

**ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH AND AFUA KUMA
OF KWAHU: A STUDY IN SOME IMAGES OF
JESUS IN SECOND CENTURY CHRISTIANITY
AND MODERN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY**

BY

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NATAL, PIETERMARITZBURG

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is an original research work composed by me, and is no way a reproduction either in part or in whole. I wish to state also that this work has not been accepted in any previous application for a degree.



Philip Laryea
June, 2000

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my dear wife Kotso, my children Afoley, Awonjo and Nii Afotey who created a congenial home situation of love and support to enable me complete this work.

ABSTRACT

Christian religious experience whether it occurs in the second century or in modern Africa is one and the same, and although the experiences may differ it is possible to draw correlations to suggest that such experiences bear witness to a common reality. St. Ignatius of Antioch who lived in the second century and Afua Kuma who hails from Kwahu in the Eastern Region of Ghana, are used to demonstrate this reality.

My sources for Ignatius' are the seven letters he wrote, six to churches he visited and one to his friend Polycarp of Smyrna, whilst he was on his way to martyrdom in Rome. As bishop of Antioch he is concerned about the unity of the church and consequently focuses attention on false doctrines and the development of what was becoming "orthodox" tradition. A number of peculiar images referring to Christ emerge in his work, such as ἀρχεῖα (archive), θύρα (door), χαρακτήρ (stamp) and θυσιαστήριον (altar). This picturesque and vivid imagery is traced to his propensity for rhetoric, which, though Asian, bears resemblance to the Greek and Roman folkloric traditions.

The *Apaɛ* or the courthouse praise poetry of the Akan folkloric tradition is the vehicle that Afua Kuma employs to express her faith in Jesus. A crisis in Madam Kuma's life must have led her to fathom the depths of her traditional background and upbringing and this she feeds into her understanding of Jesus. In her poetry Jesus is imaged as *Adontehene*, *Benkumhene*, *Ɔkatakylie*, *Ɔkokodurufo*, *Okuruakwaban*, and *Adubasapɔn* and is made to perform all the functions associated with regal authority. She also shows awareness of modern political and social structures in these images.

This thesis shows that it is the fruit of the Christian imagination born in the context of praise and worship, which ought to feed and nourish academic theology so as to keep it in touch with the spiritual vitality experienced in the community of faith.

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I acknowledge the assistance that was offered me at the University of Ghana, Legon. I mention in particular the Balme Library and the library at the Institute of African Studies. I wish to express my profound gratitude to Dr. Akosua Anyidoho of the Department of Linguistics whose work furnished me with the background and life of Afua Kuma. It was Dr. Anyidoho who first introduced me to literature on the Akan folkloric tradition and further directed me to sources that have been of immense benefit to my work. I thank those who helped me to trace the etymology and function of some words used in the Akan text of Afua Kuma's book; Nana Addo Birinkorang, the *Apesemakahene* of the Akuapem Traditional Area, Rev. S.K. Aboa of the Bible Society of Ghana, and Mr. Kofi Agyekum of the Department of Linguistics, University of Ghana. I greatly appreciate the comments made by Prof. J.H. Nketia of the International Institute for African Music on the chapters on Afua Kuma, and Rev. Dr. D.N.A Kpobi of the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon who read the entire work. I am also grateful to Mr. John K. Asmah of the Photographic Unit of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana for making available to me pictures that were used as illustrations in this work. I should also mention the help of Ms. Korklu Laryea, the Assistant Librarian at Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre, through whose services I was enabled to derive the fullest benefit from Prof. Bediako's library.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

PREAMBLE

At the same time I learn that certain false teachers from a distance have been passing through your city; but ye stopped your ears and did not suffer them to sow the seeds of evil in you. For ye are stones of a temple, prepared for the building of God, hoisted up by the Cross of Christ, the Spirit being the rope and your faith the engine, while love is the way leading to God. Ye all take your part in the holy procession, bearing each his God and his Christ, his shrine and his sacred things, dressed in the festive robes of Christ's precepts, while I by letter am permitted to share your rejoicing and to congratulate you on your unalloyed love of God.¹

The foregoing is part of a letter from the second century written to the Church at Ephesus by Ignatius, bishop of Antioch. The text pictures a vivid scenario in which is portrayed members of the Ephesian church as if in a pagan religious procession carrying with them their "God", Jesus Christ and the votive offerings to the temple. Twenty centuries on, a saintly woman, Afua Kuma, captures in Christian worship the annual *Odwira* procession of the Akan with Jesus Christ being paraded in a palanquin as a chief (Fig. 4). For Afua Kuma it is Jesus that brings together the nations, and in his entourage can be found children, young men and women, strongmen and chiefs:

Amansanhene: Jesus the Arbitrator,
he who brings nations together.
Milk and honey flow in his veins.

Children rush to meet him;
crowds of young people
rush about to make him welcome.

Chief of young women:
they have strung a necklace of gold nuggets and beads,
and hung it around your neck.
So we go before you, shouting our praises, "Ose, Ose!"

Chief of young men:

they are covered with precious beads
and gold pendants worn by princes.
They follow you, playing musical instruments.

Chief of all strong men: *Ɔwesekramofohene*,
you have placed your royal sword
in our right hand,
and the flag of victory in our left hand,
while we lead you firing cannons.

