

Linking Missiology

Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective on Ancestors

by Kwame Bediako

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Jesus and the Ancestors in Akan Worldview

Accepting Jesus as “our Saviour” always involves making him at home in our spiritual universe and in terms of our religious needs and longings. So an understanding of Christ in relation to spirit-power in the African context is not necessarily less accurate than any other perception of Jesus. The question is whether such an understanding faithfully reflects biblical revelation and is rooted in true Christian experience. Biblical teaching clearly shows that Jesus is who he is (Saviour) because of what he has done and can do (save), and also that he was able to do what he did on the Cross because of who he is (God the Son) (Colossians 2:15ff). Since “salvation” in the traditional African world involves a certain view of the realm of spirit-power and its effects upon the physical and spiritual dimensions of human existence, our reflection about Christ must speak to the questions posed by such a worldview. The needs of the African world require a view of Christ that meets those needs. And so who Jesus is in the African spiritual universe must not be separated from what he does and can do in that world. The way in which Jesus relates to the importance and function of the “spirit fathers” or ancestors is crucial.

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The Akan spirit world on which human existence is believed to depend, consists primarily of God, the Supreme Spirit Being (*Onyame*), Creator and Sustainer of the universe. Subordinate to God, with delegated authority from God, are the “gods” (*abosom*) sometimes referred to as children of God (*Nyame mma*), and the ancestors or “spirit fathers” (*Nsamanfo*). The relative positions of the “gods” and the ancestors may be summed up as follows:

While God’s power surpasses all others, the ancestors would appear to tilt the scale in their favour if their power could be weighed against that of the lesser gods. After all are the deities not often referred to as “the innumerable gods of our ancestors,” the spokesmen of the human spirits? (Sarpong 1974, 43)

John Pobee has also underlined the importance of the ancestors in the religious worldview of the Akan as the essential focus of piety:

Whereas the gods may be treated with contempt if they fail to deliver the goods expected of them, the ancestors, like the Supreme Being, are always held in reverence or even worshipped. (Pobee 1979, 48)

By virtue of being the part of the clan gone ahead to the house of God, they are believed to be powerful in the sense that they maintain the course of life here and now and influence it for good or ill. They . . . provide the sanctions for the moral life of the nation and accordingly punish, exonerate or reward the living as the case may be. (Pobee 1979, 46)

Ancestors are essentially clan or lineage ancestors. So they have to do with the community or society in which their progeny relate to one another and not with a system of religion as such. In this way, the “religious” functions and duties that relate to ancestors become binding on all members of the particular group who share common ancestors. Since the ancestors have such an important part to play in the well-being (or otherwise) of individuals and communities, the crucial question about our relationship to Jesus is, as John Pobee rightly puts it: “Why should an Akan relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe and nation?”

Up to now, our churches have tended to avoid the question and have presented the Gospel as though it was concerned with an entirely different compartment of life, unrelated to traditional religious piety. As a result, many people are uncertain about how the Jesus of the Church’s preaching saves them from the terrors and fears that they experience in their traditional worldview. This shows how important it is to relate Christian understanding and experience to the realm of the ancestors. If this is not done, many African Christians will continue to be men and women “living at two levels,” half African and half

European, but never belonging properly to either. We need to meet God in the Lord Jesus Christ speaking immediately to us in our particular circumstances, in a way that assures us that we can be authentic Africans and true Christians.

John Pobee suggests that we “look on Jesus as the Great and Greatest Ancestor,” since

in Akan society the Supreme Being and the ancestors provide the sanctions for the good life, and the ancestors hold that authority as ministers of the Supreme Being. (Pobee 1979, 94)

However, he approaches the issue largely through Akan wisdom sayings and proverbs, and so does not deal sufficiently with the religious nature of the question



and underestimates the potential for conflict. For if we claim as the Greatest Ancestor one who, at the superficial level, “does not belong to his clan, family, tribe and nation,” the Akan non-Christian might well feel that the very grounds of his identity and personality are taken away from him. It is with such fears and dangers, as well as the meanings and intentions behind the old allegiances, that a fresh understanding of Christ has to deal.

