


An Exploration into Akan Traditional Patterns of Learning and its Significance for Contemporary Akan Christian Formation



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ABSTRACT

The study is an exploration into the Akan traditional patterns of learning and how it provides educational resources to contemporary Akan Christian formation. It engages some renowned Akan Christian scholars in reflections on the pre-missionary Akan traditional learning patterns before their encounter with the Western missionaries in observation and interviews. The indigenous knowledge systems like the rites of passage remain available educational resources that must attract the intellectual considerations of Akan Christian educators. As qualitative in its methodology, the study examined available materials on the subject and conducted interviews with some individuals who were considered to have significant insights on the subject. The study has noted that Akan traditional patterns of learning possess relevant information that must be considered by the church in its quest for relevant contemporary patterns of Christian formation in African Christianity. Traditional Patterns of Learning, it is recommended, must attract academic examination and research to unearth the deep-seated worth of intellectual weight that has not attracted thorough Christian consideration due to the European-value setting for Western missionary established churches among the Akan people of Ghana.

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INTRODUCTION

The Akan had their traditional patterns of learning before their encounter with Western missionaries. The indigenous patterns of learning provided the required moral standards, cultural values and indigenous knowledge systems relevant for the individual and community life. The Western missionaries introduced Christian education and schooling patterns of learning to the Akan. The Christian patterns of learning did not seek to integrate the traditional patterns of learning into their forms of learning. The lack of integration created the impression that the Akan were ignorant and needed their superior learned teachers to offer them gifts of education. Critical pedagogy and educational systems that make teachers and students relate as subjects-subjects and co-creators of knowledge demand that the pre-existing knowledge system must be respected in order to avoid education becoming ‘banking’ as Paulo Freire prefers to call it. A critical assessment of the Akan traditional patterns of learning will make available the intellectual weight of Akan indigenous patterns of learning to the educational community.

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Paolo Freire has argued in his *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*¹ that a liberative education must consider a more critical pedagogy that perceives both teachers and students as subjects. According to Freire, ‘teachers and students (leadership and people), co-intent on reality, are both subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating that knowledge. As they attain this knowledge of reality through common reflection and action, they discover themselves as to its permanent re-creators.’²

Education becomes banking when teachers consider their students as objects while the teachers remain the subjects. He, therefore, argues that ‘education must begin with the solution of the teacher-student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers and students.’³ The educational system that the relationship between the teacher and the student is as subject and object gives the impression that the students are ignorant and are empty objects to be filled. For Freire, ‘in the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider as knowing nothing.’⁴

The learned teachers in such an educational environment fill the empty objects with their enormous knowledge which they offer as gifts to their students. He opines that, ‘education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor.’⁵ The students consider themselves ignorant in the educational process. He observes that ‘they call themselves ignorant and say the “professor” is the one who has the knowledge and to whom they should listen.’⁶

Freire argues that the pre-existing knowledge that students bring into the learning process must be respected and allowed to function as the foundation that the teachers build upon. The students must be helped to appreciate the fact that they have learnt a lot from the environment before their encounter with their teachers. According to Freire, ‘almost never do they realize that they, too, “know things” they have learned in their relations with the world and other women and men.’⁷

In the process of building the educational relationship as subject-subject, as the teachers teach, they equally learn from the students. The teachers and the students in the process discover the truth for themselves. Educators and students therefore work as a team to find the problems of history and the present. The critical pedagogy then treats the student as a co-creator of knowledge.

Akan was an educational society before their encounter with the Western missionaries and the introduction of schooling. According to Kofi A. Busia, the Akan like other African societies possess indigenous moral codes. The moral codes are the values that facilitate relationships. Busia noted that ‘the moral codes of African communities are indeed circumscribed in their application. They concern the individual in his relation to his lineage and clan and the life of the group. They are nevertheless moral systems. Religion along with custom and law control human conduct.’⁸ He further argues that moral standards are cultural values that contemporary societies commit to due to the fact that their ancestors have considered them worth emulating. Busia noted, ‘the moral standards are sanctioned by the ancestors who see to it that they are observed.’⁹

The Akan have concepts of right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable conduct and behaviour in matters that include history, governance, spirituality, morality, diplomacy and healthy relationships. Busia has further noted that, ‘the Asante have concepts of right and wrong, of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, culturally defined in terms of their own life and belief, and as has been apparent in the belief accounts given that the ancestors and gods punish those who violate the intentionally sanctioned code and reward those who keep it.’¹⁰

¹ Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 1997)

² Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 51.

³ Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 53.

⁴ Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 53.

⁵ Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 53.

⁶ Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 45.

⁷ Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 45.

⁸ Kofi A. Busia. ‘Ancestor worship, libation, stools, festivals in S.G. Williamson (ed) *Christianity and African Culture*, (Accra: Christian Council of Gold Coast, 1955), 2.

