Part One: Patterns of African Sacral rule

Part One will concentrate on the West African pyramidal ruling society. This part is divided into three sections. The first section is on Cameroon and the second is on Ghana. With references from the Bible, the third section will be comparison and contrasting view between Cameroon and Ghana as they support the thesis. In order to do justice to our argument, we will be using historical facts to throw light on the formation of the Grassfields Communities in Cameroon and the Akan groups in Ghana. Theological tools will be used to highlight the genuine spiritual tradition from which the African society evolved. The position of the sacral ruler in relation to his entourage of kingmakers, members of the ruling class, healers, women, servants and traders, will be described as we tried to locate where the power lies in the social organisation of African sacral rule. Attention will be paid to data which point to the nature and functions of the governing system as far as religion, politics, economy and social promotion are concerned. As we clarify the process of social formation and the conceptual basis of community, we will not lose sight of the relations and reactions within sacral rule, which provides African traditions with an inherent dynamic dimension, allowing intra institutional transformation. This will lead us to critically look at the content of the mature community as it is now, and how it is used to sustain African sacral rule. Similarities and differences between Cameroon and Ghana with reference to the biblical context will illustrate the evil as well as the good in African sacral rule so that some elements could be eliminated while others are fully accepted as the institution changes and progresses with the Christian church and the various civic powers.

Chapter Two: Sacral rule in Cameroon Grassfields

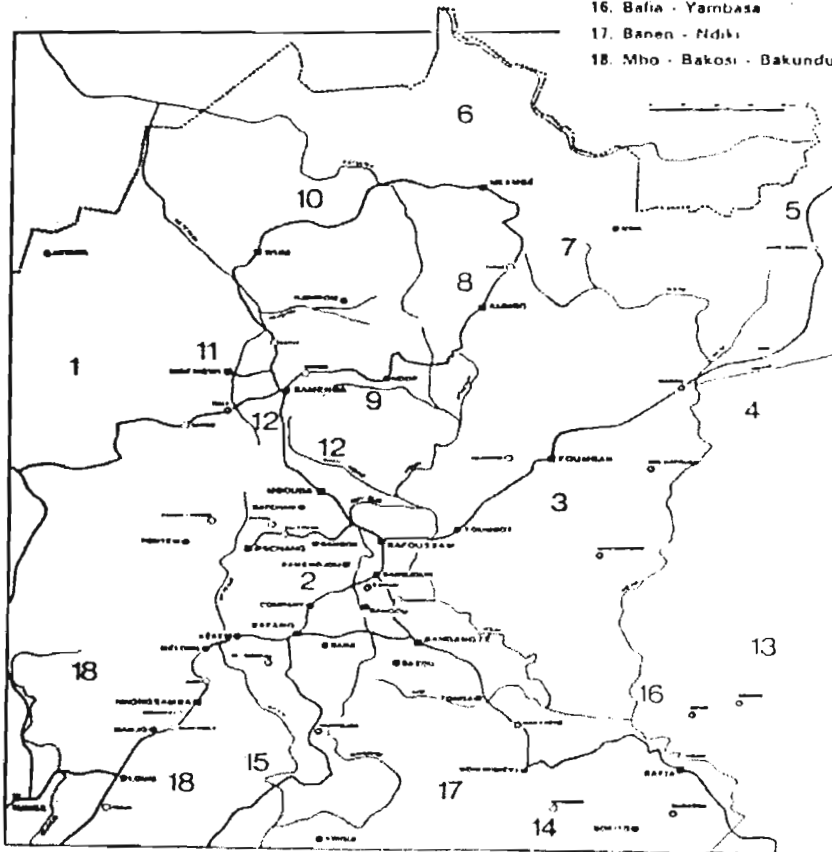
I- Introduction



Carte ethnique de l'Ouest-Cameroun

(d'après: Atlas régional de la République unie du Cameroun, Ouest 2. ORSTOM, Yaoundé, 1973)

1. Banyang - Anyang
2. Bamileke - Bangwa - Bakoa - Batongtu
3. Bamum
4. Tikar (proprement dits)
5. Mambila - Wawa - Kouja
6. Mbamba - Misaje - Mfuntse
7. Nsongli - War - Tang - Wiya - Kaka
8. Bansa (Nsu)
9. Ndop (Ndob) - Bafut - Bamenda - Babanki - Nsei (Bamossing)
10. Bakom (Kom) - Fungom - Bum - Wum (Aghem)
11. Widekum - Bameta (Meta) - Moghamo - Ngie - Ngwu
12. Bali
13. Betsi (Bati) - Mvoto
14. Bassa (Bassa)
15. Dibum - Mbang
16. Bafia - Yambasa
17. Banen - Ndiki
18. Mho - Bakosi - Bakundu



From Bernard Maillard

A- Presentation of Grassfields

Grassfields people occupy the high volcanic lands of Western Cameroon and Eastern Nigeria. "They inhabit a continuous stretch of territory which extends roughly between 4 degrees 15' and 7 degree N. and 9 degree 45' and 11 degree 15'E".⁵¹ This hilly territory is between 900 to 2100 meters above sea level. It provides a healthy climate⁵² close to the Mediterranean. The word "Grassfields" is of German origin.⁵³ The colonisers used this word to describe the people living in the grasslands in contrast with those living in the equatorial forest and those living in the savannah plain. According to the current administrative organisation of Cameroon, this generic term, from physical vegetation, puts together people living mainly in the Western and North western provinces of Cameroon even though some are now attached to Adamaoua, Centre, Littoral and South West provinces. Although Grassfields people are scattered all over the country, their original cradle was divided into ten divisions with the following capital cities: Bandjoun, Bafoussam, Baham, Bamenda, Kumbo, Fumban, Mbouda, Wum, Nkambe, Bangangte and Bafang. According to national census figures, they represent, approximately 35% of the population. Some researchers have called them the "kingdoms on the mountains".⁵⁴

Each modern administrative division groups between 25 and 30 of sacral political units. On the mountains there are around 300 independent groups, each headed by a traditional ruler. Each one speaks a different dialect of the same language as a

⁵¹ Forde Daryll, *Ethnographic survey of Africa, part IX, West Africa*, London International African Institute, 1954.

⁵² No missionary or European had died there. The area is more or less free of malaria.

⁵³ In 1884, Cameroon became a German Colony.

⁵⁴ Mfochive, Joseph, *L'éthique chrétienne face à l'interconnexion culturelle et religieuse en Afrique: Exemple du pays Bamoun 1873-1937*, Yaoundé, Clé, 1983, p. 25.

mark of autonomy. With the coming of the colonial powers, the multiplication of community stopped but it was difficult to get one language for all the Grassfields groups. Missionaries reduced some of the languages to writing.⁵⁵ In the same way that there is no one paramount ruler among the Grassfields, there is no predominant language. The lingua franca moved from Pidgin English to French and English. But there is a continual movement of population with the possibility of becoming the subject of another ruler if the latter provides better land and title. Languages were not an isolated factor in this regular exchange. One of the specific characteristics of the Grassfields people is the variety of languages they speak and their surprising aptitude for understanding those dialects from different Grassfields *Fondoms*. Linguists affirm that this is the result of the long history of diversification and contact of peoples. Putting together previous work and his own findings on Grassfields languages, Jean-Pierre Warnier came to the conclusion that:

“ Les langues Grassfields sont toutes génétiquement apparentées les unes aux autres et partagent entre 55 et 100 pour cent de leur vocabulaire de base. (Grassfields languages are linked and they share between 55 to 100 percent of their basic vocabulary)”.⁵⁶

Using the latest methodology in glottochronology,⁵⁷ Warnier concludes that this percentage of basic shared vocabulary between Sudanese and Bantu languages bears witness to some three thousand years of interaction.⁵⁸ This linguistic mixing up of different languages is a proof of how the society enjoyed an elastic border where

⁵⁵ Basel Mission concentrated on: Douala, Bali, Bamun, and slightly on Bandjoun; Roman Catholic developed Nso', and Bafang; French protestant missionary chose: Bangangte. Strong African groups developed (Ghomala') Bandjoun with the surrounding communities, and Bafut.

⁵⁶ Warnier, Jean-Pierre, "Histoire du peuplement et genèse des paysages dans l'Ouest Camerounais", in *Journal of African History*, 25 (1984), p. 397.

⁵⁷ Glottochronology is an academic exercise which use the percentage of words common to two or more different languages to calculate the number of years of interaction.

⁵⁸ Warnier, Jean-Pierre, "Histoire du peuplement et genèse des paysages, p. 398.

newcomers felt at home under the authority of the *Fo* and the hospitality of the existing population. Grassfields society was an organised institution for the promotion of human values without regard to people's original communities but considering their potential contribution to the common good. Every subject was eligible to participate in the political life of the *fondom*.

Anyone who shows good will enough to pay allegiance to a Grassfields' ruler is accepted with the challenge to prove himself of value to the community and to the political unit. A ruler is enthroned for all Grassfields people and subjects are regarded as potential members of any Grassfields community of their choice. The London International African Institute in its survey of the area called them the "People of Central Cameroons".⁵⁹ In this ethnographic presentation, Grassfields territory comprises, the Tikar in the English-speaking area and the Bamun and the Bamileke in the French-speaking area. Considering the Missionaries' arguments for human delimitation of the area, Albert described the people:

“Nous avons de fortes raisons de croire que les croyances et coutumes des Bandjouns sont, à part quelques différences de détails, les croyances et les coutumes de tout le groupe Bamiléké: Aussi bien les Bamilékés de la zone anglaise que ceux de la zone française. L'administration ne permettait pas sans doute le transport des crânes d'un pays lointain à la case de famille. Du moins... elle est intervenue auprès de l'autorité anglaise pour que soit rapporté à Fouban le crâne du père de Njoya et celui des notables tués dans un combat avec les Bamilékés de Koumbo. Ce qui semble bien indiquer, entre parenthèse, que les Bamouns, avant leur passage à l'Islam, avaient les mêmes coutumes, et donc appartenaient au même groupe ethnique que les Bamilékés. (We have good reason to believe that the beliefs and customs of the Bandjoun are the same as those of the whole Bamileke group with some differences in detail. We are talking of the Bamileke of the French territory as well as those of the English territory. The administration never accepted the transport of skulls from a distant community to a family compound. However, it asked the English authorities for permission to transfer to Fumban the skulls of Njoya's father and his warriors killed during the battle against the Bamileke of Kumbo. This seems to indicate that the Bamun, before they embraced Islam, shared the

⁵⁹ Forde, Daryll, *Ethnographic survey of Africa*, (cover page)

same customs and therefore belonged to the same ethnic group with the Bamileke)".⁶⁰

"The history of the area is one of a long series of struggles, raids, and invasions, involving mass migrations, contacts, and conflicts between different ethnic groups. Thus each of these peoples has at some period come into contact with one or more of the others, either in the course of migrations or through invasions, warfare or search for better position in social status, power sharing or property acquisition".⁶¹ Family members do not live in the same compound. Each brave son or daughter is expected to establish himself on a different personal piece of land and is expected to hold an honourable title. The ambition to possess personal property made marketplaces the point of contact among the Grassfields community. Weekly markets are organised twice in a given sacral ruler's compound. Music, dances and food items are common. All those groups are culturally homogenous as the hierarchical social structure is everywhere the same and the kingmakers, secret associations of titled subjects, women and traders pay allegiance to the sacral ruler and support him. Everywhere, the religious life is similar as people practice the African belief in ancestors through exhumation and reverence of the skull of a departed parent and individual prayers offered directly to God under the *Yam* tree planted in the courtyard of each house head. People are naturally religious as ancestors are buried in front of their houses. The religious activities related to sacral rule will be discussed below.

The particular situation in the Grassfields leadership is that the area is populated by thousands of lineage heads related among them by common will to submit to one

⁶⁰ Albert, *Bandjoun; Croyances, Coutumes et folklore*, p. 8.

⁶¹ Dugast, "People of the Central Cameroons" in Ford, Daryll (ed), *Ethnographic survey of Africa*, p. 9.

ruler. This latter is called in Grassfields language *Fo*.⁶² *Fo* literally means “the one who is able to resist, who holds power and does not die”. Prince Fotso Moïse, an ordained minister, described him from experience as follows:

*“Fo littéralement désigne celui qui résiste, qui a une puissance. Ce mot dans son sens cohérent veut dire celui qui est immuable. C’est pourquoi lors de son décès, le Bamileke ne dit pas que son roi est mort mais qu’il s’est évadé “Fo pi” (littéralement, Fo is used for someone who resists, who is in possession of power. This word also describes and qualifies someone who is unshakable. This is why when a Bamileke ruler dies people say the king has disappeared)”*⁶³.

The meaning of the word *Fo* is not fully conveyed by the term “King”. Some researchers in Grassfields studies had proposed that the word *Fo* be used instead of King and that of *Fondom* in place of kingdom because “contrary to European or Western states, power is not shared by the three bodies which are: the Legislature, the Executive, and the Judiciary. Power is embodied in a single person, who is the *Fo*. The *Fo* is the depositor and keeper of the many powers that are both royal and popular”.⁶⁴ The understanding of sacral rule and the social organisation which resulted from this type of leadership will be clarified as we analyse the sacral establishment of a Grassfields state, the process of its socio-political organisation and its religion.

II- The history of some Grassfields groups

The spiritual worldview of Grassfields groups is related to the process of the formation of the *fondom*. They have different historical backgrounds. The differences

⁶² This word has some variation in its pronunciation. It will be Fon, Foyn, Feu, Mveun, Fe, Fen, Foo and Fo as you move from one village to the other.

⁶³ Fotso, Moïse, *Les Bamileke devant le Christianisme: Aperçu ethnologique*, thèse de Licence en Théologie, à la faculté de Théologie Libre de Montpellier, Juin 1968, p. 8.

⁶⁴ Ngogang, Joseph-Amy, *British culture in Anglophone Cameroon*, Dissertation presented for the fulfilment of Masters Degree in English, University of Nancy II, September 1992, p. 5.

have resulted in socio-political and religious practices which under critical examination may be shown to have led to different points of view. These differences are going to be illustrated by presenting the historical process of the *fondom* of Bandjoun, Bamun, Meta' Bangwa and Kom as narrated by Emmanuel Ghomsi, Sally Chilver, Pradelle de la Tour, Paul Nkwi and Claude Tardits respectively. It must be noted that Bandjoun, Bamun, Meta' and Bangwa have a mixture of maternal and paternal systems of inheritance typical of the Grassfields. Kom is essentially a matrilineal *fondom* with a matrilineal system of inheritance similar to that of the Akan. The religious and the spiritual significance of the formation of Grassfields groups ranged from divine intervention in making the establishment of the *fondom* possible (Bandjoun); the conquered submitting spiritually and religiously to the conqueror with all the blessing at their disposal for the success of the newly established rule (Bamun). Also, through negotiation, religious tolerance and fusion are established where economic power seems to be an important factor (Meta'); and, finally, where through war, force is used after conquest (Bangwa and Kom).

At Tsesha' in Bandjoun, Dubu, the ruler of the existing population, had been living peacefully with his people. Ngwotchom I,⁶⁵ a prince from Baleng, while hunting, found an empty piece of land in Famleng where he settled less than 7km from Tsesha'. One night, after many days of hunting and marching from Baleng, where he had failed to inherit his father, God revealed himself to him and promised him that he was going to be an important *Fo*. In the morning, he found all kinds of ants eating the remaining parts of the meat they had eaten the night before. This was a clear sign that God was

⁶⁵ Ghomsi, Emmanuel, "Organisation et fonctions de résidence royales dans les Grassfields du Cameroun: L'exemple de la chefferie de Bandjoun", in Franz Steiner (ed). *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur kulturkunde*, pp. 49- 63.

with him. He set up a place for worship and sacrificed the first food to the God who had revealed himself to him. Surprisingly, he named the place after his hometown:

“En l’honneur de ses ancêtres de Baleng et en action de grâce au Dieu qui l’a accueilli et établi (In honour of his ancestors from Baleng and in gratitude to the God who welcomed and established him)”.⁶⁶

He became king not in competition with his brother who inherited their father’s throne, but with his blessing and cooperation. Here there was no conflict between God acting in Baleng and revealing himself to Ngwotchom in this area far from his hometown. There was a kind of alliance between them. His father⁶⁷ enthroned him as a *Fo* and Ngwotchom planned to have his own population and his own royal insignia. He chose the way of generosity and kindness. However, while crossing the river *Mghem*, he drowned and his son inherited the position to continue the project.

Once in Tsesha’, Ngwotchom II provided king Dubu⁶⁸ with meat, and fell in love with a princess who stole the royal bracelet for her lover. With this Ngwotchom II became king and was enthroned by his father, the king of Baleng, to rule over Dubu and his people. He used the products of hunting in corrupting and often in buying the allegiance of powerful people from neighbouring chiefdoms in order to balance the existing Dubu population in number and in influence. The king with his retainers was ready to spend goods to help a powerful subject of the neighbouring state to become the king’s subject. He was given the name of *Foa Jo* (the king who buys and of those who are used to buy). The people were called *Pae Jo* (those who were bought and had been transformed to become those who buy). With the exception of the Dubu family, nearly

⁶⁶ Djougla, Federic, “Histoire de Bandjoun à travers ses rois”, in. *Msem Todjom 2001*, Bandjoun, November 2001, p 14 Nkui, Paul, *Traditional government*, p. 11.

⁶⁷ Even though they were brothers, the enthronement as the successor to Baleng *Fo* made him his father

⁶⁸ Ghomsi, Emmanuel, “Organisation et fonctions de résidence royales. p. 50.

all heads of lineage in Bandjoun traced their origin from a neighbouring *Fondom*, even the king. It is a community made of people coming from various *fondoms*. They are united both by the language and by the palace. The name of the village *Paedjo* (Bandjoun) means people who were bought because their leader was the one who bought most of his subjects and transformed them into free persons while providing them at the same time with land and titles. Whenever there was a succession dispute in other villages, the losing party was contacted for their establishment in Bandjoun. Through war the ruler of Bandjoun increased his population and his territory. With time, the “king who buys” had founded one of the most important villages of the Grassfields.

Dugast describes how the Bamileke and the Tikar lived in the current Bamun territory before they were invaded and were obliged to either move or submit to new masters. Nchare, a strong prince, struggled in vain to inherit his father’s position as Tikar sacral ruler at Rifum. This failure was followed by much disenchantment from people and a possible famine.⁶⁹ What Dugast did not tell us is that at birth, Nchare was endorsed with the sign of the heir apparent. His half brother who inherited the position of their father, had the same sign and so did his brother from the same mother. Encouraged by his faithful warriors and followers, he migrated with his brother, who was also keen to gain power. When they crossed the river Mape, they had a disagreement. They continued together but tensions always ended in Nchare’s favour. As Nchare conquered the Bamun area, a relative established himself at Kumbo and founded the Bansa’ *Fondom* while Nchare stopped at Njimom with his 20 faithful

⁶⁹ Dugast, “People of the Central Cameroons”, p. 55. Famine here is rightly linked to the Nchare experience and had no Syrian reference, as Mfochive seems to affirm. (Mfochive, Joseph, *L’Ethique Chrétienne*, p. 25)

followers.⁷⁰

In his struggle for leadership, Nchare was confident because he had royal blood, received divine signs to be *Fo* and people acknowledged and honoured him as such, but he had no territory. It was at Njimom that he performed the ritual which made him the owner of the land and he therefore became fully qualified to be a *Fo*. Thus far, Njimom and his princely leader had played and continued to play a key role in the religious enthronement of the Bamun *Fo*.⁷¹ However, it was only when they reached Foumban that he could be made *Fo*:

“A series of wars followed, resulting in the conquest of the territory and new people. Sixty-seven local communities were conquered.⁷² The next four kings were marked by conflicts and rivalry within the royal household.”⁷³

Military enterprise and conflicts could be the means by which Bamun *fondom* came into being as Njoya, the *Fo* of Bamun, would write:

“*Une population fière, belliqueuse et intelligente qui parait avoir fait de l'intrigue une de ses principales raisons de vivre*” (a proud, warlike and intelligent people who seemed to have made conflict their principal way of living).⁷⁴

Claude Tardits expressed the view that at the beginning of the 19th century, Bamun looked like any other kingdom of the Western Mountains.⁷⁵

In Meta', however, the *Fo* was not very powerful among the distinguished heads of lineages. But his economic position gave him prominence. He did not use force but

⁷⁰ Mfochive, Joseph. *L'Ethique Chrétienne*. p. 33

⁷¹ Njounwet Pierre (79), Bamun-Njimom, March 23rd 1998 Two nights and one day

⁷² Mfochive, Joseph. *L'Ethique Chrétienne*. p. 31.

⁷³ Mfochive, Joseph, *L'Ethique Chrétienne*, p. 55.

⁷⁴ Njoya, *Histoire et Coutumes des Bamouns*, Translated by Henri Martin. Yaoundé. IFAN Centre du Cameroun, 1950, p. 9.

⁷⁵ Tardits, Claude, “Le palais royal de Foumban”, in Franz Steiner (ed). *Paideuma, Mitteilungen zur kulturkunde*, p. 67.

intelligence, words and relevant religious rituals to persuade them to let him be their leader. To resist external attacks, they agreed to share their mystical and religious duties with the most powerful among them. Today, unlike at its beginning, the economic position of the *Fo* is not too different from that of his peers. His "compound is slightly more imposing than those of important lineage heads."⁷⁶ Meta' society at the beginning, was composed of scattered, nuclear, polygamous and patrilineal extended family compounds, which were brought under the sacral rule of a new comer.

Lekemenia, the ancestor-founder of the Bangwa Kingship lineage, was a prince from Bandrefam. He failed to succeed his father but since he was a skilful hunter, he was able to establish himself in a rich area among the fragmented Bangwa community. He did not reach the level of head of lineage. It was after him that his successor, Lekopup, ascended to the leadership role during religious celebrations. The existing family heads religiously gave him the right to sit with them. Gaining more and more influence among the heads of lineages, he became powerful as he proved to be charismatic and he was spiritually unchallenged. He could control the power in sacred places and could perform some mystical or magic rituals. He became the principal ritual performer among the most influential heads of lineages. He was the first in Bangwa to religiously ennoble a *Wafu* and a *Kuipou*, with whom he shared power, as it is known in the Grassfields sacral rule. It was Dola his heir who unified Bangwa by forcibly appropriating the residence of the oldest lineage to build the actual renovated palace.⁷⁷ The heads of lineages accepted to be united through a religio-political association. Each one kept his mystical and magical practices secret but was forced to

⁷⁶ Chilver, and Kaberry. *Traditional Bamenda*. Buea Printing Press. 1967. p. 34.

⁷⁷ Pradelle de la Tour, Charles Henri, *Ethnopsychanalyse du peuple Bangwa*, Paris. Karthala, 1974, p. 15.

share them with the one who overcame them by enforcing a political and administrative dimension in the primal lineage head authority. They submitted, assembled and surrendered themselves to Dola, so that they could hold the highest-ranking titles in the *fondom*.

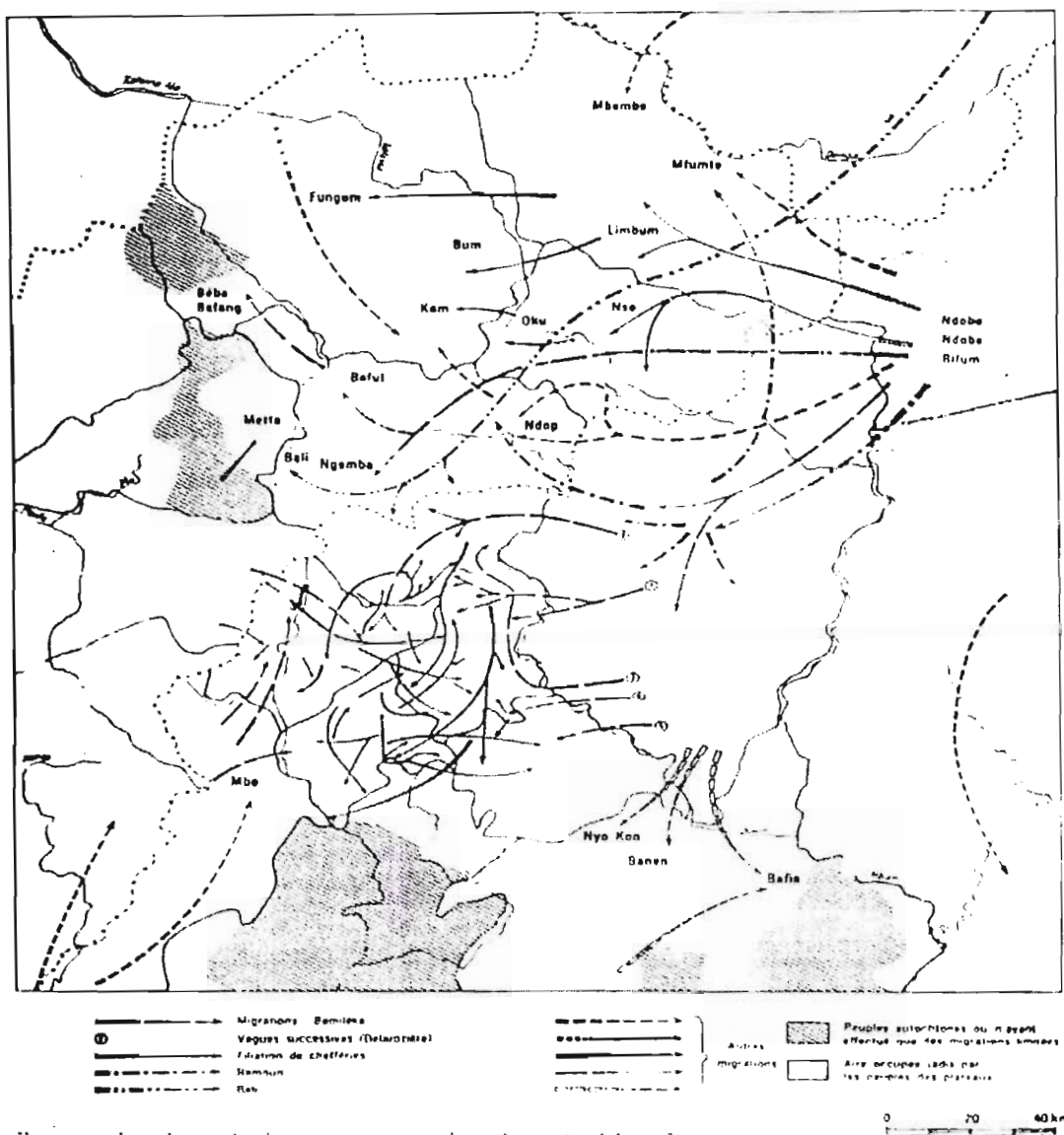
Nkwi, talking about the foundation and the extension of the Kom kingdom, confirmed the formation of the Grassfields states. The Kom palace appears to have been established earlier, before the arrival of the founders of the Kom dynasty. According to oral tradition, the nucleus of the palace was formed by *Nd-Nalli*. After a peaceful settlement, the *Nd-Nalli* moved to another place leaving the kingly compound of *Laikom* to the powerful new comers in Kom...In the 19th century, Kom began to extend its borders through wars and the influx of refugees from neighbouring ethnic groups fleeing from Fulani raids, *Fo Yu* began to make his influence felt in the area through a war of expansion. He brought a number of small chiefdoms under his control and imposed Kom hegemony over them. Four of the southern chiefdoms -Mejang, Mbengkas, Baiso and Baicham- sought the protection of Yu against Bafut harassment. King Yu readily accepted them and incorporated them into his kingdom.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Nkui, Paul, *Traditional government and social change*, p. 17.

III- Migration and the shaping of new identities of people

1- Movement of population in the Grassfields Fondoms

SCHEMA DE LA MISE EN PLACE DU PEUPLEMENT



Champaud, J., Atlas régional, Ouest II, 29

Generally, for the nearly 300 Grassfields *Fondoms*, the population grew with people coming from neighbouring groups. Most of them had failed to inherit their fathers' positions and were in search of better lands and titles. Once welcomed by the ruler of

the host *fondom* and his high-ranking retainers, the new comers could become the new masters if they were strong enough. On the other hand, if they were not strong enough, they would have to pay allegiance to the welcoming ruler and could be established nearby as distinguished noblemen where they would become founders of patrilineal family. Their property had to be handed to only one male child. All males non-inheritors had to find themselves fathers without any property. They were obliged to leave their parental home and seek better status elsewhere in the same *fondom* if permitted by the custodian of the palace, or in another *fondom* if they were welcomed there and if they could easily satisfy their economic and political ambitions.

"The Grassfields, which extended from the highlands of the northern province to the western province, was for centuries the scene of a movement of small groups of peoples and the diffusion of institutions and material culture."⁷⁹

The real history of an "independent Grassfields kingdom" is the compilation of the histories of different families. Inhabitants of the same area have different foundation stories. Until today, colonial experience has limited the history of a whole group headed by one person to that of the royal family. Though the story of the royal family seems to provide an adequate account of the political history of the community, it is still far from being the general history of the people. Jean-Pierre Warnier, one of the dedicated specialists on Grassfields studies, had discovered the same reality and would write:

"Les populations du haut Plateau sont animées de mouvement en tous sens. Les chefferies ne cessent d'échanger leurs populations. La plupart des généalogies remontent finalement à une origine locale ou à un groupe voisin...toutes les traditions orales sur les migrations des notables ont une signification politique: elles connotent soit la légitimité du pouvoir du Notable à l'intérieur de son lignage ou du Fon dans sa chefferie, soit des alliances politiques extérieures...elles expriment la distribution locale et régionale du pouvoir. (The population of the high plateau had been constantly on the move. The

⁷⁹ Chilver and Kaberry. *Traditional Bamenda*. Buea, 1967, p. 27.

Fondoms (Kingdoms) never stopped exchanging their population. Large numbers of genealogies traced their origin locally or from a neighbouring group. Oral tradition about the ruling class migration history carries political meaning: It is to legitimise the leading position of that notable in the lineage, or that of the *Fo* in his chiefdom, or to explain external political alliances. These oral traditions explain the regional distribution of power".⁸⁰

Wars were, of course, another way of increasing the *Fo*'s power, the size of his population and of his territory with the integration of war captives and the acquisition of new lands.

"Captives taken in war were brought to the king: women did not become royal wives but were given out to notables, while the younger men often became servants to the king and, if well-behaved, were eventually given a plot of land and a title".⁸¹

With the existing population, the incoming people, the distribution of land to males non-inheritors by the central power, the buying of valuable personalities from the neighbouring states and the incorporation of war prisoners into the society, there was a randomly detribalised population. On the Grassfields Mountains, we can affirm with Hurault that:

"La société...peut être définie comme un mode de groupement d'individus irremédialement détribalisés. (Society could be described as a group of entirely detribalised individuals)".⁸²

For a period of more than three thousand years, people of the Grassfields Mountains underwent a series of conquests, resistances, submissions and migrations. Some people

⁸⁰ Warnier, Jean-Pierre, "Histoire du peuplement et genèse des paysages dans l'Ouest Camerounais", in *Journal of African History*, 25 (1984), pp. 395-410.

⁸¹ Chilver and Kaberry, *Traditional Bamenda*, p. 31.

⁸² Huraut, *La structure sociale des Bamiléké*. Paris, Mouton et Co, 1962.

went round and it is possible to find cases where some came back to the same place they had left one hundred and seventy years before.⁸³

2- Strangers' headquarters: *Jiomghuo*

In Bandjoun, Baham, Bangou and Bali, there were locations inhabited by newcomers called *Jiomghuo* accordingly in Bandjoun. All recent arrivals who were capable of performing wonders or miracles and who sought personally to become Bandjoun subjects, were directed by the *Fo* to settle at *Jiomghuo* which literally means; the strangers' quarters. Eighty percent of powerful ritualists in Bandjoun lived in *Jiomghuo*. Generally charismatic, they are the specialists of *Ke*, which is a religious purification ceremony organised every other year. We shall discuss this fully later on. Bernard Maillard, who was surprised by the concentration of these specialists in one place commented as follows:

*“En tant que province des étrangers et résidence des spécialistes du ke laisse supposer que la manipulation du ke revient à un groupe, représentant, peut-être, le noyau de la chefferie et que les autres habitants du pays sont des envahisseurs dont ils dépendent sur le plan mystique. (Being a province of strangers and the residence of specialists of Ke, one can suppose that the management of Ke belonged to a group representing the nucleus of the chiefdom and could mean that other inhabitants are invaders who depend on their mystic power)”*⁸⁴

⁸³ In 1965, there was gunshot at Kefo in Bandjoun. It is acknowledged that people of Kefo were from Bamun and they were bilingual, speaking Bandjoun and Bamun. The government District Officer in Bandjoun was a son of the Kefo people who had refused to migrate three generations ago. When the District Officer came to settle the political struggle between the losing party UPC and the ruling party UC later to become UNC, he asked them: What brought your ancestors here? They answered: war. The District Officer continued. What is killing you now? They replied: war. And he said: Go back to your original country. There is peace there. One third of the population volunteered to go back.

Interview with Tagne Tega' (69), Bandjoun-Bem, July 21st 1999 (16h-18h).

⁸⁴ Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion, les structures socio-religieuses de la chefferie de Bandjoun*, Bern, Peter Lang, 1984, 1983, p. 166.

In fact, they were ritual performers from neighbouring *fondoms* where they had not been satisfied with their political and economic position. They did not come together as a group, but operated individually. When one came claiming to be in possession of mystical power, or when he knew how to perform magic and was willing to strengthen the power of the Bandjoun *fondom*, he was invited to demonstrate it in front of selected people at a chosen place. If it worked, then the performer was invited to teach some three people his technique. If the three chosen people succeeded in attaining the same level of performance, then the ruler was also initiated into that cosmic or mystic ritual. During this time the newcomer would be living with a *Jiomghuo* inhabitant chosen by the *Fo*. If the practice turned out to be new, the newcomer was then given land to settle on by a decision of five persons: the *Fo*, the three trainees and his host.⁸⁵ His children were expected to be taught the same technique for continuity. The *Jiomghuo* like any other quarters in Bandjoun was constituted by individuals of different origins and lineages living together for the well-being of the palace. One's position at the palace indicated which kind of relation one ought to have with one's neighbours and it also determined one's reciprocal attitude towards them. This is how on the Grassfields Mountains the community became homogenous and detribalised. Everyone was first of all related to the *Fo* and then to the palace.

3- The *Fo* or the sacral ruler as the Pivotal centre of the society

Sacral rule had as one of its purposes the integration of newcomers. Rulers had no reason to enslave them or to sell them into slavery. It is believed that every lineage

⁸⁵ Our informants required anonymity for their names, the place and the dates of interviews.

has religious and magical powers useful for the well-being of the whole community.⁸⁶

Each subject is related to the ruler who is the pivotal centre of the society. If he is not your parent, one of your parents has been his retainer. He is the only one who gives credible and honoured names as well as land. As powerful invaders.

"Ils se sont emparés de toutes les terres, reléguant au second plan les premiers maîtres de la terre à qui ils rétrocédaient le droit d'exploiter quelques parcelles contre une véritable allégeance. Ils ont respecté les langues et les coutumes locales mais le commandement et la possession des terres leur revenaient. (They got hold of the land, pushing back the original owners of the land, allowing them to use any piece of it as they showed signs of submission. They respected local language and customs, but authority and land possession belonged to them)".⁸⁷

The ruler could marry the daughter of a simple citizen or that of a commoner and give birth to a noble person. The fourth or fifth generation of a prince could be taken to the palace as servants. There was continuous renewal of title and room for brave citizens as the *fondom* invented palace associations for the welfare of the community. The *Fo* determined the promotion of new leaders and the respect for senior title-holders. More than 75 % of the population were related to the palace since the king could be a relative or a family member could have been serving in the palace.⁸⁸ There was no established family without some association with the palace and the secret societies. The *Fo* ruled over a group of detribalised individuals, whose main ambition was to share some power with the decision makers in the community, that is, the *Fo*, no matter where they came from.

“Before a subject enters the meeting room at the palace, he swears saying: I am here for the *fondom* and the *Fo*. My mind is for the *fondom* and the *Fo*. My heart is for the *fondom* and the *Fo*. My strength is for the *fondom* and the *Fo*. I

⁸⁶ Hurault, *La structure sociale des Bamiléké*, p. 22.

⁸⁷ Ghomsi, Emmanuel, “Organisation et fonctions de résidence royales. p. 49.

⁸⁸ “Les simples habitants...dans certaines chefferies comme Batié, représentent moins de 25% de la population” Hurault, *La structure sociale des Bamiléké*, p. 22.

forget about my problems. I forget about my family. I forget about my wives and children. I forget about myself. The *fondom* and my *Fo* only matter. Then he bends down and goes in for the meeting. If it is the first time, one makes sacrifice to the national shrine”.⁸⁹

The individual exists according to his relationship with the sacral rule. This relationship can be geographic, physical, psychological, mystic, social, religious and judicial as Maillard discovered:

*“De plus, une relation extrêmement étroite lie l’homme à la chefferie. L’homme n’existe que dans la mesure où elle se situe géographiquement, physiquement, psychologiquement, socialement et religieusement et pourquoi ne pas le dire surtout mystiquement par rapport à la chefferie; car il y a une unité dans la complexité de l’homme et de son univers. (More than that, an extremely close relationship links someone to the *fondom* (palace). One’s level of existence is judged according to how far he is geographically, physically, psychologically, socially, religiously and mystically attached to the palaces; because there is a complex relationship between an individual and his environment).”*⁹⁰

The *Fo*, the conqueror-leader, personalised the community, the government, the rituals, the gods and the spiritual powers. Once he had launched his rule, the *fondom* showed a remarkable continuity. The system of government was rife with demographic and territorial dissatisfaction, and was organised to safeguard its own interests. Leaders who settled internal matters were separated and re-established on a different site, but they all participated in one association or the other in the palace different from that of their father. The matrilineal ties were not apparent but discreet. Members of the same maternal lineage could belong to distinct *fondoms*. The maternal ancestors were much more active in the life of the Grassfields person than the paternal ancestors. But the possibility of sharing power in the society pushed the brave and ambitious subjects to care more about their relationship with the palace and with their fathers.

⁸⁹ Interview with Fezzeu, Bandenkop Palace, January 20th 1998.

⁹⁰ Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, p.78.

From what had been said on history and migration and the shaping of people's identity, Grassfields sacral communities were in existence about 3000 years ago.⁹¹ At the moment, there are around 300 *fondoms* forming the Grassfields area. The process of the formation of one political group involved strong hunters and ambitious people in search of new land and new properties to re-establish themselves and their families. Movements of people in every direction as explained above, through tribal wars, cunning and negotiation contributed also to the establishment of the communities under study. There is no evidence of complete suppression of the conquered people, but the organisation and the restructuring of the society have been achieved by the conqueror retaining the position of sacral ruler *Fo* while the conquered take part in the power sharing by becoming kingmakers, members of one of the secret societies, or by holding any other position which helps maintain the sacral rule. The incoming leader and his followers dispossessed the first owners and became masters of the land and the main religious and political figures. They respected the local language, customs and religion but took control of the land and also assumed religious leadership. The *Fo* would give the original occupants the right to own a piece of land or to participate in the political or religious life only when they were completely loyal to him. Recent developments in the modern politics of the area have not changed the pattern of *fondom* as established by historical events. However, political influences have been introduced into the sacral ruling system through the enstoolment and destoolment of sacral rulers during the colonial period and thereafter, whenever the new modern administration felt it should interfere.

⁹¹ See p. 57.

IV- Custodians of sacral rule

A- The Fo and the Kingmakers

The kingmakers are those who share power with the *Fo* in the *fondom*. The conquerors in most cases were fewer in number than the conquered.

“When a minority ethnic group conquers a vast space, peopled by many ethnicities, the empire becomes a political necessity, because the numerical ratio between conquerors and conquered is too unfavourable, a universalistic ideological superstructure is then born and develops in order to assimilate the divergent peoples who cannot be destroyed”.⁹²

However, in the special case of the Grassfields, conquerors as well as conquered, participated equally in leadership. They were called the *Mkam*.⁹³ When *Fo* Nchare⁹⁴ performed his first ritual while dedicating the conquered land to the God who helped him, and established his palace in Fouban, the local leaders shared some powers with him and they played an important role in the enthronement of the Bamun *Fo* and in the daily life of the palace. Dugast and Jeffreys were far from the truth when they said that in Fouban, Nchare proclaimed himself ruler.⁹⁵ No one makes himself *Fo*. Mfochive acknowledged that after a military conquest, to bring the conquered population into a centralised administrative unit required negotiations and cooperation.

“L’assimilation couronnée de succès de la population conquise dépendait, dans une certaine mesure, de sa coopération et de son consentement à reconnaître un roi comme leur chef. Le caractère sacré du roi était en partie responsable de l’acceptation volontaire progressive de son autorité. Les insignes magico-religieux, les symboles du rang de chef étaient souvent pris aux chefs conquis. (The successful assimilation of conquered people depended largely on the conquered’s cooperation and consent to acknowledge the strong

⁹² Diop, Cheikh Anta, *Civilisation or Barbarism: An authentic anthropology*, London, Lawrence Hills Books, 1991. P 133.

⁹³ *Mkam* is the plural of *kam*, which carries an idea of silence and activity. *Cue gae kam*: keep quiet. *Kam* literally means. attack it or start doing something. They represent the silent but real and strongly active power behind the *Fo*.

⁹⁴ Dugast, “People of the Central Cameroons”, p. 11.

⁹⁵ Ford, Daryll, *Ethnographic survey of Africa*, p. 12.

leader as their chief (*Fo*). The sacral nature of the king (*Fo*) was the outcome of a deliberate and progressive acceptance of his authority”.⁹⁶

This appropriation of ruling power was the result of the conquered people’s participation in the political and spiritual life of the *fondom*. The original knowledge of cosmic forces and rituals that impart mystical power and, therefore, religious duties and spiritual responsibilities, belong to the people. Those people played a significant role in the enthronement of a *Fo*. It was when they had successfully initiated the *Fo* into their own rites that they accepted him as ruler. At Njimom, the local people ran away but at Fouban the local people participated in the enthronement of Nchare. If local people had accepted negotiations at Njimom, Nchare would have been *Fo* there, but he was made *Fo* at Fouban because after the war, the conquered people were hospitable and went in for negotiation.⁹⁷ Margaret Littlewood reported the remarks of Egerton about the foundation of Bangangte in the following words:

“The old rulers whom Nganteu⁹⁸ found were not entirely cast out or even completely deposed, so that there came into existence a dual system of sub-chiefship shared by the descendants of the original rulers of the country and the descendants of Nganteu’s people”.⁹⁹

A Grassfields palace is the meeting point of two leading forces, one from the people and the other from the royal family under the control of one head supported by a clear hierarchy. Secret societies can be divided into two following the same pattern: royals and ordinary people. If one enters the palace through people-based societies, he will never be part of certain associations, but on the other hand, if someone starts his social

⁹⁶ Mfochive, Joseph. *L’Ethique Chrétienne*, p. 46.

⁹⁷ Rudolph Peshandon (84), Interview, Bamun-Fouban, May 8th 1999 (10h-14h).

⁹⁸ Nganteu is the name of the founder of Bangangte *fondom* and literally means “the one who rejected every act of submission”.

⁹⁹ Littlewood, Margarite, “Bamun and Bamileke” in, Forde, Daryll (ed). *Ethnographic survey of Africa*, p. 94.

ascension and enters the palace as a member of the royal family, there are people's associations at the palace which he will never know about it. Only one prince at a time will be eligible for membership of both royal and people associations and that prince is the *Fo*.

“When the *Fo* is absent, it is not his *Kuipou* (his deputy from royal blood) who will act. it is his *Nwala* (prime minister from the common people) also called *Chinda* who acts on his behalf”.¹⁰⁰

In 1937 Rev Albert surveyed the secret societies in Bandjoun,¹⁰¹ and outlined the conditions of membership, with more details than Chilver and Kaberry had given for Bansa', Bamali, Bali and Widikum. Littlewood classified them according to their religious, military, administrative, judicial and social orientation.¹⁰² Maillard, 38 years later, organised Albert's work and presented the secret societies according to meeting days and their political, mystical and social functions.¹⁰³ Making use of their work, when we organise the associations in the palace according to the original source of power,¹⁰⁴ it is clear that there is a continual tension between royals and common people. Those with no royal blood, full of political ambitions to share more power in the *fondom* balanced the aristocratic tendency of the royal descent, under the sovereignty of the *Fo* who is there for the promotion of both groups. The *Fo* alone embodies the two sources of power: People and royals.

With regard to power sharing, there is one group of people who are nearly equal to the *Fo*. They appeared sometime more concerned with communal affairs than the *Fo*.

¹⁰⁰NGnie, Kamga, (69), Bandjoun, January 13th 1999, (9h-17h).

¹⁰¹ Albert, Bandjoun: Croyance, coutume et folklore, pp. 34-35.

¹⁰² Littlewood, Margarite, “Bamun and Bamileke”, pp. 110-114.

¹⁰³ Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, pp. 94-101.

¹⁰⁴ Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, annexe no 2.

They are the nine or the seven with whom the founder of the *fondom* launched the group as an independent entity. They have no special meeting day. In *Ghomala'* they are called, *Mkam Vu'u* (the 9 notables).¹⁰⁵ Each one of them can initiate a gathering of all with the ruler, though. usually, it is the ruler, who takes the lead to convene a meeting when everything is normal. However, a member of the group can call the meeting when there have been signs of abuse of power, open misconduct or blasphemy by the *Fo*. This often leads to blame, followed by abdication, exile or death of the *Fo*. Jeffrey, Dugast, Warnier, Chilver and Kaberry rightly called them kingmakers, because they are the only ones who transform a Prince into a *Fo*. So the *Mkam vu'u* are the only ones who can transform the *Fo* they had made into something else: a prisoner or a condemned man. Unless the acting *Fo* dies, abdicates or is deposed, the kingmakers cannot enthrone another *Fo*. Those who enthrone the *Fo* have the right to depose him. In the event of grave misconduct, he could be killed or exiled.

Kingmakers have been the objects of many studies alongside the sacral ruler (*Fo*). Any work on the Grassfields social organisation mentions them, as they are instrumental in the enstoolment as well as the destoolment of *Fo*. Each one of them controls privately a mystical force he shares with the ruler only during his enthronement. Each one can retrieve his mystical power from the *Fo*. Contrary to the newcomers who are obliged to teach the ruler how to use and claim back that power, the *Fo* depends on the *Mkam Vu'u* who can claim back the cosmic and mystical protection they give him.

“En considérant la royauté divine comme une manœuvre de l'aristocratie pour augmenter son pouvoir au détriment du roi, on ne comprend pas que dans les monarchies sans état, bien que le roi soit

¹⁰⁵ Ghomala' is the Bandjoun language adopted as lingua franca by a group of Grassfields communities.

privé d'une partie de son pouvoir, la divination garantit la permanence du système (considering the sacral rule as a tool in the hands of members of the ruling class to reduce the power of the sacral ruler. people do not understand that in stateless monarchies, divination ensures the stability of the system)".¹⁰⁶

Colonial agents helped the Grassfields rulers to recover this power from the *Mkam vu'u* and to become holders of all traditional powers in the modern administration. Intentionally or not, colonisation victimised the *Mkam vu'u* who lost their public influence. However, the traditional institution maintained them as the strength behind the *Fo*. Their participation in palace associations continued and they are deeply involved in religious matters for the well-being of people. Usually, it is possible to know everything about the ruler but it is difficult to know everything about the *Mkam vu'u* and their associations.

B- Secret Associations

Anthropologists, historians and missionaries in their struggle to understand Grassfields secret associations, agreed with this statement by Littlewood:

“there is no adequate information about Bamileke (French appellation of Grassfields) men's associations or secret societies, though it appears that they are of extreme importance to the political structure of the *fondom*. This is not brought out sufficiently in the literature and there is also a lack of information on their working and internal organisation”.¹⁰⁷

In the secret society, new members who have become *Mkam*¹⁰⁸ are taught how to be silent and active at the same time. Religious training requires silence and demonstration. Certain knowledge is demonstrated in silence. Spiritual knowledge is to

¹⁰⁶ Iniesta, Ferran, *L'univers africain*, pp. 120-130.

¹⁰⁷ Littlewood, Margarite, “Bamun and Bamileke”, p. 110.

¹⁰⁸ See note no 103 on the meaning of the word “Mkam”.

be applied in silence for others to see and appreciate the extent of one's link to God. Silence is not always a sign of ignorance. As for the palace associations, the more said publicly, the more ignorant one appears. Unless silence becomes part of the academic enterprise, access to what goes on at the sacral ruling system of the Grassfields is difficult. Silence is not synonymous with secrecy. Here, silence means a pre-condition to knowledge and post-condition to initiation. Silence is necessary after initiation. Palace associations are training centres for people and royals in all kinds of religious experiences.

There is no secret among the members. Primarily religious, palace associations promote spiritual attitudes, build connections with the invisible on earth, train in the exploration of cosmic forces, and introduce members to the worship of deities, sanctuary service and prayer to the Supreme God. Secret associations at the palace are based on the two sources of power in the *fondom* which are the ordinary-title people and the royals. Societies of both trends are under the leadership of influential noblemen and noblewomen. Their services at the palace can be the stepping-stone to a high position in future because discipline, service and obedience are tools for the acquisition of political influence and economic position. When one has access to a position, it means that one has become a member of an association and one's real place depends on personal talents and individual personality. One can be at the forefront till another member overshadows one's personality.

In secret societies, there may be a political debate when a member dies and a decision is to be made as to which one of his sons should succeed him. The debate could also take the form of the introduction of a newcomer, a consultation on the

launching of a war, organisation of festivals and funerals, a discussion about a social project brought in by the ruler, appreciation and amendment of a member's conduct and that of the *Fo*, swearing an oath to the association shrine after a consensus has been reached, and sharing the food and drinks a new member had brought. These are possible items on the agenda in secret associations. But it is noteworthy that next to religion, commerce is the activity of the palace associations as every Grassfields *fondom* has a market located at the entrance of the *Fo*'s domain.

From the periphery, the death of an influential member can open up a new position in the association. Position of power in the association are highly mobile, depending on the families and persons who occupy them. These positions are not the preserve of aristocrats but are held by the *Mkam*, since they are a function of religious mandate and personal character rather than financial clout. They reflect the success or failure of the *Fo* who is held responsible for the well-being and misery of the people as for the prosperity and the misfortune of the *Fondom*. "*Fo be e fo u lu bi mkam*" (*Fo* is unshakeable because of *Mkam*). Thus one has to be careful in dealing with them. Secret associations provide the arena for ambitious people to assume power and occupy high positions in the sacral ruling system as far as power sharing is concerned. There are two ways of joining an association; by succession or by social recognition.

a- Succession: (*Nae tsu dyie- Zudie*)

The last words of a father are very powerful. The last will of a parent can be either a blessing or a curse and is religiously executed. It is the starting point of everything the head of family will initiate after his death and the basis of family life.

The ground on which the head of a household is buried is believed to have the power to bless those who honoured him and to curse those who opposed his will. The heir in such a case would remain thankful to his father and to his relatives who helped him to become the family head. In his book, Hurault¹⁰⁹ reported the case of Mr Nze Mboungyi, a monogamous member of the ruling class of the Batie *fondom*, who died around 1934. His son, Tembouchue, richer and more influential than his father, owned more fertile land and had many wives. He abandoned his father's compound after the latter's death, in favour of life in Batie *fondom*. In 1954 when he fell sick, a diviner told him that his illness was the result of his dead father's anger against him. After his recovery, Tembouchue appointed his son Kegnwe to rebuild his father's house and tend the land.

It is believed that when a child abuses the wealth and social status of the departed parent, he must suffer a curse from the ancestors. But this has little impact on the heir who has been appointed by the dead. The head of the family is expected to improve and to extend the wealth and title of his father. As far as the social hierarchy is concerned, he is encouraged to achieve more than his father did in order to give more honour to the name of the lineage.

*"Son devoir est d'assurer la perpétuation du lignage, donc de ne pas diviser les terres les femmes et l'argent du défunt. (His duty is to ensure the perpetuation of the lineage, therefore, there was to be disposal of the land, women and money of the departed)".*¹¹⁰

Like a new manager, the successor has to take care of the dead man's property, as he would have done if he were alive. The death of the head of the family should not stop

¹⁰⁹ Hurault, *Les structures sociales des Bamiléké*, p. 51.

¹¹⁰ Fokam Kamga Paul, in *Fo Kamga II*, tape recorded, Bandjoun, 1975.

the growth of the lineage. The future of the family depends on the new leader. The selected child has no choice but to accept. He cannot refuse. He must succeed his father.

"Refuser une succession c'est faire injure à la mémoire du défunt. Or dans un pays où le culte des morts et l'adoration des crânes est un devoir pour les vivants, personne ne risquerait de faire injure à la mémoire d'un mort. (Refusal of succession is considered an insult to the memory of the departed. In an area where the cult of the dead and the veneration of skulls are an obligation for the living, nobody would dare insult the memory of the departed)."

If the position carries with it wealth and influence like that of the *Fo*, and the designated successor turns it down, one of his brothers will go for it. The case of Kopto and Tueto in the *fondom* of Bandjoun is an illustration. Tueto was seized and brought to *La'kam* for the 9 weeks' initiation. A few days later, he sent for his brother Kopto. When the latter came, Tueto put the royal cloths and *cagoule* he was wearing on him and ran away. This was how Kopto became sacral ruler in Bandjoun. It is possible to accept to sit on the throne and then ask a brother to hold the office and to lead the family or the *fondom*.

b- Social recognition

The social and economic structures in Grassfields Cameroon allowed every citizen to own property and to aspire to a leadership position. This contradicts what Bayart said about African societies as Warnier before us observed that

"L'éthos de la munificence, dans lequel Bayart... voit une des caractéristiques principales de la politique africaine du ventre fait mauvais ménage avec l'éthos Bamiléké de la notabilité conquise par l'épargne. (The ethos of patronage in which Bayart sees one of the major characteristics of African politics of the belly, has no place in the Bamileke ethos of nobility that one achieves through saving)".¹¹¹

¹¹¹ Warnier, Jean-Pierre. *L'esprit d'entreprise au Cameroun*, p. 29.

The Grassfields society is hierarchical and inequality is therefore obvious. The interesting fact is that apparent losers, who failed to inherit from their father, are much more willing to enhance their status in the *fondom* themselves.

*“La chefferie ne veut pas se vider de ses forces vives. Elle a encore besoin de ses entrepreneurs-notables pour assurer sa reproduction symbolique... les sociétés Bamiléké produisent une catégorie de cadets qui se rebellent d'autant moins contre le principe de la notabilité qu'ils souhaitent y accéder. Elles produisent d'autre part une catégorie de notables dont elles encouragent et légitiment le travail d'accumulation. (The fondom is not willing to lose its manpower. It is in need of entrepreneurial notables for its symbolic reproduction... Bamileke societies produce a category of men who do not rebel against the principle of succession to nobility, as they are rather willing to become part of it. Fondoms produced a category of notables who have been successfully challenged to legally accumulate wealth)”.*¹¹²

Such people among the *Mkam* are called *Sa'ssi mo* (one who germinates from the ground). Artists, builders, warriors, healers, blacksmiths and, very often, traders start by investing the capital they receive from their parents. As each becomes successful, his colleagues praise him and the relatives are informed. He first gives something to his parents, starting with his mother. The father usually receives less than what the child presents discreetly to his mother. The father would share with his friends and neighbours what he receives while telling them stories about his son. One of the friends would approach the son and propose to present him to the *Fo*. The child would be requested to discuss it with his father, and if it is agreed, he would go to his mother who would take him to his uterine relatives. He would then fulfil the family requirements and go through *Kem*¹¹³ and *Tseke*.¹¹⁴

¹¹² Warnier, Jean-Pierre. *L'Esprit d'entreprise au Cameroun*, p. 72.

¹¹³ *Kem* is the naming ceremony of a male born.

¹¹⁴ *Tseke* is the family ceremony one organises before participating to *Ke* at a *Wumbo*'s compound or at the palace.

After these family ceremonies during which people drink and eat at the expense of the candidate, he can go to the *Hyala'* (palace area with its activities) and request for a position and title in the *fondom*. At a certain point in the process of occupying a position within the palace hierarchy, he is supposed to come back to the family to be enthroned among his relatives in order to sit with the leaders in the *fondom*. Climbing the social hierarchy depends based on economic power.

“Ces paiements sont faits en premier lieu aux parents puis au chef et aux notables, qui festoient aux frais du récipiendaire (These payments are made to the parents, to the Fo and to the notables who celebrate at the expense of the candidate)”.¹¹⁵

African sacral rulers can confer titles on their subjects and these are incentives to the hardworking to invest in trading, building, marrying many wives and acquiring titles.

C- Sacral rule and commerce: the traders

Members of a secret society provide their male children with capital raised from their financial activities within the association. Any success from this seed-money encourages the child to support the *fondom* and to join at least one secret society.

“Les sociétaires discutent et amendent ces projets, proposent aides ou participations... au pays Bamiléké et Bamenda, la pratique des tontines est largement antérieure à la conquête coloniale. Les économies de l'Ouest sont des économies marchandes et monétarisées depuis plusieurs siècles... la pratique des tontines dans un contexte ascétique, moralisateur et sacralisé bénéficie d'un enracinement historique solide et profond. (Members of the society discuss and amend projects, propose help and participation... In the Bamileke and Bamenda areas, putting money together to make it grow through commerce had been in practice a long time before the colonial conquest. West Cameroon economies have been commercial and monetary for many centuries...the practice of credit in a moral, ascetic and sacral context has solid and deep historical roots)”.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ Warnier, Jean-Pierre. Histoire du peuplement et genèse des paysages. p. 72.

¹¹⁶ Warnier, Jean-Pierre. *L'esprit d'entreprise au Cameroun*, p. 83.

At the palace there is an area reserved for members of various associations and an other area open to everybody. Everyone is expected to go to the *Hyala*¹¹⁷ as either a member of the secret society, a trader, a dancer or a spectator. The market plays a significant role in the life of people from the commoners and high-ranking nobles to the ruler. Children, young people, adults, elderly parents, men and women interact at the market place. At the market place, there is no social discrimination whatsoever. It is a place where people from near and far meet to sell, buy, beg and converse. Commenting on the Grassfields communities, Engelbert Mveng said:

*“Ce qui caractérise ce peuple, c’est à la fois une ardeur au travail qui ne compte guerre beaucoup de concurrent sous les tropiques, un esprit d’économie et de prévoyance qui ne va sans une certaine âpreté au gain, une intelligence pratique rare. Individualiste, les Bamileke vivent en petites propriétés dispersées sur la montagne: les cases sont séparées: il n’y a pas de sarés. Chaque propriété, chaque case parfois, est entourée de son jardin, de son verger et de ses plantations. (These people are characterised by hard work unrivalled by any in the tropics: economically astute, they have a clear sense of foresight with a strong thirst for profit and possess a rare practical intelligence. Individualistic, the Bamileke live in small compounds scattered on the mountain; the houses are separated; they do not have a dwelling for all. Each compound and sometimes each house is surrounded by a fence which protects one’s garden, and one’s plantations)”*¹¹⁸

Membership of a secret society depends on wealth, hard work and good services. Marriage is based on wealth because the negotiations with in-laws cost a lot. Misfortune is the sign of laziness and ignorance in commercial transactions. Economic power is a prerequisite of leadership position in the *fondom*, since money opens the doors of secret societies.¹¹⁹ Long distance trade in other *fondoms* may help a person to move from a lower position to a higher one. There are no slaves at market places but

¹¹⁷ Literally, *Hyala* is where people go to show their wealth so they can be promoted in a secret association. It is also literally the central place which supports the whole village. It is just a word for the *Fo*'s compound and that of the original *Mkam Vu'u*, the nine who founded the village.

¹¹⁸ Mveng, Engelbert, *Histoire du Cameroun*, Paris, 1963, p. 227.

¹¹⁹ Njapa Victor (85), Bangangte, April 16th 1999, (9h-10h30), Head of lineage and retired clergyman.

people who are introduced to a particular commercial sector by a mentor are expected to prosper in future. enjoy autonomy and support him when he grows old and frail. There is no collective ownership of wealth and titles. Grassfields people are individualists. Each person has his own compound, his own garden, his own property, and his own title. They are deeply detribalised but united by the palace, the language, maternal relationship and paternal ancestors.

Individualism is so developed among the Grassfields that their language provides a wide range of “collective personal pronouns”.¹²⁰ Individualism, mercantile spirit, thirsts for wealth and profit are aspects of pre-colonial Grassfields culture. Every subject has a chance to become prominent under the protection of the *Fo* and his people. Grassfields realities are exceptions to what Iniesta said about African rulers:

“Le pouvoir africain n’amasse habituellement pas de bien, mais permet à de groupes sociaux experts dans les échanges d’accumuler des excédents. (The African notion of power does not favour the amassing of a lot of wealth but allows certain social groups which are experts in trading to accumulate excess).¹²¹

In pre-colonial Grassfields, the struggle for titles overshadowed the economic trend which blossomed at the coming of European rule. Colonial experience clarified what was the real place of commoners in the old society. Trade at the coming of European rule was so competitive that neither the German nor the Greek and Lebanese, nor the

¹²⁰ The English personal pronouns: “we”, “you” and “they” as collective pronouns, are not enough to express the Grassfields reality. “We” is translated as *wokpae*, which means all of us. But *wokpae* is only one of the multiple expressions of “we”. One has *wokpu*, (me and you). If you are more than two, the other members of the group are not part of what you are projecting. *Wokpaevu* stands for “him” and “we”. *Wokpaewap* is used for “they” and “we” which implies that those people near us are not part of the project. As far as social gatherings are concerned, Grassfields people are individualistic. They have reached the point of putting divisions in a collective entity. What we say of the personal pronoun “we” is valid for “you” (plural) which can be *Wo* (you), *wopoapu* (you and they nearby), *wopoayu* (you and him or you and her), *wopoawap* (you and they far from here)... The same thing can be applied to *Wap* (they), *wappuawo* (they and you- plural when the concerned people are near), *wappuapu* (they and you- plural when the concerned are far), *wappuawoe* (they and you singular), *wappuawap* (they and they).

¹²¹ Iniesta, Ferran, *L’univers africain*, pp. 102-140

French, British and Indians had ever established a successful trading company in the Grassfields. Economic independence through commerce was the area of constant struggle between the Grassfields and the colonialists.

D- Untitled subjects

In any given human society it appears that the exercise of power is an expression of social inequality among people. The counterpart of power is subordination, inferiority or low position in the social organisation. The lowest level of subordination is slavery. This is true for rigid and despotic societies where power is exercised from top to bottom. There are societies where power is exercised from more than one point in all kinds of directions. As explained above in the discussion on sacral rule in Grassfields, though there is a top, there is no bottom. Only the position of the *Fo* and the position of the *Kam Vu'u* are fixed. However, if the office is fixed the occupants are not fixed. They are expected to have a dynamic role as the *Fo* has power over the people while kingmakers have power over him. There is constant renewal in the whole society and one's position depends on personality, good services, individual ambition and hard work. Consequently, laziness, misconduct and lethargy have the effect of keeping one in the lower position in the society. In the Grassfields, there is a random interpersonal traffic of influence. Influence is not channelled in any predetermined pattern or structure. The strong are at the top and the weak at the bottom. But this situation is transitional as events and time contribute to change people's positions. Untitled subjects are potential candidates for future titles. Title-holders are potential mentors of newcomers or young successors. On the Grassfields Mountains of

Cameroon, there are no slaves in the European sense of people who constitute the labour force with no right to personal material possessions.

Malcon's account of slavery in Bagam, in 1926, is a model of confusion between the integration of war prisoners, the recruitment of future titled people, their seven or nine years of training, their three years of participation in the executive and the bride price as a practice of slavery. He concludes his report by expressing his embarrassment in the following words:

"In practice, there is very little difference between the status of a freeborn man and a slave".¹²²

The "very little difference" he saw is, in fact, no difference. The fundamental principle underlying the detribalisation process in the management of Grassfields affairs is that all human beings are equal. Differences are a result of dynamism, personality, intelligence, hard work, good services and property.

"Le captif sérieux ne pourra pas être vendu et probablement recevra en mariage une fille du maître, ainsi qu'un bout de terre comme les autres fils de la maison. Intégré dans l'appareil d'état il deviendra guerrier ou obtiendra des postes de responsabilité administrative, parfois en qualité de conseiller royal. (A serious captive couldn't be sold and he may marry the daughter of his master, so he will be given a piece of land as any other free born in the house. Being integrated into the governing system of the state, he may become a warrior or be appointed to an administrative position and sometimes as an advisor to the ruler)".¹²³

It had been generally accepted that the palace at Bamun engaged in slavery. Even some natives have relied uncritically on the written books of foreign researchers. But they are always embarrassed at the end, as Littlewood would declare:

"In his description of the coronation ceremony, Njoya mentions that the senior slave of Njimonchara accompanied his master during the ceremony of ablution

¹²² In, Littlewood, Margarite, "Bamun and Bamileke", p. 117 and 118.

¹²³ Iniesta, Ferran, *L'univers africain*, p. 129.

in the Nchi River. The status of slaves therefore was not necessarily low. It is stated that a slave by the name of Nguwo usurped the Bamun throne in Nsangu's life time and to stabilise his position, began to kill off the males of the royal family".¹²⁴

Though a slave in a royal house could ambitiously strategise and take the highest position in a Grassfields *fondom*, slavery as conceived and practised by European slave traders was absent on the mountains. The assumption of the practice of slavery in the Grassfields at the beginning of the Atlantic slave trade¹²⁵ needs some revision as Warnier and Thornton affirmed.

Warnier in his detailed study of the society, made certain surprising discoveries.

With regard to the position of the male cadets, he came to the conclusion that,

"Au terme d'une succession positionnelle de règle dans tout le pays, le titre et le patrimoine d'un notable, qui se mesure en épouses, en droits matrimoniaux de type ngkap, en terres, en raphiales, en capital symbolique exprimé par un nom, des objets emblématiques, un réseau d'alliance, sont hérités en totalité par un seul de ses fils qui prend, vis-à-vis de ses parents la position du père. Les cadets célibataires qui, avant la colonisation, restaient captifs du système à moins d'être vendus comme esclaves, disposent maintenant des possibilités de défection, l'exil comme option" (At the end of positional succession in practice in the whole area, the title and properties of a noble, measured in terms of the number of wives, money from bride price as a *Ngkap*, lands, raffia forest, privileges attached to the name, emblematic objects and a range of relationships, are inherited by a son who becomes like a father among his relatives. The cadets who before colonisation were held captive to the system if not sold into slavery have now the possibility of exile as option).¹²⁶

The possibility of one male child inheriting all the patrilineal property whilst the youngest males, left with nothing, had to organise their lives afresh, favoured the practice of slavery because some left and never came back. The tradition is that those who succeed return to share the fruit of their success with their relatives. According to

¹²⁴ Littlewood, Margerite, "Bamun and Bamileke", p. 75.

¹²⁵ Thornton, John. *Africa and Africans in the making of the Atlantic world, 1400-1800*, 2nd edit. Cambridge University Press, 1999.

¹²⁶ Warnier, Jean-Pierre. *Esprit d'entreprise au Cameroun*, p. 70.

Warnier, those who never came back were taken into slavery. This is how he demonstrates that Grassfields society contributed to the slave business. The Grassfields social mechanism did not tolerate laziness and was ready to reward hard work. If Grassfields people in search of a better life elsewhere were taken into slavery, it was without the knowledge of their relatives and leaders. Selling people into slavery was not the characteristic of an African society.

“L’idée de l’Afrique comme gigantesque usine d’esclaves correspond essentiellement aux siècles de paroxysme de la traite atlantique et renforce le préjugé qui classe les sociétés africaines dans la barbarie et la servitude millénaire. La société pré-esclavagiste est autrement. Il est fort douteux qu’il y ait eu, avant le 16e siècle, des états qui aient fondé leur pouvoir sur le mode de production esclavagiste. (The idea of Africa as a big factory for the production of slaves fills the picture formed at the height of the Atlantic slave trade and goes to reinforce the presumption that African societies were sunk in barbarism and slavery for thousands of years. African society before the slave trade was different. It is strongly doubtful that, before the 16th century, any African state based its rule on slavery as a mode of production of its wealth) ”¹²⁷

An untitled subject is not a slave but a potential future leader although this would depend on his own personality and good will.

E- Women in Grassfields sacral rule

Women’s activities seem to be limited to farming. They produce the necessary food for the family and for the market. Their attitude towards their husband and the respect they show towards their male children could lead to the misapprehension that women occupy a low position in the Grassfields. Maternal ties are so strong in people’s life that the woman who succeeds another as mother, grand mother or any other position of matrilineal descent, enjoys spiritual as well as political power both in the lineage and at the palace as wife, mother and chair of secret societies.

¹²⁷ Iniesta, Ferran, *L’univers africain*, p. 130.

1- Matrilineal descent

On the Grassfields mountains, there are two lines of inheritance. A female child inherits from a woman, and a male child from a man. As it will be shown below, maternal ties had no limits but the paternal links apparently stopped at the second generation.¹²⁸ The successor cares for the skulls of the lineage. Among those who are still alive, the woman alone is in possession of the ancestral spirit. Every woman, whether she has a female child or not, is qualified to have a successor who treats her skull like that of an ancestor, and who occupies her seat in a women's society. When it comes to performing rituals for the blessing of the family members, she is the only person to officiate. All the descendants of that very mother depend spiritually on her. If it happened that the one she has been succeeded was also a successor, the new one has more spiritual and political power in the lineage. She participates in the deliberations on family related projects. She provides trading capital to her male as well as female descendants. Blessing each one and praying for his prosperity, she represents the source of well-being for people under her authority.

¹²⁸ Lineage fission: On the Grassfields Mountains, each child who has not been chosen for succession is forced to become the founder of a new lineage within the same *fondom* or out of it. He is obliged to find a plot near or far from his father's compound where he will establish his own family. But he will remain linked to the lineage down to the second generation. Economic and social advancement is praised as a sign of blessing. "*Le principe de l'indivision de l'héritage, mettant les enfants non héritier dans l'obligation absolue de s'établir par leur propre moyen, et les considérant comme fondateurs de lignages est un puissant aiguillon. Dure envers les incapables et les paresseux, la coutume Bamiléké donne aux doués la possibilité d'une réussite sociale rapide*" Hurault, *Les structures sociales des Bamiléké*, (The principle of not sharing the inheritance is a strong stimulus for children who fail to inherit. This forces them to establish themselves with other provision as they are considered founders of new lineages. Hard against the incapable and the lazy. Bamileke culture provides the talented with the possibility of rapid social ascension). As he starts afresh a new lineage, he is free to establish it with his personal input. This African way of encouraging invention and modifying tradition led Tardits and Hurault's to the following conclusion: "*En dehors de la lignée des héritiers, il y a coupure à la deuxième génération: il n'y a donc pas chez les Bamiléké de vrai patrilignage*" (Apart from breaking the succession of heirs, there is a fission at the second generation: among the Bamileke there is no real patrilineage). Tardits Claude, *Les Bamiléké de l'Ouest Cameroun*.

For every social promotion, a mother or grandmother had to plead with her son's father to allow the son to hold titles and to have a good standing in the *fondom*. If a mother or maternal uncle refused to back a person's social and political ambitions, there would be no way for promotion. "Mo bock mao bun wae" (If your mother does not like you, who could love you).¹²⁹ In the event of a misfortune, if she refuses to pray to appease the ancestors, nobody else could do it. Women in sacral ruling system managed spiritual and political power in silence but firmly enough for the people under their authority to recognise and respect it.

2- The ruler's wives

This sacral authority at the family level is more and more open to public view as women carry out their responsibility in marriage. Marriage is part of a relationship between two families. Those who make it happen were often friends. The wife is aware of everything related to her marriage and makes use of this to make serious impact on her parents and husband. "The Grassfields chiefs cemented their relations through marriage alliances".¹³⁰ When the son of a woman inherits from the father, he expands the authority of his mother's parents. If the mother is a princess, the influence of that neighbouring *fondom* is assured during their grandson's rule. Before he can begin his reign, the *Fo* has to be trained. At the start of his training at *La'kam*, the *Fo*'s wives' participation is crucial. When the new *Fo* is taken to *La'kam* where he will undergo 9 weeks of initiation, a granddaughter of a prince is elected from within the royal family to assist the *Mukam*, as the future *Fo* is called, at the beginning of his passage from

¹²⁹ Proverb in Bandjoun

¹³⁰ Nkwi, Paul, *Traditional government and social change*, p. 45.

prince to the status of *Fo*. That wife is called *Mafo cushue* (the wife who tastes and shares the food with the *Fo* during initiation period). By becoming pregnant, she demonstrates that the *Fo* can perpetuate the royal lineage. In the same week, another teenage-girl from kingmakers or any influential title subject from the people source of power is brought in to serve as *Juikam* (abbreviation of *Jui la' kam*: wife of initiation in *La'kam*). She functions beyond the *Mafo cushue* during the *Fo*'s initiation at the *dye kwe* (house of contract). She is also called the mother of the *Jie*, the supreme council under *Mkam vu'u* at the *fondom*. The *Fo* is left alone with her during the 9 weeks of initiation at the *La'kam* in the compound of Tafo Mekwi. The *Juikam* has to be the only one with whom the *Fo* will pass through all the necessary rites. She becomes a member of the significant *Jie* secret association.¹³¹

Other young girls have to be brought to the *Mukam*. However, when one becomes *Fo*, he chooses his *Mave Kung* (the first lady for public appearance), called the *Kung* for short. She is considered the first wife of the *Fo* and is allowed to enter the princely *Nye* secret society as the mother of all the princes and princesses. The *Fo* appears publicly only with the *Kung*. The entrance of the palace is bordered on both sides with houses of the *Fo*'s wives. They are all under the authority of the *Kung* and the *Juikam*.¹³²

The *Kung* and the *Juikam* command all the other wives of the ruler. A Grassfields *Fo* has many wives. The *Juikam* and the *Kung* are the ones through whom any other wife passes to get to her husband the ruler. It is through them that the *Fo* himself passes to have with him the wives he likes. However, the *Fo*'s will is not

¹³¹ Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, p. 62.

¹³² Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, p. 37.

always respected because the *Juikam* and the *Kung* have to account to their co-wives who want to spend the night with the *Fo*. A ruler's wife is a potential mother of the heir to the throne. She is considered the mother of princes and princesses, and has the right to acquire land for her sons. She is powerful enough to oppose the king's decision to establish a brave subject on a piece of land she has desired.

3- The ruler's maternal uncle and king's maternal grandfather

When a prince is to be initiated to become the next ruler, he has to go to his maternal grandfather before the public enthronement, to ask his blessing and permission to serve the *fondom*. When his grandfather accepts the goat, palm oil, raffia wine, plantain with pork or goat-meat, the grandfather takes the *Mukam* (prince in training to become *Fo*) into the lineage skull room. When they come out, he hands his grandson to the people who brought him, saying, "*E po lae ghe Fo* (Yes, make him *Fo*). "*Mueguoju' ghom gae po lae e ghe Fo*" Our ancestors say: Make him *Fo*.¹³³ Once the *Fo* begins his reign, his grandfather is given the title *Tafo* (father of the *Fo*). The title of *Tafo* is never used to refer to the late *Fo*, but is always reserved for the maternal link of the enthroned *Fo*. The new *Fo*'s mother is named the *Mafo* while the *Fo*'s maternal uncle bears the title of *Zumafo* (the one who enjoys gifts presented to the *Mafo*). The *Mafo*, *Tafo* and *Zumafo* are embodiments of matrilineal sacral rule in Grassfields. They are highly respected as they are the *Fo*'s best advisers. In a polygamous family, children are considered equal before the father, the only difference being in the identity of the mothers. The ruler's maternal relatives in the sacral ruling system give the

¹³³ Fai Ndzeindze Paul (82), Kumbo, June 28th 1999 (9h-12h) Influential Prince and retired clergy of PCC.

greatest support to the *fondom* within the limits of their assigned roles for the well-being of the palace.

4- The *Mafo* (King's Mother) or Queen Mother

Upon the succession of a *Fo*, the title of *Ya*, *Na* or *Mafo* (*Fo*'s mother) is now conferred upon his mother. If the mother is deceased, then a *Fo*'s sister or a daughter of the late ruler, usually, the *Fo*'s aunt is appointed to the office. If a *Mafo* dies, her eldest daughter or a sister occupies the position. The ruler's sister in their mother's lifetime could be elevated to the position of *Mafo* and thus enjoy corresponding privileges. Only princesses or the *Fo*'s mother qualify for the position of *Mafo*. Once she has been conferred with the title, the *Mafo* leaves the palace compound and is established far from the ruler's domain and enjoys much authority in the *fondom*. The *Mafo* has her own separate quarters and huts for her privileged relatives and friends. Her consent is required in the choice of marriage suitors for the girls she is given by the *Mkam* (nobles).

The *Mafo*'s house is a place of refuge and not even the *Fo* himself could seize anyone who seeks protection there. She has the right to decide whom to marry and had prior rights over the children of the marriage. She has no obligation to be faithful to him alone and is free to leave him when she wants to do so. She is the president of the women's society which meets in her compound. She is also one of the few women qualified to be members of certain men's secret associations. As the mother of the ruling *Fo*, she may also take part in discussions of the *Mkam vu'u*, when necessary,¹³⁴ while he is alive. The reverence with which the sacral ruler's mother is regarded tends

¹³⁴ Littlewood, Margarite, "Bamun and Bamileke", p. 110.

to contradict general statements about the low status of women. As far as the political life of the *fondom* is concerned, the *Mafo* is a powerful player.

In some Grassfields *fondoms*, the *Mafo* is called the *Shyiefo* or *Shetfon* (above the *Fo*). In Bamun political history, the one who bore this title was the mother of *Fo* Nsangou. She could contradict her own son, the reigning Bamun *Fo*. Her real name was Ngoungoure. She had strong relations with Gbetkom, an influential adviser at the palace. Gbetkom who was not of royal blood, was so eager to seize power that he organised a *coup d'état* against Nsangou with the support of people from the rival *fondom* of Banson. When the *Fo* became aware of the plot, he removed Gbetkom from all responsibilities at the palace. But his mother successfully opposed the decision and Gbetkom continued to be present at the palace, exerting even more influence. When the *Fo* finally died in another war against the Banson, *Shetfon* Ngoungoure ruled with Gbetkom's help for a while. However, when *Shetfon* appointed her four-year-old grandson Njoya as heir to the throne, Ndjapdounke the new *Shetfon* was impatient to inherit the position and power of *Shetfon* Ngoungoure:

*“Pour ce fait on est en droit de se demander ce qu'était devenu Shetfon pendant la régence de Ndjapdounke. Les mémoires royaux disent qu'après avoir exhorté les Bamun à rester de loyaux sujets de Njoya, Shetfon rentra à Mfoyoum, se pendit. Cependant une tradition rapporte que c'est Ndjapdounke qui fit mourir Shetfon à la corde; Shetfon fut étranglée dans son lit. (One is right to ask what happened to Shetfon during the regency of Ndjapdounke. Royal chronicles indicate that after she had exhorted the Bamun to serve Njoya faithfully, she went back to her domain at Mfoyoum and hanged herself. Another tradition has it that it was Ndjapdounke who had Shetfon Ngoungoure killed with a rope around her neck. Shetfon was strangled in her bed)”.*¹³⁵

Ndjapdounke ruled over the Bamun for a decade until Njoya was 15 years of age. Great respect was given to the queen mother even from the *Fo* himself. Njoya had a

¹³⁵ Mfochive, Joseph, *L'Ethique Chrétienne*, p. 117.

submissive attitude towards his mother who seemed to be held in as much esteem as the ruler himself. In the ruler's absence, it was she who took over his duties as judge and had the authority to mete out punishment.¹³⁶ More than just been the ruler's wives, the *Mafo* are members of secret associations.

“Les reines mères participent aux sociétés secrètes suivantes: Mue La', Muem Kem et Kwosi Shyie. Les reines mères aux titres purement honorifiques ont accès à de nombreuses sociétés mais sept d'entre elles leurs sont fermées. Msop, Bejye, Kom Mshu, Megwanye, Pangwop, Kamkwoe et les Meke. Deux d'entre les Mafo ont accès au fam et participent au Kem Jie. Quant à la Mafo cushue du chef et non celle de Kuipu, elle participe à la société des fils du chef. le nye, alors que la mave kung de la chefferie en tan que mère des enfants du chef y accède. Quant à la Juikam elle se rend au Jie. (Queen Mothers participated in the following secret societies: Mue La', Mue Mkem, and Kwo'si Shyie. The honorary title of queen mother gives them access to secret societies. Two of the Mafo are allowed to enter the fam and participate in the Jie. The Mafo Cushue of the sacral ruler and not that of his vice, participates in the society of the princes, the Nye. The Kung as mother of all princes, also has access there. The Juikam has access to the Jie)”.¹³⁷

F- The diviners

The diviners are both fortune-tellers and healers. They possess the knowledge of herbs, the ability to discern one's relationship with the ancestors and what the spirits require in exchange for a peaceful and prosperous life. Herbs are usually given after incantations and prayers. Healing is the result of a power encounter where the healer is believed to play an intermediary role between God and the spirits who cause sickness. An attitude of dependence towards the ancestors is crucial for good health. All the diviners are known at the palace. The recognition of a new diviner depends on the goodwill of the sacral ruler and his entourage since they are the first to benefit from the diviner's services. They often come to the *Fo* to foretell coming events or the outcome of a project. They are among the interpreters of signs in the *fondom* and are able to link

¹³⁶ Littlewood, Margarite, "Bamun and Bamileke", p. 67.

¹³⁷ Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, p. 102.

them with events. They combine writing, astrology, medicine and religion. They have free access to the *Fo* due to the nature of their work. The Grassfields sacral ruler has no appointment rights on this office. He himself depends on the diviners in order to avoid deep embarrassment.

The activity of the diviners has no blood connotation. The practice is neither passed down from father to son, nor from mother to daughter. Even though the social structure has a place for them, diviners are not classified. They are spiritually above everybody else because they can on the one hand, provide people with prophetic knowledge about the Supreme God and the ancestors' expectations, and, on the other hand, heal them from the ill effects of any encounter with cosmic forces, magic, and religious powers.

G- Religious art in the sacral rule

Writing had been practised among the Grassfields for years, long before the missionary enterprise and colonisation. The Cameroonian scholar Dika-Akwa Nya Bonambela, in his book on the methodology of African anthropology and history, presented the Bamun script and the demotic script of the Bamileke.¹³⁸ Even if missionaries favoured the development of African initiative in literacy with their own authentic script,¹³⁹ colonial agents made sure that what they found on their first contact was destroyed.

Sculpture was an intense activity in the society. Artists and blacksmiths worked for themselves as well as for the ruler and the high-ranking nobles. Any wealthy subject

¹³⁸ Dika-Akwa. Nya Bonambela, *Les problèmes de l'anthropologie et de l'histoire africaines*, Yaoundé, Clé, 1982, p. 38-41.

¹³⁹ Basel Mission published Bamun script in the Magazine *Heidenbote*. 1906.

could have at his service a *Talom* (blacksmith) and a *Geve* (an artist). The *Fo* shared the rights over artistic production with the *Mkam* (ruling class of nobles). The best products were reserved for the *Fo* and the palace. Copies could be replicated for subjects depending on whether they could afford to acquire them.

Art served as the representation of ideas, feelings, experiences, and some of the processes of defined activities such as hunting, fetching water and greeting the *Fo*. Oral expression describes human life which is in turn captured and depicted in art with the environment as the backdrop. Lines, animals, trees, herbs, people, sun, moon, stars, triangles, circles, rectangles, eggs, cocks, hens, leopards, lions, elephants, hippopotamus, children, women, men, hunters, priests, sacral rulers and nobles, all have a meaning and are found on buildings, on cloth and on stones. For the proper execution and interpretation of these art marks, the trainee artists undergo intensive training. The master artist selects the trainees among young people.

Music and dance are performed in the market place at the entrance to the palace. They can also be organised at people's compounds during funerals. Children learn to play the drums and xylophones at the compound of the neighbouring *Mkam* (notables), the only ones who are qualified to possess these instruments. Dances go with linguistically articulated songs. They are occasions for praising one's family, wives, children and friends, and are occasions to talk about the *Fo*'s life experiences. However, the *Tso Kwemteng* dance, as it is called, is performed without singing by the dancers and spectators. Only the instruments are used to make the music. Members of this society are believed to be the most respected of all the mystical associations of the *fondom*.

Even though people live on the mountain and have established a hierarchical society, the daily running of sacral rule contrasts with the natural environment. The head of the community is not at the top like the peak of a mountain. The most powerful is rather at the bottom as the architecture of the royal compound expresses it. The organisation of a Grassfields royal household is generally situated on a hill. The peak is reserved for people regardless of their origin or rank and it is the place for market and public activities. Further down the hill is the initiation forest for the people and the houses for different secret societies. Then comes the ruler's private quarters with his wives' houses and the residences of his political advisors and retainers, his personal domain, followed by the sacral and secret forest reserved for him and the kingmakers, and the limit is the river (continual flowing water). In the Grassfields social structure, the lower the location on the mountain, the greater the opportunity to become powerful. It is by moving downwards that a person eventually gains power and distinction. The head of the community lives at the base of the mountain because the real authority is in the valley. What is on the slope is public, visible and vulnerable and therefore, everybody can make use of it. The community is not at the bottom but at the top of the social structure. What happens on top of the hill is the reflection of what has been going on at the foot of the mountain.