The Universality of Jesus Christ and Our Adoptive Past

We need to read the Scriptures with Akan traditional piety well in view, in order to arrive at an understanding of Christ that deals with the perceived

reality of the ancestors. We need also to make the biblical assumption that Jesus Christ is not a stranger to our heritage, starting from the universality of Jesus Christ rather than from his particularity as a Jew, and affirming that the Incarnation was the incarnation of the Saviour of all people, of all nations and of all times. Yet by insisting on the primacy of Jesus’ universality, we do not reduce his incarnation and its particularity to a mere accident of history. We hold on to his incarnation as a Jew because by faith in him, we too share in the divine promises given to the patriarchs and through the history of ancient Israel (Ephesians 2:11–22). Salvation, though “from the Jews” (John 4:22) is not thereby Jewish. To make Jesus little more than a typical Jew is to distort the truth. His statement in John 3:43–44 that a Jew could have for a father, not Abraham at all, but the devil, was outrageous from a Jewish point of view. What counts is one’s response to Jesus Christ. In these verses we find one of the clearest statements in Scripture that our true human identity as men and women made in the image of God, is not to be understood primarily in terms of racial, cultural, national or lineage categories, but in Jesus Christ himself. The true children of Abraham are those who put their faith in Jesus Christ in the same way that Abraham trusted God (Romans 4:11–12). Consequently, we have not merely our natural past; through our faith in Jesus, we have also an “adoptive” past, the past of God, reaching into biblical history itself, aptly described as the “Abrahamic link” (Walls 1978, 13).

In the same way, Jesus Christ, himself the image of the Father, by becoming one like us, has shared our *human* heritage. It is within this *human* heritage that he finds us and speaks to us in terms of its questions and puzzles. He challenges us to turn to him and participate in the new humanity for which he has come, died, been raised and glorified.

The Good News as Our Story

Once this basic, universal relevance of Jesus Christ is granted, it is no longer a question of trying to accommodate the Gospel in our culture; the Gospel becomes our story. Our Lord has been from the beginning the Word of God for us as for all people everywhere. He has been the source of our life and illuminator of our path in life, though, like all people everywhere, we also failed to understand him aright. But now he has made himself known, becoming one of us, one like us. By acknowledging him for who he is and by giving him our allegiance, we become what we are truly intended to be, by his gift, the children of God. Our response to him is crucial since becoming children of God does not stem from, nor is it limited by, the accidents of birth, race, culture, lineage or even “religious” tradition. It comes to us by grace through faith.

This way of reading the early verses of John’s Gospel that echo the early verses of Genesis 1, from the standpoint of faith in Jesus Christ as *our* story, helps us to appreciate the close association of our creation and our redemption, both achieved in and through Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:15ff). We are to understand our creation as the original revelation of God to us and covenant with us. It was in the creation of the universe and especially of man that God first revealed his Kingship to our ancestors and called them to freely obey him. Working from this insight, we, from African primal tradition, are given a biblical basis for discovering more about God within the framework of the high doctrine of God as Creator and Sustainer, that is deeply rooted in our heritage. More significantly, we are enabled to discover ourselves in Adam (Acts 17:26) and come out of the isolation which the closed system of clan, lineage, and family imposes, so that we can rediscover universal horizons.

However, “as in Adam all die . . .” (1 Corinthians 15:22), Adam sinned and lost his place in the garden. Where the biblical account speaks of the expulsion

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of man (Genesis 3), African myths of origins talk of the withdrawal of God, so that he is continually in people’s thoughts, yet is absent from daily living in any practical sense. The experience of ambiguity that comes from regarding lesser deities and ancestral spirits as both beneficent and malevolent, can only be resolved in a genuine incarnation of the Saviour from the realm beyond. But trinitarian doctrine is preserved, for the God who has become so deeply and actively involved in our condition is the Son (John 1:18) whom to see is to “see” the Father (John 14:15ff; Acts 2:38ff), and this is made possible through the Holy Spirit (John 14:23).