⁹ Busia. *Ancestor worship, libation, stools, festivals*, 22.

¹⁰ Busia. ‘Ancestor worship, libation, stools, festivals, 21-22.

The indigenous knowledge values and moral standards were embedded in unique materials that were different from the learning materials that the western missionaries introduced. Nana Addo Dankwa admits that the Akan possess learning materials. He noted that, 'our forefathers, who at their time had not developed the art of writing and recording events, gave special significance to their culture and rituals by using such sculptural items as stools, dolls, etc. as symbols which were made to represent various important historical events. In effect, these special sculptural items became their books in which were embedded their early history, practices and experiences for posterity.'¹¹

The existence of indigenous books suggests the reality of indigenous learning patterns. The indigenous learning materials however, did not attract the educational considerations of the western missionaries. Western missionaries attempted to convince Akan converts that the Christian faith and Christian civilization oppose Akan cultural worldview. They did not therefore pursue the integration of the cultural values into the transmission and education of the Christian faith. In explaining the lack of integration, Noel Smith noted that, 'wherever the missionaries worked they opposed, often successfully, those features of Akan religion and custom which were most objectionable to them, and in so doing, they aroused the conviction in the native mind that Christianity was entirely opposed to the ancestral ways.'¹² Bediako has equally described the approach as European values setting for non-Europeans.¹³

The educational materials that missionaries introduced to the Akan were the prevailing educational materials in Europe without consideration to the pre-missionary existing indigenous learning patterns. Williamson noted that, 'the polity and organization, the liturgies and devotional expressions, the discipline and instruction, and the total outlook derives directly from the parent missionary societies and the churches supporting them. The Christianity of the Akan area proves to be the denominational Christianity of the west.'¹⁴ The learning patterns and educational materials that Western missionaries presented to Akan Christians excluded indigenous learning resources. The rejection however, does not deny the existential fact of the cultural values and learning capabilities of the indigenous patterns of learning.

Johann Christaller in his collection of Akan proverbs pointed out the need for the African Christians to make educational exploration into the available proverbs and other indigenous learning resources that were rejected by missionaries and other educational systems offered to African Christians. He stated, 'may this collection give a new stimulus to the diligent gathering of folklore and to the increasing cultivation of native literature. May those Africans who are enjoying the benefit of Christian education, make the best of this privilege; but let them not forget that by entering into their way of thinking and by acknowledging what is good and expounding what is wrong they will gain more access to the hearts and minds of their less favoured countrymen.'¹⁵

Smith has subsequently urged for, 'a fresh consideration of the social and religious factors embodied in the indigenous Akan worldview and which condition the inner life of the people, so that the message of the Gospel may speak directly to their minds and hearts.'¹⁶ The research is an exploration into the nature, educational pedagogy, moments, resources and agencies of Akan indigenous patterns of learning and the lessons that it presents for contemporary Akan Christian formation.

METHODOLOGY

The research as qualitative was pursued through primary and secondary sources. Observations and interviews were conducted on Akan traditional patterns of learning in relation to Christian and schooling patterns of learning. The relationship between Western missionary educators (teachers) and their new converts (students) was examined in some educational assumptions of Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. Available relevant

¹¹ Nana Addo Dankwa III. *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana. The Future*. (Accra: Konrad Adenauer Foundation 2004), 72.

¹² Noel Smith, . *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana 1835-1960*. (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1966), 87-88.

¹³ Kwame Bediako. *Theology and Identity The impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa*. (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992).

¹⁴ Sidney G. Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1965), 165.

¹⁵ Johann G. Christaller, *Three Thousand Six Hundred Ghanaian Proverbs (From the Asante and Fante Language)* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2000), ix.

¹⁶ Smith. *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana*, 280.

materials on the engagement of Western missionaries and Akan traditional patterns of learning were examined to appreciate the integration of traditional patterns of learning into Christian formation.

The Nature of Akan Traditional Formation

The Akan have always been conscious of the growth and development of the individual members of the society. The formation of the people within their cultural values with their traditional patterns of learning is therefore attached with very great importance. Akan traditional patterns of learning however, lack materials of Christian education and schooling patterns of learning. It has been argued by Sam Prempeh¹⁷ that the existence of Akan traditional education is an undeniable reality. He claims that the whole life of an Akan person is a learning process. Prempeh has indicated that, ‘there is so much that can be said for the whole idea of Akan traditional education. The whole life cycle of the Akan and for that matter, other traditional areas and ethnic groups is a learning process.’¹⁸

The schooling pattern of learning that the missionaries introduced came with books. Nana Addo Dankwa III admits that the pre-missionary indigenous patterns of learning did not possess the missionary learning materials. He however, has noted that the Akan possessed their unique types of documentation and learning materials that he considers as their form of books. He argues that, ‘our forefathers, who at their time had not developed the art of writing and recording events, gave special significance to their culture and rituals by using such sculptural items as stools, dolls, etc. as symbols which were made to represent various important historical events. In effect, these special sculptural items became their books in which were embedded their early history, practices and experiences for posterity.’¹⁹ Akan traditional symbols are identified as indigenous forms of documentation. The symbols are used to document the history, cultural practices and experiences of the community.