As presented above, in the system, virtually everybody has the potential to rise to prominence within the sacral rule. The important point here is that there is a hierarchical order which has to be followed in the sacral ruling system. The hierarchy was such that not everyone of its members is of royal blood. This has come about by the already stated historical fact that, besides the use of the language of the conquered

people for the administration of the *fondom*, the *Fo* shared political power with the leaders of the conquered population who normally became kingmakers. Whereas the *Fo* is paramount, his mother, the *Mafo* (mother of the *Fo*) has the same status as the kingmakers. During two periods in the history of the Bamun, she even held the title of *Shetfon* which means “above the *Fo*”. The maternal grandparents of the *Fo* are automatically title-holders and are called the *Tafo* (father of the *Fo*) and the *Zumafo* (the beneficiary of things belonging to *Mafo*). They share the same status in the hierarchy as members of secret societies. The wives of the *Fo*'s and princesses stand above the untitled people. Traders in the hierarchy enjoy upward mobility. Though generally respected, this hierarchy is also reflected in the organisation of the palace, compounds of titled people, funerals, and festivals as well as in the land distribution process and development projects of the area. Other people who share in the maintenance of sacral rule are the diviners and artists. The detailed description and functions of the various custodians of sacral rule as outlined above provides the social and political framework for understanding the religious patterns in Grassfields sacral rule.

V- Religion on the Grassfields Mountains of Cameroon

A- Origin, source and derivatives of indigenous Grassfields religion

The religion of Grassfields Cameroon can be identified from the historical elements which are related to the naming of the Supreme God. Grassfields *fondoms* stand as the meeting point of two spiritual traditions, with regard to the naming of the Almighty God. One is the hunter tradition of Sudanese origin and the other is from the

agrarian Bantu local population. These two religious traditions became one as they structured and shaped the religious imagery of sacral rule. Among the Grassfields people, there were two names for the Supreme God. The word used for God and derived from Sudanese was probably *Nye* and that from Bantu was *Sii*. The two traditions merged to shape people's spiritual worldview, a new word *MNyeSii* emerged. Depending on the dialect, *Nye* can be pronounced *Nye*, *MNye*¹⁴⁰, *Nyoi*, *Noi*, *Nya*, *Nyi*, *Nyi*, *Nye Kob*¹⁴¹ and for *Sii* one could have, *Sii*, *Chi*, *Shi*, *Nsi*, and *Nsie*. It is of interest for our work to note that *Nye* had always had a relationship with the royals. The twins who are supposed to come from God belong to the sacral ruler and their names usually end with *Nye*. We have for example Kenye, Kenmonyé, Kammonyé, Tuemonyé, and Pouomonyé etc...

Sii, which is the name of God, is equally the word for Earth, the dwelling place of the ancestors, and the source of food. The word *Sii* expresses the idea of permanent and sustainable presence. *Sii* refers to the reality on which every good thing is built. People often name their children according to the events in their life. There is a range of theophoric¹⁴² names in Grassfields which witness to the relationship between them and the Supreme God. *SiiMo* (God of someone) is a prayer to God to save a child whose sibling had died before his birth or an expression of thanks to God for saving the parent from a dangerous situation. *MoSii* (Man of -from- God) or *JwiSii* (Woman of -from- God) testifies a special intervention of God at the birth of the child. *YumSii* (Listen to

¹⁴⁰ The "m" at the beginning indicates the direction MNye (to God).

¹⁴¹ *Nye Kob*: Misled by their language helper, German Missionaries wrongly added "Kob" to *Nye* to talk about the Supreme God and they included it in the Mungaka Bible. *Kob* has a geographic connotation and *Nye kob* is the spirit worshipped at a shrine close to a raffia forest at some distance from the dwelling houses.

¹⁴² Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, p. 176. We enrich his list with other names relevant to our studies.

God) draws attention to God's word and deeds towards a parent. *SiiJye* (God knows) refers to God's knowledge of one's deep and open intentions. *Da'Sii* (Only God) speaks of God's mastery and control in all situations. Other names are: *SiiPuWa* (who is like God) exalting God's sovereignty and powerful intervention in the lives of human beings; *SiiLa'Com* (God will have mercy or Let God's compassion be expected by all means); *GhomSii* (God's word or God has spoken) when God has answered prayer; *SiiTouok* (God intervened in one's favour) and *SiiTamDze* (God took the lead), expressing the deep conviction that God helped the project to come through successfully.

In the word *MNyeSii*, the two names of God are combined into one and often used to reflect the two traditions that had been merged in the religious foundation of the *fondom*. The combined name is used when one is seeking for help in a difficult situation. When the head of a lineage is blessing his people, the use of *MNyeSii* witnesses to his complete dependence on God. It is used under the *Yam* tree for individual prayers to the Supreme God. As detailed below, religious life in the Grassfields is expressed at three different levels: individual's relationship to God, familial links with the ancestors and the state religion at the palace.

B- Concepts of God in Grassfields

In general, Grassfields people believe in the Almighty God who causes things including the human beings to come into existence. God is the creator of himself and is greater than all things. He is transcendent, immanent and with us to protect us against evil spirits. Good spirits are God's messengers to protect those who are attacked by the

bad ones. Just as there are medicinal herbs and poisonous herbs on the same field, there are good and evil spirits living together. God is father to them all without destroying any. Spirits can dwell in humans, and in animate as well as inanimate things like rivers, mountains, forests, trees, rocks and stones. Human beings and things seem to be placed at the same level in their interaction with God. God can use one or the other as a channel to communicate with his creation. God is immanent in all things and could be manifested through any element in the universe. It is God who destines each interaction and who initiates it.

However, there are special people and special things which symbolise the presence of God and communicate divine power continually because these are related to the everlasting existence of the Almighty God. The mystery of an individual destiny can be known before birth, at birth and as one grows older. God can be consulted through the skulls of family ancestors while shrines and sanctuaries are places for worship and consultation in spiritual matters. Interestingly, such channels are often of foreign origin. People identify them as the focus of individual consultations that also reveal visions and prophecies to persons, families as well as to the *Fo*. Priests are trained in the locality to go and establish a shrine or sanctuary elsewhere. The fact that ways of meeting spiritual needs can be not only imported but also exported is evidence that Grassfields people have a clear concept of the universality of God.

The *Fo* is the religious and spiritual head of a political and religious community. He performs some of his religious functions but delegates others to able and trustworthy people. To increase their political influence, successive *Fo* have tended to claim that access to the Supreme God by others could be beneficial only through them.

In this way, they have established themselves in a unique spiritual position and claim their political hegemony as that sanctioned by God. God's purpose and sacral rule thus become fused in the minds of Grassfields people. Governance and religious practices are intertwined. In the event of epidemics and ecological misfortunes, people believe that God has rejected the *Fo* and he is then destooled, exiled or put to death. At the family level, it is the lineage head who interacts with the ancestors on behalf of the family members as he performs the ancestral cult through the skulls of the departed. An individual could also personally worship God under the familial compound *Yam* tree and bring his requests before God when he is in difficulty or seeks guidance. He intercedes with the Almighty God for help to achieve his ambitions. This a priori understanding of who God is has brought about sets of religious practices which can be identified with the individual under the *Yam* tree, the family around the ancestors and hence with priestly functions at the palace and the sacral ruler as the main religious figure in a Grassfields community.

C- Individual prayers under the *Yam* tree

The *Yam* tree is present in every compound. It is planted by the *Fo* or by the biological parent of the founding father of the lineage. When the *Fo* acknowledges the services of a dutiful subject or when he is ready to honour a newcomer, he agrees with his council, demarcates a piece of land, and plants a *Yam* tree for religious purposes. Other *Yam* trees may be planted later on for shrine spirits. However, in the middle of the courtyard of a house, there is a *Yam* tree surrounded by small herbs and other special small trees like the *Pfuekeng* (tree of peace) in particular, but not always. There

are always stones at the base of the *Yam* tree, and it is protected by a short fence made of *Kya* (raffia bamboo). This protected area is called the *Cwep Sii* (place reserved to *Sii*, the Supreme God, and only for him). When a family member becomes independent and acquires his own land, the father cuts off one branch of this very *Yam* tree and plants it for his loyal son's religious needs. The acquisition of the land is a religious act since there is a spiritual delimitation of the land. This ensures that the founder and his descendants have a place of worship from generation to generation. As the first owner of the land given by the *Fo*, the founder does not pray through an ancestor but addresses the Supreme God directly. And so do the male children who are unable to inherit from their fathers.

The *Yam* tree is the physical representation of God's presence. There is no systematic consultation of this symbolic place of contact with God. The random visit is dictated by individual desires or needs. Praying under the *Yam* tree is individual, independent, and flexible. One is free to go there for one's own purposes at any time. In the event of a misunderstanding with the successor who alone is qualified to consult the ancestors, the aggrieved goes directly to the *Yam* tree and addresses his prayers directly to God. When a person has offended the ancestors, he comes to the *Yam* tree to ask *Sii* the Supreme God to protect him against the wrath and anger of his forefathers. Even the successor, if after praying and sacrificing to the ancestors about a problem, he finds no satisfaction, he goes directly to the *Yam* tree to ask *Sii* the Supreme God to intervene.

The leaf of the *Yam* tree is used for divination. It is popularly used as a deposit in borrowing money and to postpone a religious duty towards the ancestors and God. The *Yam* leaves are religiously used as guarantee. Modern linguists have used the

expression “*Hue Yam*” (*Yam* leaf) to speak of a bank cheque.¹⁴³ The *Yam* tree is a place where the impact of a person’s own words on his own life and future is a reality. If a man is happy with his past, he asks for continuity and presents a sacrifice of thanksgiving. If he has new ambitions, he prays to God and asks for wisdom and protection. If he is not happy with his past, he asks for forgiveness, and for a better future. One’s past, present and future are united and reduced to one under the *Yam* tree. One’s future germinates out of words pronounced under the *Yam* tree.

The *Yam* tree stands as the Supreme Court in any claims and complaints that cannot be resolved in community. The weak often use the possibility of going to the *Yam* tree to put pressure on the powerful to get what they want. Everybody becomes weak under the *Yam* tree because, once there, a mistake or a lie leads to the death of the culpable in 3 days, in a week, in 9 weeks, in 3 months or in a year’s time. The expression “*O ma’ga to cwep*” (he shot his gun at the sacred place reserved to God) attracted the attention of Maillard who commented on it: “*Façon de dire qu’une telle attitude ne peut que se retourner contre lui*”¹⁴⁴ (way of saying that such an attitude will rebound against oneself). Where there has been case of familial and social misconduct by the family head, it is under the *Yam* tree that people who have been victims of his abuse of power make their complaints.

What one needs to bring under the *Yam* tree are words in relation to one’s life: past, present and future. The animal to offer is not killed but is kept alive. The successor has to care for it and when that hen or goat has three sets of chicken or kids,

¹⁴³ In an unpublished article, “*Bases socio-religieuses de la culture commerciale chez les Grassfields de l’Ouest Cameroun* (Socio-religious basis of trading culture of the Grassfields people in Western Cameroon)”. I used this expression to show how in modern business, Africans could maintain the religious basis of wealth and how they could contribute to the spiritualisation of financial institutions.

¹⁴⁴ Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, p. 182.

it is concluded that God is pleased with the present and with the person. The youngest male of the chicks or kids is then offered as a sacrifice according to the will and plan of the head of family. This Grassfields way of caring for sacrificed animals is one of the sources of economic power for the keepers of the places of contact with God who are the priests of the ancestral cult in the family.

D- Familial belief in Ancestors

Once the founder of a family settles on the newly acquired land, he does not pray through an ancestor. As landowner, he and his descendants have a place for worship. If he prospers by having children and good crops, by enjoying good health and good relations with his neighbours and by acquiring new titles and new wealth, he will sacrifice regularly at the foot of the *Yam* tree. When he dies and is buried on that land, the whole area becomes his sacred property to be cared for by his sons and daughters from generation to generation. In returning to earth he is elevated to the highest position a human being can ever reach. He becomes an ancestor as his children remember his deeds and words and live accordingly.

The process of becoming an ancestor concerns men and women, married and some outstanding unmarried. Very often, five years after the death of anyone who has children or some faithful followers, his relatives and friends go back to his grave, exhume his skull, put it in a clay pot and give it to the grandfather or the grandmother. After a prayer, the latter gives it to the chosen heir, who digs a place in the house and places it in it for religious and political purposes. He offers the first food and drinks to the ancestor on behalf of every family member present or absent. They all eat and drink

together. The dead parent from then on, is no longer perceived as a human being. He is elevated to the rank of an ancestor and becomes a *Pfe Sii* and part of *Mueguoju*.¹⁴⁵ He is seen as a benevolent spirit attached to the family through his deeds and words spoken on earth or those to be communicated to his descendants in the future. The successor becomes a spiritual leader among his relatives. It is this spiritual responsibility which confirms him as the head of the lineage. He then abandons his formal name and takes on that of the dead parent.

From this time on, the successor is the only one who will be praying, pouring libation and consulting the skull which represents the ancestor. If he is a positional successor, he may be caring for more than one skull according to the number of generations that go back to the family founder. If it is a paternal office, the successor's spiritual power will continue with his children and the children of his chosen heir only. Those who fail to inherit become the founders of new lineages. On the father's side, the individual goes to his father and to his grandfather and stops there. If it is a maternal succession, the uterine link continues as long as one is tied to his relatives via the mother to female links in generations both before and after him. Maternal uncles in preceding generations are so attached to a person that he could move from *fondom* to *fondom* to paying visits to his mother's aunts and uncles. They themselves go regularly to the successor as they need their niece or sister who is the man's mother. Because political power in the family is attached to the skull cult, female succession carries more weight than male succession within the lineage.

The successor has to perform regular rituals on the skulls of ancestors according to his own goodwill and according to the demands coming from people related to the

¹⁴⁵ *Pfe Sii* is the word for ancestor. *Mueguoju* is the plural of *Pfe Sii* and means the body of ancestors.

skull. He or she has the last word during family gatherings and decides on the timing, the manner, and the kind of prayers to be addressed to the ancestors. Before the meeting, he feeds the ancestors. It is one of the rare moments when the ritual is communal. Very often, each relative comes alone for prayers to the ancestors and the ritual is performed for him. In a peaceful family, successors do not expect the family members to come for special prayers. The religious duty of the successor is to ask for the protection, prosperity, good health and wealth for his descendants or those under his authority. When it happens regularly, it is for thanksgiving, healing from sickness or help in misfortune. In the case of long sickness, if after praying to the ancestors there is no sign of recovery, the sick person is washed under the *Yam* tree and not in the skull room. The use of the skull room is strictly regulated and reserved for the successor alone.

However, it is possible to inhabit the room, in which case, sacred places are found for the skulls. If a family member goes to the ancestors' skull by himself, it is a sign that the authority of the successor is being questioned. If this is not the case, permission to pray under the *Yam* tree should be sought from him and then he will normally accompany the supplicant and sits nearby to listen to what he says. In fact, the words that are pronounced are from him. Heads of lineages have often used their spiritual position as a way to secure people's allegiance to them. Fear of offending the ancestors and the Supreme God encourages people to content themselves with the successor praying for them. For political purposes, the belief in ancestors is more apparent and more significant than the relationship with the Supreme God.

E- Priestly functions at the Palace

In the matter of communal and public religion, everything seems to be concentrated at the palace where people, nature and words play a significant part in the practice of traditional religion. Social promotion is linked to religious and mystical knowledge. Cosmic forces are understood to preside over political, military, judicial, administrative and medical activities. The secular and the sacred are intertwined. People, sacral places and spiritual forces are apparent at a precise place where political power and religion are under the authority of one person. The sacral palace compound is the centre of religious life, and the one who controls the people's religious feelings is the one who rules. All the religious practices and expectations are directed through the *Fo*. When anybody prays to the Supreme God under the *Yam* tree in his own particular compound, or if one goes to any of his ancestors in his family, the concrete answer the Supreme God and the ancestors give passes through the *Fo*. "*Mo bae la' po bae o lo mu mnue ne shyé dze Fo*" (when one has fulfilled all the requirements in his father's compound, one is always satisfied in front of the ruler). "*Sii bae bi mo o cu' so Fo*" (when God is with a person, he becomes a friend of the ruler). All kinds of spiritual and religious, political and military, as well as judicial and administrative responsibilities are from the *Fo*. People view promotion in religious terms, and they articulate their worldview through the use of religious imagery. The whole universe, with all its components, is symbolically represented in the sacral compound at the *Hyala*.¹⁴⁶ From there, God given life radiates from the ruler to individuals via sanctuaries and family heads.

All sanctuaries are attached to the *Fo*. Maillard lists the sanctuaries in Annexe

¹⁴⁶ Quarter where the palace compound is located and where the market takes place.

no 4 of his book. Fifty-eight of them are scattered all over the Bandjoun *fondom*.¹⁴⁷ They are under the control of the palace. The sanctuary for the practice of the belief in ancestors in the ruling family, is a special house in a reserved forest and is cared for by the palace servants. The sanctuary for the protection of the royal family and compound, which is a *Yam* tree with stones supporting a pot always full of water and some herbs, is cared for by special priests who live outside the royal compound. The sanctuary for oath swearing is the *Yam* tree planted at the threshold of each secret society, or behind the public hall for the ordinary subjects in need of justice. Some sanctuaries have the function of safeguarding the people and of maintaining secrecy on what is discussed and learnt in the secret societies. Some other sanctuaries are related to people's faithfulness to the *fondom* and its sacral ruler. Yet, others such as, sacred forests, rivers and mountains are outside the palace compound and are cared for by a priest.¹⁴⁸

There are also sanctuaries that serve to expel evil from the *fondom* and to prepare the people for war. Finally, other sanctuaries are for administering justice and executing decisions. While some are reserved for the *Fo*, others are entrusted to either the royal family, or the secret societies, or the mystical people of *Jiomghuo*, or the provincial priests appointed by the *Fo*. Those in charge give a regular account and also receive instructions. The functions of these sanctuaries are crucial for sacral rule. They ensure the protection of the state from cosmic and ecological misfortune, the earth's protection against natural calamities, and a rich harvest of agricultural produce.

There are cases where sanctuaries are outside the geographical limits of the *fondom*. The peak of some mountains like Mount Kouham, Mount Mbet Pit and

¹⁴⁷ Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, pp. 235-237.

¹⁴⁸ Kui Tchouo'Mkung is the main priest for important sanctuaries in Bandjoun. He lives at the royal quarter.

Mount Mbet Nso' are common places of worship for *fondoms* across the Grassfields. People from Bamun and Bagam¹⁴⁹ as well as Bangang Fokam go to one of these for worship. These sanctuaries are in Bamun territory but have no link with a particular *fondom*. They are open to those who have been there before as well as to the new masters of the land; and to anyone who is courageous enough to climb the peak of the mountain for religious purposes. Yet very few people go there. Priests account somehow to their *Fo* who feels this religious power out of his control. However, sacral rulers are pleased with the sanctuaries which are under their direct influence. Intentionally, the sacral ruler manages to confine the ritual worship of those sanctuaries to the knowledge of one or two families. He refers to them very rarely and never in public. The rituals performed at these external sanctuaries point to the knowledge of God as the one above the *Fo* and as the one protecting the small and distant *fondom* from a territory where the *Fo* has no political influence. The number of sanctuaries witness to the polyvalent, wide and multi-dimensional influence of *Sii* the Supreme God.

The Baleng sacral ruler cares for sanctuaries beyond his territory. There are sacred places in Bandjoun, Balengou, Bandoumkassa cared for by people from Baleng on behalf of the *Fo*. Bandjoun, Balengou and Bandoumkassa had been founded by princes from Baleng, and therefore, whatever their influence on their neighbours, they are under Baleng authority having succeeded in founding *fondoms* as children of their father. The presence of the Baleng *Fo* beyond the boundaries of his own territory has religious and familial importance. It is not political even though during the Bandjoun war against the Bamun, they came together to ensure the Bandjoun victory over the

¹⁴⁹ Mfochive, Joseph, *L'Ethique Chrétienne*, p. 30.

Bamun. Military alliances, of course, have political dimensions. In general, each *fondom* organises itself to survive among its surrounding equals. For instance, the Bandjoun ruling class refused with time to be called *Leng Jo*¹⁵⁰ as the founder had wanted. In Bandjoun, only the royal family comes from Baleng. Bandjoun people come from near and distant neighbouring *fondoms*. The Baleng *Fo* has the last word on the election of the heir to the throne in Bandjoun because it is his family. Sanctuaries beyond a territorial *fondom* therefore, serve religious purposes and have no political connotations.

F- The *Ke* festival

The *Ke* is a vital spiritual and mystical ceremony. Only missionaries with ethnographic interest looked at the *Ke*, this popular, secret and religious practice in Grassfields groups. Other researchers said nothing about it. The *Ke* festival is a cyclic religious celebration organised every other year. The year of *Ke* is followed by the Year of *Je*. The *Ke*¹⁵¹ is like a year of retreat, a year of activities carried out behind closed

¹⁵⁰ Bandjoun is the colonial transcription of Jo as the Bali guide informed the Germans. Leng Jo means Bandjoun from Baleng origin.

¹⁵¹ Albert, *Bandjoun; Croyances, coutumes et folklore*, pp. 142-144. And Rev. Maillard, *Pouvoir et religion*, pp 131-166. "Sans le ke Bandjoun ne serait pas ou ne serait plus. Le ke est cette force diffuse que les hommes manipulent, tout en sachant qu'elle est originellement une et bénéfique. Le ke est la puissance numineuse de l'année de ke – le pouvoir de guérison et de détection du mal – le pouvoir de posséder un double animal- le pouvoir de chasser les forces maléfiques – le pouvoir de protéger rituellement – le pouvoir de nuire par détournement de son but primitif- le pouvoir qui fonde la force mystique de certains membres de la société, comme le Jie organe suprême de contrôle de la vie mystique et social et le Maso- le pouvoir de lancer la foudre, d'arrêter la pluie, de faire des choses spectaculaires" (without *Ke* there could have been no Bandjoun or Bandjoun could never come into being. Le *Ke* is that diffused force human manipulates in the knowledge that it is basically one and beneficent. The *Ke* is the numinous power of the year of *Ke* – the power of healing and of detecting evil – the power of possessing double animal – the power of chasing evil forces – the power of protection from rituals – the power of performing evil by changing the primitive trajectory of *Ke* – Power at the foundation of mystic practices of certain members of associations like *Jie* supreme mean for the control of mystic and social life and the *Maso* – the power of sending thunder, of stopping rain and of performing wanders) Maillard, *Pouvoir et religion*, p. 151.

doors. The following information about it is from the Bandjoun *fondom*. Maillard detailed it at length as he participated in it and confessed:

“Le Ke refait un univers défait par l’usure du temps...le Ke dépasse infiniment l’homme, est un et multiple à la façon de Dieu...le Ke est évidence et mystère toute à la fois...l’année de Ke est chargée de puissances mystérieuses (the Ke remakes a universe troubled by time...the Ke is far beyond human realities, it is one and many like God...the Ke is apparent and mysterious at the same time...the year of Ke is full of mysterious powers)”.¹⁵²

Gu’ Ke (the year of *Ke*) is a period of 9 months reserved for initiations. It is followed by the year of *Je* (period of public joy as people play on the xylophone), the time of presenting in public all that happened during the year of *Ke*. However, in the expression of joy, many mistakes can occur. And so it is during the year of *Ke* that people, the ground and the cosmos must be purified and renewed. The objective of the *Ke* is purification. Purification is about the people, the earth, the cosmic forces and their relationship with God.

The heart of the celebration is at the *fondom* palace and mainly at the *fondom* market place. It is led by the people of royal descent, the head of the existing group of people who were conquered, and some important notables endowed with mystical powers. Usually, when the appropriate officials have opened it, the conquered *Foa Dubu* is honoured before the ruling family from Baleng can take part. It is possible that the celebration of the *Ke* for the purification of the people, the earth and the cosmic forces originated from the time of *Dubu*. *Dubu* is ahead of the ruling family as far as the sequence in the process of the celebration of *Ke* is concerned. *Dubu* is followed by the ruling *Fo* with the secret association *Nye*. When everything is performed at the palace, the *Wambo* who have the exclusive right to possess in their respective

¹⁵² Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, pp. 133, 134.

compounds *Nye* society, continue with the *Ke* and are joined by the people. While princes are involved at the *fondom* palace, the ordinary people will be part of it in the compounds of the *Wambo* in their own geographic areas. The celebration lasts a year, 6 months at the *fondom* palace and 6 months at *Wambo* compounds.

*“Personne n'en est fâché, à vrai dire. Après ce temps de Ke, c'est vive la joie. Les projets qui ont eu le temps de mûrir vont être réalisés. Des jeunes gens ont fait un pas décisif et ils s'engagent avec encore plus d'énergie qu'auparavant. On est comme rechargé”*¹⁵³ (No one is in fact angry. After this period of *Ke*, it is time for joy. Conceived projects, which had had time to mature would be realised. Young people had grown and are full of energy more than before. One is like renewed with more strength).

VI- The process of sacralising the ruler

In Grassfields palaces as well as in important compounds, male specialists care for women in labour till the child is born. It is generally believed that one is born with ruling features. The future of each person is known at birth. There are signs which show that a newborn child has been predetermined to hold the highest position in his family and in the *fondom*. If one cannot succeed, perhaps his son or grandson may do so. At birth, when pectoral veins form a cross on the child's chest or back, he is considered to be a candidate for the throne. When it happens that a lion, a leopard or a buffalo enters the village and harms no-one and a child is born at approximately the same time within a few seconds, that child is also seen as a candidate for the throne. When during a dry season there is rain and a child is born at that moment, he is considered a potential *Fo* or head of family. If a child is born when the moon is full, it is possible that he will be an heir. Specific astrological signs may presage the birth of the heir to the throne. The variation of sunlight and the intensity of the heat of the sun indicate if the baby will be

¹⁵³ Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, p. 153.

a leader or not. Those signs are kept secret between those who assisted at the birth of the child and the ruler. A leader is born by God's will which is manifested in cosmic and extraordinary signs at his birth and during his lifetime. It often happens that there are many equally qualified candidates for a single position.

Succession in Grassfields is selective. No matter the position of a son among his brothers, it is the high-ranking people surrounding a member of the ruling class or the top leader himself who choose the heir on merit. The *Fo* and his officials listen to what people say about contestants; observe how each of them behaves and what he is able to contribute to the well-being of the family and of the *fondom*. The father in the ruling class secretly makes up his mind and communicates the name of the best among the potential heirs to the kingmakers or to the *Fo*. They debate over him until they come to an agreement.

The office is also political. The position of the father or of the *Fo* in the Grassfields is an important office which is not easily attained. There is often competition among the princes. Each candidate wants to gain a reputation in the society by proving that he is hard working and by rendering satisfactory service to the people and to the *Fo*. Every person knows that it is only by merit and the consent of influential people around his father that he can be a positional successor. Paul Nkwi confirmed this view of succession:

"In the rites of formal election, we notice three categories of persons: the crowd, the king-enstoolers, and the chamberlains... His presence in the crowd and his final choice, revealed that he was democratically elected in so far as the king-enstoolers who formally chose him, had themselves been elected by the people. The king-enstoolers... did not only manifest their clan's right to give formal approval to the heir-apparent's claim to succeed, but they also manifest the will of the commoner (*koummanchi*) in the choice of their new leader..."¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Nkwi, Paul, *Traditional government*, p. 33.

Grassfields succession is sacral since the successor has to take over from the departed; he does not only inherit his personality, but has also to take his name.

“L’héritier continue la personne du défunt et à ce titre plutôt de son nom, de son titre, ses fonctions sociales et religieuses que ses biens. (The successor extends the personality of the departed mainly his name, his title, his social and religious functions rather than his material property)”.¹⁵⁵

When a successor is selected, a retreat period of nine weeks is observed at the *Hyala*’ for training. He will be taught how to settle family cases which come under his jurisdiction. He is also taught how to handle political cases and how to bring them to the ruling class. The multiple initiations the future *Fo* passes through sets him apart for the highest special, secular and religious duties in the sacral ruling system. Each kingmaker has one week to impart to the potential *Fo* historic, cosmic and mystical knowledge. Each one shares his knowledge and experience only with the ruler. It is after this period of learning that the prince can become a ruler and is believed to be different from other human beings. During this period, seven days are reserved for training the prince in the priestly functions and spiritual life. Three days are observed in the sacral forest and one day at the grave of the departed *Fo*. He is then taken to the *fam* where his ancestors are buried. There he is sacralised to become earth, animal, human being and spirit as he receives the divine authority to rule by embodying the ancestral spirit, starting from the ancestor founder of the group down to the newly departed ruler. He becomes unique in the *fondom* for having gone through all these rituals.

The new *Fo* is not too different from a transient God. As the embodiment of the *fondom*, the *Fo* is considered to be closer to *Sii*, the giver of life. This is expressed in

¹⁵⁵ Tardits, Claude, *Les Bamiléké de l'Ouest Cameroun*, p. 26.

the names like: *FoSii* (ruler who comes from God), *FopouSii* (ruler and God) and *SiibaFo* (God is ruler). But there is no name like *FobaSii* (the ruler is God). He is not the almighty God as people experience the presence of the Creator under the *Yam* tree. The fact that the kingmakers can blame, sanction, exile and destool him makes the ruler a transient personality with regard to the responsibilities and honours attached to his person.

But unless the *Fo* is like God, his rule will quickly come to an end. Constant agreement with his controlling officers help the ruler to safeguard his rule. At the end of the sacralisation process, the ruler does not become God but is entitled to rule as holder of spiritual powers. Whenever the ruler refers to himself by divine titles and goes into priestly activities, he also renews his mandate to the people. When people approach him in religious reverence, it is a sign that they are ready to serve him. Their attitude is far from worshipping the ruler. Instead, they are paying allegiance to their leader through religious language and expression. The best way to retain power is through the permanent involvement of the people and the continued effort of the ruler in order to legitimise his power through religion, social conduct and improvement in the public's welfare.

The sacralisation process ends with the enthronment of a new ruler. The new *Fo* keeps his name. The community's journey undergoes a fresh orientation as the new head starts his rule with new people. All those who held positions in the closed executive group surrounding his father have to be replaced by new ones: "*A kuipnyae mfo kuipnyae mco'*" (a new *Fo* with a new team). It is a new period, a new season. The

Nwala,¹⁵⁶ the *Tabue*,¹⁵⁷ the *Juikam*¹⁵⁸ and the *Kung*¹⁵⁹ are changed. The enstoolment of a new *Fo* opens the way for a renewal of the tradition through the appointment of new executive members of the sacral ruling system. The new ruler is expected to be better than his father if he is to become popular. He has to continue from where the parent stopped by creating new secret societies and new opportunities for the people and by renovating the traditional house called *Nemu* or *Bun Dye*. This genuine way of effecting changes in the ruling tradition gives the Grassfields sacral rule a dynamic dimension.

Summary of the patterns of sacral rule on the Grassfields

Sacral rule as practised in the Grassfields of Western Cameroon has been presented in detail above. These mountain dwellers enjoy a healthy climate in the midst of high grass. They have little familial link among themselves but relate to one another through the *Fo* who is an embodiment of the major political, social, economic, mystic and religious forces in the *fondom*. By force, or by negotiation, after conquering a number of local people, the *Fo* positions himself as the centre which welcomes and promotes newcomers as well as dutiful subjects to positions related to his sacral rule. Although he is the public figure of the community, the sacral ruler's success depends on the kingmakers, the secret associations, the traders, the untitled men, and the women and on his mother with her uterine relatives.

From a personal relationship with God under the *Yam* tree and the prayers

¹⁵⁶ *Nwala*: Term for high-ranking ministers in the traditional government.

¹⁵⁷ *Tabue*: The cook who follows the same rites of initiation with the *Fo* at *La'kam*.

¹⁵⁸ *Juikam*: Powerful woman partner of the *Fo* during initiation period and coming from the people power base.

¹⁵⁹ *Kung*: First lady to be chosen by the new *Fo*.

offered by the head of family to the ancestors at the family level, to the prayers of the ruler and his nominee at the *fondom* sanctuaries, each one practised the religion with a clear sense of the Supreme God, the spirits and the ancestors. At any level in the hierarchy, rulers claim their power from the spiritual realm. Their position is considered to be of divine origin manifested through cosmic signs, success in acquisition of wealth and positive appreciation from friends, neighbours and the ruling class. People, diviners, artists and the *Fo*, make use of religious knowledge in their daily occupations. The sharing of power in the *fondom* is the result of a sacralisation process, for every Grassfields community is founded on divine revelation. The higher one is in the hierarchy, the more power one shares in the *fondom*'s life and the more one is believed to be closer to God. At the peak there is the *Fo* who bears divine titles even though there are cases where the *Fo* shows deep submission to his mother in the sacral rule of Grassfields Mountains. The ruling class constantly refers to invisible forces to legitimise its power. The *Fo* and his entourage try to show that their attitudes and realisations on earth have been prepared in the spiritual world.

The position of the *Fo* among the royals and that of the head of lineage in families are objects of political competition because there are often more than one contender for a single position. Every candidate has to rely on human relations, politics, the maternal influence, support of the ruling class, and the goodwill of the *Fo*, to successfully set through a succession process. When a child goes through this process satisfactorily, he becomes a member of the ruling class as *Zudie* and inherits all the property of the departed parent. The possibility of acquiring a title, of improving one's position and of owning land helps the ambitious to bring their progressive projects to

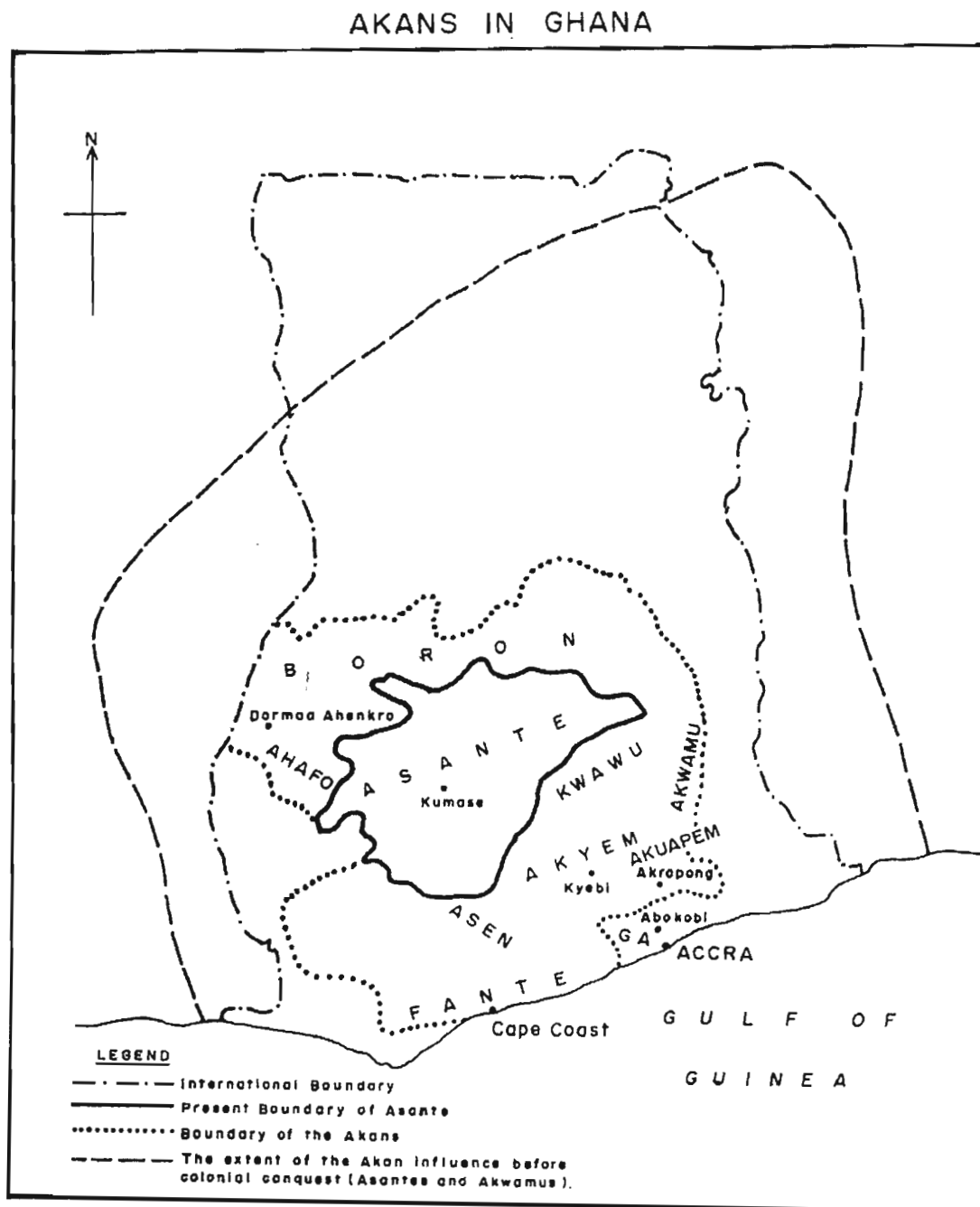
realisation. Those who fail to inherit can gain access to the ruling circle through economic opportunities. Services, hard work, success in trading and accumulation of wealth are the keys that open the doors of secret societies as well as the mouth of the *Fo* who has the sole rights to provide title and land to a loyal *Sa'ssi Mo* (one who germinates from the ground).

The following empirical elements drawn from the Akan people of Ghana will be the second case study for the understanding of sacral rule in Africa.

Chapter Three – Sacral rule among the Akan of Ghana

I- Beginning of Sacral rule in Ghana; the Akan communities

A- Presentation of Akan People



a- Meaning of the word Akan

According to J. B. Danquah, the word “Akan” comes from *Okanni* which means “a nice, refined, well-mannered man, a civilized or cultured person”.¹⁶⁰ Linguistically, the word Akan is a generic term for people who speak dialects of a common language called Twi. They live in Ghana where they constitute the basic population of the Central, Eastern, Asante, and Brong Ahafo Regions and beyond the border of present Ghana right into Côte d’Ivoire. Akan people are known in Ghana as the

“Wasaw, Denkyera, Fante, Assin, Akyem, Akuapem, Asante, Akwamu, Kwahu and those of the adjacent provinces and districts... When one compares their customs, usages and domestic as well as political institutions, and finds them in the main identical, one does not hesitate to say these inhabitants had a common origin”.¹⁶¹

Their territory stretches from the coast to the forest, going up to the mountains of Akuapem, reaching 1800 meters above the sea level at Akropong and Abetifi. The area is rocky with a thin layer of topsoil. It has a natural mosquito-free and healthy environment.¹⁶² They occupy the cradle of gold, diamond and forest resources in the country. Akan people in general are agrarian in occupation. They live on a fertile land and their innate desire is to live an independent life.

Each Akan community is composed of people who trace their ancestry to one of the ancestral founders of the clans. The specificity of each ancestor is that ancestors are believed to maintain some kind of totemic relationship with certain animals. Unless a community has people from each clan it is not a full sacral rule. The identity of the Akan is that each group is composed of Aduana, Agona, Asakyere, Asenee, Asona,

¹⁶⁰ Danquah in Debrunner, Hans, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, Accra, Waterville Publishing House, 1967, p. 2.

¹⁶¹ Wolfson, *Pageant of Ghana*, London, Oxford University Press, 1958, pp. 201-202.

¹⁶² Lewin, *Asante before the British: The Prempean Years, 1875-1900*, Regents Press of Kankas, 1978. p. 10.

Bretuo, Ekona and Oyoko.¹⁶³ Intra-clan marriage is not allowed. There is a tissue of relationship across the clans as well as across the political unity of sacral rule. In *Twi*, the Akan language, the word for family lineage is *abosua*. Rattray demonstrates correctly how marriage relations are in Akan:

“*Abosua bako mogya bako* (one clan, one blood). An *abosua* cannot marry the same *abosua*, or, in other words, clans are exogamous”.¹⁶⁴

b- Migration story of the Akan states

From Bornu near Lac Chad¹⁶⁵ around 3500 (three thousand and five hundred years) BC,¹⁶⁶ the Akan group went northwards and constituted a big group at the border of the Sahara desert. Drought, famine and political unrest might have caused them to move westwards where they became part of the famous Ghana Empire based on a grouping of people from various origins. The Soninke¹⁶⁷ who were the overlords at the centre of the Ghana Empire had the title “*Ghana*” which means war chief. They were patriarchal. The Akan, who perhaps could not stand being led by such people, continued their migration southward probably long before the disintegration of the Empire. Political competition and rivalry about the new ruler, the influx of new groups from the north across the Sahara desert after the Arab invasion of North Africa, and the grouping of people by patriarchal descent, may have caused the dissatisfaction of the Akan who preferred to maintain their language and their matrilial culture outside the boundaries of the Ghana Empire. They migrated in small independent groups, speaking

¹⁶³ Nkansa, Kyeremanteng, *The Akan of Ghana, their history and culture*, Accra, Sebewie Publishers, 1996. pp.34-40. As we followed the Asante spelling of clans, we organized them according to alphabetic order.

¹⁶⁴ Rattray, *Ashanti*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1923. pp. 35, 36.

¹⁶⁵ See note no 14, p. 25.

¹⁶⁶ As explained from the glottochronological method on the Grassfields sacral rule. p. 55.

¹⁶⁷ Davidson, Basil, *Africa in history: Theme and outlines*, London, Cox and Wynam, 1968. p. 76.

the same language.

Dialects appeared as they enjoyed more and more independence and as they conquered different local groups on their way. However, they have maintained an almost complete purity of their language since the departure from Meroe.¹⁶⁸ They probably reached their present location between late 800 mid-900 AD. A more sedentary life style then developed among the Akan. They settled down, fighting among themselves for the best land, the best soil and political leadership. There was a dense movement of population due to maternal inheritance and freedom to marry a man or a woman from any neighbouring group. The possibility of moving from one's matrigroup to another near or far, intensified a mixture of population among the Akan. Very often, a child born in the house of his father shares his teenage and adult life between his father's family and his mother's, especially with the maternal uncle he hopes to inherit from.

This is why an Akan group is identified with the above clans coexisting according to hierarchical social organisation. One clan cannot form an Akan political unit, because intra-clan marriages are forbidden. The founders of the oldest Akan political units were hunters. In the course of migration, hunters tended to control the patterns of movements as the Akan moved from one place to a better one. Hunting¹⁶⁹ is by nature adventurous and mobile, and provides the hunter with knowledge far ahead of his fellow members. Knowledge of the animals and vegetation, of the geography and topology of the land, and of the existing people enable the hunter to dictate the socio-political and economic function of the group. Hence, the Akan leader and his clan are

¹⁶⁸ Nana Addo-Birikorang, Unpublished on the "migration steps of the Akans", Akropong Akuapem, 1999.

¹⁶⁹ Some Akan festivals and initiation in Fante gave hunting a central position during the ceremony.

called “*Odehye* (the one who knows the land and the boundaries)”.¹⁷⁰ The *Odehye* becomes the ruler and his family becomes the royal family. He has no right to lord it over other clans. He is the senior among equals as members of different clans decide to join him in the new land. The hunter knows and controls the borders of the land entrusted to him for the whole group which is willing to follow him and to acknowledge his authority. Trapping animals for food involves spiritual and military abilities. Akan traditional sacral rule evolving from this hunting activity involves political, social, economic, military and religious management of land. People who form one unit or tribe have organized themselves around the body of *Nananom* (sacral rulers) who pay allegiance to a paramount leader with the privileges of a person ruling by divine right. At the base of the hierarchy, the *Mmusua kese* (matriclans) support the paramount ruling family among them. All the *Mmusua kese* approach with religious language and attitude their different ancestral stools and according to the Akan military divisions they group themselves under the *Nifa* (right military wing), the *Benkum* (left military wing), the *Kyidom* (rearguard wing), the *Adonten* (front guard wing) and the *Gyase* (central military wing). Military organisation does not negate one’s religious responsibility but ensures the protection of the paramountcy as it acknowledges the authority of the head of the military division. The five military leaders share huge powers with the *Ohene*, the ruler they agreed to install. The *Ohene* doesn’t have absolute and all inclusive powers. He coordinates forces to defend the institution of sacral rule. In this socio-political hierarchy, it is possible to recognise the status of a newcomer and to give him a position which is equivalent to his position in his own

¹⁷⁰ Informal conversation with Ankobea Yaw Sakyi, Akropong Akuapem, 28th September, 2002, 10-14h.

original society. This does not apply only to their fellow Akan, but to all respectable newcomers into an Akan political unit.

Relation between Akan states

Speaking the same language and enjoying the freedom to change their community and the possibility of establishing themselves elsewhere, promoted regular and complex relations among the Akan groups which tied one sacral rule to the other. The Akan had a clear sense of the superiority of their language over any other. If they can transcribe and read the Meroe script with satisfaction today,¹⁷¹ it is proof that they have maintained the purity of the Meroetic language for a long time. The leadership in Akropong-Akuapem is a clear example of the Akan aptitude of non-linguistic integration and superiority whenever they arrived in a new area. During three hundred years of living with the Guan, they successfully imposed their language so that some people lost their Guan language and adopted *Twɔ*. This enables some to be part of a larger Akan community and the Christian Church.¹⁷²

Sharing the same ruling culture and ironically sharing the same political ambition, Akan people lived in constant preparation for war. They often attacked their fellow Akan, as well as non-Akan neighbours. Such an environment of fear and losses from wars helped them to develop a strong political will and a defensive stance in order to avoid being conquered. An Akan community considers other Akan communities as equal. Differences among them came from success or defeat in war. The sacral nature of each ruler was respected. Religious rituals of possession or dispossession followed

¹⁷¹ *Nana Addo-Birikorang's* current achievement with the London Museum. Unpublished work.

¹⁷² Rev. S.K. Aboa; interview, Mampong Akuapem, 12 Nov 1999, 17h- 19h.

the conquest of a piece of land.

B- Focus on some Akan groups

There are several Akan groups spread all over Ghana. But for the purpose of this thesis, we will focus on the Asante and the Akuapem where the missionary enterprise since the 18th century has been continually active.

a- The Asante Empire: The advent of Osei Tutu and *Okomfo* Anokye

Before 1698, when Osei Tutu and *Okomfo* Anokye launched the Asante confederacy, the area

“was composed of localised matrilineages, subdivisions of the dispersed Akan groups, whose members usually occupied specific wards. Matrilineages, headed by the *ofiepanyin* or lineage elder, had right to that portion of the village land”.¹⁷³

Osei Tutu, once established as the sacral ruler in Kumase, began to exercise authority over a number of related Akan groups hitherto without organic unity among themselves. Osei Tutu, a member of the royal Oyoko group, and a possible future *Asantehene*, spent his youth at the royal compound of the Akwamu before coming to Kumase to inherit the throne¹⁷⁴. At the time, the military Akwamu were ruling over their Guan, Krobo and Ga neighbours and they had been extending their political domination over non-Akan groups through war. He developed a deep friendship with *Okomfo* Anokye, a priest of Guan origin. Osei Tutu learnt how to rule from him and from his experience in Akwamu. The idea of Asante unity which has come from the Oyoko family, germinated as they had been kept in subjection for a long period by their fellow Akan of Denkyera. Osei Tutu developed the idea, made use of the Akwamu

¹⁷³ Davidson, Basil, *Africa in history*, p. 26.

¹⁷⁴ Interview with Michael Koranteng Awere, Akropong, 90 old year Christian from Akropong-Akuapem royalty, 10 November 1999, 17h-18h.

method of ruling over non-Akan groups, and urged the other family heads in Kumase to join forces to defend their common political interests. In the late 17th century, the need to be released from their obligation to pay tribute to the Denkyera and to other more powerful neighbours, and to exploit their opportunities in long-distant trade, was commonly shared. But their separate group loyalties, stood in the way with each linked to a different ancestral system and its living representatives. Each group maintained the private right to believe his own ancestors. Basil Davidson's account of the event is as follows:

“Their traditions tell how two outstanding leaders, Osei Tutu and *Okomfo* Anokye, the one a military and the other a priestly leader, were able to bring these systems together under a new kingship. Choosing a moment when different Akan groups were under pressure from their overlords of neighbouring Denkyera, Osei Tutu and Okomfo Anokye called an assembly of chiefs and other leading men. Anokye told them that God wanted them to be united in loyalty to a single line of power; in Akan symbolism, to a single ancestral stool or ruler's seat. As evidence of God's will, he caused a golden stool to descend from heaven and gently alight on Osei Tutu's lap. This golden stool, Anokye explained, was the symbol of their welfare as a single people. It embodied all their hopes, of health and strength, survival and prosperity. No ruler was ever to take his seat upon the golden stool but its guardianship would be a necessary condition of kingship. The spiritual attributes of the golden stool were thus accepted as subsuming those of the separate ruler's stools of each constituent. By this religious fiction the Ashanti Union was launched upon its way. It was forbidden to remember the separate group genealogies or at any rate to recite them in public. This law of common citizenship became a potent element in building one of the most powerful states of African history. Ritual and politics here as elsewhere, marched hand in hand. Royal rites and regalia provided enough justification for political action”.¹⁷⁵

From the launching of the Asante Confederation, there was a change and the old Asante had become a new one, and the other Akan communities who agreed to be part of the new Asante shared powers in the newly born Empire. The original Akan communities who were founding members of the Asante Empire were the Bekwae, the

¹⁷⁵ Davidson, Basil, *The African genius: An introduction to African social and cultural history*, London, Black Bay Books, 1969. p. 195.

Dwaben, the Kwahu, the Kokofu, the Mampong and the Nsuta.¹⁷⁶ The guide to *Okomfo Anokye* 's Sword Room¹⁷⁷ explains that before the meeting, each community leader, male and female, gave to *Okomfo Anokye* part of their flesh, hair, nails, saliva and blood. The priest put them together, burnt it, collected the ashes and prepared a concoction for everyone to drink as a sign of unity and readiness to acknowledge the authority of the one who will be chosen as paramount ruler among them. When Anokye caused the Golden Stool (*Sika Dua Kofi*) to descend from heaven, the same concoction was used for the first libation and this is how it has become the soul of the Asante people through the generations. The Stool came to Osei Tutu and all the rulers present had to pay allegiance to the head of the Oyoko family based at Kumase who had become the Asantehene (the king of Asante) and from then onwards bearing the title of *Otumfuo* (the almighty ruler). But privately, the leaders of those Akan groups continued their religious activity of venerating their ancestors and of occupying the territory that had been established as theirs by religious rituals. The Asantehene had no religious rights over the lands of his fellow Akan.

*“Le roi dieu Ashanti, malgré sa divinisation, ne supprima ni ne supplanta les pouvoirs des clans ou les petites monarchies incluses dans le pacte, dorénavant mises en état de subordination. Cependant des clans puissant comme les Anyi ou les Baulé, préfèrent abandonner le territoire et émigrer à l’ouest de la rivière Camoé (The divine ruler of the Asante, in spite of his divinisation, neither abolished nor replaced the rights of the clans or small monarchies included in the contract, which put them in a subordinate position. However, powerful groups like the Ani and Baule, abandoned their territories and emigrated westward crossing the River Camoe)”*¹⁷⁸.

If the Ani rejected the idea of a confederation by abandoning their former land which the new ruler did not claim, for another far in the West, many other Akan communities

¹⁷⁶ Lewin, *Asante before the British*, p. 9.

¹⁷⁷ Visit to Kumase, July 1998 and 20th September 2002.

¹⁷⁸ Iniesta, Ferran, *L’univers africain*, p. 111.

rejected it by organising themselves to protect their interests through war against the new Asante Empire. They copied the new Asante structural rule of social and military organisation. Denkyera was the first to be conquered. The Akyem succeeded in killing Osei Tutu himself and took his body with them, forcing the Asante to stop fighting the Akyem for a while. Asante warriors were obliged to continue their conquest in various directions. Before the European Colonial enterprise, the Asante Empire had expanded both within and beyond the border of the present Ghana, as our map shows.¹⁷⁹

b- Creation of Akuapem

Akuapem is a Guan word, which means a thousand groups in one. Akuapem sacral rule came into being as a result of struggle, friendship, negotiation, and contract between the Guans, the Akwamu, and the Akyem. The Akwamu seemed to be the first Akan group to be in contact with the mountain dwellers of Guan origin. They expanded their domination over the surrounding communities: the Ga, the Guan and the Krobo, reaching Togo and the sea; and trading with the European on the coast in all kinds of goods, as Basil Davidson described:

“Akwamu maintained its primacy among the states of the Gold Coast and Togo seaboard through nearly half a century. Challenged by the Danes at Christiansburg, soldiers of Akwamu seized the Castle and held it for a year, trading under their own flag, until handing back the Castle to the Danes in exchange for a smart ransom”.¹⁸⁰

Militarily more organised and more equipped than the existing Guan and Krobo peoples, the Akwamu who did not take into consideration the customs and the language of the conquered population, ruled over them without any sense of negotiation. Only

¹⁷⁹ See map p. 124.

¹⁸⁰ Davidson, Basil, *The African genius*, p. 205.

force mattered and the conquered wanted to be free as the Akwamu system considered them as “a collection of defeated neighbours awaiting their chance of relief”.¹⁸¹ The Akyem Abuakwa,¹⁸² although not superior in military strength to the Asante had killed Osei Tutu the *Ohene* and had allowed the body to sink and let it disappear by burying it in the water.¹⁸³ This victory made them popular and the Guan, who were subjected to Akwamu exploitative and military rule, approached them for help. The Guan in particular contacted the Akyem for military help. The Akyem *Ohene* sent his twin brother Ofori Kuma with warriors who successfully chased away the Akwamu and freed the Guan, the Krobo and the Ga in 1730.¹⁸⁴ *Okyenhene* was then given the title of *Osagyefo*, which means valiant liberator or valiant redeemer.¹⁸⁵

After negotiations, Ofori Kuma with his warriors were established as rulers over the Guan in order to prevent the Akwamu from attacking them again.¹⁸⁶ The Akwamu were confined to a permanent land with well-defined boundaries only after their war with Ofori Kuma who chased them out of the Ga, Guan and Krobo territories. The Akwamu failed to realise their political ambitions even though they were the inspiration behind the launching of the Asante Empire through Osei Tutu.¹⁸⁷ Ofori Kuma was proclaimed paramount sacral ruler and war leader based at Akropong among the Guan people. After the war, the Guan who had been released from the Akwamu threat in 1730,

¹⁸¹ Davidson, Basil, *The African genius*, p. 205.

¹⁸² All the Akyem did not come under one ancestral paramount stool. There are Akyem Abuakwa, Akyem Kokofu, and Akyem Asante.

¹⁸³ Informal discussion with Robert Addo-Fening, University of Ghana, Legon, 19 November 1999, 16h-17h30. Akyem Abuakwa later on was conquered and brought under Asante influence.

¹⁸⁴ McFarland, *Historical Dictionary of Ghana*, London, the Scarecrow Press, 1985, p. xxiv

¹⁸⁵ literally *Osagyefo* means ‘the one who fights another’s battle to free him’.

¹⁸⁶ Rev. S.K. Aboa; interview, Mampong Akuapem, 12 Nov 1999, 17h- 19h.

¹⁸⁷ Rattray confirmed this view as he affirmed that in Asante, after the Queen Mother, the next in command is the Akwamu chief and his confrere the Ko’ntire. Osei Tutu created in his sacral a position in honour of Akwamu. Rattray, *Ashanti law and Constitution*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1929, p. 89.

debated with Ofori Kuma and his warriors of Akan origin on the sharing of powers in the new sacral ruling system. They agreed at Abotakyi to organise it according to the Akan military social and political culture. The left wing of the military (*Benkum*) was to be headed by the ruler from Larteh. The right wing (*Nifa*) was entrusted to Adukrom, the front wing (*Adonten*) was assigned to Aburi, the back wing (*Kyidom*) was the part reserved to Kyerempong Kubasse and the central wing (*Gyase*) was given to Amanokrom a satellite town of Akropong. The Akan were then placed at the heart of the sacral ruling institution of the Akua-Pem.¹⁸⁸ This is how the concord of Abotakyi created the new state of Akuapem in 1731.¹⁸⁹ Akan people in that group were confined to Akropong the capital and to Amonokrom and Aburi, which consisted of the remnants of Akwamu people who surrendered to Ofori Kuma before the end of the war. They did not try to make use of the local language and customs. They maintained the *Twɛ* language and their matrilineal system of leadership among patriarchal communities. Religiously, they account to their ancestors commencing with Ofori Kuma of Akyem origin who had led the war against the Akwamu. However, they did not lay hands on Guan land nor had any religious ritual been performed by the Akan to possess the land. Rather, they were given a plot by the Guan as the capital of the newly created Akuapem sacral rule.¹⁹⁰

The local people in Akuapem remained masters of the land. They maintained their position in their own grouping while paying allegiance to the Akan ruling family. As far as the rest of the population was concerned, Guan leaders were conscious that they

¹⁸⁸ Reindorf, Carl Reindorf, *The History of the Gold Coast and Asante: Based on Tradition and Historical Facts Comprising a Period of More Than Three Centuries From About 1500 to 1860*, Accra, Ghana University Press, 2nd edit. 1966, p. 85.

¹⁸⁹ McFarland, *Historical Dictionary of Ghana*, p. xxiv.

¹⁹⁰ Nana Addo Dankwa III, Interview, Accra, 19 November 1999, 10h-13h.

were in the majority and that the Akan ruling group was in the minority. But their protection was in the hands of the Akan among them. Akuapem sacral rule originated in war, as a group of many people of Akan and non-Akan origins and cultures coming together. The masters of the land and leaders of the majority group, afraid of another attack from their overlords, the Akwamu, established a group of efficient warriors to rule forever over them as a protective institution. The minority Akan warriors agreed to hold the religious, political, judicial, administrative and military powers in heading the entire group. This is how the Akuapem (group of thousands in one) came into being as an Akan sacral state of two distinct languages: Twi and Guan.

II- Social organisation in an Akan sacral rule

Cheikh Anta Diop demonstrated authoritatively that:

“All the traditional African kings are designated by the clergy or the sacerdotal caste, because their legitimacy comes from the traditional religion. Some states are born out of resistance to an enemy. A homogenous ethnic group organises to drive out a danger, an outside enemy. A military aristocracy appears and progressively arrogates to itself political rights that rapidly become hereditary. Privileges will be given to military profession, which outclasses all others, because of the risks involved. The protector of the society ends up commanding it, governing it, given the circumstances that engender this protective activity”.¹⁹¹

The history and social organisation of the Akan show that this people are basically military as all men are potential warriors. With the creation of the Asante Empire, its launching was based on religious practices but its day-to-day administration was military. Its social organisation has been dominated by the military. Religious, intellectual and moral attributes were played down in the social promotion of a subject.

¹⁹¹ Diop Cheikh Anta, *Civilisation or Barbarism*, pp. 131, 166.

Spiritual functions were overshadowed by the military.

The *Okomfo*, the African priest, is lower in honour compared to the respect and wealth of a warrior. Military enterprise is based on religion. Shrines are consulted, sacrifices are made to ancestors and prayers for individual protection are said as the military sprinkle their body with the water of *Nyame Dua*. But politics, trading facilities, taxes to extract from neighbours, are acquired through military means and are paramount in the declaration of war and the daily running of state affairs. The centrality of war is more clearly seen, as one looks closely at the ruling class people. Even though the making of a ruler depended on religious rites, once in leadership position, his ability to protect people's interests added much to the praise accorded to his military talents. Going into the stool room for ancestral worship carried weight, as the warriors were victorious in the battle.

A- The *Ohene*: The sacral ruler

The *Ohene*, as the head of the community, was basically a military commander in chief. The position of the *Ohene* was highly respected as his power increased with victories in wars. The titles he was accorded reflected his increasing power, starting with "*Nana*". "*Oseadeyo*" was added, followed by "*Osagyefo*" and, finally, the title of "*Otumfuo*". *Nana* is the title given to an accepted and elevated guardian of community ancestors, community history, and community material wealth. The *Nana* is a caretaker 'invested with sanctity, just so long as he sits upon the stool of his dead ancestors'.¹⁹² He is the one who preserves the tradition and the religious welfare of people. He is the one who puts everything where it should be. He cares about a sustainable peace in the

¹⁹² Rattray, *Ashanti law and Constitution*, p. 82.

community. The *Nana* is like a parent in the hands of whom one's well-being is placed. He is the guardian of the things a person needs to better his situation. The *Nana* has the responsibility of looking after the interests of all the members of the particular kindred group which has to furnish the leaders.

Oseadeyo means the one who fulfils his promises. Before going to war, he promises the people victory. If he achieves it, as people enjoy the fruits of conquest, the sacral ruler bears the title of *Oseadeyo*. Everyone who has passed through the enthronement rituals is called *Nana*, but *Oseadeyo* is a title reflecting the personal achievement of the acting ruler. *Oseadeyo* is the one who turns words into realities.

Osagyefo is a title given to a ruler who comes to help a neighbour in difficulty, fights on his behalf and frees him from the domination of an enemy. It means liberator, redeemer and saviour. This title is given to the one who fights another's battle with success. An *Osagyefo* is the provider of freedom to captives. *Otumfuo* is the appellation reserved for the *Ohene* who has never been conquered. It is the title of the ruler who has always been victorious in battles. He is almighty and he holds all the powers. He is the one who overcomes every body and who has never submitted to any other force.

All these human and divine titles given to the Akan leader signify that he is qualified as the sacral ruler to exercise his authority as the intermediary between the *Samanfo* (ancestral spirits) and people, and to be a religious leader, guardian of people's past, present and future; secondly to affirm his position as chief justice and administrator and, finally, to gain reputation as the commander of a winning army.

“A good chief (*Ohene*) was scrupulously careful to rule through his elders and to allow all lesser Chiefs to manage their own affairs, and was equally careful not to weaken their power, and eventually his own authority, by attempting to

centralise all the government of his division; he dealt with the matters that arose outside the sphere of his direct control through the proper channel".¹⁹³

B- The *Mpanyimfo*: Elders and heads of the military wings

The centrality of war is more evident in the organisation of the society. The whole community is divided into five wings according to their position under the five military leaders:

<i>Benkumhene</i> :	Leader of the left wing of the army
<i>Nifahene</i> :	Leader of the right wing of the army
<i>Adontenhene</i> :	Leader of the vanguard wing of the army
<i>Kyidomhene</i> :	leader of the rear-guard of the army
<i>Gyasehene</i> :	Leader of the central wing, coordinator of the other army wings
<i>Ankobeahene</i> :	Leader of the personal bodyguard of the Ohene.

Among the *Mpanyimfo*, the position of the *Gyase* was the most important as in times of peace, he coordinated the services crucial for the daily running of state affairs. Under his care were the “servants and minor officials who performed the numerous duties in the immediate vicinity of the Chief (*Ohene*)’s person”.¹⁹⁴ Those minor ranking people in the order of the sacral rule are: the *Okyeame* (Linguist), the *Akonuasofo* (Stool-carriers), the *Asokwafo* (Drummers, horn-blowers), the *Akyiniyekyimfo* (Umbrella-carriers), the *Brimfo* (caretakers of the Royal Mausoleum), the *Agwareyefo* (Bathroom attendants), the *Akrakwa’fo* (*Ohene*’s soul-washers), the *Ahoprafo* (Fan-bearers), the *Sodofo* (Cooks), the *Asoamfo* (Hammock-carriers), the *Akokwafo* (Floor polishers), the *Sanahene ne Afotuosanfo* (treasurer and sub-treasurers), the *Adabra* (Eunuchs), the *Seniefo* (Heralds), the *Afonasofo* (Sword-bearers), the *Atumtufuo* (Gun-bearers), the *Akyemfo* (shield-bearers), the *Kwadwumfo* (Minstrels) and the *Abrafo* (Executioners). Because they rendered services for the well-being of the institution of

¹⁹³ Rattray, *Ashanti law and Constitution*, p. 88.

¹⁹⁴ Rattray, *Ashanti law and Constitution*, p. 91.

sacral rule, they enjoyed respect in the society.

Just as there are servants at the service of the *Ohene*, there are some at the service of the *Mpanyimfo*. The *Mpanyimfo*, leaders of the respective military wings organised their office following the same structure as the *Ohene* who is really the first among equal heads of matrigroups. Just like the *Nana*, the *Mpanyimfo* are basically heads of their kindred groups where they live but come to the paramountcy on special days and special occasions. Leaders of the army wings share the position of *Panyimfo* with the heads of *Abusua* (important matrilineal family).

In Akuapem, the *Mpanyimfo* are fixed. But in other Akan groups, some military offices are filled by nomination, and its succession can move from father to son. The *Gyase* position in Asante and Akwamu is not matrilineal. It is believed that military achievement is from spirit and not from blood. A child is more than a biological product.

One inherits the spirit of the father and the blood of the mother. The ancestral link is through blood while human achievement is through spirit. Religious duty is efficiently performed when the ruler shares the same blood with the one who preceded him. Military, priestly aptitude and the gift of commerce flow from father to son. This is how patrilineal ties were conceived by the Akan matrilineal community. In fact, matrilineal practice was not entirely pure, neither was it absolutely applied in all circumstances. In Asante, a man told Rattray;

“I preferred my slave wife and my children by her to my free wife and free children because I have undisputed right over them”.¹⁹⁵

The ruler who is supposed to be second to none in his group must have cherished the

¹⁹⁵ Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 33.

will to entrust someone from his close entourage with full responsibility for his safety. There is evidence that in the old Akan community, slaves occupied the famous position of the *Gyase* because they proved unchallenged as faithful protectors of the person and the stool of the ruler. Later on, brave warriors were nominated in complete disregard of their origin. However, with colonisation, succession became fixed and, therefore, the matrilineal principle of succession came to be applied.

C- The *Abusuahene* and the *Odikuro*

At the beginning of the reign of an Akan sacral ruler, a group of matriclans would come, agree on public unity, swear allegiance to the ruler but remain in control of their ancestral Stools. Those who have no Stool would also come; the spokesman will be given one and, therefore, will be appointed the leader among them for military duty. Military position was the basis of the political organisation.

“Each official was the head of the unit under his care. To fight to defend the land was a duty which one owed to one’s kindred, and to the ancestors from whom the land was inherited. The practice was to let each unit settle its own affairs”.¹⁹⁶

The five high-ranking military positions are fixed. Other heads of families enjoyed the rank in the social organisation as bodyguard under one of the military wings. They held the position of *Abusuahene* (Head of matrigroup). The *Abusuahene* was a *Nana* named after the matrilineal royal group. His authority was limited to the affairs of that particular family where he had to ensure the guardianship of ancestral charters. He was first and foremost the repository of ritual power. He is also a member of the ruling class and participates in the meetings in the palace.

The *Odikuro* was leaders of migrant groups who had been integrated into the

¹⁹⁶ Busia, *The position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of the Ashanti*, p. 65.

community. The *Odikuro* was often the head of a non-Akan village, which was conquered or welcomed according to an authentic process of detribalisation. The general idea that non-Akan people were enslaved is not true of Akan sacral rule. Instead, the Akan leading structure helped newcomers to slowly become part of the whole community. The *Odikuro* was responsible to the Elder under whom the *Ohene* (ruler) had placed him. Other villages were founded probably through people moving out in search of farmland, and being followed later by other members of their former group. When they succeeded in choosing a leader among them, because they didn't belong to one blood or matrilineal family, the leader became an *Odikuro* linked to the palace through an appointed Elder. The duty of the elder was to maintain peace and amity within his corporate group and to represent it in its relations with other groups of the sacral rule. The head of each village had political duties also, for the people grouped around a leader, and formed a unit for political and military action. If for centralisation purposes the military overshadowed the natural or community civil leaders, the *Adikuro*,¹⁹⁷ the women and the servants continued to hold familial powers that were crucial for the social peace. An *Odikuro*, like a *Nana*, remained head of his people, and was allowed to have a Stool, to care for the land and to settle matters of minor importance. He paid allegiance to the *Ohene* and he joined their Elder's military wing in wartime. Under the care of his protective Elder, the *Odikuro* and his people were warriors for the sacral ruler. Their performance at war could facilitate the social promotion of their leader when he acquired a title in relation to his achievements in war.

¹⁹⁷ *Adikuro* is the plural form of *Odikuro*.

D- Slaves in the Akan sacral rule

People who were bought as well as the war captives were trained to be warriors for the next war the Akan group might face. They were entrusted to a ranking member of the ruling class or were at the palace with the ruler. Citing Reindorf, Rattray observed:

“Reindorf then proceeds to give a list of the different bands or *asafo*, the name of many of which still survived in every territorial organisation. In other words, the early wars of the Asante were, as he states, fought by slaves recruited both locally and from the fighting tribes of the North, who were organised and pushed into the fighting line by their masters”.¹⁹⁸

When the so-called slave came back from a war expedition with a trophy, he was elevated as any other free Akan warrior. A title like Bediako was given to acknowledge one's loyalty and outstanding military services. Any successful warrior also received gifts of women, some of whom were of royal blood. It is a mistake to liken the West African domestic slave to the slave who was transported to the Americas by the Europeans on the ground that both provided free and cheap services.¹⁹⁹ Among the Akan, an intelligent, respectful and faithful servant may end up very often marrying the master's daughter. Most of the time, trusted slaves traded on behalf of their masters.

“Slaves could, and often did, amass considerable wealth and attain to considerable power. A master encouraged his slave and helped him to do so. A master could not deprive his slave of his self-acquired property. *Akoa didi me a, na no wura, okom de no a, ne die no afubye* (a slave may eat to repletion while the master remains hungry, but what the slave has is, after all, only wind in his stomach)”.²⁰⁰

If a slave was not happy with his master he was free to run away and to throw himself

¹⁹⁸ Rattray, *Ashanti law and Constitution*, p. 121.

¹⁹⁹ Thornton, John, *Africa and Africans*, pp. 72-97.

²⁰⁰ Rattray, *Ashanti*, pp. 40-41.

on the mercy of a spirit at a sanctuary (*Obosom*), or an ancestral spirit (*Samanfo*). By becoming a servant to a shrine, or by bearing religious responsibility, a dissatisfied slave remained within the sacral rule with more freedom. As it was forbidden to the leaders of the army to mention the origin and the ancestors of his soldiers publicly, it was also forbidden to abusively call slaves to talk about their origin.

“Direct public statements about the slave origins and antecedents of lineage filiates were actionable and punishable in law: *obi nkyere obi ase* (no one must disclose the origin of another)”.²⁰¹

Public mention of another’s ancestral origin could cause the destoolment of an *Ohene*.

Akan slaves and especially an

“Asante slave, in nine cases out of ten, possibly became an adopted member of the family, and in time his descendants so merged and intermarried with the owner’s kinsmen that only a few would know their origin”.²⁰²

Leadership positions under Akan sacral rule appeared to be limited and few new offices were created. But with the possibility of changing one’s position through bravery in war, loyal services to the master and through accumulation of wealth, the *Ohene* had the right to create new offices and to appoint his favourites in complete disregard of their origin. This practice opened doors to any ambitious subjects to climb the hierarchy of sacral rule. This promoted the aristocratic type of leadership as war provided opportunities for long distant trade. The case of a slave who ended up acquiring the title of *Obirempong*²⁰³ is significant.

“As a youth, Opoku Frefre was summoned to Kumase from his natal village in order to serve the Oyoko Abohene Buapon in the lowly capacity of keeper of the bedchamber door (*duabini*). Trained in fiscal matters, Opoku Frefre succeeded in securing the personal attention of the Asantehene Kweku Dua

²⁰¹ McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 99.

²⁰² Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 42.

²⁰³ Big man who accumulated wealth and displayed it through public rituals for social recognition.

Panim. This was the start of a political career that led to the award of the *mena* (last ritual for the acquisition of the title of Big man; award of an elephant tail)".²⁰⁴

*“La monarchie Asante, formée à l’intérieur de la Côte d’Or se réorganisa, renforça sa cavalerie pour empêcher les membres de son peuple d’être des objets de chasse pour les troupes du littoral et pour se transformer eux même en exportateur d’or et d’esclaves: Des petites monarchies et des organisations de clans, on est passé au système d’état complexe de la fédération Asante qui au XIX siècle prouva sa souplesse par son passage à l’organisation de plantation en fonction des demandes européennes. (The Asante monarchy in the interior of the Gold Coast, organised and strengthened its cavalry to prevent its people from being objects of slavery in the hands of coastal warriors. The Asante monarchy made them instead, agents of gold exportation as well as guides who had to take the slaves right to the coast: Small monarchies and clan groups evolved into the complex state of the Asante Federation which was able to convert easily into farming large plantations in order to meet European demands) ”.*²⁰⁵

A slave is a political status and can, therefore be changed since it is not an economic position. Pre-colonial Akan sacral rule was a dynamic political institution where traditional leaders offered the possibility for people to move from grass to grace.

E- Abirempong:²⁰⁶ The position of the big rich men within the Akan sacral rule

According to Busia, the Akan ruler

“is rich in terms of the services he received, but he could not accumulate capital for his personal use. The chief was not allowed to have personal property of his own. The specific levies collected and paid into the chief’s treasury circulated again to the people. The weavers, carvers, goldsmiths, metal-workers, and the like, who worked for the ruler were never paid wages, but they were fed at the chief’s expense while working for him, and received a token of thanks after they had finished”.²⁰⁷

Busia goes on to show how the sacral institution was income gathering but not income

²⁰⁴ McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 53.

²⁰⁵ Iniesta, Ferran, *L’univers africain*, p. 171.

²⁰⁶ *Abirempong* is the plural form of *Obirempong* (big man).

²⁰⁷ Busia, *The position of the Chief in the Modern political system of Ashanti*, pp. 51-52.

generating. Farmers, hunters, skilful carvers, blacksmiths, gold miners, fishermen and traders are allowed to manage the token of thanks privately and, very often, they ended up accumulating wealth for themselves. Dwelling in the best forests with fertile and rich land and soil, Akan people developed an agricultural type of economy long time ago. They produced food items like the cocoa yam, cassava, plantain, banana, and palm oil. Domestic animals such as fowl, cock, hen and sheep, were also reared on a small scale. Craftsmen who work in gold and wood, have been encouraged and supported by the institution of sacral rule. Carved drums, gold ornaments, royal pageantry, and priestly shrine decoration witness to their unique genius and to the personal wealth each one could accumulate.

“Prior to the emergence of chiefdoms, the most successful individual entrepreneurs had been accorded community recognition of their capacity to accumulate by being called with accurate simplicity, big men (*Abirempong*)”.²⁰⁸

With the expansion of the Asante Empire, commerce flourished among the Akan. Opportunities for an exciting and bountiful market were open as long distance trade proved to be the best way of accumulating wealth.

“Forest products and gold and kola nuts trade routes to the towns of Timbuktu, Jenne, Segou, Gao on the Niger to Haussaland (northern Nigeria) in the northeast, and ultimately over the Sahara to the immense markets of North Africa. From the north slaves leather goods, sheep, silks, blankets and manufactured goods crossed into the towns of the metropolitan region. Southwards Asante traded palm oil, ivory, and gold dust with European representatives in the towns of Cape Coast Elmina, Winneba, Saltpond, and Accra and brought back iron implements, salt, rum, guns and gunpowder”.²⁰⁹

People could accumulate a lot of wealth. Sacral rule had genuinely institutionalised wealth acquisition so that there was room for public display of personal wealth,

²⁰⁸ McCaskie, *State and society in pre-colonial Asante*, p.42.

²⁰⁹ Lewin, *Asante before the British*, p. 12.

indicating authority through possession of a symbolic spear and other regalia. McCaskie enriched Busia's research on the *Obirempong* by furnishing historical evidence from Asante²¹⁰ affirming that

“*Abirempong* (big men) were incorporated into the state at its creation, and these retained the dignity of the title; equally some individuals who had distinguished themselves militarily in the same period were raised to the title of *Obirempong*”.²¹¹

During the 18th and 19th centuries, sacral rule politicised, structured and formalised the title of *Obirempong*. People gathered wealth in large quantities by leading the state army, by conducting the state's trade, or by being a favoured beneficiary of state law.

“The state deliberately reinforced the significance of this ultimate mark of recognition by instituting a graduated series of titles that led up to it, and by surrounding the actual award of the title of *Obirempong* with very complex ritual and ceremony”.²¹²

The status of *Obirempong* (big man) is the picture of the hunter of the elephant. Possession and display of the *mena* (elephant's tail) was the public mark of the achieved status of *Obirempong*. Dance or mime of elephant hunting in order to secure his tail was of central significance.²¹³ Moreover, the state reserved the right to bestow the title of *Obirempong* in recognition of an individual's success in accumulating wealth.

“The state assiduously reinforced this received construction of the nature and purpose of wealth. The key symbolic artefact deployed by the state was the

²¹⁰ Public display of wealth recorded by a Wesleyan missionary at Kumase in 1862 in 1862. In November 1817 Hutchison, the British resident in Kumase, witnessed the public display of wealth made by the Kumase *Gyasehene* Opoku Frefre. On 15th July 1844, Chapman observed the public display of wealth made by the *Manwerehene* Kwasi Brantuo and one other office holder at the time of Asantehene Kwaku Dua Panim. McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, pp 44-47.

²¹¹ McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 42. “The *Tafohene* Safo Akenten was prominent among the *Abirempong* conquered by the Asantehene Osei Tutu and then incorporated into the nascent Asante state”. McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 43.

²¹² McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 43.

²¹³ McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 43.

Sika mena or the Golden Elephant Tail, which took precedence over all of the elephant tails of the *Obirempong*. From Osei Tutu onwards there were *Sika mena*”.²¹⁴

The Asante understood the *Sika mena*, the symbol of wealth, as being in an intimate binary relationship with the *Sika Dwa Kofi* or the Golden Stool, symbolising political authority and legitimacy of power. This type of metaphorical concept is common in Asante thought, and it is intended to express notions of support, help, and enabling assistance; that is, the *Sika mena* was constructed as the helper of the *Sika Dwa Kofi*.²¹⁵ The wealth of the *Obirempong* gave him power, even over the sacral ruler.²¹⁶

“In pre-colonial Asante, land and labour were not marketable as strict economic resources within this or any other such rigorous structure of commodity valuation. Thus anything generally approximating to capitalist agriculture only emerged in Asante with the spread of the monetisation of land and labour as resources that derived from the insertion of the cocoa-based cash crop economy in the colonial era”.²¹⁷

Slavery was not practised as the European organised it. The possession of servants validated and represented influence, attainment, status and rank. The purpose of being a big man with many servants was political and social but not economic. The conversion into economic capital was to start slowly as Europeans penetrated the African community.

²¹⁴ McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 47.

²¹⁵ McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 47.

²¹⁶ “Yamoa Ponko acquired substantial wealth in the northern trade with the Gonja towns of Gbupe and Daboya, which lay on the commercial route that linked Asante with the middle Niger; and following the Anglo-Asante treaty of 1831, the southern trade in cloth and other European merchandise afforded retail opportunities and considerable profits. Prior to his death in or about 1785, Yamoa Ponko made a public display of his wealth and was awarded the title of *Obirempong*. He made an extremely unusual and probably unprecedented request. Contrary to established custom, he asked that the Asantehene Osei Kwame attend and preside over his funeral custom in person. For whatever reason, Osei Kwame did, indeed, preside over Yamoa Ponko’s extravagant funeral custom”. McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, pp. 50-60.

²¹⁷ McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 48.

F- Women in leadership

Akan groups are the unique people in Ghana among whom inheritance is matrilineal. The office of leadership in society appears masculine but the access to it follows female decision and feminine links in familial structure. The Akan leader, no matter his position in the order of sacral rule,

“traced his descent, through the female line, from some ancestress who was supposed to have been the founder of his kindred group. This woman had often a mythological origin; she descended from the sky; she came from the ground”.²¹⁸

Akan sacral communities genuinely encourage competition between male and female. Their women can do all that men do: farming, politics, military service and divination. Women also take part in an authentic calendar study of astrology and reforestation. The *Ohema* (Queen Mother) has the power of veto on the selection of the next successor to the throne.

Men and women struggle on how to care for trees and when to cut down one of them. The Queen Mother shares with the *Ohene*, the power to order the cutting of trees and the carving design of a stool. For the marriage of the British Princess Mary in 1922, Asante Queen Mothers represented by the Queen Mother of Mampong presented her with a Stool. Not only did they decide on the type of wood; they also chose the carver, the blacksmith, the design and they religiously blessed it.²¹⁹ They have the right to establish and manage diplomatic relations. The Queen Mothers from neighbouring groups could indirectly influence the selection of a sacral ruler of one Akan group. Clay work seems to be completely in the hands of Akan women. The various forms of pots, clay jugs for fetching water and clay ornaments witness to the artistic genius of

²¹⁸ Rattray, *Ashanti law and Constitution*, p. 81.

²¹⁹ Rattray, *Ashanti*, pp. 294-299.

women. Although they compete strongly with men in gold mining, they were however, absent in gold trade and long distant commerce.

In wartime, “the senior woman of the *Omanhene* carried the most important of the blackened Stools. Brave women carried water to the firing line”.²²⁰ In the absence of the ruler, the military defence of the Stool falls upon the Queen Mother. Alongside the *Ohene* she had chosen, the Queen Mother is also the caretaker and guardian of the Golden Stool. When the Asantehene Kwaku Dua III (Agyeman Prempeh) was exiled and the British Governor claimed the right over the Golden Stool, the Queen Mother of Kumase launched the famous war which is named after her: “The Yaw Asanteewaa war” of 1900. The war lasted around a year and ended with the capture of the Queen Mother, but the Golden Stool was safe.²²¹

Akan women are much more instrumental in religious matters. They are the virgin priestesses serving at the *Ahenfie* (palace) as guardians of the *Nyame Dan* (Temple to the Supreme God) where the sacral ruler spends a retreat of nine days and eight nights every year. They are patrons of shrines (*abosom*) where people come for medical care and spiritual protection. Their significance in the daily running of the institution of leadership will be more evident as we discuss and analyse the religious dimensions of sacral rule.

III- Access to leadership or the sacralisation of an Akan ruler

A- Nature of the office

²²⁰ Rattray, *Ashanti law and Constitution*, p. 124.

²²¹ Rattray, *Ashanti*, pp. 292-293.

It can be deduced from what has been presented that the position of ruler is a male office. One of the maternally connected male born of the *Ohene* is to be selected. The selection can be vetoed by the Queen Mother because the kinship system is matrilineal. It is through the maternal link to an uncle that a potential candidate can gain access to the highest position in sacral rule. Thus, the office is male, and the channel is female. In the same way, the ambition of a son to rule can become reality only through his mother, and his destoolment from the highest position to a lower one passes through the same channel. It is an office hedged by checks and balances. People can enstool and destool their ruler. Founded on the idea of selection and that of enstoolment and destoolment, the position of an Akan sacral ruler is political. Holding or losing power in an Akan community seems to be a daily struggle of interpersonal transactions of influence. The successful ones assure a stable social position and, therefore, hierarchy among the Akan is a social reality. The ruler is the one to ensure the spiritual acquisition of a piece of land by making a sacrifice on a new area to be used by his people. The protection of the community, and the acquisition of new territories helped develop an army. The first to defend people's interest through war is the *Ohene*. The Akan ruler is first and foremost a military leader. Sacral rule is therefore a characteristic of a military organised society.

The possibility of only one person sitting on the stools of dead rulers made the office a sacralising stage for priestly function. An Akan sacral ruler is therefore also a religious leader. In fact, the Queen Mother's veto is paramount as much as she presents the candidate as an efficient intercessor for the group, and as capable of ensuring people's spiritual welfare. The dominant desire of the people is for the increase and the

fertility of the earth in fruitfulness and the women in childbearing so that the race may continue. Those who give those things are the gods, the ancestors and the Supreme God, through the ruler. Only the chief could bring all the lineages together and sacrifice to his royal ancestors on behalf of the community as a whole through celebrations of *Adae* and *Odwira*. The *Ohene* is the organiser of the religious festivals of the community. Before they came together to settle in a town the ruler first sacrificed on behalf of his population. To the people these religious responsibilities were “his most important functions”.²²²

B- Ancestralisation of the dead ruler

The Akan people believed that the well-being of a society depends upon the maintenance of relations with ancestors on whom the living depend for everything good and for protection. Each lineage kept in touch with its own ancestors through ritual sacrifices. Each lineage has its blackened stool, which is believed to hold the spirit of the ancestor who used to sit on it. It is obvious for people that the spirits of the dead rulers protect the community as a whole. As Rattray²²³ reported, when a ruler dies, after the customary ceremony of washing and preparing the body, the corpse is dressed in gorgeous attire. A feast is prepared at which every kind of acceptable food is displayed before the corpse, and the guests, who have brought their plates, make pretence of sharing in the feast. After this banquet with the dead is over, the elders advanced one by one to swear an oath of faithfulness before their late master in deep religious words

²²² Busia, *The position of the Chief in the Modern political system of Ashanti*, p. 11.

²²³ Rattray, *Ashanti*, pp. 83-84.

while putting their sword on his chest. The corpse is then taken for burial and his stool is blackened. The former master has become an ancestor.

Among the Akan, the Stool is greater than the person who sits on it. At the death of a sacral ruler, the *wirempefo* (group of unknown young and strong boys) constitute themselves into an armed body, sweep down upon the ancestral Stool-house, and carry off the blackened stools without which a new ruler cannot be enstooled. This is to counter the intrigues of ambitious Queen Mothers, or of persons of royal blood who might be ready to force their individual claims to the Stool without the vote of the kingmakers, the *mpanyimfo* (elders) and that of the people. The persons who select the *Ohene* are those who can destool him.