Chief of all chiefs,
he says the chiefs are the
wise men of the land.
So let us bring our troubles there,
and let his judgement stand.
The one who lays his worries there
and says, "Lord, judge for me!"
is the only one that God can help;
God's wisdom sets him free.²

Christian history is replete with the celebrations of Jesus of Nazareth as these texts from the second century and modern Africa show. His life and work has influenced perhaps a large number of people not only within his own time, but also across the centuries. The entry of Jesus into the world especially beyond the Judeo-Palestinian borders and the sequel to this entry is acknowledged as a novelty unequalled in human history. Wherever he appeared his followers broke with the religious norms and traditions that hitherto had regulated their life and conduct. The new wave of spiritual fervour and vitality that was unleashed as a result of the preaching of the Gospel can only be described as phenomenal. T. R. Glover asserts that the impetus of the new movement can be traced not so much to an institution or the observance of religious rites and ceremonies as to the "mystic deeps of man's soul; ... spread by the preaching of the word, by simple, altogether natural and individual efforts; and flew,

like hallowed fire, from heart to heart, till all were purified and illuminated by it.”³ Conversion to a new faith as a concept, with the probable exception of the Greek philosophical schools, was alien to the existing religious traditions, and one can therefore appreciate the zeal with which the Empire clamped down on Christians to force them to conform to the *status quo*.

Nor is this experience limited only to second century Christianity. From the nineteenth century onwards Africa has been experiencing something similar as people turn to Jesus Christ as the result of the preaching of the Gospel. At the centre of this new religious turbulence and upheaval, as we have noted, is Jesus of Nazareth. It is only natural, therefore, that in attempting to unravel this phenomenon we should call upon those who were witnesses to Christ and who in diverse ways sought to relate their experience in their own contexts. It is pertinent to ascertain, therefore, how he was perceived and portrayed during these periods.

Second century Antioch and modern Africa⁴ are selected as the contexts within which we situate our discussion because they share certain common features so far as the transmission of the Gospel is concerned. Perhaps, apart from the second century, no other epoch of Christian history has witnessed a massive spread of the Christian faith as Africa. It is fair and prudent, therefore, that in our attempt to understand how people conceive and articulate their faith in Christ, we should focus on those Andrew Walls has described as “representative Christians.”⁵ Both St. Ignatius and Afua Kuma have been selected as representatives of these epochs of Christian history because they bear witness to what happens when Jesus is experienced for the first time in a new religious context.

The book of Acts gives an account of what happened when the Gospel crossed the Jewish frontier into Hellenistic territory; in Antioch of Pisidia and at Iconium Paul and his entourage engage not only Jews in the Synagogue but also Gentiles;⁶ in Lystra and in Athens the transition becomes even more pronounced with messages from the Apostles that give

indication that the centre of gravity of Christianity was beginning to shift from Jerusalem with its emphasis on the Jewish scriptures and practices of the Synagogue, to a more positive engagement with the religious heritage of Hellenistic peoples.⁷ The age of the Apostolic Fathers, however, makes further consolidation of this transposition from Jewish into new Graeco-Roman cultural spheres. This initial outburst of the Gospel, which saw the flowering of the Church in the second century, is a phenomenon to which people like Ignatius were called as witnesses. It is a period that has been described as the link between the New Testament and the formulation of the Church's orthodoxy.⁸ Ignatius, who has been celebrated as the most prolific of the Apostolic Fathers, however, provides more than just a link. His seven letters carry some of the ingredients that laid the foundation for the ultimate development of orthodoxy. In that sense he is more than just a mere witness of the apostolic tradition; Ignatius can be considered as an illustration of the Christian imagination in a new linguistic and cultural milieu. It is possible then to assess his contributions not only in terms of the development of dogma and the Episcopal tradition, but also in terms of his deep capacity to re-image Jesus Christ in the then new and growing milieu of Hellenistic Christianity. The Ignatian epistles carry vivid and graphic descriptions of Jesus as he understands him in the context of his Syrian cultural background. Afua Kuma on the other hand represents awareness among African Christians of the need to reconfigure their experience of Christ on the basis of their pre-Christian religious tradition. Madam Kuma's *Jesus of the deep forest*⁹ is, therefore, an authentic expression of the Akan Christian imagination in a context in which hitherto Christ has not been known. Both Ignatius and Afua Kuma, as shown in this work, witnessed to Jesus Christ in profound and picturesque imagery drawn from their respective Greek and Akan folkloric traditions. The images which are verbal expressions and, therefore, deal with language provide the vehicle by which Christ is conveyed. A large section of this present work will, therefore, be devoted to the study of how

the terms were used in the pre-Christian religious heritage and how they have been transformed in Christian usage.

By placing Afua Kuma alongside Ignatius we are afforded the opportunity of reading from the perspective of the twentieth century the Christian experience of the second century. Afua Kuma, therefore, provides us with the pair of eyes to reinterpret the experience of Ignatius. In that sense the second century material becomes an ancient analogue of the modern African experience, and that enables us to draw parallels between the two epochs of Christian history and to correlate the experiences. This furnishes us with the skills to make a valid and well-informed interpretation of the modern African experience and thus serves to illuminate the ancient material of the second century. The point must be made, however, that the African experience is credible enough to stand on its own without subjecting its fortunes to the second century church or more particularly the Western missionary enterprise, which in fact is only an episode so far as Africa is concerned. The African Christian story should be judged on its own merit and integrity “as a legitimate tributary of the general stream of Christian history”¹⁰ and not as a *tabula rasa* to be treated as though it were an exotic product bearing the label of something novel and foreign. Africa’s contribution to the Christian faith, however, goes beyond religious and intellectual thought. Her contribution is also to be witnessed in the praxis situations of Church-State relationship and how this impinges on the exigencies of life. Reflecting on the destiny of the Church in Africa, Sanneh is of the opinion that Africa offers lessons which the Churches in Europe and the West can hardly gloss over. He writes:

No one can miss the vitality of the religion in much of the continent. In spite of the strident forms of political nationalism that have followed the end of colonialism, the Church in Africa has continued to play an active role in national affairs, sometimes paying a heavy price for refusing to bow to political pressure. If it were nothing more than the carbon-copy of the Western Church, the African Church would have merged with the political state and become a defender of the status quo. For in many parts

of the West the Church has been thoroughly neutralised, its prophetic sting drawn by the effective encirclement of institutional political privilege, with a fate no better than the Church enjoys under Communist domination in the East. This fate has not for the most part overtaken the Churches in Africa, with notable exception of South Africa.¹¹

Lamin Sanneh has further argued that Africa's religious response to Christianity has been "clear and consistent enough to deserve serious attention" and by this he means that the history of African Christianity should be interpreted by making "reference to African religious models, with local African agency as an indispensable link in the historical chain of transmission."¹² We find in Afua Kuma one who provides this "indispensable link" in the African religious models.