Jesus as “Ancestor” and Sole Mediator

Thus the gulf between the intense awareness of the existence of God and yet also of his “remoteness” in African Traditional Religion is bridged in Christ alone because “there has been a death which sets people free from the wrongs they did while the first covenant was in force” (Hebrews 9:15). How does this death relate to our story and particularly to our natural “spirit-fathers”? Some suggest that ours is a “shame culture” and not a “guilt culture,” on the grounds that public acceptance determines morality, and consequently a “sense of sin” is said to be absent (Welbourn 1968; Taylor 1963, 166–69). However, in our tradition, the essence of sin is in its being an antisocial act. This makes sin basically injury to the interests of another person and damage to the collective life of the group (Pobee 1979, 102ff; Busia 1954, 207).

Such a view of morality does not resolve the problem of the assurance of moral transformation that the human conscience needs. For the real problem of our sinfulness is the soiled conscience and against this, purificatory

rites and sacrificial offerings to achieve social harmony are ineffectual. Yet the view of sin as antisocial is also biblically valid: sin is indeed sin against another person and the community’s interest. But human beings are the creation of God, created in God’s image, so social sin is also sin against God. The blood of Abel cried to God against Cain (Genesis 4). The Gospel underscores the valid insight about the social nature of sin, but brings the need for expiation into a wider context. Sin is more than antisocial act; the sinner sins ultimately against a personal God with a will and purpose in human history.

Seen from this angle, the insights about Jesus Christ in the epistle to the Hebrews are perhaps the most crucial of all. Our Saviour has not just become one like us; he has died for us. It is a death with eternal sacrificial significance. It deals with our moral failures and infringements of social relationships. It heals our wounded and soiled consciences and overcomes once and for all and at their roots, all that in our heritage and somewhat melancholy history, brings us grief, guilt, shame and bitterness. Our Saviour is our Elder Brother who has shared in our *African* experience in every respect, except our sin and alienation from God, an alienation with which our myths of origins make us only too familiar. Being our true Elder Brother now in the presence of his Father and our Father, he displaces the mediatorial function of our natural “spirit-fathers.” For these themselves need saving, having originated from among us. It is known from African missionary history that one of the first actions of new converts was to pray for their ancestors who had passed on before the Gospel was proclaimed. This is an important testimony to the depth of their understanding of Jesus as sole Lord and Saviour. Jesus Christ, “the Second Adam” from heaven (1 Corinthians 15:47) becomes for

us the only mediator between God and ourselves (cf. 1 Timothy 2:5). He is the “mediator of a better covenant” (Hebrews 8:6), relating our human destiny directly to God. He is truly our high priest who meets our needs to the full.

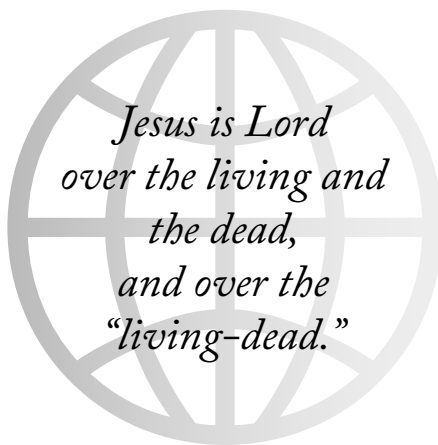
From the understanding held about the spirit-world, the resurrection and ascension of our Lord also assume great importance. He has now returned to the realm of spirit and therefore of power. From the standpoint of Akan traditional beliefs, Jesus has gone to the realm of the ancestor spirits and the “gods.” We already know that power and resources for living come from there, but the terrors and misfortunes which could threaten and destroy life come from there also. But if Jesus has gone to the realm of the “spirits and the gods,” so to speak, he has gone there as Lord over them in the same way that he is Lord over us. He is Lord over the living and the dead, and over the “living-dead,” as ancestors are also called. He is supreme over all gods and authorities in the realm of spirit, summing up in himself all their powers and cancelling any terrorising influence they might be assumed to have upon us.