Akan traditional education moreover, takes both the formal and informal approaches. According to Mercy Oduyoye,²⁰ ‘the people learn by seeing, doing, and asking questions. She argues, ‘we do have our own ways of educating people. The informal ones may take the form of questions and answers like a parent telling a child we do not do this; we do that, then the child asks why do we not do that, and that creates the opportunity for education. Where you find systematic learning is where you have apprenticeship to a particular trade like religious systems where they learn to become traditional priests (*Okomfo*). We do have that systematic education.’²¹

The indigenous oral literature provides the sources of information for the formation process. The indigenous values and wisdom are embedded in the festivals, rites of passage, including naming ceremonies, puberty rites, marriage, funerals, kingship institutions, drumming, dancing, traditional music, arts, and craft. The Akan philosophy and thought system are further deposited in folktales and proverbs.

Students in Akan education are expected to learn through association, interaction, encounter, observation, participation, experience, service, mentoring, asking and receiving answers to questions, and confinement. The systematization of indigenous learning patterns is affirmed by the fact that there are separate educational and knowledge values for children, young women, young men, adults, community leaders, traditional rulers and professionals like traditional healers, and traditional priests. Akan traditional education is therefore oral, regular, systematic, and institutionalized.

¹⁷ Sam Prempeh was a lecturer in Primal Religions and Church History at the Trinity College Legon. He later on took appointment as the Principal of the Seminary. Prempeh, whose father was among the Manhyia royals deported to the Seychelles Islands, later became the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana from 1999-2005.

¹⁸ Interview with Sam Prempeh September 1, 2004 Osu Accra.

¹⁹ Nana Addo Dankwa III. *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana-The Future*, 2.

²⁰ Prof Mercy Amba Oduyoye an internationally acclaimed theologian is an Akan woman. She worked as Deputy General Secretary for the World Council of Churches. She is the founding member of the Circle of Concerned Women Theologians and the Director of Institute of Women in Religion and Culture based at Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon.

²¹ Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye May14, 2004 Legon Accra.

Formation in Indigenous Akan Thought System and Concepts

Education is a process of assisting members of a society to have access to knowledge and experience. It deals with what society considers as relevant knowledge. According to Kwabena Nketia,²² ‘education in the general sense applies to any situation in which a person is being helped either to have access to knowledge or an experience. The process of transmission may be formal and institutionalized or informal but still recognized as part of a tradition. The educational process includes what knowledge is relevant to the society.’²³

There are concepts in Akan thought system that point to traditional formation patterns of the indigenous people. The Akan language existed before the introduction of foreign languages like the English language. In the process of developing a Christian educational system and materials for Akan Christians, the missionaries identified and adopted Akan thought systems and concepts. Indigenous educational concepts like *nimdee* (knowledge), *adesua* (learning), and *adekyere* (teaching) that were used in the pre-missionary indigenous formation patterns have remained in Christian formation concepts.

The indigenous educational concepts were moreover, adopted in the translation of the Bible into the Asante language. The concept *nimdee* (knowledge) has been used in the translation in the Book of Hosea in the Asante Twi Bible as ‘*nimdee a me man nnie nti, wobetwa won agu*’ (Hos 4: 6). The passage is translated in English as ‘my people are destroyed for lack of knowledge’ (NKJ). Jesus is presented in Scripture as a teacher *Kyerekyereni* (one who teaches). He engages his students in *adekyere* (teaching) and *adesua* (learning). Jesus gave his disciples the instruction to go into the nations to engage in *adekyere* (teaching).

Nimdee is a combination of two words; *nim* (know) and *adee* (something). *Nimdefoɔ* is therefore an individual who can be considered to possess knowledge that society considers relevant as Nketia indicated. *Nimdee* is a formation value that members of Akan society are expected to pursue and possess. The pursuit of *nimdee* in Akan society is lifelong. People who are considered as *nimdefoɔ* (knowledgeable persons) are highly respected in Akan societies. It is a discipline that engages an individual from the womb to the tomb.

The acquisition of *nimdee* (knowledge) is a discipline Akan people are expected to consciously pursue out of the engagement of teaching (*adekyere*) and learning (*adesua*). There is an Akan proverb, which says that, *Obi nnim a obi kyere* (translated as those who lack knowledge are to be taught). *Nimdee* (knowledge) is acquired through the interaction between *adekyere* (teaching) and *adesua* (learning). *Adekyere* which comes from *adee* (something) and *kyere* (teach) means literally to teach something. *Adesua* similarly is a combination of *adee* (something) and *sua* (learn). *Nimdefoɔ* then are the people who have gone through the process of *adesua* and *adekyere* in their formation process. Such people are considered to possess the relevant knowledge and values of the society.