C- Selection of the new ruler

Two elders are selected during a meeting of the *Mpanyimfo* and kingmakers to approach the Queen Mother and to ask her to nominate a new candidate for the stool. In complete ignorance of where the Stools are, the Queen Mother, in consultation with the royal family, must elect from their lineage a male blood relation of the founding ancestor or ancestress. They consider all the eligible candidates and choose the one they think is more suitable. The necessary qualities according to Busia were: intelligence (*adwempa*), humility (*ahobrease*), generosity (*ne yamye*), manliness (*abooduru*), and physical fitness (*dem biara nni ne ho*).²²⁴ She informs the elders of the name and description of the chosen candidate. The *Krontihene* (president of the council of Elders in the absence of the ruler) summons a meeting of the elders and tells them of the nominated candidate. They appoint a day for a meeting which the headmen, elders, and

²²⁴ Busia, *The position of the Chief in the Modern political system of Ashanti*, p. 11.

commoners attend. On that day, commoners and elders are together and the royal lineage is in a separated house, that of the Queen Mother, at a short distance away from the general meeting. The spokesman tells the gathering the name of the candidate the Queen Mother has nominated. The elders will appear to deliberate over the matter and then ask the commoners what they think about it. If at the end the house of commoners and elders reject the candidate, the Queen Mother is informed and the royal family nominates a new one. Both parties usually agree on one candidate. But in case of a disagreement, the popular candidate from the royal family is selected. A royal does not install the *Ohene*; that is the privilege of the commoners who have to serve him.²²⁵

D- Sacralisation of the new ruler: Akan liturgy of the accession to power

When the two parties have agreed, the royal family holds a meeting in the Queen Mother's house as noted by Busia:

“They settled any disputes or differences there might be between the chief elected and any member of the royal family. All the adult men swore an oath of allegiance to the chief-elect, promising to serve him as the chosen occupant of the stool of their ancestors, and to support him in his administration”.²²⁶

Then the selected candidate is taken to the Stool Room where the Elders and Kingmakers are waiting. The installation ceremony starts with the welcome address of the *Krontihene*. Then the *Okyeame* (linguist) is given the floor to recite publicly to the new ruler the following:²²⁷

Yempe Asekyere (We do not wish that he disclose the origin of any person)
Yempe Atendidie (We do not wish that he should abuse us)
Yempe Ayamonyono (We do not wish selfishness)

²²⁵ Interview with Dormaa Ahenkro Elders, Dormaa, 27 July, 1998.

²²⁶ Busia, *The position of the Chief in the Modern political system of Ashanti*, p. 11.

²²⁷ Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 26. Translation amended by Nana Birikorang *Apesemankahene*, Akropong, August, 2001.

Yempe Asodene (We do not want you to be stubborn)
Yempe Kwaseabuo (We do not wish you to cheat)
Yempe Atim'sem (We do not wish you to be imprudent)
Yempe Kumasesem (We do not want things done as in Kumase)
Yempe ebe ba se, 'kwan nni ho, 'kwan nni ho (We do not wish that it should ever be that he should say; I have no time, I have no time)
Yempe Apo (We do not want bullying)
Yempe Popo' (we do not want personal violence)

The *Mpanyimfo* swear an oath in a religious language to obey, protect and advise the ruler, and to transmit the decision to his people while putting on the chest of the newly selected candidate the same sword they had put on the chest of their former ruler at the last meal with the dead. The ruler, in turn, points his sword to the sky and slowly brings it to touch the ground, swears before the elders to rule as his forefathers did and to listen to their advice by saying:

“Today you have elected me: if I do not govern you as well as my ancestors did; if I do not listen to the advice of my elders; if I make war upon them; if I run away from battle; then have I violated the oath”.²²⁸

The elected candidate is led forward to where the most important of the blackened Stools of his dead ancestors is placed. Upon it, the heir to the

“throne is placed for a second and lifted up; and the process is repeated three times. From now onwards, he is invested with all the sanctity and the power of the dead, until the time he dies or is destooled”.²²⁹

He is then taken out and put on the Stool his family has prepared for him. After that the friends of the candidate carry him on their shoulders and tour the town. The candidate is then *Ohene* (full-fledged sacral ruler). The sacralisation of the ruler is then a genuine liturgical process carried on by kingmakers in order to hand power to the highest leader they have chosen. He is sacralised to the highest level but he does not become a god or

²²⁸ Busia, *The position of the Chief in the Modern political system of Ashanti*, p. 12.

²²⁹ Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 26.

a spirit. His position as bearer of divine titles is transient. He needs God and the spiritual hierarchy of power to rule. He has been introduced into the spiritual world for people to show him due respect.

E- Checks and Balances: the destoolment of a sacral ruler

As a full-fledged ruler, the *Ohene* now knows the influential members of his entourage. Everybody has his share of power to pass on to his heir. All powers in his community are brought to the palace and are not given to him. Every move and command, which appears to emanate from the *Ohene*'s mouth has to be discussed in private with the right people. It needs to be previously agreed upon by his councillors and approved by the Queen Mother to whom everyone in the community has access and whose popular opinion on any subject is thus made known. Serious departure from this custom could eventually lead to destoolment. A sacral ruler's duties and limitations are strictly defined by a whole series of instructions. Some are publicly recited before him on the occasion of his enstoolment, and others are progressively known as he rules.

“If he abused his power, he was divested of it by having his special connection with ancestors, established on his enstoolment, severed. His sanctity was violated and he was no longer able to sit on the stool of the ancestors”.²³⁰

A chief was not, as we can see, ostensibly an autocratic ruler; in reality, he was expected to do little or nothing without having previously consulted his councillors who in turn conferred with the people in order to sound popular opinion. He was respected by all and feared by all in virtue of his close connection with the spiritual world. When a chief opens his mouth in court he speaks with the power of the “*samanfo* (ancestors)”,

²³⁰ Busia, *The position of the Chief in the Modern political system of Ashanti*, p. 43.

and should never be contradicted; in consequence, a chief should never speak hastily. He speaks through his “*Okyeame* (linguist)”. A chief will keep his ancestors informed of any important case and will ask for their assistance.

It is believed that in case of an abuse of power, injustice, cruelties, insubordination of the king or misconduct, “the Supreme Being and gods can desert a kingdom leading to its ruin”.²³¹ Where the ruler disagrees with his court, he is likely to be destooled or put to death. Destoolment is a desacralisation process by which the kingmakers withdraw from the sacral ruler the power they had handed to him. “Those authorised to choose the king are the rightful persons to depose him”.²³² A ruler cannot be destooled in one day. The process takes at least two or more *Adaes* approximately eighty or more days. Before the charges are read publicly, an informal warning would already have been issued. When the heads of divisions and families realised that the *Omanhene* is not willing to consider their position, they mobilise the people to humiliate him in public during an *Adae*. It can be done by slapping him, by taking off his cloth, his sandals, by removing his chair and forcing him to sit on the ground or by pushing him. If this happens and there is no reaction from his immediate entourage, everybody knows that the destoolment has started. This is a public display of socio-political and military disagreement with the ruler. Destoolment is similar to a palace coup. Although the outcry may come from the people, implementation of the destoolment is by the palace people. When this happens, gun firing follows and the friends of the ruler take him away. In the absence of the ruler, libation is poured on the

²³¹ Akeampong, Emmanuel, “C.C. Reindorf on the cultural articulation of power in pre-colonial Ghana: Observation of a social historian”, in Jenkins (ed), *The recovery of the West African past: African pastors and African history in the mid-nineteenth century*; C.C. Reindorf and Samuel Johnson, Basler Afrika, 1998, p. 108.

²³² Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p.15.

courtyard at the palace, and the elders follow the Queen mother to her compound. On another day, they will go to the *Bamuhene* (Executioner) and to the head of the royal family. They will then parade through the street of the town and appoint a time to perform the destoolment in the Stool room. In the Stool room, they read the charges and confirm that the ruler neglected their warning and that the deadline has passed. Then they proclaimed together in one voice, "Now we have destooled him". The ruler is addressed by his formal social name and not the Stool name, mention of his previous occupation is made and all of them say, "He is no more a sacral ruler; he is no more sitting on a royal Stool." The *Okyeame* continues by addressing the ancestors: "We are then asking you (ancestors) to protect him as a private person and should you not put any demand on him."²³³ He is discharged from any obligation.

During the process of destoolment, the kingmakers appear to have broken faith with the leader they had chosen. However, this is simply a political game because some destooled rulers can be re-enstooled after sometime. Kwasi Akuffo and Kwame Ofori II in the royal history of the Akuapem group are notable examples.²³⁴

F- Wealth and personal accession

Wealth is not necessarily linked with access to sacral rule as such. It can be a subsidiary argument for selecting one member of the Queen Mother's possible choices. In fact, legitimate trade is an important means of wealth accumulation. Access to the possibility of amassing wealth in either warfare or trade was mediated by the state.

²³³ Interview with *Nana Addo-Birikorang*, the *Apesemankahene* of the Akuapem, 9 Nov 1999, 20-21h.

²³⁴ Kwasi Akuffo succeeded to the stool in 1895 and was destooled in 1907. He was reinstooled in 1920 and died as sacral ruler of Akuapem in 1927. Kwame Ofori II was enstooled in 1945 and was destooled in 1949. He came back in 1959 and died on the stool in 1974. See in Brokensha, David, *Akwapim handbook*, Accra, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1972, p. 212.

Before extending trade links southwards, Akan people acquired substantial wealth in northern trade with the Gonja towns of Gbuipe and Daboya which lay on the commercial route that linked the area with the Middle Niger. Following the various European treaties with Akan groups at the beginning of the colonial enterprise, the southern trade in cloth and other European merchandise afforded retail opportunities and considerable profits. The sacral rule expected the opportunity to match trade profits with talent and personal achievement. McCaskie reports a genuine case from the Asante.²³⁵

IV- Religion in the Akan sacral rule

Akan religion has attracted people from various disciplines for more than a century starting with the Christian missionaries like Johannes Christaller, who revealed to the universal public its meaning and practice during the third quarter of the 19th century. English anthropologists like Ellis,²³⁶ Rattray,²³⁷ and many other Africans like Busia,²³⁸ have written about the religion of the Akan, one contradicting or correcting the other. Rattray made an inventory of positions and classified them into two: those who saw in African practices the notion of a Supreme God, represented by Christaller, and those who denied it, represented by Ellis. He argued for the presence of the belief

²³⁵ "In and about 1785, Yamoia Ponko made a public display of his wealth, and was awarded the *mena* and the title of *Obirempong*. He made an extremely unusual and probably unprecedented request. He asked, contrary to established custom that the Asantehene Osei Kwame attends and presides himself over his funeral custom in person. It was presumably in acknowledgement of Yamoia Ponko's especial achievement in the accumulation of wealth-and perhaps, too, because of attachment or personal sentiment- that Osei Kwame agreed to this request. He was the pioneer in accumulation through trade and not through war success. In receiving the *mena* and in having the Asantehene as his principal mourner, Yamoia Ponko in effect had asserted his achievement and status, at the highest and most public level, not once but twice". McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, pp. 53-54.

²³⁶ Lengthy quoted by Rattray, *Ashanti*, pp. 92-150.

²³⁷ Rattray had discussed Asante religion in nearly all his books like: - *Ashanti*, - *Ashanti law and Constitution*, - *The tribes of the Ashanti hinterland*, vol. 1, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932.

²³⁸ Busia, *The position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of the Ashanti*,

in the Supreme God called *Onyankopong*, *Onyame* or *Nyame*. However, it is now obvious that the knowledge of the Supreme God before the preaching of the Christian Gospel was genuinely African. People believed that *Onyankopong*, the Supreme God, is the highest being and creator of everything comprising Earth (his female counterpart) and human beings. Evil spirits are believed to be sent by enemies for destruction. Some outstanding people are often believed to become spirits "*Samanfo*" after their death. These spirits are evoked for protection. An ancestral spirit which can enter and dwell in a human being and in a stool, is benevolent and necessary for his offspring because it serves as a link to reach *Onyame*.

Unlike the *samanfo* or human spirits, the *Abosom* (gods or superhuman spirits) are believed to have no human origin. According to the Akan myth transcribed by Rattray,

"*Nyame*, the Sky God, had various sons of whom one was particular as a *Bayeyere* (favourite son). *Nyame* decided to send these children of his down to the earth in order that they might receive benefits from, and confer them upon, mankind. All these sons bore the names of what are now rivers or lakes...as a woman gives birth to a child, so may water to a god".²³⁹

Onyankopong, who is sovereign, good in nature and giver of life, sends good spirits for protection. Spirits dwell in rivers (Tano in Asante) on mountains (Oboo Tabari in Koforidua), in stones, in trees and in some reserved forests. Communication with these spirits is through specialists called priests, whom the corresponding spirits can possess. In trance, priests explain to someone what is happening inside him, what would happen to him and how to behave in order to avoid misfortune. These natural objects soon become centres of protection after some rituals have been performed for the spirits to be incarnated in them. With time, people start revering them and considering them as

²³⁹ Rattray, *Ashanti*, pp. 145-146.

shrines or sanctuaries for spiritual consultations. Shrines are placed under the lordship of *Onyankopong* for the well-being of people.

Some shrines are imported like Tigari from northern Togo, Gyagyawurugya from Benin, Moatia from the Pygmies in Cameroon and Congo and the Wolomo practices from Nigeria. Local ones can be exported like Akonedi from Larteh which had spread all over Ghana and beyond, reaching America and Austria. Some are confined to one place like Gyamfi in Akropong-Akuapem. People go to shrines for prayers and consultations as the *Asofo* (ministers or owners) are also healers of physical and spiritual sicknesses. The shrines and the priests or priestesses (*Akomfo*) in charge are not bound to a special Akan community. As the servants of the sons of *Onyame* (the Supreme God), their religious functions are for the benefit of people inside and outside the Akan community. The Akan people, too, can cross the boundaries of their group and seek information from a relevant shrine. Priests and shrines had few military and political connotations.

The undisputable religious practices among the Akan relate to the popular belief in ancestors through the Stools in families and the consultation of shrines where the *Abosom* (protective spirit agents of the Supreme God) dwelt to serve individuals, members of the ruling class as well as anyone coming from outside the geographic area of the community. Contribution to the religious knowledge of the Akan will be made as the following arguments show how religion plays a major role in the sacral rule of the Akan communities.

1- Individual spirituality: Nyame Dua (the tree of God) in an Akan compound

In his rejection of Ellis's view that there is no notion of a Supreme God among the Akan, Rattray said:

“It is hardly an exaggeration to say that every compound in Asante contains an altar to the Sky God, in the shape of a forked branch cut from a certain tree which the Asante called ‘*Nyame Dua*, lit. God's tree. Between the branches, which are cut short, is placed a basin, or perhaps a pot, and in this receptacle, is generally to be found (besides the offering) a Neolithic Celt (‘*Nyame akuma*, God's axe)’”.²⁴⁰

The pot contains water, an egg, three carefully selected small stones and some leaves as the *Mamponhene* (the ruler of Mampong) of Akuapem explained to us.²⁴¹ Water, egg, stone and leaves are related to the mystery of life. The egg, as Rev S.K. Aboa explained to us represents the life. The *Nyame Dua* is planted in front of homes and compounds. It is regarded as an altar for God. It signifies God's presence everywhere and every time”.²⁴² The *Nyame Dua* came into being as a replica of *Adukromonsu*²⁴³ which is a big hole in the trunk of a big tree in the forest containing water. This water, which quenched the thirst of hopeless hunters and farmers, was believed to come from God and was used for libation as one addressed prayers to the Almighty God.

The *Nyame Dua* in houses was then created as a replica of what was found in the forest. It is a place for prayers on a daily basis. One is expected to sprinkle one's body with water from the pot before going out of the compound. The believer thanks God for his protection and asks him to be with him as he goes out of the compound and comes into it. For the families, since only one person cares for the ancestors within a

²⁴⁰ Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 142.

²⁴¹ Visit to the ruler of Mampong-Akuapem under the linguistic and cultural guide of K.S. Aboa, Mampong, 12 Nov 1999, 17h-19h.

²⁴² Quarco, Kofi Alfred, *The language of Adinkra patterns*, Legon, Bebewie Ventures, 2nd ed, 1994.

²⁴³ Informal discussion with Ankobea Yaw Sakyi, Akropong, 27th September, 2002, 11-14h.

matrilineal community, non-heirs content themselves with the prayers said under the *Nyame Dua*. From childhood to death, everyone is exposed to prayers directed to the Supreme God. Prayers to *Onyame* are offered through the same means no matter one's status in the sacral rule. Under the control of his close entourage, the *Ohene* had to practise this under a strict discipline. Only God can save him from unrest. At the royal level, the *Nyame Dua* needs special care, for the sacral ruler is thus reminded to "give sacrifice to *Nyame*".²⁴⁴

Asante people had built a temple for the *Ohene*'s spiritual duties towards the *Onyame*, the Supreme God. Once a year, the *Ohene* (sacral ruler) spent eight nights in the *Nyame Dan* (temple of the Supreme God) with one of his wives. Rattray accorded great attention to this spiritual retreat of the sacral ruler of the Asante.²⁴⁵ Four priestesses dressed in white cared for the temple. They were known as:

- 1- *'Nyame boa me* (God help me.)
- 2- *Fa ma 'Nyame* (Take it and give it to God.)
- 3- *'Nyame asem* (God's word.)
- 4- *'Nyame adom* (God's favour.)

Respectively, when the ruler arrived for his annual retreat, the four priestesses came with the mashed yam they had cooked. The *Fa ma 'Nyame* had to hold the *Eto* (mashed yams). All of them would go under the *Nyame Dua* and the *Fa ma 'Nyame* started by saying: "*Nyankopong Kwame wo hyire ni o*, (God whose day of service is Saturday- this is your white clay, life to our master)". Then the ruler would place a spoonful of *Eto* in the pan upon the top of the forked branch of *Nyame Dua* saying: "*Me Nyankopong me sere wo nkwa, na me sere wo ahooden* (My God I pray you for life and

²⁴⁴ Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 144.

²⁴⁵ Rattray, *Ashanti*, pp. 141-144.

I pray you for strength)". Rattray continues to report that a sheep is also slaughtered and the blood allowed to fall upon the ground; pieces of meat are threaded upon the skewers projecting from the forks of God's altar, with the words: "here is a sheep I killed for you, take and eat and give me health and strength". At the end of this day of his arrival, he would spend eight nights in the temple with the wife he had chosen. The royal personal annual retreat ended with the slaughtering of two white fowls.

Apart from the *Nyame Dua* outside and inside the *Nyame Dan*,²⁴⁶ there is nothing else in the temple. There is a separate house for the priestesses outside it. The temple of the Supreme God is the royal sanctuary for the *Ohene*'s yearly spiritual retreat of nine days and eight nights. The first and the last days are for sacrifices when the priestesses *Fa ma 'Nyame* is in action. Probably, the second and the fifth days are those in which the priestess *Nyame adom* (God's favour) talks about the mercies of *Onyame* (God) to the ruler. The third and sixth days see the *'Nyame asem* (God's word) priestess in action speaking to *Ohene*, the ruler, on behalf of *Onyame*. The fourth and seventh days are reserved for *'Nyame boa me* (God help me) who talks about the help *Onyame* could bring to the sacral ruler. The eighth day, the *Ohene* could be alone before *Onyame*. There is no doubt that the *Ohene* has at least one day for being alone in the temple with *Onyame*. However, differently from Rattray, we may classify the four priestesses in the following order:

First day; *Fa ma 'Nyame*
Second day; *'Nyame adom*
Third day; *'Nyame asem*
Fourth day; *'Nyame boa me*
Fifth day; *'Nyame adom*
Sixth day; *'Nyame asem*

²⁴⁶ This building dedicated to the Supreme God was flanked at the palace courtyard. Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 94.

Seventh day; *'Nyame boa me*
Eighth day; *Ohene and Onyame*
Ninth day; *Fa ma 'Nyame*

Under the *Nyame Dua*, prayers are individually said and the words are strongly personal. But in the stool room, the expression of the belief in ancestors is communal.

2- Belief in Ancestors: Religious responsibilities of head of family

Talking of the belief in ancestors, Rattray limited his observation to that of the ruling family.²⁴⁷ Going beyond, Busia explained how the religious attitude towards ancestors is not only the business of the ruling family, but that of all the heads of family. Taking the Asante case as a model of what goes on in Akan communities, he revealed:

“The Asante believed that the well-being of a society depends upon the maintenance of good relations with ancestors on whom the living depend for help and protection. Each lineage kept in touch with its own ancestors through ritual sacrifices. Each lineage has its blackened stool, which is the shrine of its ancestors. It is believed that the spirit of dead rulers protects the whole community. The chief is then appointed to act as the intermediary between his royal ancestor and the tribe. When he sat on the stool he embodied the spirit of his ancestors and his person became sacred”.²⁴⁸

A- Ancestral belief in families: the significance of the private *Samanfo*

In a single Akan community, there are many family heads and stool holders. The stool has a link with the ancestors. The ruling family stands only as one family among other families. Consultation with the ancestors and prayers for the protection of their descendants are done on a daily basis or when necessary. The Akan religion is mainly the belief in ancestors, and the position of the head of family gains clear significance within the organised ceremonies by which the people expressed their sense

²⁴⁷ Rattray, *Ashanti*, pp. 92-100

²⁴⁸ Busia, *The position of the Chief in the Modern political system of Ashanti*, p. 26.

of dependence on their fore parents. Busia reports the following farewell words at funerals:

“You are leaving us today; we have fired guns; we have given you a sheep; we have performed your funeral; do not let any of us fall ill. Let us get money to pay the expenses of your funeral. Let the women bear children. Give life to all of us, give life to the chief”.²⁴⁹

The influence of the head of a maternal lineage on his people depends on whether or not his prayers to the ancestors are beneficial to the members who seek peace, good health, rich progenitor, wealth and friendship. Informally, every living member of the family believes that the bond of kinship persists between him and the dead. With regard to marriages, one knows that the successors who sit on the stool of the ancestors have to pour libation and say prayers to the dead for the daughter to be married or for the son to be successful in marrying the girl of his choice as the family leaders go for negotiations. Libations have to be poured on behalf of family members who are travelling. For the traders, before they start a business, the spiritual input of the successor who enters the Stool room is instrumental. Sick people believe the most in the healing capacity of the ancestral cult. The ancestors have to be consulted before entering into new friendship. Before the arrival and after the departure of an important guest, the head of family has to pour libation or invite the dead to be part of the welcoming and the farewell parties. Family members who show some indifferent attitudes are often called to contribute and to come for blessings during the rites of the ancestral cult. From childhood to the grave, ancestors and their representatives who are the heads of families are real spiritual forces on which each life is built. The concrete expressions of the belief in ancestors are performed by people with the same blood.

²⁴⁹ Busia, *The position of the Chief in the Modern political system of Ashanti*, pp. 23-24.

While those practices are private for the families at the periphery and not at the centre of the sacral rule, that of the ruling people at the *Ahenfie* (palace) is public and observed by the whole community on a monthly and yearly basis. They are the *Adae* and *Odwira* ceremonies.

B- Communal spirituality: Ahenfie's religious duties

The channel of the ancestral cult among the Akan is the stool. The *Awukudae*, *Akwesidae* and *Odwira* are communal ceremonies organised for the ancestral cult of the ruling family. *Awukudae* ceremonies are celebrated on Wednesday, *Akwesidae* on Sunday and *Odwira* every end of the traditional year after 9 *Adaes*. From one *Adae* to the other, there are between 40 and 42 days. The Akan calendar is based on the religious activities. A month starts with one *Adae* and ends with the other. At the ninth *Adae*, the yearly celebration of the *Odwira* religious festival is performed. One year is 9 *Adaes*, that is $40 \times 9 = 360$ days or $42 \times 9 = 378$. The average of these extremes is 367 days. The Akan word for month is *adaduanan*, which is also the word for forty days. Time here is measured according to the sequence of religious practices of the sacral ruler. If the *Ohene* fails to organise an *Adae*, the community life is troubled. Even in wartime, everything is done for the *Adae* to be performed and even to be extraordinarily performed.²⁵⁰ Success in war as well as in farming, in eating specific kinds of food follows religious prescriptions. Movements of the ruling class are programmed and executed after consultation with the ancestors and priests.

²⁵⁰ In the Seychelles Island, Agyeman Prempeh and his faithful elders in exile, celebrated *Adae* regularly. For details, see Akyeamong Emmanuel, "Christianity, Modernity and Weight of Tradition in the life of *Asantehene* Agyeman Prempeh I, c. 1888-1931", in *Africa*, no 69 (2), 1999.

Rattray's description as an eyewitness shows how the belief in ancestors at the sacral *Ahenfie* of an Akan group is instrumental in maintaining the position of rulers.

He found the *Adae* to be:

“ceremonies at which the spirits of the departed rulers of the clan are propitiated, their names and deeds recalled, and favours and mercy solicited”.²⁵¹

Focusing on the Wednesday as is the case in Akuapem, people involved in the celebration of the *Adae* are: the *Omanhene* (the ruler), the *Sodofo* (the cooks at the palace), the *Asokwafo* (the elephant horn blowers), the *Akonnuasofohene* (the head stool-carrier), the *Okyeame* (linguist or spokesperson), the *Tumutufu* (the gun-bearer), the *Okofonfo* (the sword-bearer), the *Osene* (the herald) and the *Dabrefu* (Members of the *Ohene*'s household) commencing with the Queen Mother (*Ohema*). All these people are related to the *Ohene* as he runs the sacral institution with their help and services. Each one plays an important role in the religious maintenance of the community. The absence of one of these people is detrimental for the success of the ceremony. The chain of command is fixed. Power is distributed with functions to be performed. Everything has to be identified with a function and a division, with the person responsible for that. Everything is not the ruler but all powers are put together to sustain the institution of sacral rule. If this intimate entourage is in favour of the ruler, there is no problem. The *Ohene* is the first to enter the stool room. A simple remark, but important for this thesis, is made by Rattray:

“On entering the room the Chief (*Ohene*) bared his shoulder and slipped his sandals from off his feet, standing upon them (as) marks of respect accorded by an inferior to a superior”.²⁵²

²⁵¹ Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 92.

²⁵² Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 95.

It is believed that the *Ohene* does not bare his shoulder in front of anybody in his kingdom. He is not supposed to have any contact with the ground. Once his feet touch the ground, he ceases to be the *Ohene*. However, in the stool room he can bare his shoulder and slip off his sandals. But then, he loses his ruling prerogative in front of the ancestors.²⁵³ In the stool room, he is instructed on the history of each stool while the words and deeds of a memorable dead ruler are repeated, the *Ohene* listens seated on the stool of that very departed ruler in the ancestral stool room.

“The stool, which during the lifetime of its possessor was so intimately bound with its owner’s *sunsum* or soul, thus becomes after death a shrine into which the departed spirit may again be called upon to enter on certain special occasions, such as (*Adae*) that it may receive that adulation and those gifts that were dear to it in life, and so be induced to continue to use its new and greater spiritual influence in the interest of those over whom it formerly ruled when upon earth”.²⁵⁴

People witness what is going on and consider it till the following *Adae*. They will live according to the words and deeds of that former ruler whose stool was the main focus during the *Adae*.

Everything in the *Adae* celebration starts with the ritual feeding of ancestors, their greetings, prayers for health, peace, prosperity, rich crops, success in war, protection and wisdom for the ruler, and ends with the drink offering of the ancestors. The rest of the food and the drinks are shared among the people present. What is interesting among the Akan is the absence of priests in the daily running of state business. Because religion is practised in family and the leadership is military and

²⁵³ The Kabbaka of the Baganda reluctantly and very rarely goes to the ancestral tomb for it is there that he loses all power and becomes vulnerable. It is the only place where others like his mother can talk to him with authority. Interview with Kikongo Mugerwa, Kasubi Tomb, Uganda, 10th May 2000, 9h-13h

²⁵⁴ Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 92.

political, the shrine's social activities seem to be kept private and allow for no public comment or display.

3- Priesthood and sacral leadership among the Akan and the place of the *Abosom*

It is very hard to find a harmony between a sacral ruler and a priest with spiritual impact beyond the *Ohene's* geographic territory. It is also hard to see the political and the religious walking hand in hand in the Akan sacral rule because it is generally believed that the two powers follow two extremely divergent forms of transmission. The political is matrilineal while the religious is patrilineal. The minimal priestly influence in the actual practice of Akan leadership confirms its foreignness and its non-Akan origin. Historical facts prove that powerful priests are from conquered *Guan* and *Ga* populations of patrilineal descent. However, prophecy and healing gifts attached to the shrines and priests forced the ruling class to keep them in the society. In support of this view, it is worth quoting Rattray as he presented the process of the making of a shrine in Akan community:

“This god of ours, if in our time, or in our children's, and our grandchildren's time a king should arise from somewhere, and come to us, and say he is going to war, when he tells you and you well know that should he go to the fight he will not gain the victory, you must tell us so; and should you know that he will go and conquer, then also state that truth. And yet again, if a man be ill in the night, or in the day time, and we raise you aloft and place you upon the head, and inquire of you,...let the cause of the misfortune which you tell him has come upon him be the real cause of the evil and not lies... Today you become a god for the chief. Today you become a god for our spirit ancestors. Perhaps upon some to-morrow the Ashanti king may come and say...”²⁵⁵

Before launching a war, in case of long sickness, in case of any difficult problem every body, subject and royal, is expected to consult many shrines to know the truth. Shrines

²⁵⁵ Rattray, *Ashanti*, p. 149.

belong much more within the realm of individual and secret activity than in the order of communal and public practice. However, in wartime, the “*abosom*, the shrines of the lesser gods and their priests or priestesses, accompanied the army”.²⁵⁶

Nevertheless, in the Akan experience of sacral rule, the warrior’s dress is full of charms from various shrines. They are so attached to it that it is difficult to say what gives victory at war, those charms or the military prowess of the warrior, or both. In fact, the famous Guan priest, *Okomfo* Anokye, was instrumental in the launching of the Asante Empire. Because he caused the Golden Stool to mysteriously descend from above during a meeting of important Akan leaders and alight on Osei Tutu’s lap, the new Asante ruler was publicly sacralised. Even though he succeeded Obiri Yeboa on the Oyoko Stool at Kumase, his successors from generation to generation considered him the founder of the Asante Empire. The Golden Stool is different from the Akan ruling Stools in the sense that it contains the soul, the past, the present and the future of all those who founded it.

“So long as the Golden Stool was safe, its adherents will prosper. But the condition of this safety is unity”.²⁵⁷

Successive Asante victories in war are believed to be the result of the power from the Golden Stool.

“When an engagement went against the army, the rank and file might scatter, but not their commanders. The last rallying point was round the Stool, that is the most important of the blackened Stools, which was always taken to war. All the members of the aristocracy were expected to lay down their lives rather than this should fall into the hands of the enemy”.²⁵⁸

²⁵⁶ Rattray, *Ashanti law and Constitution*, p. 124.

²⁵⁷ Davidson, Basil, *Africa in history*, p. 206.

²⁵⁸ Rattray, *Ashanti law and Constitution*, p. 122.

Akan wars were undoubtedly religious wars. The safety of the ancestral Stool was a strong stimulus in the warrior's determination to be victorious. From the ruler to the simple subject, every person was to put loyalty to the Golden Stool above all else. This is how the religious basis of the Asante Empire became a priestly achievement. When *Okomfo* Anokye launched the Asante Empire with Osei Tutu the military leader, he retired to Agona, leaving his friend with a free hand in the daily running of royal business after giving him ethical and spiritual regulations by which to live.²⁵⁹

4- The *Odwira* festival: the yearly religious purification rite in the Akan sacral rule

The *Odwira*²⁶⁰ festival is a yearly religious and political celebration for the purification of nature, the environment, the sacral rule and individuals. It is preceded by forty days of

“total ban on drumming, noise, or the performance of large and noisy funerals. It is therefore a period for fervent prayers to change individual spirituality for both mental purity and spiritual holiness”.²⁶¹

During this retreat period, there is also a ban on the eating of the new-season yam. Every Akan *Odwira* has to be celebrated when people have strictly stopped eating yam for six weeks in the territory.

“It is a period to recapitulate the determining role of the popular masses and the role of the individual in the historical process...Significantly the festival

²⁵⁹ Rattray, *Ashanti law and Constitution*, pp. 270-284. He went for a seven years and seventy days trip to get the medicine against death. But because people mourned and performed his funeral before the fixed date, he never came back. Nobody has seen his body and there is no grave for *Okomfo* Anokye.

²⁶⁰ Adams, Frank, *Odwira and the Gospel: An exploratory Study of Asante Odwira Festival and its significance to Christianity in Ghana*, Ph D Thesis, University of Wales, Oxford Centre for Mission Studies, oxford, November 2001.

²⁶¹ Nana Addo-Birikorang, “*Akuapem Odwira-Adae Butuw festival*”, in *Akuapem Odwira and Adae Butuw festivals; Souvenir programme*, Cultural Research Centre, Akropong-Akuapem, 1998, p. 1.

satisfies partly religious and political issues and dramatises Akuapem sacred myths, legends and specific historical episodes”.²⁶²

The political nature of the *Odwira* is obvious as the first *Odwira* festival organised in Akuapem was celebrated on 18th October 1826²⁶³ after the defeat of the Asante at the Akatamanso²⁶⁴ war on 7th August 1826.²⁶⁵ Before this date, each leader who wanted to save his position had to go to Kumase for the Asante annual *Odwira* festival to pay allegiance to the Asantehene who “sits” on the Golden Stool. Ability to organise a similar celebration was a clear sign of political independence from the powerful Asante. In Akan communities, the *Odwira* originated in Asante and it has been celebrated as Osei Tutu and *Okomfo* Anokye conceived it. The political relevance of the *Odwira* is explained fully by McCaskie as follows:

“The initial determination and celebration of *Odwira* derived in very significant part from the fact that Asante was a state founded in localised warfare, and then spectacularly aggrandized in the eighteenth century by military conquest. Thus, *Odwira* came to serve as an annual forum for the mandatory affirmation and renewal of personal allegiance by subjugated or otherwise constituent office holders”.²⁶⁶

The *Odwira* was an occasion of great political importance when war trophies were displayed. The *adumfo* (war captains or heads of a group of soldiers), in general, ritually took possession of the skull of celebrated adversaries. The *Odwira* formed a

“series of enabling transactions that were designed to condition, to manage and to signal transformational movement from defilement to purification, from desegregation towards integration, and from past to the future”. The display of important enemies physical relics “commemorated the puissant rectitude of the state’s authority over its domestic (Akan) foes, as well as over its non-Asante enemies”.²⁶⁷

²⁶² Nana Addo-Birikorang, “Akuapem *Odwira*-Adae Butuw, p. 6.

²⁶³ Nana Addo-Birikorang, “Akuapem *Odwira*-Adae Butuw, p. 1.

²⁶⁴ Reindorf, *The History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, pp. 189-197.

²⁶⁵ McFarland, *Historical Dictionary of Ghana*, p. xxix.

²⁶⁶ McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 146.

²⁶⁷ McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 214.

McCaskie listed 13 of those skulls including that of Charles McCarthy the British Governor, killed in 1824 at the time of Osei Yaw Akoto.²⁶⁸ Following this public celebration, awards were given to distinguished warriors and loyal subjects. However, the religious aspect of the *Odwira* is the more apparent activity. Sacrifices, feeding of the ancestors, ban on noise, ban on yam eating, spiritual introspection, and praises of the ruler in religious language and attitudes, are everyday realities of the *Odwira*.

“By its primary definition, *Odwira* was a festival of cleansing and purification, orientated towards a ritual mediation on the seamless unity of dead, living and the unborn. The eating of new-season yam was an obviously appropriate analogue of this project. The ancestors were thanked for the harvest, and offerings were made to symbolise and to underscore the concept of unity with them; and eating the new crop itself – a cyclical, recurrent opening to futurity – was a marker on the road that led onwards to succeeding generations of the unborn”.²⁶⁹

Conclusion of Part One: The theological base of African sacral rule

I- Summary on Cameroon and Ghana

We have looked at facts on Cameroon and Ghana for the purpose of our study. Similarities and contrasts between Cameroon and Ghana can be synthesized and the African realities clarified so that a policy can be formulated to include the field of sacral rule and its custodians as part of the missionary enterprise. An attempt in this direction is as follows:

Cameroon and Ghana differ geographically only in vegetation and natural resources. Both have high mountains giving the impression of prominence which can be thought of as picturing a pyramidal organisation of society and of spiritual

²⁶⁸ McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 214. For details see Reindorf, *The History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, pp, 180-188.

²⁶⁹ McCaskie, *State and Society in pre-colonial Asante*, p. 145.

worldview. Like a mountain peak, the sacral ruler stands at the head of society and the Supreme God is Lord over the spiritual, the physical and human world including the ruler. In Cameroon as well as in Ghana, the mountain peaks are believed to be the dwelling places of God, reserved for worship, sacrifices, spiritual consultation and retreats for deep communication with God. We can speculate that the notion of an Almighty God evolved as people considered their natural environment and envisaged a kind of parallelism or even an equality between the head of the society and the head of the spiritual world. In this way, the position of the ruler gained religious significance and he became sacral. In the spiritual realm, the immediate entourage of the sacral ruler corresponds to a range of good but lesser spirits. As it is easier to come into contact with the *Mkam* (nobles in the Grassfields) and *Mpanyimfo* (lower rulers in Akan) than to go through complex protocol stages before meeting the sacral ruler, many people prefer to stop at the level of the nobles who are lower rulers. In their spiritual life, people content themselves with the lesser gods, leaving contact with God to the rulers.

On the other hand, although mountain peaks and hill tops can be thought of as a picture of a hierarchical society and a hierarchical spiritual worldview, the sharing of power seems to present the opposite view. In Cameroon, the lodging of the sacral ruler is at the bottom of the hill and not at the top of the hill. The highest authority is at the bottom and not at the top. In Grassfields, the further down the mountain a man descends the more powerful he may become for it is in this way that one might eventually gain power and distinction. What is at the top is public and vulnerable, therefore, everybody can make use of it. Ghomsi expresses this view when he said:

“On peut affirmer qu'en descendant le versant de la colline, on remonte en fait toute la hiérarchie sociale: on va des lieux réservés au peuple, aux lieux réservés aux notables et à celui du chef (one can affirm that it is by going down

the hill that one climbs up the social hierarchy: one moves from places reserved for the public to places reserved for the *Mkam* and finally to that of the *Fo*”.²⁷⁰

The visits a positional successor or ruler pays to the people show him to be the higher authority. He exercises his power by regularly inspecting what goes on at levels under his responsibility. “*Yiae sii nae kua yiae thae*” (What is at the top is supported by what is at the bottom).” The more contact one has with the higher authority down in the sacral forest and drink with them from the royal stream at the bottom of the hill, the more powerful one is expected to be. In Grassfields society, the head lives down the mountain. The real authority is in the valley. The community is not at the bottom but at the top of the hierarchy of the society.

This explanation of social hierarchy through the physical presentation of the area could hardly be expected to apply in the Akan situation. Surprisingly enough, however, one comes to the same understanding when the head of the group is destooled by the lower rulers. The apparent dominance of the ruler may be transient as at any moment people can express their dissatisfaction, forcing the immediate entourage of the *Ohene* to take action to put an end to his rule. Missionaries and colonialists who fought against the head, whom they believed to be involved in devilish practices and to be a hostile power, were surprised at the sustainability of the institution and the support people gave it. The real power in genuine African leadership lies with the lowest and not with the highest in the hierarchy of sacral rule. Cheikh Anta Diop lists the members of the electing committee of a Wolof traditional leader as follows:

“The council in charge of electing the *Damel* is composed of:

- 1- The president: representing men without caste

²⁷⁰ Ghomsi, Emmanuel, "Organisation et fonction de résidences royales dans les Grassfields, p. 61.

- 2- The representative of free men administering one region
- 3- Two representatives of the Muslim clergy
- 4- The representatives of the slaves of the crown.”

He comments: “men of caste as well as the captives of the crown had an interest in the conservation of power and the established order”.²⁷¹

The views of people wrongly called “palace slaves” are crucial for the conservation of power. They should not be confused with slaves as chattel slaves. We can reaffirm that, if a mountain is represented by a triangle, society is organised so that the community is at the top while the head is at the bottom. This can be applied to the spiritual realm where, though the conceptual dwelling place of the Almighty God is in the Heavens as on the top of a mountain, human beings plead for him to come down on Earth so as to have spiritual interaction with them. The Earth therefore becomes very important in both the spiritual and theological understanding of the African people. The Earth in Akan religiosity is believed to have been created by *Onyankopong*. It is significant that it was elevated to the position of a female god. The Earth is the receptacle for libation, and one talks to God by looking at the Earth in both areas of our study. In Grassfields, the name of God and that of Earth are the same and a person accesses to the position of ancestor through his burial. For it is when one becomes Earth that he can reach God and become a relevant intercessor for his offspring.

Before the coming of the Christian missionaries, there were established languages. In Cameroon, some were reduced to writing in their own dialect and a range of symbols and symbolism were in the hands of palace people and the diviners as one could observe in Bamoun.²⁷² In the case of Ghana, although there was no pre-missionary written language, there had also been established symbols and symbolism

²⁷¹ Diop, Cheikh Anta, *Civilisation or Barbarism*, p. 167.

²⁷² Dika-Akwa, Nyabonambela, *Les problèmes de l'anthropologie et de l'histoire Africaine*, pp 38-42.

communicable as written language expressing proverbs, ideas, and attitudes as we find in what are called the Adinkra symbols.²⁷³ This ability to represent ideas and proverbial expressions in a written form, prepared the Grassfields sacral rule for the literary activities of the missionary. The Akan language, which has got uniform importance throughout the system of ordinary life and sacral rule activities, was used to express the symbols and understanding of society and God. This understanding was at an advanced stage when the missionaries came. For the Grassfields of Cameroon as well, the symbols and understanding were uniform due to a structure, and the tools of thinking, worshipping and daily running of sacral rule affairs even though the maintenance of different dialects of the same language was held to be crucial for a peaceful relationship between independent political units. Existing religious language, idioms, attitudes and spiritual exercises help people to incorporate into their own way of thinking the missionary preaching, the translated Bible and the worship of Christ.

The Akan language was a unifying factor due to its use in modern administration, commerce, education and the daily activities of modern political life. However, modern Cameroonian political life was organised according to parties which corresponded to different dialects. Artificially generated competition expressed a self-centred identity through the use of one's own dialect. In Ghana, Christian missions found it convenient to use the Akan language for evangelisation. But in Cameroon, the situation was different because the use of a different dialect was seen as been independent. When the missionaries attempted to use a single dialect for the whole Grassfields area, violent opposition arose. There was a misunderstanding about which

²⁷³Quarco, Kofi Alfred, *The language of Adinkra patterns*, Legon, Sebewie Ventures, 2nd ed, 1994.

language to use for evangelisation in Cameroon, while the Akuapem Twi, which was simplified so that any non-Akan could speak it easily, helped the missionary to reach out beyond Akan groups.

As we have seen, it is arguable that both Grassfields and Akan peoples have a common origin. Throughout the period of migration, they had retained their identity through the maintenance of their language and cultural leadership patterns. The pattern of historical development as a people had been through the conquest of new land and new people through wars. A remarkable apparent difference exists between Grassfields and Akan people. The Grassfields displaced conquered people from their land and took possession of it, but later on, the conquered people were integrated into the *fondom* (sacral rule) through marriage and social elevation. However, in the Akan case, vacant lands were often taken, leaving the defeated people still occupying the land. Political and socio-cultural dominance was rigidly imposed on the people which virtually made the Akan the masters of the land. Integration in Cameroon was through patronage and derived from sacral rule and the rulers. But in the Akan set-up, there was no law to enforce integration on the conquered people. They were free to choose to become part of the community or not. In the historical development of our case studies, this socio-political and socio-cultural dominance over conquered peoples did not include spiritual, theological or religious dominance. There was tolerance and various spiritual achievements continued to coexist when a new sacral rule had been established after a conquest had taken place. Everybody continued to venerate his ancestors; priests and priestesses continued to care for shrines and sanctuaries while diviners continued to predict fortune as well as misfortune for people. No conquest was aimed at destroying

anything related to God. Submission did not mean departing from one's existing belief system. This religious tolerance in the historical development of people led to the socio-political organisation whose patterns are as follows:

The Grassfields of Cameroon are composed of groups of centrally governed units. There is no paramount ruler among them. The hierarchy of sacral rule is structured around the *Fo* and kingmakers. The members of secret societies are called *Mkam* (nobles) and their political positions are variable and not fixed. The centre of executive political power is inherited from the father by the son, but the beneficiaries of the honours attached to the position are maternal. When a new *Fo* is enthroned, the power centre shifts to the maternal relatives of the new ruler. When there is a change of government, the centre of administrative power changes. Power is mobile at all levels and though the position of the *Fo* and the nine kingmakers is fixed at the top of the society, there is no bottom. The *Fo* is spiritually superior to everything and everyone in the sacral rule. And hence he controls everything and has the responsibility of using it to achieve all the good things the society requires. Because of this, the *Fo* is blamed for any abomination: defeat in war, destructive epidemic sickness or poor crops. Ecological misfortune or any other disasters could lead to the destoolment of the sacral ruler. Generally, these were interpreted to mean that he has done something wrong against God and that God has rejected him.

Things are slightly different in Ghana with the Akan where everything is organized around a hierarchy of people with the power of enstooling and destooling the ruler. A convenient Akan political hierarchy is the paramountcy with its five military divisions. Within these five divisions, each clan has independent functions and has its

own rights. Power is invested in the paramountcy and not in the ruler. The power of the paramountcy is not personal power, but belongs to the office. The ruler has no monopoly over power. The five divisions share and contribute to the maintenance of the sacral institution. The structure duplicates as one goes down the hierarchy to the level of the clan, the family (*abusua*) and the village (*odikuro*). It is one's function in the community at large which matters not one's position in the sacral rule. The ruler exercises some degree of authority, but only in the private council. The first fighters who won the war and freed the Guan were given Stools and a share of power in the newly created Akuapem paramountcy. Called the *Okoman*, they were in charge of the division as Twi-speaking tutors of non-Akan royals when they came to the palace at Akropong. The chain of command is town-based. The basic units are the town, the division and the sacral ruler.

Sacral rule was opened to new religious practices and new centres of prayer which could coexist with old ones. With this flexible and adaptable skills, royals in both Cameroon and Ghana made no attempt to purge the people of their earlier spiritual experiences, neither was an attempt made to unify their people as followers of one single way of relating to God. In pre-missionary Cameroonian and Ghanaian context, there is no case of conflict over religious practices. Regarding two religious traditions as mutually exclusive was not public policy but a matter of private choice. There are people who belong to more than two spiritual traditions and everyone is free to consult as many shrines as he desires. One is free to roam about in any part of this totality of

spiritual experiences. This lack of crash and clash established the all-inclusive African spiritual worldview which is also gender independent.²⁷⁴

Looking at the position of women in Cameroon, they are expected to give room to men in a public gathering. But in the domestic situation, seniority determines the informal hierarchy except where changes have occurred due to an appointment to position in the family. In the Grassfields socio-economic set-up men and women are equal. There is a women's association at the family level and a district locality in the compound of a *Mafo* (sacral ruler's mother). But at the palace level, there is no women's association even though all the secret societies allow for one or two female members. Apart from the influence invested in the *Fo*'s mother and her family, women have no apparent position in the sacral rule.

However, it is not so in Ghana where the maternal inheritance system gives women an important position in Akan sacral rule. They choose the ruler, and they keep and blacken the Stool. In this regard, they are given respect and recognition. Women in the royal set-up have to be handled with great care, in matters which may evoke socio-political misunderstanding. Some women have taken the Stool away in the past and by so doing destroyed families because without the Stool, a new ruler cannot be enstooled. Generally, in Akan society, women are treated as equal to men. The maternal inheritance gives them the upper hand in managing the economy of the family. A man's wealth goes to his sister, and not to his children. However, women are considered impure during their menstruation period. This lack of purity prevents them from entering the Stool room or some other spiritual places in the palace. It is believed that

²⁷⁴ Oduyoye, Mercy Amba, *Daughters of Anowa: Akan Women and Patriarchy*, New York, Mary Knoll, Orbis Books, 1995.

elders, Stools, ancestors, spirits, and *Onyankopong* (Supreme God) cannot bear the sight of a woman blood.

Although in both societies there is a mixture of acceptance and creation of barriers and difficulties in the way of women, from any perspective, women can only be described as of major importance in families, in private, in society, and in the daily running of the sacral rule. This importance can be demonstrated through their spiritual, religious and theological experiences in both Cameroon and Ghana. In both sacral ruling systems, the unity of men and women as the people of God cannot be doubted for discrimination on the basis of gender is difficult to be found. In certain exceptions to this general statement, exact parallels can be found for men. The fact that *Onyankopong Kwame* has a female counterpart, *Asase Yaa*, gives a unified spiritual notion of the Supreme Being who is made of both genders. Even though in Cameroon as in the Bible, God has no female counterpart, women who remain barren beyond their childbearing age attain a status, which enables them to join any secret association or any activity appropriate to their male counterparts. With regard to the spiritual importance of Earth on the Grassfields, becoming Earth is considered to be a sacralisation process, the way to be elevated to transcendence.

As far as the economy is concerned, on the one hand, Grassfields people traditionally engage in farming and trading in which the capital is often provided by the parents. At the community level, the *Fo* also provides capital for loyal citizens. Sacral rule in Cameroon generates income as the promotion of the younger generation is at the heart of the whole system. The real support is individual input as the *shua'* (cooperative) system provides one with capital for multiplication at any level of the

sacral rule. Money is central to the socio-economic and human relations, and carries spiritual connotations: blessing for faithfulness and curse or death for unfaithfulness. The economic life is centred around money, fair play and trust-worthiness. Akan people, on the other hand, are owners of farms where they generally employ people from other groups. They are administrators and managers of projects. They invest knowledge and know-how more than physical manpower. They trade in natural and mineral resources. Their gold is collected at the surface and not from digging the soil. They are entrepreneurs and not labourers.

The concept of property, wealth and the creation of wealth in the economy of both societies is centred on the permanency of what one acquires. The relationship between what one genuinely owns and one's reliance on the Almighty God is profound. People believe that the Almighty God gives and protects property and wealth. Knowledge and ways to generate wealth and multiply capital come from God. In the family, the society and sacral rule, the acquisition, maintenance or dispossession of one's property or wealth is believed to be the result of one's spiritual experience. Several rites are religiously performed in connection with property acquisition and multiplication of wealth, bringing the acquisition of property and wealth right into the realm of the spiritual life of the owner and linking him to God. What people do or do not do with their wealth and property is related beyond the economic aspect to their religious beliefs.

With regard to cultural patterns, Grassfields in Cameroon is dominated by bureaucracy, taboos, customs and traditions, which make it an extremely formal society. The main cultural gatherings are the funeral celebrations and biennale cultural

displays at the palace. There are cultural elements in the building of traditional compounds. Marketplaces are full of indigenous arts and crafts made of wood, clay, raffia, iron, and natural or manmade fibres. Traditional acrobatic and military training used to be prominent in the recreational aspects of the culture.

As for the Akan people, generally, they are easy-going in an open society. Protocol is observed in the palace and royal house. Order is from the lower position in the sacral rule to the *Ohene* (sacral ruler). This is apparent when there is a gathering. Protocol governs what one does and says in the gathering. It includes the order of greetings from right to left. In many places, one is free to walk. But there are worshipping places where this is taboo like forest, mountains and places in town, for functions that are reserved for rulers. Because one belongs to a family and is related to one or two Stools where one can be appointed to traditional leadership, every Akan is a potential owner of a Stool. *Kente* weaving and textile industry have retained some of their original features, but the influence of the northern people with whom the Akan have been trading for a long time, is dominant. Clay modelling, wood-carving, metallurgy and particularly work in gold, represent the main cultural arts. Construction of musical instruments such as drums and vibrating instruments, as well as animal skins for decoration, are also part of the culture. Acrobatics and dances have been features of the performing arts of the culture. Female and male initiations at the family level, entertainment by youth groups during the *Odwira* and *Adae* festivals and funeral celebrations, are occasions for cultural displays.

Any attempt to tease out the total culture of either Cameroon or Ghana from its spiritual or religious frame of reference may be almost an impossible task. The cultural

elements, which are manifested in the total behaviour of the people, camouflage the fine differences between their in-depth spiritual experiences and what they overtly display. Only a close study of the cultural and the spiritual life of the people can reveal the unified field, which is dominated by spiritual aspiration.

Considering religion in Cameroon, people believe in the Almighty God who caused things to come into existence including the human being, and has a purpose for each one of them. Destinies are detectable even before birth, at birth and also as one grows older in life. God is above, yet immanent and with people to protect them against evil spirits. Good spirits are God's messengers for people's security when attacked by the bad spirits. In the same way as there are medicinal and poisonous herbs in the same field, there are good and evil spirits living together. God allows them all without destroying any. Spirits can be incarnate in a human being and in inanimate as well as inanimate things like rivers, mountains, forest, trees, rocks and stones. Skulls of the ancestors, shrines and sanctuaries are places of worship and used for consultation in spiritual matters. Lesser deities, which are for protection, are often of foreign origin and these serve for individual consultation and also for the interpretation of visions and prophecies to individuals, to families as well as to the *Fo* (sacral ruler). In the Grassfields of Cameroon, the sacral ruler is the religious and spiritual head of the community. He performs and delegates some of his religious functions to able and deserving people. At the family level, it is the successor who interacts with the ancestors on behalf of the family members as he celebrates the ancestral cult on the skulls of the departed. The personal worship of God also happens under the *Yam* tree when there is a difficulty or confusion about an issue. One then consults the Almighty

God to clarify the matter. Elements of sacrifice for every spiritual need are: water, oil, blood, honey, salt, plantain, maize and animals. Oil is not used in Ghana and yam predominates among the Akan. Otherwise, people use the same elements in Ghana as in Cameroon for sacrificial purposes.

Akan people believe in the Almighty God *Onyankopong Kwame*, higher male and creator of everything including his female counterpart, *Asase Yaa*, Mother God. People and everything else are product of the fertile unity between *Onyankopong Kwame* and *Asase Yaa*. The first thing God expects from the one who comes to worship him is the common water. Water is the medium of communication with *Onyame*. Libation is at the heart of Akan religion. Desperately thirsty in the forest, hunters and farmers find in the *Adukromonsu* (water fetch in the hole of trees of the forest), living water from God. Water is seen as the physical link to the source of life. The *Nyame Dua* (God's tree) developed as a duplicate of *Adukromonsu* for daily and personal prayers to the Lord Almighty. Worship is familial and individual. When one goes to the paramountcy, the palace religion is limited to the Stool symbolizing the ancestors who dwell with *Nyame Dua* and *Onyame*. All the other multiplicities of shrines, sanctuaries, personal inventions and discoveries, importation of new spiritual elements, recent developments, also elements of Christian and Muslim traditions as well as African traditional religiosity are all tolerated but outside the palace confines.

The *Omanhene* and the chiefs may have special priests who are consulted in wartime and during epidemics or misfortune. In the case where a priest's advice leads to a satisfactory conclusion, a grant of a Stool may be given to him for his family to elect a political leader different from the performer but from the same clan and who

would serve as link between the ruler and the priest. Priests have no part in the political concerns of sacral rule. It is worth pointing out the skill and attitude of people in Cameroon as well as in Ghana to adopt and to respect foreign shrines or sanctuaries cared for by people coming from afar. This favours the general acceptance of any shrine within the total spiritual world. Religious disappointment is believed to come from priests or priestesses, the owner of the place of contact with God or the patient but not from the shrine itself. There are cases where all the people in charge of a sanctuary or a shrine have been removed to be replaced by an entirely new set while the shrine has continued.

II- The African spiritual worldview and its affinities with the biblical context

a. The African spiritual worldview

“African soil is not so infertile that it cannot produce its own new ideas. The African soil is rich enough to have germinated its own original religious perception”.²⁷⁵

This statement of Mbiti can be substantiated by linking the spiritual worldview of sacral rule to the larger African context. From what we found above in Cameroon and Ghana, the African spiritual worldview comprised the invisible and the visible, in heaven and on earth. Everything within sacral rule, from nature to culture, is religious and spiritual. The animate and inanimate, the living and dead participate in the spiritual experience of people. The spiritual world is structured more or less according to human social organisation but in all aspects the spiritual world is richer and larger than the

²⁷⁵ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, London, 2nd edition, Heinemann, 1989, p. 6, 30.

social organisation, which is just an element within the total picture of the concept. The African spiritual field takes the history, geography, vegetation and heroes of the community into consideration. John Mbiti discovered that

“God is regarded in Africa as King, Ruler, Lord, Master and Judge. God rules and reigns over the universe. People consider him to rule not only in human affairs but also over nature.”²⁷⁶

God is also the Lord Omnipotent, the Almighty, the Transcendent and Omniscient. He is universal and immanent, creator of everything and source of life symbolised by water, blood and spirit. He is immaterial and is able to incarnate in the elements of nature. Nobody made him and he is above death. God is eternal, he is made by no other and there is none beside him. He has been; he is; and he will be, as things happen from generation to generation. He is not to be confused with nature or human beings. God is spirit.²⁷⁷ God occupies the highest position and he is holy in nature. He is ready to punish evil and to help develop a range of spirits and divinities who link heaven and earth, visible and invisible.

Those spirits are the common spiritual beings beneath the status of divinities, and above the status of men in the hierarchy. They bring instructions from God to human beings and carry people's prayers to God as well. As a group, spirits are more powerful than men. They can move freely between the highest realms where God is, in his service, but are also at the service of human beings in their search to link with God. They are manifestations of God in nature and are consulted at shrines and sanctuaries. Evil spirits seem to come from wicked living people, from dead people, from magic

²⁷⁶ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 6.

²⁷⁷ A Pygmy hymn says: “In the beginning was God, Today is God, Tomorrow will be God. Who can make an image of God? He has no body. He is as a word which comes out of your mouth. That word it is no more. It is past, and still it is lived. So is God.” Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 34.

practices and witchcraft, or from sorcerers. Special people and spirits ensure the safety of humans under God's instruction and protection. Those special people are known as priests, rainmakers, healers, and sacral rulers. People can consult them to receive messages from God, send their prayers to God and fight against evil. Special people participate in the dynamic life in the spiritual world where the numerous divinities called "children of God" are held to be responsible for founding nations, ordering societies, ensuring political unity and the continuance of sanctuaries. The majority of people believe that spirits dwell in woods, bushes, forests, rivers, mountains, or just around the villages.

"For their life, African peoples place God in the transcendental plane, making it seem as if he is remote from their daily affairs. But they know that he is immanent, being manifested in natural objects and phenomena, and they can turn to him in an act of worship, at any place and at any time."²⁷⁸

This notion of everything partaking in the spiritual life can be applied to every individual who is expected to pass through the ancestralisation process and to serve as a link between God and posterity. The lesser spirits -the spirits of ancestors as well as evil spirits- are present in the activities of priests and priestesses in charge of sanctuaries, and in those of sacral rulers in charge of families and socio-political institutions. In Cameroon and Ghana, like in some other African societies, special care is taken of graves and skulls since the living-dead may be considered to dwell in the area of the graves and their skulls, some of which are within the former houses of the departed. Closer to humans than God is, the spirits of the departed are objects of belief and are everywhere. They can incarnate in or make use of, anything and witness every human deed. Even if many of them seem to come into existence through human

²⁷⁸ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 33.

imagination, the reality of the spirits of the ancestors is an inseparable part of people's life.

A form of the Trinitarian concept of God is reported among the Ndebele and Shona, according to which God is described as "Father, Mother and Son". This is probably a logical convenience rather than a theological reflection to fit God into the African conception of the family.²⁷⁹ The African spiritual world is the unification of a spiritual hierarchy and the human social organisation under the lordship of one God. The Kingdom of God brings together heaven with its population, earth with its nations and the universe with its visible and invisible components. A study of the spiritual concepts underlying sacral rule in Cameroon and Ghana confirms what Mbiti said:

"Expressed anthropocentrically, God is the originator and sustainer of man; the spirits explain the destiny of man. Man is the centre of this ontology, the animal, plants and natural phenomena and objects constitute the environment in which man lives, provide a means of existence and, if need be, man establishes a mystical relationship with them. This anthropocentric ontology is a complete unity or solidarity, which nothing can break up or destroy. To destroy or to remove one of these categories is to destroy the whole existence including the destruction of the Creator, which is impossible. One mode of existence presupposes all the others, and a balance must be maintained so that these modes neither drift too far apart from one another nor get too close to one another."²⁸⁰

b. An African understanding of the biblical spiritual worldview²⁸¹

God

In the Bible, as well as in African traditions, as we have seen, God is spirit and creator of things visible and invisible, on earth and in heaven. The African discourse on God as creator follows the same organisational structure as that of Genesis 2 and John

²⁷⁹ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 36.

²⁸⁰ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, pp. 15, 16.

²⁸¹ "Cultural continuity with the Bible" in, Dickson, Kwesi, *Theology in Africa*, pp 141-184.

1. However, the Biblical discourse in Genesis 1 makes a difference when the sequence of creation goes deeper than the African one presenting God's deeds day-by-day, and thus enriches the African knowledge of what happened. In both contexts, God can be known through nature and extraordinary deeds. In Africa, people believe in a natural propensity to know God rather than being taught in a classical way, as it is the case in the Bible. The acquisition of knowledge about God in Africa is through personal encounter. This results in the natural acceptance of a universal God with a variable concept of the same God who reveals himself in different ways due to difference in the circumstances of spiritual experience. But in the Bible, knowledge acquisition of God is rigidly taught with a predefined frame of reference.²⁸² Personal or individual conceptualisation of God is not tolerated. What is written and taught is what should be accepted and practised. Africans' knowledge of God is expressed in their social structures, proverbs, maxims, songs, prayers, names, myths, stories, and religious ceremonies. All these are easy to remember and pass on to other people since the lack of sacred writings favoured orality in the traditional society and provided a basis for a living and dynamic religion. In contrast to the Bible, therefore, one should not expect a classic dissertation about God, repeatable all the time without any change. The Bible in its written form is invariant with regard to time and space.

God is not localised but is everywhere. God is beyond time and not limited to it. This universal and non-temporal view of God is common to both the African and the Biblical contexts. Surprisingly, in both contexts, the universality of God's deeds seems to be reduced and limited to ethnic proportions and possession. In the Bible God is pictured as the "God of Israel". Jesus said that he had been sent to the "lost sheep of

²⁸² Deut. 4: 2, 9, 23

Israel”²⁸³ and he commissioned his disciples to the Israelites first.²⁸⁴ The Asante believe that they are the chosen people of God for the conquest of their neighbours. On Grassfields mountains, God has special concern for each compound and each political unit and he is approached as such. Christian Europe presented Christianity as a Western religion. This ethnocentrism with regard to God as being on the side of an individual set of people seems to be universal. This does not contradict the universal nature of God and his protection for the whole world. In the Bible as well as in Africa, one can call God to come on one’s side for protection in case of danger.

God in Africa and in the Bible is believed to be a ruler. The Holy Ruler is the same in the Bible as in Africa. He reigns in heaven and on earth. He has a military nature, and he is with his people in wartime. If in the African context he remains a helper in wartime, in the Bible he goes beyond that and leads Israel in war. He is a military ruler. As a ruler, God is a judge and sits in court to make sure that justice is done. He punishes wrong deeds and rewards right actions, attitudes and thoughts. Even if here and there God is tolerant like he is in Africa, in parts of the Bible, God is jealous and exclusive. There are passages that present God as forgiving, compassionate and welcoming people without regard to their sin and their past.²⁸⁵ But the Christian doctrine brought by the missionaries favoured the few exclusive passages, neglecting somehow the meaning of passages in direct connection with the African experience of God as inclusive and tolerant. He can judge spiritual things and human beings in heaven and on earth. He sits on a throne, provides titles to people in his court, commanding, and enjoying praises from men and women and from angels who are

²⁸³ Matt. 15: 21 – 28

²⁸⁴ Matt. 10: 5 - 7.

²⁸⁵ Ps. 130: 3 - 4.

spiritual beings. From all nations on earth and from all corners of the spiritual world, animate and inanimate things and beings worship him. God has a personality, and in this personality, there is a will, which governs the universe and prospers the life of humankind.²⁸⁶

God is also Father and Mother in the two contexts. But it is worth saying that Jews and Christians developed the notion of God as Father extensively, neglecting His equal female qualities which come to light with the matrilineal societies of Africa. At the same time that African traditions enriched their worldview with the masculine titles of God, they enriched the Jewish and Christian perspectives with His Akan feminine ones. God, in the Bible and in Africa, is neither a man nor a woman. God is spirit and has no human flesh. Both genders are equal in relation to God.

Angels and spirits

In Africa and in the Bible, God is similarly pictured as having sons who are mainly known as angels in the Bible and spirits dwelling in sacred places, or within human beings in Africa. The angels as sons of God are divided into two: the good ones and the bad ones. The obedient sons are the angels and the opponents are the devils. In the Grassfields of Cameroon, the word “angels” is translated *mcosi* (Servants of God). They are in the hands of God. Spirits in general belong to the ontological mode of existence between God and man. God manifests himself through *abosom*, which is the Akan term for divinities. Like angels in the Bible, they come from God to act as his servants and intermediaries between him and other creatures, and their number, is large. They are closer to men than God is, in the sense that they are constantly experienced in

²⁸⁶ Ps. 148: 1 – 14.

the physical life of man as thunder and lightning, rivers or lakes, mountains or rocks, forest or trees. These attributive divinities in Africa seem to be the creation of the human imagination. But this does not however cancel their reality.²⁸⁷ Like spirits at shrines and sanctuaries, angels link heaven and earth, bringing on earth God's instruction, protecting people, nations, properties and nature which are in danger. Without being God, they act on his behalf and humans are so used to them that they could easily be confused with God.

In the Bible more than in the African spiritual worldview, warnings to prevent people from worshipping the messenger in the place of the sender are frequent. There is a total lack of similar warnings against worshipping the means in place of the creator on the African side which has led people who go to the shrines and sanctuaries for spiritual consultations to adopt inappropriate attitudes of worship. However, going to two shrines is not a way of paying allegiance to two competing gods but it is going to two different places of contact with the same God just as in the Bible he is contacted when an angel pays a visit or when people seek an angel's protection.²⁸⁸

In the Bible, dreams are believed to be a channel of communication with God's messengers. Dreams play a major role in the spiritual experience of people in Africa as well. If by following messages that one has received when in deep sleep, one is obeying God, then God's deeds in Africa have never ceased. If angels act through dreams then they can accomplish their mission through this human experience. This is what the

²⁸⁷ "The world of spirits, wherever it might be situated, is very much like the carbon copy of the countries where they live in this life". Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 79.

²⁸⁸ "In the prayer before going to sleep, the word occurred: In the name of the Lord the God of Israel, may Michael be at my right hand, Gabriel at my left hand; Uriel before me; Raphael behind me ; and the Shekhina of God be above me." In Jacob, Louis, *the Jewish Religion; A comparison*, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 25.

African spiritual worldview expresses but may at times mistake a transient and spontaneous event for a fixed and continual spiritual experience.

The counterpart of angels in Africa turns to overshadow the reality of God himself in spiritual experience. In some passages in the Bible, an African kind of spiritual attitude towards angels can be found. It is true that the healing experience in Bethesda where the angel troubled the water so that the first who entered them could be healed was a continuous event and Jesus did not condemn the practice and those who believed in it; instead, he healed the sick man who had been waiting for 38 years.²⁸⁹ The spiritual and healing power of water as we see in the story of the healing of the Syrian commander, Naaman²⁹⁰ and the saliva of special people²⁹¹ seem to be quite essentially African and show that Africans are very much at home in the Bible. The Bible expresses the view that angels sent by God can come to human beings through elements of nature. God is then transcendent and immanent. He may come to humans from above and also from any direction with the aim of reaching human beings. God is everywhere and can be met through anything. Spirits are invisible but could easily make themselves visible to special human beings.

Evil

Good spirits and evil spirits are found everywhere. In Cameroon as well as in Ghana, just as in the Bible, evil spirits are part of the spiritual world. The African worldview differs from that in the Bible in that there is no Satan which can compete with the Almighty God in the African religious experience. Rather, in the African

²⁸⁹ John 5: 1 – 15.

²⁹⁰ II Kings 5: 1 – 19.

²⁹¹ Mark 8: 22 – 28.

spiritual world, lesser spirits of the same class as the angels fail in their efforts to oppose God, but succeed with humans. In his fall, the devil (Satan) never stopped opposing God, tormenting people and bringing misfortune and curses on the visible and invisible universe as well as on the human community.²⁹² Evil spirits occupy the same position in the spiritual world as the devil in the biblical one and the difference is in their functions. Contrary to the biblical understanding of the origin of evil, in Africa it is believed that harmful spirits come from the angry dead and from malicious people who work against their relatives or neighbours through magic, sorcery and witchcraft.

In both spiritual worldviews, evil is much more obvious through human conduct and through unhappy events. Humans experience natural evil in their lives and this comes in the form of suffering, misfortunes, diseases, calamities, accidents and various forms of pain. Those who practise witchcraft, magic and sorcery are the very incarnation of moral evil. People in both contexts -African and biblical- share a common struggle to differentiate between evil deeds and God's punishment.

Ancestors

The names of the ancestral founders of Jewish society are highly honoured as are those in Africa. Names like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, David, Josiah and Zedechiah carried weight and helped to develop religious attitudes and language. The difference is that Jews and Christians worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They adore the God of Moses, David, Josiah and Zedekiah, whereas in Africa, lack of clear instruction has led people to confuse in attitude and language the ancestor founder of their political unit with God who revealed himself to them. They attempt to

²⁹² Revelations 12: 7 – 9 and 20: 7 – 8.

unify God and the one through whom he operates.²⁹³ Unlike in the Bible, in Africa, spiritual education is imparted not through formal teaching programmes but informally as the occasion arises. In the African traditional set-up there is no danger of becoming an atheist community as people believe that “*obi nkyere obefra Nyame* (no one shows the Supreme Being to a child)”;²⁹⁴ neither is there any felt need for systematic teaching about the right attitude towards God when one consults his ancestors, at the shrine or sanctuary. The right attitude to God is not taught. This lack of a formal structure as to how to put a spiritual experience into a learning activity seems to be the basic difference between the biblical context and the context of African sacral rule. By bringing into sacral rule a structured learning programme for people’s spiritual experience as they approach God through intermediaries, the purification and sharpening of the African notion of ancestors as part of the spiritual world could have been achieved. The parable of the rich man and poor Lazarus shows from the example of Abraham the image of a faithful ancestor in African terms. Just as Abraham was not God, African ancestors are not equal to God and yet their offspring found peace in their bosom as Lazarus did with Abraham. “If you are sons of Abraham do what Abraham expects. Repent.” This is an African discourse about ancestors who are *Mueguoju’* that is, people of the past who passed on good principles which help people to live in peace and prosperity. Ancestors could be understood as Mbiti explains:

“The pouring of libation, or giving portions of food to the living-dead, are symbols of communion, fellowship and remembrance. They are the mystical ties that bind the living dead to their surviving relatives. Therefore these acts are performed within the family. There is nothing here about the so-called

²⁹³ Ortigues, Edmond, *Religion du livre, religion de la coutume*, Paris, Le Sycomore, 1981.

²⁹⁴ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 29.

ancestor worship, even if these acts may so seem to the outsiders who do not understand the situation.”²⁹⁵

Remembrance of one's forebears in a religious language and attitude seems to be closer to the biblical equivalent for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jewish and Christian attitudes and language about Moses, Elisha and Elijah on account of their charismatic careers are very close to the African expression of the spiritual value of ancestors. People walked on the graves or watered the skulls of their forebears because it is feared that anything separating them from these ties will bring disaster to family and community life; in a nutshell this attitude is felt to be beneficial for the growth and maintenance of people's spiritual well-being and family unity.

Prophets, priests and kings

In the biblical as well as in the African spiritual worldview, prophets, priests and kings are human and yet they take part in the spiritual project of God on earth. As special beings, their positions in the spiritual realm seem to be worked out much more in the African worldview than in the Bible. They enjoy direct contact with God and act accordingly either to gain approval or to oppose him. Some biblical characters like Jonah, can enter into a contest with God, but God continues to make use of them. Those people in Bible as well as in Africa have known what their godly mission on earth is. Some have the mission to teach and to instruct a special group of people on the expectations of God. Some have a concern with national welfare. Others are good at predicting, and at describing futuristic events before they happen. Priests in both traditions are good as intercessors. As they offer sacrifices, they pray and do their best

²⁹⁵ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 25.

to link the individual, the nation and the cosmos to God as he is found in the Bible and in the African experience. They are special humans as they talk effectively to God on behalf of needy humans. Some inherit the paternal priestly role like the Levites in the Bible and the Akan priests; others become prophets or priests after training under an experienced prophet like Samuel and Grassfields diviners. Such succession procedures are also practised in other part of Africa. Some get their status after they have shown signs of spiritual possession.²⁹⁶

In the strict biblical sense of prophets and the prophetic movement, there were no prophets in the African traditional society. One person identifying himself with a message from God for a whole nation or a specific group in the nation may not be found in Africa. Nobody could give a date in history when African religion started, or the individual who started it. There are no founders in the traditional religions in Africa.

Priests are the chief intermediaries between God and man. They are the religious symbol of the presence of God in the society. The duties of the priest are chiefly religious, but since Africans do not disassociate religion from other departments of life, the priest has more than one function compared to priests in the Bible. But equally, the African priest and priests in the Bible are the spiritual and ritual pastors of the community and of the nation.²⁹⁷ it is they who officiate at sacrifices, offerings and ceremonies relating to their knowledge. They care for and maintain the temples and places of worship.

As for kings, they are human and they become God's agents by being anointed by a priest chosen by God. The more a king consults God and the more he has concern

²⁹⁶ Elisha succeeding Elijah in I Kings 19: 19 – 21 and II Kings 2: 1 – 14; 4: 1 – 37.

²⁹⁷ Hosea 4: 4 – 10.

with God in his daily struggle with the national welfare and the maintenance of power in his accepted limits, the more he is believed to act on God's behalf. Without being God or priest, the king can sing praises to God, take the lead in building and dedicating a sanctuary for the worship of God, sustain and provide subsidies for priestly functions and pray for himself and for his people. He is conscious that his election to the position of sacral ruler places him in direct contact with God who can talk to him directly, through dreams, or through a priest or a prophet. His rule is sanctioned by God and not by humans. The Almighty God of nations is the one who will in the long run reward or punish the actions of the king in the Bible as well as those of the sacral ruler in African traditions. The quality of the relationship between the African ruler and God is what matters. We shall discuss this more fully later on.

The function of these special persons is to link the community to God. The difference between the two contexts is that in the Bible, the selection of these special persons follows written instructions and familiar rules, while in Africa, there are no written instructions. Qualification comes from the ability to perform and the trust that the community has in an intermediary.

Holy Spirit

According to biblical teaching, the Holy Spirit can achieve some wonders in the life of Christians. It is believed that the Spirit can indwell the human body and possess a worshipper who may speak in tongues, perform miracles, and gain access to spiritual knowledge of events; past, present and future. The spirit is the power behind the performances of gifted or anointed people. All these achievements are not

alien to the African spiritual worldview where leaders of African shrines and sanctuaries are believed to perform similar marvels. As the Holy Spirit purifies the inner life of the individual and assures him of an inner peace, so spirits in the service of God in African sacred places are expected to realise their service in the lives of those who consult them. However, in the Bible, the Holy Spirit is not directly involved with human governance, as the African context would have him to be. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit seems to take over the work of the angels.²⁹⁸

Christians however developed the notion of the guardian angel throughout the Roman Catholic and Anglican liturgies as they followed the rabbinic biblical understanding of the angel. “There is a cult of guardian spirits in the Ankore communities”,²⁹⁹ says Mbiti and this could be compared with the Christian ideas, but the Catholic version differs from that of the Protestant and the subsequent Pietistic limited concern with the hierarchy of the spiritual world. In their view, the Holy Spirit comes from Christ. He continues the work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ


The notion of a God who became man and who went back to his original nature is quite strange and has no precedent in the African worldview. God cannot become a man. The monotheism so strong in the African spiritual worldview does not allow God to become flesh. He is so distant from man, and so powerful that the notion of becoming a human being in order to rescue humanity from perdition is completely new. Strangely enough, he went back to his spiritual nature showing men the way by which

²⁹⁸ Hebrew 2: 1 – 4, and II Cor. 3: 12 – 18.

²⁹⁹ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 85.

they could be part of God's spiritual world in heaven and on earth. In the same way his coming on earth was a necessity for Jews, Greeks and Romans. Jesus Christ has to be born in the African spiritual world to enrich and to transform, but not to destroy it.

In the spiritual realm, Jesus could enjoy the presence of Moses and Elijah; he could mention Abraham and John the Baptist's position in the heavenly community after his death. He could hold a discussion with the devil, and could demonstrate his power to the evil one. He did not question the work of good angels but he proved to have power beyond that of an angel. His purity and his love in the visible and invisible earthly world of human beings as well as in the visible and invisible spiritual world, is what African leaders are longing for: the fullness of the knowledge of God and the grandeur of his rule. The Kingdom of God is humanly and spiritually oriented. Man cannot become part of the Kingdom of God without having his spiritual world and his community ties transformed by Christ. The preconditions for this process of christianisation and transformation of sacral rule must be the subject of future theological analysis. A thoroughgoing consideration of all aspects of the theology of the worldview and cosmology described here must be undertaken. This will need to deal with the religious practices associated with the African belief in ancestors, the places of contact with Almighty God both natural and man-made with priest and diviners in charge of appropriate rituals and the religious significance of the sacral ruler and his relationship with the Almighty God. In order to limit the theological scope of the thesis to the topic chosen which is sacral rule and Christian mission, the theological issues dealt with will be restricted to the significance of the sacral ruler and his relationship to



God through the sovereign presence of Jesus Christ prior to the arrival of the missionary.

III- A Fresh look at the relationship between the ruler and God in African sacral rule

A- Raison d'être of sacral rule

1- Religious legitimisation of sacral power

From what has been presented above on the patterns, nature and goals of African sacral rule, with historical and contemporary facts from Cameroon and Ghana, it can be said that there is an undeniable respect for the invisible and a complete openness to the transcendent. This attitude is the result of a long and dynamic spiritual tradition on African soil. Religious practices, language and attitudes colour every aspect of life. They were the grounds for social life and human existence in African communities. The social nature of the sacral rule in the Cameroon-Grassfields and among the Akan in Ghana was the result of their religious practices. Shaped by a genuine sense of relating everything to God, sacral rule was organised to enhance the situation and the position of brave and ambitious subjects. Collective and individual promotions were goals achievable through sacral rule for perfect harmony in the whole community.

This social nature of the African ruling tradition carried a strong political dimension, which evolved not from society but from the spiritual realm. Leaders referred to invisible power for the legitimisation of their position and the affirmation of their right to rule. They spread the belief that what they made happen on earth had been

prepared before hand in the invisible world of spirits who acted under the Supreme God's instructions. Even the decision to defend people's interests was the outcome of religious consultations. The political as well as the social and military aspects of African sacral rule were by-products of traditional spiritual experience.

2- The sacral ruler as intercessor

The process used by the African founders of community tended to gradually replace the original authority, who was the Supreme God, while establishing a sacral rule aimed at securing the power of the ruler. In the process of joining God and the ruler together, we cannot infer that the Supreme God decreased but that the ruler did increase his power over his people. The ruler's religious activities obscured the presence of God. The ruler became the prominent religious figure. Addo-Fening's observation about the status of God in the ideology of state in Akyem Abuakwa in Ghana is worth citing:

“No single God can be said to have been permanently acknowledged throughout the state's pre-colonial history as the national god. National or state gods were transient... Whichever god was adopted at the state level enjoyed royal patronage, was bountifully maintained and used for political, judicial and religious purposes”.³⁰⁰

The members of the ruling class did not kill the Supreme Being. The sacral ruler appeared to remove the Supreme God from the public sphere by privatising him for his exclusive access. Many religious practices within the chieftaincy are, by definition, mysterious and secret. Their existence is generally known but the execution of the ritual was reserved for holders of power. Between members of the community and God, there stood sacral rulers who brought them new things because of their knowledge of the invisible world. They took people's request to God, prayed for them, sacrificed on their

³⁰⁰ Addo-Fening, Robert *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 32.

behalf, and the blessing from God followed through the gifts of rain and fertility of the soil, good crops and birth of many healthy babies, physical health and social peace, success in war and in trading. All these were interpreted as coming to the community through the good office of the ruler. Although they came from God, the credit went to the ruler who was really an intercessor for the people and a leader with priestly functions. The rise of the sacral rulers and members of the ruling class did not diminish the prevailing importance of religion and spirituality. Prophets and priests continued to share some powers in the state. But the ruler's religious duties were so dominant that priests and prophets could simply be ignored. People were educated to be satisfied with the rulers praying for them. The establishment of sacral rule privatised God but could not kill him. Rulers had to pray for all members of their group, for their community as an entity and for people beyond it who might wish to come under their rule.

3- The Hospitality of ancestors

The statistical and religious progress of the group was at the heart of sacral rule as the rulers and the people welcomed new groups and special people into their community. This was not only for political, social or military motives but it was the practical expression of the hospitality of African ancestors. The welcoming of these diverse groups was done in the name of their ancestors and their local gods. Even though ancestral worship was familial, its social and political impact stretched beyond the members of the family. The spiritual integration of non-family members into the ruler's prayers is not only a demonstration of human power but a submission to the ancestor's will to save human life and to use it for the best in the community. This ancestral consultation could be followed by all kinds of political initiatives including

negotiation involving peace, cunning, cheating, exchange, sharing and force.

B- People's understanding of sacral rule and God

People understood sacral rule as their own tradition. People identified themselves with sacral rule as they knew it. They lived like willing victims as well as willing beneficiaries of their structures of leadership. They were consumers of the leader's spiritual activities. They contented themselves with the prayers and sacrifices which the ruling class performed on their behalf. As Mbiti observes:

“As spirits are invisible, ubiquitous, and unpredictable, the safest thing is to keep away from them. If they, or living dead, appear too frequently to human beings people are disturbed.”³⁰¹

People were passive as far as religious practices were concerned. However, they watched carefully that the right people had performed sacrifices as they ought to. It was believed that ecological events in their favour was a sign that the ruler and his entourage had performed the right ritual on time and as it ought to be. Rituals perceived as crucial for the people's spiritual well-being were the condition for the allegiance they paid to their leaders. The ruler was a subject of conversation as people went about their daily tasks. He was an object of constant and informal critique. Ferran Iniesta confirms this view when he affirmed:

*“Le véritable monarque divin est tellement au centre de la pensée collective qu'il est plus proche d'être un otage rituel”*³⁰² (the true sacral ruler is at the very centre of collective thought to the extent that he is almost a hostage to ritual).

The community in African sacral rule believed that the future of the institution was

³⁰¹ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 80.

³⁰² Iniesta, Ferran, *L'univers africain*, p. 106.

their business and not the ruler's.

Popular opinion could either maintain a ruler in his position or, if unfavourable, lead to his rejection. It was instrumental in the destoolment of an acting ruler. When people were not happy with the ruler they could ask for his destoolment. This would lead to the desacralisation of the ruler. Their self-identity through the institution of sacral rule seemed to be the force behind the survival of sacral rule in Africa. Their affirmation of a popular ruler was so strong that one might say that they considered him a god. Every political success the ruler had was thought to demonstrate his closeness to the Supreme God.

C- Relationship between the sacral ruler and the Supreme God

Chilver and Kaberry reported that during the enstoolment of a new Grassfields ruler, the kingmakers ritually said:

“We have given the country to the king: henceforth he will be unlike other men. People are saying: Go now, since you are God for us. No man can be above you. You have ceased to be a man like others. The Earth is like God and the king is God. We throw earth at him because he is like God. If he does wrong, the earth will punish him. People are saying: let the Earth hold the king; if he does wrong Earth will kill him. If he offends God, he offends the Earth”.³⁰³

The kingmakers are the ones divinising the ruler. They are the positional successors of the original heads of the first settler population. Because they are conquered leaders, the sacralisation of a new ruler represents for them a step in their process of paying allegiance to the one who overcame them. When they said: "the Earth is like God and the king is God. We throw Earth at him because he is God...If he does wrong, Earth will kill him", they are making a political statement. If the community

³⁰³ Chilver and Kaberry, *Traditional Bamenda*, p. 27.

really believed that their ruler was God, then logically, killing the ruler would mean killing God. Instead, if a ruler died after an accusation, people would say that God has rejected him. This is a proof that God is different from the ruler and could be equal to the Earth: "If he offends God he offends the Earth". The high-ranking officers used the possibility of their ruler being killed by the Earth as a political tool for controlling the monarch's behaviour. It was generally believed that when the traditional leader repeatedly ignored warnings from the nobility, he was likely to die. "In grave misconduct the chief could be destooled by the kingmakers and executed or exiled".³⁰⁴

The greater the agreement between the ruler and the officials who separately controlled different spiritual powers, the more God-like the ruler appeared to be, even though God and the human ruler are clearly distinct for the thoughtful person:

"Le chef est tout pour les siens. Il dispose même des terres. Il conditionne la fécondité... Il est si proche de l'Etre Suprême et des puissances supérieures que le non initié l'identifierait à eux. Encore qu'il faille affirmer qu'il s'en distingue absolument" (The ruler represents everything for his people. The land is his. Reproduction, and ability to give birth or to get satisfactory crops belong to him. He is so close to the Supreme Being that the ordinary person would be confused. But everything affirms that they are different from each another).³⁰⁵

Although the ruler is sacralised, he has never become God in African spirituality. Nobody worshipped him. No prayer was directed to him. Every head of family venerate his ancestors. Traditional religion is familial. At the level of the community, acts of worship are reserved for the governing body. It is through the initiation rituals that the ruler is qualified to be closer to God more than anybody else in the community. The more people believe that he can act on behalf of God for them, the more politically successful the leader is. His divine right was set up to enforce his authority over the population.

³⁰⁴ Dah, Jonas, *Chieftaincy, Widowhood and Ngambi in Cameroon*, Pforzheim-Hohenwat, 1995, p. 2.

³⁰⁵ Maillard, Bernard, *Pouvoir et religion*, pp. 85, 86.