The guarantee that Jesus is Lord also in the realm of spirits is that he has sent us his own Spirit, the Holy Spirit, to dwell with us and be our protector, as well as Revealer of Truth and Sanctifier. In John 16:7ff, our Lord’s insistence on going away to the Father includes this idea of his Lordship in the realm of spirits, as he himself enters the region of spirit. It also includes the idea of the protection and guidance that the coming Holy Spirit will provide for his followers in the world. The Holy Spirit is sent to convict the world of its sin in rejecting Jesus, and to demonstrate, to the shame of unbelievers, the true righteousness which is in Jesus and available only in him. He is also sent to reveal the spiritual significance of God’s judgement upon the devil who deceives the world about its sin and blinds people to the perfect righteousness in Christ. Our Lord therefore, entering the region

of spirit, sends the Holy Spirit to his followers to give them understanding of the realities in the realm of spirits. The close association of the defeat and overthrow of the devil (“ruler of this world”) with the death, resurrection and exaltation of Jesus (John 12:31) is significant, and the thought of the “keeping” and protection of his followers from “the evil one” forms an important part of Jesus’ prayer recorded in John 17, aptly described as his “high priestly” prayer.

The Epistle to the Hebrews as Our Epistle!

Turning to the epistle to the Hebrews, it has often been assumed that the problem of theology in New Testament



times was how to relate the Gospel to Gentile cultures and traditions. The meaning of Christ for Jewish religious tradition was thought to be relatively simple. The epistle to the Hebrews however corrects that error. The writer is aware that some Hebrews might be tempted to turn from the proclamation of the great salvation in Christ.

The clue to the epistle’s teaching lies in its presentation of Christ. Hebrews is the one book in the New Testament in which Jesus Christ is understood and presented as High Priest. And yet, “If he were on earth, he would not be a priest at all . . .” Though our Saviour obviously does and did fulfil a High Priestly function in his redemptive work for us, the

problem arises when one has to justify that insight on the basis of Old Testament prophecies and anticipations. The fact is, “he was born a member of the tribe of Judah; and Moses did not mention this tribe when he spoke of priests” (Hebrews 7:14). The view of Christ in Hebrews involves making room in the tradition of priestly mediation for one who, at the purely human level, was an outsider to it. Just as an Akan might ask, “Why should [he] relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to his clan, family, tribe and nation?”, so a similar question must have occurred to some Hebrews in time past and the epistle was written to answer that question.

The writer’s approach is to work *from* the achievement of Jesus in the meaning of his death and resurrection, *into* the biblical tradition of sacrifice and high priestly mediation. In the process, the universality of the Lord from heaven as the Saviour of *all* people everywhere, forms the basis of the call to Hebrew people to take him seriously as *their* Messiah. Even more striking, the writer shows that the High Priesthood of Jesus is not after the order of Aaron, the first Hebrew High Priest, but after that of the enigmatic non-Hebrew, and greater priest-king, Melchizedek (Hebrews 7 and 8). Therefore, the priesthood, mediation and hence the salvation that Jesus Christ brings to all people everywhere belong to an entirely different category from what people may claim for their clan, family, tribal and national priests and mediators. The quality of the achievement and ministry of Jesus Christ for and on behalf of all people, together with who he is, reveal his absolute supremacy. As One who is fully divine, he nonetheless took on human nature in order to offer himself in death as sacrifice for human sin. Jesus Christ is unique not because he stands apart from us but because no one has identified so profoundly with the human predicament as he has, in order to transform it. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ is rooted in his radical and direct significance for every human person,

every human context and every human culture. The value for us of the presentation of Jesus in Hebrews stems from its relevance to a society like ours with its deep tradition of sacrifice, priestly mediation and ancestral function. In relation to each of these features of our religious heritage, Hebrews shows Jesus to be the answer to the spiritual longings and aspirations that our people have sought to meet through our traditions.