Beyond the acquisition of *nimdee*, Akan society demands *nteteɛ* (nurturing). Akan society has much regard for people they consider to have received *nteteɛ*. Society frowns on persons who are considered to have not gone through proper nurturing. *Nteteɛ* is demonstrated by how an individual exhibits acquired knowledge in community participation.

The desire for proper training in specific areas of an individual’s life and profession is very significant. The process of *adesua*, *adekyere* and *nteteɛ* in Akan society are pursued within identified societal values. Moreover, there are educational agencies, resources and moments that facilitate the indigenous formation process.

Akan Indigenous Formation Values

Educational values and philosophies determine the starting points of educational programmes. The developers of educational policies often settle the values that the educational programme intends to transmit and the kind of person the educational programme seeks to form. The Akan people describe some individuals as *Oye onipa paa*, meaning this person is a true human being. *Oye onipa paa* is a way of indicating that traditional values intended to be acquired in the formation process have been achieved. The determination of a desirable and acceptable person in Akan society is connected with the exhibition of indigenous knowledge and values.

Akan society connects their identities deeply with morality and acceptable behaviour. Every member of the community is nurtured to identify with and demonstrate the societal norms for the honour and dignity

²² Joseph Hanson Kwabena Nketia (1912-2019) was a Ghanaian ethnomusicologist and composer.

²³ Interview with Kwabena Nketia May 19, 2004 Madina Accra.

of the community. The formation of individual members of the community is therefore for harmonious community participation. Akan education among others is focused on the formation of an Akan person for community living and participation. The whole education process is to prepare the people for life.

The formation values seek to educate the members for life and beyond. In response to the nature of Akan indigenous formation, Nana Addo Dankwa III considers the indigenous learning patterns as progressively aiming at the formation of the living members of the society. He indicated that, ‘most of our symbolic gestures apart from being visual aids have been the basis for morality.’²⁴

Analysis of Akan concepts, proverbs and stories demonstrate Akan values, which can be considered as the formation values for indigenous formation patterns. The symbols and concepts depict value systems in different areas. Akan indigenous knowledge and value systems can be identified in traditional diplomacy and courtesy, constitutional and legal systems, political and leadership systems, spirituality and moral systems, arts and craft systems, health and healing systems, crises and bereavement management systems, environmental protection and restoration systems, communication and information management systems, documentation and celebration of historical events, philosophical thought and ideological construction systems, defence and security systems, aesthetic and beautification systems, marriage, family life and community building systems.

Agents of Indigenous Formation

Akan traditional patterns of learning possess educational agents who are responsible for the socialization and formation process. The agents for the socialization and formation process are the parents, family members, community elders and traditional leaders. Oduyoye has observed that, there are specific roles for mothers and fathers as agents of Akan traditional education. She has noted that, ‘the normal education on how to live in community is done usually by the women because the children are kept with their mothers. The father will apprentice the boys in farming, hunting, construction of houses, and fishing. The boys are supposed to be taken care of by their fathers while the girls continue to stay with their mothers. The Akan like balance.’²⁵

Akan mothers generally prepare their children for acceptable social morality in everyday life, while the fathers take responsibility for the professional and vocational training of the boys. A major determinant of parental success is how children are nurtured for community involvement and participation. Though mothers handle the initial socialization of the children, the fathers take care of the boys at the point of role differentiation where they teach the boys in their various professions. Mothers however remain the key agents of nurturing the girls in marriage life, home management, basic hygiene and women’s role in the community.

Oduyoye further asserts that, ‘the mother educates both the boys and the girls until they come to an age where we say, *enyɛ obaa na obɛkyerɛ no sedɛ yeko po*, meaning, it is not the woman who will teach the man how to go fishing, then the boys are separated to get a closer attachment to their fathers. It is during the period of role differentiation that the fathers teach their boys what they know best and the mothers continue the education of the girls this time on marriage life, childbirth and upbringing, and women roles in the community. I do not think there was any definite age for the separation but even from observation, there is a point where the boys are discouraged from entering into the women’s kitchen. The mothers push the boys towards their fathers to learn how to be an Akan man.’²⁶

Prempeh in line with Oduyoye’s position on the role of fathers in the formation of boys indicates that, ‘much as this may by modern standards of education be regarded as informal, it is intended to make him a complete person. If you are a man and your father had a profession, you should by the age of 17, or 18, and at the latest 20 be proficient in it. You should have known how to behave towards adults. You should have been ready to marry when you enter into that kind of relationship. You should have been able to have your own farm. If your father were a hunter, you would have followed him over to the bush that you would be able to identify an antelope in a shrub and should be able to shoot at it and get it right. For that reason, whatever the agenda, there are certain processes they pass you through to mature that will make the kind of person who is civic, who is enterprising and who is industrious.’²⁷

²⁴ Interview with Nana Addo Dankwa III November 22, 2004 Akropong Akuapem.