What we seek to demonstrate is the fact that the phenomenon of Christian imagination regarding the person of Jesus Christ, though found in two different contexts and separated by twenty centuries, is one and the same. However, the experiences are unique and different. In that regard it is possible to think of the Christian faith as taking a distinctive stamp from the culture in which it seeks to inhabit and to describe it as "culturally infinitely translatable".¹³

Kwame Bediako's summary of these views is apposite:

From this perspective it becomes possible to see Christianity's various cycles of expansion into different cultural contexts in its history as so many cultural manifestations of incarnations of the faith. Each incarnation has been different and yet each has managed to preserve elements which unite them all as sharing in a common reality...¹⁴

MOTIVATION AND RATIONALE

My interest in this topic was ignited by a suggestion from Prof. Andrew Walls, who drew my attention to the dearth in the study of the portraiture of Jesus Christ, especially in the African context. This interest was further heightened by an observation of how Jesus is understood and portrayed within my Ga context of Southern Ghana. In music, sculpture, painting and generally in the aesthetic arts, we see the images of Christ freely expressed. In a

local fishing community the picture of Jesus is painted on the doors. Ghana's music industry has been inundated with a genre of Christian music, which is an adaptation of the rhythmic style of the popular Ghanaian secular "Highlife" music, with Jesus Christ as the central theme. In recent times most of the traditional folkloric songs, including the courthouse praise songs used in honour of chiefs, are being put to Christian use.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND BACKGROUND TO STUDY

Probably with the exception of Kwame Bediako's *Theology and Identity: The impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa*, not much study has been done in setting the second century Christian experience as analogue of the modern African experience. In *Theology and Identity*, Bediako argues that the concerns that occupied theologians in the second century on the question of Christian identity find expression in the writings of theologians in modern Africa. He contends that since the phenomenon of determining Christian identity is one and the same, it is possible to draw parallels and correlate the experiences of both contexts. The study of Christian imagination regarding the person of Jesus Christ has however proceeded on parallel lines. Howard Marshall's *The Origins of New Testament Christology*,¹⁵ surveys the broad range of titles and images of Christ in the New Testament era. His work is important because it gives insight into the origins of titles such as Messiah, Son of Man, Son of God, Lord, Last Adam, and Son of David used by the early Christians to express their faith in Jesus Christ. The survey enables us to know how such titles were used in the pre-Christian tradition, and affords us the opportunity to appreciate their use in the Christian context. Jean Daniélou's *Primitive Christian Symbols*,¹⁶ which focuses mainly on the Judeo-Christian tradition, draws attention to other metaphors and titles of Jesus. Anton Wessels' work, sub-titled, *How Jesus Is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures*¹⁷ gives an indication of how Christ is

understood and described in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Mugambi and Magesa (ed), *Jesus in African Christianity*¹⁸ and Robert Schreiter (ed) *Faces of Jesus in Africa*¹⁹ give an overview of how Jesus is imaged in Africa. In both books can be found Charles Nyamiti's article, which gives a very useful survey and analysis of recent African Christologies.²⁰ In that article Nyamiti observes that "with the exception, perhaps, of Black Christology in South Africa, none of the existing African Christologies has had any appreciable influence in the life of the African churches",²¹ and proceeds to adduce reasons why this is so. The preponderance of white theology, he argues, may be one probable cause, or the rudimentary nature of African theologies that are inadequate for the needs of the theological institutions. Part of the problem he blames on our inability to explore and utilize the "channels through which African Christologies could penetrate the churches." He then comes full circle when he notes: "All the Christologies described previously can be said to be systematic or academic: they are the result of a critical and systematic reflection on the mystery of Christ in the light of African realities." He, however, admits that other ways exist of doing theology other than the academic, and perhaps it is in the churches that we can find these theologies. He writes:

Indeed, if African theology is the understanding and presentation of the Christ-Event in accordance with African needs and mentality, then African Christologies must have existed since the beginning of evangelization on the Black continent (although mainly in a latent, oral and unsystematic form).²²

We cannot agree more with Nyamiti, for if indeed several Christologies abound in forms that are oral and unsystematic, then Afua Kuma's *Jesus of the deep forest* serves as an illustration of this fact and needs to be investigated.

THESIS FORMULATION AND ANALYSIS

THESIS

The second century phenomenon of the Christian imagination is analogous to that in modern Africa, and though the experiences differ it is possible to draw correlations between the two contexts to suggest that the phenomenon is one and the same.

ANALYSIS OF THESIS

Christ is one and the same person and yet the imagination of him in cultures in which he has inhabited has produced different portraits. The images of Christ from the second century experience of Ignatius are unique and bear the stamp of Hellenistic culture. These are different from the images we witness in the experience of a twentieth century African Christian like Afua Kuma. Do these images compromise or affirm the uniqueness of Christ? Is it possible to correlate these depictions of Christ and arrive at some common truths regarding his person? Is one image or set of images in one context adequate to describe him, and if this were possible what are the implications for the transmission of the gospel in different cultures? Is Christian imagination regarding the person of Jesus a once upon a time experience, or is it one that is capable of being repeated in other contexts? In essence, the argument that this thesis seeks to make is that the person of Jesus Christ is yet to be fully explored, and that when we have said all that we can about him, we still would not have reached the “full measure of the stature of Christ.” The discovery of new images in other cultures and situations throw more light and deepen our understanding of him.