Sacral rule organises everything around a high centre. Its legitimacy derives from divinity, and not from the population. And as Addo-Fening has also noted, regarding Akyem Abuakwa: “Neglect of town and state gods could cost a ruler his stool”.³⁰⁶ The ruler’s relationship to God in private confirms the fact that without the Supreme Being, his ancestors would never have established their rule over the community, and without God’s will, he would never have risen to the leading position. The sacral ruler Ngnie Kanga of Bandjoun confessed during an interview:

*“C’est pour me sacrifier pour mon peuple et pour honorer le nom de mon père que j’ai accepté d’être fait roi. C’est lorsque le jour se lève et que je me réveille que je suis convaincu que je ne suis pas mort. Ma vie dans cette chefferie dépend de Dieu”*³⁰⁷ (For my people’s sake and my father’s name, I sacrificed myself and I agreed to be ruler. At daybreak, when I wake up then I am sure that I am not dead. My life in this community depends on God).

The word for God that this African ruler used was the equivalent word for YHWH the Father of Jesus Christ the Lord.

D- Jesus and Traditional Leaders in the structures of sacral rule

There are two points of departure for an African theologian: the one taken by Sawyerr³⁰⁸ and Idowu³⁰⁹ starts with African religious life and move on to perceive in it a preparation³¹⁰ of African people for the Gospel of Jesus Christ which Nyamiti called “ascending Christology”.³¹¹ There is another approach taken by John³¹² the author of

³⁰⁶ Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 32.

³⁰⁷ Interview with Ngnie Kanga Joseph, the *Fo* of Bandjoun, May 1998.

³⁰⁸ Sawyerr, Harry, *The Practice of the Presence*, Michigan, William b. Eerdsman Publishing Company, Grand Rapids, 1995.

³⁰⁹ Idowu, Bolaji, *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, Ikeja-Nigeria, Longman, 1962.

³¹⁰ The doctrine of “*Preparatio Evangelica*” had been the starting point of African Christological reflection. These authors as well as Penoukou and others, privileged this method which is apparent in the New Testament with Matthew, Marc and Luc. Penoukou, “Christology in the village” in Robert J. Schreier (ed), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, pp. 24-51.

³¹¹ Nyamiti, Charles, *Christ as our Ancestor*, Mambo Press, Zimbabwe, 1984, p.8.

the fourth gospel and Justin Martyr.³¹³ This is the tradition in which Bediako³¹⁴ finds himself which Nyamiti has described as “descending Christology”. It begins with the transcendental perspective, living the consideration of human religious practices to follow in second place. In this approach, Christ is the pre-existent one: the *Logos Spermatikos*. It is Jesus’ presence in African institutions including sacral rule which provides in our view a more comprehensive and fruitful starting point for the application of scriptures to the African pre-missionary context. When the incarnate Jesus is recognised and the sacral rulers put themselves under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, then a comprehensive transformation of religious practices can begin. At this point, African theologians will have their part to play in articulating the issues which will arise post conversion. Let us concentrate on the relationship between Jesus and the traditional leaders.

1- John 1: 1-12; The *Logos Spermatikos* (Seminal Word)

Leaders in sacral rule believe that their institution and their territory is a gift from God. They could be the founder or manager of community but the giver of the power is God. At the foundation of African sacral rule, God was present to make things happen. The Gospel of John in the first verses says:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through Him all things were made; without Him nothing was made that had been made. In Him was life, and that life was the light of men. The true light that gives light to every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and though the world was made through Him, the world did not recognise Him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not

³¹² Unlike Matthew, Marc and Luc who start their respective account of Jesus’ deeds with a genealogy indicating the earthy and human connections of the Messiah, John starts his in heaven with a clear sense of the Pre-existent and transcendent nature of Christ.

³¹³ Bediako, Kwame, *Theology and Identity*, pp. 145-160.

³¹⁴ Bediako, Kwame, *Theology and Identity*, pp. 145-160.

receive Him. Yet to all who received Him, to those who believed in his name, He gave the right to become children of God”.³¹⁵

With regard to the pre-missionary era in African life, this text could be considered as a fresh version of the creation of the whole world where Jesus is the maker of the universe and of the world from generation to generation. He was at the beginning of all things. Through him all things were made in all parts of the world including Africa. For the Jew, this text did not go further than what they already knew; Jesus was the fulfilment of the prophecies of their spiritual tradition as God had never ceased to be present in their worldview and history.

When a non-Jew like Justin the Martyr from a Hellenistic background read this text and reflected upon it, he talked of *Logos Spermatikos* (seminal Word³¹⁶). Kwame Bediako analysed this concept at length and said:

“Having learnt from the Old Man that the saviour who lately came was in fulfilment of prophecies proclaimed in a distant antiquity, Justin understood also that such a saviour had therefore been active all along in the vindication of truth among men. As this vindication of truth has a history in the past, racial and cultural distinctions cease to be relevant and the religious history and conduct of people from every nation now come under one rule and measuring principle. Justin’s most notable contribution to Christian thought lay in what he perceived to be this measuring principle: The universal activity of the seminal Word, who took shape and became man and was called Jesus Christ. Every human thought and action and every human spirit are placed under one criterion of judgement, namely Christ, the seminal Word of God, who has sown seeds of truth among all men. At the heart of Justin’s theory of the universal activity of Christ as the seminal Word, the Word who sows, there lies a deep concern with human redemption. The centrality of the Old Testament consisted in its prediction of the incarnation of the Saviour, the Word of God, who took human form and was called Jesus Christ and who came, not as the fulfilment of the exclusive, nationalist aspirations of Jews but supremely as the expectation of the nations”.³¹⁷

³¹⁵ John 1: 1, 2, 3 11, 12.

³¹⁶ Bediako, Kwame, *Theology and Identity*, pp. 137-173.

³¹⁷ Bediako, Kwame, *Theology and Identity*, pp. 145-160.

Justin considered Jesus as the living, saving, and true Word through whom all things were made. It is quite important to realise that Justin's reflection about the seminal Word is quite often more concerned "with questions of theism, God's government of the world, and with ethics. Much of the time Justin is at pains to draw attention to evidences in human conduct which, he believes, are indications of the activities of the Word among men".³¹⁸ In the light of Justin's thinking, the profound concern of African sacral rulers in seeking God's will and sanction for their decisions, actions and ambitions, is a witness to the presence of the Seminal Word in their ruling institutions. In consistently trying to legitimise their power from the spiritual realm, African rulers were aware that their knowledge of God was partial and needed to be completed since they were used for religious consultations. They were waiting for the moment when God would come to them to clarify the entire history of their religious traditions. This expectation of African sacral rulers pointed to the redemption of their people and the institution under their authority. "Justin held that the entire history of the intellectual and religious quest of men centred upon bringing human beings into fellowship with God. But it is crucial to Justin's whole argument that all this history, properly understood, is both a work of Christ and an anticipation of Christ".³¹⁹

Those who bore witness to the spiritual life as Christ-like before the advent of Jesus of Nazareth were "Christians before Christ". Whatever either rulers, traders, legislators, or philosophers expressed well and elaborated, they owed to their partial knowledge and contemplation of the Word. But since they did not know the whole of the word, who is Christ, they often contradicted themselves. Whatever things were

³¹⁸ Bediako, Kwame, *Theology and Identity*, pp. 145-160.

³¹⁹ Bediako, Kwame, *Theology and Identity*, p. 153.

rightly said among all men according to Justin, are the properties of Christians.³²⁰ Therefore, African sacral rule would have become a Christian property. In fact, sacral rule as a belief system aimed at guiding and nurturing human relations with the invisible, at building moral and social attitudes based on ancestral instructions, and at providing the necessary peace for collective life. Justin's insight might serve us well here for in the religious history of Africa, African tradition, too, had "Christians before Christ". Commenting on the work of Justin Bediako noted:

"Christ as Logos becomes the universal mediator of the knowledge of God and as such the culmination of the history not merely of Israel, but of the entire inhabited world. What is interesting in this universalising of salvation-history is that holy pagans and Jewish saints became Christians before Christ, on the same terms and the Old Testament, by virtue of Christ foreshadowed therein, becomes a Christian Book. All those who have enjoyed the testimony of righteousness, from Abraham himself back to the first man, were Christians".³²¹

Might a case be made for discovering "Christians before Christ" among sacral rulers in African traditions? Before looking at the New Testament references where Christ appeared to be the owner of African sacral rule, we shall concentrate on the nature of Christian missions and the process of their introduction into Africa.

³²⁰ Bediako, Kwame, *Theology and Identity*, p. 152.

³²¹ Bediako, Kwame, *Theology and Identity*, p. 160.

Part Two: Encounter with Christian Mission

This second part of this thesis consists of a critical account of how African sacral rule in its religious itinerary became aware of the Christian presence and its subsequent reaction. It is divided into three sections.

The first section is about Christianity in the post-Reformed western world, the process of the birth of the modern missionary movement, the creation of the Basel Mission and its concrete involvement in the evangelisation of Africa. The spiritual state of churches in Europe, the dominant spiritual worldview in the society at large and in learning centres, as well as the impact of the African-American Christian cry against slavery will be analysed in order to show the contribution of each to the Pietist movement which gave birth to the Basel Mission in 1815. After 1827, the Basel Mission was transformed from its previous role as a training institution to one involved in all aspects of Christian mission. The detailed account of Basel missionaries venturing into Africa in obedience to the great commission of Jesus Christ, will give an understanding of the nature, goals and methods involved in Christian mission.

The second section concentrates on the introduction of Christian mission to the Cameroonian and Ghanaian institutions of sacral rule by the European missionaries. The intention here is to explore step by step what happened when the missionary came into contact with African sacral rule either by personal request to be in a particular field or by invitation from the local authority. Photographs, oral tradition and religious art on church buildings and on sacral palaces and also in written reports, will be carefully used to explain and to contrast positive and negative reactions which occurred in the process of the encounter between Christian mission and sacral rule.

The third section looks at the sustainable presence of the Christian church among the sons and daughters of Africa. An empirical description of the still ongoing relationship between African sacral rule and Christian churches as one can observe it with the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, is aimed at clarifying the intentional and the unintentional results of the encounter. An analysis of the religious practices and regulations as well as personal gifts and attitudes of representatives of both institutions will give insight into areas of continuity and change.

Chapter Four : Nature of Christian Mission

I- Spiritual forces on the eve of the modern Christian mission

The modern Protestant missionary movement of the 18th century was born of Pietism and was the outcome of the Christian effort to overcome the crisis which had occurred within Christianity. Protestant churches formed after the Reformation in Europe had moved from dependence on the personal convictions of pioneers to being established national institutions. The institutionalisation of this new spiritual movement, on the one hand, brought about inter-denominational conflicts between Catholics and Protestants which, in some cases, led to religious war. But, on the other hand, the management of the new spiritual organisations needed liturgical and rigid doctrinal guidelines in order to avoid the excesses of individual persons. The Pietist movement developed later as a reaction to spiritual stagnation within Protestant churches. Before we concentrate on the spiritual state of affairs in Western society, it is

worth noting that Africans in the Christian church in the West contributed in their own right to the success of the Pietistic movement in Europe and in the making of the Basel Mission.

**A- From pro-slavery Christianity to the anti-slavery missionary movement:
The spiritual and theological unity of Africans and Europeans**

“Why did Basel Mission start work in West Africa? Because it was consciously part of a movement to right the wrongs caused by the slave trade”.³²² The modern Christian missionary enterprise started when African-Americans, supported by Western people, were campaigning against slavery. Before the emancipation, European Christian consciousness was invaded by the African-American struggle against the slave trade. African-Americans had begun the long process of changing the Christianity they encountered in the United States from a pro-slavery to an anti-slavery stance. The modern Protestant missionary movements in Europe appeared as the “white” wing of the movement for the abolition of the slave trade both in Europe and in America. The Christian conscience in the West had been troubled by guilt concerning the Africans. There was concern for both those who had been taken into slavery to America, and for those in danger of enslavement there who were still in Africa. The western protestant missionary societies supported a radical African American anti-slavery stance which resulted in a Christianity very different from that which was established under the patronage of governments in Europe and America. The Basel Mission was committed

³²² Jenkins, Paul, “solidarity in the Basel Mission past and present”, in, Baumann Franz (ed), *No bird flies with just one wing: Reflections on the history and identity of the Basel Mission*, Basel, Mission House, 1990, pp. 71, 72.

to working with countries which had legally abolished the Atlantic slave trade.

Africans who survived the journey from their native lands to the white-owned plantations in America, had been gradually assimilated into a Western style of life and religion. It was in this style that they dressed and built their houses. They spoke the language of the community which was predominantly English, Portuguese or Spanish. Freed slaves participated in the white man's model of society. They had been isolated from their sacral ruling communities for a long time, and had adopted the democratic ideals of the society in which they lived. When blacks had been baptised, they practised the Christian faith of the family they worked for. By the end of the 17th century, the largest community of African Christians could be found in America. Although they were of African ancestry, their cultural links with their continent of origin and African sacral rule needed to be re-established. Therefore, though their worldview continued to be African, their practical outlook was not different from that of the white Western missionaries. In spiritual terms, for the white missionary movement, black people ceased to be commodities and became brethren in Christ Jesus.

African-Americans were the largest group to use the Bible and Christian doctrine as weapons against slavery, to draw the attention of slave dealers to the horrors of the slave trade and the divine necessity of its abolition, and to plan for the Christianisation of the African continent.³²³ As victims, they expressed the sufferings of Christian slaves better than any other human beings could do. Their understanding of the biblical teaching on freedom forced Western people to search their conscience and

³²³ "That very day of Emancipation (1838), they (Afro-Jamaicans) jump in joy, fill the Church, sang and said; we will bless Africa with the Bible", in unpublished Joseph Fuller's diary, Baptist Mission Archive Regent Park, Oxford.

to review the spiritual foundation they had constructed for slavery.³²⁴ Africans showed in their pamphlets that human law could not be justified without divine law; and every slaveholder was a robber. Cuguano, who was taken from Africa to America, and then from America to England, suggested:

“I would propose that there ought to be days of mourning and fasting appointed, to make inquiry into that great and pre-eminent evil for many years past carried on against the hidden nations, and the horrible iniquity of making merchandise of us, and cruelly enslaving the poor Africans; and that you might seek grace and repentance, and find mercy and forgiveness before God omnipotent”.³²⁵

Chaplains in slave boats, spiritual leaders in white plantations and some influential members of parliament first in America, and then all over Europe, came to support. It was pre-eminently the question of emancipation and reintegration of former slaves which enabled them to harness these sources of spiritual energy to create an organisational network all over Europe.³²⁶

Baptists, Methodists and Moravians in America turned the African-American call for the abolition of the slave trade into a popular movement on the plantations as well as in Europe. Protestant missionary societies in Europe supported the African-American project and re-echoed it in powerful circles, so that the desire to practise slavery should be eradicated from the hearts and minds of people as well as from the territory of Europe and America. Pietism served as a fertile ground for a new

³²⁴ Black slaves like Gustavus Vassa born Olaudah Equiano, an Ibo from Nigeria and Ottobah Cuguano, a Fanti from Ghana wrote and published sensitive, spiritual, and emotional pamphlets against slavery, narrating in English how cruel the Christendom initiative in slave trade was. Ottobah Cuguano; *Thoughts and sentiments on the evil and wicked traffic of the slavery and commerce of the human species, humbly submitted to the inhabitants of Great Britain*

Robert, J. Allison, *The interesting narrative of the life of Olaudah Equiano; written by himself*, Boston, Bedford Books, 1995.

³²⁵ Debrunner, Hans, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, Accra, Waterville Publishing House, 1967, p. 107.

³²⁶ Schweitzer, Peter, *Survivors on the Gold Coast: the Basel Missionary in colonial Ghana*, Accra, Smatline publishing, 2000, p. 10.

understanding of Christian mission and responsibility towards Africa. The Pietists made abolition a reality by using some of what the various chaplains of Western commercial companies operating on the African coast had been writing in favour of the suppression of slavery to fuel their campaign:

“For the founders of the Basel Mission, ... the sufferings of Jesus (and people) are a mirror for the movement of God in this world. Mission originates in this suffering and is both the continuation and the instrument of constant attempt by God to approach humankind. Mission is the continuation of the divine work of reconciliation”.³²⁷

Most chaplains in castles and commercial ships were against slavery and contributed their support for the passing of the emancipation ordinance. Slave dealers ignored and opposed these spiritual leaders who were ready to challenge them in any case of misconduct. In 1710, Rev. Rask of the Danish Castle at Christianborg describes the transportation of the slaves;

“The slave trade is the most horrible and detestable trade imaginable. When I have to witness this my eyes shed tears...they are many, mostly women, who fill the air with heart piercing cries, which can scarcely be drowned by drums or other loud instruments. This often cuts deep into my heart. Yet it did not lie in my power to change the fate of these unfortunate people”.³²⁸

During this period, the Danish government took into consideration the cries of the Chaplains and African-Americans from Africa and the West Indies and made efforts to improve the social conditions of the Black race.

Doctor Paul Erdmann Isert, botanist, natural scientist, and disciple of Jean Jacques Rousseau, entered the service of the Danish Guinea Company in 1783. In 1786, he made an exploratory journey to Akropong Akuapem in Ghana to see how he could

³²⁷ Rennstish, Karl, “One movement, two constant factors”, in Baumann Franz (ed), *No bird flies with just one wing*, p. 87.

³²⁸ Debrunner, Hans, *A History of Christianity in Ghana*, p. 47-48.

elevate the African race by working among those who were still « unspoiled » by the worst features of European life at the coast. Isert had a very positive view of the African, which he found confirmed in the cheerful and enthusiastic welcome he received from *Nana* Abuobi Atiemo, the sacral ruler, and his people in Akropong. Isert wanted to counterbalance the evil of the slave trade by establishing a colony of Christian farmers, craftsmen and traders in the Gold Coast (Ghana), which would be a mission-station at the same time.³²⁹

Count Ernst Von Schimmelmann, Prime minister of Denmark, one of the founder directors of the Guinea Company and friend of Isert, helped to realise this plan. Dr Isert was empowered by royal proclamation to found a plantation colony in conjunction with a mission enterprise in early 1788. He was given detailed instructions:

“The colony should aim at becoming self supporting by the introduction of West Indian crops; Former slaves should be given their own piece of land and no European should be allowed to acquire land for himself. As soon as the enterprise starts, Moravian missionaries will join the community”.³³⁰

The Danish government provided a large subsidy for the creation of that plantation. Isert settled at Akropong the capital town of Akuapem where the *Omanhene Nana* Abuobi Atiemo gave him a large tract of land after they had signed a contract. He loved Africa and people were excited about this way of empowering Akuapem inhabitants. He had become an African with Africans. He was called *Twa di* (-cut and eat- because he used fork and knife to eat). When he went to the Coast in January 1789 to send his

³²⁹ Selena Axcelrod Wingnes, *Letters on West Africa Slave Trade: Paul Erdman Isert's journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Island in Columbia 1788*, Oxford University press, 1992. This book written in German and published in Copenhagen in 1788 was an instant success. It was translated into Danish, Swedish, Dutch and French. « During the ensuing nine years, it appears in two editions in German, Danish, French, Swedish and Dutch » quoted in Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960: Younger Church in a changing society*, Accra, Ghana University Press, 1966, p. 26.

³³⁰ Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*, p. 27.

annual report, “his own people interested in slavery killed him because he was an obstacle to the slave trade and a prominent next Danish Governor”.³³¹ His death was a shock. He had contributed to people’s well-being so that his name was linked to the ruler, Abuobi Atiemo, who was his friend. This linkage continued even after the death of Atiemo and Isert’s name is always mentioned with his when there are spiritual rites in the ancestral Stool room. By 1794, this project had been abandoned. But the Basel mission profited from the experience of the Danish planters and around 1840 Isert’s project was to be revived by his countryman, Andreas Riis, for the well-being of the African people and the spread of Christianity. Unfortunately, it did not occur to Riis to link his enterprise to that of Isert through his spiritual presence in the Stool room. That could have been a way to consolidate his relationship with the Akropong sacral rule.

However, European national governments, in their contact with Africa, were often not interested in leading Africans to Christ. Instead, they limited themselves to seeking commercial profit, at the expense of Africa. In Europe, theologians, lawyers, economists, and parliamentarians campaigned together against slavery, proposing fair Commerce, Civilization and Christianity to Africa to redress this situation. T. F. Buxton, one of the famous abolitionists, said:

“ I lay great stress upon African commerce, more upon the cultivation of the soil, but most of all upon the elevation of the native mind ...When we shall have put down that prodigious evil which forbids all hope of their (Africans) improvement, it is abundantly possible that the millions of Africa may assume their place among civilised and Christian nations”.³³²

³³¹ Nana Addo-Birikorang, *Apesemankahene*, (Prime Minister) of Akuapem State, interview, 31st August 2001, 10h15-12h

³³² Buxton, Thomas Fowell, *The African slave trade and its remedy*, London, Dawsons, reprint, 1967, pp. 457-458.

The Basel Mission had been established as a missionary institution by 1815. Their godly commission was to lay equal emphasis on Commerce and Christianity. They were out for the reparation, restitution and renewal of Africa in the name of Christ. Basel missionaries started working against slavery in Europe with arguments and attitudes similar to that of African-Americans. They were to proceed in this line from this time on in Africa, long before the emancipation of Blacks in America, and before many European countries officially and practically stopped the slave trade.³³³ For Blumhardt of the Basel Mission, mission is for:

"reparation of injustice committed by Europeans, so that to some extent the thousands of bleeding wounds could be healed, which were caused by the Europeans since centuries through their most dirty greediness and most cruel deceitfulness".³³⁴

One of the possible cures of the evils of slavery and the slave trade appeared to be the introduction of Christianity into Africa. In Cameroon and Ghana, missionaries from Jamaica, England, Switzerland, Denmark and Germany adopted this programme and implemented it by 1850. Africa justly excited a deep and universal interest. Afro-Americans and Whites in America and Europe put their economic, moral and spiritual forces together to bless Africa with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. African-American Baptists came to Cameroon as the first missionaries. The English Missionary Alfred Saker, when leaving London, had to travel to the West Indies first before continuing to his destination in Cameroon. He arrived in Jamaica where he recruited forty Christian Negroes to travel with him. They arrived at Fernand Do Po where they established a Christian community as a base from which they could accomplish their evangelistic

³³³ Abolition of slave trade: Denmark : 1803, England : 1807, West Indies : 1833, Jamaica : 1837

³³⁴ Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, p. 287.

mission in Cameroon. One of Blumhardt's instructions to the missionaries as they departed for Africa was:

“Never forget for a moment how arrogantly and disgracefully the poor Negroes have been treated for centuries...and still are being treated...by people calling themselves Christians. An infinite amount of crying injustice has to be made good by your unselfish loving, caring and forgiving behaviour when you are among them, in order to extinguish from their hearts the bitter feelings which every European face must provoke in them”.³³⁵

The Basel Mission acted on this principle, in sending its first batch of missionaries to support the African-American missionaries in Sierra Leone. It recruited a small colony of Black West Indian Christians to assist Riis, the European missionary in the Gold Coast (Ghana), in order to prove that Christianity was not the affair of heroic white individuals only, but a corporate venture for Africans as well. These Africans and Europeans were not united on racial, national, or denominational principles, but by a common understanding of the Christian faith and their task as agents for the spread of Christianity in the world. They were united theologically and spiritually. This fresh understanding of one's relationship to God and service to him, helped Christians to set up missionary organisations in Europe, America and Africa, to ensure the abolition of the slave trade. This intra-transformation process of Christianity in order to achieve the spiritual and ethical abolition of slavery, was deeply rooted in the African experience of the Christian Gospel. However, in South Africa where Africans were kept out of Christianity, this new trend in the Christian doctrine which considered the Gospel as basically anti-slavery, was completely alien to the Boers.³³⁶ Abandoned to Whites,

³³⁵ Blumhardt, quoted in Rennstish, Karl “One movement, two constant factors”, in Baumann Franz (ed), *No bird flies with just one wing*, p. 89.

³³⁶ European Christianity in South Africa, which did not experience the Afro-American struggle, did not recognise Christianity in the work of the first modern missionary, the Moravian Georges Schmidt, when he ministered among them from 1736 to 1742. When he baptised Blacks, he was chased and forced back

Christianity was distorted to become a pro-slavery or pro-apartheid religion until Black Christians questioned it. This is a proof that Christianity changes in regard to history and context.

The centuries of African-American sufferings stimulated in Jesus Christ's disciples in America and Europe, a rethinking of Christian teaching, and they could no longer tolerate the slave business the Whites had initiated. It is this long process of African reorientation of the Christian doctrine against the slave trade that invaded the Christian conscience all over the world. "It is not words and deeds alone, but words that come out of suffering, and deeds that involve suffering, that carry out the work of mission".³³⁷ Without the African-American Christians, there would not have been any abolition movement, and no Fourah Bay College in Africa or Basel Mission in Europe.

B- The spiritual state of churches and the subsequent discomfort of pietistic members

Protestant reformers had used the Bible to displace the hierarchy of spiritual intermediaries in the Roman Catholic theology and liturgy.³³⁸ They had championed

to Holland. Allier, Raoul, *La psychologie de la conversion chez les peuples non-civilisés*, Paris, Payot, 1925, pp. 35,36.

³³⁷ Rossel, Jacques, "Movement in the making", in Baumann Franz (ed), *No Bird flies with only one wing*, p. 40.

³³⁸ The Roman Catholic Church, which started in a plural religious tradition, had continued to develop a doctrine of the spiritual world full of intermediaries. First, in heaven they included the notion of Angels and Satan. Second, for the underneath population, they were interested in the promotion of those who had died, (from human level to the status of saints), and their contribution to the spiritual well-being of the living congregants. And third, they explained the value of the contemplative life, developed intercession and personal dedication to God. Monasteries were established as centres for prayer, intellectual life and theological discourse. Spiritual experience was somehow limited to the clergy and people contented themselves with prepared prayers and rituals performed only by the clergy. In the medieval period, the doctrine of Saints and Angels and their relevance in people's spiritual life were to be sharpened. The notion of purgatory, and the notion of being in limbo, which was an argument about the salvation of the dead and their itinerary towards paradise, got some final touches. This development of the spiritual significance of intermediaries suffered from Protestant criticism.

religious freedom and people became responsible for the content of their faith. They proclaimed one's right to spiritual maturity as the faithful scrutinised the Bible and related directly to Jesus Christ. Post-Reformed Protestant churches went through a series of crises before finding in the Pietistic movement significant reasons for Christian mission with Basel playing a prominent role. Pioneers of the Protestant Reformation appeared in church history as a starting point of a new spiritual tradition within Christendom. They had to explain to all those who were attracted by their spiritual initiative what it was and the strategy to follow. It was not easy for the new Protestant groups to become part of the cultural realities of the European societies.

Protestant leaders tried very early to get the support of princes, kings, and politicians in parliament. Each European government felt the need to identify itself with a church because there were many churches constituted according to the charisma of a particular Reformer. The notion of dedicating of land to God or the relationship between people living on a given territory with a specific practice of religion, remained in the constitution of the nation, inspired the executive government and modelled community attitude at large. Reformation maintained a belief in the spiritual basis of political units. European countries were Lutherans, Reformed, or Catholic. The position of the governing body that did not tolerate the presence of an alternative way of worshipping God led to religious wars between different denominations within a unique political group. No religious tradition was completely eliminated after the war. Reformed churches and Roman Catholics lived side by side under the authority of a given government. Therefore, there was informal and passive interaction between them

which often became tense. In Germany, after the Thirty Years War, Protestant churches were so poor that:

“They were ruled from without by the civil governments of various states, and from within by theologians as autocratic as the papacy. Both civil and theological rule tend more to vigilance over doctrine than to care for Christian character... Luther had placed the seat of faith in the heart, but emphasis had now shifted to the intellect.”³³⁹

The impact of religious wars on the spiritual life of churches was that people lost their zeal and their previous religious enthusiasm. Nominal Christianity was dominant. Outward observance and participation in sacraments were sufficient to qualify one to be a member of the church. The understanding of teaching was limited to its intellectual aspect. The Lutheran Church, in particular, felt the need for new reforms as it was exposed to the damaging influence of the state as well as the informal and formal tensions between various denominations and city-churches. Spiritual discomfort and internal criticism became part of church life. People no longer cared much about the fathers of the Reformation.³⁴⁰ Reformers had abandoned the hierarchical spiritual realm of the Greco-Roman pantheon to proclaim the uniqueness of the Christian God. They championed the view that there was one single way of relating to God through the daily reading of the Bible. But in the Post-Reformed Christian Church, vigilance to orthodoxy got prominence and there was no concern for any individual experience of the Gospel. This way of running church affairs was not satisfactory. The subsequent articulation of Christian doctrine, liturgy, rituals and practices hardened the new denominational identities, and made way for the spread of secular culture. By adjusting

³³⁹ Waterhouse, E.S., “Pietism” in, Hastings, James (ed), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. X, Edinburgh, The Scholar Press Ilkey, 1980, p. 6.

³⁴⁰ “Luther had placed the Bible above dogma. The order was now reversed, and a creed-bound church neglected the Bible in home, school, university and service. Theological controversy was both frequent and acrimonious. Lay rights were subordinated to pastoral prerogatives.” Waterhouse, E.S., “Pietism” in, Hastings, James, (ed) *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, p. 7.

itself to external forces, the church gave up its prophetic role and stopped generating spiritual solutions for individual and collective problems.

This spiritually dry environment where orthodoxy and lack of vision were damaging the basis of religious life, was invading the whole church, which adopted an increasingly conservative attitude to new challenges as if the church leaders did not need new theological and spiritual attitudes. Therefore, the Pietistic movement emerged as a way out. Pietists forced the boundaries of church principles for renewal through new initiatives in spiritual life as believers exposed themselves to the direct influence of the biblical world.

C- Development of Pietism in Europe and the creation of the Basel Mission

Pietism was a religious movement within the Protestant churches. It originated in Germany and took its name from the book *Pious desires* written by Philipp Jakob Spener.³⁴¹ This book is a critique of the established influential power organisations: the Church and the Government. Second to Martin Luther in helping people to overcome spiritual discomfort within established churches, Spener urged through his book and intensified through his preaching and pastoral ministry

“Devotional study of the Bible, fuller realisation of the doctrine of the priesthood for all believers, emphasis on the charitable aspects of Christianity

³⁴¹ Spener (1630-1705), German Lutheran minister and pietist leader. Born in Alsace where he studied theology. He went to Basel, Geneva, Stuttgart and Tubingen. After his doctorate in theology Alsace in 1664, he served as pastor in Frankfurt. At Frankfurt he reformed religious instruction by preaching on the whole books of the Bible, restoring the confirmation service, and setting aside days of fasting and prayer. He proclaimed the necessity of conversion and holy living and set up a “collegia pietatis” within the church where pastors and laymen met to study the Bible and pray together for mutual edification. Pierard, in Douglas (ed) *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 925.

and the transformation of university theological studies to serve devotion rather than science.”³⁴²

Pietism became a movement in the 1670s under the influential leadership of Spener. It started modestly in an attempt to improve the religious life in Frankfurt where Spener was heading a Lutheran congregation. He found that Sunday services alone were not a sufficient programme of individual education that leads to deep commitment to Christ. In his own house, Spener organised a private devotional gathering for biblical teaching, promotion of goodwill and reformation of life, as Christians were eager to serve Christ and the Gospel through strong fellowship. These meetings helped people to find in Bible reading and personal commitment to spiritual life a solution to the rigid control which existed in Church and society. Pietists sought for a Christian life free from denominational ties and national feelings. In the course of their struggle from different experiences, Pietists reached the same depth and success as the abolitionists, by using the Bible to reorient Church teachings and social practices.³⁴³

Spener published the six principles³⁴⁴ of pietism in 1675 in Frankfurt, and the influence of the movement spread rapidly in Germany and all over Europe. Spener gained popularity and was appointed Court chaplain in Dresden in 1686. By accepting

³⁴² Cloney, “Pietism”, in Ferguson Sinclair B., (ed) *New Dictionary of Theology*, Illinois, Inter-Varsity Press, 1988, pp. 515 – 517.

³⁴³ Pietism is “a combination of religious emotions and deep thought of individual conversion and strong Christian fellowship”. Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*, p. 20.

³⁴⁴ 1- Earnest Bible study conducted in small groups within the church. 2- A lay share in the church government as the proper consequence of the Christian doctrine of the priesthood of believers. 3- That the knowledge of Christianity is practical, not theoretical, and shown in charity, forgiveness and devotion. 4- That rather than denouncing their errors, sympathetic treatment should be given to unbelievers, to win them, if possible, to truth. 5- That theological training should be reorganised, and emphasis laid on devotion rather than on doctrine. 6- That preaching should be more practical and less rhetorical. Waterhouse, E.S., “Pietism” in, Hastings, James, (ed) *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, p. 7.

this position, he demonstrated the kind of relationship a pietist has to nurture with his government. Though he maintained that:

“Questions of piety and doctrine are inward. The state should therefore leave them alone. In external matters of worship and church life, however, the state may rightly interfere, if necessary to promote the general well-being of the country and to maintain order and peace.”³⁴⁵

The seriousness of his ministry increased his personal popularity even though Pietism as a movement was under violent attack. The Prussian Court supported the movement and decreed in 1729 that: “all who desired appointment in Prussia must study two years in Halle”.³⁴⁶ At its beginning, the Pietistic movement was not against the political hierarchy of nobles and rulers. Its development depended on the context:

“At home, Pietism spread gradually to the large centres of Germany. Pietists worked hard for the conversion of the nobles with the conviction that God fearing rulers make good statesmen. In Holland, they succeeded in addressing the ruling class. But in Wurttemberg their message appealed more to the farmers, petty traders, craftsmen and the army”.³⁴⁷

Problems arose when there were non-Christians in power.³⁴⁸ Pietists in Holland, England, and the Scandinavian countries developed a theology for the spiritual well-being of rulers. A recovery of this kind of evangelistic enterprise towards members of the ruling class in Europe might serve as an example for a balanced Christian mission to African sacral rulers.

³⁴⁵ Waterhouse, E.S., “Pietism” in, Hastings, James, (ed) *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, p. 7.

³⁴⁶ Waterhouse, E.S., “Pietism” in, Hastings, James, (ed) *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, p. 8.

³⁴⁷ Dah, Jonas, *Missionary Motivations and Methods: A critical examination of the Basel Mission in Cameroon 1886-1914*, University of Basel, 1983, p. 9.

³⁴⁸ Revolutions, religious wars and the Enlightenment aimed at removing any religious basis for the government. A political unit may have Christian members but the religious basis for its daily running has no spiritual reference. God, the Church and the Bible have been taken away. Legitimation of power was from people and no more from the Church. European states became secular with the result that the temporal power of the Christian church was eroded.

August Hermann Francke,³⁴⁹ known as the second great leader of Pietism, was an accomplished Hebrew and Greek scholar, teaching in Leipzig. Orthodox theologians made him a target because he insisted on conversion and personal regeneration as preconditions for theological studies more than Spener did. He was forced to leave his position as a university teacher and to retreat to a pastorate in Erfurt for a while in 1691. However, Spener negotiated the unsalaried chair of Greek and Oriental Languages in the university of Halle for him. In Halle, Francke succeeded in giving an academic dimension to Pietism. With others like Thomasius, he developed a “Biblical metaphysics”, a “*philosophia sacra*” and a “salvation history” of humankind to counteract the static and backward-looking explanations of contemporary doctrinal teaching. The group insisted on the individual experience of living faith and personal regeneration with ethical signs as preconditions to hold a chair in theological studies.

Francke organised the philanthropic work and, therefore, gave a practical dimension to the Pietistic theory of charity. His orphanage and educational institutions affiliated to the University of Halle did not win the attention of his colleagues, but that of the poor, the needy and people at fringes of the society instead. This idea of helping the needy prepared members of the Pietist movement, on the one hand, to denounce and oppose the evil Western system of slavery and, on the other hand, to attach to their missionary activities in Africa, a “reparation” dimension with the creation of schools and hospitals.

³⁴⁹ Francke (1663-1727), German Lutheran minister, professor and early advocate of Pietism. He became professor of Hebrew at Leipzig in 1684 and professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Halle in 1692. By 1698, he was professor of Theology and in this post, he made important contributions in the study of philology. See, Clouse, Robert G., “Francke August Hermann”, in Douglas (ed) *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 388.

Beside the Bible society, the orphanage, the home for widows and the printing house, Francke had also made Halle the international centre for the dissemination of Pietistic literature, missionaries and beliefs to Russia, Scandinavia, Britain and America. Linkages within Pietism started in a given fellowship group and bypassed the church and state committees through Christian literature in various languages: German, English, French, Dutch and others. This attitude towards languages, reading and writing for international linkage, would work as one of the basic principles in the training of missionaries in Basel and the subsequent interest of Basel missionaries in African languages in the mission fields. Pietistic insistence on individual experience and its attack on the rigid vigilance of church leaders in doctrinal matters led to widely different developments of the movement, in different cities, countries and denominations.

What was called Pietism in the majority of European countries, took the name “Puritanism” in England.³⁵⁰ Puritans from England, like the Moravians from Germany and Denmark, served as a channel of communication with the Americas. They developed and passed on to the rest of Europe the enthusiasm of the African-American spiritual struggle for the abolition of the slave trade. Puritans and Pietists belonged to the same continental movement. They initiated an Evangelical consciousness in Europe which acted as a fertile ground for the campaign against slavery in Europe. In England and the Scandinavian countries, those missionary societies born of Pietism were national and denominational. The following missionary societies were set up: the Baptist Missionary Society created in 1792, the London Missionary Society in 1795, the Church Missionary Society in 1799, the Moravian Missionary Society in 1797, the

³⁵⁰ In England the ethical aspect of Pietism was extended to serious restrictions in one’s daily life.

Danish Missionary Society and the Dutch Missionary Society. In Germany, on the other hand, they were established on a city basis: Leipzig Mission, Berlin Mission, Bremen Mission, Basel Mission and others.

“Until the time of Francke, the work of missions was considered to be the responsibility of the government on which depended the welfare of the souls of the subjects. Therefore the call to mission was thought of as coming to a man from without, from those in authority.”³⁵¹

In Herrnhut, under the leadership of Count Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf,³⁵² Pietism took yet another form. The call to Christian mission overseas was presented in a way which would be independent of both church and state interference. In this, Zinzendorf created a missionary movement which differed both from the British denominationalism and from the German city dependence on the State. These two principles were foundational for the Basel Mission. Born at the royal court of Dresden where Spener³⁵³ was ministering as chaplain, and educated at Halle school under Francke, Zinzendorf studied law at Wuerttemberg from 1716 to 1719. He was then aware of the various forms of Pietism in different cities. In 1715, in Halle, after the visit of Ziegenbalg who came from the West Indies, he started worrying that “all the

³⁵¹ Grau, Eugene, “The German Protestant Heritage of the Church in Ghana”, in, *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology*, Accra, Presbyterian Press, Vol. 3, no 4, June 1968, p. 20.

³⁵² Zinzendorf, the founder of the Moravian Mission, was born in Dresden to an Austrian noble family. He was raised by his maternal grandmother, a Pietist and close friend of Spener and Francke. He became interested in foreign missions after meeting the Danish-Halle missionaries in India, but his family pressurised him into a government career. After entering the Saxon civil service in 1721, he sponsored religious assemblies in his Dresden home and purchased an estate at Berthelsdorf to form a Christian community called Herrnhut. While travelling in Western Europe (1719-20), he came into contact with Reformed theology, non-church groups and Roman Catholicism which further broadened his understanding of Christianity. He studied law in Wuerttemberg (1716-19) and later on theology in Tubingen and was ordained Lutheran bishop in Berlin in 1737. In, Pierard, Richard V. “Zinzendorf” in Douglas (ed) *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, p. 1071.

³⁵³ “In 1704, he (Spener) consecrated little Zinzendorf by the laying on of hands for the furtherance of the kingdom of Jesus. Throughout life, Zinzendorf kept a deep respect for Spener, and occasionally describe his own task as reawakening Spener’s seed.” In, Grau, Eugene, “The German Protestant Heritage of the Church in Ghana”, p. 14.

heathen might be converted before he would be old enough to join in the mission service”.³⁵⁴ For him, mission to the heathen was the sign that one loves Christ and has understood his Gospel. Pressurised by his family, he served the Austrian Saxon government from 1721 to 1727. He used his income to create a Christian community similar to that of Wuerttemberg in Dresden and called it Herrnhut (the Lord keeps watch). Those who volunteered to settle in Herrnhut called themselves Brethren. They came from Berthelsdorf, Bohemia and Moravia. The apparent dominant number of Moravians made Zinzendorf followers in Herrnhut to be called “Moravians”.

He resigned from government work in 1727, to consecrate his whole time to the Brethren in Herrnhut so that his feeling for mission and thinking about it could become mission action. Under Zinzendorf’s leadership, the Brethren officially joined the Lutheran Church on August 12, 1727, on condition that they be allowed to manage their own spiritual affairs as a distinct group within the church in the way that Zinzendorf had already experimented in Wuerttemberg. They worked out a collective identity as “a body of soldiers of Christ, ready to advance his cause at home and abroad. The ideal to be reached was of a community separated from the world but ready to send forces to work anywhere for Christ.”³⁵⁵ Zinzendorf directed his mission work to the Negro slaves of the West Indies and the Greenlanders. He considered personal conversion and experience as the first step to being a witness to the living Christ in order to “bring one soul to the Saviour”.³⁵⁶ What one has experienced with Christ and through his Gospel has to be passed on to others.

³⁵⁴ Grau, Eugene, “The German Protestant Heritage of the Church in Ghana”, p. 15.

³⁵⁵ Grau, Eugene, “The German Protestant Heritage of the Church in Ghana” p. 18.

³⁵⁶ Grau, Eugene, “The German Protestant Heritage of the Church in Ghana”, p. 18.

Every member of the fellowship in Herrnhut was prepared for mission activity, for one's public witness had to be followed by an unconditional readiness for mission service. Zinzendorf was able to awake the missionary spirit in his congregation and within the Pietist movement as a whole. By so doing, he enriched the basic principles of Pietism with a foreign mission component. Even though Zinzendorf was ordained a Lutheran bishop in 1737, he toured all over Europe and also travelled to America, expanding his vision and establishing Moravian communities. He exchanged thoughts with the leaders of the Greek Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Reformed Churches and non-church groups to all of whom he emphasised his non-doctrinal Pietistic stance and teaching that "missionaries were not to found churches or congregations but to preach the Gospel." Mission for Zinzendorf was interdenominational and international, for the missionary would be working outside his own country among the heathen and poor and would have to bypass his own church committee, relying on the support of the Brethren. For him, the New Testament was the only missionary book and he had no detailed programme for the missionaries, trusting that God would tell them at the right time what to do.³⁵⁷ This latter view was not considered by members of Pietistic movement beyond Herrnhut.

In view of the need for trained missionaries, modern missionary societies joined together with Pietists in Germany to plan the creation of an evangelical training Institution. As another step in the development of the Pietistic movement, the Evangelical Basel Mission Society was then created in Switzerland in 1815 as an evangelistic training institution to serve with existing Protestant missionary societies in any part of the world. From the beginning, it belonged to no single church and to no

³⁵⁷ Grau, Eugene, "The German Protestant Heritage of the Church in Ghana", pp. 20-21.

single country. Their main objective was neither to extend nor to promote the nation or the denomination. They were rather concerned with the new understanding of Christian responsibility in spreading the biblical Good News of Jesus and the benevolent civilisation both within Europe and Africa. They had little connection with their own government and, in mission fields, they hardly concerned themselves with the promotion of the African traditional system of government. Those who came as missionary candidates did not represent a defined sacral community. It was a personal venture for Christ.

The Wuerttemberg movement that also dominated in missionary circles all over Europe developed a moderate form of Pietism. In May 1662, Spener was in Stuttgart and his ideas were largely welcomed, with little aggressive opposition from the church and the state.³⁵⁸ Among Pietist centres of this period, Wuerttemberg stood as a model of rural life where Pietism had spread more generally among the leaders, middle class and poor people. In Wurttemberg, Johann Albretch Bengel³⁵⁹ together with others among the Lutheran clergy and in academic circles, became a member of the movement and ensured its success within his own pastoral ministry. In the same way, parliamentarians such as Blumhard and Hoffmann, joined the movement. If elsewhere Pietism appeared to be uncontrolled, this general sympathy to it in Wuerttemberg gave to the movement all its chances to develop as a new spiritual and cultural tradition. In spite of the general acceptance of Pietistic principles, there was a vital group of separatists. They were

³⁵⁸ Bediako, Kwame, "The Presbyterian Church of Ghana; Aspects of its origins, Development, Spirituality and Ethos", Akropong, unpublished article, January 2003, p. 3.

³⁵⁹ Bengel, Johannes Albretch, (1687 – 1752) Lutheran New Testament scholar. He entered the Lutheran ministry in 1707, and in 1713 became professor at the Seminary of Denkendorf. He did some work on classical and patristic literature but his chief importance is as a textual critic and expositor of the New Testament. In 1741, he was made general-superintendent at Herbrechtingen, and in 1749, at Alpirspach. In Cross, *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1974, p.158.

ready to object to any new or confusing situation from church and state representatives. They instead attempted to create a community of their own, with the approval of the city government which helped to found the first Christian village in Korntal as is detailed below. Unlike in other German cities, there were active members of Pietism among the leaders of the Wuerttemberg Church, State and University. A pietist from Wuerttemberg was supposed to run a life rooted in a profound reverence for the Bible.

The particular development of this movement in Wuerttemberg gave the Basel Mission a unique orientation.³⁶⁰ The largest fellowship group where the recruitment of Basel missionaries took place was in the Christian villages, created in the Wuerttemberg area. Members of the Pietistic movement cut themselves off from the temporal power and adopted a defensive attitude towards the secularisation of government by attempting to establish a theocracy. With this form of Pietism, everything was organised to facilitate people's lives at the periphery of the society, far from the decision-making centres. This understanding of the Christian faith was automatically adopted by Basel missionaries when they had to come into contact with African sacral rule. Wurttemberg Pietists developed reading and writing skills like those of Halle. This helped the members to be free in consulting their Bible and sharing their personal spiritual testimony beyond their fellowship group. This helped the movement to spread beyond their small circle and country to reach other continents. Pietistic literature enforced spiritual and theological unity for a renewal of people's faith, in church and Christian society. Through Christian literature, Pietists from

³⁶⁰ "The leadership of the Basel Mission was recruited from there. More than two thirds of the missionaries who worked in Cameroon and Ghana came from Wuerttemberg. Finally, Wuerttemberg Pietism exemplified various facets of nineteenth-century pietism in general". Dah, Jonas, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p. 10.

humble backgrounds were able to influence the society more than they could have imagined possible. They aimed at cultural liberation from the established Church and its traditions. But contrary to the Methodists in England, they achieved it in Wuerttemberg within the church and became a reliable religious movement.

The members gave new meaning to the existing spiritual and social tradition. Since they were so prepared to maintain the exclusive God in the spiritual worldview of Western society, they were far from making any effort to understand or accept the hierarchy of the spiritual world of the mission field. They objected to what was not in accordance with their convictions and had cut themselves off from their own government and their own church. This experience predisposed them to oppose the system of sacral rule which is symbolised by the sacral ruler, includes lesser deities and unfamiliar structures for the spiritual life. From the periphery of the society, they coupled poverty with a strong spiritual freedom and a clear shift from established traditions. Pietists were “driven off the land by overcrowding and inadequate resources. This is the reason why there was a huge migration of people from Wuerttemberg to Russia and America”.³⁶¹ When they could not emigrate, many cut themselves off from society pulling themselves out from the traditional Church to worship differently under God’s care alone, far from the influence of secular government.

D- The first Christian Village

In their struggle to reproduce a community similar to that of the New Testament, Pietists in Wuerttemberg, under the leadership of Gottlieb Hoffmann, a

³⁶¹ Jenkins, Paul, "Towards a definition of the Pietism of Wurttemberg as a missionary movement" African Studies Association of the United Kingdom, Conference on *White in Africa*, Oxford, September, 1978, p. 6.

parliament member, proposed the creation of new communities in Wuerttemberg, where separatist pietists could feel at home with their own constitution, liturgies and ceremonies. He argued that they might forgo emigration if they felt at home in this kind of community. In 1818, the government accepted this proposition on condition that members of such communities remained subject to the state law and that only two of such communities could be permitted. Two hundred and fifty people were settled in Korntal in 1819. They were farmers, weavers, tailors, shoemakers and blacksmiths. They underwent military service. This is how the first Christian village was created as a place

“in which Christianity would be the official religion and public officers as well as government would have to adhere to religious principles and precepts... (and a) place where the pure faith could be observed while waiting for the consummation of the thousand years’ reign”.³⁶²

The growing lack of religious enthusiasm resulting from the new way of thinking and learning in reference to strict control from church and government leaders made spiritual enterprise very difficult.

“The static teaching of wisdom and doctrinal teaching of orthodoxy ignored everyday life experience. Orthodoxy used the Bible as a lifeless book of learning instead of viewing it as the living and revelatory report of history.”³⁶³

Pietists all lived together, practising their trades and their common faith without disturbance. It could be said that their goal was the establishment of a theocracy in Korntal in Wuerttemberg where one could live like the early Church as much as possible, under the direct lordship of Jesus. They believed that there was no intermediary between Jesus and the individual. By so doing, through the Bible, they not

³⁶² Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, p. 270.

³⁶³ Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, p. 88.

only entered the immediate context of the first Christians, but they attempted to create a similar environment in order to experience the same spiritual welfare as they did. The opportunity of entering the biblical context would become available to the African, too, as missionaries established Christian quarters in mission fields and translated the Bible into African languages.

Korntal, the Christian village, was a place of refuge for separatist Pietists and a centre for Christian life in Wuerttemberg. Hoffmann's civil and parliamentary activities with his commitment to Pietism made him an interesting person in the society of his day:

“A state dominated by the spirit of religion is like a healthy body in which all members and tolls appears well-ordered, peaceful and at ease in their activities”.³⁶⁴

The vision of a Christian village was to keep members together in their fight for the Kingdom of God. They developed a separate life so that, in spite of their social composition, they did not exercise a broad influence on the society as a community. They used the Bible more as an offensive against unbelief than a loving appeal to listeners in Wuerttemberg and elsewhere. Ambitious nobles, kings and important people in the area supported them. Pietists promoted theocracy and admitted only the authority of Christ and the Bible. Established churches and local governments resisted this Pietistic influence. When smaller German monarchies united to form a centralised country after 1871, the impact of Christian village life became less and less. The Pietists failed to adapt and to keep their initial influence on people. They became rather victims of the newly constituted power that ruled the new German nation.

³⁶⁴ Dah, Jonas, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p. 13.

This idea of the Christian village had an impact on the Basel Mission and the related Missionary Societies. For evangelistic work in Africa, missionaries found that African-American Christians could serve as members of the first Christian group in Cameroon and Gold Coast. Jamaicans were potential colleagues and collaborators, and could be used to form a Christian village in the mission field. The creation of villages or an area for converts in a given African sacral ruling system followed this principle. Pietists' conception of the ideal government was of one which would hold the ring to allow village life to flourish without intervention. They did not need a king or a president. A rather negative attitude was developed towards worldly honours, wealth, high position and a comfortable life. Pagans were expected to convert immediately upon hearing the Christian preaching.

“Grounding their life on the Bible as the sole word of God, they asked only to be free to pursue the one all absorbing Christian task, the conversion of the heathen, the renewal of the established Church for the spread of the Kingdom of God”.³⁶⁵

In Leipzig, Pietism was violently opposed and its influence on the Church was indirect. In Frankfurt, Dresden and Berlin, it reached the church through the royal court. In Herrnut, Pietism became an authoritative community for the spiritual awakening of missionaries. But in South West Germany and among the German speaking Swiss, with Wuerttemberg and Basel playing leading roles, Pietism became part of church and civil life. To the general principle of Pietism, Wuerttemberg added the training of converts in various crafts, and farming and gave to the achievements of the movement tools for becoming a spiritual and cultural tradition. This development of Pietism, which shared the abolitionist ideal, forged in the Basel Mission an interesting attitude towards power.

³⁶⁵ Dah, Jonas, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p. 14.

E- The Christian Mission's attitude to powers

“Power is that which achieves the realisation of one's intention and will, affecting to that end one's behaviour and that of others, and overcoming resistance in both cases. It is frequently a function of social systems by which it is communicated and propagated to the advancement of collective interest”.³⁶⁶

The Basel Mission had inherited from the Western spiritual worldview and tradition, the various attitudes of European Christianity towards European nations and governments. In the time of Constantine, there was a symbiotic relationship between the Church and the Roman Empire. When Constantine became a Christian, the Roman pantheon was destroyed. The conquest of Rome went hand in hand with the changing of the spiritual worldview. From a world full of deities and small rulers of limited political units, Constantine established, on the one hand, an exclusive spiritual world where Christ the Lord has no challenger, and on the other hand, a large Kingdom whereby the coexistence of smaller independent political units were not tolerated. He conceived and realised one Empire with its ruler at Rome the capital, unchallenged by any other smaller free community. This concept of kingdom building became a cultural dimension of European spiritual imagery. This notion of one Ruler for one Empire was transferred to the spiritual realm and it became a spiritual culture to believe in One God, one Saviour, and one Church. As Constantine imposed himself through military conquest, the new spiritual world imposed itself through the destruction of the pantheon and the persecution of idol worshippers.

“The essence of power is the same in Church and state, and reveals in its usual oscillation between the forms of force and authority”.³⁶⁷

³⁶⁶ Mackey, James, *Power and Christian Ethics*, p. 2.

³⁶⁷ Mackey, James, *Power and Christian Ethics*, p. 18.

The Emperor presided over political and religious matters. People were supposed to believe what the ruler believed, and to do what the ruler ordered and did. The Emperor was to decide the religion and articles of faith for people.³⁶⁸ “*Cuius regio cuius religio*” (the one who reigns is the one to decide about religion). When the king changes his religion, the people do the same.³⁶⁹ From antiquity to the Middle Ages, loyalty to a ruler was expressed through religion. Some Basel missionaries, like Edelheinz in Bali-Cameroon,

“thought that princes who became chiefs (sacral rulers) were a better opening into the palace to influence chieftaincy with Christian character”.³⁷⁰

When the Germanic Barbarians conquered Rome in the 4th century,³⁷¹ majority of people believed that it was a curse for the destruction of the Roman gods and that salvation would come from their restoration. The winners maintained Christianity as the state religion and Augustine of Hippo could theologially demonstrate³⁷² that Christianity had nothing to do with the changing of the situation in the Empire. In the temporal world, people maintained that there is one God, one Saviour and one Church. The new masters in Rome gave prominence to the Church.

Medieval cosmology was structured more or less along the following: God first, church second, the emperor third, nobles, military, civil servant, merchants, the rest of

³⁶⁸ The Emperor chaired the Nicene council in person.

³⁶⁹ The conversion of Constantine stopped the persecution of Christians and favoured the destruction of the Roman pantheon.

³⁷⁰ Dah, Jonas, *Chieftaincy, widowhood and Ngambi in Cameroon*, Pforzheim-Hohenwart, Germany, 1995, p. 4.

³⁷¹ Russell, James, *The Germinisation of Early Medieval Christianity: A Socio-historical approach to Religious transformation*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1994. And also, Cussack, Carole, *Conversion among the Germanic Peoples*, London, Cassel, 1998.

³⁷² Augustine, City of God, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, Schaff Philip (ed), Vol. II., Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1993, pp. 1-511.

the people, animals, plants and objects.³⁷³ Spiritual power was above political and secular powers. As Christ's representative on earth, the pope was above the Emperor and, therefore, above the kings. Rulers got their power from the pope. The pope was the one who crowned temporal rulers. "The head of the Church has power over the civil government and over the civil government's exercise of power".³⁷⁴ This medieval notion of the spiritual as above the temporal could be seen in some Christian missionaries who considered their task to transcend the governing structure which they have to direct. The ordination ceremony gave such missionaries a sense of superiority over worldly ruling powers.³⁷⁵ Christian enthronement of a ruler by the pope was considered by people as the paramount legitimation of the Emperor or the king's authority. However, before the Reformation,

"when the Norwegian king Sverre became a Christian in the 14th century, the pope invited him to come to Rome to be crowned. He turned down the invitation objecting to the crowning role of the pope".³⁷⁶

The Reformation undermined the role of the pope and church as crowners of temporal rulers. The Church was no longer one but many. The church's power over kings, nobles and people became relative. John Calvin and Martin Luther rejected the view that rulers get their power from the pope. And so did the Protestant churches in Europe. King Henry VIII of England at the time decided to make himself head of the Church as he was already head of state. He applied to himself this unitary view of power in Church and State. Leaders of the Reformation Movement rejected the belief that everything belongs to God through the pope.

³⁷³ Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, p. 263.

³⁷⁴ Mackey, James, *Power and Christian Ethics*, p. 18.

³⁷⁵ Paul Dieterle, the Basel missionary on the Grassfields Mountains of Cameroon is an example.

³⁷⁶ Interview with Jan-Martin Berentsen, professor of Missiology at the school of Mission and Theology, Friday, December 1st 2000, Akropong Akuapem Ghana; 8h30-10h

“But it was not until the 17th century that the pietists brought the image of the Ruler and Judge of the World down from its high position in the Church buildings and in orthodox Protestant teaching, because they had experienced themselves that Jesus is with his people always”.³⁷⁷

Some Christian missionaries shared this view as part of their Pietistic commitment and their understanding of Protestantism in mission. They brought more restriction about the spiritual worldview by rejecting the spiritual value of intermediaries like the angels and the spirits of faithful dead Christians called saints as well as Mary and the pope. After the Reformation which aimed at the establishment of Protestant churches, the Roman church responded as a deposed ruler. It no longer had power in Protestant areas. Validation of one’s rule passed directly from God to the king and to his notables. The ruler’s faith became paramount and was adopted by his nobles and his faithful people.

The Reformation did maintain the idea that the one who rules decides over the religion of his people. The one who reigns, controls the religious life of people. European countries appeared Lutheran, Reformed, Roman Catholic, or Anglican, according to the religious choice of the king of that particular country. During the Reformation in Europe, the one who reigned, decided not only on matters concerning the military, politics, and economic but also the religious itinerary of his country. During that period, Basel and South West Germany identified with Lutherans. To live in the area one needed to be Lutheran. The religious practices covered a geographic territory under the leadership of a powerful prince. Almost all European countries identified with one particular expression of the faith.³⁷⁸ Such geographic conquest was

³⁷⁷ Rossel, Jacques, “A movement in the making”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 41.

³⁷⁸ During the Reformation, Norway sided with Lutheranism. From the king to the people, the country and the state were Lutheran. By the 1850s, to be a Norwegian citizen, one needed to be Lutheran. Because of religion, many fled the country and we have today more Norwegians in America than in

in the heart of many missionaries and their will to provide a Basel Mission identity to a given territory was obvious on the field. Such personal convictions often brought about religious conflict within the same country. Those who suffered during this period helped shift the emphasis from the ruler's religious power to the power of reason with the Enlightenment with the result that the Church was gradually eliminated as a factor in the governing structure of people. Reason was extremely valued and rationalism empowered individuals at the expense of collective influence.

“Basel in the late 18th and early 19th centuries was a place where people's thinking was much influenced by the ideas about freedom evolved during the Enlightenment, so that it was possible for a supra-national missionary society with a broad vision to establish itself in the city”.³⁷⁹

Logic, which was recovered from the Greek roots of European culture through the Renaissance movement, became the new way of leading people. Reason became the ultimate power. It attempted successfully to replace God and rationalism reached the point where there was no God but human logic. Human beings, communities, animate and inanimate elements of the visible and invisible world had no supernatural reference. Even if European society was built on Christian principles, it was in the process of eliminating every reference to the metaphysical in all aspects of people and community life. To emphasise the cultural situation in Europe at this time, politics, governments, rulers, without giving up their Christian conviction, stopped using religion to legitimise their power. The Enlightenment gave room to two different groups in society: those who believed that there was an invisible God and those who believed that there was no

Norway. The Norwegians who travelled to England and became Quakers could not come back to Norway because the country was Lutheran. (Jan-Martin Berentsen, Akropong, 2000).

³⁷⁹ Rennstish, Karl, “One movement, two constant factors”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 91.

God, with an increasingly growing number in the latter group. Social need, civic rules and common goods were provided for all without reference to the national faith. The ruler's daily occupation was disconnected from his inner spiritual conviction. He ruled by law and less and less through presenting himself as a model of personal relationship to Christ. This public spiritual disconnection from the spiritual world favoured the Pietist's virulent critique of temporal power. Subsequently, Basel missionaries distanced themselves seriously from their home governing structure.

The Enlightenment positively championed the freedom of religion and beliefs. Nobody could decide another's belief. People were educated to choose freely what to believe and which church to go to. The intellectual development of the Enlightenment thus damaged some basic foundations of the Christian faith. People were so exposed to this movement that the church leaders' deep opposition to it could not stop its impact.³⁸⁰ The individual was free in his faith with the support of Christian philosophers. Enlightenment ideas flourished in the universities but not within the members of the governments of various European Countries. Even though people believed in it, rulers continued to hold the view that they should decide over the state religious identity even though they were not immune from Enlightenment influence. Politicians as well as the constitution denied scholars the right to be religiously free. From the thinkers, the Enlightenment principle would eventually reach the decision-makers through Revolution.

³⁸⁰ "How can God reign sovereignly if people understand themselves to be free? Is God still active in a world in which it is believed that people take the initiative to create whatever they need? Can God still be the God of providence and of grace? Can he establish and institute the Church which addresses the human world with divine authority? The unshaken massive and collective certitude of the Middle Age has indeed vanished entirely. The Christian faith is severely questioned, contemptuously repudiated, or studiously ignored. Revelation, which used to be the matrix and fountainhead of human existence, now has to prove its claim to truth and validity. A new theological discipline began to emerge: Christian apologetics" Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, p. 268.

During the age of Revolution (before and after 1789), the real power of kings and nobles was destroyed. The religious basis of the political unit was eliminated. Power had no connection with the spiritual realm and became purely secular. The revolutionaries believed that all human beings were born free and equal. The notion of high position based on blood under God's blessing was turned down. Access to leadership ceased to be from father to son. Leaders were to be selected according to rational principles of the Enlightenment and the religious freedom of individuals guaranteed by Protestant leaders. The ordinary people saw themselves as being, in some measure, related directly to God and no longer through the king, nobility or the Church. They shared some powers which, in past days, were in the hands of a few leading people.

“It took the French Revolution, in the end, to set up a system of laws and structures which began to curtail the exercise of power by the mighty, and to give the powerless a share of power. The sharing of power was described by the founding fathers of the Basel Mission in 1815 as the basis of a benevolent civilisation”.³⁸¹

Religion fell into the hands of individuals. The Pietistic movement developed fast in such an environment where the individual was the ultimate power in religion, knowledge, attitudes and social matters. The real life was lived at the periphery of the society. Spiritual and temporal rulers had little influence on people's choices. “Very hesitantly, the Basel Mission has learnt in the name of Christ to take the weak and the poor under its protection against the strong and the ruthless”.³⁸² God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit and the Bible became the norm by which every action was justified, every inquiry

³⁸¹ Rossel, Jacques, “A movement in the making”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 41.

³⁸² Rossel, Jacques, “A movement in the making”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 36.

made and every decision taken. This was the rationale for the attitude of the majority of the Basel missionaries in Africa. Personal and inward satisfaction overshadowed community interest. There was no power except that of the individual. What a person felt was good, according to his experience and ambitions, was that which mattered more than anything outside him.

The Enlightenment did not only destroy the spiritual basis of the European ruling world, but negated the creative nature of God, eliminated the spiritual dimension of the society and that of the community, and, finally, killed God if it did not bring him as well as the rulers under an individual reasoning power. Pietists sided with the Enlightenment and used its method while distancing themselves with regard to the spiritual realm. God and the Bible were held to be the basis of everything over and against the general trend of getting rid of God for human beings to develop their full potential. European societies themselves could not stand such a situation where power was in the homes and in the hands of individuals. Military leaders and princes in power tried everywhere to keep people under their authority. The Napoleonic conquest came as a successful anti-revolutionary coup to restore some aspects of the ancient regime. Napoleon helped to rebuild the French Empire as all European countries did not follow the principles of the French Revolution: more than one monarch had remained in power.³⁸³ Germanic princes managed to rule in their geographic areas. Successfully, military leaders and princes gradually claimed back centralised power from the individuals. People who had enjoyed some personal freedom in political decision for a while tried a series of liberal revolutions by 1848.

³⁸³ Belgium, Spain, Portugal, England and Scandinavian countries.

“They all failed except in Switzerland, where a new constitution transformed the old system of loose confederate into alliances into a modern federal state. Its major novelty was the legislative referendum whereby a certain number of individuals -actually 50,000- can demand that a popular vote be held on whether to accept or reject any law newly adopted by parliament. The people thus became sovereign rulers of their country”.³⁸⁴

The Basel Mission is part of this unique country whose people experienced an unhindered freedom in political matters. Even though Basel shares the same Germanic culture with areas of South-West Germany ruled by princes and kings, it was part of Switzerland where sacral monarchic rule was perceived as a danger to one’s religious and political freedom. Swiss nationals of the Basel mission had an attitude to power which was democratic over and against their fellow Europeans from different countries. For Basel people, there was basically a clear fear of external forces: the government and the Church.

“One fundamental point can be made right at the beginning: faced with the structures of power a missionary society and its members can respond with the whole range of reactions from...playing along with the superior power of the West to resistance...the classical case of Christian resistance...is the movement to abolish the slave trade and slavery, which grew up among Christians in Britain in the eighteenth century, and which is also one of the roots out of which Basel Mission grew”.³⁸⁵

Pietists could reject all the power of temporal and religious rulers and their practices as they championed a new life in a new society, a new worshiping community under a new liturgy, and a new life cut off from tradition in a new territory. They rejected the established orders with verbal and spiritual forces and tried to impose theirs with success. If the free slaves came to personal contact with Christ through suffering, the

³⁸⁴ *Presbyterian Training College Akropong Akuapem: 150th Anniversary, 1848-1988, Souvenir Brochure*, p. 10.

³⁸⁵ Jenkins, Paul, “solidarity in the Basel Mission past and present”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 66.

Pietists came to the same spiritual depth through discomfort with the social regulations and Church doctrine and rituals. Like the African-American abolitionists, they were against their own society and its powers, and so they could be expected to wrestle with the African sacral rule and the African ancestral religion.

They rather took children's education and youth training seriously. They set up and implemented a parenting style of leadership. They put their energy into family worship and Bible reading. The family was the first element in the church structure as well as the foundation of community life. Beyond the family ties, they nurtured spiritual newcomers while godfathers and godmothers were used to integrate new converts into the community of faith. They tried to influence others rather than be influenced by others. Based on the special call they had received, they put their own power directly under that of God. Even though they put their spiritual life under the control of the Bible and prayers, they sometimes used force to impose what they thought was right rather than negotiate a natural influence in their relationship with other spiritual or temporal groups. From the very beginning, Basel missionaries really challenged the established powers in the hands of government members and clergy. Shakened by this Pietistic evangelistic initiative, Western Churches as well as White countries' leading structures were obliged to react in a negative way through the development of the colonial ideology.

The development of methods and processes European governments and churches used to counteract the missionary project of the salvation of Africa through the Gospel and the abolition of the slave trade, moved from pro-slavers' open rejection to consideration of the evangelistic argument, gradually to concession and finally to

agreement.³⁸⁶ Members of the pro-slavery lobby in parliament modified their position by giving political and financial support to the humanitarian aspect of the mission enterprise while attaching to it an exclusive Western economic and political interests. They forgot those of the Africans which however continue to be the leading motive of the Basel Mission. The subsequent government campaign against slavery carried a dormant but strong opposition to the missionary movement. The dominant theme in the imperial era was the ownership of land, people and resources for the political expansion and economic improvement of European countries over and against the leading motive of the Basel mission which was “fighting against injustice and struggling for human rights as an evangelistic privilege”.³⁸⁷ Since the Pietistic missionaries from Basel were reluctant,³⁸⁸ colonial and denominational competitive missionary societies were created³⁸⁹ to achieve Western imperial ambitions.³⁹⁰ Although these colonial Christian

³⁸⁶ Ewane, Kangué, *Semence et moisson coloniales*, Yaoundé, Clé, 1983.

³⁸⁷ Rennstich, Karl, “One movement, two constant factors”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 88.

³⁸⁸ Before responding to the request of the German colonial office for missionary in Cameroon, the Basel Mission set forward the following conditions:

- 1- The society pursues the goal of planting Evangelical Christianity among the heathen and of assembling converts into Christian congregations to the exclusion of any political objective.
- 2- By establishing Christian primary schools, the mission seeks to equip those in its care to read the Holy Scriptures, and to develop an educational system that will lead to the growth of a Christian people.
- 3- Through higher schools it trains natives as teachers and pastors and seeks to develop further education with a Protestant evangelical spirit which will match local needs.
- 4- It controls the religious and moral life of the gathered congregations through the introduction of a Christian Church order in accordance with the biblical principles.
- 5- The mission works towards a situation where the Christians’ own contributions pay for the expenses of their congregations. This is not only intended to reduce the financial load the mission has to carry, but is also seen as having an important ethical significance.
- 6- The society takes it as its duty to protect the national peculiarities of the people among whom it works, as long as such are not steeped in paganism, or schools, although other languages are taught as necessary.

³⁸⁹ Federich Fabri, the director of the Rhenish Mission Society presented Bismarck with a series of arguments in favour of a German colonial enterprise in Africa. His concern for colonial expansion was fundamentally opposed to the purpose of the Christian mission. Fabri became an embarrassment for his missionary fellows and he was forced to resign his directorship and went to serve in the German colonial office. From June 1880 he campaign forcefully for the annexation of territories. At the continental

missions have a lasting impact on Africa, the argumentation of this thesis will concentrate on the identity of a Basel missionary.

II- The Sacralisation process of a missionary

A- Conditions for becoming a student of Christian Mission at the Basel Mission Institute: the call

At the establishment of the Basel Mission Institute, the Pietistic Movement was well organised and the training institution came as the solution to the problem of equipping and sending relevant missionaries into the mission fields. Candidates came at first from accredited Pietist communities. They were required to have a special call. This was a discreet and strictly personal stage for becoming a missionary. The next stage was to enter the “collegia pietatis”. This had been initiated by Spener with the significant organisational input of Francke at Halle, the missionary awakening of Zinzendorf at Herrnhut as well as the civil and Church related experience in the Christian village in Wuerttemberg. At Wuerttemberg a strong fellowship group helped to develop the biblical notions of “goodwill”, “love for the Lord”, devotion, deep commitment and total surrender for the service of the living Christ. The recruitment for missionary activities was done in these Pietist prayer and Bible reading groups and not from church committees. Eventually, Christians believed that they had received the gift of salvation for themselves and for the heathen, while over the centuries they had linked

mission conference held in Bremen in 1884, Fabri spoke on the significance of orderly political circumstances for the development of Christian mission. He had become an agent of the German colonial expansion. Under Fabri’s instruction, twelve new German Missions were formed in the colonial period, most with the explicit purpose of working in German colonies. For more details, see, Dah, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, pp. 30-36.

³⁹⁰ Ngongo, Louis, *Histoire des Forces Religieuses au Cameroun: de la Première Guerre Mondiale à l’indépendance (1916-1955)*, Paris, Karthala, 1982.

salvation almost exclusively to God and to life after death. However, the Evangelical Basel Missionary Society was far from being a mere agglomerate of discreet individuals. It was a structured and sustainable entity. Offices in the organisation were named. Job descriptions were set up. Rights and duties were defined and means of selection and succession were agreed. The missionary who received the call became part of the whole structure designed for Christian mission.

The fundamental spiritual understanding of mission as the movement of God towards humankind did not at first awaken any need to reflect theologically on the role of mission as an institution. In any case, the theological emphasis on the Kingdom of God pointed away from the Church as an institution and was to be carried on by the individuals. The Basel Mission “intended to lead to the formation of voluntary associations of like-minded people, cutting across national and denominational boundaries ... (it) could be seen as a kind of preliminary sketch for a freer organisation of Christendom in the future. From the beginning it was emphasised again and again...that mission must be understood as a movement within the Church. Mission was consequently seen as a service to perform on behalf of the Church”³⁹¹ by special people. The individual call introduced the candidate into a para-church structure engaged in the Christian mission enterprise.

“There is no question that the mothers and fathers of the Basel Mission understood mission as the task of proclaiming to all people the redemption in Jesus Christ, which has been created by his death and resurrection. Mission originates in the sufferings of Jesus”³⁹².

³⁹¹ Rennstish, Karl, “One movement, two constant factors”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 93.

³⁹² Rennstish, Karl, “One movement, two constant factors”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 87.

Suffering is not a collective reality but a personal feeling. Those who identified their future to be in this kind of redemptive suffering were trained as heralds of the Gospel of peace. Just as God approached humankind through Jesus' sufferings, mission is the continuation of the divine work of reconciliation by the candidates who are willing to suffer like their saviour. Before his training, the missionary is spiritually empowered. If at this stage he is aware of his spiritual calling, the formation period will confirm his vocation or not.

The candidate needed "spiritual qualifications, a knowledge of the Bible, and common sense. Competence with a mallet or a saw was all to the good but formal education was not necessary".³⁹³ Missionaries needed the basic elementary education required for literacy. The rest they could acquire in the seminary: matriculation or high school certificates were not required. If a candidate was gifted, he could be accepted or recruited by the mission without the educational prerequisites. Formal education was relatively expensive. Christians from a humble background were not able to afford it.

"They saw the missionary as providing an education that would make them upwardly mobile individuals for whom the missionary career guaranteed advancement in economic and social status. Few educated people were willing to become missionaries. Most scholarly missionaries were sent to Asia".³⁹⁴

B- The training period

The training of a missionary in Basel covered six years. The trainee had his classmates, teachers and administrators of the Basel Mission with him. The fellowship and teaching were compulsory. At the end of the six years' training, the individual would become part of a structured community and share the same intellectual, spiritual

³⁹³ Walls, Andrew, "Missionary vocation and the ministry: the first generation", in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, New York, Orbis Books Maryknoll, 1996, pp. 160-172.

³⁹⁴ Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 59.

and practical view articulated in Basel. By this time, the individual call had been shaped and the individual had become part of the missionary community and movement through the acquisition of a body of knowledge and attitudes.

A lot of time and attention was accorded to craftwork, farming, carpentry, masonry, trading, preaching the gospel and pedagogy. The academic dimension of the missionary training included: biblical study, biblical languages, church history, mission, philosophy and cultural learning. The majority of German Protestant missionaries rallied around Gustav Warneck (1834-1910) who was the greatest teacher of German missionaries in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Warneck succeeded in making missiology an academic discipline. He taught it at the university of Halle. In 1874 he founded a missionary journal called *Allgemeine Missionszeitschrift* (AMZ). In the first issue he called for a world survey to determine a method of applying universal principles in evangelisation. As with the academic approach adopted in the proceedings of the continental conferences, the journal featured anthropology, geography and linguistics as auxiliaries to religious studies. This paper influenced profoundly Pietistic literate missionaries in Germany and beyond. In 1874, he stated that nations had their individuality and, consequently, the mission ought to treat them pedagogically.³⁹⁵ In other words, they had to put nations into learning conditions. From 1885, Gustav Warneck spread the view that mission work was aimed at training Africans in all kinds of work in order to free them from laziness as well as to facilitate the establishment of a reliable race.³⁹⁶ The candidates in Basel were trained to help the evangelised acquire an efficient attitude to God, work and to the traditional society.

³⁹⁵ Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 156.

³⁹⁶ Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 66.

Gustav Warneck and his contemporaries looked at the Gospel or Christianity as something completely new to the world that would radically transform the lives, thinking and social structures of people in their specific context. Since Warneck was very popular in German missionary circles including Basel, missionaries saw themselves as bearers of inexorable truth bringing the Gospel to the mission fields with a will to develop a Christian community according to African social patterns.³⁹⁷ Cultural learning was an important part of the making of the missionary. The missionaries learnt the techniques needed to speak and to write new languages for translation purposes. Even though it was generally believed that heathen culture was godless and needed to be replaced by Christianity, they used local religious idioms in translation and, therefore, gave unintentionally some credit to the experience of the African religious past.

Catching up with Warneck's notion of the "individuality" of every nation, Ittman Baltz, a Basel missionary in Cameroon thought that,

"true missionary work had two bases of equal importance, namely, the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the people's living traditions".³⁹⁸

However, majority of the missionaries rejected Ittman's conviction. But the Basel Mission which had a deep concern for the promotion of the African people, their language and their society institutionally, supported Ittman and Warneck. The treatment of non-Western customs in the spirit of religious rigour so dominant in missionary attitudes brought about confusion between evangelisation and Europeanisation or westernisation. Pietistic narrowness on moral matters brought with it the first of these

³⁹⁷ "Vergliederung in eine originale Volksgestaltung". Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 55.

³⁹⁸ Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 60.

dangers; the second lies in the cultural superiority and national egoism of the conductors of missions; and the faults of both were exacerbated by a lack of pedagogic skill in approaching other nations, as Lekunze comment on Warneck:

“Warneck wished to mitigate ethical severity while maintaining the element of spiritual renewal. His missiological ideas exerted a pervasive influence on the continental missions; therefore, 1885 is reckoned as a year wherein the process of building a universal doctrine of missions was considerably advanced and succeeded in giving a common direction to the thinking of the continental missionary movement, of which the Basel mission was part”.³⁹⁹

His academic conviction was rejected by people who had been exposed to the horrors of African culture as depicted in Western literature. They failed to do justice to the notion of spiritual renewal of religious practices in the African context as they missionised in African sacral rule.

However, Warneck argued successfully against the national inclination which grew up with the colonial enterprise. To him mission work was basically international and should be respected as such by all colonial powers, including the German Reich. He argued that German missionaries had no capacities greater than those of missionaries of other nations.⁴⁰⁰ The Basel Mission and its directors favoured Warneck’s mission-state ideology. Theodor Oehler the inspector declared:

“they are not for opening up of plantations and training Africans for plantation work, neither is their objective the spreading of culture and the spreading of German colonial politics. Instead, their task is one of spreading the Kingdom of God in the service of Jesus Christ. The fruits of culture and striving for the development of the land are not neglected if the mission carries out its duty. Yet their single aim and preoccupation remains the Kingdom of God”.⁴⁰¹

C- The Glory and the Kingdom of God in the Christian Mission enterprise

³⁹⁹ Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 156.

⁴⁰⁰ Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, pp. 67-68.

⁴⁰¹ Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 73.

Even though missionaries had to suffer, they believed that God and God alone could take the initiative in saving people. Theocratic ideals and the notion of the glory of God can only operate within the context of a theology deeply conscious of the unity of life and the royal dominion of Christ over every sphere of life. They wanted to be under the rule of Christ. It is God who forgives and saves, not human beings. It is God who reveals the truth and life, not human reason. God's initiative did not exclude human endeavour but rather his majesty was really the other side of his grace and love reaching out to humankind. Jesus is the king; he is the King of kings. Mission developed a theocratic way of leading people. The missionaries continued with the notion of submission to authority, as their Roman tradition since the time of Constantine had prepared all Christians to do. Although the secular development of Christendom oriented people more and more towards democracy, yet many European countries had continued with a monarchical organisation of the society. Overseas mission was the European leaders' business. The pope empowered the Portuguese and Spanish kings to evangelise and to make the world Roman Catholic. The Danish king contacted the Basel Mission for missionaries in his overseas territories in the West Indies and Gold Coast (Ghana).

For the Protestant missionaries from a Pietistic background, earthly rulers were so far away from their spiritual trajectory that one must link directly to the one loving King Jesus Christ. Following revolutionary principles, they linked all the aspects of their lives directly to Christ. With the creation of the Christian village of Korntal, the Pietists developed theocratic attitudes, skills and social organisation. They received everything from Christ: from the call for mission to the inspiration for the proclamation

of the saving Gospel...

“Basel Mission’s concern with spreading a benevolent civilisation clearly meant trying to help potential converts to slough off heathenism and secure a living for them, both as a precondition for the development of a new creature, in Christ, and for a new society”.⁴⁰²

The royal dominion of Christ in all spheres of the Basel missionary’s life was a reality. He was sent by Christ to glorify the name of Christ.

With the influence of this monastic spirit, a sacrificial life in mission facilitated the development of a life of deliberate consecration to God. The revivalists felt personally responsible for the salvation of the lost and believed that those who heard the message were likewise individually responsible for accepting it. Missionaries were going in thousands to Asia and Africa, confident that the Kingdom of God would come to the deprived peoples of those continents. According to Pietists,

“The kingdom of God in Jesus’ ministry was purely religious, supernatural, future-oriented, predominantly spiritual and inward; it had no political, national or earthly design”.⁴⁰³

They wanted the kingdom of God to come because the earthly ones were not suitable for spiritual life. When the kingdom of God comes, the Kingdom of man loses ground. Custodians of sacral rule in Africa were hardly considered to be part of the missionary process on the field. According to Jacques Rossel of the Basel Mission,

“If our starting point is only the claim to sovereignty of the resurrected Christ, our thoughts and actions will incline towards ideology. On the other hand, if we are only interested in the conversion of individuals, we shall become a sect isolated from the rest of society”.⁴⁰⁴

⁴⁰² Rennstish, Karl, “One movement, two constant factors”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 89.

⁴⁰³ Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, p. 271.

⁴⁰⁴ Rossel, Jacques, “A movement in the making”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 37.

That was what happened in the field. Talking about the Kingdom of God, each member of the Basel Mission went willingly or unwillingly according to the following principle explained by James Mackey:

“History of relations between Church and civil society in Europe is meant to show that we do not deal with the fluctuating interactions of two separate different powers, but rather with the same language and imagery of power, the same idea or essence of power, animating two governments, each assuming different practical forms in the course of time, and all of this providing for the historical spectacle of fighting, interfering, treating with each other, of merging, and at times, if only in theory of Hobbes, all but disappearing, the one into the other”.⁴⁰⁵

The fear of disappearing into the Christian Mission brought more than one problem to the African sacral rulers who established some kind of relations with Basel missionaries. There was no theological reflection on the impact of the extension of the Kingdom of God on the earthly ones who also claimed divine origin.

D- Cultural and political concern in the activities of a Basel Missionary

According to Blumhardt quoted above, in the instruction he gave to missionaries in 1827, they should -in contrast to the average attitude of European settlers- sincerely regard indigenous rulers as having authority over them. This would also make their solidarity with the local inhabitants quite clear. It is important not to forget for a moment how arrogantly and disgracefully the poor Negroes have been treated for centuries -and still are being treated- by people calling themselves Christians. This declaration of the inspector was to prevent the missionaries from adopting the individualistic attitude they had inherited from Western Protestantism.

The religious consciousness of the missionary was dominated by the Pietistic

⁴⁰⁵ Mackey, James, *Power and Christian Ethics*, p. 20.

principles of an individual experience of conversion that is, the individual practice of faith through daily devotion with insistence on Bible reading, a continuous critical self-examination, the individual need for forgiveness, the ability to identify where God was speaking to the individual and the conviction that everything that happened in the personal life was given by God. This principle claimed that everyone was an emancipated, autonomous individual. It developed in Christianity a rampant individualism which is one of the cultural characteristics of Western Christianity. The civil government became peripheral, since each individual not only had the right but also the ability to know God's revealed will, to act accordingly and to be satisfied. The propagation of Christian knowledge through newly erected libraries, the distribution of Christian literature, charity, education and benevolence, helped the Pietists to be liberated and to be independent from the governing structures. Those to be saved were individuals not whole communities or culture. On the field, the evangelised was surprisingly not so free to respond individually and he often failed to respond to the Gospel message spontaneously according to the missionaries' expectations. The idea of community life and collective consensus which is basic in Africa, is the very element the missionary had lost.

As far as European politics was concerned, Basel was dominated by Wuerttemberg. Wuerttemberg Pietism portrayed two contradictory attitudes to politics.⁴⁰⁶ The "quietists" in Wuerttemberg believed in building up strong village structures in which life flourished without any interference from the exterior. They sought for the establishment of the Kingdom of God in Wuerttemberg and saw themselves as a religious brotherhood. For some among them, politics was the cause of unbelief. They

⁴⁰⁶ Dah, Jonas, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p. 14.

saw politics and party politics especially, as the instrument of the devil, because they believed that all politics was filled with egoism, a partisan spirit and did not work for the good of all. They were convinced that their social and political goal could be achieved without political parties and the parliament. No true Christian, in their opinion, could be a true politician, neither could a true politician be a true Christian. The Basel Mission started when Germany was not yet a nation state. It was difficult for them to develop a submissive attitude to the Kaiser or to a king, how much less towards a sacral ruler in Africa. Even when Germany became a centralised nation, Basel with other independent Swiss states remained free from external power influences on personal opinions.

Another group of Pietists held the view that religion and politics, not only in the Old Testament but also in their time, were inseparably bound together. They believed that God punished people whenever they fell away from him, and rewarded them when they kept his commandments. The Christian task was to fulfil God's will in this world by working together with the politicians. Some prominent Pietists took part in campaigns for parliamentary elections. Some elected Pietists like Johannes Daur, the superintendent of Korntal and Johann Christoph Blumhardt, the first Basel inspector, gave up politics in the end.⁴⁰⁷ Generally, for Pietists, political achievement was measured from the point of view of faith. Politics was good or devilish according to the politician's faithfulness to God's biblical instructions. The individual, the church and the society were ruled by the same divine revelation. The missionary had an obligation to proclaim the word of God because for the Basel Mission and James Mackey, as far as moral conduct and ruling code are concerned, Christians believe in having divine

⁴⁰⁷ Dah, Jonas, *Missionary Motivations and Methods* p. 15.

rights to promulgate them.⁴⁰⁸ Blumhardt who gave up politics and later on joined the Basel Mission, had a sufficiently well-balanced view to be able to instruct the missionary to avoid clashes with African rulers.