Sacrifice

Sacrifice as a way of ensuring a harmonious relationship between the human community and the realm of divine and mystical power, is a regular event in Ghanaian society. It is easy to assume that the mere performance of sacrifice is sufficient, yet the real problem is whether sacrifice achieves its purpose. Hebrews gives us the fundamental insight that since it is human sin and wrong-doing that sacrifice seeks to purge and atone for, no animal or sub-human victim can stand in for human beings. Nor can a sinful human being stand in for fellow sinners. The action of Jesus Christ, himself divine and sinless, in taking on human nature so as to willingly lay down his life for all humanity, fulfils perfectly the end that all sacrifices seek to achieve (Hebrews 9:12). No number of animal or other victims offered at any number of shrines can equal the one, perfect sacrifice made by Jesus Christ of himself for all time and for all peoples everywhere. To reject the worth of the achievement of Jesus Christ on the grounds of race, ethnicity, and cultural tradition, is to act against better knowledge, distort religious truth, and walk into a blind alley, in the words of Hebrews, to court “the fearful prospect of judgement and the fierce fire which will destroy those who oppose God” (10:27).

Priestly Mediation

If the quality of Jesus’ self-offering in death sets his sacrifice above all and achieves perfect atonement, so his priestly mediation surpasses all others. Jesus had no human hereditary claim to

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priesthood (Hebrews 7:14; 8:4), so the way is open for appreciating his priestly ministry for what it truly is. His taking of human nature enabled him to share the human predicament and so qualified him to act for humanity. His divine origin ensures that he is able to mediate between the human community and the divine realm in a way no human priest can. As himself God-man, Jesus bridges the gulf between the Holy God and sinful humanity, achieving for humanity the harmonious fellowship with God that all human priestly mediations only approximate.

Yet his priestly ministry takes place not in an earthly temple or shrine, but in the realm where it really matters, where all issues are decided, in the divine presence (Hebrews 9:24). But his priestly mediation has done more than act “on our behalf.” It actually ends priestly mediation by bringing into the divine presence all who by faith associate themselves with him. The meeting of the perfect sacrifice with the perfect priestly mediation in the one person, Jesus Christ, means that having identified with humanity in order to taste death on behalf of humanity (Hebrews 2:14–15), he has opened the way for all who identify with him to be with him in the divine presence (Hebrews 10:19–20). This unique achievement renders all other priestly mediations obsolete and reveals their ineffectiveness. To disregard the surpassing worth of the priestly mediation of Jesus Christ for all people everywhere and to choose ethnic priesthoods in the name of cultural heritage, is to fail to recognise the true meaning and end of all priestly mediation, to abdicate from belonging within the one community of humanity, to clutch at the shadow and miss the substance. The thrust of Hebrews is that such error is not only unredeemable, it is also utterly unnecessary.

Ancestral Function

Of the three features of our traditional heritage we are considering, ancestral function seems to be the one to which Jesus Christ least easily answers. Ancestors are lineage or family ancestors and so are by nature ours. So the cult of ancestors may be said to be beyond the reach of Christian argument. If the cult of ancestors is valid, here is solid ground on which traditional religion can take a firm stand. It is precisely here that the problem lies. In what does the validity of the cult of ancestors consist? Since not all become ancestors but only those who lived exemplary lives and from whom the community derived some benefit, are not ancestors in effect a projection into the transcendent realm of the social values and spiritual expectations of the living community? Since traditional society views existence as an integrated whole, linking the living and the departed in a common life, such a projection is understandable. Yet the essential point is that ancestors have no existence independent of the community that produces them. The cult of ancestors provides the basis for locating in the transcendent realm the source of authority and power in the community and gives to leadership itself a sacred quality.