²⁵ Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye May14, 2004 Legon Accra.

²⁶ Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye May14, 2004 Legon Accra.

²⁷ Interview with Sam Prempeh September 1, 2004 Osu Accra.

A child belongs to the family and therefore every member of the extended family is expected to get involved in the nurturing of the child. Brothers, sisters, uncles, aunties, grandmothers, grandfathers, in-laws are expected to contribute towards the formation of children and young people. Robert Addo-Fening²⁸ observes that the formation of the child is the responsibility of the community too. He has observed that, ‘usually in the Akan setting the child’s upbringing is the responsibility of every member of the community. Every member of the village is allowed to discipline a child and later inform your father when the child does something wrong.’²⁹

Addo-Fening admits the lack of book culture in Akan indigenous formation. He however, insists that the interaction between teaching and learning was done as pointed out earlier, through observation, association and participation. He observed that in Akan society, ‘the son follows the father into the palace where the resources were. If you want your son to be a goldsmith you sent him to that environment where the resources existed. They became drummers by observing, serving and direct participation in a form of apprenticeship. It was a very informal system. You go to the resources and occasionally try your hands.’³⁰

Through regular services, Akan formation processes were enhanced and strengthened. According to Sam Prempeh, ‘children who stay in the royal house learn so much through observation, service and interactions. They become experts in drumming. I do not think people will sit down and say come let me teach you how to drum. As the elders’ drum, as they play the appellations, they pick it up. After some time if you give him the drum although he may not get the tune or the pitch to be right, he begins to learn the process of playing. That will also apply to the horns and the windpipes but there is an even more serious learning process because as he provides service; go and bring the sheep, go and slaughter it. Bring the tray or the brass bowl, collect the blood, he is in the process of being exposed to something which is far more ritualistic and also spiritual. He may not understand everything but if he passes through that process over say a two, five, or ten year period he would have learnt so much which somebody who lives in Bukom (a coastal area located in Accra) who is used to the sea and fishing has not learnt in the process. Much the same way a young man who is in Bukom might have learnt a lot that those in the interior would not know. In each context, in each cultural milieu people like that kind of education, which might be informal but still a learning process.’³¹

Resources for Indigenous Formation

There are indigenous educational resources to educate the people from childhood to adulthood. The frequent use of the resources encourages acceptability and common knowledge by all. Prempeh admits not only the existence of the resources but argues for the intelligence of the users of indigenous educational resources. In his attempt to assess the intelligence of the users of indigenous resources, he observes that, ‘they do such education very well because the fact that they are illiterates does not mean that they are not intelligent. If he had gone to school, he would have been a professor, but just because he did not go to school as I said does not mean he is not intelligent. They are very intelligent people and there are people within the royalty who are historians as they narrate and re-narrate stories, they get them all into their heads. In the process, there may be a slight twist but the core values of the history remain intact.’³²

The indigenous learning resources are known and common to all. They are identified from traditional symbols, cultural categories, festivals and traditional ornament. Okyeame Ampratwum³³ has opined that, ‘those resources though not documented in books are known by all palace functionaries in the sound of drums, dances, proverbs, and ornaments that the king uses on some special occasions.’³⁴

The Black Stool, for example, has been considered as the key educational resource for the formation of traditional leaders. Nana Addo Dankwa argues that, ‘the Black Stool at the moment is supposed to be a

²⁸ Robert Addo-Fening is a historian who has made major contributions in the documentation of the history of Akyem Abuakwa and of Ghana.

²⁹ Interview with Addo-Fening June 6, 2004 Legon Accra.

³⁰ Interview with Addo-Fening June 6, 2004 Legon Accra.

³¹ Interview with Sam Prempeh September 1, 2004 Osu Accra.

³² Interview with Sam Prempeh September 1, 2004 Osu Accra.