E- Brotherhood and compassion in Christ

In 1827, Blumhardt gave these instructions to missionaries setting out to the Gold Coast (Ghana), a region in Africa damaged by the slave trade:

“You owe to these mistreated creatures inexhaustible patience and abundance of comforting love, if the thousand bleeding wounds which the filthiest covetousness and most cruel cunning of the Europeans have inflicted on their people for centuries are even partially to be healed. Whoever does not feel in his heart a rich fullness of compassion and an overflowing measure of loving affection towards these poor people, let him ask with prayer and supplication to be given these heavenly gifts from above, that through them he may be strengthened to go among this people doing good, following the example of his divine Redeemer... Converts too are to be instructed in the true basis of Justice and humanitarian principles and in this way they will become more clearly aware of the feeling of being unjustly treated, which they have to suffer as a result of political oppression and misgovernment”.⁴⁰⁹

Compassion for the evangelised was in the heart of missionaries as they went far into new lands. The missionary, however, cannot always avoid the reproach which Christ and the apostles had already faced, that Jesus seemed to be the enemy of Caesar and had created unrest in the whole world under the Emperor’s authority. Therefore, the preacher of the Gospel sometimes behaved against the African sacral rule disregarding the instruction of Blumhardt their first Inspector.⁴¹⁰ They used the possibility of misgovernment to quickly qualify as devilish the genuine institution of sacral rule with its custodians in the African mission field. However,

⁴⁰⁸ Mackey, James, *Power and Christian Ethics*, p. 24.

⁴⁰⁹ Rennstich, Karl “One movement, two constant factors”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 88.

⁴¹⁰ An Inspector in the Basel Mission hierarchy is the acting director of the mission house.

“One familiar picture of the missionary in the past is that of an explorer, going unto unknown territory, and meeting people who are seeing a Whiteman for the first time.... the picture of someone trying to clarify what is happening, and to transform it into the kind of relationship of justice and mutual appreciation that God intends us to have with one another”.⁴¹¹

Justice and mutual appreciation are the result of a loving attitude. From the beginning, action on behalf of the poor and the observance of human rights, were inherent in the missionary commission. A compassionate approach to the people played a special role in building up a form of help which included all aspects of the lives of the evangelised. The missionary had something to share with the inhabitant of the mission field: his spiritual tradition, medical knowledge, educational system, farming techniques as well as trading skills and above all his humanity, shaped according to the missionary’s native context. According to the constitution of the Norwegian missionary society,

“every opportunity for the preaching of the gospel to the heathens must be used conscientiously and honestly, and one should not leave it at delivering a public and general message from time to time, but should also approach the individual with the message of salvation”.⁴¹²

Inspector Josenhans (1850-1879) pursued the promotion of benevolent civilisation for the benefit of Africans wholeheartedly and with the exercise of all his organisational talents. With him, the economic dimension of the Basel Mission was expounded systematically. The industrial mission or the trading company of the mission developed as a practical training of converts in work in order to overcome laziness. It was called “*Kultur arbeit* (the culture of work)”. Mission work, with Josenhans, aimed at civilising the converts in the German work ethic. “*Ora et Labora* developed into *Beten ist arbeit*

⁴¹¹ Jenkins, Paul, “solidarity in the Basel Mission past and present”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 89.

⁴¹² Bolch-Hoell, in, Christensen Torben and, Hutchinson William R., *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperial Era: 1880-1920*, Forlaget Aros, Aarhus, Denmark, 1982, p. 16.

(praying is working).”⁴¹³ But his successor, Otto Schott (1879-1884), initiated open criticism of the Basel Mission’s economic activities. Schott was against the economic dimension of mission work and therefore sacrificed the African to the uncompassionate greediness of European colonialists. By so doing, he failed to make African Christians economically independent. Without the missionary on the field, they could not stand the cruel capitalist competition of the Europeans. Schott’s position reduced Christian converts into educated factory boys who could later be exploited by colonial agents. The question of whether or not to run mission industries and the ensuring modern projects as an appropriate activity for the Basel Mission, is still open. And the challenge of restitution for the damage done in the Third World is just as relevant today as it was in the early days of the Basel Mission.

“After the separation from the Basel Mission Industries and the Trading Company, the Basel Mission made theological and school education the main focus of its activity overseas for several decades. But in the 1950s various Church organisations working in development aid suggested cooperation with the mission and out of this came a new involvement with the training of craftsmen and initiating small-scale industrial enterprises. These projects belong to the local Church congregations”.⁴¹⁴

In spite of his aim to stop missionary involvement in economic activity, which prevented mission from training the converts in business matters, Schott pleaded for the self-sufficiency of the growing indigenous congregations. He planned for self-administration and for self-financing. He argued for indigenous pastors and for indigenous theology. This high view of Africans helped the missionaries to take their local collaborators into consideration and to honour their work. Quite a good number of

⁴¹³ Rennstich, Karl, “One movement, two constant factors”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 96.

⁴¹⁴ Rennstich, Karl, “One movement, two constant factors”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 91.

them were trained in Basel and were equally ordained in Basel⁴¹⁵ as well as in Africa. This high esteem of the African's ability to evangelise brought an African dimension into the centre of missionary leadership. Schott did criticise the mission ideology and practices and championed an internal debate for change in the Christian mission enterprise.

“In 1884, he sided with churches in India and in Africa and asked the mission to deviate from her nationalistic thinking. The mission must not bind herself to any worldly institution but must proclaim the Gospel without any obligation to a particular government. The aim of the mission must be the creation of self-reliant Christian congregations in India and in Africa. The indigenous churches should develop their own cultural and religious characteristics within their native environment rather than becoming a copy of German Christians. Why can we not be satisfied by simply doing mission work instead of transplanting our problems to overseas churches?”⁴¹⁶

Facing these different positions, a Basel missionary had to choose between Blumhardt, Josenhans, Schott, or the cultural colonial mission of the German Empire. However, the missionary methods could be summarised as follows:

Missionary methods

The Basel mission had an appreciation of the traditional culture. This grew out of the Germanic romanticism with its sense of the fundamental importance of folk identity and folk life.⁴¹⁷ Christian missions at this time seem to have been influenced by Gustav Warneck who held the view that

“a church is truly independent only if it has the possibility of returning to the source of its faith (the Bible) in its own language. The Bible in Warneck's opinion must cease to be a church book to become a people's book in homes if a change in the lives of the people is to be expected. In order to achieve this,

⁴¹⁵ David Asante of the Gold Coast (Ghana).

⁴¹⁶ Rennstish, Karl, “One movement, two constant factors”, in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, p. 97.

⁴¹⁷ Russell, James, *The Germanisation of Early Medieval Christianity*, p. 3 and pp. 134-182.

mission schools must serve as forerunners of the church for the planting of the Bible and Christian morals in the life of the society. In this sense, the *Volksbibel* and the *Volksschule* are inseparable.”⁴¹⁸

One of the essential parts of their duty was to study the language and traditions of the people carefully in order to understand them better. They were requested to love their work and to love the people.

As soon as they entered an area, they gathered people for public preaching as the first step to the formation of a congregation. Immediately, they had to begin elementary schools, giving instruction in reading, writing, arithmetic, and religion. They had to develop writing in local languages in order to prepare people for the reading of the Bible in their languages. Not to run a school was as meaningless as living without a future. They later on established theological institutions and initiated the formation of indigenous leadership and responsibility. Schools, congregations and hospitals had a common goal, which was conversion. Mission had as its chief aim, the conversion of souls.

Christian missions in general fostered leadership development more than economic development. However, they were expected to teach people field and garden work, in order to improve their living conditions and help them to develop financial independence. Very early, the Basel Mission created an industrial and trading branch for the mission in order to train the converts practically in business and world market transactions.

F- Ordination as sacralisation

⁴¹⁸ Dah, Jonas, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p. 215.

The ordination of a missionary was a final ceremony, during which service, he was commissioned. After his training, he had to be ordained to be fully empowered for working overseas. Each missionary had to know that the love of God had been shed abroad in his heart and each was willing to sacrifice himself for the sake of Jesus Christ who had died for him personally. Mission work was impossible without an element of sacrifice, self-denial, and preparedness to suffer for Christ. This missionary love expressed itself as a desire to bring everlasting felicity to non-Christians; the salvation of souls was more important than the planting of churches or the improvement of temporal conditions. This was so because evangelical Christians affirm that without conversion to the Christian faith, people will perish eternally. Christian civilisation could rescue people from the unreliability, fear, selfishness and immorality which are the result of this-worldliness expressed in “animistic heathenism”; a superstitious system in which polygamy, child marriage, human sacrifice, brutalities, witchcraft, cruel customs, lack of public spirit, caste, corruption, and bribery, commercial deceit and fraud, idolatry and magic all flourished. The spiritual fate of African people was the dominant motive for mission and candidates pledged to devote their life to the salvation of the pagan.

The death of missionaries did not stop the missionary enterprise. With the ordination rite, the missionary received directly from Christ the necessary strength to carry on with his activity. More than the call he received, ordination gave to the missionary a spiritual credit for his personal enterprise. On the field, all his decisive initiatives would be referred to Christ who was sending him. His aptitude to lead the community of converts would reflect the quality of the missionary’s relation to Christ.

The temporal power of the missionary was controlled by the spiritual one he was linked with right from the ordination day when he was definitely set apart for the proclamation of the Kingdom of God. In the name of Christ, on his way, nothing could stop the missionary from executing the Great Commission. As he exercised the spiritual power, he also used the same vocabulary for its temporal dimension as James Mackey stated it:

“Christian Churches have constantly engaged with secular powers on similar if not identical terms, there is also the fact that the terminology and understanding of power in the West is common to Church and civil society”.⁴¹⁹

The temporal leader, therefore, was different from the missionary only because while using the terminology, he had no spiritual authorisation for the administration of his authority. Whereas in Europe, secular leaders had been deprived of the spiritual foundation of their authority, in Africa, sacral leaders had always believed that their temporal power has its source in God. As compared to the Western secular leaders, the missionaries were revered because of their call, ordination and the nature of their work. The “Great Commission” of Christ gave to the missionary a self-understanding of his sacral function that was similar to African patterns.

Conclusion

From the presentation of the Basel Mission, it appears that modern Protestant missions from Europe were religious institutions carried on by legitimate spiritual leaders. The missionary’s feeling of being anointed to lead the Christian community helped him develop similar attitudes with regard to African sacral rulers. The religious nature of the Christian Mission functioned as a dynamic, fertile ground for humanitarian, cultural,

⁴¹⁹ Mackey, James, *Power and Christian Ethics*, p. 18.

and personal motivations as the missionary went actively participating in mission business. The humanitarian component dominated the Christian mission enterprise as it was determined to put an end to the slave trade, to act in favour of an oppressed race and to elevate the African mind and standard of life through literacy, farming, craftwork, health care and commerce. Christian mission was also out to enforce justice and to do better than pro-slavers, colonialists, greedy traders or exploitative industrial farmers. Missionaries wanted to work with Africans and to learn their languages, as they were openly passionate for new mission fields and for cultures that were still unreached with the Gospel. They wanted people to know what they knew. They exposed themselves and the evangelised to the direct influence of the biblical world by translating the Bible. They produced Christian literature in African languages and hardly translated their own European stories with the same passion. As best they could, they brought the Kingdom of God to the so-called deprived people by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ for the salvation of heathen souls. Humanitarian motive, the salvation rights of Africans and the faithfulness to biblical instructions dominated the activities of the Christian Mission. Their task followed the European model as they limited their understanding of the Great Commission to individual empowerment for teaching African people new spiritual values. Missionary responsibility was the cultural and religious liberation of Africans from their pagan traditions through the spread of biblical faith. The Jamaican (African-American) contribution was gradually forgotten even though the institution of Christian mission remained international, intercontinental and interdenominational. However, missionaries were not completely free from national and denominational feeling. Nevertheless, many of them put the evangelistic

activity above their original church and country interests.⁴²⁰ The fact that Pietistic Basel missionaries had no officially basic commitment to any European government had serious consequences on their inability to relate to African sacral rulers.

⁴²⁰ Slageren, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 259. En 1935 Debarge quitta l'hôpital de la mission Protestante Française a Bangwa. Elle reviendra plus tard dans le même pays pour diriger une oeuvre médicale de la mission catholique Romaine. (Debarge left the hospital of the French Protestant mission in Bangwa and came back later on in the same country to head a Roman Catholic health centre).

Chapter Five : Introduction of the Christian Mission to African Sacral rule in Cameroon

The missionary period

A- Jamaican Baptists in Douala and the conversion of African rulers-1841

The earliest evangelisation of Cameroon was primarily due to the missionary spirit of the Jamaican Baptist churches which contributed spiritually and theologically to the reorientation of Christian doctrine and ethics from a pro-slavery religion to anti-slavery religion for the freedom of Africans in America and for the salvation of Africa. The island of Jamaica has played a very distinguished role in the evangelisation of West Africa. In 1793, an ex-slave from Virginia named George Lisle, began his Christian preaching in Jamaica. His spiritual life and enterprise were rooted in the African-American experience. The early Christian converts from Lisle's preaching,

“became an intrinsic part of the local Negro culture and poverty stricken populations of the slave plantations, and was therefore not ready to have links with the British in London. In 1806, the Jamaican house of Assembly passed a law prohibiting Negro-Christians to organise prayer and study sessions on the plantations and so these groups were dependent to a large extent on the planters' goodwill and consequently were in an exceedingly vulnerable position. Therefore the local leaders managed to establish a partnership between British and Jamaican Baptists, which resulted in a missionary assistance of British representatives of the Baptist Missionary Society from 1814 onwards”.⁴²¹

The British representatives of the Baptist Church became ardent advocates of the anti-slavery movement in America and exported the struggle to their homeland in England. After the emancipation of the slaves in the British colonies had been achieved in 1838, many Jamaican Christians of African descent were seized with the burning desire to return to the land of their fathers and to bless their fellow African communities with the

⁴²¹ Slageren, Van Jaap, “Jamaican Missionaries in Cameroon”, in *Exchange* vol 30: 2, April 2001, pp. 145-6.

Gospel. They felt a filial responsibility for the salvation of their ancestral land and their race. This laudable desire rooted in their belief in ancestors within the African-American Christians found support with the British Baptist ministers of the Jamaican Church. Black Christians, like Thomas Keith and James Keats, showed individual courage and determination as the London committee took time to respond to the African-American zeal to carry the Good News of Jesus Christ to Africa.⁴²² Thomas Burchell, James Phillippo, and especially William Knibb channelled the popular will into an organised movement, and succeeded in collecting 1,000 (one thousand Pounds) pounds for the mission in Africa.⁴²³ A hundred poor labourers offered enthusiastically a week's wages for missionary work in Africa and together with the English Baptist Missionary Society, set up a training college for the African mission in Jamaica-Calabar⁴²⁴ near Rio de Bueno.⁴²⁵

Together with the London committee, John Clarke, an English missionary in Jamaica since 1828, and G.K Prince, a medical doctor who had married a mulatto Jamaican and was a former slave owner, were both appointed to explore the possibility of a mission in the Niger Delta. With Jamaican finances they reached Fernand Do Po on the January 1, 1841, some 25 miles off the Cameroon coast. They proposed to the mission committee to establish the first mission station at Fernand Do Po. They also investigated the mainland and contacted Cameroonian rulers. February 4, 1841, they reached Douala. Clarke and Prince were received by the local ruler, Douala Manga

⁴²² Sanneh, Lamine, *West African Christianity*, pp. 107-8.

⁴²³ Sanneh, Lamine, *West African Christianity*, p. 108.

⁴²⁴ Calabar though a famous town in eastern Nigeria is also found in Jamaica where its reputation originated from a theological seminary set up for African-Americans who ambitioned a missionary work in Africa.

⁴²⁵ Slageren, Van Jaap, "Jamaican Missionaries in Cameroon", pp. 146-7.

Bell, and several other heads of communities of the same rank. Cameroonian rulers had been furnished with letters of recommendation by the foremost British official of the area, resident at Clarence in the person of Nicholls. The missionaries were introduced by Lilly, a resident English trader in Cameroon. King Bell the sacral ruler was so open that Prince wrote:

“Truly we find that the Lord is a hearer of prayers; we see that he is favouring our mission, and inclining the hearts of men towards us. At this moment, though the power of a people and of a chief whose hearts are wholly given to the idolatry of covetousness, and with whom the life of a man is of less value than a printed cotton handkerchief, yet we are, by faith in the most high, and as his servants, divested of all apprehension; and by his spirit operating upon the heart of our heavenly host, our persons and property are respected in an unwanted degree”.⁴²⁶

Without the sacral ruler's will there was no contact with people and, therefore, no preaching. Traditional society was older than the presence of the missionaries. In most cases, the Douala rulers gave orders and their people were summoned by a drum to gather and hear all that the visiting missionaries had to say. Clarke and Prince secured a piece of land for future mission use. Not all sacral rulers welcomed Clarke and Prince. King William of Bimbria refused to receive the missionaries because of the presence of a Portuguese slave dealer in the palace.⁴²⁷ They wrote a favourable recommendation to the mission committee in London, emphasising that the Baptist Society should lose no time in sending out missionaries and money to commence the missionary work.⁴²⁸

Rev Thomas Sturgeon arrived from London with his wife at Clarence. Clarke and Prince left for England early in February 1842, with the aim of reporting about the

⁴²⁶ Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 28.

⁴²⁷ Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 28.

⁴²⁸ Prince wrote: “This Island will be the first starting point of our society. In the near future we hope to set a line of missionary stations stretching from the regions of mahometan darkness on the borders of the great Sahara to the same thick night at Timbuktu, Hausa, Bornou, the Nubian desert and the Egyptian sea”. Slageren, Van Jaap, “Jamaican Missionaries in Cameroon”, p. 147.

beginning of the work and to give it due publicity for the attraction of volunteers and general support. At sea, a storm overtook them and their ship drifted to the West Indies and they went to Jamaica. Even though at the time this natural event appeared random and unpredictable, nevertheless, we can see that it supported the work that African Americans were doing. The Baptist Christians on the Island of Jamaica were surprised but happy to see that they deserved preference in knowing the possibilities of mission work in Cameroon. Although there has been no public or academic⁴²⁹ recognition of the major role that West Indians have played in mission work in Africa, the pioneering work that they did should now be self-evident. Nature witnessed their right of being the first to be honoured by the report on the African mission they had initiated. Clarke and Prince visited many churches pleading for volunteers. As a result, Joseph Merrick and Alexander Fuller sailed for London with Clarke and Prince where they arrived on September 8, 1842. Their publicity was very successful and among the volunteers was the ship mechanic, Alfred Saker, who later achieved distinction for his missionary work in Cameroon. Prince, Merrick and Alexander Fuller left England in July 1843 and arrived at Fernand Do Po on September 6, 1843 aboard the *Marys*. The first efforts to evangelise Cameroon on a permanent basis date from 1843, when Joseph Merrick, of African ancestry, laid the foundation, in Douala and later on in Bimbia, of a future missionary enterprise in the interior of the country. He toured the territory with Prince and continued the contact with Douala rulers. Prince headed the mission established

⁴²⁹ Cameroonian scholars have now paved the way for academic investigation into the Jamaican heritage. For details, see: Isaac, Kamta Makarios, *Renaissance de l'Afrique et Evangile: Héritage de Joseph Merrick et de la chrétienté afro Jamaïcaine dans la mission sociale et politique de l'Eglise au Cameroun (1850-1920)*, Thèse de doctorat présentée à la Faculté de Théologie Protestante de Yaoundé, Mars 2003.

with Alexander Fuller in Fernand Do Po while Joseph Merrick, with his wife at Bimbia was busy on the mainland.

John Clarke and Alfred Saker first travelled to Jamaica from London on board the *Chilmark* on July 15, 1843, with the aim of collecting the volunteers there. These Jamaican volunteers were expected to bear the tropical climate better than the Europeans. Among them were Samuel and Joseph Fuller, sons of Mr and Mrs Alexander Fuller. While some went as missionaries, others went as Christian settlers. Altogether 42 people, including children, sailed on December 1, 1843, and arrived at Clarence on February 16, 1844. Merrick and Alexander Fuller received the team. On June 10, 1845, Alfred Saker and Johnson Horton followed and were asked to help Merrick on the mainland.

A second station on the mainland of Cameroon was opened at Douala. The young Joseph Jackson Fuller, a trained carpenter, went to Bimbia with Joseph Merrick. Saker continued in Douala the work that Joseph Merrick was coordinating from Bimbia. With his colleagues, he built houses as he trained people in bricklaying and other practical work. Saker followed his method and succeeded him as the coordinator of missionary work on mainland Cameroon when Merrick died at sea on October 21, 1849.⁴³⁰ The missionary who opened the heart of the sacral rulers to the Christian mission work was Joseph Merrick. He loved the people as they were. He learnt to understand them and to preach to them:

“How much of the temper of Christ it needs in order to love a people whose actions are unlovely and who in the midst of filth, wretchedness, poverty, ignorance and barbarism treat the missionary and his message not only with indifference, but sometimes with perfect contempt. Yes, we must love them and show our love. If deep-toned piety is necessary in the missionary at home,

⁴³⁰ Slageren, Van Jaap, “Jamaican Missionaries in Cameroon”, p. 149.

I am also ready to say it is necessary in a tenfold degree in the Christian mission. Sometimes in the agony of my soul I exclaim that until God raises up another class of missionaries altogether more devoted than the present, the heathen will never be converted".⁴³¹

Merrick was gifted in languages and had considerable knowledge of Latin, Hebrew, Greek and French which he learnt at the Calabar Theological seminary in Jamaica. His love for the people and his will to bless them with the Gospel of Jesus Christ led him to the study of African languages. He translated and printed the Books of Genesis and Exodus as well as the gospels of Matthew and John in the Isubu language which was the dominant Bimbia language.⁴³² Commenting on Merrick's work Slageren wrote:

"By his initiatives, he broke with the contemporary missionary thoughts about Bible translation, which preferred to translate only the New Testament or part of it, the Old Testament being left aside."⁴³³

Beside this translation and printing work, Merrick spent much time exploring the country with Joseph Fuller and meeting with the rulers⁴³⁴ for discussions on biblical faith. When Merrick died in 1849, and Saker took on the Baptist leadership in the mainland Cameroon coordinating mission work from Douala, Joseph Fuller continued with Merrick's method which Saker also applied subsequently to maintain harmonious relations with the sacral rulers they interacted with.

⁴³¹ Slageren, Van Jaap, "Jamaican Missionaries in Cameroon", p. 149.

⁴³² Slageren, Van Jaap, "Jamaican Missionaries in Cameroon", p. 150 and Sanneh, Lamine, *West African Christianity*, p. 111.

⁴³³ Slageren, Van Jaap, "Jamaican Missionaries in Cameroon", p. 150.

⁴³⁴ Merrick: "King William received me with uniform kindness since my arrival, and is not only willing that his own people should receive the benefit of our instruction, but that the people in the interior should be visited, and made acquainted with the precious truths of the gospel; and in proof of this willingness, has promised to send men with me to the Cameroon Mountains, and to do all in his power to facilitate my journey", in Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 91.

Without any theological training, Fuller, less gifted in translation and printing, focused his work on people's needs and considered palaces as the heart of Africa's conversion to Christ. He learnt to understand and decipher the language of the drums, and had a good sense of humour. He baptised African rulers who asked for baptism without regard to their marital status. He baptised polygamous rulers while seeking ways to stop polygamy. He participated freely in royal funerals and burials, and preached over their empty coffins.⁴³⁵ He succeeded in penetrating the practices of sacral rule without clashes with the result that he had a great impact on changing practices from the heart of sacral rule. Fuller spent forty years ministering in Cameroon on the coast. His influence on people and rulers was "greater than that of any other comparable person who had been working on the coast of Cameroon. His main message was to tell people that God's book had come to the country".⁴³⁶ When the council of Douala rulers decided to write to the Queen to establish an English legal system among them, they referred to themselves as Christians. Fuller helped on the council as secretary and adviser on foreign politics and relations. Saker enthusiastically ordained and moved him from Bimbia to Hickory (Bonaberi) on the opposite side of River Wouri not far from Deido and Akwa, where he settled. Both of them followed Merrick's missionary method. Saker found in Fuller the safety, continuity and stability to do his missionary work. Subsequently, when Saker was on leave to England, the

⁴³⁵ Royals were buried in secrecy and therefore there is no body in the coffin which is part of the public ceremonies.

⁴³⁶ Slageren, Van Jaap, "Jamaican Missionaries in Cameroon", p. 151.

entire leadership of the mission was African, comprising Joseph Jackson Fuller with two others.⁴³⁷

Saker developed skills in translation, language learning and the training of Christians in various crafts. Following the path of the one who introduced him to the African genius, Saker rapidly translated the Bible into Douala language by using “as an example the work of Joseph Merrick, who had a large input into his scriptural insights and translation methods”.⁴³⁸ He completed the New Testament in 1862 and the Old Testament in 1872. He printed the whole Bible with Joseph Merrick’s printing press which he had transferred to Douala. Saker benefited from the services of George Nkwe, a royal slave entrusted to him by the Akwa sacral ruler. He helped Saker to understand the social and spiritual outlook of the Douala people. He brought sacral rule to the immediate environment, mind and heart of the missionary. Nkwe was promoted regularly and ended up as an ordained minister with the approval of his master, the Head of Akwa community, in 1866. His salary as pastor was given to the ruler. Through George Nkwe, the traditional leadership of the coastal Cameroon region was opened to Christian teaching. Saker was given the right to advise on royal matters. He stopped human sacrifice during royal funerals by participating in burials as preacher over empty coffins following Fuller’s attitude and Nkwe’s advice. He lived with Douala people and loved the adults as well as the youth. He devoted much time to training them in literacy and craftwork. His popularity made the Douala language a standard means of communicating the Gospel.

⁴³⁷ Schaf, *On their way rejoicing: The history and role of the Bible in Africa*, Paternoster, Carelisle Cumbria, UK, 1994, p. 58.

⁴³⁸ Slageren, Van Jaap, “Jamaican Missionaries in Cameroon”, p. 153.

Joseph Fuller in his relations with rulers on the mountains built on the gains made by Joseph Merrick. Negotiations with African rulers depended on the missionary and the local leadership and not on the mission board in Europe or in Douala. They initiated negotiations and got land and converts before writing a report informing their various boards. Richardson the mulatto Jamaican posted at Bakundu (Banga) made such an impact on people from 1879 to 1886 that the Basel Mission found the work there easy enough to create three stations at the same time to assist the work of Richardson when he decided to labour in Congo. The stations were Mangamba, Bakundu and Nyassosso. It was from Nyassosso that the Basel Mission extended its evangelistic activity to the Grassfields Mountains. New missionaries learnt the language and missionary work was not done in English but in Douala. Joseph Merrick and Richardson convinced the rulers of the relevance of the gospel of Jesus for them, adopting the following method: "I love you, I don't know you, but God sent me to you with his message. I accepted to bring it and I am ready to live among you. Teach me your language. In your language this is the loving message. I was asked to deliver it to you. This is how I live as a Christian."⁴³⁹ Fuller and Saker shared the same stance. They were talented in the way they could articulate the cultural and spiritual transition for the realisation of the new civilisation without conflict. They revealed themselves as builders of new attitudes and new vision as a continuation of the pre-Christian community life. They were gifted in encouraging people towards cultural transformation as they read and understood people's history through the reading of the Bible. Working from the heart of sacral rule everywhere they found themselves, Baptist

⁴³⁹ Summary of scattered documents in archive related to Joseph Merrick.

missionaries who planned a Christian village did not organise one in the mainland Cameroon as practised by the Basel Mission in Ghana.⁴⁴⁰

B- Basel Mission and the Cameroonian Baptist Church

The Basel Mission inherited from the Baptist these five decades of sustainable interaction with African sacral rule on the coast of Cameroon. In contrast to its early history in the Gold Coast (Ghana) mission field, the Basel Mission came to Cameroon under colonial recommendation. In Cameroon, the missionary was expected to be obedient to two masters. On the one hand, he had to seek the agreement of African rulers before starting his evangelistic activities among the people. On the other hand, the missionary was expected to obtain permission from the government or its representative for the opening of new schools, churches and mission stations. Negotiations for the transfer of Baptist properties to the Basel Mission occurred in Europe without the consent of the missionaries in Cameroon. European missionaries had been exposed to the growing impact of the colonial enterprise on Christians. Those who were trained in the atmosphere of abolitionist thinking and the salvation of Africa and Africans with the Bible and were working on the field were not aware of what was going on in Europe. Colonial offices and Christian Mission Boards took political decisions which affected missionary practices in Africa.

Joseph Fuller who had decided to remain in Cameroon rather than go to the new Baptist mission field in Congo, became aware of the takeover of the evangelistic work

⁴⁴⁰ When the Spanish declared Fernand Do Po a Roman Catholic territory and forced some of the Jamaican settlers and converted Africans to be established at Bimbia on a remarkable piece of land, a Christian village was created. But there is reference to a local Christian being invited to leave his compound to be relocated on the Christian territory.

by the Basel Mission on the day the four representatives came to him with the transfer order already signed. They arrived at Douala on December 23, 1886. They were: Gottlieb Munz, Christian Dilger, Johannes Bitzer and Friederich Becher.⁴⁴¹ The Jamaican contribution in the Mission to Cameroon had been undermined by the British committee which failed to inform beforehand the African Church as well as the Jamaican Church. Even the committee in London was not a hundred per cent in favour of handing the property to the Basel Mission but preferred rather to do so to the German Baptists in Berlin. Because the decision came from the German colonial office, the pro-colonial members in mission boards in London determined the decision and for a sum of forty thousand German Marks, the Baptist Missionary society put an end to its work in Cameroon.

The liberal spirit and the freedom of missionary practice that Baptists missionaries enjoyed from their Jamaican root suffered very early from the Basel Mission's will to control and guide very closely the spirituality, liturgy and commercial activity of the Christians. Much of Jamaican activity "stemmed from the importance placed by the Protestants on a literate population which could read and study the Scriptures by themselves".⁴⁴² Missionary administration and colonial presence were more evident in the Basel missionary attitude than in that of the Jamaican and British Baptists who headed the mission in Cameroon. The Cameroonian Baptist pastor Dibundu, natural leader after the departure of Fuller, had a difficult time with Munz the head of the Basel Mission in Douala. Munz had a centralised management of power

⁴⁴¹ Dah, Jonas, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p. 114.

⁴⁴² Weber, *International Influences and Baptist Mission in West Cameroon; German American Missionary Endeavor under International Mandate and British colonialism*, Leiden, E. J. Brill, 1993, P. 2.

with everything starting with himself as the embodiment of mission policy. The independence of the local congregation was gradually reduced and the need to break with the Basel Mission came as result of bitter disagreement on this issue between the German Missionaries and the Cameroonian enlightened pastors. People and royals had been identifying themselves with Christianity for nearly half a century.

Basel missionaries followed some Baptist methods but the conflict came with the difference in the administration of the Church. Baptist missionaries had a congregational governance while Basel missionaries had a Lutheran governance. With the Baptists, a lot of power was given to the local community. With the Lutheran, the last word came from the Bishop or the appointed leader of the group. Consultation seemed to be the basis for congregational decisions, whereas information and obedience presided over Lutheranism.

The Basel Mission had the tendency of keeping its distance from sacral rule. But the rulers were interacting with the Gospel through their relatives or entourage who were deeply involved with the missionary enterprise as they interacted with the Baptists. In spite of their willingness to help, Basel missionaries always came too late when the local people had already found a solution. At an early stage, Basel missionaries followed the congregational decisions. However, Munz could not stand the local Christians' freedom of initiative in spiritual matters. During the struggle with Dibundu at the Bethel Church, the Basel Mission concentrated on the annexes and opened new mission stations while the Baptists were entirely engaged in the struggle. Munz had no desire to destroy what had been done but wanted rather to control it and be assured that it fell in line with missionary principles as understood by the Basel

Mission. The struggle was popularised by the local church. Basel missionaries handled with great difficulty the random freedom of Christian practices at the coast and went inland to create new stations. King Akwa, Alfred Saker's host, remained Baptist, proud of the freedom of consulting and understanding the Bible he had been reading from childhood in Douala his native language.⁴⁴³ The African rulers aligned with Dibundu. Akwa, Deido and Hickory (Bonaberie) communities openly supported the Baptists. King Bell, as the paramount ruler who signed the treaty with the Germans, rather followed the Basel missionaries. He came with freedom of initiative in Christian spiritual matters and friendship from the Jamaican Baptists, the German Kaiser and the German Chancellor in Berlin. He quickly learnt the German language for political purposes. King Bell, whose full name was Rudolf Douala Manga Bell, supported the Basel missionary in this religio-political struggle against the Baptist pastor Dibundu.⁴⁴⁴ He brought with him his people and his relatives. His faithful nephew Modi Din was one of the first pastors ordained by the Basel Mission.

Douala Manga Bell and Munz came into contact with each other through Christianity and the colonial office. Basel helped King Bell to gain an influential position among the Christians a position held by King Akwa since the coming of the Baptists. Pastor John Diebol, the first Cameroonian Basel ordained minister on September 19, 1901, was posted to Bell and Bonadouma territories. It was said about him that:

⁴⁴³ Ype Schaaf had demonstrated that the Bible did not move from London to Douala, but from Jamaica to Douala where people did hear God's teaching in their native African Languages Isubu and Douala. Schaf, Ype, *On their way rejoicing*.

⁴⁴⁴ "Le chef Manga Bell était membre de cette Eglise (Bâloise). Il était même un des anciens les plus écoutés. (King Manga Bell was a member of the Basel Church. He was even one of the most influential church elders)". Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 129. King Rudolf Douala Manga Bell was the one who influenced the council of Douala in favour of Germany. He was the best friend of the Kaiser and the German bridge to African society.

“Jusqu’à sa mort en 1908, il exerça une grande influence sur le roi Rudolf Douala Manga Bell, qui l’avait nommé son aumônier. (Until he died in 1908, Diebol greatly influenced king Rudolf Douala Manga Bell who had appointed him his chaplain at the royal council)”.⁴⁴⁵

When Diebol died in 1908, the one who replaced him as favourite of the sacral ruler Manga Bell was his nephew pastor Modi Din. Manga Bell was more than happy with the Basel Mission. In fact, before 1814, the ruler of Bell’s area was paramount among all the coastal groups. In 1814, King Akwa, with the support of the people and rulers of neighbouring groups namely Deido and Bonateki, led a successful rebellion and the balkanisation of the Douala community started.⁴⁴⁶ They established their new sacral rule which divided the Douala community into two. In 1843, they hosted the first missionaries to Cameroon who were Baptists from Jamaica and London. Joseph Merrick and Saker entered the communities of the coast through the self-promoted Akwa group. Through them, the Akwa leaders and Christianity began to attract the interest of the subjects of the rival Bell community.

Douala Manga Bell used the disagreements between the Baptist and the Basel missionaries to become one of those who would channel people’s religious feelings in the colonial environment. Government facilities, Basel missionary discipline, schools, hospitals and technical work as well as the presence of Douala Manga Bell, attracted people from various groupings. They came with the Baptist influence rooted in the Jamaican way of self-articulation of what is Christian based on their biblical understanding of the issue as they read the sacred book in their own language. Local Christians of royal background taught German missionaries how to read the Bible in the

⁴⁴⁵ Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l’Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 64.

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with Rev. Kingue Kwa, president of the Association of People above 80 years, Akwa-Nord, Douala, July 13, 1998, 11-13h.

Douala language. Dibundu was so busy with the Church that the real successors of Fuller in the Douala royal council became George Nkwe with the Baptists, and Modi Din with Basel. They did not only bring a Christian dimension into traditional politics but also injected the spiritual experience of sacral rule into the Baptist and Basel missions.

The conflict between King Bell and the German colonial administration over the expropriation of the Douala from their ancestral land, involved an African missionary. Douala Manga Bell, the ruler, was jailed with his cousin, Pastor Jacob Modi Din. As for the Germans, they decided that Modi Din was as guilty as the ruler. Popular opinion believed that Modi Din was the spiritual and conceptual force behind Douala Manga Bell.⁴⁴⁷ The missionaries defended their colleague whom they considered an innocent pastor and key helper for the peace and for Christian interest, and, therefore, in favour of the colonial policy. Even in jail, the African sacral ruler, Douala Manga Bell, was with a Christian spiritual leader. In his political struggle for the well-being of Cameroon and Cameroonians, Douala Manga Bell, the sacral ruler, uttered a prophecy in prison about Cameroon and Germany with a deep spiritual attitude. Expressed in a popular song, it is called “*Tet Ekombo*” (Father of the country). This prophecy “*Tet Ekombo*” is articulated as a genuine spiritual interpretation of the events that happened to a sacral ruler. This litany is full of Christian names and interpretation of the event, using biblical metaphors.⁴⁴⁸ The name of God YAHWEH appeared three times, the

⁴⁴⁷ We are doing justice by saying that Basel missionary leaders fought for the liberation of Douala Manga Bell. Colonial authorities rejected all their claims and delayed only the death of the ordained pastor Modi Din who got out of the prison freed by the French, who had become the new masters of Cameroon.

⁴⁴⁸ Ebele Wei, *Le Paradis Tabou: Autopsie d'une culture Assassinée*, Douala, Edition CERAC, 1999. p. 175-176.

name of Jesus twice that of Juda once and reference to the Jews which portrayed the Douala as people protected and supported by YAHWEH ends the song. Is “*Tet Ekombo*” not, in many points, the first Christian prophecy on politics from within the Christian Church in Cameroon?

The separation from the local Baptist Church did not dispossess the Basel Mission of the Jamaican inheritance. It followed the practice of preaching over the empty coffins of royals and enjoyed the disappearance of polygamy within the ruling class of the Douala sacral rule. The Basel Mission followed Merrick’s linguistic approach, and for the theological training of the Cameroonian clergy, they produced a Greek-Douala dictionary. It is interesting to note that as German missionaries in a German colony, they did not first concentrate on a German-Douala dictionary but on a Greek-Douala dictionary. This attitude had only one reference in Christian history in Africa: Joseph Merrick the Jamaican. The Basel Mission used the Douala language for evangelisation, and they publicised it so that for a while, Douala overshadowed the German language in Cameroon. This favoured a growth of the mission for it

“was a blessing for the Basel Mission to inherit a local language with a grammar and literature no matter how imperfect it might have been in details”.⁴⁴⁹

The Basel mission publicised as well the Bamun script and contributed to its development with the printing press they set up for producing Christian literature in Fouban. They translated the Bible into the Bali language as they started working on Grassfields Mountains. This is how Jamaican Baptist missionaries through their social,

⁴⁴⁹ Dah, Jonas, *Missionary Motivations and Methods*, p. 115.

linguistic, educational and religious accomplishments made “a lasting impact”⁴⁵⁰ on Cameroonian society.

C- Bali Fandom: the first Basel Mission station in the Grassfields

In the territory of King Bell in Douala, there is a quarter named after the Bali. Bali people were known as the best slave raiders. They were the link between the coast and the Mountains. They had no stable headquarters because they were everywhere harassing Mountain dwellers and with European guns raiding the Africans for sale at the coast in Douala. The African rulers often hardly met. However, there were various means of communication: drums, traders and diplomatic relations carried out by members of the ruling class. Bali knowledge about the “white man” was from Douala rulers and especially from Douala Manga Bell.⁴⁵¹ The end of slavery with humans being replaced by ivory, kola nut and other goods, was known in the interior through the Bali who championed the trips from the Coast to the Mountains. The sacral ruler of Bali knew that the white man he had never seen came from the sea he did not know. He knew also that the white man’s skin colour could change from white to red, and that it could burn when he was upset and ready to kill.⁴⁵² He knew also that better guns came from the coast and were made by the white man. Some large cloths came from there and the royal ones either came from Hausa land or were locally made. He knew also that the beads came from the sea. It is interesting that this knowledge of whites came through articles of trade.

⁴⁵⁰ Weber, *International Influences and Baptist Mission in Cameroon*, p. 5.

⁴⁵¹ The Bell community had named a quarter of theirs after Bali long before the colonial event.

⁴⁵² Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 96.

When the Germans set foot in Cameroon, they were informed about the Bali through the coastal traders and rulers, Douala Manga Bell probably, had communicated the news to the Bali ruler through the Bali long-distance traders⁴⁵³ who stopped in his area for commercial purposes.⁴⁵⁴ Even when the Germans were in Douala, the old trading roads and contracts between the Bali and the Douala remained. The colonial administration did acknowledge it and if Zintgraff⁴⁵⁵ decided to explore Grassfields with yearly residence in Bali, it was based on what the colonial administration knew about the Bali from the hosting Douala rulers and traders. German administrators did not compete with the Douala by trading with non-coastal people in Douala but went far into the interior, with Zintgraff, for instance, going to Bali. Information was passed through talking drums and Bali soldiers went to the border to bring him to the *Fo* (sacral ruler) of Bali.

Zintgraff “remarked that for the first time, he had met with Africans who looked him straight in the eye”.⁴⁵⁶ Bali soldiers proved far better warriors than his carriers. The discipline and order they paraded, contrasted with Zintgraff’s carriers’ attitude and he was then convinced that he was in the presence of a “real chief”. How he succeeded in signing contracts for peaceful occupation of the area by Germany will be presented later when we analyse the colonial impact on sacral rule. The Bali ruling class preferred

⁴⁵³ Warnier explored long-distance trader routes towards Hausaland and Sahara. Little has been written by scholars about the coastal long-distance traders of Grassfields.

⁴⁵⁴ As middlemen, the Douala in treaty with the Germans insisted that they would remain their agents for the interior and that the Germans would not go trading in the interior of the country.

⁴⁵⁵ Zintgraff was a German explorer for European causes. He entered the service of the German government in 1886 and was sent to Cameroon where he helped to overcome the Grassfields and some parts of the Adamoua and Benue territories. Militarily-minded, he tried to do ethnology work for which he was not trained. For more information on Zintgraff, see, E. M. Chilver, *Zintgraff's explorations in Bamenda Adamawa and Benue Lands 1889-1892*, E. Ardener (ed), Buea, Government printing press, 1966.

⁴⁵⁶ Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 95.



Picture 1. Keller, the head of the Basel missionary delegation, agreed to appear in front of Fonyonga the *Fo* of Bali in local gown in 1903

What is interesting is that the Bali ruling class had invited the Basel Mission to labour in the area. When they approached Bali, Fonyonga sent his guard to bring them to him. As they were waiting at the entrance of the royal compound, the sacral ruler sent them traditional dress to wear before appearing in front of him (the *Fo*). The head of the delegation Keller obeyed, and the three were introduced into the yard where the ruler was waiting for them. They agreed that they would labour for mission work together.⁴⁶⁰

⁴⁶⁰ Picture 2, E-30.26.37



Picture 2. Sitting from right are Fonyonga and Keller in traditional gown, Schuler and Spellenberg.

At the end of the first meeting, Schuler and Spellenberg wore their own traditional dress and Keller took a picture of them.⁴⁶¹



Pic. 3. Gottlieb Spellenberg and Schuler

⁴⁶¹ Picture 3, E-30.25.37

The first Christian message in Grassfields was presented through the traditional royal dress and not with a Geneva gown. By accepting to wear this dress and such an honour, the missionaries acknowledged the power of the ruler and thus placed themselves at his service. By the same act of obedience, they expressed a genuine will to be integrated into the society. The team of missionaries went with the promise of sending permanent missionaries to Bali. They described Fonyonga as possessing real authority and as well-disposed to promote Christianity.⁴⁶²

On March 17, 1903 Rev. Frederick Ernst and Rudolf Leimbacher arrived in Bali. Rev. Keller with his wife and child followed them on January 22, 1904. Keller was the Mission representative and responsible for language and translation as well as writing manuals in the Bali language. Leimbacher was the builder and carpenter while Ernst was in charge of church planting in the area. Fonyonga, instead of giving a royal title to Keller, gave it to Ernst instead. Keller, more experienced than his colleagues, used his personality and the freedom he was enjoying from royal instruction to deal with people and to communicate Christian principles to the entire society without interference. He translated biblical stories and hymns into *Mungaka*, the Bali language; he also prepared the school syllabus in the Bali language. He never thought of translating his German children's stories into *Mungaka*. He rather skilfully exposed people to the biblical environment. People were interacting with the biblical context

⁴⁶² "The missionaries marvelled and declared that it was truly a rare phenomenon that this African chief, more intelligent than many of his colleagues, was adequately alert in every respect that he knew what he was lacking, yet humble enough to sit himself before strangers and preserving enough to attain his goals, despite many discouraging circumstances". Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 109.

and not the European context. As people read the biblical stories in their language, they were able to model their Christian community on the New Testament model.

Fonyonga was busy with Ernst who had been promoted to the rank of a titleholder. He was called *Fonyongchu* (king of beard) with the right to sit with Grassfields rulers as a friend of Fonyonga, the Bali ruler. Like their predecessors, this new group of missionaries were dressed by the Bali leaders in the Grassfields royal gown.⁴⁶³



Picture 4. Keller, Leimbacher and Ernst

With the abolition of the slave trade and end of tribal wars due to the presence of the German colonial military and administration at a distance of 25 miles from Bali, Fonyonga found in the Christian Mission a potential political channel.

⁴⁶³ Picture 4, E-30.25.041, Basel Mission archives.

“Dès leur installation il fut permis aux missionnaires de prêcher à l'élite du peuple dans la cour royale (as soon as they settled in, they were invited to preach to the élite in the royal courtyard)”⁴⁶⁴.

He obliged his nobles, his wives, and even his soldiers to attend the Sunday morning worship services. Through the missionaries, he had another means of talking to people. For moral and political crucial remarks, Fonyonga spoke through the missionaries. The missionaries at the same time had a free hand to penetrate the life of the people who had welcomed them on the instruction of their ruler.

With regard to the areas of conflict such as religion, initiation rites, traditional religious festivals and polygamy, the ruling class had difficulty in stopping the missionary's impact on the population. Europeans talked positively about Christian ethics over and against the negative pagan customs whose first custodian was Fonyonga. Missionaries were more perplexed by the problem of how to deal with a ruler and his entourage who right from the beginning of their activities in Bali, proved genuine allies to the success of their goal. The ruling class in Bali legitimised the religious power of the missionary. In matters of religion, family life, social conduct and the art of governance, missionaries attempted to teach the ruler and his subjects what was right. However, Bali leaders realised rather late that the missionary preaching and social education were subverting their power over the people.

Nevertheless, they concentrated on the salience of the Christian civilisation.⁴⁶⁵ Fonyonga supported mission schools in vernacular and sponsored the salaries of teachers posted in neighbouring villages as long as they were using the vernacular as a

⁴⁶⁴ Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 99.

⁴⁶⁵ Knowledge, government affiliation, money, European advisors, and diplomatic agents at the royal court- these symbols of power and prestige were what interested the chief. Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 120.

medium of communication. With Rev. Ernst, he learnt tirelessly and quickly the German language. He found in education the secret of German power, and learnt German for diplomatic purposes, making Ernst his link with the colonial government. In June 1906, the *Fo* himself declared Sunday the day of rest for people to be exposed to German wisdom. In the same year, Bali got its first church built in local style. There was a regular movement between the Mission station and the palace. Missionaries went to the ruler on weekdays and the ruler came to church on Sundays. Despite the fact that the missionaries knew that the Bali ruling class including Fonyonga were not going to become Christians, they knew that they could not do without them and their support. The traditional ruler in Bali considered himself a leading figure in Christian mission expansion in Grassfields. He looked at the mission work as a personal investment.

“Chief Fonyonga himself promised to give each of the 13 young teachers who were creating schools in 10 neighbouring villages a monthly allowance of 5 shillings”.⁴⁶⁶

To show his power, he paid more than he promised. He could and did influence the posting of mission students in neighbouring villages.⁴⁶⁷ He offered a sum of 200 German Marks as contribution for the erection of a school building in Bali.⁴⁶⁸

“Il est d'ailleurs certain qu'il agissait moins pour des motifs évangéliques que dans l'espoir de pouvoir renforcer son pouvoir sur les villages voisins avec l'appui du missionnaire (it is quite certain that he was far less motivated by evangelistic goals than by the hope of strengthening his power over the neighbouring villages with the support of the missionary)”.⁴⁶⁹

⁴⁶⁶ Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 83.

⁴⁶⁷ Bandjoun and Bangwa, two important Grassfields communities located far from Bali, approached the Basel Mission through Fonyonga. Fonyonga was instrumental in the opening of schools in Bandjoun three years before a missionary was posted there. Lima in Bandjoun and Difon in Bangwa were sent by Fonyonga on Grassfields diplomatic terms. Ndeyo in Bandjoun and NGankou in Bangwa were sent on missionary terms.

⁴⁶⁸ Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 117.

⁴⁶⁹ Slageren, Jaap, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 97.

The missionary was welcomed everywhere in the Grassfields with great honour as prince, messenger from the Bali *fondom* and blood friend of Fonyonga. In the same way that *Fo* Galega had entered into blood sharing⁴⁷⁰ relationship with Zintgraff, Fonyonga entered into blood exchange with the church planter, Rev Ernst, also known as *Fonyongchu*. Fonyonga was searching for ways to extend his political power over the neighbouring independent constituencies. Each village Ernst visited would end up having princes, royal servants and sons of high-ranking notables as students. All the students had royal or noble connections and the missionary in Bali, thus prepared the next generation of Grassfields traditional leadership. Under missionary Ernst's influence, the German government elevated Fonyonga to the level of paramount ruler over his independent neighbouring colleagues in 1905.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁷⁰ Blood share or blood exchange is a practice by which two people who had made a friendly contract, decide to support one another no matter the situation and swear to avoid separation in their life time, engaged in exchanging their blood. They cut themselves at the same place in reference to each one's body. Each one use his finger to put in his mouth three times the blood of his fellow and with six sticks three for each person, they exchange three times their blood and the contract is eternal.

⁴⁷¹ Picture 5, E-30.26.050. Fonyonga and Rev. Ernst (*Fonyongchu*) Basel missionary and diplomatic adviser of the Bali sacral rule.



Picture, 5. Fo Fonyonga in traditional gown and Rev. F. (*Fonyongchu*) Ernst the church planter.

By 1909, the colonial government and the mission representatives had become aware of Fonyonga's diplomatic use of mission activities. They felt that Fonyonga was enjoying too much power and agreed to put an end to it. The missionary awareness resulted from the discrepancy between the number of students trained and the number of those who came for baptism.⁴⁷² Students from royal background were making use of the Christian teaching far from missionary influence in the sacral ruling circles of their different political units.

⁴⁷² J. Keller was disappointed to note that out of the thousands of pupils who passed through the school, only about 150 were baptised. Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1986-1923)*, p. 118.

Controversial reports about the superiority of Bali over Bafut, Bansa', Bamun, Bandjoun, Bangwa and Bana, were pushed forward with seemingly convincing facts. Three new military posts were created: Dschang, Fumban and Bana. The establishment of new mission stations opened the eyes of the missionaries to the foreignness of Bali leadership in their territory. The growth of the church and the attitude of the ruling class to it confirmed the difference with Bali. However, the missionaries, with the exception of Ernst, did not oppose the government in its decision to withdraw from the Bali ruler the title of Paramount ruler in the Grassfields. In 1909, Ernst went to Germany with Fonyonga's son, Sosiga. He wanted to bring him up as a Christian African ruler. Unfortunately, Ernst died in Germany before Fonyonga's dream could be realised. Fonyonga tried unsuccessfully to have someone like Ernst among the missionaries. But it was not possible. He, however, became aware of the colonial project to take from him the title of Grassfields paramount ruler. When he discovered that his fellow traditional leaders were now aware of his diplomatic use of mission work for political purposes, Fonyonga's support for the mission reduced drastically. The creation of a mission station in Fumban for *Fo Njoya* the Bamun ruler without his consent further reduced his zeal for the mission, and the Bali ruling class participated less and less in mission business. In 1912, a decree issued by the colonial administration formally withdrew from him the title of Grassfields paramount ruler although nobody else was appointed in his place. The popularity of Bamun gradually overshadowed that of Bali. Keller was too critical towards the military brutality in the area, and found the traditional authority more providential for the mission work than the German military administration. He

was as hard on European nominal Christians as he was on the Africans who were attached to their primal religious practices.

D- Ghoring and *Fo* Njoya in Bamun: Friendship and subsequent misunderstanding

Many African voices forced Keller to ask for another mission station on the Grassfields Mountains, independent of Bali and based in Fumban. Rev Ernst, the church planter, and some Bamun students in Bali, were instrumental. Armed with a royal title and attire, which allowed him to sit with the ruling class and rulers of any Grassfields group, Ernst contacted more rulers than Fonyonga wished. He did not confine his work to the friends of the Bali ruler. In November 1903, he made a trip to Fumban, the Bamun capital. Unlike Fonyonga who had wanted to use the German missionaries to extend his influence over the Grassfields communities, the Bamun ruler was interested in the religious meaning of the Gospel message and its relevance for his people. *Fo* Njoya, the sacral ruler, was interested in maintaining the leading position of the Bamun in the midst of new events and expressed a strong passion to find new ways to reduce his people's sufferings. He was confident of the unchallenged power and wisdom of the Bamun, and had been struggling to parade the achievement of the Bamun in order to attract the respect of the Germans towards his group. Creative, curious, eager to learn, a master in conceptual thinking and a military strategist, *Fo* Njoya was a philosopher heading an African sacral rule. Having understood the "secret" of writing, he was promoting literacy through his own writings within the ruling class. This was an aptitude that Ernst had foreseen in him. As they were

discussing, Ernst was surprised to see the Bamun script, a text written by *Fo Njoya* and his close associates, Mama, Mamben and others.

On his arrival, Ernst felt that the Bamun had been expecting him. For *Fo Njoya*, this was not his first contact with the Christian Gospel. Habish,⁴⁷³ the German trader, employed two clerks from Lagos named Same and Mensah. They were baptised and confirmed Christians from the Jamaican Presbyterian Mission working in Calabar in Nigeria. They used to sing and tell Bible stories. They were called “*chantres du Christ*” (Christ’s singers).⁴⁷⁴ They made such a great impact on the Bamun that the royal council decided to hear them also. After expounding the story of creation and that of Joseph, people asked questions. Bamun royals then copied the answers the two Christians had given, and kept the sample in the Stool room. The curiosity of the sacral ruler grew every time the stories were read and they were read very often. The pre-Basel missionary biblical writings in African language and scripts by “non-Christians” were some of the random Jamaican legacies for the blessing of Africa with the Gospel.

“*Plusieurs Bamun furent convaincus de la vérité du message qui leur était apportée (Many Bamun believed in the truth of the new message)*”.⁴⁷⁵

Same and Mensah informed them that there were missionaries in Bali who could explain the Christian message more deeply. Although *Fo Njoya* knew about the military post in Bamenda, he knew nothing about the missionaries. Lieutenant Hirtler,

⁴⁷³ Habish was one of the three Germans who came to Fumban on July 6, 1902 when Captain Ramsay, in the company of 200 armed Africans and carriers, made an expedition to Bamun. Habish was the first resident European in Fumban. There is no indication of the white trader discussing the Christian faith with the Bamun. Nobody saw him supporting his African clerks in their public preaching.

⁴⁷⁴ Mfochive, Joseph, *L’Ethique Chrétienne*, pp. 141-142. There are samples of pre-Basel missionary Christian songs in Bamun.

⁴⁷⁵ Mfochive, Joseph, *L’Ethique Chrétienne*, p. 142.

in his conquering⁴⁷⁶ expedition to Bamun on April 13, 1903 did not mention the existence of the missionaries to *Fo* Njoya as Zintgraff did with the rulers of Bali and Bandjoun. In June 1903, two Bamun involved in the mission school in Bali came for holidays and presented themselves directly to the palace to explain to *Fo* Njoya their experience at Bali. The ruler appreciated their courage, gave them some provisions and before they left, said to them:

“Quand vous retournez à Bali, dites à ces hommes (missionnaires) qu’ils viennent aussi chez moi (when you return to Bali, tell those men (missionaries) to come also to my territory)”.⁴⁷⁷

If Keller encouraged Ernst and Leimbacher to go to Fumban it was because of these African voices. Another voice was Ernst. In fact, Ernst on his way to Douala met with a Bamun slave who talked about his group and about *Fo* Njoya. Ernst sent him with a letter expressing his willingness to come to the ruler very soon. Among the missionaries, there had been much discussion on the Bamun issue. However, in an informal discussion with *Fo* Fonyonga, when they raised the issue, the latter called *Fo* Njoya “a small boy”.⁴⁷⁸ Nevertheless, missionaries sent a favourable report and in November 1905, the Basel Mission authorised Stolz, Lutz, Gohring, and Leimbacher to pay a visit to Fumban to negotiate the erection of a mission station in the Bamun

⁴⁷⁶ He came with some German soldiers leading an army of Grassfields men and mainly from Bali. But Njoya was successful in convincing the Bamun to be peaceful with the Germans and they avoided a bloodbath. Nine days later the Bamun diplomats were in Buea, the colonial capital, to discuss the possibilities of Bamun people trading on the coast in the same way as Habish was trading in Fumban. The delegation came back with a formal letter assuring the Bamun of German protection. Bamun then became part of the German empire. Mfochive, Joseph, *L’Ethique Chrétienne*, p. 139.

⁴⁷⁷ Mfochive, Joseph, *L’Ethique Chrétienne*, p. 142.

⁴⁷⁸ Njoya was younger than Fonyonga but more experienced in leadership than the Bali ruler. In Njoya’s battle against Mbetkom, Fonyonga came to his help. Njoya maintained a thankful attitude towards Bali people.

territory. They came without guns, simply dressed, looking innocent and without carriers.

Before the missionaries appeared, Njoya had interacted with the German military, traders, farmers and administrators. He presented himself as a military leader to be reckoned with.⁴⁷⁹ He encouraged Bamun people to trade alongside Habish, the German trader. He reluctantly sent Bamun people to work in German farms on the coast and in his own territory. He strove to be the Kaiser's representative in the colony. However, he maintained a distant relationship with all of them, particularly as they were all established outside the walls of his capital. When he was discussing the presence of missionaries with the delegation from Bali, he asked if the mission work was as demanding as that of the farmers, traders and administrators. The ruler was very concerned about what could disadvantage his people. He and his elders came to the conclusion that the missionaries were men of God and different from men of war, traders and farmers. Their evangelistic projects attracted the ruling class who were eager to know the motivations behind their loving attitude. The sacral ruler, his mother, his servants, his nobles and people connected with the ruling family, attended the preaching services at the mission station and in the palace.

⁴⁷⁹ Mfochive, Joseph, *L'Ethique Chrétienne*, p. 138. The colonial military agent's report on Njoya: "*Le chef Njoya, pour qui le titre de Lamido est déjà employé, est un grand ami de tout ce qui est allemand et a renouvelé l'assurance de son dévouement. L'autorité personnelle de cet homme, la situation relativement grande qu'il occupe et sa manière de concevoir les choses, le placent très loin au-dessus des autres chefs de la région. Ses qualités propres, dont la preuve réside dans les ressources qu'il tire d'un pays étendu et peuplé, le font apparaître comme ayant les qualités nécessaires à la fois à la propagation de la civilisation et au développement du commerce. (Chief -Fo- Njoya for whom the title of Lamido is already used is a friend of everything German. He has shown many times how he is devoted to the German cause. The personal authority of this man, the relatively big size of his position and the intelligence of his conception of things place him over and above all sacral rulers in the area. His personal character derived from natural resources of a large and populated territory has developed in him the necessary capabilities for the propagation of civilisation and the development of trade)*".

The sacral ruler was more interested in the fullness of the meaning of Same's stories than in getting insight into the German language or education. However, the nobles of the community were interested in mission schools, literacy and knowledge. *Fo Njoya* gave land, provided pupils for the schools, devoted himself as did his council to the spirituality of the missionary, reduced the Grassfields week of eight days to seven with Sunday as the unique resting day and no more two as it was in other Grassfields communities. He put his script at the disposal of the missionary, offering his time, heart and wisdom to the service of the Gospel. He succeeded in making Christianity a palace religion. However, he was not yet ready to help to expand it to the Bamun countryside and to the other Grassfields territories. He was interested in the translation of the religious heritage of the Germans into Bamun. The missionaries' readiness to learn the Bamun language attracted *Fo Njoya* who taught them the secret of his script and they copied together the main Bible stories and Christian songs for the pupils in the mission stations and for those who attended the royal school. *Fo Njoya* legitimised the missionary's spiritual authority and was not ashamed to be his hearer and translator. The missionary's catechism was shaped by the ruler's questions and he transmitted quite quickly to the leaders of the Bamun society the content of the Christian doctrine. These Bamun leaders naturally became the first African non-baptised catechists under the guidance and support of the Basel missionaries.

The Bamun people were satisfied with the missionaries' answers to their spiritual thirst. One of the missionaries, Gohring, acknowledged their Christian spiritual services by admitting royal pupils to the sacraments. The more the leaders taught and communicated the Christian doctrine, the more they were aware of the possibility of

becoming Christians themselves and they formulated their intention to be baptised. In 1913, they asked for full membership. Evidently, *Fo Njoya* did not need the missionary to enjoy the benefits of German civilisation.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁸⁰ Pictures of the Kaiser, and that of *Fo Njoya* as found in Basel Mission archives.



P. 6. Kaiser Wilhelm Federick II of Germany and *Fo* Njoya of Bamun Cameroon

He needed the meaning of the Christian doctrine to locate himself in the general knowledge of God. He got it and asked to be made a Christian. In Bamun, the acquisition of values belonging to Europeans did not go with the conversion to Christianity. *Fo* Njoya, with Mama and Wamben of Bamun, appeared to be the first African modern theologians. He was the first Grassfields sacral ruler who understood the Christian Gospel, devoted his time and knowledge to putting it into writing, decided to follow Christ and shared his conviction with others. The missionary, Gohring, considered him as the greatest missionary in Grassfields. The ruler was surprised that the missionary was not able to care after a lot of students. Those who were not selected by the missionary were cared for by the ruling class with the same programme prepared by the missionary. *Fo* Njoya had at the beginning of his school five hundred pupils and not sixty like the missionary.⁴⁸¹ He was one of the best catechists and trained a lot of Christians. The missionary publicised the Bamun script,

⁴⁸¹ Sons and daughters selected by the missionary were accommodated at the mission station. They were free from the traditional life and the missionary applied on them the principles of the "Christian village".

life and customs. A lot of photos in the Basel Mission relating to Bamun featured *Fo Njoya*. The missionaries hoped to evangelise the Bamun population through the *Fo*. He had opened the door of sacral rule to Christian teaching. The religious head was the ruler and *Fo Njoya* was given the mission keys when the Germans were defeated in 1914. In the end, the missionary expressed his intention and appreciation to *Fo Njoya* by handing over to him the keys to the Church in Bamun.

Wives, women, princes, princesses, mothers and the queen mother, embraced the new faith. The Christian community was entirely juvenile and feminine without male adults as members. However, men were translators of the substance of the message. They could have easily got full membership with the missionary. The missionary had the power of selection and of declaring someone Christian or not. The sacrament was not administered to those who asked for it but to those whom the missionary had chosen. This seemed to be at the margin of the biblical instruction about the administration of the sacraments. Baptism for instance, became an award, and not a tool for the “discipling of the nation” as it was intended by Jesus and as we shall seek to show later on in this work. On the coast, Munz continued with Fuller’s method of considering baptised polygamous rulers as full members of the Church. But since he criticised the Jamaican way, the subsequent Basel missionary wanted to apply the principle of non-participation of polygamous persons in the Christian sacrament.

The non-baptised catechists of the royal school asked to be baptised following the missionary’s appreciation of those they had trained. They were: *Fo Njoya*, *Nji Mouliom*, *Njinka*, *Njindassa’*, *Lomumbou*, *Nji Momkouop*, *Njikam*, *Njidam*,

Mokoumie, and members of the royal family starting with Mama and Wamben.⁴⁸² The missionary asked those Bamun leaders to divorce their many wives and to keep only one if they wanted to participate in the sacraments. They were upset, with the exception of *Fo Njoya*. *Fo Njoya* chose among his wives the one with whom he wished to be baptised, and the day was fixed. The nobles were not in agreement with *Fo Njoya* but he insisted on going ahead. His chosen wife was already in the chapel waiting for him. However, the kingmakers stopped him on the way. He asked them to allow him this act but they started singing war songs. After *Njoya* had crossed the river and entered the mission territory, one of the kingmakers went forward, drew a line with his weapon and said to *Fo Njoya* his sacral ruler: “we (inclusive pronoun – we and you-) are not moving forward beyond this line. Either we go back with you alive or with your head if you cross it.”⁴⁸³ *Fo Njoya* turned back and they held an emergency meeting about Christianity. Nobody questioned its relevance for the Bamun people but they found the monogamy attached to it subversive. They decided to discuss it with the missionary.

When the waiting missionary did not see *Njoya*, he baptised the selected wife. This was not only a breakthrough in *Njoya*'s intimate life, but it was a great frustration for the ruler and his entourage who saw it as refusing something to the nobles and rulers who were asking for it and giving it to the children, women, untitled and poor in the society. Gohring, the missionary, was developing a rival leadership. People felt it and were preparing to maintain their position as social regulators.

“Le roi vit certainement d’un mauvais oeil la formation des personnalités qui s’affirmèrent en face de certaines obligations de la coutume ancestrale. Les

⁴⁸² Mfochive, Joseph, *L’Ethique Chrétienne*, p. 144.

⁴⁸³ Interview with Pouomkouso Samuel, Douala-New-Deido, May 13, 1999, 12h15-17h30.

chrétiens de la famille royale n'allaient plus au palais pour subir leurs rites d'initiation (the king did not appreciate the formation of challenging personalities who demonstrated freedom of participation into ancestral obligatory customs. Christians from royal family refused to come to the palace for the initiation rite)".⁴⁸⁴

Fo Njoya persecuted many Christians but nothing was said about his own mother. She remained a Christian until her death. Many untouched princes and princesses challenged successfully the palace decision to practise the Islamic religion in place of Christianity.

"La responsabilité de l'individu était déterminée par le lien qui le rattachait aux ancêtres et au roi. Le lien unissant le roi à l'individu conférait à ce dernier la liberté de l'action personnelle. Hors de ce lien qui unissait l'individu au roi, aux ancêtres et à Dieu, la liberté n'existait pas. (One's responsibility was determined by the quality of one's link with the ancestors and with the ruler. The link between the sacral ruler and the individual gave him the freedom to act personally. Apart from the relationship with the ancestors, the ruler and God, there was no freedom of personal decision)".⁴⁸⁵

They were not aware that the missionary had developed the individual personality of women, children and mothers. In time of open conflict, it was difficult for a royal to mistreat his own Christian child, his beloved wife or his mother if the ruling class wanted to revert to something else. They oriented their action towards non-family members.

The struggle was between the missionary and the traditional leaders. They met many times with the missionary who held fast to his principles. The mission considered polygamous marriage as oppressive, exploitative and unchristian. Missionaries were diametrically opposed to it and fought desperately to discourage polygamy. The polygamous marriage run by the leaders had been the greatest hindrance to Church and traditional state relations. Pro-Islamic members of the ruling

⁴⁸⁴ Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 104.

⁴⁸⁵ Mfochive, Joseph, *L'Ethique Chrétienne*, p. 158.

class presented Islam as a non-offending religion for the Bamun polygamous marriage system. The members of the sacral rule hierarchy started to distance themselves and the content of the teaching in the royal school from the missionary's. Gradually, their family doors were closed to the Christian influence as the missionary spread it. The faithful friends of *Fo Njoya* began to turn away from the missionary. The Christian mission was losing the support of the male leaders who controlled every aspect of the Bamun life and culture. When the missionary eventually left the field, they became persecutors of the baptised. The ruling class now had converted and prepared people for sacraments. The converts were their sons and daughters and mainly their wives and mothers. However, the missionary did not allow them to take part in the sacraments. Yet, they were ready to make some changes when consulted. As a result of this one problem which confronted Christian ethics as understood by the mission, the missionary underestimated the spiritual contribution of the Bamun ruling class in shaping the condition for participating in the sacrament.

4- An unusual missionary in Bandjoun: Friederich Spellenberg

Bandjoun, to some extent, was special. This sacral rule experienced somewhat special events. It was difficult for any new thing to come directly to Bandjoun. It had to start first with the neighbouring grouping, thus given the Bandjoun ample time to analyse it and to find ways to go about it. While Christianity was the business of the sacral ruler and palace people in Fumban, in Bandjoun it was limited to the internal management of the compounds of high-ranking notables. In fact, the long time traditional royal politics between Bali and Bandjoun received fresh impetus with the coming of the Germans and of Basel Mission. When the Germans adopted the Bali as

military allies and provided them with guns, the Bali sent 250 out of 2000 rifles to Bandjoun. When Zintgraff was not allowed to visit neighbouring political units, he made a return trip to Bandjoun with Bali soldiers. There he left a picture of Jesus at the Last Supper with his disciples.⁴⁸⁶ The explorer was in favour of the evangelisation of Cameroon by the Basel Mission which the colonial office had selected from the beginning for the religious education of Cameroonians. The heart of Grassfields Mountains was not touched by the German military. They moved from the littoral through Mamfe reaching Bali, and going on to Fumban. Or they could go through Nkongsamba Bakossi, Dschang, Mbouda and Bagham to Fumban. From there, the short cut to the coast was through Bangangte, Bazou, Yabassi and Douala; Or from Bangangte, through Bazou, Yabassi, Loum and Kumba to Buea, the capital.⁴⁸⁷ Communities on the Plateau were in contact with the neighbours and had some knowledge of what was going on. However, they enjoyed more independence. The colonial Government decided to maintain its presence in the area.

The Germans opened a military station in Bana and in Dschang. The Bafoussam area was still untouched and no European knew exactly what was going on there. Information was obtained through Bali and Bamun. Bana and Dschang were portrayed as places of torture, imprisonment and loss of freedom. However, the Bandjoun ruler used his good relations with Bali and through his ruler with the Germans to take the lead among the traditional leaders and used the new military posts to gain prominence. People from the Bafoussam area were interested in the

⁴⁸⁶ Slageren mentioned this picture in his book but could not trace its origin which is now established in the person of the German explorer and colonial agent Zintgraff.

⁴⁸⁷ See Dieterle Paul, *Paul Dieterle 1890-1982; Souvenir du Cameroun; 1920-1946*, unpublished document.

activities of the traders and farmers. Carriers and farmers were in keen competition with their German bosses. White shops in Dschang, Bana, Bamenda and Fumban were soon taken over by the Bafoussam.⁴⁸⁸ Young boys were sent to school in Fumban, Bana, Dschang, Bali and Bandjoun. Those in Bandjoun were from different classes in the ruling hierarchy. Those sent from Bandjoun were royals, sons of nobles and those who had relatives in the palace.

Among the second generation of students in Bali, were six from Bandjoun including three princes. Students were sent every year in increasing number. When there was a need to establish new schools, the Bali students were recruited to help white missionaries, the Bandjoun sacral ruler requested that a school be opened in Bandjoun. He sent his diplomats to negotiate the terms with *Fo* Fonyonga. Ernst, who was touring the whole of the Grassfields territory at the time, came to Bandjoun through Bangou and Bayangam. If Bandjoun was a possible Christian Mission station, it was because the traditional leaders of the time, Fonyonga and *Fo* Njoya, knew the importance of Bandjoun political unit under the leadership of *Fo* Fotso Massu'dom. In line with the traditional politics, *Fo* Fotso requested a Bali prince as teacher in Bandjoun. Surely Fonyonga had influenced the appointment and posting of Elias Lima⁴⁸⁹ in Bandjoun. Lima, the Basel Mission teacher, was well known in Bandjoun.⁴⁹⁰ He came simultaneously with Isaac Ndeyo from Baleven sacral rule. They worked hard with the palace to have their house and classroom built. They

⁴⁸⁸ Bafoussam is a group of 21 villages where Bandjoun, Baham, Bayangam, Bamoungoum, Batie, Badenkop, Bahouang, Batoufam, Baleng and Bafoussam are leading.

⁴⁸⁹ He named his first son after the sacral ruler of Bandjoun Fotso, which in the Bali version became Lima Forcho who was once the Cameroonian ambassador in Saudi Arabia. The current ruler in Bali is a grandson of Lima. The Queen mother is a daughter of Lima.

⁴⁹⁰ He was the classmate of Bouopda Magne, a prince who failed to be the next sacral ruler in Bandjoun because of his training in Bali and his services as one of the black managers in a German farm in Melon.

recruited and taught 240 pupils each year for two years before the coming of a white missionary. Striebel, the German Basel missionary, in Bangwa supervised their work in Bandjoun. The ruler preferred working with Lima and Ndeyo to cooperating with Striebel from Bangwa. The posting of African Basel missionaries was a matter for negotiation between traditional rulers and this strengthened their diplomatic relationships.

Striebel himself pressurised the Basel Mission hierarchy in Cameroon to post a missionary to Bandjoun because of the presence of the Roman Catholics. The Basel Mission predicted the denominational conflict with the Roman Catholic Church when they commented on the departure of the first eight missionaries sent by the Pope on October 1, 1890. It was said of the situation:

“Voilà donc la lutte entre les deux églises, si préjudiciable pour l'évangélisation des peuples païens, transportée aussi dans ce champ où la mission de Bâle trouve actuellement un accueil si réjouissant. Là comme ailleurs, ils (missionnaires catholiques) s'efforceront avant tout de frapper au cœur le protestantisme, à moins que le gouvernement allemand n'assigne à chaque église son territoire particulier (We have the conditions for conflict between the two churches that is so detrimental to the evangelisation of pagan people, also transported onto the field where the Basel Mission is presently happily welcomed. Like elsewhere, they (the Catholic missionaries) will aim to strike at the heart of Protestantism unless the German government confines each church to a particular territory)”.⁴⁹¹

This fear became real in Bandjoun. Even though Catholics came later, they also decided to be established where the Basel Mission had already opened schools. The ruling class in Bandjoun had to satisfy them both but select only one to quench their own spiritual thirst. The Basel Mission won out the struggle against the Roman Catholic missionaries thanks to the Grassfields teachers, Lima and Ndeyo. The headquarters of the Basel Mission sent Rev Gottlieb Amman as medical missionary in

⁴⁹¹ “Cameroun”, in, *Nouvelles*, Basel Mission magazine, 1890, p. 383.

February 1913. In March of the same year Friederich Spellenberg followed him for church planting and evangelisation. Students including royals were sent in large numbers to *Jiomghuo*, the only modern education centre of the region. With the presence of Spellenberg, students came from many communities. He recruited them during his tours. In less than three months, their number rose from 240 to 700.

Friederich Spellenberg⁴⁹² was a special missionary. Controversial in character and, therefore, prone to conflict in interpersonal human relations, Spellenberg was not easy to manage. He seemed to be happy with a non-constitutional stance or practices. Full of initiative, he liked to try new ways and to face new challenges. His way of coping with the evangelised was often to do so away from the regulated duties or attitudes. He was in favour of using both indigenous and German languages in schools according to the government policy and not according to missionary policy. In Lobethal, instead of using the Douala language, Spellenberg preferred using Bakoko an indigenous language. This was against the missionary principle of choosing an indigenous language and considering it as Mission language to be learnt by everybody everywhere. Dynamic and critical, he often got his superior in the missionary hierarchy into difficult situations. Free in his thinking and attitude, he had little support among the missionaries. Reports about him were far from good, and Basel was worried about the conflict among missionaries. In 1910, he was recalled to Basel and because of what he knew people had written about him, refused to go, even though he deserved a year's holiday in Germany having been in Cameroon since his arrival in 1902. He thereafter established himself as an independent missionary. He

⁴⁹² His elder brother, Gottlieb Spellenberg, had better human and professional relations. He was also a very good photographer.

was honoured with the Governor Erbemaier's visit on his way to Fumban as a sign of his good relationship with the colonial administration.

He then decided to go to the most suspicious and frightening area where there was no military station or German administrative post. People there were so hostile to the colonialists and Germans were punishing them in their thousands. At Baboni, the missionary Spellenberg was able to introduce the Gospel freely with a personal understanding of the meaning of making disciples for Jesus. During his friendly conversation with the ruler and his nobles, he drank raphia wine with them. While they were together pouring libation to the ancestors, Spellenberg introduced a discussion on biblical lessons for all of them. He observed that there was no group where leaders did not pour libation to ancestors.⁴⁹³ When he joined them in pouring libation, they were more receptive than when he was delivering a doctrinal sermon. He had a learning attitude and could appreciate the moral, religious and spiritual values of ancestral religion, which is the basis of the unity the people needed for their communal life. He was interested in art work for the building of the church, classrooms and houses for teachers, and he used the traditional architecture and the mission station looked like a Grassfields palace compound. He had recruited on a permanent basis an artist from Baham for the decoration of the church.

This new missionary attitude, surprisingly, resulted in Spellenberg's condemnation and dismissal, and caused much frustration to the converts in Lobethal

⁴⁹³ *“On ne rencontre guère un chef qui ne fasse pas des libations aux ancêtres. Je me suis adapté à cette habitude. Qu'est-ce que ferait Jésus? Il ferait la même chose. Le vin de palme est une boisson de réconciliation, qui dissipe toute colère des vivants et des morts. Par le vin de palme on devient plus proche des gens que par une prédication doctrinaire. (There is no sacral ruler who does not pour libation to the ancestors. I made myself at home with them. What could Jesus do? He would have behaved the same. Palm wine is a drink for reconciliation which removes all the anger from the hearts of the living and dead. Through palm wine, one is closer to people than through a doctrinal sermon.)”* Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 115.

and Magamba. When this missionary “black sheep” reconciled with the Basel Mission, he was posted to Bandjoun as second missionary in charge of church planting where he continued to apply his way of carrying out the mission enterprise, although now with more tact and success.

In Bandjoun, he argued for teaching in the indigenous language and not in Bali which he did not know. He started to teach in both German and Bandjoun languages. Rev. Amman, the head of the Bandjoun mission station was a nurse who had also learnt Bali, was faithful to the Basel Mission principles and could not initiate anything without the approval of the hierarchy in Bamun or in Bali. He proved to be weaker than Spellenberg who overshadowed Amman’s personality. Clashes occurred between them and Amman was sent to Babungo. This conflict between the missionaries was detrimental for the evangelistic work. The healing aspect of mission work, which attracted the parents through their children and for which the missionaries won their support when they were satisfied, was cut off in Bandjoun and its surrounding area. There were more than twenty-five independent groups to be cared for by one missionary. The mission involved schoolwork, church planting, the healing activity and Bible translation. It was difficult for one person to cover it all. With Spellenberg’s willingness to replace Bali with Bandjoun, Elias Lima, who worked under the instruction of the Bali ruler, did not hide his support for Amman. This put him in a difficult position. For the first time, the Bandjoun ruler preferred a white man, Spellenberg, to the beloved teacher with royal connection, Elias Lima.

Spellenberg taught more German than Bandjoun which he had to put into writing. His helpers were Samuel Youmbi and Isaac Ndeyo. Working with more than

twenty five communities all alone, he was less focused and did not get beyond the translation of the Apostle's Creed, the Lord's Prayer and the Ten Commandments for the pupils' use. However, he gained the support of the German colonial government and the Bandjoun sacral rulers. By so doing, he counteracted the influence of the Roman Catholics in Bandjoun. But at the same time, he had no friend among his own missionary colleagues. Alone in the field Spellenberg invaded the conscience of the Bandjoun people and the neighbouring groups with the freedom of religious understanding and expression as well as the freedom to express personal faith.

Spellenberg was as difficult to handle as the Bandjoun he dealt with.⁴⁹⁴ When Basel opened a school in Bayangam without informing *Fo Fotso*, the Bandjoun sacral ruler, Fotso reported the case to the colonial military leaders in Dschang and the Bayangam sacral ruler languished in jail till the Basel Mission came to his rescue. For a Grassfieds sacral ruler, hosting a missionary was a demonstration of power to fellow equals. For the Bandjoun who received him, it seemed that the princely teacher from Bali had prepared the way for Spellenberg who was toeing the same line. This strengthened the political relationship between Bandjoun and Bali. People built the church compound in the same way they built their palace so that the physical outlook of the two structures was alike. The traditional diplomats established the church at *Jiomghuo*, the foreigners' quarters.

The mission station was considered as being above the secret associations, just

⁴⁹⁴ When the military chief of Dschang came to make sure that all the groups were under German rule, Baham people started fighting. They were defeated and *Fo Fotso* from Bandjoun used his position with the Germans to stop the fight, claiming that Baham was under him and that the Germans had to consult him in future attacks in the area. Showing them the guns Zintgraff brought to Bandjoun, Fotso let the German go with the knowledge that he was paramount to so many independent groups. This negotiation was outside the Basel Mission influence.

as the *Fo* was above all of them. The *Mkam* who were the members of secret associations would put on their masks from their homes as they went to palace meetings and removed them only at the entrance of the palace compound. With the coming of the white missionary, when they approached the mission territory, they reacted the same way they did when they entered sacral ruling territory by removing their mask. Spellenberg acknowledged this honour by following the traditional rites of people of his age and could naturally hold the title of *Tajuighyuo*.⁴⁹⁵ He danced with people in the traditional marketplace after he had fed the leaders of the village and successfully performed the necessary rites.

The way Spellenberg adapted to the traditional life turned the Mission work into the kingmakers' business. They were the ones hearing, judging and informing the ruler. They went to church, and the sermons they considered helpful for the *fondom* were repeated under their arrangement at the palace to the ruler, his wives, servants and children. The creation of a new mission station in another quarter was the traditional officers' business. The Basel Mission was for the nobles. They were not going to church for baptism but to gain new insights on how to maintain peace in their compounds and wield power more effectively. In short, Jesus was for the nobles and their compounds.

Spellenberg did not rush into baptising people as the Roman Catholics did. He organised his work following the Grassfields social structure with the help of the local teachers and the schoolboys. He was like the ruler and the local teachers his officers. The pupils guarded the mission the same way the palace was kept by

⁴⁹⁵ This title was given to a loyal subject who had proved to be economically and socially reliable by feeding the whole village and by touring the marketplace heading at the head of a dancing party organised by the ruling class in his honour.

watchful servants. The Gospel could do wonders. Spellenberg introduced mission work in Bandjoun without destroying the people's customs. Nevertheless, because the pupils came from different communities, they quickly developed new identity which excluded the traditional people. Consequently, the authority of the ruler, the kingmakers and the ruling class as social legislators was subverted. However, the First World War helped them to regain their lost power over the pupils. Many of them ran away to Nkongsamba, Douala, Yaounde, Ebolowa, Kumba, Buea, Tiko and Tombel as the persecution of former German pupils, military allies and civil servants started. Those who could not change their Grassfields communities by coming under the authority of another ruler were likely to be eliminated. The death of *Fo* Fotso, the Bandjoun ruler, offered an opportunity to the French, the new masters, to give prominence to the Roman Catholics by imposing Joseph Kamga, a contestant to the Bandjoun throne, as the new *Fo* against the kingmakers' decision. To save the internal harmony in the *fondom*, they quickly adjusted themselves with the intruding colonial power.

5- Paul Dieterle and Fo Kamga in Bandjoun : Open rejection of royals as part of the missionary movement

A- Dieterle's knowledge of Grassfields before he was sent there

Paul Dieterle was a Basel missionary from German-speaking Switzerland. He was ordained on July 13, 1914 and sent to Ghana in March 1915 for three years of ministry in Abokobi. Abokobi was an entirely Christian village built after the pattern of Korntal in Wuerttemberg. The Paris Evangelical Missionary Society which

replaced the Basel Mission in Cameroon, was in need of missionaries, and Paul Dieterle, Schreiber, Bartsch and Frey were proposed to go to the Mission House in Paris for three months. They arrived at Douala on August 30, 1920. On their arrival, it was rumoured that:

*“Les Bâlois sont arrivés et une foule nombreuse vint nous saluer nous exprimant sa joie. Seules les paroisses catholiques firent circuler le bruit que les Allemands étaient de retour dans un but d’espionnage. (Basel missionaries had arrived and a crowd came to welcome us expressing their joy. Only Catholic congregations spread the news that the Germans were back as spies)”*⁴⁹⁶

Dieterle worked on the coast and made his first trip to the Grassfields Mountains in 1924, invited by Rev Jacob Modi Din.⁴⁹⁷ For four years, as president of the missionary conference, his knowledge of Grassfields was gained through the reports on the persecution of Christians by the sacral rulers such as *Fo* Njoya in Bamun, *Fo* Njike in Bangangte and *Fo* Fonyonga in Bali. In 1925, he was able to intervene to overturn the negative royal decision against Christians in Bafut. On his way back to Douala, as he entered the forest leaving the high grass fields, he expressed his feelings in the following words:

“La forêt m’a englouti de manière pesante: il m’était difficile de quitter ces tribus libres du nord, sur les collines ouvertes au vent, hommes libres de construire leurs cases et de mener leur vie tribale, malgré l’autorité pesante de leurs chefs, qui représentaient le pouvoir politique et religieux” (The forest surrounded me heavily : it was difficult to leave those free tribes of the north, situated on hills opened to the wind, where lived men free to build their houses and to run their tribal life in spite of the strong authority of rulers who symbolised political and religious power).⁴⁹⁸

In 1926, Dieterle was posted to Yabassi where he could visit the Grassfields communities on the forest borders. In his memoirs, he wrote:

⁴⁹⁶ Dieterle, *Paul Dieterle 1890-1982; Souvenir du Cameroun; 1920-1946*, unpublished, p. 1.

⁴⁹⁷ One of the three Cameroonian pastors ordained in Basel in 1912.

⁴⁹⁸ Dieterle, *Souvenir du Cameroun*, p. 6.

“Un des problèmes qui se posait à nous était la présence de chefs puissants au nord de Yabassi. C'étaient des populations descendues du nord en partie depuis le Grassland (One of the problems we faced was the presence of powerful rulers north of Yabassi. This population came originally from the Grassland)”.⁴⁹⁹

In Yabassi he was involved in eight cases of protective intervention to defend individuals and groups of Christians against the sacral rulers. To encourage Christians to challenge the authority of their ruler, he baptised them.⁵⁰⁰ Then, he went on to explain how the struggle between the Gospel and “forces of darkness” began. Young evangelists courageously attempted to introduce the Gospel in their areas and everywhere, small Christian communities were springing up which he had to visit, care for and protect against the “cruel influence” of traditional rulers. Once, Dieterle had to rush to a ruler’s palace to save a Christian young girl from a “ruler’s greediness”.