The pertinent questions to guide the study are as follows:

1. What are the origins, nature and form of the images?
2. Are there pre-Christian roots or antecedents of the images and how were they used originally in the pre-Christian tradition?
3. How did the images shape Christian thought and how were they in turn affected?
4. What changes and forms have they assumed as a result of Christian impact?
5. How do the images of Christ in the second century inform and enhance our understanding of Christ in modern Africa, and how does the African experience illuminate second century Christian experience?
6. What is the significance of mother-tongue for the understanding of the Christian imagination?
7. What indications do the study of these images give for our understanding of the differences between oral theology and academic theology and what ought to be the link between them?
8. Of what significance is Christian imagination for the evolution and development of Christological thought?
9. What indications do these images give of the theological enterprise in modern Africa?
10. How do African images of Christ throw light on the issues, questions and formulations about Christ in the early church?

PROCEDURE

DELIMITATION OF STUDY

The scope of this dissertation is limited to the images of Christ in the published works of Ignatius of Antioch and Afua Kuma of Kwahu.



METHODOLOGY

The works of both Ignatius and Afua Kuma will be analysed in the contexts from which they derive. Parallels and correlations will then be drawn with the view to showing the relevance of one context for the other.

SOURCES

Two main sources will be used in this study; the Greek and English translations of the Epistles of Ignatius and the original Twi and English translation of Afua Kuma's *Jesus of the deep forest*. However, secondary sources that relate to their works will also be used. In the case of Afua Kuma an attempt will be made to use oral sources by means of interview.

RELEVANCE OF STUDY

This study is relevant because it shows that though the phenomenon of the Christian imagination is one and the same regardless of the context in which such imaginations occur, they give rise to different conceptions of Christ. These conceptions however, affirm the relevance of the doctrine of the Incarnation. The study also shows that this phenomenon, which is the fruit of the initial outburst when Christ enters any human experience, is important for our understanding of the relationship that should exist between "grassroots theology" and academic theology and the evolution of Christian doctrine. The importance of the study is also found in the way it relates to and creates space for further theological reflections on some of the non-traditional images of Jesus Christ, and subsequently furnishes the grounds for their absorption into the wider network of the theological enterprise.

GENERAL OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

Chapter one is a general introduction to the topic. An attempt is made to articulate the problem that is being investigated, the methods and procedures employed. The background and significance of Ignatius of Antioch is taken up in the **second chapter**, while in the **third** an attempt is made to see the images of Christ through the eyes of Ignatius. **Chapter four** surveys the background of Afua Kuma and her significance as a Christian, and in **chapter five** I focus attention on the images of Christ in Madam Kuma's *Jesus of the deep forest*. In the **concluding chapter** I attempt to weave the theological strands common to the second century and modern Africa in the works of both Ignatius and Afua Kuma.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹Ign. *Ephesians* IX cited in J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.52

² Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest: Prayers and Praises of Afua Kuma*, Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1980, pp. 23-25

³ T.R. Glover, *The Conflict of Religion in the Early Roman Empire*, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 8th ed., 1919, p. 159

⁴ I owe the use of the expression "modern Africa" to Kwame Bediako. See his *Theology and Identity: The impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa*, Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992, pp. 225ff. Bediako makes a distinction between Africa as known in the pre-Colonial and pre-Missionary eras and what he terms "modern Africa." He argues that the rather distorted image of Africa, which found its way into European scholarship dates back to the period of the slave trade. Missionary approach and attitude to the African heritage was subsequently shaped by this ethnocentrism. In the sense in which the term has been used in the title of this dissertation, Afua Kuma would be reckoned as a representative of the modern era in as much as she appropriates the largely ignored elements in the Akan tradition to articulate her faith in Jesus Christ.

⁵ See Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1996, p.23

⁶ See Acts 13-14

⁷ See Acts 14: 8-18; 17:16-34. It will be noticed that on both occasions in Lystra and in Athens hardly any reference is made to Jewish religious beliefs. The starting point has always been the religious traditions of the people. Whereas in the Synagogues of the Jews of the diaspora Paul would argue to prove that Jesus is the Christ, in Athens especially he introduces Jesus without using his personal name, but as a “man” God has appointed to judge the world in righteousness.

⁸ William Schoedel, "Theological Norms and Social Perspectives in Ignatius of Antioch", in E.P. Sanders (ed), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition: The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, Vol. 1, London: S.C.M. Press Ltd, 1980, p. 30

⁹ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest: Prayers and praises of Afua Kuma*, Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1981

¹⁰ Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity: The Religious Impact*, London: C. Hurst & Company, 1983, p.xvii

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 250

¹² *Ibid.*, p.xiv

¹³ Andrew Walls, “The Gospel as prisoner and liberator of culture”, cited in Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995, p.109

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Howard Marshall, *The Origins of New Testament Christology*, England: Apollos, 1976

¹⁶ Jean Daniélou, *Primitive Christian Symbols*, London: Burns and Oates, 1964

¹⁷ Anton Wessels, *Images of Jesus: How Jesus Is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.,1986

¹⁸ See J.N.K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (eds), *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and diversity in African Christology*, Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 1998

¹⁹ See Robert Schreiter (ed), *Faces of Jesus in Africa*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991