³³ Okyeame Ampratwum is a Christian and Okyeame Pannin (Senior Linguist) at Asante Mampong

³⁴ Interview with Okyeame Ampratwum June 1, 2004 Asante Mampong.

symbol of authority, a symbol of unity and thirdly and sadly it is supposed to be a deity, which people go to for prayers or what they need and so forth. The first two symbols of authority and unity have some semblance of truth but the real importance of the Black Stools encompasses the history of the chief whose name the Stool bears.’³⁵

Educational Moments in Akan Indigenous Education

There are traditional educational moments based on the fact that different values are transmitted to different age groups at different stages in an individual’s life. Prempeh has indicated that, ‘what you teach a six (6) year old would not be the same thing you would teach the person when he is 16 or 18. It would not be the same when the person is entering into marriage. You can identify the indigenous educational moments with given teaching methodology as well as the content.’³⁶

Children, youth and adults are expected to learn different values at their various levels in life and that gives the grounds for the conviction that the neglect of those moments will demonstrate a lack of education. The rites of passage that serve as major indigenous educational moments include birth, naming ceremonies, puberty, marriage, and death actually provide the main educational moments in traditional patterns of learning. Oduyoye sums up the fact that the rites of passage serve as educational moments in the following words, ‘you can have educational moments with the rites of passage. Every time there is a rite of passage, that is an educational moment. When they are conducting a naming ceremony, it is an educational moment. It is at that point that the children around will hear and learn for the first time that in the Akan community when we say yes, it is yes and when we say no we mean no. No one tells you at that moment that we are going to educate you but it is a moment that you learn something. The puberty, marriage, burial and funerals are educational moments as they offer teaching and learning opportunities.’³⁷

There are educational moments in Akan life apart from the rites of passage. At any time that the need is felt for one to acquire specific knowledge, there are structures for the acquisition of such knowledge and experiences. Such moments include leadership formation, acquisition of vocational skills and apprenticeship. Nketia observed that, ‘whenever we feel one has reached a moment to possess specific knowledge and information, we pursue the effort to ensure that the knowledge is properly acquired.’³⁸

Encounter between Akan Traditional Patterns of Learning and Christian Education

The Akan indigenous patterns of learning have survived pressures from missionary faiths like Christianity and Islam as well as the schooling pattern of education. Noel Smith has observed that, ‘the missionaries came from Western Europe conscious at that time of its developing technology and of its cultural achievements in contrast to which West Africa could only seem backward and in dire need not only of the grace of the Gospel of Christ but also of the blessing of Christian civilization.’³⁹

Western missionaries did not consider pursuing the integration of the Akan indigenous learning patterns into its Christian education patterns due to the fact that the indigenous religious practices were considered heathen, the best that could be done was to do away with such practices. Missionaries saw their task as calling the Akan into new life. Williamson noted that, ‘the missionary’s attitude was, without doubt, unfavourable to Akan customary ways and traditional life. He understood his purpose in terms of calling the convert from traditional associations in heathen surroundings into a new way of life.’⁴⁰

Efforts were made in order to work towards the extinction of Akan indigenous practices without intellectual exploration. The destruction of Akan indigenous belief systems became an integral part of missionary efforts. As Williamson observed, ‘the primary task of missionaries among the Akan was the destruction of traditional superstition and the implantation of the Christian faith.’⁴¹ The faiths were presented

³⁵ Interview with Nana Addo Dankwa III November 22, 2004 Akropong Akuapem.

³⁶ Interview with Sam Prempeh September 1, 2004 Osu Accra.

³⁷ Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye May14, 2004 Legon Accra.

³⁸ Interview with Kwabena Nketia May 19, 2004 Madina Accra.

³⁹ Smith. *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana 1835-1960*, 87.

⁴⁰ Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 56.

⁴¹ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 54.

as two different religions that could not be integrated.

Akan people were called into the Christian faith not through their cultural understandings but through the European worldview. They were therefore to seek emancipation from their cultural past in order to endorse missionary acceptance. For Williamson then, 'it by no means follows from this that the Akan will become Christian, but only that he may seek emancipation from his traditional past to seek refuge elsewhere.'⁴²

The Akan it has been noted have concepts of right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable conduct and behaviour in matters that include history, governance, spirituality, morality, diplomacy and healthy relationships. Busia has noted that, 'the Asante have concepts of right and wrong, of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, culturally defined in terms of their own life and belief, and as has been apparent in the belief accounts given ancestors and gods punish those who violate the intentionally sanctioned code and reward those who keep it.'⁴³

In the consideration of Oduyoye, the perception of European culture as superior to Akan culture by Western missionaries explains the non-inclusion of Akan traditional patterns of learning in missionary formation patterns. According to Oduyoye 'these people came with their own socialization. They came with their own philosophies of life. They had come with a religion, which was already recognized in the West and had already informed their culture. They came thinking that their culture was the Christian culture.'⁴⁴

Akan Formation through Schooling

The effort towards the proper acquisition of knowledge explains why the Akan would adopt without much hesitation other patterns of education like schooling showing the considerable flexibility, adaptability and creativity in the Akan concepts of education and formation. The Akan culture is accommodative. Since the introduction of Western missionary education in Ghana, the Akan society has adopted schooling as part of its formation patterns. Schooling as a pattern of formation has become part of the traditional formation patterns for the members especially the traditional leaders.