“Je me suis rendu chez lui: il m'a reçu amicalement au milieu de sa cour, mais parlait de manière assez arrogante, insistait beaucoup sur l'importance de sa tribu et de ses nombreuses sociétés secrètes qui maintenaient l'ordre; j'en ai conclu qu'il se sentait loin du pouvoir colonial et croyait avoir tous les pouvoirs. Mon cœur était plein de reconnaissance envers Dieu d'avoir été capable d'aider ces chrétiens persécutés et d'avoir pu trouver moyen de leur redonner courage au milieu de ce monde païen hostile. Et jusqu'à la première guerre cette région avait mauvaise réputation et les Allemands l'évitaient. Ce pouvoir des chefs était par ailleurs contesté par les jeunes qui étaient descendus à la cote et avaient appris à connaître le monde libre; beaucoup étaient devenus chrétiens. De retour chez eux ils avaient de la peine à se plier aux coutumes païennes et appartenaient à une autorité

⁴⁹⁹ Dieterle, *Souvenir du Cameroun*, p. 9.

⁵⁰⁰ “J'ai ainsi décidé de baptiser dès le lendemain les quatre personnes les plus concernées par cette épreuve. L'église était pleine à craquer et la place était pleine de curieux qui voulaient voir ce qui allait se passer car le chef avait juré de tuer tous ceux qui se feraient baptiser. J'essayais de leur donner du courage par ces mots: Je suis le bon berger, je connais mes brebis et les miens me connaissent! Mes brebis entendent ma voix et me suivent et personne ne les enlèvera de ma main” (Then I decided to baptise the following morning four people who were obviously more concerned with the situation. The church hall was packed with curious people who had come to witness what would happen because the sacral ruler had sworn to kill all those who would go for baptism. I tried to encourage them with the following words: I am the Good Shepherd, I know my sheep and my sheep know me! My sheep hear my voice and follow me and nobody can snatch them from my hands). Dieterle, *Souvenir du Cameroun*, p. 10.

différente, divine, bien supérieure à celle des chefs. Des querelles étaient donc à prévoir entre les chrétiens et les chefs. Il est donc devenu rapidement évident que nous ne pouvions pas laisser seules ces communautés encore fragiles. Ainsi la conférence missionnaire de 1926 proposa d'y envoyer le Pasteur Robert pour un an: il parcourut le pays et fonda la station de Bafoussam; le Pasteur Christol le remplaça encore pour un an” (I went to him: he received me in a friendly manner in the middle of his courtyard. He spoke quite arrogantly, insisting on the significance of his tribe, and the huge number of secret societies for maintaining order; I concluded that he felt he was beyond the influence of the colonial power and believed that he had absolute powers. I was grateful to God for the ability to help the persecuted Christians, and to give them courage in the midst of a hostile and pagan world. Up to the First World War, this region had been notorious and the Germans feared it. This authority of rulers was contested by the young people who had gone to the coast and had learnt to be free; a lot of them had become Christians. Once back home, they had a lot of problems in following the pagan customs because they had knowledge of a different divine authority, far superior to that of their traditional rulers. Quarrels between Christians and sacral rulers were inevitable. It is obvious that we cannot abandon these still fragile communities. Therefore, the missionary conference of 1926 proposed Rev Robert’s transfer there for a year: he toured the area and opened the Bafoussam station. Rev Christol replaced him for another year).⁵⁰¹

In Dieterle’s writings, the Bafoussam area with Bandjoun at the centre and comprising the entire Bamileke tribes, needed a permanent white missionary to protect individuals and groups of Christians against their rulers. This view of the traditional leadership as a target of struggle made Dieterle develop a rather negative attitude towards everything royal.

Why was Dieterle so conscious and so ready to protect individuals and groups of Christians against their African rulers? On the one hand, a Swiss background gives a clue. The specific political culture of Switzerland was that of people who exercised sovereignty over laws governing them. One Ambassador of Switzerland explained it in the following words;

“the ideas of liberalism, first tried out during the French revolution after 1789, then stifled by Napoleon’s autocratic rule and, after his ouster, rejected

⁵⁰¹ Dieterle, *Souvenir du Cameroun*, pp. 9, 10, 11, 12, 14.

by a temporary restoration of the *ancien régime*, had been gradually gaining ground again. In 1848, a series of liberal revolutions were attempted. They all failed except in Switzerland, where a new constitution transformed the old system of loose confederate alliances into a modern federal state. Its major novelty was the legislative referendum whereby a certain number of individuals -actually 50,000- can demand that a popular vote be held on whether to accept or reject any law newly adopted by parliament. The people thus became sovereign rulers of their country".⁵⁰²

Dieterle came from this unique country which had experienced a people's freedom in political matters. He was not German like his predecessors who had come from areas ruled by princes and kings, but a Swiss for whom sacral monarchic rule was a danger to one's religious and political freedom. Swiss democracy, which for him was the best, was also good enough for the Christians in Grassfields. This was why he devoted all his life to it. However, the African sacral rulers like the European colonial agents were too strong for a sudden change in attitudes.

On the other hand, his Pietist background and his ministry in Abokobi reinforced Dieterle's negative attitude towards Grassfields rulers. Pietism, as we saw, proclaimed the good news for individual rather than universal salvation. This principle resulted in a separatist attitude towards the world and in seeking personal purity in isolation. The idea of the Christian village was invented to suit the claims of Pietists who wanted to leave the society to start afresh a new social and church life without reference to any previous tradition. Not only did Dieterle come from this background but he also started his missionary activity in an African Christian village. In Abokobi he was conscious that it was possible to create a Christian village in Africa. Interestingly enough, Dieterle appreciated the linguistic work of Johannes

⁵⁰² *Presbyterian Training College Akropong Akuapem: 150th Anniversary, 1848-1988*, Souvenir Brochure, p. 10.

Zimmermann, the founder of the Abokobi Christian village who, had produced scientific books in the Ga language, followed by Johannes Christaller in the Akuapem *Twi* language. Out of this three-year ministry in Abokobi, was born his dream to found a Christian village and to author a linguistic work in an African language. He saw his opportunity when he was sent to the Bamileke area on Grassfields Mountains.

B- Situation of the Christian Mission in the Grassfields on the arrival of Paul Dieterle

The mission board in Douala-Cameroon decided, as a matter of urgency, to create a permanent mission station in Bandjoun by 1926. The expression Dieterle used to describe the Grassfields sacral leadership was, “*labyrinthe, et cruelle influence*” (labyrinth, completely closed, dangerously unknown milieu, abandoned at the mercy of cruel exercise of power) and, similarly, exhibited a great deal of negative apprehension for compounds and people’s houses.⁵⁰³ On his way to Bandjoun as permanent missionary in 1928, he wrote;

“Nous étions émerveillés par toutes ces beautés, mais aussi plein d’appréhension à l’idée d’être si seuls et si pauvres, et surtout sans aucune autorité particulière, dans ce pays inconnu, peuplé d’environ 400 000 personnes” (We were deeply impressed by the beautiful countryside but at the same time, we felt so lonely and inadequate and especially without any specific authority in this unknown country with a population of about 400,000).⁵⁰⁴

He felt that he was not competent enough to carry on with the mission work. He

⁵⁰³ “*Ces cases étaient un univers complètement fermé. Il était typique de cette population de chercher ainsi une indépendance à l’intérieur des concessions, malgré la puissance absolue des chefs et un esprit tribal très fort*” (These houses were a closed universe. It was typical for these people to seek some independence inside their compounds away from the absolute power of the ruler and a strong tribal spirit).

⁵⁰⁴ Dieterle, used the word “love” for: Modi Din, p. 6, Njoky, pp. 8 and 11, the ruler of Diboum, p. 9, Debarge, p. 19, and in p.17 a Biblical quotation. For the sacral rulers, he used adjectives like: cruel, heathen, labyrinth, complex, completely closed, abandoned and tyrannical or at the mercy of the rules.

needed to find some other means than love, for in his document, this word is used four times Just in relation to missionaries who had impressed him. He had come to fight against the rulers by protecting what was Christian. He considered the area as virgin territory without regard to the prior work of his fellow Basel missionaries, nor to the fact that Christian preaching had never stopped in Bandjoun, Bangwa, Bana and Bagam since the Basel students and a great number of kingmakers had known “Jesus of the compounds” following to the evangelistic activities of Spellenberg and the unbaptised Basel pupils trained in Bali. They had known the missionary in the secret society⁵⁰⁵ and not only at the mission station. Together with the missionary, they had poured libation to the ancestors before Dieterle’s arrival. They had designed and built a mission station after the pattern of their palaces.

Christians and non-Christians in Bandjoun, in particular, knew also of Robert, the first French Protestant missionary who had helped the Bandjoun ruler to own a car in 1926. People did not trust Deterle as they had trusted Youmbi Samuel who kept the first station working until the “return” of Spellenberg. Robert was a credit to the community as he encouraged Bandjoun leaders to help build a new school and revived the existing ones. Youmbi, in the absence of a missionary, created a new Basel school in Pou’-Bandjoun with the sacral ruler’s support. People worked joyfully for these schools and Robert was busy with the new station in Bouo on the border of Bandjoun and Bafoussam.⁵⁰⁶ He trained Tayou Jacques, Youmbi Samuel,

⁵⁰⁵ It is only in Badenkop; one of the Grassfields community that this Spellenberg practice had been kept till date and there is an official chaplain for the secret society who is officially nominated by the “*président régional* (presbytery chairman)” of the *Eglise Evangelique du Cameroun*.

⁵⁰⁶ Dieterle wrongly attached the station in Bouo to Bafoussam. There is no historical evidence of the Bafoussam ruler delimitating the mission land. Dieterle had the land delimited by the Bandjoun ruler. But Bouo, where the mission station was and still is, belonged to Bandjoun. If the Fo of Bafoussam did give it to Robert, he knew that Bandjoun leaders could not successfully opposed to his suggestion

Simeu Pierre, Kwankam Noe, Ngankou Abraham, Noutong Thomas, Simo Elias, and Soup dum Jacob in the French language. However, they continued to use their German Bible and the Bandjoun translation of the Lord's Prayer, the Apostle Creed and the Ten Commandments. Christol continued Robert's project by giving the African leaders of the Christian communities more freedom and more knowledge of French.

On Dieterle's arrival, his initial shock was that there was no sign of clashes between Christians and the traditional society. In fact, the Christians were enjoying royal patronage. He was never called to settle any matter between individuals nor between groups of Christians in a confrontation with the custodians of sacral rule in Bandjoun. As a Basel missionary, he probably knew about the negative comments on Spellenberg in Cameroon, in general, and in Bandjoun, in particular. Perhaps he had come prepared to operate differently. In this case, Spellenberg's success became Dieterle's failure and Spellenberg's failure became Dieterle's success. What happened was that Dieterle preached the Christ of the mission station rather than the Christ of the compounds and the secret societies.

The Bandjoun people who hosted the old new mission stations, guarded their previous understanding of the Gospel and the work of Christ from Dieterle's very early influence. By 1929, a year after his arrival, the Bandjoun people and the evangelists had come to believe that because Dieterle was not working under the same missionary organisation, he was therefore, not sent by Christ. The old Bali students who had created Christian communities in their various localities used to

because Bandjoun people were more Christian than Bafoussam and Robert had closer relationship with the Bandjoun ruler than the Bafoussam one. No Bafoussam had ever received a compensation from the missionary for the Mission station land. But the Bandjoun Palace had and the mission station was surrounded with the Bandjoun.

meet with Jacques Tayou from Bayangam as their natural leader. Dieterle's first report in Bandjoun was against Spellenberg, the first Basel missionary in the area, and against Christol, his immediate predecessor. He found that the Grassfields evangelists' spiritual freedom had come from missionaries before him. He complained in the following terms:

“L'attitude de ces évangélistes, formés par Christol, et en qui nous avions toute confiance nous a fait beaucoup de peine. Ainsi pour ces dirigeants d'Eglise, nous n'étions que des Blancs dont ils avaient besoin pour leur protection et comme aide, nous n'étions en aucune manière leur chef spirituel. Ainsi tout allait tant que nous ne nous mêlions pas de leurs habitudes et coutumes” (The attitude of these evangelists who had been trained by Christol in whom we had trusted, gave us a lot of pain. For these heads of Christian communities, we were just Whites who were there to protect and help them when they wanted it. We were by no means their spiritual leaders. Everything went well so long as we did not interfere with their customs).⁵⁰⁷

They were autonomous spiritual leaders and would passively wait for missionary instructions. This attitude troubled Dieterle who, due to his position in the mission as well as his Swiss and Pietist background, had to claim the last word in spiritual matters.⁵⁰⁸ He could no longer trust his Bamileke collaborators, and relied rather on the Bamun catechists he requested. He developed a strong paternalistic stance and his attitude towards Bamileke Christian communities as well as Bamileke

⁵⁰⁷ Dieterle, *Souvenir du Cameroun*, p. 18.

⁵⁰⁸ *“Il devenait urgent que nous sortions de notre isolement, afin de mieux connaître les mentalités et pouvoir assumer la direction spirituelle de l'œuvre. J'ai décidé de faire tout d'abord toutes mes tournées tout seul, sans les évangélistes, afin de trouver un contact plus direct avec les catéchistes et les paroisses et une meilleure ouverture. J'ai demandé ensuite à l'Eglise Bamoun de m'envoyer deux anciens catéchistes. J'étais persuadé que des étrangers qui parlaient la langue locale m'apporteraient de meilleures informations que mes propres catéchistes. Njilu fut affecté à Bafoussam, et Popwere à Bangangté”* (It became urgent for us to come out of our isolation in order to know their mentalities and to assume the role of spiritual leader. I decided to visit the communities alone without the evangelists so that I may have a direct contact with the catechists and Christians where I could be aware of what is going on. Secondly, I requested from the Bamun church two experienced catechists. I was convinced that the foreigners who speak the local language would provide me with better information than my own catechists. Njilu was posted to Bafoussam and Popwere in Bagangte). Dieterle, *Souvenir du Cameroun*, p. 18.

catechists and evangelists was harsh and strange. Clashes occurred with the local people successfully resisting the missionary's innovations in Christian ethics. Very often, a traditional ruler had to intervene to rescue Christians from the missionary's brutal and unrepentant attitude.

Before Dieterle arrived, stations built by Spellenberg had been reopened by Youmbi Samuel in Bandjoun and Jacques Tayou in Bayangam. Dieterle came to continue the work. The nobles of Bouo, eager to have another missionary, welcomed him. Youmbi and Tayou had been using the translation and the first attempt to a grammar they produced with Spellenberg. Dieterle, like Robert and Christol worked with them for the first year. When he went to the next missionary conference in 1929, he presented it, and his fellow missionaries encouraged him to use Bamun so that missionary language tests would be limited in Cameroon to just Douala and Bamun. After all, the more languages there were, the more problems missionaries would have in their language tests.

C- Dieterle in the Grassfields: 20 years of desperate struggle against Pagans and Christians in the Grassfields sacral rule

When he came back, from the 1929 missionary conference, Dieterle simply said to his collaborators, "stop working on the Bandjoun language. From now, we must use the Bamun". Jacques Tayou, who had a Bamun wife, calmly but firmly stood up and refused. None of the missionaries before him had wanted the Bamileke to submit to the Bamun in their worship of Jesus Christ. On the Grassfields Mountains, a dialect was and still is, a sign of autonomy and political independence. During the next church service, Dieterle made the same announcement and he could

not continue the service. Christians did not wait for the members of their ruling class to react. Church elders openly expressed their opposition to the decision. On Monday in school, he explained what had happened at the missionary conference and told the pupils that they were going to have to learn Bamun. A pupil from the Bagam community stood up and said, “We are not Bamun and we are in Bandjoun territory. We are here to learn French and to worship Jesus Christ”. Dieterle, as usual, called him up for the discipline of the twenty lashes. Before he could give him the first lash, however, the pupil slapped him, saying, “If the Bamun had bribed you in order to conquer us through you, we preferred to die in the war.” And he shouted: “The missionary is a Bamun warrior”. Dieterle left him, ran to his house and was very upset. Dieterle had always seen everything Bandjoun as an obstacle to his ministry.

He convened an extraordinary meeting of the evangelists but none of them was willing to go to Fumban for training as the mission conference had requested.

Then he discovered the political history of the Grassfields:

“Quand j’ai demandé, lors de la réunion du consistoire, qui voulait aller à Foumban, personne ne s’est présenté. Et ce n’est que plus tard que j’ai compris la raison de ce refus: Quatre vieux évangélistes les avaient tous réunis et leur avaient interdit d’accepter, car les Bamuns étaient leurs ennemis qui les avaient chassés des régions du nord” (When I asked them during the district meeting who was ready to go to Fumban for training, nobody volunteered. It was later on that I got to know the reason why they had all refused. Four old-experienced evangelists had gathered them and advised them to reject my proposition because the Bamun were their enemies and had chased them from their original territories in the north).⁵⁰⁹

In his memoirs, it is evident that Dieterle remained with the Bamun⁵¹⁰ version of the

⁵⁰⁹ Dieterle, *Souvenir du Cameroun*, p. 18.

⁵¹⁰ Bamun was just one of the Grassfields groups and was not the most important one. With the departure of the Germans and the division that occurred, the word “Grassfields” was officially employed in the English Cameroon, and the French divided the area into two, Bamun and Bamileke. Soon after, they again divided the Bamileke into five administrative divisions. Today, the whole

Grassfields history. In the Grassfields version, the Bamun wanted to be recognised as the paramount rulers of the whole Grassfields. They tried it with the German colonial government but they did not succeed because when the Bali ruler was first elevated to that position, the Bafut, Bansa' Bandjoun and Bamun rulers were reluctant to accept him and opposed it until *Fo* Fonyonga of Bali lost the position with the growing influence of *Fo* Njoya. Before the French arrived, people were aware of Bamoun political ambition and they were prepared to counteract it. Evangelists and pupils rejected the Bamun in order to protect their political independence vis-à-vis the Bamun. After this first attempt in 1929, Dieterle stopped working with Bandjoun translators who continued to struggle with their language in biblical teaching without the missionary. Things moved fast with the Protestant pupils Dieterle sacked from school because of their "proud" spirit and their tendency to support the Bandjoun host language. Dieterle had systematically tried to eliminate everything that was Bandjoun.

Dieterle's missionary work on the Grassfields Mountains was dominated by the struggle against the Bandjoun and the development of the Bangangte language without the contribution of the traditional leaders. Many people confused his rejection of the traditional ruling influence in the church with the dynamism of the Bandjoun. But we see things differently for in Bangwa where the palace was deeply involved in church business, their language was not chosen. In Bangangte where the language was chosen, the ruling class had nothing to do with the church. Dieterle had a natural sense of being anti-monarchist. This was a Swiss democratic type of relationship to

Grassfields covers 13 divisions with Bamun being only one of them. But they were created because of the nature of their ruler *Fo* Njoya.

power. He failed to introduce this leadership style into the Grassfields, however, he tried to relate to people.

In 1937, after 9 years in Bandjoun, Dieterle still needed an interpreter as on the first day. He would not make the Bandjoun language his operating medium because it was spoken by a “hegemonic and difficult people”. He rather encouraged the choice of one among the various dialects of the Grassfields. He organised a meeting in Bangwa on November 14, 1937 to choose a Bamileke language for church services. He had opted for Bangangte beforehand because Popwere, his trusted Bamun evangelist, was working in Bangangte, and because of Ngankou who had married a Bamun wife working in Bangwa. However, Jacques Tayou had also married a Bamun and had been a member of the Bandjoun translation committee from its beginning. During the meeting, the missionary went out but he was more present than when he was inside. For people he had prepared failed to hide the knowledge of their previous meetings with Dieterle and the whole assembly asked the missionary to choose any language, and they would accept it. Sadly, he was not mature enough to understand that no one wanted to be the missionary’s pawn against the Bandjoun. After the meeting, two weeks later, the Bandjoun ruler, *Fo Kanga* came with a draft of the grammar work in the Bandjoun language that Dieterle had refused to speak during nine years in that locality. Reluctant to help, Dieterle asked him to contact the colonial administration⁵¹¹ but the sacral ruler, *Fo Kanga* of

⁵¹¹ “Il nous apportait un manuel de grammaire Bandjoun qu’avait réalisé un de ses sujets. Nous lui avons expliqué que le choix de la langue était une affaire interne à l’Eglise Evangélique et n’avait rien de politique et qu’il fallait demander l’aide de l’administration... Je l’ai assuré de mon entier soutien à un tel effort d’alphabétisation dans sa région” (He brought a grammar of the Bandjoun language prepared by one of his subjects. We explained to him that the choice of a church language was an internal matter within the Evangelical Church and had no political connotation, and that he had better

Bandjoun, went instead to the Roman Catholics who welcomed him.⁵¹²

Curiously, Dieterle later announced the choice of the Bangangte language at the missionary conference in Douala and not at the district meeting in the Grassfields. He had chosen that particular language for personal reasons. Nobody else knew about it apart from the Bamun church leaders working in the Bamileke area. The language choice was approved by the missionary conference in December 1937. When Dieterle came back and announced that the Bangangte language had to be spoken and taught everywhere in Grassfields and also in Bandjoun, all the Christians of Bandjoun ancestry staged a walkout. Before the following Sunday, Dieterle received a letter from the Bandjoun elders saying that they would not allow the Bangangte language to be taught in Bandjoun, and that their children would not study it. In his memoirs, Dieterle wrote:

*“C’était l’annonce d’une crise grave...Les responsables d’église ont interdit aux chrétiens de venir sur la station, ainsi que d’assister aux cultes. J’étais celui qui voulait leur imposer une langue étrangère...(This was the beginning of a serious crisis...the church leaders prevented the Christians from coming to the mission station and from participating in the Sunday services. I was the one who wanted to impose on them a foreign language on them)”.*⁵¹³

In fact, what happened was that the Christians and the entire Bandjoun community considered the missionary a danger to their spiritual life and well-being. Nobody went back to him again. This meant that nobody was going to the mission station. Church services were held, but because the missionary administered the Holy Communion, nobody took it in Bandjoun from 1937 to 1942 when another missionary came to

go to the colonial administration for help...I assured him of my support for such a literacy project in his area). Dieterle, *Souvenir du Cameroun*, p. 28.

⁵¹² That grammar, with the first book in Bandjoun, was printed by the Roman Catholic press in 1941.

⁵¹³ Dieterle, *Souvenir du Cameroun*, p. 28.

replace Dieterle at the mission station in Bandjoun.

The sacral ruler employed the previously sacked pupils to teach in the government schools and some became members of his modernised traditional council. No Bandjoun connected candidate was to be ordained. Seven years of non-participation in the sacraments reinforced the positions of the two parties. The movement became popular, and even the secret societies came to the support of the Christians. Christians were representatives of both the ruling class and the traditional society in church since there was no baptism or holy communion, everyone was aware of what was happening. The Bandjoun Christians continued to believe and to spread the enduring view that Christ had nothing to do with Dieterle's attitude and deeds in Bandjoun. They had expressed openly their wish for the transfer of Dieterle out of Bandjoun territory, but he did not want to leave. Dieterle was perceived as an obstacle to people's spiritual itinerary. The extraordinary outcome of this situation was that the Bandjoun successfully developed a non-missionary Christianity such as Spellenberg had started. In the meantime, the Bandjoun and the Bayangam continued to organise the church and to participate in church meetings without Dieterle. They never missed one church meeting, but they never agreed with Dieterle either.

In 1940, there was a church meeting in Bamena to which Dieterle came alone in his vehicle. The Bandjoun delegation led by Jacques Tayou of Bayangam, went on foot. After the meeting, the missionary went back the way he came but dropped the money he collected on the road. Walking back home, Tayou found it and picked it up. At home, Dieterle could not find the money and drove back to Bamena, passing Tayou and the others on the way but not stopping. When eventually, on the way home

he stopped at their level, they asked him: "Is this the packet you are looking for?" He said: "Yes". Tayou asked him: "How much money was in it?" And he said the amount. Tayou then asked Youmbi to count the money in front of Dieterle by the roadside. The missionary was very happy and invited them to come with him in the car. But they refused, saying that they had to stop off to make a pastoral visit on their way home.

From 1937 onwards, there was an unusual growth of the Catholic Church in Bandjoun and Bayangam, with the creation of public schools around Protestant ones to save the Bandjoun from the ill-will of Dieterle who did nothing to promote the Bandjoun language. Nevertheless, in 1941, Protestant elders presented Dieterle with the grammar and the first Bandjoun books printed by Roman Catholic priests of the Sacred Heart order. The church elders proudly told Dieterle that they were waiting for his transfer to resume taking the Holy Communion. In the meantime, they were teaching their children with the very books he had refused to work at and that Protestant efforts had become Roman Catholic achievements. Dieterle was so troubled that when he was going to Bangangte after fourteen years of desperate struggle against the Bandjoun, instead of repenting, he took away with him the bell and the glass windows in the temple he helped build. When he was finally transferred to Bangangte in 1942, it was because his colleagues wanted the Bandjoun to come back to the Lord's Super and to be fully a part of the church with books in their own language.

Chapter six: Introduction of Basel Mission to sacral rule in Ghana

The first group of Basel missionaries arrived at Christianborg in Accra on December 18, 1828. They worked among a mixed population in this area where Europeans and Africans had been living together for years. They were Danish and Ga people. The Danish had not only colonial aspirations but also a great interest in the slave trade as well as in selling guns and drinks. The Europeans led an immoral life, full of debauchery and idolatry. At the time, they were expecting the missionaries ordained in Denmark and sent with the Danish king's approval to serve them. Danish subjects in particular would be surprised that, among the first batch of four missionaries, none was Danish.

They were Ferdinand Solbach, Gottlieb Holzwarth, Johannes Philip Heinke from Wuerttemberg, and Gottlieb Schmidt from Basel. Some of the missionaries worked among the Europeans and others among Africans. Although the preachers of the Good News were prepared to minister to the Africans with their training in Basel, they were not really prepared to work among their fellow Europeans who did not share the same goal. The conversion and spiritual edification of Europeans in mission fields had not yet become a serious theological issue in Christian missions and churches.

At this early stage, the missionaries limited their work to the coastal area. The Ga people around Christianborg were less traditional than the missionaries expected them to be. Their interaction with Europeans had introduced them to some elements of Western culture. They were the middlemen in the slave business. Less accustomed to farming but they earned their living both from fair commerce and from the illegal

slave trade. However, they could read and write in their language because the Danish people had produced a grammar in the Ga language. Some could attend school in the Danish castle with the Europeans and Mulattos.⁵¹⁴

The death rate was very high among the missionaries. In less than eight months, three missionaries had died leaving Johannes Heinke alone. Danish pressure and spiritual needs forced him to concentrate his energies more on the Europeans than on the Africans. The early death of missionaries on their arrival was a shock at Basel, but candidates were not discouraged. On March 2, 1832, the second group of Basel missionaries arrived at Christianborg. They were Peter Peterson Jager, Federick Heinze and Andeas Riis who was of Danish nationality. Riis was immediately appointed chaplain at the castle and had to minister to the Europeans. For three years, he would unhappily and with little success fulfil his duty as chaplain. His own people continued to buy and ship the Africans. Even with the Bible and the state law, he could not stop them from practising the slave trade. The Governor urged him to be more patriotic and less concerned with the Africans. Unfortunately, for health reasons, and for lack of an opportunity of direct contact with an African community not yet corrupted by the European mind, Riis decided to move to the Akuapem mountains. He settled at Akropong where his countryman, Paul Isert,⁵¹⁵ had

⁵¹⁴ Wilhem Johann Mueller, a chaplain at Fort Frederiksborg near Cape Coast, took great interest in African life and religion, and argued for the Bible to be translated into local languages. Two Danish chaplains based at Christianborg found the restricted boundaries of fortress life inhibiting. Johann Rask (1709-12) and H. S. Monrad (1805-9) condemned slavery and the trade that sustained it. They encouraged the African pupils enrolled in the castle school. William Amo of Axim obtained his doctorate at Wittenberg, Jacob Capitein at the University of Leiden, Frederick Svane and Jacob Protten at the University of Copenhagen. Sanneh, Lamine, *West African Christianity*, pp. 113-114.

⁵¹⁵ Referring to the Akuapem Mountains, Isert wrote in 1786: "The climate is definitely healthier than the sea coast. The high location of the land also counts. It is colder here than on the coast. The temperature dropped ten degrees as soon as I had ascended the mountain. One feels only a little wind; nevertheless, the air is clear. The Aqwapim still live like the first innocent in paradise, with little

established a project for the improvement of the African situation and had signed a contract with the paramount ruler, Abuobi Atiemo. Governor Morck approved and encouraged Riis' decision to go further in the interior.

A- Andreas Riis and Addo Dankwa I: 1835-1839; A mutual observation

When Riis was set to leave for Akropong, the governor ordered a soldier to escort him right to the destination. He also gave him a Danish flag to be hoisted at Akropong once there. Riis accepted the company of the soldier but refused to play any political role in accordance with his Pietistic background.

“Danish Governor Morck sent a Danish flag to be hoisted at Akropong as an indication that it represented the political interest and supremacy of the Danish government. But the missionary declared his stance against any involvement in Danish political ambitions and activity by refusing to hoist the flag”.⁵¹⁶

Nobody invited Riis to Akropong. He chose to settle there, hoping to apply what he had learnt in Basel. Political and diplomatic obligations had seriously made his work as chaplain on the coast difficult.

“Some of them (the Danish at Christianborg) were slave traders in open defiance of the law. Many indulged in a life of debauchery, and in their hour of spiritual needs, would consult an African traditional priest rather than the Chaplain”.⁵¹⁷

Work among the Europeans had prevented Riis for a long time from reaching out to the indigenous people. He wanted to missionise those who were not yet

difference”. Appendix IX, in Brokensha, *Akwapim Handbook*, Accra-Tema, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1972, p. 200.

⁵¹⁶ Interview with Apesemankahene Nana Addo-Birikorang, Akropong, September 1st 2001 at 11h.

⁵¹⁷ Antui, J. Daniel, “The African factor in the Christian Mission to Africa: A study of Moravian and Basel Mission initiatives in Ghana”, in *The International Review of Mission*, Vol LXXXLII, no. 344, January, 1998, p. 59.

influenced by the degrading behaviour of other Europeans. He intended to begin his “real job among the mountain dwellers of Akuapem”.⁵¹⁸ Riis enjoyed the company of his military escort whose name was George Lutterodt,⁵¹⁹ and who probably knew the road to Akropong Akuapem very well. They arrived at Akropong on March 22, 1835.

“That very afternoon, under the leadership of the king of Akuapem, the population had gathered to welcome Riis”.⁵²⁰ *Nana* Addo Dankwa I invited him to the palace. By refusing to hoist the flag, the missionary demonstrated to the people of Akuapem state as well as to the Danish authorities, that he was not in Akropong to champion the political cause of the Danish administration, but to champion the cause of the Gospel in order to improve the situation of the indigenous people. “The kingdom had agreed to build him a house”.⁵²¹ On March 25, Riis was invited by the *Nana* (sacral ruler) to meet with his divisional chiefs to discuss his presence in the state. The missionary introduced himself and presented the purpose of his mission as a “preacher sent by a man who had lived, never died and had ascended to heaven and to explain his life and deeds to people”. Members of the Akuapem ruling class understood Riis to be referring to the story of Gyamfe⁵²² who seemed to be being described by the missionary. Therefore, they unanimously gave him a free hand for his mission. The council of chiefs also assured him that they were going to build him

⁵¹⁸ Antui, J. Daniel, “The African factor in the Christian Mission to Africa, p. 60.

⁵¹⁹ Popular history considers Lutterodt as the *Okyeame* (linguist) sent by the Governor to introduce Riis to the Akuapem royals.

⁵²⁰ Jenkins, Paul, “The scandal of continuing blindness in Mission historiography: The case of Andreas Riis in Akuapim”, in *The International Review of Mission*, Vol LXXXLII, no. 344, January, 1998, p. 69.

⁵²¹ Jenkins, Paul, “The scandal of continuing blindness in Mission historiography, p. 70.

⁵²² Gyamfe was a mystical head of the Amputy group. He grew so old that he had to be carried to the open yard for sunshine. Because he was a mystic, he started to ascend to heaven in full view of everybody. At a certain distance from the soil, he moved into a grove and became a tutelary spirit. Interview with Apesemankahene Nana Addo-Birikorang, Akropong, September 1, 2001 at 11h.

a house. The first thing the missionary realised was not a church building but a house according to the traditional leaders readiness to contribute to the success of Riis mission. The point of interaction with people was the building project. This activity involved the participation of many people and required some knowledge of carpentry and masonry as well. People were impressed by the way he built. Riis taught them how to build a modern house suitable for a European. As the Akropong people acquired new building skills, the missionary became more and more popular. They called him “*Osiadan*”, meaning the house builder.⁵²³ It was not the content of Riis’ message as preacher but his skill as a builder, which helped to establish the Christian mission at Akropong. In his diary, Riis reported that on

“September 28, 1835, people gathered to make swish to plaster the house after a heavy rain and they called more people from surrounding settlements to help them”.⁵²⁴

In spite of this traditional belief in Gyamfe, a few days before the missionary arrived, there had been the usual *Adae*, which is celebrated every forty days. On that particular *Adae*, the sacral ruler (*Omanhene*), the linguist (*Okyeame*) and the Queen mother (*Ohemaa*) had gone to the Stool Room to be instructed by the Ancestors. It had happened that they had talked about stories relating to the Stool of *Nana* Atiemo and his interaction with Isert, the Danish botanist who set up farms and planted trees in Akropong. The story had reminded them that:

“Isert said to *Nana* Atiemo; if one day a white man decides to settle in your town, don’t refuse. Welcome him and he will in return plant fruit trees, build roads, teach the white man’s science and make your town beautiful”.⁵²⁵

⁵²³ Even though his six years’ training was to make Riis a preacher, he became a builder.

⁵²⁴ Jenkins, Paul, “The scandal of continuing blindness in Mission historiography, p. 70.

⁵²⁵ Conversation with Addo Dankwa III, Akropong, October 17, 2000.

In less than a week, they heard the news that a Dane was coming to live with them. Following the instruction received in the Stool Room, the sacral ruler's welcoming attitude was rooted in the ancestral worship of the African community. Kindness shown to Riis was in obedience to the instruction from the ancestors. The presence of the missionary was directly linked with the people's spiritual tradition. Nobody opposed the building of a house for Riis, the incoming missionary, because the ancestors had spoken about it beforehand.

Riis had been praying to his Lord according to Christian spirituality for a fruitful time in Akropong. At the meeting with the Akropong elders (*Mpanimfo*), both Riis and Addo Dankwa I were able to give direction as to what attitude the people should adopt. Here, there was a direct correlation between Jesus Christ sending the missionary and the ancestors instructing the Akropong people to build him a house. African spiritual experience and Christian spiritual experience intersected at this point and really coincided when the missionary enters the Akuapem sacral rule. Has this meeting of two different religious traditions been theologically planned, fusion of spiritual aspirations would have occurred. Social interaction between the missionary and the indigenous people got prominence over the spiritual. Riis spent the first two weeks visiting the surrounding areas and making house-to-house contact with people. For close to a year, he

“lived together with his carpenters, interpreters, labourers, goats, sheep, hens and chicks, in a windowless room whose roof was badly leaking”.⁵²⁶

The royals of Akuapem gave Riis a high status in the kingdom. Without this sense of hospitality, the Basel Mission would never have been established in

⁵²⁶ Antui, J. Daniel, “The African factor in the Christian Mission to Africa, p. 60.

Akuapem. By so doing, the traditional sacral leadership in Akropong was as active as the Basel Mission Board in supporting the presence of the European missionaries in Africa.

“Following Pauline mission strategy, Riis lived like the Africans, spending weeks in the forest, sleeping on palm branches and feeding on pepper soup, snails and fish. He built a house for himself and for those who would eventually follow him in mission”.⁵²⁷

Riis enjoyed a better relationship with the African ruler, Addo Dankwa I, than with the Danish Governor, Morck, from his homeland.

Governor Morck was so angry with Riis that he wanted him to leave the Colony. Because he did not cooperate with the Governor in his efforts to administer the Akuapem state, the missionary became a pawn in the political intrigue between the Danish Governor and the paramount sacral ruler at Akropong. Morck summoned Riis to Christianborg, and accused him of taking an unpatriotic attitude. He detained him at Christianborg Castle from April 7 to June 2, 1836. Whereas colonial policy was in conflict with Christian principles, African traditional spirituality paradoxically promoted the spread of the Christian Gospel. Morck was far away from the abolitionist movement. In fact, he developed friendly relations with slave dealers and managed to oppose Riis' concern for the salvation of Africa as the Basel Mission conceived it under the influence of the African-American struggle, and the support of William Wilberforce and Thomas Buxton. The colonial spirit developed as the slave dealers' strategy to counterbalance the success of abolitionist missionaries. Unlike the missionaries who wanted Africans to develop and own their own resources in order to be partners in the world market, the colonialists wanted to exert their hegemony over

⁵²⁷ Antui, J. Daniel, “The African factor in the Christian Mission to Africa, p. 60.

Africans and to have control of African resources. Danish Governor Morck was also alarmed at the

“spread of English influence in the Eastern area of the Gold Coast. He sought to enforce Danish hegemony over the Akuapem and the Krobo”.⁵²⁸

After Riis was set free to return to Akropong, he started teaching. However, he used English and not the Danish language. The Danish authorities interpreted this to mean that the mission was against the Danish administration. But Riis knew that for trading, English would prove to be more helpful than Danish. Later, when he was able to speak *Twi* the Akropong language, he decided to teach in the vernacular.

Riis showed no desire to use Christianity to destroy the African way of life of the receiving community. He loved the people as they were. By 1839, out of the dozen missionaries sent to the Gold Coast, only two missionaries were still alive: Andreas Riis and his wife. Unlike his fellow missionaries, when he fell sick, he put himself and his family under the healing hand of an African herbalist.⁵²⁹

Riis did not hurry to baptise people. He wanted them to willingly adhere to the Christian faith rather than be coerced into it. He created farms and gardens, trained people in carpentry and masonry, using the native language; he helped them to produce new crops such as cocoa, for sale on the coast. In 1839, he went on leave to Europe after about a decade of work in Africa. At his farewell party, Riis expressed discouragement that his work among the Akuapem had been a failure: there was not a single convert. The people replied through the majestic voice of *Nana Addo Dankwa I*:

⁵²⁸ Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960: Younger Church in a changing society*, Ghana University Press, Accra, 1966, p. 31.

⁵²⁹ Antui, J. Daniel, “The African factor in the Christian Mission, p. 62.

“How can you expect so much from us? You have been staying among us all alone and for a short time only. When God created the world, he made Book for the White men and Juju for the Black men. But if you can show us some Black men who could read the White men’s Book, then we would surely follow you”.⁵³⁰

This royal declaration may be subject to more than one interpretation. However, the dominant one was that the missionary had thought that the absence of conversions was due to the lack of literacy and writing books in the African past. The missionary’s Pietistic background which insisted on a separatist attitude towards external social groups, led Riis to polarise the statement. According to his understanding of what the ruler told him, Riis knew what to do next: he would come back himself because the people wanted him back, but he would also bring back with him some Black Christians who could read and write. He was able to find a number of volunteers in the West Indies who were later to form the first African Christian community among the indigenous people of Akuapem.

A- Basel Mission and sacral kingship at Akropong 1843 – 1914: Distant and passive opposition

In 1843, Riis returned to Akropong with a group of Christians from the West Indies⁵³¹ and they formed a Christian quarters called Salem. He wanted to prove that

⁵³⁰ Antui, J. Daniel, “The African factor in the Christian Mission, p. 64. The current ruler of Akropong Nana Addo Dankwa III used almost identical words when quoting his ancestor in “The Akuapem connection”, in *Mission in Context*, edited in 1992 by The Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for mission Research and Applied Theology, Akropong, November 1986, p. 17.

⁵³¹ The group that came consisted of 12 married couples, 3 unmarried people, and 8 children. The married couples, according to men’s name were: Joseph Muller, James Green, John Hall, John Rochester, James Mullings, John Hall. The unmarried were, Alexander Worthy Clerk, David Jonah Robertson, and Anne Rochester. The party embarked on a sailing vessel on February 7, 1843 and landed at Christianborg on April 16, 1843. They reached Akropong on June 18, 1843. Since that day, the Gospel trumpet has never ceased to sound, in Akuapem and every part of the country, far and near. They were farmers. See Rev. Hall, Peter, *Pioneer Series: Autobiography of Rev. Peter Hall first Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana*, Waterville publishing House, Accra, 1965, p. 5.

the Bible was also for Blacks. Working side by side in Christian mission with African-Americans was in line with the generally accepted principle that Blacks from the New World and African Christians were responsible for the evangelisation of Africa and the elevation of Africa mind. The West Indians had now reached their destination. The task ahead of them was the conversion of the natives from heathenism to Christianity.

“My parents migrated to the Gold Coast not from any outward advantage which they hoped to get but from the true love they had for the Lord and also to witness to the grace of God not only to the white man, but also to the black man. Their only prayer was that the eyes of the blacks whom they regarded as their brothers may be opened to see Jesus as the Saviour of the world.”⁵³²

They learnt the local language, *Twi*, very fast, and they encouraged Riis to use it in his teaching. They gave prominence to the African way of life over and against the Western one. In matters of health, community life and attitudes to the sacral ruling system, the Jamaicans trusted the Akuapem people. The West Indians had been trained in the ability to detect every exploitative, domineering and enslaving attitude in the whites. They were well trained Christians who had spiritually surpassed their fellow whites in faith. Unfortunately, the European missionaries who had administrative roles found in the Jamaican presence an obstacle to the mission work as they had planned it from Basel. Things came to a head after five years when the contract Riis had drawn up with them expired. The document had stated that they were free to return to Jamaica or to settle in Africa for another five years, if they so wished. The majority went back to Jamaica, probably owing to disagreement with the European missionaries.

⁵³² Hall, Peter, *Pioneer Series: Autobiography of Rev. Peter Hall*, p. 5.

However, the Hall, Miller, Rochester, Mullings and Clerk families decided to remain after the first five years. They made themselves completely at home, and identified with both Christianity and the Akropong sacral rule. Peter Hall was a church leader in Tutu, which was under the Akuapem paramountcy. When he prayed for God to bring about a judgement in favour of *Nana Akwesi Akuffo* the sacral ruler of the Akuapem area, who was facing a destoolment charge at the colonial court in Accra, he had a bitter confrontation first with his own congregation. They stopped attending services and reported him to the Basel Mission committee headed by Rev E. Samson and Dr. Fisch in Aburi. They said that Peter Hall was biased in favour of *Nana Akwesi Akuffo* because he was born and brought up in Akropong and they were classmates. The committee listened to Peter Hall but concluded that though it had been good to pray for a Christian leader according to their Pietist principles, it was an offence to pray for a heathen leader, and that Peter Hall should not have taken a partisan line because of his long connection with Akropong in a matter which angered the majority of the members of his congregation.⁵³³

The idea of bringing the West Indians developed out of the remark *Nana Addo Dankwa I* had made to Riis on the eve of his departure to Basel in 1840: "If you can show us some Black men who could read the White men's Book, then we would surely follow you". If the presence of Jamaicans confirmed the universality of the Christian teaching, did it meet the condition on the fulfilment of which the promise was made? Our answer is: Yes and No. It is Yes because for the ordinary people and the missionaries, the coming of Blacks who could read the White man's Book seems to have proved that the Gospel was for Black people as well as for the White. It is

⁵³³ Hall, Peter, *Pioneer Series: Autobiography of Rev. Peter Hall*, p. 58.

Yes also because for ordinary people one black-skinned man is the same as any other and the Akropong people were converted. The West Indians were able to reach out deeply and quicker than the white missionaries, to the souls of the Africans.⁵³⁴ Riis and his colleagues were not wrong to make West Indians part of the Christian mission enterprise in Akropong, in particular, and in Africa, in general.

Our response is also No because the range of meanings that *Nana Addo Dankwa I* himself intended might well have not been limited to the missionary understanding. Commenting on his ancestor's recommendation to the missionary, *Nana Addo Dankwa III*, the current sacral ruler of Akuapem reported that:

“The elders of *Nana Addo Dankwa I* in 1840 complained that the new religion being introduced by his friend Riis, was condemning tradition and culture out of hand, and since Chieftaincy was the repository of culture and customs of the people, it was feared that the new religion might destroy Chieftaincy.”⁵³⁵

The Pietistic expectation of the conversion of the heathen on hearing the Gospel relied entirely on Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit preceding the missionary on the mission field. It took little consideration of the struggle the hearer might undergo in order to respond genuinely to the Gospel.⁵³⁶ Therefore, since no theological skill and argument was developed to establish the continuity between the convert's past and the new faith, the missionary could not understand that the ruler's statement meant that:

⁵³⁴ “The first convert at Akropong was baptised twelve years after the arrival of Riis” and it occurred because of the Jamaican Christians. Sanneh, Lamine, *West African Christianity*, p. 113.

⁵³⁵ Addo Dankwa III, “The Akuapem connection”, in *Mission in Context*, p. 17.

⁵³⁶ According to Zinzendorf, the Pietist authority in missionary enterprise, “All heathen were in need of redemption, and had little confidence in suggestions that they were virtuous. But he was just as much convinced that the preaching of the historical person of Jesus and his redemptive death would have an effect on the heathen and were they as cold as ice, they could turn into flame, and were they as stone, they would come to life and walk into the arms of the shepherd... Wherever missionaries went, the Holy Spirit had already prepared the hearts of people, making them long for grace. The missionaries are therefore merely the messengers. Once they have spoken, the heathen will say, “that is it”. In, Grau, Eugene, “The German Protestant Heritage, p. 21.

“Since the creation, most Africans have been adherents of Fetish and Juju and their involvement in these have not in any way undermined their basic culture as Africans. If you, Riis, the missionary, wants Africans to know how to read the Bible and to become adherents of your new religion, then you must make sure they remain culturally Africans.”⁵³⁷

This interpretation of *Nana Addo Dankwa I*'s statement helped to understand it as a royal critique of missionary method and attitude towards African culture and customs. Beyond the personal conversion of the individual, the traditional ruler wanted Riis to extend his missionary activities to the “cultural conversion”⁵³⁸ of the Akuapem people. The paramount chief, *Nana Addo Dankwa I* was drawing Riis' attention to his own problem because he was attracted by the Christian faith. In other words, he was concerned for the salvation of sacral rule as a repository of spiritual experiences, culture, customs and political structure. He was inviting Riis to take into consideration the religious itinerary of Akuapem rulers who had not been without religion on his arrival at Akropong. Nobody questioned the novelty of Christianity and its role in sharpening their previous knowledge of and devotion to God. They were ready to reorient what they had inherited from their ancestors but were not as such ready to contribute to the destruction of the very sacral rule they identified with. This view was reiterated by *Nana Addo Dankwa III*, who cautioned that, “ in the desire of Christian churches to wash the African baby to make it acceptable to Christ, they should make sure that in the process they do not throw away the baby with the bath water.”⁵³⁹

⁵³⁷ Addo Dankwa III, “The Akuapem connection”, in *Mission in Context*, edited by the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre, p. 17.

⁵³⁸ Sanon, Titianma Anselme, *Tierce Eglise ma mère ou la conversion d'une communauté paënnne au Christ*,

⁵³⁹ Addo Dankwa III, “The Akuapem connection”, in *Mission in Context*, p. 17.

In case the African “baby” to be washed by the missionary was an “adult” empowered to take his own bath, one other possible interpretation of *Nana Addo Dankwa I*’s statement is as follows. In sacral kingship, there are members of different associations as well as a hierarchy of powerful leaders in the palace whose head is the ruler. *Nana Addo Dankwa I*, in saying: “When God created the world, he made Book for the white men and Juju for the black men. But if you can show us some black men who could read the white man’s Book, then we would surely follow you” would have meant this: If you show us a Fetish or Juju man just like us in our palace associations, reading the Bible, then we will definitely follow you. It can only be presumed that if the ruler were alive when the West Indians arrived, he would have said: “Well, they are black like the Christians on the coast, but they are not my kind. Among them nobody is a royal like me.” This is why till today, the Akuapem ruling class has never opened the doors of sacral rule to a missionary. The answer to the question posed by *Nana Addo Dankwa I* is yet to come. Keeping in mind the reference to African-Americans as partners in the missionary work, one can only conclude that bringing the Jamaicans to Akropong helped the missionary work at the periphery of society but not at its heart where people’s life is nurtured through their sacral leaders. Any change in the Akuapem sacral rule is the business of the ruling class far away from the missionary and colonialist intrusion.⁵⁴⁰

Riis was encouraged by the success of West Indians in producing African converts to the Christian faith. The Akropong Christians rapidly enlarged the population of Salem, reserved for converts. The relation to the *Ahemfie*

⁵⁴⁰ Among the first generation of Christians living in Salem at Akropong, very few showed attraction towards the sacral rule. The ruling class has not yet empowered a Jamaican descent in royal terms.

(paramountcy) ceased to be between an individual missionary (Riis) and the African community (Akuapem people) to become an interaction between two communities: the inhabitants of Salem and the rest of Akropong. The previously united community became divided. The dominant relationship in Akropong became that between Christians and non-Christians, and no longer what had existed between the leaders of the two different communities who had respected one another. Riis continued to go to the forest to cut timber with his people and the natives. They worked together in building houses. The lessons in carpentry and masonry were very well appreciated. People could not believe that the new houses were their own achievement. In their admiration of the buildings, people linked the Akuapem ruler, the missionary and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The new way of building soon spread beyond Akropong as the first channel of communicating the Gospel and of extending the popularity of the Akropong paramount ruler and the missionary. Christians and non-Christians as well as nobles and rulers started to renovate their houses, following the European model, through the work of African students of the mission.

Just as with the learning and acquisition of new skills in masonry and carpentry, the growing of cash crops such as coffee, cocoa and mango trees, made farming the second area of interaction between sacral rule and Christian mission.⁵⁴¹ The Jamaicans brought the seeds they needed for cultivation with them. They set up plantations as demonstration fields to teach Africans new agricultural methods and to enable them to get used to the new crops. Those who followed the missionary method became rich very quickly by selling the products from their farms. The economic

⁵⁴¹ *Omanhene* Kwasi Akuffo who ruled from 1895 to 1907 and, again, from 1920 until his death in 1927, was known as “Omanhene the farmer”. He was a pioneer in cocoa farming. He instituted prizes for farmers and became a friend of the British governor. See, Brokensha, *Akwapim Handbook*, p. 206.

potential of mission students attracted more people than Riis could have expected. Many students came from areas beyond Akuapem. Once back home, they started their own farms and taught their neighbours the new farming methods. Unintentionally, they contributed greatly to expand the Gospel, the image of the missionary and the fame of the Akuapem ruler.

Fellow traditional leaders started to see that Akropong royals had gone the right way. They wanted the missionary to settle in their territory as well. They aimed at stopping the popularity that had rejected the people of Akropong as the leading group on the Akuapem ridge. Competition among rulers helped the mission work to grow unusually fast as people discovered the benefit of farming, building and literacy. Each sacral ruler wanted to attach his name to the spread of the Christian faith as the Akropong ruling dynasty had done under Addo Dankwa I. Literacy and education developed at Akropong with Johannes Christaller who translated the Bible into Akuapem *Twi*, wrote a *Twi* Grammar and collection of proverbs, explained in a book the native customs, religion and socio-political organisation of Akan people, and also made popular the Basel Mission seminary. More than building and farming, education promoted the Basel Mission and more and more disciples of Jesus were made from other African communities starting from Akuapem. Princes and princesses came to the mission school. Sons and daughters of rulers had their minds, hearts and spirituality prepared by the preachers of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. They unconsciously infused into the royal household the presence of Jesus Christ by living according to the Christian doctrine and Christian moral standards. Some mission

students such as Amoako Atta I of Akyem Abuakwa gained early access to the headship of the sacral system of government in Akan states.

**C- Rev. David Asante⁵⁴² and Amoako Atta I at Kyebi from 1874:
Friendship and subsequent confrontation**

If in Akropong the missionary contact was led by Europeans, in Akyem Abuakwa it was led by an African, a son of the area. David Asante was born to parents in the immediate entourage of the ruling Asona clan⁵⁴³ in Akropong. The cosmic signs which accompanied his birth made him one of the contestants to the throne in Akropong. But rulers of the matrilineal bloodline inheritance practised by the Akan reduced his chances of being elected. However, he was brought up as a likely successor to the throne or as one who was to be an influential leader in the Akan perception of political power. David's intelligence, knowledge, training and peaceful attitude, as well as the courage and confidence to meet new challenges, attracted both the Basel missionaries and the traditional ruling class in Akropong.⁵⁴⁴

⁵⁴² According to church records, David Asante was born in 1830. His father was Odehye Owusu of the ruling Asona clan and direct cousin of the *Okuapemhene* Adum Tokori. At his birth, the whole day was cool with the shining sun and it rained without the cloud covering the sun in order to reduce its brightness. The whole royal set-up in Akropong believed that this was a sign that Asante would be a peaceful leader but would suffer a lot of opposition. His father was a friend of the Basel missionary, Widman. When he died during the poll tax riot which led to the creation of Abokobi and the destruction of houses in Osu, Widman took David Asante with him. "As a boy he had a lot of moral courage to make sweet use of adversity and was one of the four natives to be baptised into Christianity on Christmas day of 1847. He was also among the pioneer students to be admitted in the Basel primary school in 1844 as well as being one of the five pioneer students of the theological seminary in 1848." In Addo Birikorang, *Special Okuapeman Durbar in honour of National Delegates to the Synod of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana*, Heritage Graphix, Akropong Akuapem, August 1998, p. 11.

⁵⁴³ Keteku, h. J., *Pioneer series: The Reverends Theophilus Opoku and David Asante*, Waterville Publishing House, Accra, 1965, p. 12.

⁵⁴⁴ "David Asante as well as his colleagues Paul Keteku, Isaac Addo, and Bekoe exercised great influence on the existing traditional administration and politics in Akropong specifically, but also on Akuapem in general." In Nana Addo Birikorang, *Special Okuapeman Durbar*, p. 11.

David Asante experienced a genuine conversion to Christ,⁵⁴⁵ and became a hymn writer and a translator of the Bible and Christian literature. He developed a personal and joyful love in serving Christ, using as his personal motto: “Where duty calls, be never wanting there. Obey the order of the Lord.”⁵⁴⁶

During his ministry as catechist and pastor, David Asante proved able in a number of different occupations: builder, farmer, educationist, religious leader and influential member of the missionary conference and in the African sacral rule hierarchy. However, he identified with Christianity as proclaimed by the Basel Mission against some features of his own culture and was ordained like any other missionary in Basel in 1862.⁵⁴⁷ Having been trained in Basel, he was also harsh towards nominal Christians such as some Europeans and Mullatos from the coast who came to consult traditional shrines in his area.⁵⁴⁸ His frank, thoughtful, and peaceful messages stimulated such an intense awareness that the response of his hearers was often equally strong whether it was conversion or violent rejection. In every situation, David Asante’s first concern was to portray Christian identity in African idiom and language. Without his linguistic expertise the missionaries alone could hardly have elevated the Akan language to the level of sophistication they achieved in translating

⁵⁴⁵ The process of his conversion started when he witnessed in Akropong the baptism of Tete and Anum from Osu-Accra. This occasion has made such powerful impact on him that he followed the missionary with new understanding and a strong desire to become full member of the Christian church. Later, on Christmas day, 1847, David Asante was among the first four Akropong people to be baptised. In, Keteku, *Pioneer series: The Reverends Theophilus Opoku and David Asante*, p. 19.

⁵⁴⁶ Keteku, H. J., *Pioneer series: The Reverends Theophilus Opoku and David Asante*, p. 13.

⁵⁴⁷ “His mother was said to have rebuked him for accompanying the Basel missionary, J. A. Mader, and for interpreting Rev. Mader’s sermons which attacked indigenous religion, but David Asante stuck to his guns and continued with assisting in the propagation of the gospel... He had a very difficult time with people who resented his outspoken frankness in his railing against African Traditional Religion”. In Nana Addo Birikorang, *Special Okuapeman Durbar*, p. 11.

⁵⁴⁸ In, Keteku, *Pioneer series: The Reverends Theophilus Opoku and David Asante*, p. 15.

the Christian spiritual heritage into people's life through the Akan traditions.⁵⁴⁹ David Asante claimed a place for the Christian faith within the sacral ruling system. But with regard to African traditional religious structure and its custodians, this was not the case.

Nana Amoako Atta I had been in contact with the Gospel at the mission school but he could not complete his studies. In his teens, he left the mission school to take up the position of sacral ruler. Like his peers and some influential people in the surrounding independent states, Amoako Atta invited the missionary to establish a mission station in his territory. The creation of a mission station usually began with the missionary house, the school, the Christian village or Salem, and the church building. The hopes of missionaries were fixed up the schools which were multiplying rapidly. Traditional leaders everywhere provided land as well as the communal labour of their subjects, to help the missionary. *Nana* Amoako Atta I really opened his royal office to the missionary.

“During the first fifteen years of its establishment in Akyem Abuakwa, the Basel Mission enjoyed the goodwill and cooperation of successive kings and their chiefs”⁵⁵⁰.

Royal officers were allowed to visit, and to entertain the missionary while royal servants and pawns were sent to help the missionary. Amoako, who had attended the mission school, sought membership in the Christian church. In 1867, he ignored the appeal of his traditional priest who wanted him to close down the school;

⁵⁴⁹ David Asante was the right hand man of the Rev. J. G. Christaller in the translation of the Bible and in the writing of other *Twi* books. In, Keteku, *Pioneer series: The Reverends Theophilus Opoku and David Asante*, p. 17.

⁵⁵⁰ Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 56.

instead, he patronised it and supported the spread of Christianity.⁵⁵¹ He so liberally opened his council to the missionary that some of his *mpaninfo* (nobles) were encouraged to open their stool room to the Christian leader, something which the Akuapem sacral rule had never done before and has never done again since. The fact that missionaries abstained from domestic politics increased the support of the sacral ruler and his high-ranking officers. But problems would eventually arise between the Christian mission and the sacral ruler when state functionaries, royal servants and pawns were converted since their new Christian obligations interfered with their state duties.

The struggle was not between the missionary and the royals, but among the royals themselves: the converts and the non-Christians. At this early stage, the non-Christians in sacral rule outnumbered the Christians. The Christians were, therefore, forced by their weak position to seek support from the missionaries. In defending the converts, the missionary found himself opposed to those who had been kind to him. The African leader who was regarded as the true religious ruler, the representative of both the ancestors and the Supreme Being, had readily invited the missionary to establish a Christian station in his area of jurisdiction. He had asked his people to help to build a church.

“The king must have nurtured the hope that Christian leaders would continue to respect his secular and spiritual authority rather than dispose his converts to question it”.⁵⁵²

Although there were some direct confrontations, very often the traditional rulers and in the Christian leaders respected one another while the real confrontation was at the

⁵⁵¹ Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 57.

⁵⁵² Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 59.

grassroots level. There was an unstable relationship between those who had become attached to the missionary and those who maintained loyalty to the sacral ruler, such that disagreements and even clashes could flare up at any time. Some disagreements happened without the knowledge of the missionary or the sacral ruler. In certain situations, the ordinary people did not know whom they should obey of the two spiritual leaders in the territory. It was when they could not deal with this impasse that the Christian representatives and the royals were obliged to meet.

In 1874, Kyebi was promoted to the level of a district. This meant that it could now host an ordained missionary as well as a catechist, and Rev David Asante was sent there regardless of the peculiar circumstances surrounding his birth, David Asante was a cousin to *Nana* Amoako Atta I and also a prominent candidate for the Akuapem royal office. He was famous as a teacher and for being the first African missionary posted to Kyebi, the capital of Akyem Abuakwa, from which the Akuapem ruling class had come. The ruler at Kyebi, who had power to advise on the nomination of the *Okuapemhene*, was excited to receive a “son” and a possible future ruler as missionary in his state.

David Asante was himself a part of the problem to which he had to find a solution: the strained relationship between church and state in Akyem Abuakwa. There were kinship ties to be considered on both sides as well as the faithfulness to Christ and the Gospel which was essential for the missionary work.

“The Okuapemhene expected Asante to sympathise with his concern about the indiscriminate conversion of royal slaves (servants) and state functionaries”.⁵⁵³

⁵⁵³ Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 63.

Family loyalties brought them close and in the case of a misunderstanding, therefore, the confrontation was direct and personal. Very often they did not share the same objectives. Amoako Atta wanted to enrich the African spiritual tradition based on ancestral worship with the Gospel of Jesus Christ just as he had received from the mission school. He approached his cousin the missionary, for support in transforming the religious practices connected with the ancestral stools which were the basis of the whole structure of sacral rule. David Asante, as any other Basel missionary would have done, identified with Christian principles and defended them in a separatist stance in apparent ignorance of the spiritual struggle of the ruler. He attacked *Nana Amoako Atta I* on the issue of slavery. Limiting himself to only the ethical aspects of royal life, the missionary unconsciously had considerable influence on every aspect of the responsibilities of the Akan leader: social, legal, economic and political.

On his part, the sacral ruler wanted to recover his lost power over his converted people through David Asante. He wanted David Asante to confirm his right to rule not only in Akan terms but also using his Christian education and commitment. Akan rulers discovered in David Asante the spiritual help they needed.

⁵⁵⁴ The sacral rulers were drawn to David Asante whose whole life style seemed to them to be a model of what the spiritual life of a leader could be. They might have wanted to help him to mature in his ability to communicate the Gospel to them. But, unfortunately, this did not happen. His Pietist training diverted him from being concerned with the issues that were their daily struggle because the art of governing

⁵⁵⁴ He was an influential adviser of the Akuapem ruler in Akropong. He visited Ramseyer and Khume in prison in the Asante palace in Kumase in 1871, bringing the ruling class of Asante to show more respect in the treatment of the missionary. In 1885, he paid a visit to the Asante ruler, Kofi Karikari, and preached to his people in Kumase. In, Keteku, H. J., *Pioneer series: The Reverends Theophilus Opoku and David Asante*, pp. 13, 17.

was not an item in the Basel Mission agenda. The Basel Mission seemed to them to be suggesting that any sacral ruler dealing with their missionaries would need to abdicate spiritually first. *Nana* Amoako Atta I was deeply disappointed. He was well aware that David Asante was capable of a much deeper relationship with him and felt that Asante's failure to develop this friendship must have been due to personal dislike. Amoako Atta I felt that his trust in his cousin, the African missionary, had been misplaced. He then polarised the issue following the apparent attitude of David Asante.

There were now two princes caring for the same people in the same area. One at the palace, the former Basel mission student and sacral ruler, Amoako Atta I, the other missionary teachers at the mission station, a potential sacral ruler, Reverend David Asante. Both were spiritual leaders to be obeyed. Without having any intention of challenging Amoako Atta I, David Asante ministered at Kyebi as if he had been a rival traditional sacral ruler with an appearance of being superior to Amoako Atta I. As a missionary, he was linked to the colonial enterprise through the emancipation ordinance and to the English law, both of which threatened the independence of sacral rulers. In championing these causes, he found himself successfully challenging the power of the ruler in his own territory.

In less than three years, David Asante had converted several royal servants, many state functionaries, as well as the ruler's trusted servants. He succeeded where his colleagues, the white missionaries, failed in having the royal household converted to Christianity and resettled in Salem. Asante unconsciously derived pleasure from

surrounding himself in the Christian village with people with royal experience: royal servants and pawns, nobles and rulers. He converted Emmanuel Boakye

“the Okyenhene’s best friend, the keeper of king’s privy purse and who married under the king’s negotiation his niece, Akosua Gyankroma”.⁵⁵⁵

According to inheritance regulations, Gyankroma was qualified to give birth to a possible next ruler of Akyem Abuakwa. Amoako Atta I had given his best friend a chance to be the father of an heir to the throne at Kyebi. By 1887, Gyankroma, in becoming a Christian followed the husband who had resolved to settle with Asante at Salem with his stool. Her conversion opened the way for Christianity to intrude into the religious solidarity of the royal family.

After only three years of ministry at Kyebi, everything in the community of Akyem Abuakwa was divided into two, controlled by the two religious leaders: the Salem, with the converted subjects of the Okyenhene under “the would-be ruler” David Asante, and the traditional society with non-Christian subjects under *Nana* Amoako Atta I. Amoako Atta could not have foreseen the fact that the ordination of David Asante at Basel would qualify him to be a religious leader in Akan terms. He could not have imagined how any empowerment Asante received from the British Governor and British law might push him to interfere with the local legal system and politics in an Akan traditional court. He forgot that Asante’s childhood education as a potential contestant to the throne at Akuapem predisposed him to act like a *Nana*, as Akan people knew their ruler to be. All the authors who have discussed the open confrontation between David Asante and Amoako Atta have looked for reasons why the African missionary acted as he did. It is reported that:

⁵⁵⁵ Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 65.

“By 1877, European colleagues (of Asante) had formed the opinion that Asante had become too much involved with people and things to which a straightforward missionary calling would not lead him”.⁵⁵⁶

The Basel missionary was not prepared to relate in any form to the African sacral rule. The initiative of African and Jamaican collaborators to consider the sacral rule as a mission field was perceived by the white as highly suspicious. Addo-Fening, a historian of Akyem Abuakwa, analysing the event, wrote: “For inexplicable reasons Asante appeared to have singled out the *Okyenhene* (the sacral ruler of Akyem) for discrimination and embarrassment”.⁵⁵⁷ As a future ruler who, by ambition and by childhood education, had been prepared to be selected as the next ruler, he had made use of any opportunity to exercise power, perhaps unconsciously, like a traditional leader. *Nana* Amoako Atta I, who knew very well the pattern of political power and its outcome, understood the situation, and took immediate action. In agreement with his council and kingmakers, on September 27, 1877, *Nana* Amoako Atta I banned Asante from his territory. He did not burn the Church nor did he reduce the Salem area, but he declared Asante *persona non grata*. One cannot have two rulers caring for the same people in the same geographical area.⁵⁵⁸ As paramount ruler of the state, *Nana* Amoako Atta I did not ask for support or advice before taking this decision. Asante complained to the colonial Governor who had made him Administrator of Justice according to British law. He complained also to the missionaries who had made him a religious leader. But instead the Governor and the Basel Mission headquarters transferred Asante to another mission station. *Nana* Amoako Atta I,

⁵⁵⁶ Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 66.

⁵⁵⁷ Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 64.

⁵⁵⁸ Herod was quick to understand this kind of situation when he was told that the King of the Jews was born. He tried to get rid of him as soon as possible.

after this victory over Asante, continued to integrate Christian principles without any direct missionary instructions, in the daily running of state affairs, a stone's throw away from Salem.

In spite of the attraction of Christ presented by the preachers of the Gospel, the need to maintain Akan spiritual traditions remained at the centre of Amoako Atta's struggle. How could a ruler be unfaithful to the long and venerable tradition of a relationship with the Supreme Being? *Nana Amoako Atta I* must have wondered how the God and father of his Lord Jesus "by whom, through whom, and for whom all things (including the sacral rule to which he belonged) were created,"⁵⁵⁹ regarded him, for it was generally believed that the ruler was the one whom God through the ancestors and the living had chosen to lead in an Akan community. The missionary had failed to understand the theological struggle of the African ruler. In more recent times, leaders of the Basel Mission, could observe that their predecessors had made the classic mistake of opposing those who should have helped them:

"As human beings we are responsible for consciously working out our innate instinct for survival within the boundaries set for us. If we forget these limitations; if we demand living-space for ourselves alone...we become guilty of sin. The most important gifts of the Spirit are those which help us Christians to continue to fight for the acceptance of others, and for sharing with others".⁵⁶⁰

D- Salems and Abokobi: Christianity saving the African spiritual tradition

a- Salem practice

It was reasonable for the rulers to allow the Christians to have their own separate suburb or Salem. The governing body expected the missionary and his

⁵⁵⁹ Colossians 1: 16.

⁵⁶⁰ Rossel, Jacques, "A movement in the making", in Baumann, Franz, (ed) *No Bird Flies With just One Wing*, pp. 37-38.

congregants to be gradually integrated into the communal life of the territory like any other in-coming group. The missionary, however, brought also to Africa the idea of a Christian village. It was not long before the traditional leaders realised that as Christian Salems became well-established, there was a tendency for Christians to feel that they had removed themselves from traditional jurisdiction and obligations.

“Some converts pleaded their Christianity to evade their obligations which were not matters of conscience, and the missionary invariably came to support”.⁵⁶¹

The missionary showed little respect for African traditions and in his work aimed to bring

“individuals into touch with the saving grace of Christ and to build the convert into new Christian societies. These new Christian communities would be at once, the sign of the transforming power of Christ and the means of renewal of a degraded and depraved African society”.⁵⁶²

When the missionary persuaded many Christians to relocate their homes to the mission station, this became a source of alarm for the traditional rulers. For they foresaw that the Salem was the first step towards an eventual creation of dichotomy between church and state.

“People suspected that the mission set up a state within a state, withdrawing people from their normal allegiance and religious duties”.⁵⁶³

This statement is not only a suspicion but is right to some extent because in Africa, an independent community starts with a spiritual delimitation of land. In African spirituality, tribal gods and ancestral spirits own the land. From one community to the other, one is under the protection of different ancestors and gods.

⁵⁶¹ Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*, p. 93.

⁵⁶² Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 58.

⁵⁶³ Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 59.

Giving part of the land for mission establishment was acknowledging the power of the Christian God over that territory. A community is based on the presence of religious and administrative leaders. The missionary embodied these functions even though he acquired this authority under a different liturgical process. By sending people to be with the missionary, holders of the cultural leadership helped the Christian village to have a population of converts. With a population, a territory, a spiritual as well as temporal leader, the Salem constituted a group within a group and was populated by people belonging to the sacral rule. This outcome was contrary to the intention of the hospitable ruler and his council.

They did not expect the Salem practice to break the unity of the community, encourage competition between two spiritual traditions in family life, separate best friends or promote new leadership. Christian converts were joining another rule, and if the head of that group happened to be a potential traditional leader who had been ordained missionary, people were ready to follow him and to transfer their former obligations to their new ruler. This is why David Asante converted more Africans from noble background and royal households than any other missionary. With a European missionary as the head of the Salem inhabitants, people were reluctant. But with an Akan as head of Salem, people came with their past spiritual experience and enriched it with Gospel teachings far away from their former religious leaders. Traditional leaders specifically objected to the conversion of state functionaries who performed tasks considered crucial for the political, social, economic and spiritual well-being of the kingdom. Rulers did not have the same attitude towards those subjects at the periphery of the society. They were concerned with the actors in the

royal establishment. They struggled to save the people, objects, rules, channels and practices crucial for the administration of the ruling power.

The Salem organised itself according to the pattern of Akan sacral rule. The council of church leaders included the minister, the linguist (*Okyeame*), and others bearing Akan ruling titles. The notion of a Christian in prominent role of a linguist (*Okyeame*) had no reference in Christian tradition. It is an African notion rooted in the African spiritual tradition. The Salem body integrated this African way in the Christian village in its establishment as a religious community of individual believers. David Asante, the African missionary, for example, “allowed Emmanuel Boakye to bring with him his stool to the Salem...and granted custody of Gyase Stool to the Basel Mission”. If Asante had stayed longer in Kyebi, he would have reproduced the traditional leadership in Salem with the pastor replacing his parent, the acting ruler Amoako Atta I. *Nana* Amoako Atta stood as the unique obstacle to the realisation of David Asante’s project. Naturally, Asante wanted to get rid of him. Accepting Boakye’s Stool at Salem and granting custody of the Gyase Stool to the Basel Mission had no reference in Christian mission spirituality and politics.

Paterning the Salem on sacral system of government with a linguist and other functionaries was unknown to a European missionary’s socio-cultural and spiritual experience. David Asante felt a great honour as he prayed to Jesus Christ with people seated on their ancestral Stools. His attitude was completely different from that of his European colleagues in the field because he carried with him the long spiritual African tradition as he ministered with the Basel Mission. In all the Salems, Christians would transfer their African religious attitude and spirituality as well as

their political allegiance from the traditional set-up to the Christian community. David Asante thus helped to save the African spiritual organisation of power by giving Akan terminology to the Salem structure of government.

b- Abokobi

Abokobi was a special Christian community which grew into an entire Christian village. After twenty-six years of continuous Basel Mission work at Christianborg (Osu), the British authorities that acquired the Danish possessions on the Gold Coast decided that Africans must pay tax to the colonial British administration. People at Osu opposed the decision and, in 1854, the British military bombarded the area and also destroyed the Church.⁵⁶⁴ The German missionary, Johannes Zimmermann, in charge of the community, assisted by A. Steinhausser, did not stand on the side of the British colonialists to oppress the people, neither did they encourage the Osu people to resist the British. Instead, they took the Christians and all those who were willing to follow them into the interior and enlarged the land that Andreas Riis had bought some years before and settled there with the population. Some went to other Basel Mission stations like Aburi and Akropong.⁵⁶⁵ All the dwellers were converted Africans. Those who became Christians in the neighbouring villages were allowed to build their houses there. This is how Abokobi came into being, as a mission reaction to the harsh treatment of African people by the European power. In 1857, a former traditional priest, Paulo Mohenu, was baptised, and he

⁵⁶⁴ Schweitzer, Peter, *Survivors on the Gold Coast: the Basel Missionary in colonial Ghana*, Accra, Smatline Publishing, 2000, p. 59.

⁵⁶⁵ Hall, Peter, *Pioneer Series: Autobiography of Rev. Peter Hall*, p. 10. "The Bombardment at Christianborg brought many refugees to settle to Akropong. They were Ga and they were petty traders. The Poll-tax which brought about discontent and which in turn brought about the bombardment of Christianborg spread to Akuapem."

relocated himself to Abokobi, the Christian village.⁵⁶⁶ Later on, he became a powerful evangelist. Another traditional priest called Akotia failed in the performance of his charismatic activity. People were against him, he rushed to Paulo Mohenu, was baptised in 1890 and became an undisputed member of the Abokobi community.

Abokobi is situated in the Ga area. At the time, Ga people lived under priestly leadership. Under this system the aptitude one had to deal with spirits and gods qualified one to be the head of a community. Traditional priests were political and military leaders also. On September 4, 1893, the Abokobi population elected Akotia as its representative for his spiritual qualities in the same way that the neighbouring villages elected theirs. In March 1894, he and his leading team were inducted during a church service. Through Christ, Akotia came back to the leading position he had lost four years before. He continued in his role as the African tradition demanded, but his whole orientation had changed now that he had become a Christian. In the Ga tradition of leadership, closeness to God qualified one to head a village. Akotia rooted Abokobi the Christian village in the Ga spiritual tradition. No neighbouring Chief (*Nii*) questioned the relevance of the Abokobi leadership, but they rather envied Akotia because he possessed what they did not have: Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and the Bible. They recognised that Akotia had transferred to the Christian community the African notion of the leader as one in a continually good relationship with spiritual forces and the Supreme God. In the Christian tradition, the secular leader could have a prophet or a chaplain, but without the leader himself necessarily being a qualified priest. In Abokobi, no one could be a member of the leading committee if people questioned his spiritual life.

⁵⁶⁶ Sanneh, Lamine, *West African Christianity*, p. 113.

When the British got control of the Gold Coast (Ghana) after the conquest of the Asante, they requested that native authority all over the British colony be organised according to the Akan system of government. In the Ga area, where leadership was in the hands of the traditional priests (*Wulomei*)⁵⁶⁷ a new tradition was invented and new people were elected to represent them before the British Government at Accra. Before 1896 when the British Government took the *Asantehene* to the Seychelles and occupied Kumase, nobody in the Ga area was a *Nii* (King), as he is referred to today. The newly elected representatives established themselves and with time they came to enjoy some of the powers of the priest (*Wulomei*). What is today claimed to be African tradition in Ga was an internal invention initiated by the British government to harmonise colonial system of its indirect rule in Ghana. Now, it is only in Abokobi that the head of the community has to show an unquestionable relationship with God as the Ga pre-colonial tradition required. The Salem practice has helped preserve the traditional structure of leadership in the Ga area and of the Ga people.

E- Ramsayer and Asante sacral rule

The Basel Mission planning and strategy were dominated by the situation in Asante territory. Although Riis went to Kumase in 1839-40, by 1860 no Christian community had been established there. Asante alone proudly maintained its independence vis-à-vis British colonial ambition. The Asante felt superior to the Europeans and considered mission work a disruption. They were not as attracted by mission work as the neighbouring Akan states. Missionaries started working with the

⁵⁶⁷ *Wolomei* is the plural form of *Wolomo* (priest).

less powerful Akan groups which provided the means of a possible extension of the Asante Empire. Missionaries, traders and soldiers were considered agents of the enemy of Asante rule, and were all objects of suspicion:

“In June 1869, Asante force, led by Adubofuor, Gyasehene of Kumasi captured the towns of Anum and Ho, burnt the Mission station, and took prisoner the Basel Missionary Ramseyer, his wife, their new born baby, Kuhme the mission cotton trader and Bonnat a French Merchant. They were taken to Kumasi where they were held prisoner for four and half years”.⁵⁶⁸

In September 1869, the news reached the mission in Basel which contacted the British government for help. The representatives of the British Foreign Office refused to intervene because Ho was outside the British territory and Kumase was the capital of the independent Asante confederacy. Ramseyer found himself at the heart of an uncorrupted African sacral rule.

“The Asantehene, Otumfo Kofi Karikari, treated them with customary courtesy and sent a regular stipend consisting of gold dust and occasional food items. They were allowed to do some limited farming. When the king discovered the building skill of the prisoners, he commissioned them for erecting some lodges”.⁵⁶⁹

As prisoner, Ramseyer was well treated. He was given opportunities to tell Karikari and the royal household the Good News. He was allowed to preach and “even to speak against local customs and he was so uplifted that he begged the committee in Basel to consider Kumase as a Mission Station”.⁵⁷⁰ Being able as a prisoner to speak to Asante royals in the inner court of *Ahenfie* (the palace) in Kumase at that time without being killed, shows how kind the Asante sacral government was to the missionary. Surely Jesus was with Ramseyer and with the

⁵⁶⁸ Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*, p. 110.

⁵⁶⁹ Schweitzer, Peter, *Survivors on the Gold Coast*, p. 62.

⁵⁷⁰ Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*, p. 111.

Asante ruling class for the interaction to be possible between the two spiritual traditions for four years! Ramseyer won no convert at the heart of the Asante structure of leadership, yet he did not lose hope. “His days of captivity were days of silent preaching by his life and work in Asante, preparing the hearts and minds of the people to accept Christ”.⁵⁷¹ Ramseyer’s wife had more impact on people than the talkative missionary.

Asante leaders wanted Ramseyer to observe as closely as possible their kindness and customs in order to work for them when they freed him. But Ramseyer showed no appreciation. He was eager to talk and convince others to follow his teachings. He did not listen to those who could have helped shape the life of the Asante people. Ramseyer failed to use this opportunity to learn from the right people the meaning of their customs and the nature of their aspirations. He could not negotiate a spiritual meeting between Asante sacral rule and the Gospel of Jesus. Beyond his human character, the Asante people could sense Christ with a difference. They never objected to Ramseyer preaching the Gospel. However, the missionary condemned too quickly the African way of relating to God with an apparent will to immediately replace it with Christianity, as he understood it. Asante sacral rulers proved to be far less eager consumers of European spiritual tradition. Instead they were so proud of their religion that Ramseyer’s criticisms turned out to be a sign of spiritual ignorance.

⁵⁷¹ Kwamena, Poh, *The Rev Ramseyer and the Foundation of the Presbyterian Church in Kumasi*, unpublished.

Ramseyer and the other prisoners were detained for political purposes. Asante leaders were preparing political allies among the Europeans. They had not finished the process of winning the support of Ramseyer and the others when

“on February 4th 1874, the British forces entered Kumase and released the prisoners. The town was burnt to the ground. In September 1874, the town was raised to the status of British Colony. But Asante however remained independent”.⁵⁷²

Ramseyer worked for a while with David Asante at Kyebi but in the same year, 1874, he moved to the newly created mission station at Abetifi, six miles from Kumase. During this time Ramseyer waited, looking to the day when it would be safe to start work in Asante. The defeat of the Asante during the Segrenti war resulted in a long period of political instability in the Asante royal household.⁵⁷³ In 1888, Agyeman Prempeh, at the age of 19, was elected Asantehene with the title Kwaku Dua III. He was bound to clash with the British because he was a nominee of the majority party within the Asante that had not accepted the defeat of 1874 and the treaty of Fomena. His rival to the Stool, Tweriboana, was a nominee of the minority party that wanted peace with the British and was supported by those foreigners. British troops prepared for war.

Prempeh had not wished to fight with the British, and he managed to bring his opponent to accept him. British troops were waiting for him to launch the war but nothing happened.

“On 31st October 1894, on hearing the news that Britain had resolved to send an army into Asante, Prempeh dispatched 3 messengers to Ramseyer at

⁵⁷² Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*, p. 111.

⁵⁷³ There was a spate of destoolment of Kofi Karikari after the Segrenti war of 1874 in favour of his younger brother Mensah Bonsu. In 1883, Destoolment of Mensah Bonsu who was unwilling to run the risk of possible war with Britain. Sudden death of Kwaku Dua in 1884 and 4 years of civil war between the supporters of Tweriboana and Prempeh as claimants of the Golden stool.

Abetifi, asking him to use his good office with the Governor as he was ready to accept the conditions imposed and would agree to come under the white man's rule".⁵⁷⁴

The Asantehene by turning to Ramseyer for help expressed what the Asante had hoped Ramseyer would have become if they had been able to keep him under their own control this meant a political ally. Surprisingly, the messenger came back with the news that "it was too late". Ramseyer was apparently waiting for the British occupation of Kumase which would give the missionaries the freedom and protection to extend Christianity into the Asante Empire. On January 17, 1896, the vanguard of British forces reached Kumase. They met with no resistance as they entered the town. On January 20, 1896, the Asantehene knelt down before the Governor without his sandals or the golden circlet and agreed to submit to British demands. British troops, acting like winners after a fierce war even though there had been no fight, took Prempeh, his parents, the Queen Mother and a number of important members of the ruling class into custody initially at Elmina castle⁵⁷⁵ on the coast, later to Sierra Leone, and, finally, to the Seychelles. Agyeman Prempeh sacrificed himself to maintain the integrity of the Asante nation and the safety of the Golden Stool. That very same day on January 20, the Governor invited Ramseyer to Kumase in these words:

"Kumase will henceforth be opened to missionaries and should you arrive at Kumase before I left. It will give me pleasure to see you".⁵⁷⁶ As Ramseyer entered Kumase, he wrote; "It is no more a dream. I am again in Kumase and can now say: Kumase is a Basel Mission station. Here stand Perregaux and I as free missionaries and the entire country is opened to us".⁵⁷⁷

⁵⁷⁴ Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*, p. 113.

⁵⁷⁵ His cell at the Elmina Castle is no more called a cell but "Prempeh's room". The author made two visits to Elmina Castle in August 1998 and May 2002.

⁵⁷⁶ Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*, p. 126.

⁵⁷⁷ Kwamena, Poh, *The Rev Ramseyer and the Foundation of the Presbyterian Church in Kumasi*, p. 18.

The Asante governing body had taken Ramseyer as a political prisoner and treated him kindly in order to save their power in case of an emergency. Ramseyer, on his part, helped to replace them with European power and preferred to be a minister in Kumase without the sacral leaders of the Asante Empire. In June 1896, Ramseyer was presented with a number of slaves and the British colonial government gave him a land for mission work. Unlike in other Akan states, the land for the mission station in Kumase was not given by the traditional owners of the land, but by the new British masters in Kumase, for the education of the people at the periphery of the society. Ramseyer opened three schools and baptised the first Asante at the end of 1897. When he returned to Switzerland for good in 1905, he had converted not a single traditional leader. The missionary attracted none of them for they knew from the exile of the Asantehene and the quick establishment of the mission station without their consent that Ramseyer, their former prisoner, was not innocent. By aligning himself with the British and not with the Asante, Ramseyer delayed the brightness of the Gospel light from shining within the institution of sacral rule in the Asante Empire.

F- Asante royals in exile: direct contact with Christianity

The spiritual itinerary of the Asante was not to remain as discussed above. In exile, Prempeh and all those who were with him were exposed regularly to the Christian message through a chaplain of the High Church of Anglicanism.

“As early as 1900, Archdeacon Buswell of the Church Missionary Society noted Prempeh’s interest in Christianity: King Prempeh seems to look forward to my visit with pleasure. He certainly listens most attentively and by his questions and remarks I gather that he is trying, and not

unsuccessfully, to take in what he hears. I find also that he talks about it afterwards".⁵⁷⁸

Why did Prempeh and his entourage side with Christianity? Emmanuel Akyeampong suggested three things as answer to this question: The ship the sea and the exile. He wrote:

"The ship, the sea, and the exile are crucial in understanding the transformation of Prempeh's identity. He was determined that he would return to his native Asante, and he was willing to change if that would facilitate his repatriation. He embraced the spirit of innovation and change. He embraced modernity".⁵⁷⁹

Prempeh moved from a conservative to a progressive attitude by adopting modernity as the British presented it. He introduced new elements into his worldview through constant debate with his traditional people. Secondly, Akyeampong used a comment from an old man (octogenarian) who had been with Prempeh in the Seychelles to argue that: the middle passage that slaves underwent resulted in a sensitivity to their spiritual needs.⁵⁸⁰ In captivity, Prempeh began to doubt the relevance of his Asante religion. The religion of the winner became rather attractive and he was willing to embrace it. Thirdly, Prempeh's relocation in the Seychelles from Sierra Leone

"impressed upon him the territorial scope of British influence and power. He became aware that only British goodwill could ensure his return to Asante. Prempeh decided to demonstrate to the British government that he had become a loyal and civilised subject".⁵⁸¹

In other words, Prempeh expressed an interest in Western education and Christianity, the very things the Asante people had rejected in their first contact with Europeans.