²⁰ See Charles Nyamiti, “African Christologies Today”, in J.N.K. Mugambi and Laurenti Magesa (eds), *Jesus in African Christianity: Experimentation and diversity in African Christology*, pp.17-39

²¹ *Ibid.*, 34

²² *Ibid.*, 35

CHAPTER 2

ST. IGNATIUS: THE MAKING OF A CHRISTIAN RHETORICIAN

INTRODUCTION

Ignatius, bishop of the church in Antioch (69-107AD) is reputed to be one of the most important of the Apostolic Fathers. Much of what is known about him come from letters he wrote to his friend Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna and six of the churches he visited whilst on his way to martyrdom in Rome. In this chapter we make a brief biographical sketch of his life and provide a background to his letters. We shall attempt to show that the notions expressed in his letters owe their origin to a brand of Syrian Christianity, which, though unique in its own style and form, also bears traces of Jewish and Hellenistic ideas. We select for investigation, Greek Rhetoric, a literary tradition that seemed to have influenced Ignatius' style of writing.

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Apart from what can be gleaned from his writings, the origins and early life of St. Ignatius are generally lost to posterity. From his own accounts we infer that he was probably brought up under pagan tutelage and must have adopted a youthful lifestyle which was completely at variance with the faith he was to receive later. We have indication of his conversion expressed in a typical Pauline notion, “an ἔκτρομα, a child untimely born to Christ”.¹ Another word, ἔσχατος (the last), which he uses of himself in his letter to the *Eph.* xxi 4, *Trall.* xiii 2, *Smyrn.* xi 1 give a hint about how he understood his call to be a Christian. J.B. Lightfoot understands this term to imply a “sense of inferiority” and which can be “explained by supposing that his conversion was comparatively late in date.”² This “sense of inferiority” is confirmed by Schoedel who catalogues a long list to buttress his claim of “Ignatius’ self-

effacement.”³ It has been suggested that this attitude of negative self-assessment on the part of Ignatius is probably due to the fact that he might have been a persecutor of the church, or an alien to the cause of Jesus Christ and the gospel.⁴

Ignatius, according to tradition, is the second of the Antiochene bishops. The probable date of his accession to the episcopate is about AD 69. The only authentic source regarding his martyrdom are his letters that give indication of the peace in the Antiochene church being disturbed. For reasons unknown to us he is arrested and taken to stand trial in Rome. Unlike St. Paul he goes to Rome not to make an appeal to the Emperor, but to receive the crown of a martyr. The date of his martyrdom is placed around AD107.⁵

THE WRITING OF THE EPISTLES

The Epistles of Ignatius viewed against the background of those written by Clement of Rome enables us to see a great transition, significant in terms of the socio-cultural and religious frontiers that separate Rome and Corinth on the one hand from Antioch and Asia Minor on the other hand. In Antioch of Syria, we enter a different religious and moral terrain where the influence of Greece and Rome begin to diminish and give way to the “fervour, the precipitancy, of oriental sentiment and feeling.”⁶ This change in religious temperament is easily noticeable in the epistles of Ignatius. Lightfoot finds Ignatius’ “impetuosity, fire, and headstrongness”, very compelling. L.W. Barnard observes that, “unlike the other Apostolic Fathers he lays bare his innermost thoughts and feelings.”⁷

Ignatius must have written his letters while on his way to martyrdom in Rome. He wrote four of these letters while staying with Polycarp in Smyrna. *Ephesians*, the *Magnesians* and the *Trallians* were written to churches whose delegates he had met while in Smyrna, and *Romans* was addressed to the Christian community with which he hoped to spend his last days. In *Romans* we find littered as in the others, thoughts of his approaching martyrdom,

while in the other three epistles he was concerned about doctrinal and ecclesiastical issues in the churches of Asia Minor. From Troas he wrote three letters, two of them addressed to the Churches in Philadelphia and Smyrna and the last one to Polycarp, bishop of Smryna. In interpreting and understanding Ignatius, Barnard cautions us to bear in mind the peculiar circumstances that occasioned the writing of the epistles. He draws attention to the fact that Ignatius was a condemned prisoner who was in the custody of Roman soldiers he often referred to as ten leopards, and at whose hands he suffered greatly.⁸ It is important to note therefore, that “Ignatius was not writing in the leisurely manner of the academic scholar.”⁹ In the letters we witness a passionate devotion to faith, a readiness to confront heresy and schism which are destructive of church life and orderliness. The ideas thus expressed may lack consistency and may be different from those expressed by systematic theologians who may find themselves in less arduous circumstances.

Ignatius would have been surprised, therefore, if he had been told that the letters he was writing were going to shape Christian thought and action several centuries later. Writing of letters as a means of communication was part of the Hellenistic culture at the time, and Ignatius had no alternative but to appropriate what was available to everyone else. William Schoedel notes that Ignatius is indebted to the conventions of the Hellenistic forms of letter writing, and that “comparisons of his salutations and farewells with those of Paul show that he is closer to Hellenistic practice than Paul and has modified the conventions in his own way.”¹⁰ It is important to note also that what later generations would regard as sources for theological reflections were written under very trying circumstances. The passion and eagerness, with which he looked forward to his death, was equally directed against the heresies and false teachings that threatened the unity and survival of the churches. His letters are, simply put, an expression of concern directed against the divisive elements in the

churches, while at the same time drawing attention to sound teaching that make for unity and orderliness. Paul Donahue sums up the situation thus:

Ignatius writes as a condemned prisoner on the way to execution, to churches confronting serious problems that disturb and divide them. He is primarily a pastor, not an apologist or a theologian, and his chief concerns as he writes are pastoral. He wants to help the churches to which he writes to come to grips with the problems which beset them, to help them overcome the divisions into opposing groups which theological differences have produced.¹¹