Schooling and Christian education have gained such prominence in Akan traditional formation to the extent that currently one must or is expected to receive both traditional education and schooling in order to be considered for enstoolment. The accommodation of the Christian pattern of formation has been done for the improvement of the tradition. Emily Akuffo,⁴⁵ herself a royal of Akropong Akuapem argues that, 'the royals are trained to acquire the desirable public behaviour and comportment. Many of the Akropong kings were educated in mission schools. Some were lawyers, teachers, etc before their installations but they were also given traditional education on the desirable Akuapem values. The royals who have received both missionary education and traditional education are very unique.'⁴⁶

In a similar vein, Nana Osei Bonsu II, the Asante Mamponghe, observes that Christian education has made significant contributions towards the formation of traditional leaders. He indicated that, 'culture can be aptly described as dynamic. It grows and in the course of growing, undergoes certain changes for the benefit of all. The Asante custom was made by our ancestors for the present generation, and the people yet unborn, so it is clear that our custom is dynamic with rules and regulations we are privileged today to have most of our Amanhene highly educated. Some are doctors, lawyers, lecturers, professors and so on. As you are aware I am myself a lawyer and registrar of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. The Juabenhene for example is an engineer. So, education has produced enlightened and informed persons.'⁴⁷

Nana Osei Bonsu II argues that Western and Christian patterns of education do not conflict with traditional education. In point of fact, they contribute towards the growth and development of the kingship institution. He further demonstrates the harmony between traditional education and other patterns of formation

⁴² Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 134.

⁴³ Busia. *Ancestor worship, libation, stools, festivals*, 21-22.

⁴⁴ Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye May 14, 2004 Legon Accra.

⁴⁵ Emily Akuffo is a royal and Church leader at the Christ Congregation of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana at Akropong Akuapem.

⁴⁶ Interview with Emily Akuffo May 14, 2004 Akropong Akuapem.

⁴⁷ Daasebre Osei Bonsu II, interviewed by G. P. Hagan & Irene Odotei, in Odotei & Hagan (eds). *The King returns*. (Accra: University of Ghana 2003), 135.

by how even the Christian faith and values promote good traditional governance. Nana Osei Bonsu therefore argues that Christian formation values and patterns have been integrated into Akan indigenous leadership formation in Akan society by the traditional authorities. According to Nana Osei Bonsu, ‘the missionaries introduced Christianity in Asante and built schools to educate people, especially the members of the royal family. People became Christians while in school and in the course of time most royals were converted to the English Church Mission. We find that our families were Christians at birth; in other words, we were born into Christianized royal families. Apart from my title Daasebre, I have a Christian name given to me when I was baptized. If I die today, members of my church would ask for some Christian ceremonies. It does not mean that when we perform such ceremonies, then we have neglected or abandoned Asante culture. It is wrong for anybody to assume that a Christian chief has abandoned our culture.’⁴⁸

Critical Assessment of Akan Traditional Patterns of Learning

There is a need for a critical assessment of Akan traditional education and formation patterns with the intention of identifying how they serve the contemporary formation of Akan Christians. In his assessment of Akan formation patterns, Nketia has indicated that, there is an urgent need for the Akan church to build values and standards that are deeply rooted in the indigenous formation patterns. According to Nketia ‘this discipline must be pursued in terms of our own conceptions of what we want, how we see church life and worship. We need to build values and standards that are deeply rooted in the indigenous formation patterns.’⁴⁹ The call for a critical assessment of Akan traditional education and formation suggests that adequate exploration into the indigenous intellectual resources has not been adequately done. There is a need for the identification of indigenous formation values that can be integrated into Christian values in the formation process of a Christian person.

Christian theologians and educators must consider deeper study and research into the indigenous knowledge systems with the intention of adopting in their formation process values and standards from Akan indigenous patterns of learning. Prempeh has observed that, ‘there is some value in what the traditional people are doing in terms of education both formally and informally and therefore let us sit down, study, research and learn something from it.’⁵⁰

There may be a feeling of shame and reluctance in academic and intellectual attention to the indigenous knowledge system due to the impression that Western missionaries have given to the indigenous resources. According to Prempeh, ‘if we are not coming out to accept the values and what can be gained from the traditional structures and their processes of going about things, for example, the leadership formation development, it is all because we feel ashamed to say after all there is something good in it.’⁵¹ The feeling of shame when it comes to the discovering and usage of Akan indigenous learning patterns in Christian formation as claimed by Prempeh mainly has occurred because of missionary ignorance and prejudice against the educational and theological weight of Akan indigenous learning patterns but not because it does not exist.

The feeling of cultural superiority did not motivate the early missionaries to study and subject African indigenous learning patterns into any serious theological and academic enquiry. Akan Christian intellectuals must accept the responsibility to do what Western missionaries did not do because they (the Akan Christian scholars), know and value the language. Oduyoye insists that ‘if anybody is going to include Akan indigenous knowledge systems and resources into the Christian faith it must be us (Africans).’⁵²

TOWARDS AKAN CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

Patterns of Christian education have received acceptance and integration in Akan traditional patterns of learning and formation. The integration of the indigenous patterns of learning that has already taken place in Akan indigenous patterns of learning, however, are yet to be properly integrated into patterns of Christian

⁴⁸ Daasebre Osei Bonsu, *The King Returns*, 133.