⁵⁷⁸ Akyeampong, Emmanuel, "Christianity, Modernity and Weight of Tradition in the life of *Asantehene* Agyeman Prempeh I, c. 1888-1931", in *Africa*, no 69 (2), 1999, p. 290.

⁵⁷⁹ Akyeampong, Emmanuel, "Christianity, Modernity and Weight of Tradition in the life of *Asantehene* Agyeman Prempeh I, p. 288.

⁵⁸⁰ "Those already in slavery, those on slave ships when the trade was abolished, those being held captive in African slave forts, all felt the need for spiritual nurture". Akyeampong, Emmanuel "Christianity, Modernity and Weight of Tradition in the life of *Asantehene* Agyeman Prempeh I, p. 289.

⁵⁸¹ Akyeampong, Emmanuel, "Christianity, Modernity and Weight of Tradition in the life of *Asantehene* Agyeman Prempeh I, p. 290.

Contrary to the Pietist movement, the high church missionaries of the Anglican Church believed that human beings were not equal. There were Kings, Lords, and subjects. In the church one could be a simple communicant, priest, bishop or archbishop. There was a hierarchy and at the top of which stood the Queen or the King who ruled as head of the State and head of the Church. Asante royals in exile accepted Christianity and Prempeh was baptised the same day with Mwanga, the former leader of the Buganda, who happened to be another deposed African sacral ruler in exile. Mwanga died in the Seychelles but Prempeh, who was renamed Edward, came back to Kumase in 1924. Akyeampong draws attention to the fact that Prempeh's Christianity had political implications because his entire entourage adopted British royal names. While Prempeh took the name Edward, the Queen mother Yaa Akyaa chose the name Elisabeth.⁵⁸² The Anglican proceeded differently as compared to the Pietistic Basel missionaries. In Uganda, the Anglicans had started their missionary work at the heart of the traditional centre of power. The *Lukkiko*, the immediate entourage of the sacral ruler who shared power with the *Kabaka*,⁵⁸³ adopted Anglicanism. King Mwanga decided to fight the Christians who were introducing new spiritual, social and political trends into the community of Buganda without his consent. In this struggle, Mwanga was instrumental in producing the African saints called the Ugandan Martyrs. He order the death of all those who have been converted to Christianity. As a result, he was exiled to the Seychelles where he met Prempeh.

⁵⁸² Akyeampong, Emmanuel "Christianity, Modernity and Weight of Tradition in the life of *Asantehene* Agyeman Prempeh I, p. 290.

⁵⁸³ *Kabaka* is the word for sacral ruler in the Luganda language in Uganda and corresponds to the *Fo* or the *Nana*. *Lukkiko* is the word for kingmakers, the high-ranking member of the sacral rule hierarchy among the Baganda and corresponds to the *Mkam* or the *Mpanimfo*.

The colonial government introduced those rulers into Anglican Christianity far away from their home territory. In the case of Uganda, the *Lukkiko*, who are the kingmakers, went ahead under British pressure to enthrone the one-year-old son of Mwanga in his place. His name was Cwa and he was brought up as the first Christian African sacral ruler. To introduce civilisation and Christianity, the colonial agents had had to break the stronghold of African sacral rule. Prempeh's conversion was in line with his status as a captive. Political ambition and religious allegiance were fused, and together with his entourage, Prempeh decided on the denomination and not the Christian faith itself.

“The environment and culture of the Seychelles kept Asante religion and culture alive in the mind and hearts and minds of the elderly exile. They organised *Adae* regularly with an alternation between *Kwesidae* and *Wukudae*. Libations were poured to the Asante ancestors and the Sunday *Akwesidae* was marked by church attendance”.⁵⁸⁴

Considering himself in Kumase like the Queen in England, Prempeh favoured the Anglican Church, went for service every Sunday, sent his household to mission schools, convinced his ruling class and influential state functionaries to go to the Anglican Church or to follow Christianity. Before 1924, there was no reference to an Asante ruler in Christian mission. They waited for Prempeh who enlightened them from the Stool room while sitting on the Golden Stool to embrace Christian faith. His re-enthronement as the king of Kumase was followed by a thanksgiving service at the Anglican Church. Since then, Christian prayer and thanksgiving services have become the tradition in the Anglican Church in Kumase when a new Asante ruler is enthroned.

⁵⁸⁴ Akyeampong, Emmanuel, “Christianity, Modernity and Weight of Tradition in the life of *Asantehene* Agyeman Prempeh I, p. 295.

Conclusion: African Sacral rule and Christian mission: Early agreement and disagreement

Agreement

In Cameroon as well as in Ghana, sacral rule patronised the evangelistic activity in the African society. Sacral rulers were ready to accept what the missionary brought and they provided him with necessary facilities. One of the first areas of interaction was the provision of a house for the missionary. A house was usually granted to someone that people honoured and wanted to live with. The donation of a house was a definite contract between two people who agreed to live together. Faithfulness and loyalty were required from both parties just as respect from the traditional rulers and loyalty from the beneficiary of the house. As for the foundation of the mission church in Africa, sacral rule with its own spiritual tradition was not passive in the evangelisation of Africa. The content of the missionary message mattered a great deal. African rulers found the words and deeds of Jesus Christ attractive. They adopted an inclusive attitude which ensured the presence of Jesus in their spiritual worldview. Spiritually, they had a place which could be filled by Christ as the Gospel threw light on their relationship with God. With regard to Cameroon, in the context of the Jamaican missionary work, and subsequently under the national leadership, the combination of school and church became an expected integral part of the Cameroonian Christian community.⁵⁸⁵ The sacral ruler Douala Manga Bell, in a time of political crisis with the Germans which eventually led to his death, presented his case in Christian spiritual. This served to bring under the Lordship of Jesus the

⁵⁸⁵ Weber, *International Influences and Baptist Mission in Cameroon*, p. 3.

whole Sawa people of the coastal Cameroon as his prophetic words were turned into popular poetic song by Christians in the church.⁵⁸⁶

All the African sacral rulers in Cameroon and in Ghana who came close to the Gospel of Jesus struggled to make the Christian faith a state religion. *Nana Addo Dankwa II* in Akropong, *Nana Amoako Atta I* at Kyebi, *Fo Njoya* in Bamun, and the Asante royals in the Seychelles honoured the Christian worshipping day by amending their traditional religious activities on that day. They wanted to enrich the African spiritual tradition based on ancestral worship with the Gospel of Jesus Christ that they had received in the mission school or which they had imbibed as they learnt, discussed and taught Christian principles. Especially in Bamun, the ruler and his kingmakers wanted to become Christians in order to understand why and how some initiation rites could be anti-Christian. As catechists and masters of initiation, they felt that it was their duty and not the missionary's to legislate on the matter. They had reduced the number of weekdays and declared Sunday free as result of their Christianity. They could have done more, but the missionary felt that they had to be taught things about their age-old traditional customs. However, they reacted negatively when the missionary failed to affirm their sacral power over the religious practices of people they had selected for baptism.

The missionaries did not completely oppose the indigenous initiative in mission. In fact, the new Christian communities were organised according to the African socio-political power structure which was used by the rulers to instruct their people to welcome the missionaries. If the missionary, as head of the community, happened to be a potential traditional leader, he was emphatic in his use of African

⁵⁸⁶ Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 129.

vocabulary and notions. He was the means of transferring African spiritual and political traditions into the Christian missionary thinking and practice. Missionaries believed that Africans from such a society could become good Christians. They trusted their African collaborators and promoted them to high positions in the mission hierarchy with the appreciation of the traditional community. They used African languages to communicate with the people and felt very early the need to translate the Bible into the indigenous languages. The religious idiom in sacral rule served as a channel for the communication of God's truth to the people as well as their sacral rulers. The possibility of finding analogical and metaphoric expressions for biblical concepts in the African spiritual language bears witness to the Lord's deeds in Africa before the coming of the Christian mission. The first copy of the translated Bible was often presented to the sacral ruler and was an occasion that brought together Christians and non-Christians. Rejection of a language gave room to violent opposition and a sense of failure as we saw in the case of Dieterle in Bandjoun. African people and missionaries believed that conversion occurred when people read the Bible and articulated Christian values in their own language. The pressure of the colonial government had little effect on the respect the Christian mission showed towards the traditional socio-political structure and local languages.

Disagreement

Disagreement came from the fact that even though the missionaries accepted the social hierarchy, they rejected the religious foundation on which every part of it was built. They found the African God to be the same as in the Bible, but they did not

share the African understanding of the spiritual world. The dominant missionary attitude continued to be determined by the image of tyrannical rulers, pagan priests, and cruel customs. Missionaries assumed beforehand that the initiation rites, magical practices and various sacrifices were connected with demons. The missionary came to redeem Africa from heathen practices and it happened that those who were deeply involved in them were the sacral rulers.⁵⁸⁷ In condemning the traditional religion, they also condemned the governing body. The missionaries insisted on spiritual abdication, and the suppression of religious practices and rituals as preconditions for full membership in the Christian community. They reduced the spiritual worldview to the few elements they knew and possessed: the Bible, the Christian congregation with the sacraments, and prayers to one strict and exclusive God. Those elements could satisfy a European who, coming from a much reduced spiritual society, may find in Pietism the spiritual satisfaction to quench his thirst. But with an African who had more than one way to link with God, this missionary attitude proved to be too limited and rather irrelevant for the conversion of African sacral rulers. The pietistic spirit of the missionaries had trained them to avoid or desist from relating to any new or confusing situations, and Christianity was presented as diametrically opposed to ancestral worship. They were not, therefore, prepared to confront or overcome new situations with genuine initiatives. Their literate culture had prepared them to only value what was written. By contrast, what the Africans were suggesting had no written form and was limited to their practices and regulations. The emphasis on spiritual experience as written without the attempt to acknowledge orality

⁵⁸⁷ "The difference between the progress in the civilisation of the white man and the backwardness of the African, was due to the difference in Religion" Smith, Noel, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*, p. 90.

complemented the missionary's attitude towards African religious practices. Missionaries considered African religious rituals as satanic. Inexperience and inability to deal with spiritual matters led to a general rejection of the religious practices of sacral rule.

There was also disagreement in the relationship between ethics and doctrine. The missionaries presented conversion as the expression of an individual's understanding of, and commitment to, basic Christian doctrines. For the sacral rulers, the missionary's position that a person was converted solely on a personal profession of faith in Christ was inconsistent with his insistence that commitment to a monogamous lifestyle should be an integral part of his profession. The missionary had elevated the ethic of monogamous marriage to the status of a doctrine. since most traditional rulers found it impossible to accept that their commitment to having only one wife must be a pre-condition of their acceptance as full members of the Christian community, the whole enterprise of bringing sacral rulers into the church failed. The sacral rulers accepted the Christian faith but rejected the ethical implication which the missionary had associated with it arising from his own Western cultural perspective. African rulers in Bamun tried to convince the missionary that there was a difference between being a Christian and being a polygamist. As accepted teachers, translators and writers of the Christian doctrine and texts, these rulers worked toward individual full membership in the Christian community. At the same time, they sensed the real importance of the sacraments in Christian life. The relationship between conversion, ethics and the sacraments was not well articulated as to clarify how and when one was qualified to belong to the Christian community. The missionary had no

theological argument to help in this matter. In his confusion, he objected to the practice and it was followed by mutual rejection. In Akyem Abuakwa, *Nana Amoako Atta I* approached his cousin the missionary David Asante, to get support in transforming from within the Stool Room, religious practices on which the structure of leadership was based. Rev. Asante, in complete ignorance of the spiritual struggle of the ruler confronted him in with his role in slavery. Between conversion and the sacraments, according to the missionary understanding, there was an ethnical connection. Ethical principles were by definition cultural and contextual and, therefore, not absolute but could change depending on the environment. Unfortunately, the missionary's understanding of Christian ethics had an absolute and separatist connotation which reflected his spiritual and cultural background.

The Christian mission did very well by showing ordinary subjects the way to satisfy their personal spiritual thirst through active participation in spiritual activities. By enabling the people to seek direct access to God through Jesus Christ, the missionaries unconsciously made the Christians the spiritual rivals of sacral rulers since in the traditional religion, people at the fringe of the society were not involved in spiritual activities. Because they were now introduced into religious practices through Christianity, African converts adopted the missionary attitude to, and criticism of, the indigenous leadership. Christians started to question the religious character of ruling institutions and with it, the spiritual authority of their rulers. Christian converts became the spiritual rivals of the traditional rulers as missionaries presented Christianity as antagonistic to what was African. There was a division for the first time within the spiritual unity and the familial cohesion of the receiving

African community. The Pietistic attitude of confrontation made competition a common feature in the encounter between Christian spiritual values and the African spiritual tradition.

Part Three: Sacral Rule and Christian Church: Achievements and Challenges

Chapter Seven- The African Church period

Introduction

This chapter examines the achievements of African leaders in the Christian church and sacral rule when the Western missionaries left the leadership of the African mission field to Africans. Colonisation had brought about challenges that were now to confront by the new African church leaders. The handing over of power to Africans naturally stimulated great hopes for a new future because it was very easy to see how the prohibitions, obligations, compromises and omissions of the European missionaries had distorted the impact of the Gospel. We simplify the scene by focusing on the reaction of two groups: Christians outside and Christians subjected to sacral rule. Those outside the sacral rule such as the ordained and lay African church representatives as well as African lay Christians in trade, healing, and colonial government service, had already started to inculturate some aspects of the Christian life that had been imparted by the missionaries.

This meant that the African church leaders were expected not only to continue to maintain and manage the old church structures as before, but also to create new structures for missionary work. These expectations were held by the African community of Christians and non-Christians alike, and by former missionaries (as well as the new leaders themselves) because the funds to continue the work were not locally available, at least not initially; sacral rulers also held similar expectations. The close association between evangelisation and the humanitarian work of the

mission had been one of the attractions of Christianity and the reason for many African conversions. With the induction of their fellow Africans into leadership, both groups expected an almost unachievable level of humanitarian assistance. The task of the African Christian leaders was further complicated by the secular view that the “missionary enterprise had been an offence to African society”. The Africans who held this opinion were expecting the new church leaders who were sons and daughters of Africa, to reverse the earlier tendency of the missionary work to be centred abroad and centred it instead at home. Many ordinary Christians helped the new leaders by confidently doing what they could to keep the missionary task alive but many others were much more firmly rooted in the African worldview. A group of people have been selected who had responsibilities both in the Christian church and in sacral rule. We have given below a critical assessment of what they did in Cameroon and Ghana, taking in turn each of the three main churches that have issued from Basel Mission activities in Africa. These churches are: the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.

I- Challenging situations that confronted African church leaders

The points of agreement and disagreement between the Christian mission and sacral rule in Cameroon and Ghana continued in a dynamic way with more interaction and changes on both sides. There were regulated practices, prohibited activities, commands to be fulfilled and omissions to be tackled. The process of transformation and continuity within Christianity continued with the development of

the Basel Mission first as an evangelistic movement, and then with the establishment of a community of converts as a church organisation. It reached the point where the Europeans passed on the unfinished task of bringing the whole African community of sacral rule under the Lordship of Jesus to their African colleagues. There were situations to be discussed, modifications to be made, and practices to be eliminated. In some cases, the solution was in coexistence and accommodation, readjustment and recovery of all rights as well as new initiatives for the ongoing evangelisation process. The major challenges of colonisation came with its associated socio-economic and political realities while the missionary enterprise also left a complex situation which generated new spiritual responsibilities and the need for new vision.

A- Colonialists' attitude to religion and challenges to the African church leaders

In Cameroon as well as in Ghana, the African church leaders had been given jurisdiction over their institutions by the missionary board at Basel. This change had a direct effect on the Christian church and an indirect effect on sacral rule. Contrary to the vision of the Christian mission, European colonialists were more interested exploiting African resources, and in enriching themselves through profitable trade with Africans and in international trade on behalf of Africans whom they continually used as a labour force without regard to any form of negotiation. This attitude was inconsistent with the missionary principle of fighting injustice and championing human rights as a dominant motive in evangelistic enterprise. Colonialism distorted certain aspects of missionary practices.

The conversion processes which aimed at producing a self-confident and self-reliant African Christian was contrary to the colonial ideology which pointed to the inability of the African people to govern themselves. Christian patterns of education for African self-advancement as well as the Basel mission policy of training Africans for participating in world trade was opposed in principle to the colonial project of the political and economic exploitation of Africa in the European interest. The Basel missionaries' effort to produce socio-culturally independent Africans through linguistic exploration of indigenous languages for self-development, constituted a threat to the colonial enterprise. Though this may be true for the Basel Mission it hardly applies to the many other missionary societies some of which were established and sponsored by colonialist governments. Such missionary societies as Kangué Ewane suggests were by and large reliable agents for the colonial project.⁵⁸⁸ Politically, sacral rulers and their system supported both the colonialist and the missionary. The atmosphere was one of competition and mutual suspicion. The missionary, however, at times, positively encouraged, promoted and supported sacral rule for which they did not expect any reward. A colonial administrator instructed the missionaries before they travelled to Africa, saying:

“We did not acquired colonies in order to convert blacks, and not in the first place for their benefit, but for us white men. Anyone who opposes us in the accomplishment of this purpose must be swept out of the way”⁵⁸⁹

Riis had seen how crucial the presence of Jamaicans was to be for the success of the Basel Mission in Akropong, and the success of the Jamaican Baptists in Cameroon indicated the important contribution that the African-Americans could have made to

⁵⁸⁸ Kangué Ewane, *Semence et Moission coloniales*, Clé, Yaoundé, 1983.

⁵⁸⁹ Lekunze, Edward, *Chieftaincy and Christianity in Cameroon (1886-1923)*, p.70.

the Christian missionary enterprise in Africa.⁵⁹⁰ When the African-Americans communicated their love of freedom and equality to Africans on the continent, the colonial hierarchy saw this as a threat to their control of the colonies. After colonial representatives in Africa had protested to the mission boards in America about the danger that they saw of an influx of African-Americans into the colonies, the representatives of the missionary boards in America connived with the immigration authorities to deny African-Americans the chance to serve in Africa.⁵⁹¹

The first British colonial government contact with a Basel mission station in the Gold Coast (Ghana) was the destruction of a church building in Osu in 1854, forcing the Christians to create Abokobi as a village for themselves. The German government bombarded the Baptist church building in Bonaberie on the December 16, 1884. English soldiers in Fumban did not stop the Muslim Indians from burning copies of the Bible and destroying the Christian printing press in 1915. The French soldiers in Douala destroyed the Basel mission station under the pretext of searching for hidden German guns, and took the commercial shops of the mission by force as a war trophy in 1915. European missionaries and colonial agents did not serve the same principles or the same cause. Would the African church leaders be able to withstand the unchristian and harsh attitude of colonial agents who had at heart, not the interests of Africa, but only those of their country of origin?

Throughout the colonial period, European administrators ignored the regular presence of the ruling class of kingmakers, nobles, members of secret societies and

⁵⁹⁰ Isaac, Kamta, *Renaissance de l'Afrique et Evangile: L'héritage de Joseph Merrick et de la chrétienté Afro-Jamaïcaine dans la mission sociale et politique de l'Eglise au Cameroun 1850-1920*, Thèse de doctorat, Yaoundé, Mars 2003.

⁵⁹¹ Campbell, *Songs of Zion; The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1995, p. 92.

the entire hierarchy of sacral rule. Grassfields and Akan sacral rules were not a colonial creation and their rulers continued to be legitimised by powerful rituals. Eventhough the rulers were victims of change, yet they did not lose their source of power. The foreign masters left the kingmakers and members of the ruling class undisturbed, alone to carry on, the religious dimension of all their activities. The fact that this group of people was not in the trajectory of the colonial enterprise kept both the religious basis of sacral rule, and the African spiritual experience with God, safe. Kingmakers and others were free to participate in Christian services without being vivtimised by the government and the mission. From their perspective, they could appreciate and apply biblical principles within the traditional society. They were free to compare their past spiritual experience with the new Christian teachings. When the European missionaries left the mission field, African church leaders inherited a situation in which syncretism was becoming a way of life for the majority of people. They looked for concrete happiness from the Christian church but also from ancestors. Elements of traditional religion which had been condemned by the missionary were revived, and the new leaders who were both part of the problem and its solution had to react. How were they going to deal with all the religious rituals, practices, idioms and the spiritual worldview that continued to shape their understanding of God but which had been declared irrelevant for Christians by the missionaries? Were they commissioned to get rid of them or to study them in order to disciple their own communities and nations?

Colonialists adopted a passive attitude to religion in Africa thus encouraging the survival and flourishing of African traditional religion and Islam, both of which

were a challenge to the evangelistic programmes of African church leaders. Colonial administrative policies had prevented missionaries from evangelising certain parts of Cameroon and Ghana which were supposed to be under Muslim influence. The colonial presence in the northern parts of Cameroon and Ghana collaborated with Islam. Analysing this phenomenon in the colonial history of the British Empire, Andrew Walls noticed that:

“Curiously enough, under the British empire, and as a direct result of British policy, Islam received more converts than the jihads had ever brought it. It is also true that the British Raj, assisted in this respect by Christian missions, produced the conditions for a reformulation and revitalisation of Hindu faith. In the end, is it possible that the other faiths of the world, rather than Christianity, will prove to have been the beneficiaries of the imperial period?”⁵⁹²

The spread of Islam created political, geographical and socio-cultural barriers which constituted another challenge to the African church leaders who could not easily evangelise in the Islamic areas.

B- Colonialists’ attitude to sacral rule and challenges to the African church leaders

The colonial enterprise had damaged the institution of African sacral rule which had facilitated their presence in Africa in the first instance. Sacral rule and rulers were victims of colonial manipulations. The British, Germans and French, all ruled the people through their pre-colonial rulers. Sacral rulers in Cameroon and Ghana were considered an effective channel for transmitting colonial instructions and practice. The Germans, French and British exploited local conflicts to their advantage

⁵⁹² Walls, Andrew, “British Missions” in Christensen, Torben and, Hutchinson, William R. (ed), *Missionary Ideologies in the Imperial Era: 1880-1920*, Forlaget Aros, Aarhus, Denmark, 1982, p. 165.

to systematically disgrace the rulers one after the other, and to force them to submit to the colonial administration. The aim of colonisation was to promote the economic and political interests of the colonisers. Whereas in Ghana the British organised the disgruntled Akan groups to fight against the powerful Asante king and dishonoured him, the Germans in Cameroon used different tactics for the same purposes: extending the authority of the prominent *Fo* of Bali-Nyonga for a while, abandoning him afterwards, and appointing a less powerful replacement to this high position. Both strategies had the same aim of disgracing the African traditional ruler on African soil. Because the Germans and British acknowledged the authority of the existing rulers, there were two power sources in the colony. For the French who practised the policy of assimilation, there was one sole source of power in the colony, and all over the French territories, and that was Paris. Rulers were expected to implement decisions and discipline their people to live as if they were in Paris. The French claimed and monopolized power in a way that the Germans and the British did not attempt to do. In addition, their intention was to destroy self-respect, self-worth and identity through their programmes of French schooling and forced labour. They expected nothing less than self-annihilation on the part of the sacral rulers first and then, through them, of their people also. The challenge to the African church leaders, therefore, was to help the sacral rulers recover their lost dignity, and to empower afresh those who had been anthropologically “impoverished”.⁵⁹³

⁵⁹³ Anthropological poverty: “When persons are deprived not only of goods and possessions of material, spiritual, moral, intellectual, cultural, or sociological order, but of everything that makes up the foundation of their beings-in-the world and the specificity of their identity, their dignity, their freedom, their thought, their history, their language, their faith universe, and their basic creativity; deprived of all their rights, their hopes, their ambitions, (that is, when they are robbed of their own ways of living and existing)- they sink into a kind of poverty which no longer concerns only the

The French, German and British colonial powers all debased the institution of sacral rule. In Cameroon as well as in Ghana, colonialism took away the military, the judicial, and, to some extent, the political functions of sacral rule. They conceived the traditional power to be in the hands of the sacral ruler, and envisaged the institution of sacral rule as limited to the ruler himself. As a result, they introduced changes in the inheritance patterns within sacral rule. They destroyed the hierarchy of sacral rule by ignoring the kingmakers and members of the ruling class. Geographical boundaries were altered without consultation, and socio-political mobility was distorted. They controlled everything that occurred in the daily functioning of sacral rule and oriented every event to serve their own interests and to cause the terminal decline of the institution of sacral rule. When African church leaders inherited their positions from the European missionaries, the situation of sacral rule was at the mercy of the modern foreign governments supported by their established churches.

One of the many examples of the established churches cooperating with colonial governments to oppress Africans and to oppose African sacral rule was in the deportation and subsequent conversion of the Asantehene. In virtue of their historical relationship with the British government, Anglicans were particularly prone to cause embarrassment to their African colleagues who were to inherit the situation when they left. *Nana Agyeman Prempeh* was taken to the Seychelles in utter disgrace and came back a full member of the Anglican Church. This constitutes an example of the challenges the African church leaders had to deal with. What could the church do to

exterior goods or possessions but strikes at the very being, essence, and dignity of the human person. It is this poverty that we call anthropological poverty.” In Mveng, Engelbert, “Impoverishment and liberation: A theological approach for Africa and the Third World”, in *Paths to African Theology*, pp. 154-165, Gibellini, Rosino (ed), New York, Orbis Books Maryknoll, 1994, p. 156.

mitigate the crime that had been committed by the colonialists before Prempeh was converted and which had troubled the people's minds so deeply? Prempeh had gone so far in solving this problem that the church now only had to consider how to maintain his seat in the Anglican Cathedral in Kumase. Just as the sacral rulers had helped to establish the church in the first place, so Prempeh had helped to remove the stigma of colonial oppression by his conversion to Christianity and by making the Anglican liturgy part of the regular worship and the enstoolment process for sacral rulers in Asante. A key issue was whether the African church leaders would fully recognise the pivotal importance of the support that African sacral rulers could continue to give to the ongoing missionary enterprise.

The colonial enterprise gave birth to modern African states. A modern structure of foreign government generated new centres of power with the emergence of a new intellectual elite and a new class of businessmen. These newly formed groups largely consisted of the former students of mission schools who now challenged the existing authorities in the society. The civil servants and business people introduced changes in the church, in sacral rule and in the colonial government. Their success made the Christian mission attractive and the Gospel spread in the new areas where they now established themselves. Living outside their original communities, they unintentionally contributed to the rapid depopulation of the rural areas which were still under the control of sacral rulers. The rulers had to readjust to the loss of the intelligentsia and the exodus of their wealthy subjects to the cities. The educated Africans in the civil service and in business became a threat to the colonial ideology. Since they pointed out the horrors of colonisation, and

successfully claimed their right to self-government. With the colonial development of new centres of power, the African church leaders had to respond to a rapid increase in the number and geographical dispersion of Christian communities. The depopulation of the rural areas was not only a challenge to sacral rulers but also to the church. Those Africans migrating to the cities for work presented the challenge of urban ministry. As the demand for independence grew stronger, the African church leaders had to prepare themselves to take the church through the delicate process of decolonisation.

The fact that sacral rule has survived the colonial onslaught is a sign of both the spiritual emptiness of the colonial project and the spiritual strength of sacral rule. The latter can be a fertile ground for learning for those who are interested in its spiritual foundations. When the new elite from the mission schools were now working in the administration, the colonial government delegated to them some of the powers they had taken from the sacral rulers. Whenever there was a crisis, the French and the Germans apparently gave more support to the rulers than the British did. British colonialists were more inclined to get rid of the leaders they had themselves created. However, at independence, they all handed political power over to the civil servants whom they knew more intimately than they knew the traditional rulers who had helped so much in the creation and the early administration of the colony. This was the final blow to the African sacral rulers. In the process of decolonisation, what would the African church leaders do? European missionaries had laboured in pre-colonial and colonial Africa. Their successors had now the task of leading the church from colonial abuses and domination to independence. The traditional structure has

survived through all these changes, and has had to be included in the modern state. Are church leaders prepared to initiate new attitudes, new strategies and a new theology because the situation in the government of the nation and of the sacral rule is changing?

Independence meant that a political structure based on the military, and on bureaucracy, farming, trade and territorial administration, which had no reference to a spiritual world had been bequeathed to Africans to manage. Few colonialists were models of the spiritual life and their successors might be the same. Colonialism introduced a system of government in which the religious aspect was purely formal as in the case of Ghana, and non-existent as in the case of French-speaking Cameroon. African modern states seem to have no spiritual base and it becomes a theological task for the African church leaders to work one out. With independence, African people from a dynamic and rich spiritual world were called to participate in an “ungodly” structure. Initially, many of the new heads of independent African states across the continent made sure that they were accorded a religious title by their respective sacral rulers.⁵⁹⁴ This legitimated their personal power but none of them succeeded in building the whole structure of the modern state on a spiritual foundation and in making it a part of the wider African spiritual worldview within which they operated.⁵⁹⁵ Could the disparity between the leader’s spiritual needs and those of the state of which he is only a temporary representative mean that African

⁵⁹⁴ Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana got the title of Osagyefo (the redeemer or saviour). Ahmadou Ahidjo in Cameroon got the Muslim title El Hadj before going to Mecca on pilgrimage.

⁵⁹⁵ Only recently, Nicephore Soglo from the Benin Republic constitutionally made Voodoo the state religion during his mandate from 1990 to 1995.

church leaders have to develop something new for the African governments to be built on the Lordship of Jesus Christ?

Those challenges which come from the colonial practices in Africa represent only the other side of the new responsibilities of the autonomous leaders. European missionaries left them with commissions to be fulfilled or modified according to their spiritual, cultural, administrative and intellectual abilities; with prohibitions to avoid or reconsider according to the new understanding of the situation; with compromises to cope with or review in a new way; and with omissions to be tackled afresh. The people's hidden and expressed expectations complicated the situation for the African leaders. Succeeding the European missionaries meant that the African church leaders were expected to continue to maintain, manage and build new structures for the missionary work. Africans hoped that they would ensure a brighter future for the Christian mission, but the source of income for the continuation of the evangelisation of Africa was one of the biggest challenges. Africans in leadership were often unable to meet people's expectations for the continuation of humanitarian actions.

These expectations were expressed by the general African community of Christians and non-Christians including the former missionaries, the new African leaders themselves, the Christians, the non-Christians and the hierarchy of sacral rule. Each one of these four groups had its hopes for the autonomous church and their expectations were expressed to their new leaders in all areas stressing continuity, some discontinuity, and new initiatives. The task of the African leaders became more complicated when some non-Christians invaded the Christian conscience with the feeling that the missionary enterprise was an offence to the African society as the

institution of the Christian church came “into being in conscious opposition to the community as a whole, largely divorced from the felt needs, thought-life and behaviour of the Africans”.⁵⁹⁶ They were expecting the new African leaders to reverse the trend of missionary work and make it authentically African since they themselves were sons and daughters of the area.

People’s expectations for continuity or discontinuity with the European missionary methods were balanced with the confident attitude of Christians who helped the new church leaders to rise to the challenges by doing what they considered necessary for the missionary task to continue to be rooted in the African worldview and life. Some of these people have been focused on in this study. They have been selected on the basis of their dual responsibilities in the Christian church and in the sacral rule simultaneously. Another criterion for selection has been their perceived ability to present Christianity as the correction rather than the denial of beliefs and practices of the indigenous African system of government. What they achieved in Cameroon and Ghana among the Grassfields and Akan people respectively is critically assessed based on the characteristics of the three main churches that were started from the Basel Mission activities in Africa, namely, the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon, and the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.

⁵⁹⁶ Smith, Peter, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*, p. 271.

II- The Evangelical Church of Cameroon

A- Evangelists from a royal background against the missionary:

Jacques Tayou, Tagne Maptue François, Samuel Youmbi and Ta Henoch⁵⁹⁷

We have already presented the distant but open opposition between *Fo* Kamga the Bandjoun sacral ruler, and the missionary, Paul Dieterle. Physical confrontation once occurred over the signboard of the Mission station on the border between Bandjoun territory and Bafoussam, and was settled in favour of the latter. The ruler's reaction was to side with the Roman Catholics and to invite all his faithful subjects to become Roman Catholics. He did not reject Christ but he chose another denomination for the conversion of his community. The struggle shifted from direct confrontation between the missionary and sacral ruler to white missionaries disputing among themselves and competing one with another at the denominational level for the largest number of adherents. Jacques Tayou, Tagne Maptue, Samuel Youmbi and Ta Henoch sided with their sacral ruler but remained with the Basel Mission as they had done before the coming of Dieterle. When this Swiss Basel missionary left, the four assumed more responsibility for the continuation of the Christian Protestant faith, with each of them laying a special claim to its leadership. Tayou was the beloved nephew of Bayangam *Fo* Kom Wendja. Tagne Maptue François was an enterprising trader and influential member of a secret society. Samuel Youmbi was just a student of Spellenberg, trusted son of Bandjoun ruling class and very close to Jacques Tayou.

⁵⁹⁷ Ta Henoch is the Christian name of a Christian traditional herbalist. He was born under the name Tamnoue and took Henoch at baptism. His Christianity invaded his life so that he is known largely as Ta Henoch.

Ta Henoah was a renowned herbalist and specialised in the healing of mental illnesses. All of them were, in fact, former students of Spellenberg, and they were in favour of the traditional structures of sacral rule.⁵⁹⁸ However, they were all against praying under the *Yam* tree, praying through the skull of ancestors, and being polygamy.

The *Mkam* controlled social promotion from the palace compound and promoted those who showed personal talent and dynamism. However, all four Christian leaders bypassed the sacral rule system, and transferred its socio-economic values to the new Christian community to empower new converts financially for trade and promote them at the expense of non-Christians.⁵⁹⁹ For them, social promotion could be free from an individual's palace connections, since colonialism gave people more room to operate and the opportunity to trade far or near, without the permission of a Grassfields *Fo*. Standing against polygamy, Jacques Tayou conveyed this new understanding of freedom to the evangelists and to the Christian congregation of Bandjoun and Bayangam. François Tagne was active among the *Mkam* of in the secret societies. He appreciated Tayou's vision and shared it with the Christian traders as he trained them in commerce. With the conceptual and spiritual input of Jacques Tayou and the pastoral help of Samuel Youmbi, Tagne Maptue introduced the traditional concept of "pooling resources" into the church, and Protestant Christians quickly became successful entrepreneurs in colonial Cameroon.

Tagne was then falsely accused by his peers who could not stand his new Christian position both inside and outside the secret meetings, and he had to appear

⁵⁹⁸ Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 274.

⁵⁹⁹ Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l'Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 274.

before the administration. However, God was with him and he was not jailed.⁶⁰⁰ With Tagne on the field and Samuel Youmbi and Jacques Tayou at the mission station, this practice moved from the limited circle to the wider colonial society via Grassfields Protestant Christians in commerce. The sacral ruler of Bandjoun, who had come to rescue Tagne from the harsh attitude of members of the secret societies, explained to them what was going on and he repeated the Christian arguments Tagne and Tayou had presented to him. With his support, the traditional practice of “*tontine*”,⁶⁰¹ moved from the palace compound to the colonial cities in both traditional language and attitudes. Christians and non-Christians practised the same thing and the whole Grassfields area found its children leading in business in the cities. The missionary critic who was oriented towards the Bandjoun language had underestimated this area where sacral rule and Christian faith came together to help people thrive in business.

Tayou, from royal background, was among the “untouchables” in Bayangam and Bandjoun.⁶⁰² He had a stick to punish the diviners, and the priests of sanctuaries, and to desecrate the shrines in Bayangam and Bandjoun. He was cursed vehemently and, surprisingly, nothing happened to him.⁶⁰³ He had been the Bayangam ruler’s secretary and a Christian leader at the same time. One day, the *Mkam* were waiting

⁶⁰⁰Note no 9, in Slageren, Van Jaap, *Les origines de l’Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun*, p. 172.

⁶⁰¹ A Group of people who exist in order to provide the capital needed to finance the independent business ventures of their members.

⁶⁰² He had traditional rights to sanction everyone or anything he found incorrect. He was accountable only to the *Fo* who was the only one who could order a damaging action against him in Bayangam and Bandjoun. Princes in Bandjoun were of Bayangam descent because for two successive generations, Bandjoun *Mafo* (Queen Mothers) came from Bayangam.

⁶⁰³ When he was accused in Bandjoun, which was not his original community, the sacral ruler just said: “In future, if you see him coming, just hide or run away. Before you complain, he has given me the report. The new way must have place among us. He prevented you before acting. If you don’t like what he is doing don’t go with him. I cannot ask him to leave the country, he is the son of a *Mafo*. (*Fo* Kamga’s paternal grandmother came from Bayangam). Touching him is touching the *Fo*. Shall we try? No, they answered and went. Interview with Maurice Totouom, successor of Tagne Maptue, Bandjoun, Pete, 15 Juillet 1997, 15-17h.

for the ruler to begin a meeting where they had to settle an issue that was crucial for the community. Tayou was there waiting with them and the ruler was prolonging the delay. Tayou searched for him and found him at the corner of the meeting-house of a secret association with a diviner. With his cane he held the neck of the diviner, drove him into the courtyard of the secret society and said: “We have been waiting for the *Fo* to debate and to decide on crucial issues for the people. What were you doing with the *Fo*. Do you think these practices will help the *Fo*, help us or help the people solve their problems?” And he started beating him in public. He would only stop when the people said it was enough. The ruler himself said nothing.

Curiously, this attitude towards priests and diviners was not extended to herbalists. Rather, the church leaders appreciated their ministry, and in both Bayangam and Bandjoun, herbalists were in most cases church elders and the position of Ta Henoch⁶⁰⁴ was never questioned. With the spiritual support of Samuel Youmbi, the people to believe that traditional herbs were not evil. Evangelists were encouraged to acquire knowledge and training in the use of herbs for healing was a source of power and respect, and was also a source of attraction to prospective Christians.⁶⁰⁵ The modern hospital based in Bangoua could not reduce the popularity of Bayangam as a health centre even though Ta Henoch sent some of his patients to Bangoua and

⁶⁰⁴ Téku Kamdem in Bandjoun was also a popular mental healer. But the Christianity of Ta Henoch's Christian faith promoted his reputation a lot.

⁶⁰⁵ Evangelists were teachers, healers, judges, and, in fact, counsellors to the traditional rulers. They wielded power that our pastors nowadays do not have. And our catechists had the confidence of the people, which, sadly enough, most of our pastors do not have now, because they were consultants and healers as well as ministers of the community. Samuel Youmbi was an example because he sent some people to Ta Henoch who was an influential elder of the church gifted with the secret of healing mad people.

vice versa.⁶⁰⁶ He had a genuine way of detecting the level of mental crisis. By playing a drum and varying the rhythm and as the patient danced, he could detect from his movement the functioning of his brain. He classified patients into five groups,⁶⁰⁷ and used herbs, Christian prayers and songs. Very early, Ta Henoah replaced the spirits with Christ. He had donated the *Yam* tree in their compound for the building of the church. There was no more *Yam* tree in Ta Henoah's compound but the church. The popularity of the *Eglise Evangélique* followed the evangelist and people who had composed a song in which Ta Henoah was quoted as a model of Christian ethics. Ta Henoah was so influential and attractive that even the colonial government took notice of him.⁶⁰⁸ All of these: Jacques Tayou, Tagne Maptue, Samuel Youmbi and Ta Henoah introduced the Gospel into the traditional structure and thus transformed the entire community without cutting them off from its previous African spiritual experience.

B- Fotso Moïse and Mongwe Michel: Two potential rulers at the mission station

In 1935, Dieterle had on hand two potential heirs to the throne with strict instructions to prepare them for succession as it was believed that "*Gun bae mjum* (the future is with the children)". Gandeu, the *Fo* of Bapouantou, asked the

⁶⁰⁶ "At Bangoua, we (white missionaries) considered the Bayangam church as a health centre in its own right. We never instructed patients to stop going to Bayangam. We knew Ta Henoah as being a faithful Christian who sends a lot of patients to us. And we sent mental patients to him." Violette Baudraz, Yverdon, Swiss, of May 24, 1998, 20h-23h.

⁶⁰⁷ Mental patients were classified into five categories: *fumnye*, *khekhuo.jyjum*, *dedam* and *pue*. When a patient did not fall under any of these categories, he was sent to Bangoua, the modern Protestant hospital.

⁶⁰⁸ During the trouble which preceded the independence of Cameroun, the Bayangam population was gathered around Ta Henoah. This favoured the installation of the Catholic mission in the Protestant quarter as the palace had decided a long time before that Roman Catholics should not cross the river.

missionary to train Mongwe Michel who was the heir apparent. *Fo* Chendjou of Bamendjou made a similar request to Dieterle on behalf of Fotso Moïse, but added, “Do not baptise him, for he will be my successor.” Mongwe Michel and Fotso Moïse were both very good students. After the catechism classes, the two presented themselves for baptism. Mongwe was received and baptised while Fotso was not. When Fotso came to ask why, the missionary told him that, he did not want to spoil the sacrament by giving it to someone who would later become the head of traditional religion. When they finished their training, Mongwe was made a catechist and Fotso a teacher. At the death of his father in 1940 Fotso refused to be enthroned *Fo* and it was only when his half-brother who had taken his place was ritually enthroned, that Dieterle baptised him and appointed him Evangelist and was later ordained minister.

At the death of Gandeu, however, Mongwe who was an evangelist, decided to obey his father’s last wish. Without any regrets and professional blame, he left the missionary and agreed to be the successor, passing through all the rites and became *Foa Pouatem* (sacral ruler of Bapouantou). Two of his fellow evangelists joined him in traditional rule and became *Mkam*.⁶⁰⁹ They were Jomo Isaac and Noue Samuel. All together with *Fo* Mongwe Michel, they wanted to continue Jacques Tayou’s method of preaching the Gospel within the traditional structure and making it part of the people’s life in all respects. In other words, although the Gospel was brought by foreigners, its content was by no means unfamiliar. They did not need this white missionary to follow Christ.

What happened in the people’s onward march in Bamendjou and Bapouantou?

⁶⁰⁹ One of the reasons for their decision was the missionary’s hostile attitude towards Jacques Tayou, their spiritual leader in Christian mission, his arrogant attitude towards *Fo* Kanga of Bandjoun, and his disastrous opposition to the use of the Bandjoun language for evangelisation.

Protestant Christianity started losing ground in Bamendjou. People could not understand why the son they had prepared as heir to the throne should refuse a leadership position among them. They were used to struggles for inheritance, but this was beyond their understanding. This behaviour rested on a critique of the basic principles of life and religious practices, as they knew them in their religious practices. It was more of a rejection of the Bamendjou nation than a way of disciplining it according to Christ's instructions. People could not understand why Fotso had rejected the office of *Fo* for a sacrament, nor why he had embraced the Christian church a far larger entity rather than his own group. Nevertheless, his own people decided to save their institution without Fotso's help.

The Bamendjou people had converted to Christianity, and the first Grassfields president of the Evangelical Church of Cameroon, the honourable Pastor Monjo Elie, who had grown under the influence of Jacques Tayou, Samuel Youmbi, Tagne Maptue and Ta Henoch had worked there. When he worked there in 1945, there were six Protestant communities in Bamendjou. But today, there is only one at the centre of the town. That single Protestant place of worship has a congregation comprising workers from neighbouring groups because Bamendjou was a sub-divisional headquarters. At the provincial capital, Bafoussam, there was no Bamendjou elder in the Church. In the entire Evangelical Church, there was no Bamendjou in the men's singing group. Among the clergy, after Fotso Moïse, we now have two ministers who were ordained irrespective of their original community.⁶¹⁰ At the death of Fotso Moïse in 1994, Bamendjou people wanted to bury him as a *Fo*. However, in his will he had left strict instruction that he was to be buried by the church and not by the

⁶¹⁰ They are Rev Kengne Talla Zacharie and Rev Takam Medar.

Bamendjou kingmakers. In order to prevent them from exhuming his body, he ordered that Christians should bury him with one metre of concrete below and two metres of concrete above his dead body. And this was done. The people's comment was that "he had even refused to give us his dead body". He had given everything to the Christian Protestant church everywhere except the one at Bamendjou.

What happened in Bapouantou? With Mongwe's arrival, the church grew. The *Fo* was naturally a churchgoer. All the previous *Fo*'s wives started going to church and all the princes and princesses went to church. The sign of allegiance was given during a meeting with the *Fo* at church service. Nobles started going to church and when the other two evangelists came to join their colleague turned *Fo*, the secret societies received the seed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The *Fo* soon became polygamous, and Jomou Isaac, one of the former evangelist, followed suit. The traditional people felt very self-confident and successfully challenged the Christians.⁶¹¹ Indeed they were challenged but not defeated. The Grassfields calendar retained the eight days week. Some of the meeting days for the secret associations fell on Sunday. Some members who were Christians went to church instead and they were fined. The sanction was for everyone who went to church, except the former evangelist. On the day the fine was to be paid, the evangelist Jomou said: "If you don't ask me too to be sanctioned then don't ask any of these." One of the non-Christians retorted: "we wanted you to say that and to join them without us forcing you." Jomou the former evangelist replied: "if you don't force me, don't force any

⁶¹¹ One day, they proposed to burn the church because Christians were out of the traditional sacral rule's control. On the agreed day, the *Fo* came and said, before they could burn the chapel, "start by burning me because it is from there that you took me." Interview, with Jomo Isaac, Bapouantou, March 13, 1999, 10h-14h.

other Christian. I just propose that, because we have the right to close down the chapel, let's close it down for the Christians to be always present at our meetings.” Another member said; “If we close down the chapel, the whole village will be in trouble. Even our wives and children will not forgive us. Let us not disturb the people just for a fine to be paid. Let's agree that when our meeting falls on Sunday, the Christians are allowed to go to church and to join us later on.” With time, the meeting was held naturally after church when it fell on Sunday. Without any restrictions, but simply making Christianity part of sacral rule, the whole village became Christian. Christ and his Gospel peacefully but firmly conquered the village of *Fo Michel Mongwe*, the former evangelist.

The Bapouantou people were very active in churches everywhere. Many became elders and pastors. The men's singing group were under their leadership. For a regional movement grouping seventeen communities, whatever the Bapouantou decided in their traditional gathering about the leadership of the movement happened. However, *Fo Michel Mongwe* limited his itinerant ministry to his own people and it was hard to see him as an evangelist to the neighbouring villages. Reverend Fotso Moïse is known everywhere as a missionary and he had more than enough spiritual children, but he is not known by his own people where he was born as a spiritual leader. If the Bapouantou people are everywhere doing what *Fo Michel Mongwe* should have done, is it not time that Pastor Fotso's spiritual sons and daughters go where their minister did not go: to the heart of Bamendjou sacral rule where he was born?

C- The enthronement of Rudolph Peshandon



Picture no 7. Rev. Peshandon presenting a copy of the Bible To the Fo of Bamun NJimoluh Seidou Njoya



Picture no 8. Public dressing of Rev. Peshandon as one of the kingmakers



picture no 9. The Fo Njimoluh Seidou Njoya leading the royal dance in honour of Rev. Peshandon.

Since the Bamun *Fo Njoya* enthusiastically encouraged Gohring, the Basel missionary, to translate the Bible stories and Christian songs into the Bamun language, the royals of that particular group have never ceased to believe that their salvation lies in “God’s book.” They knew that the appreciation of the missionary was a step towards their promotion as a people with a bright past. Rev Rudolph Peshandon⁶¹² was given the task of revising the New Testament and completing the whole Bible in Bamun. At the end of the task, the Bible ceased to be regarded as a foreign book and became first and foremost the people’s book, irrespective of their religious affiliation. The Bible was seen to be a way of rescuing the Bamoun religious language and idiom. The Evangelical Church has helped the entire society to develop a structure for cultural learning as they read the Bible. The Bamun Bible was dedicated at a Church synod in Fouban in 1989. After the Christian dedication of the Bible, the palace, without consulting the church, considered it an achievement and as tradition allows the sacral ruler to elevate one illustrious citizen to the rank of kingmaker during his reign, Rev. Peshandon was chosen for that honour.

He then presented the palace with a copy of the Bible in the company of his colleagues who were present at his initiation. He did not set any preconditions. He was dressed, taken out through the back doors into the palace and came back as a member of the kingmakers’ association. Why did they choose a Christian? Why was it Peshandon? Was the ceremony to mark the acceptance of the Bible or to celebrate the achievement of a loyal citizen? As the above pictures no 7, 8 and 9 show, it is right that Bamoun royals should be exposed to the Bible, for is it not their past, present, and

⁶¹² Reverend Rudolph Peshandon is an ordained minister of the Evangelical Church of Cameroon who coordinate the final phase of the Bible translation in Bamun language. He was honoured by the Bamun ruler as testified by the three previous pictures (no 7, 8, 9).

future according to God, maker of heaven and earth? What is behind the offer of a Bible to a Muslim in African sacral rule? What would happen if this enthronement was celebrated yearly or every other year at the palace as an occasion for reading the Bible and promoting it by the sacral rulers? When a Pastor, such a great church leader agreed to be crowned, what did he have in mind?⁶¹³ This question was not asked in the interview. But in the course of discussion he asked me a similar one: “How could one use the Bible for the spiritual education of people and not just for preaching?” I replied that it was a difficult question to answer. However, many people are interested in making, and in encouraging people to make the Bible their daily bread.

III- The Presbyterian Church of Cameroon

A- Princes in Early Basel Mission activities: Jacob Su of Bafut and Elias Difon of Bali, and their younger Peter Fai of Banso'

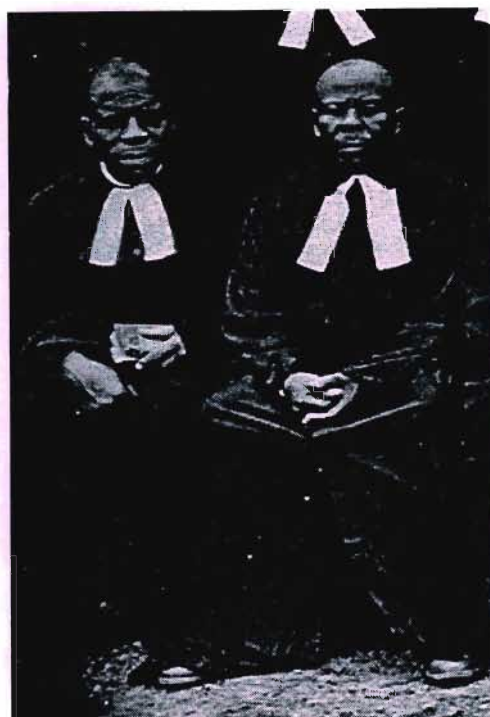


Picture no 10. Elias Difon and Jacob Su: civilised gentlemen

⁶¹³ Being a son of the area and a spiritual learner under Peshandon and Njounowet Pierre in Bamoun, I limited the interview questions to the ceremony and not to what happened in the circle of kingmakers. Christians have never doubted his Christian commitment even after his enthronement.



Picture no 11. Jacob Su preaching in traditional gown



Picture no 12. Elias Difon and Jacob Su in Geneva gown

These two Basel mission students sent by the rulers of Grassfields communities ended up as ordained ministers of the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon. Su and Difon were among the first students to be trained in Bali-Nyonga as princes from the Bafut and Bali political units. As servants, they were part of the royal entourage. They were, at the time, identified more with their community than as individuals. They became friends during their training period. Elias Difon worked in Fumban, Bangoua and Nkongsamba before going back to his original home town at Bali. Jacob Su went back to his community in Bafut as a teacher-catechist immediately after completing his six years' training. He used to preach as well as to teach young people and adults. In 1913, he was baptised with some of his congregants. Difon in Bangoua worked with Ngankou before the missionary, Strebel, came to coordinate their teaching work. He was baptised

after serving for a while. The sacrament of baptism was not a requirement before serving in the mission. Jacob Su, who liked horse riding, used to pay visits to Difon when he was far away in Bangwa. On his way, he would stop and deliver some Gospel messages. Their strength came from their vision of having been sent by a powerful traditional ruler to work with the mission. During the years following the First World War, Su was especially known in Bandjoun as the pastor on horseback as he paid visits to Elias Lima, another Bali royal in the service of the Basel Mission. Jacob Su was very influential among the Bali students who kept the Basel stations going when the European missionaries left. He travelled long distance on horseback moving from palace to palace, preaching and encouraging his fellow Basel mission students. In 1917, he appointed some of his students as catechists and opened 13 new congregations in Bafut.

Difon was placed under the care of the Bangoua ruler Nono and continued his evangelistic ministry as a royal service to the Bangoua community according to Fonyonga's instruction to him. The departure of the German missionaries did not stop the Bali trained princes from preaching as part of their royal duty. Together with Abraham Ngankou, they introduced Christ into the Bangoua sacral rule. Bangoua has produced a lot of church leaders. Even though Gankou and Difon were baptised early before the missionary left, many of their colleagues were not baptised at all because they had only been teaching students under the European missionaries. Few were catechists, and none was an evangelist. Rev Jacob Modi Din, the only ordained minister who came to their support, was from the coast. From 1915 to 1928, he toured the area on foot, baptising those whom the self-appointed Bali students had prepared. Later on,

Difon helped as language consultant for the translation of the Bible in Mungaka. Difon, like Su, used to preach in the traditional gown from 1909 to 1937 when they were ordained and thus qualified to wear the Geneva gown during the service. On horseback, on the street as well as in their respective families, Su and Difon showed signs of being civilised gentlemen. Very influential within the traditional elite they proclaimed the Gospel within the traditional structure with the aim of bringing about its inner transformation.

Peter Fai⁶¹⁴ was one of the counsellors of Chi Jeremiah Kangsen, the moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon, in matters of traditional rule. Very early, he was made a chaplain with the right to assist secret societies in their meetings even though he was not a member. Rev Peter Fai was more interested in the Christian impact on ruling structures and people during building projects in the palace, and how the population in the palace in Bansa' (*Ntoo So'*) could freely to become Christian. Successive rulers in Bansa' from 1935 up till today have trusted him.⁶¹⁵ When he was contacted for a title, he replied that the title he vocated "is that the royal wives be allowed to become Christians" and he was granted that request by *Fo Bingle I*. One reason why he refused to hold a title was that a member of a particular association at the palace was not supposed to enter everywhere. He would be limited if he held a traditional title but if he remained a minister of the church, he would have access into every secret association. Moreover, he ministered in the palace not to enjoy the royal facilities but for people to

⁶¹⁴ Peter Fai was the grandson of a sacral ruler, born in 1919, ordained in 1955, and served as pastor for 47 years in Nso', in Wum and back to Nso'. He is an elected member of the building committee at the Nso' Palace. Interview, Bansa' June 28, 1999, 9h-11h and 14h-16h.

⁶¹⁵ Fon Gha appointed him and proposed him to choose one secret society he preferred to join but Peter Fai preferred going to all of them to preach Christ and his Gospel. *Fo Bingle I* was so happy with pastor Fai's services that he offered him a traditional title. But Rev Fai wisely preferred to be called "Pastor" as the church and his Christian faith made him, and he said that his presence among the members of the ruling class was for them to be able to find a title for Christ.

become Christian. He “wanted the sacral ruler and his immediate elite to find a title for Christ themselves and to find a place for the gospel among them but not to honour him with a title”.⁶¹⁶ His life is divided into two: the church and the palace. But he even spent more time at the palace than he did in church. Not only through him were women free to practice the faith of their choice, but his presence also brought peace among different groups in the palace, and four times he had settled delicate disputes among members of rival associations. Through him many nobles seriously adopted the Christian faith. Familial relations with the Bamun made Islam attractive and if Peter Fai had not already been there, *Nso*’ traditional leadership would have become a Muslim institution. He has been the executor of the wills of the past two rulers.

Jacob Su, Elias Difon and Peter Fai worked everywhere assuming the responsibilities assigned to them by the royal court and enjoying princely honours. They were always conscious in their work that they had entered the Christian ministry on the mandate of the Bafut, Bali, and Bansa’ sacral rulers, and that their ministry was to be carried on at the palace and among the ruling class. The royal family in Bafut, Bali and Bansa’ respected them for this.⁶¹⁷ They were bicultural and were equally at home in Western civilisation and in traditional society as well as in Christianity and in the African spiritual worldview. They gradually introduced traditional musical instruments into the Church services. They preceded Rev Jeremiah Chi Kangsen at the heart of the Grassfields sacral rule.

⁶¹⁶ Interview, Bansa’, July 28, 1999, 9-11h and 14h-16h.

⁶¹⁷ The Bafut people fought against the Germans, lost in the war and the chief was taken to Bota Island. Jacob Su as missionary and prince, succeeded in bringing him back, to the satisfaction of the whole community from the Kingmakers to the nobles and untitled subjects.

B- Hans Knopfli in Bali

Hans Knopfli was the only European church worker who advised Kangsen in matters of traditional rule. As minister of the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon, he concentrated on the art of the Grassfields court. He assisted the titles high-ranking people as a qualified member. After gaining its autonomy in 1957, the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon made a strong move towards linking with sacral rule by supporting the vision of Rev Hans Knopfli. Hans Knopfli, a Swiss, had spent thirty-seven years in Cameroon as minister in charge of schools and some remote congregations. He was surprisingly impressed by the ruling structure of Grassfields and he ended up holding a title in Bali and Bamessingue with the full consent of the Moderator, Rev. Jeremiah Kangsen. He was attracted by the traditional dress and indigenous art. He specialised in woodcarving, and also worked with animal skins, clay, horns and fibre. He committed himself to this kind of work because of the rapid disappearance of the indigenous crafts of the region, and as a way to encourage the thousands of unemployed young people who finished school every year. He set up the Press craft⁶¹⁸ centre to preserve people's tradition and skills as a way of relieving under-employment. He wrote a book to document what he learnt during his long involvement with the arts and crafts. The salvation of African art and its export to America and Europe would eventually overshadow the religious dimension of the art.⁶¹⁹ He carefully reported how a buffalo horn was carved by describing the rituals

⁶¹⁸ Press craft is a church organisation set up to promote skills and work in traditional arts and crafts, and the sale of quality artefacts within and outside the country.

⁶¹⁹ Rev Aaron Su in his preface to this book, wrote: "The instructors gave their apprentices precise theories which they could retain in their minds as they had no other way of recording them. This has led people in the Western Grasslands, as elsewhere, to develop a strong and retentive memory which has been of great help to them. Besides knowing their trades well, the instructors were, and still are, religiously and culturally well-informed, because through the instructions offered, they transmit the beliefs, standards, in fact, the

before and after its preparation, and those preceding its proper use. But he did not show how this influenced his spiritual worldview, nor its impact on missionary methods and church liturgy. He was so much oriented towards the economic dimension of the art, and the preservation of the traditional carving skills that he neglected the spiritual and religious experience channelled through the Grassfields crafts. If he had not been a member of a Grassfields court, he would not have been allowed to take African art from the palace to the public place and market.⁶²⁰ He classified art objects into two categories: cultic objects and symbols of power. He linked them to the African worldview in the following words:

“The traditional worldview and fundamental beliefs of the Grasslands are manifest in the court art which links different generations in an ongoing pattern. Thus it represents a kind of collective memory”.⁶²¹

Considering “African arts as religious language”,⁶²² how can the social and economic achievements of Knopfli be enriched with a theological dimension? Aaron Su in the above quotation affirms that the communication of beliefs through arts and craft is an ongoing process. If the theological institutions could create through the arts following Mveng’s pioneering efforts in Yaoundé, then Knopfli’s achievement may be seen in the public place and market and on the pulpit as a means of communicating religious values.

entire cultural ethos of their people to succeeding generations.” Knopfli, Hans, *Crafts and Technologies: Some traditional craftsmen of the Western Grasslands of Cameroon*, London, British Museum, 1997, v.

⁶²⁰ The art of the Western Grassfields is a court art based on complex protocol and numerous rituals. Art was created in the function of the *Fo* and his elite and strengthened the respect and admiration considered appropriate to them and to their supporters. Knopfli, Hans, *Crafts and Technologies*, p. 2.

⁶²¹ Knopfli, Hans, *Crafts and Technologies*, p. 3.

⁶²² Mveng, Engelbert, “Black African Art as cosmic liturgy and religious language”, in, Koffi Appiah Kubi and Sergio Torres (ed), *African Theology en Route*, New York, Orbis Books, Mary Knoll, 1983, pp.137-142.

C- **Jeremiah Chi Kangsen: The Christian Moderator turned traditional sacral ruler**

When we say that the moderator became a sacral ruler in the African traditional community, it is with reference to chronological events in the history of Kangsen's life. However, according to African patterns, he was born a ruler. From his birth onwards, signs and attitudes showed that he was destined to be an important leader at the service of his traditional community. When he became a missionary teacher, he wrote;

“In 1942, the people of Aghem requested the Basel Mission to release me to go and open the Basel Mission (now the Presbyterian) school at Wum. I was accordingly transferred from the catechist training institution, which I was heading in Bafut, to Wum. The Wum school was opened in 1943. In 1945, I left for pastoral training in Kumasi. In 1952, the Wum community once again appealed to the Basel Mission to release me to represent them in politics, in the House of Assembly at Enugu. The Synod of the then Basel Mission Church released me to my people. I was already a pastor at that time.”⁶²³

On those two occasions, when the traditional people wanted Kangsen to serve them, they successfully contacted the Basel Mission as their son's employer. When the possibility of accepting traditional rule opened up, Kangsen was the Moderator of the church and his people appealed directly to him in the hope that they would be successful in this as well.⁶²⁴ The negotiation was not easy but Kangsen proved to be the right person and he requested the opinion of the extended family. There was no

⁶²³ Dah, Jonas, *Jeremiah Chi Kangsen: Pastor – Politician – Chief*, Nyassosso, Easter, 1985, pp. 33-34.

⁶²⁴ “The elders of the village sent for me and I went to meet them. After I had taken my seat, one of them told me that the whole village had decided that I should succeed my dead brother and become their chief. I explained that I am a Christian, a pastor and moderator of the Presbyterian church in Cameroon, leading over 200 000 people, a much larger group than the Su people I was being invited to lead. I said I could not become a Chief of Su.” “Other speakers of the village got up and said that by their choice of me as chief, they were aware I would be a different kind of chief since I am a Christian. All they wanted was to have me direct the affairs of their community as I do in the church.” “Another speaker got up and said that, they also are God's people and deserve a good leader as the Christians have. We think your leadership among us would be an extension of the work of the church.” “Another speaker revealed that there were several contestants for the stool and that the community of Su very much pleaded with me to accept the nomination and save them from all the troubles coming.” Dah, Jonas, *Jeremiah Chi Kangsen: Pastor – Politician – Chief*, pp. 34, 35.

hindrance.⁶²⁵ With the kingmakers and the children, they attended the burial of the dead ruler. That was a preliminary ceremony to becoming the traditional ruler. Once the burial was performed, he was regarded as elected ruler. On his return to Buea, he consulted no European church worker except Hans Knopfli, as Kangsen thought that this was a matter for the Cameroonians who knew the custom. Some Cameroonians who advised against his accepting the African sacral rule were afraid of negative aspects of the institution, and regarded it as the devil's snares; they also thought that such a step lowered the status of a Moderator. The majority spoke in his favour, saying that the time had come for convinced Christians to face the challenge of a traditional leadership position especially in Grassfields, and try to reform it. They believed it would be beneficial to the church and the community if the institution of sacral rule was run in a Christian manner for the glory of God and for the good of the entire community. One of those he consulted was the President of the sister church in the French-speaking area, the "*Eglise Evangélique du Cameroun* (Evangelical Church of Cameroon)", Jean Kotto, who replied with the following critical question:

"I know you as a strong Christian in whom dwells the Holy Spirit of our Lord Jesus Christ. How strong is your Lord and the Holy Spirit in you? Do you think that by drinking the royal concoction or by sitting on the ancestral Stool, Jesus and the Holy Spirit would run away from you? If it is possible, then we don't believe in the almighty power of our Saviour. If Christ is really with you always and everywhere, then he will continue to be with you. Traditional drink can never neutralise him. Rather it is he who through you will neutralise everything in traditional rule. Your personal and final decision will prove how Christian you are."⁶²⁶

⁶²⁵"I asked whether this nomination was also backed by the family. The family met with all the contestants assembled in one place and called for me. The contestants came out clearly that they would fight to inherit the stool. The family was divided. Some of the contestants asked me if I would accept the nomination. I said I will accept it if it was unanimous. Strangely enough, then, all the contestants supported me and declared that they would all surrender." Dah, Jonas, *Jeremial Chi Kangsen: Pastor – Politician – Chief*, p. 35.

⁶²⁶ Interview with Rev Eugene Mallo, Douala-Banamoundourou, November 11, 1998, 10-11h.

He then went back to Aghem for the enstoolment ceremony and he set forward the following conditions.⁶²⁷

- a. That I am a Christian, and in the event of my becoming a traditional ruler I should not be called upon to offer sacrifices to the ancestors or to the gods, or perform other ceremonies or acts that will be to the detriment of the local congregation or to the church in Cameroon as a whole.
- b. That I shall remain married to my present wife and would not take an additional wife.
- c. That the wives of the deceased chief are free to marry members of my family or other people of their choice, and that the old women with their children and grandchildren can remain in the palace if they so wish, and will be cared for by me.
- d. That I am the leader of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon living in Buea and will continue to perform my duty according to the rules of my church. For this reason, I will come home very sparingly. The chieftdom should therefore be prepared to carry on without me, at least to go on with my representatives.

⁶²⁷ “Chiefs, fathers and mothers, you know that it is not and it has never been my desire to be a chief. To be quite frank you know that I have often clashed with my brother the late chief, because of certain things I considered wrong. You also know how I have always stood with common people. You have always asked the Basel Mission to release me for service among you. You have asked me now to become a chief. And you chiefs are asking me to be one of your numbers. You people of Aghem know that I am a Christian, and a moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Cameroon. By wishing to make me chief, I hope you do not wish that I give up leadership of hundreds of thousands of Christians numbering many times the whole clan of Aghem, and come to care only for you. If you kingmakers desire that I should come and serve the clan in the leadership position, I am willing to consider the demand, provided you accept certain conditions that I will put to you.”

- e. That I will appoint a caretaker to care for the palace and its property.⁶²⁸

The negotiation, continued as followed:

“The chiefs stood up and replied to my address and said: We are glad that you agree to be chief in our clan and work with us. We are glad that by your acceptance to be chief you have saved us from a lot of troubles. There were seven contestants to this stool or “chair” and we have also received a lot of money from them to buy us over. The fight was going to be fierce and would have brought a lot of unnecessary sufferings. When you were named by the Su people we rejoiced and also came to know that the contestants had surrendered to you. As for your conditions, we accept them all. We need your services. We believe that you will help us to know God and to try to become Christians. We thank you”.⁶²⁹

This consensus between the kingmakers of Aghem-Wum and Rt. Rev Kangsen appeared to be a historical and empirical demonstration of spiritual agreement between African ancestral religiosity and the Christian faith. Because of the way Kangsen started and rose by being first a mission student, then a Christian, mission teacher, ordained minister, politician and, finally, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon, his Christian commitment never prevented his people from considering him as their own. His growing knowledge of the Christian mission and his church included a continuous relationship with the people of Aghem and all those connected with the royal institution. His concept of Christian witness was not based solely on any narrow doctrine but also on the fulfilment of all his people’s aspirations based on his understanding of Christ and the Gospel in context. With this new theological attitude towards African people and their ongoing religious experience, Kangsen brought Christ to the heart of the ruling class which seems to be an influential source of people’s worldview and religious culture. He had brought about major changes in the missionary perception and subsequent theological consideration of African sacral rule. On the one

⁶²⁸ Dah, Jonas, *Jeremiah Chi Kangsen: Pastor – Politician – Chief*, pp. 35, 36.

⁶²⁹ Dah, Jonas, *Jeremiah Chi Kangsen: Pastor – Politician – Chief*, p. 36.

hand, he succeeded in making African values part of the Christian heritage, and, on the other hand, in making the person and the Gospel of Jesus Christ part of the African spiritual experience. As both a sacral ruler and a Christian in church leadership, Kangsen was a living demonstration of the fact that it is possible for a Christian to be a sacral ruler; or that it is possible for anyone in the traditional hierarchy to relate to Christ in continuation of their ancestral religiosity.

Kangsen's Christianity did not alienate him from his own people and tradition. The kingmakers saw in him the model of the ruler they had dreamed of. They found in Kangsen's experience of the Christian faith the fulfilment of the long religious itinerary of their sacral rule. They accepted the conditions set forward by Kangsen, in the hope that he would lead them to the true knowledge of God, and that they might become Christians. In other words, the kingmakers were prepared to adjust their own religious tradition to the new situation as Christ and his Gospel through Kangsen became a daily part of their spiritual experience. As those who determine how people should live, they were also qualified to initiate the changes in the religious practices. They considered themselves responsible for the dynamic customs which they could modify only for a specific purpose. In this way, African tradition can be changed; and similarly as we have seen, the thoughts and attitudes inherited from the missionary can also be changed. Therefore, Christians in the African system of government and royals in the Christian church can be expected to innovate as they apply the Gospel of Christ to their daily responsibilities in sacral rule

IV- The Presbyterian Church of Ghana

A- Ofori Kuma II, *Omanhene* 1914-19, and 1932-42 and Reverend Peter Hall: Royals in the Christian cemetery

The custodians of sacral rule in Akuapem had never believed that the Christian religion destroyed the essence of their existence in their sons and daughters, but rather had always found in Christianity a fulfilment of their aims and goals. They considered the Christian an asset and had never rejected a contestant to the throne on the grounds of his Christian faith. When the Akuapem sacral rule ran into a serious crisis which led to the destoolment of *Nana* AKwesi Akuffo in 1907, royals in Akropong turned to the family of Rev Koranteng and selected his son and turned him *Okuapemhene* with the Stool name Owusu Ansa. He reigned only for seven years and died. The younger brother, Bernard Ofosu Apea Koranteng, was approached to serve his people as head of the Akuapem sacral rule. According to the German missionary, Erwing Northwand,⁶³⁰ who related what happened, he was not expecting it. He had just returned from England and had established a law office in Accra in 1913, and was so culturally Western-oriented that traditional rule was not his goal. His objections to the ancestral office the family had asked him to occupy were weak, and he accepted enthronement and took the Stool name of Ofori Kuma. According to Northwand, some people opposed the nomination because he was not only a Christian but a British style educated Lawyer. According to the records of Rev Hall, the Jamaican, Mrs Koranteng, mother of Owusu

⁶³⁰ *Evangelische Heidenbote*, Oct, 1915, no 10. The English version is found in Brokensha, David, *Akwapim Handbook*, Accra, Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1972, pp. 206-212.

Ansa and Bernard Ofori Apea now Ofori Kuma, was the Queen mother of the Akuapem sacral rule.⁶³¹

Ofori Kuma was born into a Christian family on the June 13, 1879 and was enthroned in 1914. A Christian and a royal, Ofori Kuma had eloquently conducted charges against *Nana Akuffo* on behalf of his brother, *Nana Owusu Ansa*. Ofori Kuma's reign was under threat from Akuffo's party so that he ended up abdicating in 1920 but came back again to be re-enstooled in 1932 and died a very memorable sacral ruler in 1942. Ofori Kuma was in all respects a "juju-man reading the white man's book" in the Akuapem language, as *Nana Addo Dankwa I* had requested in 1840 to Riis as one of the conditions for people to become christians.

In the report quoted above, nothing was said about the feelings and thinking of his father, Rev Koranteng who was at the time serving in a mission station, in accepting that one after the other, his children were to occupy the heart of African religion in traditional rule.⁶³² Northwand, a missionary in Akropong, reported Ofori Kuma's enthronment in the Basel mission paper under the title "The new Christian King of Akwapim on the Gold Coast". The author gave an unflattering account of the way in which the Basel Mission had handled their relationship with the rulers of the pagan kingdom,⁶³³ the conflict of values created by education, and the strains of changing old

⁶³¹ Hall, Peter, *Autobiography of Rev. Peter Hall*, p. 67.

⁶³² "The town was full of people and despite the slight rain the impressive ceremony was performed in the traditional manner. The whole affair seemed to be repugnant to him. But this was the way to power and he had to walk it if later on he had to teach his people something better. So he endured it patiently. On the following Sunday, he asked for a blessing which was given by Brother Jehle assisted by the priests Ofori and Hall. Pagans of course shook their head but the Christians were very happy." Brokensha, *Akwapim Handbook*, p. 209.

⁶³³ "How long yet will the pagan kingdom, this bulwark of paganism, hold out against the attack of Christianity and civilization? When will Christ also rub these strong ones and permeate the old royal lineage of Asonafo with new vitality? Will Christianity be able to sanctify, refine, and where necessary

customs. Northwand presented himself as the spiritual force behind the “preacher’s son”⁶³⁴ (Ofori Kuma) and the Christian mission’s expectation was that he might become a “little Constantine.”⁶³⁵ Ofori Kuma was a natural ruler and he knew how to pass on what he believed was good for all. He was not easily manipulated by external forces. He was not a puppet of Christian expectations, nor did pagan opposition dictate to him. He took others’s views into consideration but the more dynamic elements of modernity and Western culture, as well as the challenges of civilisation in modern Ghana, had more impact on him. Confronted by rapid change, he proceeded slowly and carefully.

Very early in October 1914, Ofori Kuma wrote to the governor to complain about the treatment of native rulers by the District Commissioner of the colonial government. In Akropong, he started his reign with a new law of hygiene on house maintenance, personal appearance and dress. He also abolished facial marks. He freed the wives of his predecessor and remained with his one wife. He decided with his court to impose a fine to combat adultery in Akuapem. He launched a fund for the construction of roads in Akuapem. For the instruction of his immediate entourage, he insisted that meetings be held at the palace on Thursdays. Opposition came from the priest of *Ntoa* because Thursday had been reserved for him. But things happened as the ruler suggested. He prohibited the public slaughter of sheep at court. The elders agreed that the sheep be slaughtered outside and a drop of the blood be put on the stone at the courtyard with a finger. A chief was required to wear traditional dress, but one day, he appeared in the

abolish the pagan, barbarous customs onto which they cling so stubbornly”? Brokensha, David, *Akwapim Handbook*, p. 207.

⁶³⁴ Brokensha, David, *Akwapim Handbook*, p. 210

⁶³⁵ Brokensha, David, *Akwapim Handbook*, p. 210.

traditional court of law in his European suit. The elders and members of the ruling class complained in vain. “He persuaded them that it was appropriate for him to wear a suit as that could not possibly impair his dignity”.⁶³⁶ The ruler was required always to go outside the palace in the company of at least one person. But he ignored this and asked people to concentrate on working and earning their daily bread instead.

He found in Rev. Peter Hall (whom he regarded as a senior brother) more than in Erwing Northwand, the white missionary, a reliable ally for his spiritual struggle. On Good Friday, 1913, an influential royal, mother of Addo Dankwa II, and a Christian, died. Christians were expecting her to be honoured with a Christian burial. But her body was taken to the royal burial site at Amamprobi in Akropong. “It was a sorrowful day for the missionaries to see this desecration of the body of a Christian.”⁶³⁷ When Ofori Kuma came to power, a nephew of his, Ofei Awere who was a Christian, died, and Hall came to negotiate for a Christian burial, a practice which was regarded as being against the customary practice. But the *Omanhene* (the sacral ruler) stood firm and “made it plain that in future all members of the royal family who died as Christians should be buried as Christians in the Christian cemetery. In order to open the way for the dead Christians from Asona clan to be taken to the Christian cemetery for burial, the Presbyters and I (Rev. Hall) agreed that we should set aside a plot in the cemetery for them”.⁶³⁸

⁶³⁶ Brokensha, David, *Akwapim Handbook*, p. 210.

⁶³⁷ Hall, Peter, *Autobiography of Rev. Peter Hall*, p. 66.

⁶³⁸ Hall, Peter, *Autobiography of Rev. Peter Hall*, p. 67. “When the Queen mother, Mrs Koranteng, the mother of Ofori Kuma and wife of Pastor Koranteng died, she was buried in the Christian cemetery. If *Nana* Ofori Kuma had not made his stand clear on the issue, Christians from the royal family would continue to be buried with fetish rites for a long time.”

Akuffo's party charged Ofori Kuma with being against custom because he had created new offices and attached them to the *Mamkralo* of Akropong and the *Gyasehene* of Amanokrom. He had elevated commoners to royal offices. He had also passed an unpopular law, which required women to cover their breasts on pain of a five-shilling fine, and he claimed Stool land as his own. There were other charges such as his having commercial interests that conflicted with his responsibilities. The conflict brought by these charges threatened the unity of the sacral rule, and on May 13, 1919, *Nana Ofori Kuma* resigned.⁶³⁹

Nana Kwesi Akuffo was reinstalled and reigned peacefully until *Nana Addo Dankwa II*⁶⁴⁰ succeeded him in 1927. The major change *Nana Addo Dankwa II* brought into the relationship between sacral rule and Christian church, is that, he made *Akwesidae* the worshipping day in church and *Awukudae* the day for religious practices in the palace. He acknowledged the spiritual significance of Sunday service in the Salem for Christians and non-Christians in his state. People were expected to go to church on Sundays without any rival religious duty. Christians were also expected to respect the religious obligations of the sacral rule.

When *Nana Addo Dankwa II* died in 1932, *Nana Ofori Kuma* was asked to come back to office. He accepted and continued without conflict what he had started in 1914. Although he made very little impact on the Christian church, his Christianity had lasting marks on the *Akuapem* traditional institution. One of the achievements of the

⁶³⁹ When the governor received the letter of resignation from Ofori Kuma, he wrote "I wish he had resigned five years ago instead of clinging to office against the wishes of most of his people". Brokensha, David, *Akwapim Handbook*, p. 211.

⁶⁴⁰ *Nana Addo Dankwa II*, was from a Christian family. He was expected to reign on Christian principles since his Stool name is that of the ancestor who helped establish Christianity in the sacral rule. The father Rev Asare Asante like Rev koranteng had married royals. The traditional people did not oppose their daughters marrying a church representative. They found it beneficial since the Christian church did not lay claim on a pastor's wife being titled Queen mother.

ruler and his entourage was the spiritual transformation of Akuapem sacral rule. It was a long project and could only be achieved patiently by the right people from generation to generation. This individual struggle took a collective dimension in Kumase with the “Association of Christian Chiefs and Queen mothers.”

B- Ghana Association of Christian Chiefs and Queen mothers

In Kumase, the National Association of Christian Chiefs and Queen mothers provided a forum for Christians in traditional leadership to bring about change as a group and not as an individual achievement. The association’s By-Laws have eleven points. Four out of the eleven points deal with the finances and social responsibility of individuals and the association (nos 4, 8, 9, 11). Three points are about the meetings (nos 5, 6, 7), and two are about the name and the constitution (nos 1 and 10). The last two points (no 2 and 3) are about membership and objectives of the association, and are presented as follows:

“Membership of the association shall be opened to all Christian Chiefs and Queen mothers of all categories throughout Ghana. Otumfo Opoku Ware II Asantehene is the Life Chief Patron of the Association. The aims and objectives are to undertake countrywide evangelism to win more souls for Christ through the medium of Natural rulers. The Christian Council of Ghana, the Catholic Bishops Conference, the Pentecostal Churches Conference of Ghana, and others shall be the Association’s support and backbone in all its local activities and foreign exchange programmes.”⁶⁴¹

Sacral rulers established the association themselves for spiritual purposes. Christian faith is the first condition and being a ruler at any level in the African society is the second. They accepted responsibility for the evangelisation of their areas of jurisdiction, ceremonies, rituals and people. *Nana* B. Akyeampong moulded and

⁶⁴¹ Membership Card of the Ghana National Association of Christian Chiefs and Queen mothers, December 3, 1997, By-laws no 2 and 3.

promoted the idea, supported by *Nana Baffour Osei Akuto*. They both then contacted *Barima Akosa Yiadom*, the current secretary, and *Nana Opoku Afriyie*, the current chairman of the association. They all came to the conclusion that it was unjust for the church to consider them as spiritually disqualified from church membership, and that they needed to prove the contrary to the church leaders by making their office a means of Christian conversion among Stool holders and among their subjects. They would do so by propagating Christian teaching and attitudes in their area so that church leaders would be persuaded to revise their regulations and allow them to partake in Holy Communion service. They got the support of a number of individual clergymen from nearly all denominations.⁶⁴² Since the association is non-denominational, the members are able to reflect on, debate over, and initiate change in their socio-religious practices with more freedom. According to the By-Laws, they are accountable only to the *Asantehene* who is their Life Patron. Mistakes in spiritual initiatives have to be corrected by the *Otumfuo* as the highest spiritually accredited ruler for Asante and Akan in particular, and the Ghanaian in general, among members of the association.⁶⁴³ Christ and his Gospel are still central even though the association is considered to be one of the channels for paying spiritual allegiance to the *Otumfuo* at the *Manhya* palace in Kumase.

What is so apparent in the By-Laws is hardly mentioned when members of the Association are in session. They pray, sing, and use the Bible like any other Christian group. They debate on their challenges and they advise one another. The presence of a

⁶⁴² Bishop Kwesi Sarpong, (Roman Catholic bishop of Kumase); Bishop E.K. Yeboa, (Anglican bishop of Kumase); Rev. Dr. Emmanuel Asante (Methodist clergy); Rev. Asua Sekyere (Methodist clergy), Rev G.K. Edmond, Industrial chaplain, Kumase; Late Rev. I.A. Quayun, Chairman of Asante Presbytery.

⁶⁴³ At the time of the launching of the association, *Nana Otumfuo Opoku Ware II* was the president of the Ghana National House of Chiefs based in Kumase.

clergyperson is an asset but his absence does not detract from the smooth running of the association's affairs. They practise a cultural reading of the Bible, likening their context to the biblical one. We will develop this type of exegesis in the last chapter. They believe that accepting Christ does not necessarily entail abandoning one's culture.

“We can worship Christ without damaging our culture. We want the church to help us and to hear us. We hear them and we consider their teaching but the Christian church doesn't listen to what is going on in the sacral rule headed by Christians. But one day churches would have open mind and eye and we would serve Christ together.”⁶⁴⁴

The sense of belonging and the need to find the relevant leadership of the association have overshadowed the personal need for sacrament. Their joy is to help the church to be firmly established in their community and to see the Christians praying for them as well as living according to biblical principles.

C- Memorandum of Sir Ofori Atta I at the Akyem Synod, July 11, 1941 and the church's reply in 1942

By 1914, the Basel Mission had had frequent conflicts with the African sacral ruling institution which caused tension everywhere. Members of the traditional council preferred to turn to the colonial government which was getting firmly established on the African soil. Anthropologists, administrators, lawyers and teachers infiltrated an area controlled by Christian missionaries. The development of government schools was a late project which gave the sacral rulers the possibility of a choice. In Akyem Abuakwa, *Nana Ofori Atta*, the sacral ruler, who was knighted and deeply involved in the British colonial government, and the product of a Christian family and education,⁶⁴⁵

⁶⁴⁴ *Barima Akosa Yiadom*, interview, Kumase, Wednesday, August 26, 1998, 10h-13h.

⁶⁴⁵ He was born at Kyebi on October 11, 1881 from *Odehye Akosua Buo Gyankomaa* and *Emmanuel Boakye*, the Basel Mission evangelist and former state drummer who challenged the *Okvehene Nana Amoako Atta I*. He was educated at mission schools in Anum, Bepong, Kyebi, Abetifi, Begoro and at the theological seminary at Akropong Akuapem where he qualified as a certificated teacher in 1899. At birth

hosted the General Synod of the autonomous Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast headed by Africans, in his capital Kyebi, on the July 11, 1941. He knew how the missionaries and Christians, among whom were his direct parents, had helped in the process of exiling his ancestor Amoako Atta I. Sir Ofori Atta succeeded in being closer to the British colonialists than to the German missionaries. When Scottish missionaries took over the German missionary work in Cameroon and Ghana, and when the Basel missionaries were invited back in 1925, the traditional leadership in Ghana showed open interest instead in British Missions like the Methodist, Anglican, and Roman Catholic.

To recover their lost power, the traditional leaders adopted a new attitude of pluralism towards different Christian denominations so that they could be free to control their people's spirituality. They avoided the compriveness of having a single Christian institution by giving the same privileges to each new denomination as they had given to the pioneering Basel Mission. With more than one denomination in the state, sacral rule stood as the host and protector of at least two different yet equal mission stations. They stirred up conflict between the Christian missions in order to show their neutrality and their ability to keep the peace.⁶⁴⁶ Nana Ofori Atta I had been struggling to give a new look to Akyem Abuakwa since 1912. He avoided clashing with the church which had brought him up, and for which his father and mother gave up everything in order to join. He recovered the traditional leadership role his immediate parents had given up. At the occasion of the Presbyterian Synod in his capital, he

he was given the name Aaron Eugene Boakye Danquah. He was enstooled Okyenhene on November 27, 1912. Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, p. 206.

⁶⁴⁶ "We have just a case at Kokofu, in your own state, where the chief has turned us out of a school building put up on a state land, because he now wishes the Roman Catholics to own the school. We want to be protected against such actions". Reply to the Memorandum, section 75, p. 25.

shared his feelings, his thoughts, and his vision of the church and state relations powerfully in a challenging speech.