It is the considered opinion of J.N.D. Kelly that “the Apostolic Fathers appear as witnesses to the traditional faith rather than interpreters striving to understand it.”¹² The writings of the Apostolic Fathers are, therefore, considered as shedding light on the emergence of Christian identity and self-definition and thus providing the “link between the plastic religious categories of the New Testament and the authoritative theological utterances of a later period.”¹³ Ignatius’ writings, however, do more than merely provide a link. His letters are celebrated today as the only ones among the writings of the Apostolic Fathers which give “evidence of an interest in the formulation of authoritative theological views and which provide an unusually vivid picture of the considerations that had a bearing on such developments.”¹⁴

SOURCES OF INFLUENCE ON THE EPISTLES

In dealing with the life and background of Ignatius we must address the context that informed and shaped his ideas. L.W. Barnard identifies three strands in the Ignatian epistles which might have influenced his writings, and which we find helpful. The local situation, Antioch, which crystallised and shaped Ignatius’ formative period, is identified as one of the factors that influenced his theology. Although situated in a cosmopolitan setting, “Antioch’s Semitic and oriental character remained dominant.”¹⁵ Barnard notes that Ignatius is

“primarily a witness to a type of Syrian Christianity which was known and practised in Antioch in the early second century, to which he himself had contributed.” The use of imagery, for which Ignatius is chiefly noted, can be traced to Semitic and Oriental imagery, which have found their way into Christianity. In *Eph.* xvii.1 he speaks of “the evil odour of the doctrine of the Prince of this world.”¹⁶ In Ignatius we find imagery dealing with pagan worship, medicine, building construction, and music. The images are so vivid and striking that they surpass those found in the New Testament. Apart from the Syrian influence, there also existed in the local situation, the Greek influence. We can be very certain that the passion, which finds expression in Ignatius’ writings, was fuelled by a “stream of popular rhetoric that may be conveniently referred to as ‘Asianism’.”¹⁷

The second strand of influence that L.W. Barnard identifies, is Judaism and Gnosticism. In his letters to the Philadelphians and the Magnesians, Ignatius deals with the threat posed by Judaism and Docetism. Ignatius warns the Magnesians (viii.1) against “false doctrines and antiquated fable”¹⁸, and against those who deny the resurrection of Christ.¹⁹ It is most likely, as indicated in *Phil.*viii.2 that “the bishop confronted opponents in Philadelphia who worked with a Hellenistic-Jewish conception of the Scriptures (OT) as “archive”, and it is likely that Hellenistic-Judaism provided some of the background for docetic ideas.”²⁰ Much as in his writings we see him combating Gnostic ideas, it has been suggested that Ignatius himself to a large extent was influenced by an Iranian-Gnostic mythical redeemer. The argument used in support of this thesis is his concept of God as silence. Barnard takes the view that although Ignatius’ concept of God may be a result of his own mystical experience, we must still account for his use of terminology borrowed from contemporary speculation. His use of terms such as ‘pleroma’, ‘straining’ or ‘filtering’ may have been drawn from the religious context in which he lived; “But Ignatius, in taking over this early Gnostic vocabulary, gave it

a new content by his grasp of the reality of the Incarnation and the centrality of the work of Christ accomplished on the Cross.”²¹

The third influence comes by way of the Christian Tradition. His literary style suggests that he must have been dependent on St. Paul, and the clearest evidence of this is his use of 1 *Corinthians*. His strong aversion to Judaism is evidence that he might have been conversant with Matthew’s gospel or the tradition that gave rise to it. Ignatius’ use of the fourth gospel stands in doubt in spite of the fact that some of the ideas he expressed, for example, on the Eucharist bear resemblance to those of John. It is quite likely, as suggested by Barnard, that the ideas Ignatius holds in common with John’s gospel came as a result of “Johannine teaching, perhaps carried by oral tradition, which spread from Jerusalem to Antioch, where it has left its mark on the liturgical usage of the Syrian Church.”²² Robert Grant, however, arrives at a different conclusion when he notes that “there is no reason to suppose that Ignatius did not know the Pauline epistles and the gospels of Matthew and John.”²³ Grant goes further to explore the question of the relationship between Scripture and tradition in the letters of Ignatius. If at the time that he wrote his letters the various books of the New Testament were only beginning to emerge, then to what extent can we ascertain his reliance on Scripture or the tradition from which the books were eventually written? Grant suggests that it is not possible to make any clear-cut distinction between Scripture and tradition since there was the tendency during the second century to regard Scripture as tradition or for tradition to crystallise into Scripture. His conclusion on the matter is helpful:

If his basic ideas are traditional what can be said of the relation between scripture and tradition? Here we can only claim that, whatever may be the case in regard to other writers, we must say that for Ignatius, because of his early date, there is practically no difference between scripture and tradition. Indeed, it might be more accurate to say that in the one case where the question seems to come up, Ignatius favors tradition over scripture. Best of all, perhaps, would be to say that in his time the question had not been raised in any sense known to modern theologians. ²⁴

THE GREEK LITERARY TRADITION AND IGNATIUS' RHETORIC

The beginnings of Greek rhetoric are traced to Homer. This is evidenced in the oratory of Nestor, Menelaus and Odysseus. Rhetoric, however, as a tradition developed long before the Rhetoricians. The art of public speech, it is believed, was conditioned by the “social and political needs in the fifth-century democracies of Syracuse and Athens.”²⁵ The Sicilians and Corax were noted for forensic speaking and the use of probability in exaggerating or underplaying facts and arguments. In Gorgias we see the merging of the “native Athenian tradition of political oratory” with the new style.²⁶

Attic oratory developed as a result of “individual genius” and “political stimulus.” To cope with the stringent social and political demands of life, these individuals turned to the speechwriters or whatever teachings they came across. Isocrates, whose speeches were used by litigants, is noted particularly for his achievement in driving the literary and rhetorical tradition towards an educational ideal around 390B.C. His works, which had a moral tone, were distinct from the teachings of the Sophists and Plato. Prior to this, the rhetoric tradition was amoral. Aristotle, a disciple of Plato, produced a rhetoric based on three main topics, namely the theory of rhetorical argument, “the state of the mind of the audience and the ways of appealing to their prejudices and emotions”, and style. The third topic had substantial and valuable discussions of metaphor. Greek Rhetoric became the educational vehicle for the transmission of Greek Culture.