⁴⁹ Interview with Kwabena Nketia May 19, 2004 Madina Accra.

⁵⁰ Interview with Sam Prempeh September 1, 2004 Osu Accra.

⁵¹ Interview with Sam Prempeh September 1, 2004 Osu Accra.

⁵² Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye May14, 2004 Legon Accra.

education. Christian education will speak to the inner minds and hearts of Akan Christians if the educators consider the integration of the indigenous patterns of learning.

Akan Christians did not enter the church educational environment as objects and empty-minded. Their worldviews have been shaped by their pre-missionary cultural values. They have a contribution to make to the learning process. The contribution of Akan Christians to Christian education and knowledge will be possible only when the pedagogy is considered as subject and subject else Akan Christian education will remain 'banking' education as suggested by Freire.

Rites of Passage and Christian Education in the Church

Akan socialization processes and formation are built around the rites of passage. They respond to matters of identity, acceptance and patterns of behaviour. The spirituality of the Akan is embedded in the rites of passage. Any formation that seeks to assist the Akan Christian to respond to their spiritual challenges and questions must be rooted in the rites of passage. The Akan Christian's spiritual question of ancestors, libation prayers, spirit possession and rituals will remain unanswered if Akan Christian education patterns do not consider the traditional patterns of learning that keep nurturing and sustaining such knowledge in them.

Akan Concept of *Onipa Paa* and Christian Discipleship Making

Discipleship making in Akan Christianity must pay educational attention to the Akan concept of *Onipa Paa* (meaning a true human being or a person who exhibits the desirable social norms). *Onipa Paa* is an outcome of sound nurturing and a symbol of acceptable virtues. The concept does not conflict with a Christian person who has been properly nurtured for life and society. A disciple of Christ emulates in their daily lives the Christ-like values that are indicated in the Book of Galatians as the fruits of the spirit (Gal.5: 19). Christian values such as holiness, truthfulness, hard work, modesty, etc. are the very virtues that the Akan expects from *Onipa Paa*. Those who are considered not to be *Onipa Paa* have a deficiency of such acceptable virtues and values.

CONCLUSION

The Akan of Ghana possesses indigenous patterns that are used in the formation of its members. The Akan indigenous formation patterns have remained and continue to serve the formation needs of the people despite the introduction of missionary patterns of education. It has been established that the Akan indigenous formation patterns lack book culture as may be found in Christian education. It has largely remained in oral tradition. However, the reality of education cannot be denied as the symbols, concepts and institutions define its nature and formation values. The formation moments include the celebration of the rites of passage i.e., naming ceremony, puberty rites, marriage and funerals. Funerals, mentoring, confinement of selected leaders and apprenticeship also provide opportunities for indigenous formation. Agents of Akan indigenous formation during the educational moment have been identified as parents, family members, community elders and traditional leaders.

Akan traditional education seeks to form members of the society with desirable values that are embedded in the traditional symbols, concepts and institutions. The exhibition of the traditional values is therefore the criteria that are used to assess members who are considered to be properly formed and integrated into the society. A person who has been formed through the traditional education process is expected to demonstrate values such as love, faithfulness, caring, hard work, fairness and good stewardship. Such are the people that the society cherishes and considers as true members of the society.

Akan society has adopted other formation patterns that have been introduced by Western missionaries like schooling in the formation of its members. Other institutions that have operated in Akan society have been slow in adopting Akan indigenous formation patterns in their formation process. African traditional education has transmitted its formation values mainly through the oral tradition. The oral nature of African traditional education, however, does not isolate it from other sources of information within the intellectual context. Values and knowledge in traditional education moreover, can be written. The question of distortion in the information of traditional education due to its use of oral tradition again can be corrected as it possesses

consistency and has institutionalized the process over the years. The various dimension of Akan traditional education must therefore be subjected to intellectual and theological exploration to identify the resources that can significantly contribute to the Christian pattern of formation in contemporary African Christianity.

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APPENDIX

- Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye May14, 2004 Legon Accra.
- Interview with Emily Akuffo May 14, 2004 Akropong Akuapem.
- Interview with Kwabena Nketia May 19, 2004 Madina Accra.
- Interview with Okyeame Ampratwum June 1, 2004 Asante Mampong.
- Interview with Addo-Fening June 6, 2004 Legon Accra.
- Interview with Sam Prempeh September 1, 2004 Osu Accra.
- Interview with Nana Addo Dankwa III November 22, 2004 Akropong Akuapem.