Strictly speaking, the cult of ancestors, from the intellectual point of view, belongs to the category of myth, ancestors being the product of the myth-making imagination of the community. To characterise the cult of ancestors as “myth” is not to say that the cult is unworthy of serious attention. The term stresses the functional value of the cult of ancestors. For myth is sacred, enshrining and expressing the most valued elements of a community’s self-understanding. The cult of ancestors as myth points to the role of the cult in ensuring social harmony, by strengthening the ties that knit together all sections and generations

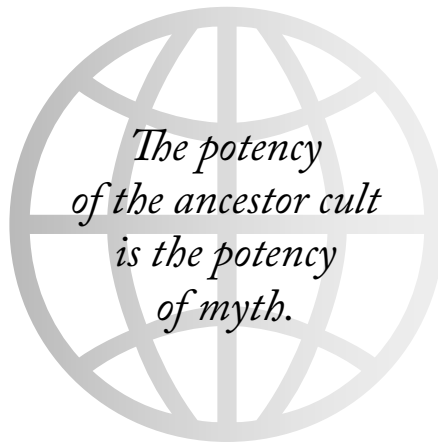
of the community, the present with the past and those as yet unborn. On each occasion of heightened feeling in the community—birth, outdooring of infants, initiation into adulthood, marriage, death, the installation of a king and celebration of harvests—the cult of ancestors forms an essential part of the ritual ceremonies that secure the conditions upon which the life and continuity of the community are believed to depend.

It is also important to realise that since ancestors do not originate from the transcendent realm, it is the myth-making imagination of the community itself that sacralises them, conferring upon them the sacred authority that they exercise through those in the community, like kings, who also expect to become ancestors. The potency of the cult of ancestors is not the potency of ancestors themselves; the potency of the cult is the potency of myth.

Once the meaning of the cult of ancestors as myth is granted and its “function” is understood within the overall religious life of traditional society, it becomes clear how Jesus Christ fulfils our aspirations in relation to ancestral function too. Ancestors are considered worthy of honour for having “lived among us” and for having brought benefits to us; Jesus Christ has done infinitely more. They, originating from among us, had no choice but to live among us. But he, reflecting the brightness of God’s glory and the exact likeness of God’s own being (Hebrews 1:3), took our flesh and blood, shared our human nature and underwent death for us to set us free from the fear of death (Hebrews 2:14–15). He who has every reason to abandon sinful humans to their just deserts is not ashamed to call us his brethren (Hebrews 2:11). Our natural ancestors had no barriers to cross to live among us and share our experience. His incarnation implies that he has achieved a far more profound identification with us in our humanity than the mere ethnic solidarity of lineage ancestors can ever do. Jesus Christ surpasses our natural ancestors also by virtue of

who he is in himself. Ancestors, even described as “ancestral spirits,” remain essentially human spirits; whatever benefit they may be said to bestow is effectively contained by the fact of their being human. Jesus Christ, on the other hand, took on human nature without loss to his divine nature. Belonging in the eternal realm as Son of the Father (Hebrews 1:1, 48; 9:14), he has taken human nature into himself (Hebrews 10:19) and so, as God-man, he ensures an infinitely more effective ministry to human beings (Hebrews 7:25) than can be said of merely human ancestral spirits.

The writer of Hebrews, confronted by the reality of the eternal nature of Jesus Christ, falls back on the enigmatic Melchizedek of Genesis 14:17–20 for



analogy; without father or mother, without beginning or end, he (Melchizedek) is like the Son of God (Jesus Christ). The likeness is only in thought. For Jesus has actually demonstrated, through his resurrection from the dead, the possession of an indestructible life (Hebrews 7:16). This can never be said of ancestors. The persistence of the cult of ancestors is owed, not to their demonstrable power to act, but to the power of the myth that sustains them in the corporate mind of the community. The presumption that ancestors actually function for the benefit of the community can be seen as part of the same myth-making imagination that projects departed human beings into the transcendent realm. While not denying that spiritual forces

do operate in the traditional realm, we can maintain that ancestral spirits, as human spirits that have not demonstrated any power over death, the final enemy, cannot be presumed to act in the way tradition ascribes to them.