“Asianism”, the rhetoric associated with Ignatius, was viewed with suspicion by the purists as “ a scholastic and perversely ingenious mannerism.”²⁷ It was a rhetoric that exuded passion and emotion. Its diction was unusual and the sentences were generally in parallel construction. It was also common to find various figures of speech such as metaphor and hyperbole. Ignatius' letters are replete with these features of Asianic rhetoric, and often they

“seem, exaggerated under the impact of the bishop’s religious fervor and his impassioned reflections on the significance of his impending martyrdom.”²⁸

Ignatius’ use of imagery in particular reflects the Hellenistic world, and the Gnostic element in them is often stretched to accommodate Gnostic elements and thought. Ignatius shows in his work that he was quite familiar with Greek proverbs and very much acquainted with the standard rhetorical themes, and this is clearly evidenced in his notions of unity, which finds space in the works of orators. The word “one”, for instance appears some ten times in his letter to the Magnesians:

As the Lord Jesus did nothing without the Father; so must ye do nothing without your bishop and presbyters. Let no man study any private ends; but let there be one common prayer, one common mind, one common hope. Jesus Christ is one: be ye therefore one. Gather yourselves together as to one Temple, even God; as to one Altar, even Jesus Christ, who came forth from One and is in One, and returned to One, even the Father.²⁹

Schoedel suggests that Ignatius’ love for compounds of words allows him to create such terms like *ιεραφόροι* (bearers of sacred things), *ἀγιοφόροι* (bearers of holy things), *θεοφόροι* (bearers of God), *ναοφόροι* (shrine bearers) and *χριστοφόρος* (bearer of Christ).³⁰ In *Phil.* viii 4, we find *χριστὸς* as a prefix in the word *χριστομαθία* and *χριστονόμος*. Ignatius is doubtless drawing from Greek and Roman rhetoric, which allows the formation of compounds of words, to convey his image of Christ. These influences coming from two sources, namely from Hellenistic religious tradition and from Greek rhetorical tradition, are employed to express his images of Christ.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to briefly explore the life and background of St. Ignatius, both as a Christian and bishop of Antioch. We noted that the only sources that help us map out his

life are those contained in his letters. But they are sources which exhibit passion, zeal, courage, and the fiery emotions absent in academic writings, but which are nevertheless needed if we must probe not only into the mind of the writer but his heart as well. His inner drive coupled with his background as a Syrian may probably help to explain his frequent use of images for which he has no parallel among his contemporaries.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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² Ibid.

³ William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch- A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1985, p.13

⁴ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 1: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp p.28

⁵ Cf. William Smith and Henry Wace (eds), *A Dictionary of Christian Biography, Literature, Sects and Doctrines; during the First Eight Centuries being a continuation of 'the Dictionary of The Bible.'* Vol.III, London: John Murray, 1882. Smith and Wace give Ignatius' accession to the episcopate as 70AD and note that Ignatius suffered "under a merely local persecution." (p.215)

⁶ Ibid., p.1

⁷ L.W. Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and their Background*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966, p.19

⁸ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 1: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.35ff

⁹ L.W. Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and their Background*, p.17

¹⁰ William Schoedel, "Theological Norms and Social Perspectives in Ignatius of Antioch", in E.P. Sanders (ed), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition: The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, Vol. 1. London: S.C.M. Press Ltd, (1980), p.47

¹¹ Paul Donahue, "Jewish Christianity in the letters of Ignatius of Antioch", *Vigiliae Christianae* 32, 1978, p.81

¹² J.N.D. Kelly, *Early Christian Doctrines*, London: A.& C. Black, (4th edition), 1968, p.90

¹³ William Schoedel, "Theological Norms and Social Perspectives in Ignatius of Antioch", p.30

¹⁴ Ibid., p.30

¹⁵ L.W. Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and their Background*, p.21

¹⁶ Ibid., p.22

¹⁷ William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch- A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, p.8

¹⁸ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp p.124

¹⁹ Ibid., p.128

²⁰ William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch- A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, p.17

²¹ L.W. Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and their Background*, p. 27

²² *Ibid.*, p.29

²³ Robert M. Grant, *After the New Testament*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967, p. 43

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.52

²⁵ D.A. Russell, "Rhetoric, Greek," *The Oxford Classical Dictionary* (2d ed.; Oxford: Clarendon, 1970) p.920

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.921

²⁸ William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch- A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, p.8

²⁹ Ignatius, *Magnesians* vii, cited in J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp p.121

³⁰ William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch- A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, p.67

CHAPTER 3

IMAGES OF JESUS THROUGH THE EYES OF ST. IGNATIUS OF ANTIOCH

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps apart from the Shepherd of Hermas, it is St. Ignatius of Antioch who is noted to have employed images and metaphors in his writings more than any of his contemporaries, and nowhere is this feature more prominent than in his portrayal of Jesus. So vivid and picturesque are these images that sometimes they are disproportionate to the ideas they are made to carry. How did Ignatius portray Jesus? Did these images have pre-Christian roots? How were these images and metaphors used in the pre-Christian religious tradition and what issues were these images intended to address? These are some of the questions that we shall attempt to answer in this chapter.