Even though royals and church personnel cared for the same people and lived in the same area, there had been few occasions for them to meet. The sacral ruler, *Nana Ofori Atta I* and his court made use of the Synod meeting in his capital to express to church representatives, their worries and hopes on the missionary and church work in the state. The Memorandum was the sacral rule hierarchy's version of the missionary and church work in the state of Akyem Abuakwa. It was about:

“a good understanding and helpful, harmonious cooperation among different sections of the community for the good of all in order to better the relations between church and state in Akyem Abuakwa .”⁶⁴⁷

This first speech from a traditional ruler in written form raises challenging questions on religious matters. Ofori Atta's major preoccupation as a ruler was to seek to involve the colonial government actively in the promotion of education in his state, and to assure the advancement and interests of his people.⁶⁴⁸ The Memorandum dwelt on the educational system in Kyebi. He favoured the public schools rather than the mission schools where he was trained. He wanted to benefit as much as possible from the colonial government, which was willing to help him unstintingly to achieve his aim, and to be a remarkable leader in Akyem Abuakwa as well as in the whole of Ghana. His experience as a statesman in traditional rule as well as in modern government gave him enough courage to address the Church synod in his capital. As someone who had been

⁶⁴⁷ Reply to the Memorandum 1942, section 3, p. 3.

⁶⁴⁸ He found the cooperation with the colonial government to be the best way to achieve his project. Having been trained in London as a lawyer, Aaron Eugene Boakye Danquah, the future *Okyenhene Nana Ofori Atta*, served the colonial government as interpreter in 1901, as a clerk with the Goldfields of Eastern Akyem and Oboasi mines in 1902 and 1903. He became the *Okyenhene's* secretary from 1904 till his enstoolment in 1912 at Kyebi. He was appointed member of the Legislative Council on March 28, 1916, Commander of the British Empire on March 14, 1918 and died with the title of Sir Ofori Atta. See, Addo-Fening, Robert, *Akyem-Abuakwa 1700-1943*, pp. 206-207.

in missionary circles, the *Okyenhene* showed in his address that he knew the Church and that he was the head of an African traditional religious institution. As ruler, he had difficulties in bringing about a peaceful coexistence between his non-Christian and Christian subjects. He then contested the missionary methods: “They (missionaries) established a partly segregated Christian community in every town or village where they worked.”⁶⁴⁹ He accused Christian subjects who generally consider

“themselves above the true national life, and look down with disgust and contempt on certain features and characteristics of people, create civil discord and disobey the rules and practices of a society”.⁶⁵⁰

Ofori Atta I reinterpreted traditional regulations using Christian and British categories. He justified traditional ceremonies: “Festivals are memorials of the past, they mark the changing year and are not brought about by the conduct of a fetish”.⁶⁵¹ Using the image of the European attitude towards relics and old customs in their country, the ruler disagreed with missionaries who “forbid Christians to participate in the public demonstrations and assemblies”.⁶⁵² About his spiritual duties, the traditional religious leader argued positively that prayers to the ancestors in the Stool room, libation and feeding of the forebears were not so different from Christian prayers and aspirations. He then queried the missionaries as well as their successors, the African church leaders, as follows:

“I invite you to take stock of the work of the pioneer missionaries and to see whether or not their policies were progressive, reactionary, or merely static, giving no opportunity for improvement or change...”⁶⁵³

⁶⁴⁹ Reply to the Memorandum, section 8, p. 3.

⁶⁵⁰ Reply to the Memorandum, section 12, p. 3.

⁶⁵¹ Reply to the Memorandum, section 17, p. 5.

⁶⁵² Reply to the Memorandum, section 19, p. 5.

⁶⁵³ Reply to the Memorandum, section 8, p. 2.

From question to accusation, he demonstrated that “the attitude and policies of the early missionaries and the Presbyterian Church is one of condemnation of everything African as such and a desire to substitute to it what is European”.⁶⁵⁴ He was certain that the early missionaries and the Presbyterian Church had not had time to investigate the African customs and way of life, and they needed some clarification from a statesman like him. He used elements from the African spiritual tradition to evaluate the missionary and church work. He felt called by God to share his knowledge about God’s deeds, and his deep personal hope with Christian leaders. It was

“to accelerate the day when the entire people and not a section of it only, will adopt Christian religion as the best for the salvation of people of his country, of mankind, and of the glorification of the name of God, the day we may become one fold and have one shepherd”.⁶⁵⁵

Church leaders found themselves facing a spiritual leader who was ahead of them, looking for the day when all his people would follow Jesus Christ and though he did not belong to the same spiritual institution, yet he was longing for the fulfilment of the same commission. A committee made of clergy and lay Christians was set up to draft a reply for the next Synod at Abetifi in 1942.

Abetifi Synod, August 1942

The first ever published document on the position of the autonomous Presbyterian Church of the Gold Coast (Ghana) was the theological and ecclesiastical presentation of the church’s relation with African sacral rule. The document was in part a justification of what was going on between the church and the traditional state, a fresh argument to support what the missionaries did and, finally, an authentic openness for future

⁶⁵⁴ Reply to the Memorandum, section 60, p. 19.

⁶⁵⁵ Reply to the Memorandum, section 78, p. 26.

relationship as the *Okyenhene*'s Memorandum had challenged them in various aspects while presenting the spiritual realities of sacral rule to be different from what is generally believed. Arguments supporting the missionary attitude towards traditional leadership dominated the document. The point of departure of the African church was the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as the exclusive Saviour to be worshipped; the protection of the Christian identity from syncretism and fetishism; the continuation of opposition till the sacral rulers removed the spiritual dimension of rituals, gave up ancestral worship and reduced the ruling institution to a purely civic service.⁶⁵⁶ From this point on, the document tolerated the survival of the ruling institution, brought in strong arguments to support the missionaries while indicating that some of their mistakes, like the notion of Salem which broke the social unity of the African community, were dying out gradually. The reply of the church did not go beyond this observation to explain the reason why and who were the agents of the process of this gradual dying out of a missionary principle. Also, the reply did not go further to ask why suddenly their son who became sacral ruler found the African spiritual experience a reliable one. As with the European missionaries, the lack of openness to a new spiritual tradition of experience prevented the African church leaders from inward criticism and analytical appreciation of external suggestions.

However, the Memorandum had raised an issue that the missionaries had not thought of like: "festivals are not brought about by the conduct of a fetish", and the African clergy had to face with a fresh attitude and to provide new answers to questions

⁶⁵⁶ "For the Christians, there is but one God and one Mediator between God and man, Jesus Christ. The Christian therefore, by the nature of his belief, cannot take part in any ceremony in which worship is offered, or superhuman honours are paid, to things other than God". Reply to Memorandum, 1942, section no 14, p. 4.

such as: “If you could bring forward definite evidence in support of what you say, we should consider it a really great step forward.”⁶⁵⁷ This was a clear invitation to the sacral ruler to help the church know more about what African religious festivals are about. This initial openness was quickly closed down, when without waiting for the ruler’s explanation, the authors of the reply turned to the missionary regulations and found ancestral worship in competition with the worship of God. Then they proposed a de-spiritualisation of prayers to the ancestors and the elimination of the religious meanings of customs.⁶⁵⁸ From here on, the document moved from the defence of Christian identity to the praise of missionaries and the justification of the church’s current aggressive attitude. The novelty of the document remains the digression on the church as fully independent and not being part of any European church or mission. Rather it was an independent African church “self-governing, self-supporting, self-propagating.”⁶⁵⁹ Therefore, in its conclusion, the document tackled the hopes of the church for sacral rule.⁶⁶⁰ Referring to the Ugandan experience as well as to that of Bechuanaland where people had accepted the leadership of a Christian without sacrificing one whit of their national honour, the document established a basis for future useful interaction:

“Furthermore, even where we find an existing practice of our church to be good and justifiable, we shall not be concerned to keep to it merely on that account. Rather we shall endeavour to discover how we may move forward to a new practice which will bring our Christian communities and the stools together with

⁶⁵⁷ Reply to Memorandum, 1942, no 17 and 18, p. 5.

⁶⁵⁸ Reply to Memorandum, 1942, no 20, p. 6.

⁶⁵⁹ Reply to the Memorandum, no 68, p. 22. “It was at the peak of the Second World War and the Presbyterian Church wanted to make it clear that they were not in contact with Germany”.

⁶⁶⁰ The whole published document was not biblical, nevertheless, the draft of the conclusion before editing had the following quotation: Luke 9/49-50: « John spoke up, Master, we saw a person driving out demons in your name, and we told him to stop because he doesn’t belong to our group. Do not try to stop him, Jesus said to him and to other disciples, because, whoever is not against you is for you ». Interview with Rev Kwansa, member of the committee in charge of the reply.

their entire following, into a closer and more sympathetic relation with one another. We shall always hail with joy any invitation from you at any time to consider plans or suggestions for compassing this end that eventually we may become one fold and have one Shepherd".⁶⁶¹

4- **Full membership to *Nana Agyeman Badu*, sacral ruler of Dormaa Ahenkro in 1969**

A landmark resolution in the long and ongoing struggle between the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and Akan sacral rule was passed when the members of the head office of the church on December 13, 1969, acknowledged Christian Agyeman Badu's status and gave him full membership with the freedom to participate in the sacraments and the possibility of occupying a spiritual leadership position in the Christian church.⁶⁶² He had been a missionary teacher before his enthronement on April 12, 1950. At the Presbyterian Synod in Dormaa Ahenkro in 1972, *Nana Osagyefo* Agyeman Badu welcomed the delegates, and promised to provide land for church work. He appreciated the cordial relationship between the church and chieftaincy. He was also glad that traditional drums could now be used in church services, and that members were allowed to take part in customs which did not involve non-Christian worship. He expressed personal appreciation for his admission to full membership. The Moderator, in reply, expressed appreciation for the magnificent welcome and hospitality given to the synod. He hoped the *Dormaaahene's* determination to be admitted to the Lord's Table would be an example to other Christian rulers. Synod accepted with gratitude his promise to release land for agriculture. He was elected member of the Synod committee dealing with "Church and culture" together with *Nana Addo Dankwa III* of Akropong

⁶⁶¹ Reply to Memorandum, no 85, pp. 28, 29.

⁶⁶² It was reported in the Minutes of the following synod in 1970, page 83, under "Remarkable event"

Akuapem.⁶⁶³

Nana Agyeman Badu was interested in his personal salvation. What he knew and believed before accepting the traditional leadership had remained strong all through the liturgical rituals for the acquisition of power. He had set conditions beforehand which the kingmakers had accepted. After six years of personal spiritual struggle in his position as sacral ruler, he petitioned the Presbyterian Church of Ghana to grant him full membership. He succeeded in putting Jesus above all the other spiritual forces in Dormaa Ahenkro. The church was seriously embarrassed because the reply they had given to Sir *Nana Ofori Atta* in 1942, had fixed their position and understanding. This new request was from a different angle and it would take the church another thirteen years to come up with a new regulation and a new understanding of sacral rule. Before he expressed his request in a written form, he had been able to ensure his personal commitment, and had started to successfully influence the religious purification of the Dormaa sacral rule. His letter was not meant for his own benefit but was a way of drawing the church's attention to what they could gain from his membership. Like the Basel missionaries, the African clergy were wary of syncretism. They stood back and adopted an inquisitive attitude while abandoning the sacral ruler to himself in the spiritual and socio-political struggle.

In his family life, he remained monogamous without clashing with his people.⁶⁶⁴

As he encouraged education and hard work, he sent the young boys he was given as

⁶⁶³ Synod report 1998.

⁶⁶⁴ "In the past, at the enstoolment of a paramount chief, he was given women. But Agyeman Badu stopped the practice because of his Christian commitment and in order to promote literacy among women. Those whom he was given he sent to school and allowed them to find lovers to marry, and he celebrated their union. That was how he polished our tradition. If the new one can have wisdom to open our mind to understand what is good for us, why not follow him"? Interview with a group of chiefs, Dormaa Ahenkro, July 27, 1998, 10h-16h.

bodyguards to school and thus showing that he was for the promotion of people rather than for their exploitation.⁶⁶⁵ Those who could not go to school were given farms or cattle.⁶⁶⁶ He then explained to people why it was unnecessary to continue with human sacrifices, as had been the practice before him, although some conservatives still wanted it to continue. Those early changes made him popular both in his immediate environment and beyond. The people's readiness to listen to him assured him of the possibility of introducing major changes within the sacral rule. Before his reign, there had been sacred days. On *Nana Agyeman Badu's* suggestion in the Stool room, kingmakers in agreement with the ancestors allowed the people to work on these days to develop the area. The economic position of Brong Ahafo Region under his leadership compared favourably that of the Asante, and in the area of education, they were far ahead.

His influence was acknowledged and the Brong and Ahafo people decided to seek autonomy from the Asante Region. With the help of Kwame Nkrumah, the Prime Minister of Ghana, *Nana Agyeman Badu* obtained the political freedom of his people and he moved from the inherited title of "*Oseadeyo*" (the one who fulfils his promises) to that of "*Osagyefo*" (liberator, saviour, the one who fights another's battle to free him without him being part of the fight). The ceremony was performed simultaneously with the elevation of Kwame Nkrumah to the same title and for the same reason. From then on, Kwame Nkrumah became *Osagyefo*. People realised that all these courageous

⁶⁶⁵ "In the past, people had to send servants to the palace; nowadays, they are sent with the *Osagyefo's* blessing, to school. The longing for literacy had helped polish our tradition." Interview, Dormaa Ahenkro July 27, 1998, 10h-16h.

⁶⁶⁶ "Those who cannot go to school become farmers. They own some large cocoa farms. Poultry and cattle breeding were also promoted but they were not as successful as farming and education." Interview of a group of elders, Dormaa Ahenkro, July 27, 1998, 10h-16h.

innovations were born of *Nana Agyeman Badu's* Christian commitment. He relied only on the prayers of Christians for victory in his struggle with the Asante. The Christianity of Agyeman Badu proved unchallenged in the traditional set-up, and the people followed him.⁶⁶⁷ Politically, as Christian, he achieved a lot. From the colonial to successive governments in Ghana, Agyeman Badu stood out as a reliable leader.⁶⁶⁸

The Christian ruler of Dormaa Ahenkro, through his Christian commitment, succeeded in removing compromising religious practices in the daily, monthly and yearly running of the socio-political institution. The impact of this achievement within his immediate environment stretched beyond the palace boundaries to be seen in the elimination of shrine places in the whole area under his jurisdiction. Kingmakers were among those who publicised the Christian character of Agyeman Badu as paramount ruler. Church people were convinced because when they paid him a visit, he would remove his sandals, kneel down and ask for a blessing.⁶⁶⁹ After prayer, he would put on his sandals and continue his function as the head of the Dormaa Ahenkro Traditional area. Removal of the sandals in Akan sacral rule is a clear sign of abdication. In his case, it was a sign of spiritual abdication. There is no doubt that this demonstration of a personal decision to rely completely on the Christian spiritual experience accelerated

⁶⁶⁷ In Dormaa, the paramount chief is believed to be second to none. But *Nana Agyeman Badu* was referring to Jesus Christ. Above his throne hangs a picture of Jesus. Influential member of the Presbyterian Church, he attended the general synod of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. He has established morning devotions in the palace. He explained to his people why it was beneficial to stop human sacrifice, and abandon the public shrines and other religious practices." Interview, Dormaa Ahenkro, July 27, 1998.

⁶⁶⁸ *Nana Agyeman Badu* was co-founder and co-creator with Kwame Nkrumah of Brong Ahafo Region. In Nkrumah's government, he was Chairman of the Secretariat of Chieftainship Affairs. He was the first to win elections against the *Otumfo*, paramount chief of the Asante, as the national president of the Ghana National House of Chiefs. He was the one who implemented democracy in the House of Chiefs in general, and within the Asante Confederacy in particular. He was humble enough to respect those who were chairing in his own area, and was among the few who advised the President of the Republic as founding member of the Council of States. He was an influential member of the Constitutional Assembly. He was Chairman of both the National Commission for democracy and the Government Transport Corporation.

⁶⁶⁹ Interview with Rev. S. K. Aboa, Mampong Akuapem, July 19, 1998, 15h-17h30, and Rev Kwansa, Aburi, August 20, 2000, 10h -12h.

his acceptance as a full member of the church. A Presbyterian from childhood, *Nana Agyeman Badu* used his Christian commitment to overcome challenging situations in African sacral rule.

5- *Oseadeeyo Nana Addo Dankwa III at Akropong Synod 1978*

Following the Christian tradition in the Akuapem sacral rule, *Nana Addo Dankwa III*, former senior presbyter and science teacher, had been trying for twenty-five years to enforce the Christian presence within the palace and in the lives of his people. He made use of his past activities in the Presbyterian Church to seek dialogue with Christians more than his predecessors had done. *Addo Dankwa I*, *Addo Dankwa II* and *Ofori Kuma* the Christian king, had made major religious changes during their reigns but they were more concerned with their people and with the institution than with their personal salvation. Going beyond these earlier efforts, *Nana Addo Dankwa III*⁶⁷⁰ had been working for the future of the traditional ruling institution and his struggle is for its survival. Current changes have been made with that purpose in view. He has expressed his views in the state court through his decisions, in seminars, and in public addresses.

Traditional power brokers are all aware that they can effect change but the challenge, however, is to get that change accepted by all, involve the ruling class if it will be beneficial, and enhance the institution without destroying of ancestral values. Members of the ruling class who found some of their religious functions incompatible with their Christian faith, had the support of *Nana Addo Dankwa III*, and were given

⁶⁷⁰ This stool name predicted that during his reign, he would make an impact on people through the Christianity. Beyond the celebration of the 150th anniversary of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, he found the area of research which deals with the meaning of religious symbols to be the ground for interaction with Christianity. Interview, Accra, August 9, 1998, 10h-12h.

royal dispensation to stop doing them thus they were allowed to continue with the Christian way without abdicating. An official letter from their ruler to that effect, was submitted to the state court to declare them ritually free from the said practices.⁶⁷¹ For example, the state council of Akuapem allowed the Queen mother to annually bless the sacral ruler with the Bible and in a Christian way at the state court without any problem of conscience. At the same time, those who continued with the traditional way were not blamed. Addo Dankwa III has succeeded in reading the Bible like his predecessors and in using it as source of inspiration in various matters.

In two seminars,⁶⁷² Addo Dankwa III has spoken concerning the quality of people occupying traditional Stools and the unnecessary mysticism in the sacral ruling system. He found the fixed power sharing arrangement of the Akan a hindrance to the appointment of the right people for important positions for the well-being of sacral rule.⁶⁷³ He believes that:

“though the fetish cult is generally and rather mistakenly linked up with almost all the various aspects of African world outlook and customs, it is not inherent to them, and one can faithfully share the African world view and participate to a large extent, in African customs, without being a fetish adherent. The present situation is such that, Ghanaians, who prior to accepting their traditional responsibilities were Christians, later find themselves as it were, falling between two stools; they are neither accepted as Christians nor as pagans”.⁶⁷⁴

His genuine contribution is the attempt to provide an academic justification for the new spiritual dynamism within sacral rule. In his paper presented at Trinity College,

⁶⁷¹ Nana Addo-Birokorang went back to the Lord's table with a letter signed by the *Omanhene* as a proof that he did not partake anymore in fetish practices while performing his normal duties as *Apesemankahene*.

⁶⁷² Trinity College, Accra, 1995 and Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre, 2001.

⁶⁷³ “When the late *Otumfo* Agyeman Prempeh II, former *Asantehene*, came to the throne in the 1930's, he made use of this inherent power of appointment. He therefore appointed a very intelligent man who possesses all the qualities of a linguist in the person of *Okyeame* Osei Akoto. This man has proved to be useful to the present *Asantehene*, *Otumfo* Opoku Ware III”. Interview Addo Dankwa III, Accra, August 9, 1998, 10h-12h.

⁶⁷⁴ Addo Dankwa III, 1995, p. 11.

he called for researchers to study the institution so that changes may be the subjects of scientific debate. To illustrate how this research could be undertaken, when he got the opportunity to address the Synod delegates at Akropong in 1979, he explained why the office of the sacral ruler is not a fetish one, how Black Stools are symbols of history, how libation is a form of prayer to the Almighty and how African art points to the philosophy, social history and religion of a people.⁶⁷⁵ Far from exposing the sacral rule to a passive influence of the exclusive Christian church, this kind of openness seeks tools for resolving the internal struggle as Christ's words and deeds challenge traditional rulers. *Nana Addo Dankwa III* is aware that sacral rule is full of symbols which are not "fully appreciated by the uninitiated". Therefore, the ongoing internal spiritual struggle that royals face needs an input from the African clergy.⁶⁷⁶ He has, in his own way, introduced a prophetic perspective on sacral rule, and has tried to point to the type of prophetic research needed in African religion as practised in sacral rule. The discourse on religion going on in palaces needs to be related to its future twenty years from now.

⁶⁷⁵ In Akan socio-political institutions, a priest cannot rule. For a priest to rule, he must resign and stop all priestly functions. When a ruler who occupies a stool possesses a spirit like the fetish priest it leads automatically to his destoolment. If a ruler is suspected of paying visits to a shrine, his subsequent destoolment is obvious. This is how *Nana Addo Dankwa III* showed that the office of the *Omanhene* (sacral ruler) has nothing to do with fetishism. Interview Addo Dankwa III, Accra, August 9, 1998, 10h-12h.

⁶⁷⁶ "Now that the top hierarchy of the Christian church in Ghana has been almost fully Africanised, it would be an unpardonable mistake for the clergy to appear too superficial to lump the two things together namely, fetish and culture, and, as it were, attempt to throw away both the baby and the dirty water." Synod report, 1980, p. 63.

Cameroon and Ghana: Comparison and contrast

When Africans occupied leading positions in the Christian church of their territories, their relationship with African sacral rule underwent a radical change according to the circumstances and the people involved. In Cameroon as well as in Ghana, the survival of both the sacral rule and the church were at the heart of the concern of people, clergy and rulers. Church leaders established their authority within the social structures headed by the sacral communities and their rulers continued to be proud that the Church existed in their domains. In Cameroon where the Basel Mission made membership of church as well as the attendance in mission school a royal business, the majority of their African collaborators returned to the same society and to the same palace from which they had been sent to learn from the missionaries. Jacques Tayou, Tagne Maptue, Ta Henoch and Samuel Youmbi, once converted to Christianity, used the Grassfields social structures and spiritual worldview as channels for the spread of the Christian faith with which they had come into contact. As they destroyed traditional shrines, and opposed polygamy, and as they spoke against the swearing of oaths by Christians, they were using Christian norms and their position in the hierarchy of sacral rule to change their own society and to renew it. Only such a critique could lead to a spiritual renewal centered on Jesus Christ. None of them contested for position within the hierarchy of traditional or modern Cameroonian society. Yet, they had such great impact on people as role models that their leader, the Evangelist Jacques Tayou, had a lot of namesakes. Ninety per cent (90%) of those called “Tayou” in Grassfields

are named after him.⁶⁷⁷ Unlike *Nana Ofori Kuma* in Ghana, Jacques Tayou and his intimate friends had limited knowledge of Western culture.

Nana Ofori Kuma, like those Cameroonians, avoided being influenced by external spiritual forces as he carried on with traditional leadership in Akropong. With the same motivation to transform the old structure to suit the new environment, he attempted to westernise Akuapem royal traditions. Ofori Kuma's Christianity was full of Western elements and he effected changes within the sacral rule without consulting or attracting the leaders of the church. People opposed him because they were against Western culture and not because of his Christian background and life. His contemporary and peer, Ofori Atta I at Kyebi in Akyem Abuakwa, brought a lot of British cultural elements into the management of the Akan sacral rule. He was so enlightened as a knight of the British Empire that he caused the relationship between church and state to be debated. Debate about spiritual matters and in a written form is more Western than African. Thus, he paved the way for the newly independent Presbyterian Church of Ghana to articulate a comprehensive reply to the challenges of traditional rule, and to make the Christian attitude towards the traditional ruling system one that was open to theological debate and change.

While in Ghana the debate about the church and the African state was put into written form, it was not so in Cameroon where the church was free from the beginning to be present in palaces. Very early on, chaplains were appointed to work within the royal compounds. Jacob Su, Isaac Difon and Peter Fai served that purpose

⁶⁷⁷ Tayou is a short form of Ta Youmbissi. He was named after his grandfather, "Youmbissi," respectfully called Tayou. "Ta" means "father," this word is an honorable title for elderly people. "Youmbissi" means "listen and follow God's instructions." The name Tayou became popular with the impact of Christianity spread by Jacques Tayou.

without any official letter in Bafut, Bali-Nyonga and Bansa'. However, once the church posted them to the community which selected and sent them to mission schools as their representatives, they ministered as clergymen in whose hands was placed the future of the sacral rule. As recently as 1994, Rev Chimi Dore Daniel, Presbytery chairman of the Evangelical Church of Cameroon based at Bafoussam, officially appointed the Rev Tcholafi as the chaplain in charge of Bandenkop palace where he had to visit all the secret societies.⁶⁷⁸

In Ghana, the sacral rulers are doing what the churches which also originated from the Basel mission are doing in Cameroon. The new Asantehene had appointed chaplains from different denominations in Kumasi for his spiritual needs. Before him, his ruling class members from Christian conviction had felt the need to come together to reflect on their Christianity and their function as rulers of the people of God in the religious language, rituals and liturgy they inherited from their ancestors. Free to contact any clergyperson of their choice, they developed friendly relations with the Christian Council of Ghana. This has no parallel in Cameroon where the "*Amical des chefs traditionnels de l'Ouest*" limits itself to local or national politics, and to the economic empowerment of its members. In Kumase as well as in Grassfields, rulers come together for social events such as funerals, festivals and the enthronement of new rulers.

Apart from Nana Addo Dankwa III of Akuapem, none of the sacral rulers in Cameroon and Ghana had found the traditional art they nurtured in their various groups to be a common ground for spiritual interaction with the Christian church. The

⁶⁷⁸ Tcholafi, before going to mission school and long before his ordination was the one who looked after the current *Fo Fezzu* of Badenkop. Tcholafi was going back to where he had been taken from 70 years before.

salvific nature of the Christian faith has made the symbolic craftwork of the Grassfields Cameroon and the Adinkra symbols of the Akan of Ghana a national pride. Hans Knopfli in Cameroon, acting on behalf of the Presbyterian Church, had paved the way for academic Christian discourse on the African spirituality represented in those symbols. Research in this area would aim at developing the biographies of outstanding Christian leaders in traditional and church roles.

Although trained from childhood by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Agyeman Badu could not refuse being made the paramount ruler of Dormaa Ahenkro. But prior to his baptism, he had surrendered everything in his life Christ. With his new position as head of a traditional sacral rule, he maintained his Christian commitment without compromise. To be given full membership and, therefore, be allowed to take Holy Communion, he went through a spiritual abdication of African rituals and was justified when after 13 years of deliberation, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana considered him eligible to become a full Church member. His apparently personal achievement had an impact on individuals within and beyond his area of jurisdiction. His immediate successor took his Stool name, determined to emulate his good deeds. This was what happened in the case of Jeremiah Chi Kangsen in Cameroon


Jeremiah Chi Kangsen, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Cameroon, former teacher of African Religion at the Theological College of Nyassosso⁶⁷⁹ and who had been trained in Kumase-Ghana, maintained his relationship with his classmates in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. He was aware of the implications of the Church's decision to accept Agyeman Badu as full member of the Church. He proceeded in like manner, and when he was also asked to head his own

⁶⁷⁹ The college has now been transferred to Kumba.

traditional community, gave certain conditions. However, in his specific case, he had reconciled himself spiritually with the African spiritual worldview compared to *Nana Agyeman Badu* who had detached himself from his African religious roots. These two outstanding Christians in African sacral rule considered some negotiations necessary with the kingmakers before they even embark on a career with sacral rule. Their preconditions and subsequent abstention from participating in African traditional religious ceremonies indicates that belief and religious practices within sacral rule needed some purification. Their attitude is a living theological expression of possible spiritual incompatibility between sacral rule religious tradition and the Christian faith. Theological debate around this issue needs to be done. However this kind of discussion will take us beyond the scope of this thesis.

Among his peers in Cameroon, Rev Kangsen was often different in his attitude, language and appreciation of African religion. He had taught African Religion in the seminary in Nyassosso before heading administrative positions in the Presbyterian Church. Far more than Rev Jean Kotto,⁶⁸⁰ he officially made African values a part of Christian heritage. Following the previous work of Christian princes in Grassfields palaces, he accepted to be a traditional leader so that he could bring his ancestral institution of leadership under the Lordship of Jesus. People were very happy to see him move from the Church head office to the Traditional head office because he embodied for his subjects and his congregants the two different spiritual traditions, linked to Christ through their ancestors. After his enthronement as traditional ruler in Cameroon, he came to Ghana before planning to go to Basel. He met the Akropong

⁶⁸⁰ Of late, Rev Jean Kotto, at the time, was the president of the Evangelical Church of Cameroon.



ruler *Nana Addo Dankwa III* who found in him an inspiration for his own struggle to see Christ transform African sacral rule in Akuapem.

Lacking the decisive power of Kangsen in church circles, *Nana Addo Dankwa III* shared Kangsen's views but focused more attention on the future of sacral rule. He depersonalised the process of change, trusting in the Holy Spirit and the dynamic power of the Bible, and using all his authority to create an environment in sacral rule within which Christians could hold positions there in spiritual agreement with their ancestral religious experience. The prophetic voice for the cultural and spiritual conversion of the ruling institution is echoed by this humble and strong Christian for whom personal salvation is meaningless without corresponding community and cultural transformation for Christ's sake.

In Cameroon like in Ghana, with all the cases cited above, there is still a general and reciprocal rejection of sacral rulers by church leaders and a popular perception of incompatibility between the traditional ruling institutions and the Christian Church. However, the contrast between what happened in the community of Christian royals who refused a ruling position like Rev Fotso Moïse, and those who accepted this responsibility like Michel Mongwe, as we saw in the case of Bamendjou and Bapouantou in Cameroon, suggests that sooner or later, Christians will need to spread the good news of Jesus Christ into all the areas of human existence including that of sacral leadership.

Chapter Eight - General conclusion: Theological steps towards the establishment of African sacral rule as a new mission field for the Christian church.

Let us begin the concluding discussion of this thesis by restating the important dimensions of African sacral rule as an institution involving people, and their socio-cultural context as well as their religious practices. The possibility of the conversion not only of individuals but also of both their culture and their religion within sacral rule points to the need for the articulation of a new and relevant theology. It is a major task to theologically establish sacral rule as a Christian mission field. This would involve, first, concentrating on the theological insights which result from an anthropological and historical analysis of the encounter between sacral rule and Christian mission. Second, in order to support the argument of this thesis, the biblical approach to sacral rule as a new mission field will be emphasised and pointers into the future theological debate will be offered.

I- Reconsideration of the theological tasks of the African Christian church

A- Signs of cultural changes from potentially fertile areas within both institutions: sacral rule and the Christian church

Within this thesis, in an attempt to open up a fresh route to theological understanding and to the promotion of new conversions, certain signs of cultural changes have been examined. The detailed anthropological presentation of the patterns of sacral rule in Cameroon and Ghana aims at facilitating the understanding of the historical events and avoiding confusion between the conversion of the ruler and the transformation of sacral rule by Christ through his Gospel. It has also been presented at length so that we can detect areas of people's inner life where changes had occurred

and to develop skills which would enable us to bring African sacral rule under the lordship of Jesus Christ. In reference to what has happened to African sacral rule in the process of interaction with the Christian church which had established itself in deliberate hostility to the existing African structure of government, the following signs indicated that a process of conversion and discipling had begun.

First, the acceptance of Christianity by sacral rulers creates opportunities for the establishment and expansion of the church. In this case, the physical as well as the material needs of the church were provided. Moreover, the acceptance of the Gospel message encouraged the subjects of a sacral ruler to join the Christian church and hence to facilitate the propagation of the good news of Jesus Christ. The major change has been that as an institution, the existing African sacral rule, by providing space for the incoming Christian church, has now to interact on a regular basis with a new social community and religious tradition.

Second, changes which are mutually beneficial to both institutions occurred through communication in African indigenous languages. Public preaching and the Bible were translated into the mother tongues of the people. The significant change in this aspect of communication is that the Christian church adopted the African ancestral experience of God through religious idioms. Thus sacral rule enriched its knowledge of God with the biblical witness.

Third, the converts were prepared to question their culture in general, and, in particular, their religious practices including those of sacral rulers. Therefore, they were able to make continuous adjustments to their way of life in the light of what they obtained from Scripture, and in terms of how they relate to Christ. Also, Christians in

sacral rule accept responsibility for transforming and not destroying their culture. The change here is the fact that African religion can be scrutinised from within. This is a state of affairs that the African church leaders are benefiting from. In fact, in order to be more successful in their evangelistic task, the African church leaders have also questioned the omissions and regulations of former missionaries. Thus, what they inherited as rigid doctrine becomes relative and subject to modifications.

A fourth sign of cultural conversion is a kind of relationship established between African sacral rule and the African church in which the exchange of ideas, functions and activities, becomes possible. The change is that the church can adopt some aspects of the sacral rulers' spiritual experience and life while a Christian minister can take a position within the sacral rule. Here, too, the church representatives are free to spread the Christian message in any area of the institution of sacral rule.

Fifth, historical evidence shows that there is a natural continuation with regard to the status of a Christian sacral ruler. A successor to a throne who takes the Stool name of a late Christian sacral ruler, is often expected to deepen the relationship of sacral rule with the Christian church. The significant change here is that people in African sacral rule have found in Christianity the fulfilment of their spiritual aspirations, so that the sacral ruler can partake of the Christian sacraments and can be an ordained minister or an elder of the church without abandoning his traditional responsibilities.

Finally, it has been shown that with the new change, a sacral ruler can partake in the Christian sacraments, and can be ordained an elder or a minister without abandoning his traditional responsibilities, and without spiritually abdicating his ancestral experience of God. The capital change here is that the African church has

acknowledged the presence of Christ within sacral rule prior to the advent of the missionaries. The changes that have occurred have confirmed the fact that it is possible to bring the institution of sacral rule and people involved in it under the lordship of Jesus Christ. These changes have also reinforced the fact that there exists a fertile ground for new theological discourse which considers African sacral rule as a new mission field. The evidence for these six points is found in the case studies of Christian sacral rulers.

B- The theological challenge of the religious biographies of Christians in African sacral rule

On the basis of the historical evidence, both African sacral rule and Christian mission have survived the encounter, self-examination and mutual criticism that have been involved. Missionaries could not convert the traditional rulers to the Christian faith nor could the traditional rulers convert missionaries to the African life and spiritual experience. They were likewise unable to establish a basis for religious dialogue. However, far from being a failure, this instead presents the current generation with a challenge. Is the present generation of theologians ready to encourage this dialogue by promoting the free expression among those operators who represent sacral rule concerning their own understanding of who Christ is for them? Until now, most African theologians have been selected and trained by first converts and missionaries. Their material for doing theology is the Christianity in which they were brought up. Their knowledge of African pre-missionary religiosity is negligible compared to what they know about the Christian faith. In the process of their theological enterprise, they lack a judicious consideration of the religious achievements of both sacral rule and the

church. Nevertheless, they have gathered necessary and useful materials through ethnology, anthropology, history, sociology or biblical studies. Some outstanding theologians like Sanon ended up making Jesus Christ the “master of initiation”⁶⁸¹ in African life. This was an illuminating development which helped African Christians and churches to see themselves in different light. By making African sacral rule a mission field, our theological contribution points to the need to establish a theological discourse between African Christians from a missionary background and those from an African religious tradition on an equal footing. The outcome of the sharing of their perception of Jesus Christ allows Inculturation theology to include the voice of Christians in sacral rule as well as that of Christians in universities.

There have been Christian sacral rulers who were fully accepted in the Christian church while they were still custodians of their ancestral heritage. Their presence as full members of the Christian church generated much theological debate within the African church leadership. In the case of Akyem Abuakwa with the Memorandum the Christian ruler presented and its reply in 1942, the debate took place at a synod meeting and not at a university. Just as we are suggesting that sacral rulers should be admitted to the theological debate, administrators of the Christian church could also be included. Synod decisions have political and administrative consequences. They also express religious and theological positions which affect the spiritual life of people and communities. In the Western culture, academic excellence in theology and the daily administration of the church are differentiated. This approach needs to be modified for African Christianity to develop. Sanon, who has been quoted above, became Roman Catholic

⁶⁸¹ Sanon, Titianma Anselme, “Jesus, Master of Initiation” in, Schreiter (ed), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, pp. 85-102.

Bishop of Bobo-Dioulasso in Burkina-Faso. His unchallenged intellectual contribution seems to have had more impact on university students and institutions than on the organisation and membership of the church in his own diocese. The implementation of ideas originating in academic African theology does not take place automatically. This is why there must be continuous interaction between academic theologians and the administrative clergy. To enable this kind of theological enterprise to be effective, sacral rulers should be included in all the discussions.

The training of a missionary did not prepare him to deal with the case of people who could come to Christ without abandoning their ancestral experience of God. They had never thought of “Christianity as a non-Western religion.”⁶⁸² Bediako has written at length on this issue, presenting arguments which are difficult to counter. His thought is insightful in a new way. The book he devoted to it is a sample of theological initiative in Africa. In Bediako’s arguments, Christianity in Africa is more than an adaptation. The African context itself offers the means for a fresh articulation of theological issues. In this way universal Christianity will be strengthened and enriched with new vision to face the current challenges. Bediako’s argument can be taken further. African Christians in the academy should now consider the wealth of knowledge and depth of relationship with Jesus Christ in the long trajectory of the religious history of sacral rule.

An attempt has been made in this thesis to meet this theological challenge by looking at the biographies and profiles of outstanding Christians who were considered by their communities as ideal sacral rulers. This has been possible because members of the ruling class, in their ancestral religious experience, have references to Christian

⁶⁸² Bediako, Kwame, *Christianity in Africa*, front cover.

values and other indicators of their readiness to convert to the Christian faith. These elements are considered by Inculturation theologians such as Nyamiti, Sanon, Sawyerr, Mveng, Idowu and others like them as “*Preparatio Evangelica*.” Once the sacral rulers are converted, it is hoped that their genuine contribution will help in the theological education of the people of God and provide Christianity with the authentic African dimension it still lacks.

The theological challenge presented to the church by the lives of Rev Kangsen of Cameroon and *Nana* Agyeman Badu of Ghana is that they were as popular and honoured within the church as they were outside it. They abstained from participating in traditional religious practices and were not regarded as spiritually part of sacral rule but of the Christian church. The challenge here is that the theological position they had adopted did not permit them to see any continuity of the African religious itinerary. Their achievements are to be seen in the context of the religious history of the church rather than that of their traditional communities. The achievements of *Fo* Kamga of Bandjoun in Cameroon and *Nana* Ofori Kuma of Akuapem in Ghana were socio-economic innovations for their people according to the Christian principles and ideologies of Western civilization. However, they were still practising traditional religion and were not regarded as true Christian converts. The challenge to the church is that these were not totally converted persons as the church would have liked and for this reason, the church has no stake in their success in socio-economic matters. Although all four men were to a degree successful both as Christians and sacral rulers, they failed to integrate the two roles in a meaningful way. When theologians in the academy create a space for free discussions where church representatives and sacral

rulers can share how their life has been shaped as they interact with Jesus and his Gospel on a daily basis, then mutual appreciation will take place, common interests will be recognised and the Inculturation theology will gain new depth.

Jacques Tayou, Michel Mongwe, Rudolph Peshandon and Ta Henoah in Cameroon, as well as *Nana Addo Dankwa III* and *Nana Agyeman Prempeh* in Ghana, tried to stop certain cultural practices of their people, they equally attempted to justify some other indigenous religious practices. This dichotomous stance of these Christian sacral rulers constitutes another challenge to the Christian church. Generally, what transpires from these examples is that suspicion was created whenever there was neither total acceptance nor total rejection of Christian principles. However, the church was not always vocal about this. At times, it was even completely silent, awaiting the debate to be launched by academic theologians. An attempt in this direction has begun with this thesis.

The above biographies point to the fact that a dynamic dialogue is possible between sacral rule and the Christian church. Before some of these people had integrated Christian faith with their ancestral religious aspirations, nobody could think of a new way of engaging theologically with African sacral rule. Now that these historical cases are capable of inspiring imitators all over Africa, what is needed is a theological interpretation of the achievements of those Christians who have held leadership positions simultaneously in the Christian church and in sacral rule. With them, the meeting of Christ with the world of African sacral rule reaches a new creative stage. A dynamic interaction between African sacral rule and the Christian church ought to be nurtured by a fresh theology worked out by people from within both

institutions who are able to identify the potential for future interaction between sacral rule and the Christian church. In this study, particular reference has been made to examples of such interaction between sacral rulers from Grassfields in Cameroon and the Akan people in Ghana, on the one hand, and the churches that have issued from the Basel Mission enterprise in Africa, on the other. The next theological task is to understand how African sacral rule relates to the biblical world and particularly to the New Testament. This is essential because Protestant theology derives its authority from the Bible in general and the New Testament in particular.

II- New Testament world and African sacral rule

In order to start with the discussions involved here, certain questions have to be asked. These are: Does Jesus play any part in the formation, maintenance and continuation of African sacral rule? If the Gospel is relevant to African sacral rule, are the people involved in it aware of Christ's concern for them as well as for the institution? If they are not aware, whom is Christ sending to African sacral rule to carry out this mission? In answering these questions, we would need to be mindful of the fundamental fact that sacral rule in its purest form belongs to Christ. With the infiltration of African sacral rule by evil elements, sacral rulers are the first to be empowered by Christ to transform it, followed by any other interested persons. In support of this view, three New Testament references are analysed below.

1- Colossians 1:15-17; Jesus Christ, the Lord of African sacral rule

Jesus "is the image of the invisible God, first born before all creation, Because in him all things were created – things in heaven and things on earth, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions, whether principalities or powers – They have all been created through him and for him. He indeed is before all things, and

they all cohere in him”⁶⁸³.

A- Situation addressed in the Book of Colossians: Christ at the “grove of initiation”⁶⁸⁴ of African palaces

The meaning of this passage will become clearer when we examine the situation addressed by Paul in this letter. Commentaries on the Book of Colossians have entitled it “Hymn to Christ”. Here the first readers of the epistle and Africans in the context of sacral rule stand on a common ground. If we follow the argument in Part One of this thesis about the possibility of “Christians before Christ” with regard to sacral rule, the Book of Colossians could be considered as Paul’s version of the “*Logos Spermatikos*” (Seminal Word’s activity) in all generations. Paul was addressing a confused situation where people from diverse religious traditions came together to form the Colossian Christian congregation.⁶⁸⁵ When Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians,

“the city’s population consisted mainly of indigenous Phrygians, Greek settlers, and Jews who were brought there from Mesopotamia and Babylon by Antiochus III in the early part of the second century BC. Colossae in Paul’s time was thus a cosmopolitan city in which diverse cultural and religious elements met and mingled”.⁶⁸⁶

⁶⁸³ Colossians 1:15-17

⁶⁸⁴ The expression “grove of initiation” came from the Congolese theologian Bimweny-Kweshi and was developed by Ka Mana to describe the African place of contact with God with details concerning the process of establishing and maintaining spiritual relationship with the Almighty. Ka Mana, *Chrétiens et Eglises d’Afrique: penser l’avenir*, Yaoundé, Clé, 1999, also issued in English as *Christians and churches of Africa: Envisioning the future*, Akropong, Regnum Africa, 2000, p 3.

⁶⁸⁵ In fact, Colossae was a small town situated in the southern part of ancient Phrygia, in the west of modern Turkey. The military generals, Xerxes and Cyrus, conquered Colossae and introduced Asia’s religion there. Alexander the Great overcame the Persians and Hellenistic culture became part of Colossae. The famous Greek thinkers, Herodotus and Xenophon, gave an account of Colossae as a commercial metropolis and an emporium of the weaving industry. The decline of Greek leadership in the area placed Colossae under the Romans.

⁶⁸⁶ Matthew, Black, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 3.

It is not surprising that it was the Colossian congregation in a city partly Jewish-oriental, Greek-Phrygian and Iranian-Egyptian⁶⁸⁷ that became the target of an assault in the name of a strange religion. Paul wrote the letter to the Colossians to solve the problem of “the effective desire to be in right relation with the power manifesting itself in the universe (and to explain) how a person may prepare himself for a vision of heavenly realities as part of his initiation into a knowledge of the divine mysteries.”⁶⁸⁸ There was a struggle to relate the religious past to the new Christian faith taking place in the spiritual experience of people coming from different religious traditions, and this brought a lot of confusion. Paul’s answer was for all such Christians in Colossae. The letter of Paul was written not only for the benefit of the Greek and Roman members of the community, but was intended to include all, with their partial knowledge of God and the spiritual realm, according to their different religious itineraries. He was addressing the religious struggles of all human beings, whatever their nation, and bringing their ancestral spiritual achievement under the lordship of Christ. African sacral rule and its adherents had always tried to relate to God at the “grove of initiation” of their palaces. Paul’s teaching about Christ as “the cosmic agent in creation and the reconciler through whom God restores harmony between himself and his creation,”⁶⁸⁹ is addressed to them also.

B- Christ the Lord of African sacral rule

Concentrating our attention on the text of Colossians 1:15-17, *The New*

⁶⁸⁷ Matthew, Black quoted the work of G. Bornkamm who cross-checked the religious origin of Paul’s vocabulary in his letter to the Colossians and agreed with him that it came from “Persian-Chaldean astrology, oriental Hellenistic mysteries and Gnostic speculation”. Matthew, Black, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 10.

⁶⁸⁸ Matthew, Black, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 9.

⁶⁸⁹ Matthew, Black, *Colossians and Philemon*, p. 20.

International Commentary on the New Testament considered “thrones, principalities, authorities, powers and dominions” as the highest orders of the angelic realm.⁶⁹⁰ Commenting on the same text, RC Lucas claims that Paul was demonstrating the superiority of Jesus over the angelic powers.⁶⁹¹ The above authors interpreted those words as describing things in an invisible and heavenly world. A close look at the text shows, however, that things which were created in Jesus, through him and for him are to be seen in at least four realms:

- 1- Things visible and on earth
- 2- Things invisible and on earth
- 3- Things visible and in heaven
- 4- Things invisible and in heaven

Limiting the understanding of “thrones, principalities, authorities powers and dominion” to the world of things invisible and in heaven, is an interpretation that needs to be reviewed. To give a full account of the meaning of this text, we need to consider all these four realms of reality. If, culturally, some people are not living in an environment where all the above things are real, they could reduce the message of this text to an invisible heavenly world. If we consider those words as describing things happening in the visible world and on earth, then we find ourselves in the world of African sacral rule. “The *Twi* words *nhengua* (thrones), *wuradi* (powers), *mpaninni* (rulers) and *tumidi* (authorities) are the categories that designate the sacral nature of

⁶⁹⁰ Bruce, FF (ed), “The Epistle to the Colossians to Philemon and to the Ephesians, in *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, William B Eerdmans, 1984, pp. 63-64.

⁶⁹¹ Lukas, RC, “The message of Colossians and Philemon”, in John, R. Stott (ed), *The Bible Speak Today*, Leicester, InterVarsity Press, 1980, p. 51.

traditional political authority and rule”.⁶⁹² This could be read thus: in Jesus Christ, through him and for him, the thrones in sacral rule were created. In Jesus Christ, through him and for him, the groups of the ruling class or lordships (principalities) were created. In Jesus Christ, through him and for him, rulers (dominions) were created. In Jesus Christ through him and for him, powers (authorities) were created. Thrones, powers, lordships, principalities, authorities, rulers and dominions are found in African sacral governing institutions. To people who live under a sustainable and well-established leadership structure inherited from their ancestors, this passage is saying that their cultural ruling structure was created in Jesus, through him and for him. In fact, kingmakers and rulers who control and hold spiritual and magical powers, who are co-ordinators of the social, political and judicial welfare of people, are supposed to be in charge of an office started by Jesus Christ, sustained by Jesus Christ and, therefore, they should be at the service of Jesus Christ because their office is for him.

One of the roles of Jesus in African sacral rule is that he is the person who holds things together. “He indeed is before all things and they all cohere in him” (Col. 1:17). In a successful African system of leadership, the people, the kingmakers, the invisible powers on earth and the rulers are supposed to agree in order to avoid disintegration of the governing institution.

“Africans have their own ontology, but it is religious ontology. God is the ultimate explanation of the genesis and sustenance of both man and all things.”⁶⁹³

Holding those elements together seems to be pre-eminently the work of Jesus placed in the hands of his servants who are the rulers, the invisible powers, the kingmakers and the people.

⁶⁹² Bediako, Kwame, *Christianity in Africa*, p. 246.

⁶⁹³ Mbiti, John, *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 15.

2- Matthew 28:16-20; Sacral Rule and the Great Commission

“Jesus came to them and said: All powers in heaven and on earth have been given to me. Therefore, go and disciple all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And remember I am with you always, to the very end of generations”.⁶⁹⁴

According to Bosch, Matthew’s Gospel presents “mission as disciple-making”.⁶⁹⁵

If one follows the sequence of this text, Jesus holds all powers in heaven and on earth, he sends his followers to disciple the nations of the world by baptising and teaching them because he is permanently with them till the end of human generations. The heart of the message is to go and disciple “nations” which in this thesis is African sacral rule. The fact that Jesus holds all powers and is always with his faithful disciples both in the duties of administering the sacraments and teaching the nations through various learning experiences, are both part of the process of discipling sacral rule. The following approach is proposed in five points:

- a- Disciple the nations (*matheteusate panta ta ethne*)
- b- Baptising (*baptisontes*) and teaching (*didaskontes*) in mission
- c- Continual presence of Jesus (*Immanu-El: God with us*)
- d- Theological significance of “generations” (*aionos*)
- e- Jesus, the holder of all powers (*panta eksousia*)

a- Disciple the nations (*matheteusate panta ta ethne*)

Matheteusate is an active verb conjugated in an imperative mode. It indicates the action to be taken without delay. The infinitive of *matheteusate*, *matheteuin* could be

⁶⁹⁴ Matthew 28:16-20.

⁶⁹⁵ “Matthew: mission as disciple-making” in Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, pp. 56-83.

rendered in the English language: to disciple, or to start within the individual as well as within the society an openness to learn from Christ himself. The noun, which comes from the same root, is *mathetes* which means pupil, disciple, or learner. If in Greek the word disciple can become an active verb, it is not so in the Indo-European languages. All the translations we consulted use the noun in place of the verb. Instead of “to disciple the nations” we read in English: “make disciples of all nations”, in French: “*faites de toutes les nations mes disciples*”, and in German: “*machtet zu Jungern alle Volker*”. They use the noun “disciple” in place of the verb to “disciple”, confusing between action and the object of that very action, and also reducing an action to a substantive, precisely, to an individual person. If the meaning of the word *mathetes* were understood as a “learner” more than a “disciple” as we think it is, it should have been easy to translate *matheteusate* the verb as “to learn” and, therefore, the great commission would be to enable all nations to enter into a dynamic learning process under the lordship of Jesus, the sending master.

This mistake in the translation of the word *matheteusate*, continued with that of *ethne*, which means “nations”. From this Greek word we have the English word “ethnic” which carries its original meaning of a group of people having the same past, living according to defined customs and sharing the same worldview. The content of the word “nations” is, therefore, larger than that of “people” and goes beyond individuals to cover the way of life of a given group of persons and its worldview in prospect and retrospect. *Ethne* (nations) is about people, their past, their culture and their goals, all put together. If one of these four elements is missing, the meaning of *ethne* is not complete as it is for the institution of African sacral rule under study.

Unfortunately, within this collective word “*ethne*, nations”, the translators have favoured two elements, restricting the meaning of this word to individuals and their future: “Preach the Gospel to every creature, that is, to every reasonable creature capable of hearing and receiving it”.⁶⁹⁶ “To disciple all nations” till “the end of generations” as Jesus commanded became “to make individual disciples of Jesus from all nations” till the “end of ages” instead of helping all nations to be ready to learn under the lordship of Jesus the Lord till the end of human generations. It is in these terms that the mission to sacral rule must be carried out.

b- Baptising (*baptisontes*) and teaching (*didaskontes*) in mission

Through baptism, people are called to become disciples of Jesus. Baptism is a call for a concrete decision to follow Jesus and to submit to God’s will. Baptism is a sacrament, in which case, it “is no human act or decision, but a gift of grace. Baptism is the forgiveness of sin”.⁶⁹⁷ The forgiveness of sin is the point of departure of the new life of the disciple which is sealed in the act of baptism. Baptism is the public sign of a spiritual covenant. It carries the power to seal a person’s firm decision to belong to Christ and to become a member of the Christian community. To accept baptism is to publicly register the decision to belong to Jesus and to fellowship with other followers of Christ. The missionary understanding of baptism as Christian missions established congregations is not in question here but withholding baptism as punishment for those who could not meet the criteria set by the missionary for baptism, is what we wish to query. Though the missionaries understood correctly the meaning of the sacraments,

⁶⁹⁶ Pople, Matthew, *A commentary of the Holy Bible*, Vol. III, Edinburgh, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1990, p. 146.

⁶⁹⁷ Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, p. 79.

they did not give open access to every ruler and the ruled, and in this way they lost the opportunity of using the members of the sacral ruling hierarchy as a means of discipling the institution and the people involved it.

By teaching here we mean the effective follow-up of converts who have expressed a desire to follow Christ. According to the Pietistic principles that we have already analysed, missionaries were first of all disciples, that is, regular learners of spiritual values through prayer meetings, Bible reading, and attendance at church services. When they went out in their immediate environment to convince new members, they were expecting them to participate in every one of these activities so that they could learn together under Jesus' guidance and through the same means. New members joined them in the prayer meetings, Bible reading, and church services. Older and new members were all learners together. Unfortunately, this understanding of what a newcomer should do would change when they had to go to new territories and to disciple new nations.

We mentioned that the Greek word *mathetes* could also mean "pupil". Because evangelisation is not carried out in a classroom situation, teaching (*didaskontes*) according to the biblical context is far from being the development of teacher and student relationship where one knows all and the other is like an empty vessel waiting to be filled. The farther the missionary moved from his training place, the more he became a teacher who had to pass everything he knew on to individuals. He felt very often that he was also empowered to control, to inspect and to sanction every attitude of the converts. It is surprising how geographic movement can distort the biblical understanding of Jesus' commission. This sudden shift in the understanding of the

Scriptures could be explained by the attitude of cultural superiority the Western missionaries had towards Africans.

They were commissioned to *matheteusate* and not to demonstrate their superiority. Missionaries were learners sent out to put a given nation into the same learning process as they were undergoing themselves, in a way appropriate to their past, their context, and their worldview, and which also coloured their relationship to Jesus. Some preachers of the Gospel misunderstood the meaning of *didaskontes* (teaching) and went so far as to place themselves on the same level with Jesus and the Bible: a complete reversal of the role they had been commissioned to adopt with the new converts and learners. Jesus sent them to continue as learners and not to assume a permanent authoritative role. Misled by the sacral nature of their ordination, missionaries limited their mission to that of providers of what they had received during their training, without developing an open attitude to the possibility of being themselves transformed by the mission field. For the Western missionaries under study, teaching meant the ability to give and not the capacity to receive. The training period had helped them acquire some knowledge, skills and attitudes. The mission was the time to pass these on. According to Jesus' commission, giving and receiving are not to be separated in the life of a disciple. One gives and receives at the same time. It is in giving that one receives and it is in receiving that one gives. Within the same process the roles of teacher and pupil can be reversed at any time as the *Ghomala'* translation of this passage reveals.⁶⁹⁸ The two actions occur simultaneously and not sequentially. In other

⁶⁹⁸ In the *Ghomala'* New Testament, *didaskontes* is translated *Ji'tae*. It is a reciprocal active verb which means to teach and to learn simultaneously. The subject of the action is *Ta ji'tae* (teacher) and the object of the action is *Ge ji'tae* (learner). Within this teaching and learning event the teacher is learning and the

words, they occur at the same time and not one after the other.

Didaskontes was rightly translated “teaching” in gerund (-ing) form which carries the idea of continual activity. The learning process in the life of Christian missionaries did not stop with the six years’ training in the institute. Mission magazines, visits of administrators to mission fields, and the introduction of new areas of knowledge in the training institutions supported the view that the missionary ought to be a constant learner. The individual character of some missionaries negated these attempts and a paternalistic stance dominated their attitude to converts in the evangelised context. “Teaching them everything I commanded you” as Jesus said, was an invitation to continual renewal of understanding of the divine wisdom and their relationship with their commissioner Jesus Christ. Andrew Walls has demonstrated in more than one article⁶⁹⁹ that the missionary movement was a learning process for the Western world as new academic disciplines like anthropology, comparative studies, and tropical medicine came to be established in Western universities. However, the problem of missionary cultural superiority remains, for even though Western scholars are more and more interested in Africa’s contribution to the intellectual world, they teach and learn strictly as teachers, while Jesus and common sense would have wanted them to show humility as they adopt the learning role. In other words, Western scholars should expect to learn not only about Africa and Africans as objects but through participation by perceiving Africa and Africans as subjects. This is how mission to African sacral rule ought to be carried out by interested evangelists.

learner is teaching. Without learning there is no proper teaching and without teaching there is no real learning. This understanding of *ji'tae* (teaching/learning) needs two words in European languages.

⁶⁹⁹ Walls, Andrew, “The nineteenth-century Missionary as a scholar” and “Humane Learning and the Missionary Movement: The Best thinking of the Best Heathen”, in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the transmission of faith*, New York, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, 1996, pp. 187-210.

c-

Continual presence of Jesus (*Immanu-El*: God with us)

In the New Testament, Jesus' followers continued the learning process and were living a life of openness. The constant presence of Jesus comforted them as they received insight into the spiritual significance of their activities and as they transmitted it in various ways to those who were not yet aware of it in the mission field as well as in the sending community. "I will be with you always" is the other name of Jesus. Jesus, as announced by Isaiah, was "*Immanu-El* (God with us)".⁷⁰⁰ As he was with the Old Testament nation of Israel, and with his followers, therefore, in any given nation in the world at any given generation in time, he is with them. There is no discontinuity between Jesus' incarnation and his presence in the congregations in the mission field. The community in Matthew's time does not constitute a new period in the economy of salvation. The past relation between the master and his first disciples is being transformed into something more than history. It challenges the present hour. The presence of Jesus in a nation was not limited to historical events. God's dealings in a nation were larger than history and stretched beyond it.

"The disciples in Matthew's own time are modelled on Jesus' first disciples just as those first disciples are modelled on Jesus himself".⁷⁰¹

The consciousness of the experience of being with Christ "is so intense that it can embrace the entire future"⁷⁰² and brighten the past by throwing light on the achievements of preceding generations. The present spiritual reality will remain forever

⁷⁰⁰ Isaiah 7:14, Matthew 1:23.

⁷⁰¹ Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, p. 76.

⁷⁰² Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, p. 77.

and will also provide new meaning to past experiences.⁷⁰³ The conversion of the institution of sacral rule and of the people involved has to take into consideration their goals and ambitions, as well as the values they have inherited from their ancestors. In the illuminating presence of Christ, people in sacral rule need both a perspective on the past and a vision of the future on a daily basis. The effort to translate and to read the Bible in African languages made it possible for African converts to enter the same biblical context as those evangelised in Matthew's time without regard to any missionary interpretation. The experience of the presence of Jesus Christ in sacral rule is just as real as in Matthew's period and in Jesus' time. Jesus' abiding presence is intimately linked with the missionary enterprise. He has really preceded the African followers who become aware of his presence, his deeds, his wisdom and of his command to them to bring other communities to the same awareness.

d- **Theological significance of *aionos* (ages, time, universe or generations)**

Translators have not often done justice to the meaning of the Greek word *aionos*. The French version of the Bible used the word "temps (time)"; but it is clear that the French word "temps" which is impersonal, is closer to the Greek word *chronos* than to *aionos*. The English translation preferred the word "ages" which refers to happenings stretching in sequence over a period. The English word "age" cannot, therefore, give the full meaning of *aionos*. In English as in French, the idea of geographic space which

⁷⁰³ Bolaji Idowu had explored the African experience of God and had affirmed rightly that the Christian God and that of African tradition is one and the same God. However, he had not got to the point of seeing that Christ was at work in the African past or of envisaging the changes Christ could bring to ensure a continual renewal in the African search for God. Idowu, B., *Olodumare: God in Yoruba Belief*, Ikeja, Nigeria, Longmans, 1962.

is conveyed by *aionos* is absent. Time, happenings from one period to another, human actions stage by stage, and the universe as it builds up over the ages, are all to be taken into consideration in the transmission of God's message carried by the Greek word *aionos*. The word "generations" suggests a better translation.

Bosch has made a serious attempt to render the full meaning of the passage in Matthew 28:18-20. In his explanation of the context of this text, he wrote:

"In the midst of confusion and uncertainty, Matthew's community is driven back to its roots, to the persons and experiences which gave birth to it, so that it can rediscover and reclaim those persons and events, come to more appropriate self-understanding, and on the basis of this, discern the nature of its existence and calling".⁷⁰⁴

According to Bosch, to "rediscover" and to "come to more appropriate self-understanding" of being *mathetes* (Christ's disciple), the people of any nation need a retrospective illumination into the past; they need to be "driven back to their roots", to "rediscover and to reclaim" the important "persons" and "events" in their past generations and also be ready to learn together with those who have been sent to them. According to this perception of mission as a shared enterprise, missionaries are expected to discover and show to those who have come to faith what it is in their past and among their people that can be rediscovered and reclaimed under the guiding sustainable presence and wisdom of the one who has always been active in the nations.

One needs to consider the present state of life and the "nature of its existence". People's lifestyle as discovered by the missionary, has to be an essential tool to make the nations followers of Jesus. The cultural dimension, which changes from generation to generation, has to be part of the pedagogic approach to nations. People's spiritual strengths and weaknesses have to be properly evaluated in order to avoid confusion,

⁷⁰⁴ Bosch, David, *Transforming Mission*, p. 83.

satisfy the expectations of the nations, and bring awareness where it is needed.

According to Bosch, there is need for the christianisation of ambitions and the clarification of Christ's hope for *ethne* (nations) to enable missionaries work towards the discipling of the nations. This is the intense experience to which we and future generations of evangelists are called. The experiences of the past, present and future generations within the spiritual realm are the foundation of Christian mission. Jesus acts within each new generation and has been doing so everywhere in the world from its creation, through history, and until the end of *aionos* (time). For, he has been given all powers in heaven and on earth. That is why each and every follower of Christ has to go and disciple all nations in the world starting with the immediate context which for some of us, is the African sacral rule.

e- **Jesus, the holder of all power (*panta eksousia*)**

“All powers in heaven and earth have been given to me *Edothe moi panta eksousia en ouranoi kai epi tes ges*”. Looking at his content, the word *eksousia* in Greek is translated as abilities, powers, and authorities. Jesus did not transfer all power to the disciples but he rather assured them of his permanent presence, if his followers become and remain *mathetes* (disciples, learners). No disciple has all power like Jesus. He has been delegating some of his power to his followers for special purposes. Unlike African sacral rulers who could perform certain wonders after their initiation, missionaries facilitated the happening of miracles performed by Jesus who was with them at all times. Because Jesus was believed to be all-powerful, it was easy for the missionary to develop a similar attitude to that of an African sacral ruler. Missionaries

forgot that “a disciple is not greater than the master”.⁷⁰⁵ They were ordained and sent to a new land to provide a demonstration of the life of those who have surrendered all to be constant learners at Jesus’ feet. Ordination was an important stage in the commissioning of workers for the mission field. Many considered it as a promotion. It is likely that some sacral rulers also considered their enthronement as a kind of elevation. This idea of possessing power of themselves is often encouraged by subjects and congregations. The sacralisation of pastors and rulers is also the uninformed reaction of people who have the capacity to develop religious attitude and language but to divert it from Jesus Christ. Based on Jesus’ statement, the “sacralisation” of missionaries through ordination, or that of the African rulers through enthronement is a delegation of spiritual powers to fulfil a divine commission. To be commissioned is to be empowered for mission. Mission is a logical consequence of Jesus’ induction as sovereign Lord of the Universe. In the specific case of sacral rulers and the African clergy under study, mission is the implementation of Jesus’ conception of power as a “non-dominating power”.⁷⁰⁶

“In heaven and earth - *en ouranoi kai epi tes ges* -”: the universal power Jesus had was a gift he had received from the Father. In the same way, when the sacral rulers and the Christian clergy receive some power from Jesus, it is because they could be spiritually reliable. The inheritance of Jesus’ power has not reached its full consummation with only one generation of his disciples in Israel. Disciples are identified as belonging to Jesus from generation to generation and regardless of their socio-religious traditional communities. Jesus’ will of delegating power to some people

⁷⁰⁵ John 13:16.

⁷⁰⁶ Bediako, Kwame, “De-sacralisation and Democratisation: some theological reflections on the role of Christianity in nation-building in modern Africa”, in *Transformation*, vol. 12. No. 1, pp. 5-11.

involves African sacral rulers as well as the representatives of the church with the condition that it is not diverted from the requirements of its ultimate source which is Jesus Christ. This “delegation of power” to sacral rulers and clergymen does not make them holders of power or repositories of spiritual abilities. According to Bediako, this “delegation of power” is the starting point for the desacralisation of rulers in the African context.⁷⁰⁷ Desacralisation ought to be the outcome of this power the rulers received from Christ.

In the process of executing this power under the care of Jesus Christ, there is the power to assemble and fellowship, the power to teach and to learn, the power to govern the Church, the power to head political units and the power to venture into a new mission field. If this is what they ought to do, the receivers of Jesus’ power have to purge themselves of all unhealthy things but instead, be equipped with the “power of forgiveness over retaliation, of suffering over violence, of love over hostility, of humble service over domination.”⁷⁰⁸ A call to this code of conduct is a call to modification of one’s personality which needs self-desacralisation as a receiver of power. Jesus’ enthronement and his aptitude to delegate some of his power to chosen people follow a completely new process of handling power as far as the human experience of leadership is concerned. Though sacral in content and origin, the execution of power according to the Gospel principles contributes to the desacralisation of rulers and enhances their position as spiritual people empowered by Jesus Christ. In the light of this, the Great Commission enunciates an empowerment rather than a command. It is a creative statement and not one which divides into those who have power and those who do not,

⁷⁰⁷ Bediako, Kwame, “De-sacralisation and Democratisation, p. 5.

⁷⁰⁸ Bediako, Kwame, “De-sacralisation and Democratisation, p. 9.

thus alienating one from the other. This way of handling power and of viewing oneself as part of this desacralisation process opens a new field for mission work and for the related academic disciplines like politics and theology.

A- **Romans 13:1 - Biblical empowerment of sacral rulers as Christian missionaries**

“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”⁷⁰⁹

The preceding analysis of the New Testament texts in Colossians and Matthew took into consideration sacral rule and all the people involved as qualified to be commissioned by Christ. This verse taken from Romans 13:1 is specifically concerned with rulers, that is, with those to whom Jesus delegates some power including the power to govern people with political considerations. Unless a person is seen to possess the potential to exercise some of the authority of God himself, he will never have the opportunity to be a sacral ruler. As we have just demonstrated, *panta eksousia* (all power) lies with Christ. “Authority, political power, does not reside with human beings, not even with the sacral ruler.”⁷¹⁰ The delegation of power is the theme of this verse in which Paul states that there is no authority which does not come from God. The enthronement of a ruler should not be the occasion for selfish acquisition of power, but an assumption of new responsibilities to bring his institution and people under his authority to Christ. To become a sacral ruler is to share in some of Jesus’ power but not to possess them personally. Such a ruler will be the caretaker of an authority which belongs to Christ. Members of the ruling class have to struggle to relate the institution

⁷⁰⁹ Romans 13:1.

⁷¹⁰ Bediako, Kwame, “De-sacralisation and Democratisation, p. 9.

and the people within sacral rule to Christ. Therefore, the continual sharing of Jesus' power is subject to maintaining a permanent link with him as the ultimate source of power for the spiritual well-being of his people and the institution under his care. Reading and hearing this text of Romans 13:1 from the point of view of rulers, it could mean that rulers and clergy will move from "a self-pleasing or self-asserting mind (to) rather a saving mind, a redemptive mind, a servant mind."⁷¹¹ For a ruler to become a servant refers to humility and leads to the modification of one's self-image as receiver of power from Jesus. Self-desacralisation stands at the beginning of a genuine spiritual itinerary both for oneself, for any institution of which one is a part and for the people Jesus has placed under one's authority.

The application of this general principle to the African sacral rule needs appropriate approach. From the anthropological and historical illustrations of our case studies, one can point out for future theological debate, some facts which can be used to open up the hierarchy of sacral rule to the desacralisation process as the rulers are now empowered for Christian mission. In carrying out their responsibility as missionaries, how would they remain spiritual servants and be continually linked to Jesus Christ the holder of all power? First, as a provider of new titles, and as the creator of new stools as well as new associations in the palace, the sacral ruler could use his power of appointment and his aptitude to ensure upward mobility in his community and fill his entourage with Christians and people of value so as to christianise and to democratise the institution and the people awaiting his services.

Second, the sacral ruler is also expected to have his own style of leadership. His code of behaviour can be redefined according to Christian principles. His personal

⁷¹¹ Bediako, Kwame, "De-sacralisation and Democratisation, p. 10.

behaviour should be Christlike. The code of conduct and the personality of the sacral ruler are part of the desacralisation process. The implementation of this Christian ethics attached to the person of the ruler needs to be consciously guided by the tolerant reactions of his people. He must open up all possible avenues, directly and indirectly, for the people to embark on this process of desacralisation and spiritualisation of their own community.

Third, among the powers Jesus delegates to rulers is the power of learning and thinking. Within sacral rule, learning and thinking are encouraged for they are assets for a community to have, on the one hand, leaders who are ready to learn and to communicate what they know to people and, on the other hand, leaders who act after thorough reflection and wide consultation in order to give meaning to what people do and believe. People come to the ruler to learn about history, culture, religion, science and technology. When a sacral ruler develops intellectual curiosity and teaching abilities in order to relate facts and understanding of the practices of the institution of sacral rule, he could introduce explanations into the knowledge of beliefs, processes, objects, and positions in his leading structure. In this way, a sacral ruler could use the notion of the “pedagogy of nations” developed by Gustav Warneck to put his community into a learning process at Jesus’ feet. As a thinker and historian who is interested in the beginning of things and their evolution, a ruler ought to introduce possible interpretations and orient people to them in accordance with the Christian message. If learning, teaching and thinking are attached to the functions of sacral rule, it will facilitate desacralisation and simultaneously preserve the spiritual nature of the position and that of the ruler. *Fo* Njoya of Bamun in Cameroon and *Nana* Sir Ofori Atta

of Kyebi in Ghana portrayed these virtues and achieved a lot within their political units.

This is how with the learning, teaching and thinking abilities of the sacral rulers, with the freedom to model their individual personalities and with the duty to ensure the social promotion of their people, sacral rulers will be concerned with fulfilling the Great Commission towards the members of their institution, and with transforming the culture and the religious practices for which they are responsible, and for which they will have to answer to Jesus Christ himself.

The thrust of the argument in the above biblical references in Colossians, Matthew and Romans, is that sacral rule can be subjected to the redemptive power of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and can become a means for the development of the African dimension of the Christian world. Just as Jesus is Lord of the Christian church, he is the Lord of African sacral rule. This thesis on African sacral rule and Christian mission has called for an intensive investigative approach covering several processes and products within history, anthropology and theology. The topic was intended to cover the whole of Africa. However, the case studies of the people of Grassfields in Cameroon and the Akan in Ghana where the Basel mission activities were focused, have been the chosen limits of the discussion. Within this scope, an attempt has been made to use the available research techniques such as interviews, participation in events in sacral rule and in the church, pictures, and literature to explore the various subject areas in order to develop an academic apprehension of the process of the relationship between sacral rule and the Christian church in Africa.

It may be stated, therefore, that in the process of the encounter between sacral rule and the Christian church, they have both survived, but much has changed in them.

Christ is Lord of both, and African sacral rule has been subjected to the dynamic and redemptive power of the Gospel of Jesus. The sacral ruler as well as the representatives of the Christian church, find themselves desacralised but simultaneously spiritually empowered for inward, intra-, and inter-transformation of themselves, the people and the institutions awaiting their services. Therefore, African sacral rule has become a new mission field for the development of the African church and African theology. Though this has been substantially illustrated through historical, anthropological, and biblical considerations, the systematic articulation of theological issues such as the desacralisation of leaders, Christian appropriation of the African worldview, belief in ancestors and places of contact with the Almighty like shrines and natural objects, has to be done on an equal footing by African theologians, church representatives and sacral rulers. Further investigation needs to be carried out into other related areas such as democracy and the secularisation of the wider society in African states and their impact on both sacral rule and the Christian church.

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Lists of Interviews

Ghana 10 Pastors

8 Lay people

9 rulers

Clergy

- 1 - Rev. Thimoty Augustus Osei (78) Akropong, July 21, 1998 (9h-11h)
- 2 – Rev K. S. Aboa, President Board of Trustee of ACMC; July 20, 1998 (9-11h)
- 3 – Rev Addo District Pastor Akropong; July 24, 1998 (15-17h13)
- 4 - Rev Kwansa Former Synod Clerk Aburi; January 16, 2000 (9h30-11h05)
- 5 - Rev Peter Kofi Nyarkoh Presbyterian Church Dormaa; July 28, 1998
- 6 – Rev Kofi A. Akono Ramsayer Traning Centre; August 5, 1998 (21h-23h)
- 7- Rev Ayihansen Presbytery Chairman Akropong; July 24, 1998 (9h-11h)
- 8 – Rev Korenten Former Moderator Abetifi; August 5, 1998 (9h-10h38)
- 9 – Rev Martin Naboh Chaplain PTC Akropong; January 16, 2000 (16h- 17h55)
- 10 – Abokobi Pastor; August 10, 1998 (13h-16h)

Lay Christian people

- Saky Addo (79) retired teacher November 3, 1999 (10h30-11h45)
- Asare (48) Bilogy teacher, Akropong July 24, 1999 (19h-21h30)
- Oboa Ofei (49) Bilogy teacher, Akropong July 25, 1999 (19h-22h)
- Kwame Addo (81) former civil sevant July 26, 1999 (16h-18h30)
- Bekwin (53) State secretary, Akropong July 1999 (10h-12h)
- Akuffo (38) PTC, state drummer Akropong July 27, 1999 (19h-21h)
- Sara Awire civil servant, (49) Akropong August 2, 1999 (16h-18h15)
- Group of 5 Church elders in Koforidua, July1999

Rulers

Anbobe Seky Asempasa (67), Akropong , August 4, 1998 Christian-Chief
Nana Add-Birikorang (80), Akropong, August 4, 20, 1998 Christian Chief

Koranten Awere (89), Akropong, August 10, 1998 Christian prince
 Osyadeyo Nana Addo-Dankwa, August, 15, 23 1998 Christian Paramount Chief
 Nii Abokobi Samuel Mohenu (69) Accra 8, August 1998 (10h-13h) Christian king
 Nii Laa Kpobi Tettey III, Accra, August 9, 1998 (11h-14h) Christian king
 Dormaa Ahenkro 6 days July 22- 28, 1998

- 1- Barima Yeboa Kordie II; Dormaa Aduanahene for 9 years, age 50.
- 2- Nana Oppong Yaw Agyeman; Akyamehene for 21 years, age 63.
- 3- Barima Oppong Yaw Ababio; Dormaa Gyasehene for 10 years, age 49.
- 4- Nana Kwasi Wiano Adomanicomahene for 42 years, age 92.
- 5- Nana Kusi Boadum; Senior register for 19 years, age 55.
- 6- Nana Akosua Ansuas Queen Mother (56)

8- Ghana National Association of Christian chiefs and queen mothers Kumase 26/8/1998: 30 present members; all are *Nana*; Akosa Yiedo (New Adwempon), Kusi Anning (Asasyohene), Agyei Kwame (Wrakosehene), Boakye Gyan (Akyese krontihene), Agyewa Twimbonsie (Wenchie Bemkumhene), Fowaa Boayie (Aprede Abrepo), Nsia Boadum (Apiaryinasehene), Ama Serwaa Kyei (Muramura), Afryie Soma (Odeneho Kwodaso), Ama Serwaa Ahirako (Boagye), Asantiwaa Krobia (Anyinaa), Serwaa Ahenfie, Ampem Daakowaa (Pokuase), Abena Akyaa (Anakoa), Konadu Agyapoma (Monvirme), Afua Abrafi (Boasohema), Ampoma Birago (Piasehema), Akua Gyewu (Npasatinhema), Twiaa pinaman (Abeesehema), Adwaa Dwarmena (Kyinyehema), Nyrako Buimpoma (Esuasehema), Amankwa Dufie, Yaa Saa (Aduapokyerehema), Bonsu Nyrako (Bogyesangoehema), Serwaa Bansu (Kwaman Apagyehema), Adwoa Fowaa (sawia Atobisehema), Kofi Fofie (Kyidomhene), Ako Opassram (Asamanhene), Yaw Duabo (Apumkye) and Akosua Fedi (Ahensa).

Regional house of Chiefs Koforidua January, 5, 200

National House of chiefs Kumasi January 10, 2000

Benin

8 pastors

3 Lay people

6 rulers

Clergy

- 1- Dideh Moïse (71) Porto Novo, October 28, 1998 (15h-18h)
- 2- Bossou Paul Porto (62) Novo, October 23, 1998 (20h-22h)
- 3- Olodo Mathieu (65) Cotonou, October 21, 1998 (10h-13h)
- 4- Dr Bessa Kodjo Gerson, Porto Novo, October 24, 1998 (15h-17h)
- 5- Gavo Jeremie (24), Agbeegon Felix (28), Porto Novo, October 24, 1998
- 6- Dr Dossou Marcelin (39) Porto Novo October 27, 1998 (15h-18h25)
- 7- Samuel Zanou (56) Porto Novo, October 27 (10h-11h50)
- 8- Agbindo Bankole Amos (50) Porto Novo, October 25 (20h-22h)

Lay people

- Director CCAF (55) Porto Novo, October 1998 (19h-21h15)
- Vizir Africa Culture (45), Cotonou, October 29, 1998 (11h-12h30) Vodoo
- Fokom Pierre (51) FUNAP, Cotonou, October 21, 1998 (15-17h30)

Rulers

- Chief Djigla Toi Kpondebe (60) Alladah October 30, 1998 Vodoo
 - Goudessi Albert (74) palace historian, since 1964, Voddo
 - Zundinpong Adinasse (78) palace Chief justice since 1955, Vodoo
 - Djigla Pierre (58) palace historian deputy on trainig, Vodoo
 - Dah Ohouanlokouo (52) palace ritualist since 19970, Vodoo
 - Djigla Julien (40), Charge Judicial affaires, Vodoo
 - Dossou Assadjiko Francois (48), Palace Retainer, Vodoo
 - Donkpigan Tosso Cledjio (78) King's spokesman, Vodoo
- 1- Porto Novo Chief (66) November 1, 1998 (10h-14h07) Vodoo
 - 2- Abomey Chief (69), Cotonou, October 29, 1999 (19h-20h35) Vodoo
 - 3- Wida Chief (59), Cotonou, October 28, 1999 (19h-21h) Vodoo
 - 4- Ketou Chief (73), Ketou October 20, 1999 One day journey, Vodoo
 - 5- Cotonou traditional council, Cotonou November 3, 1999 (9h-11h),

Cameroon 30 Pastors

16 Lay people

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Clergy

- 1- Fontsa Jean (89) Mbouda, January 17, 1998 Noble background (10h-15h)
- 2- Hans Ejenguele (62), Douala-Bonakou, January 30, 1998 (10h-12h)
- 3- Gobina M. Pierre (50), Douala-Njo Njo November 12, 1998 (9h30-11h50)
- 4- Densi Jacques (65), Douala-Akwa, November 28, 1998 (10h-12h)
- 5- Gankou George (39), Douala-Kassalafarm, November 29 1998 (9h-11h)
- 6- Wamba Fabien (50), Ndoungue, December 3, 1998 (13h-15h)
- 7- Sogwi Tenku Isaac (60) Douala-Nylon, December 11, 1998 (17h-19h30)
- 8- Nono K. Joseph (53) Douala-Bepanda, December 15, 1998 (15h-18h)
- 9- Simo Gabriel (Bishop) (67), Bafoussam, February 24, 1999 (10h-16h)
- 10- Tetouom Abraham (65) Douala-Soboum, December 16, 1998 (15h-18h40)
- 11- Njike C.Emmanuel (70), Douala-Bonakou, March 3, 1999 (15h30-17h30)
- 12- Mallo Eugene (75), Douala-Deido, March 4, 1999 (11h-12h)
- 13- Kingue Ekwa (85), Douala-Akwa Nord, April 1, 1999 (10h-12h)
- 14- Kamga Francois (70), Douala-New-Bell, March 18, 1999 (9h-13h)
- 15- Njapa Victor (85), Bangangte, April 16, 1999 (9h-10h30) Head of lignage
- 16- Kwindja Francois (81), Bangangte, April 16, 1999 (13h-16h)
- 17- Nwambo Jean (89), Bandjoun, April 18th and 20, 1999 (10h-12h)
- 18- Tebongso Pierre (59), Bafoussam, March 7, 1999 (17h-19h)
- 19- Shu Laurence (35), Kumbo, June 27, 1999 (20h-22h)
- 20- Fai Ndzeindze Paul (82), Kumbo, June 28, 1999 (9h-12h)
- 21- Montoh Simon (34), Bafut, July 3, 1999 (11h-13h)
- 22- Su Aaron (89), Bafut, July 3, 1999 (19h-22h)
- 23- Kamdem Moise (57), Bafoussam, July 7, 1999 (9h-11h30)
- 24- Rudolph Peshandon (84), Bamun-Foumban May 8, 1999 (10h-14h)
- 25- Njounwet Pierre (79), Bamun-Njimom, March 23, 1998 Two nights
- 26- Ngoumoun Abraham (54), Bamun-Foumban May 8, 1999 (14h30-18h)
- 27- Fonkwa Remy (84), Bandjoun-Mbouo July 17, 1999 (15h-18h)

- 28- Totso Chretien (86), Bandjoun-Djague, July 18, 1999 (9h-12h)
- 29- Tegomo Barthelemie (60), Bayangam, July 18, 1999 (14h-17h15)
- 30- Nguete Philippe (43), Bafoussam, July 20, 1999 (11h-16h)

Lay people

- Yomnie Lucas (70), Bandjoun, January 6, 1999 (9h-11h)
- Moume Etia (86), Douala-Bonateki, December 12, 1999 (11h-12h30)
- Tamba Francois (88), Bafoussam, March 23, 1999 (9h-11h) Chorister
- Tagne Lucas Chorister and elder
- Mbou' Levi Chorister and elder
- Valere Epe (59), Douala-Bali, May 3, 1999 (11h30-14h) Mission student
- Josue Nshare (55), Douala-Deido, May 12, 1999 (10h-13h) Church elder
- Pouomkouso Samuel (66), Douala, May 13, 1999 (12h-17h30) Elder
- Tetouom M. Claire (50), Bandjoun, June 2, 1999 (16h-17h) Church Elder
- Su Eric (30) Bafut, July 3, 1999, (16-17h15) Palace servant- Non Christian
- Bamendou (75), Dschang, March 8, 1999 (on day) Christian kingmaker
- Wo Yiven Bernadette (51), Kumbo, June 26, 1999 (17h-19h) King's wife
- Daniel Doumbe Eyango (86), December 12, 1999 (9h-1h) Church elder
- Massu' dom (70), Bandjoun, July 12, 1999 (19h-21h) Non-Christian
- Tagne Tega' (69), Bandjoun-Bem, July 21, 1999 (16h-18h)
- Fotso Victor (81), Bandjoun-Pete, July 23rd 1999 (11h-12h36)
- Choupo Lucas (73), Douala, May 14th 1999 (9h-13h)

Rulers

- 1- *Fo* Fezzeu, Bandenkop Palace, January 20, 1998 One day
- 2- *Fo* Mbinglo II, Jakiri-Mantoum Palace, June 30, 1999 (12h40-14h20)
- 3- *Fo* Ganyonga III, Bali Palace July 1, 1999 (9h30-11h) in the company of Sama Fokum, Forsam Patrick, Dinga Patrick, Guanet Nyonga, Gwampia Alfred
- 4- *Fo* Pouokam Christophe (79), Bayangam, January 11, 1999 (10h-1130)
- 5- *Fo* Pouokam Teguaia (40), Baham, January 10, 1999 (17h-20h)
- 6- *Fo* Gnie Kamga (70), Bandjoun, January 13, 1999 (9h-17h)

- 7- Batie *Fo* (40), Batie, February 10, 1999 (11h35-15h)
- 8- Bana *Fo* (63), Bana, April 4, 1999 (19h-21h)
- 9- Batoufam *Fo* (38), Batoufam, May 7, 1999 and January 4, 2000 (2hours)
- 10- Bapouantou *Fo* (35), Bafang, April 11, 1999 (17h-19h)
- 11- Bamendjou *Fo* (70), Bafoussam, April 12, 1999 (16h-18h)
- 12- Bamoun *Fo* (69), Foumban, February 20, and May 6, 1999 (6 hours)

Other Interviews

- Jacques Rossel (80), Lausanne, June 1998 (former Basel Mission Director)
- Violette Baudraz, Yverdon, June 1998 (Former missionary)
- Ian-Martin Berentsen, Akropong, June 1998 (Professor of Missiology, Norway)
- Elisha Nkoka, Abokobi, June 2000 (Prince of Lesotho)
- Fritz Hofman, Basel, June 1998 (former missionary)
- Dore Glabez Spellenberg, Korntal-Stuttgart, June 1998 (Missionary's daughter)
- Andreas Mertz, Basel, June 1998 (student in Basel Mission history)
- Hans Knopfli, Basel, June 1998 (former missionary)

Group of Chiefs and Christians

- Choeur d'Hommes Makepe "65", Douala-Cameroon; April 6, 1999.
- Amicale des chefs de l'Ouest, twice, February (47)and March (63) 1999.
- Ghana Association of Christian chiefs, Kumase, August 26, 1998.
- Youth Group, Nkwakwa-Ghana. July 1998.