Since ancestral function as traditionally understood is now shown to have no basis in fact, the way is open for appreciating more fully how Jesus Christ is the only real and true Ancestor and Source of life for all mankind, fulfilling and transcending the benefits believed to be bestowed by lineage ancestors. By his unique achievement in perfect atonement through his own self-sacrifice, and by effective eternal mediation and intercession as God-man in the divine presence, he has secured eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12) for all who acknowledge who he is for them and what he has done for them, who abandon the blind alleys of merely human traditions and rituals, and instead, entrust themselves to him. As mediator of a new and better covenant between God and humanity (Hebrews 8:6; 12:24), Jesus brings the redeemed into the experience of a new identity in which he links their human destinies directly and consciously with the eternal, gracious will and purpose of a loving and caring God (Hebrews 12:22–24). No longer are human horizons bounded by lineage, clan, tribe or nation. For the redeemed now belong within the community of the living God, in the joyful company of the faithful of all ages and climes. They are united through their union with Christ, in a fellowship infinitely richer than the mere social bonds of lineage, clan, tribe or nation that exclude the stranger as a virtual enemy.

Reading and Hearing the Word of God in Our Own Language

Once we discover that there is no valid alternative to Jesus Christ, the question is no longer: why should we relate to Jesus of Nazareth who does not belong to our clan, family, tribe and nation? But, how may we understand more

fully this Jesus Christ who relates to us most meaningfully and most profoundly in our clan, family, tribe and nation? A helpful way of growing in understanding is to read and listen to the Word of God in our own languages.

In matters of religion, no language speaks to the heart, mind and innermost feelings as does our mother-tongue. The achievement of Christianity with regard to this all-important place of language in religion is truly unique. For Christianity is, among all religions, the most culturally translatable, hence the most truly universal, being able to be at home in every cultural context without injury to its essential character. For a Scriptural religion rooting religious authority in a particular collection of sacred writings, this achievement is remarkable. Its explanation must lie with Christianity's refusal of a "sacred" language. With the exception of the dominant role of Latin in the European phase of Christianity and in some sectors of Roman Catholicism, Christianity has developed as a "vernacular" faith. The significance of this has been most marked in Africa, where the early possession of the Scriptures in mother-tongue meant that African peoples had access to the original sources of Christian teaching, on the authority of which they could, if need be, establish their own churches. Each of us with the Bible in our mother-tongue can truly claim to hear God speaking to us in our own language.

The importance of this fact is theological. The Christian belief that the Bible in the vernacular remains in every respect the Word of God, has its basis in what took place on the Day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit, through the first Christian witnesses, spoke at one and the same time to people "who had come from every country in the world" (Acts 2:5 GNB), each in his own language, causing them to "hear the great things that God has done" in Jesus Christ (Acts 2:1-12). Hearing the Word of God in our own language is not to be sneered at and left to "illiterates"; it

If Akan speakers read their Bibles only in English, they may not realize the traditional Odwira purificatory ritual is fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

is essential if we seriously seek growth in our understanding of Jesus Christ. A final illustration from the epistle to the Hebrews clarifies the point:

When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high (RSV). After achieving forgiveness for the sins of mankind, he sat down in heaven at the right hand side of God, the Supreme Power (GNB). (Hebrews 1:3b)

If Akan speakers read their Bibles only in the English versions and neglect the Word of God in their own language, it is conceivable that they would dutifully participate in every annual *Odwira* Festival without ever realising that the traditional purificatory rituals of *Odwira*, repeated year after year, have in fact been fulfilled and transcended by the one, perfect *Odwira* that Jesus Christ has performed once for all (Hebrews 1:3 in Twi: *ode n'ankasa ne ho dwiraa yen bone no*). Jesus has thus secured eternal redemption for all who cease from their own works of purification and trust in him and his perfect *Odwira*; that it is Jesus Christ *in himself*, (the Twi here—*ode n'ankasa ne ho*—being more expressive than the English versions), who has become our *Odwira*. The *Odwira* to end all *odwiras* has taken place through the death of Jesus Christ. **IJFM**

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