JESUS AS THE ἀρχεῖα (ARCHIVE)

One of the central themes in the Ignatian epistles is the subject of unity. The means Ignatius adopted to promote this ideal was to confront sectarian spirit and to fight heresy. In the passage that follows he is confronted by a group in Philadelphia on a subject that bordered on the Old Testament scriptures and the authenticity of the gospel:

I therefore did my best to promote union. Where dissension is, there God has no dwelling place. Now the Lord will forgive all who repent and return to the unity of God and to fellowship with the bishop. I have faith in the grace of Christ, who will shake off your chains; but I exhort you to do nothing in a sectarian spirit. I heard some persons saying I will not believe it, unless I find it in the charters. I said to them, It is so written. They answered, You are begging the question. But to me the charter, the inviolable charter, is Jesus Christ and His Cross, His Death and Ascension, and faith through Him. In these I hope to be justified through your prayers.¹

The statement, “I will not believe it, unless I find it in the charters” has been subjected to various interpretations. The word ἀρχεῖα translated charter is the subject of controversy. While his opponents pointed to the charter as the authentic source by which all other sources are judged, Ignatius contended that Christ himself is the charter. It is important to establish the origin and meaning of the word ἀρχεῖα as used in the context. The word as suggested by Lightfoot signifies originally “the government house” or “the magistrates office.”² The word was later on understood to mean the documents or the material holdings, as distinct from the place in which they are kept, so that at times it was difficult separating one meaning from the other. But how are we to understand the word in the context used by Ignatius? Lightfoot’s insight is helpful:

The opponents of Ignatius refuse to defer to any modern writings, whether Gospels or Epistles, as a standard of truth; they will submit only to such documents as have been preserved in the archives of the Jews, or in other words, only to the Old Testament Scriptures. Thus the ἀρχεῖα and the εὐαγγέλιον are opposed as the Old Testament and the New...³

Lightfoot, however, cites a completely different interpretation which suggests that ἀρχεῖα refers to the “original autographs of authentic MSS of the Evangelical writings” which stands in contrast to the gospel written at the time of Ignatius.⁴ By this interpretation his opponents seem to be suggesting that the true evangelical Gospel has been corrupted. Lightfoot has, however, argued that this type of interpretation is unsuited for the age of the Judaizers. Another reading seems to suggest that Ignatius’ opponents meant that unless they find it in the archives, that is the gospel, they would not believe it. The basis for this argument is that the opponents of Ignatius consider the original documents of the New Testament as sources of the true gospel. William Schoedel takes the view that, “any lingering doubt as to whether “archives” can mean the Scriptures (OT) is set aside by the curiously neglected parallel provided by Josephus.”⁵ In Josephus there is evidence that the word refers to the Old

Testament Scriptures. In his *Contra Apionem* the Jewish historian treats the Hebrew Scriptures as literary phenomena parallel to the public records of the Greeks and of the societies of the Ancient Near East. But public records in Josephus' writing actually refer to archives and this is confirmed by his use of the word 'archive', in relation to the Phoenician records. If public records are archives we must move to the next step and establish what these Jewish archives really are.

In *Contra Apionem*⁶ Josephus indicates that the keeping of ἀναγραφάς (records) was a duty assigned to chief priests and prophets, who kept the Jewish pedigree and genealogical records especially in cases of marriage where it becomes necessary to establish one's background. He as priest could trace his own pedigree because of the faithfulness on the part of the priests who kept the records for over two thousand years. But the Jewish archives were simply more than the history of the priesthood. Josephus makes reference to twenty-two books that contain the record of all time, supposed to have been written by prophets including Moses under the divine inspiration and guidance of God.⁷ He argues that these are the Jewish scriptures, which have been meticulously kept by the priests, and therefore were free from the inconsistencies and the contradictions that often characterise other ancient records, such as those of the Greeks. The Jewish archives then comprise not only records of the priestly lineage, but also the biblical books of the Old Testament, the emphasis, however, being placed on the latter. Josephus is not the only Jew who regarded the Scriptures as archives. Philo refers to the Old Testament books as records or sacred records, and makes a distinction between "the historical part of Scripture as distinguished from legislation and the account of creation."⁸ Therefore in the writings of both Josephus and Philo there is strong indication that the Jewish records or archives contain the Old Testament scriptures.

Going by the usual interpretation of the Ignatian text under discussion, it would appear that both parties to the dispute appeal to the Old Testament Scriptures as the archives with the

opponents of Ignatius making demands on him to prove his case on the basis of the Jewish Scriptures. Ignatius' response to the effect that the tenets of the Gospel are rooted in the Old Testament tradition was not enough to convince them. To his opponents, Ignatius was begging the question, because the point at issue was not what was written, but in fact whether one can actually prove his point from what is written. It is within the context of this dispute that "Ignatius appeals to an even higher authority."⁹ The cross of Christ, his death and resurrection constitute for Ignatius, the "inviolable archives", and it is upon the basis of these tenets that he hoped to be justified. The new dimension brought into the argument by Ignatius was bound to create some difficulties for these Docetic Judaizers for whom the cross of Christ was anathema, and who had rejected the reality of the death and resurrection of Christ. To argue, therefore, as Ignatius did that the cross, death and resurrection of Jesus are the inviolable archives was unacceptable to the Judaizers. The word ἄθικτα (inviolable) used by Ignatius to qualify archives is reckoned as "an appropriate epithet of ἀρχεῖα, being used especially of sacrosanct places and things."¹⁰ The image of Jesus Christ that Ignatius sought to portray is quite clear. Jesus Christ, for him, represents the new and inviolable archives. In doing this, Ignatius takes a notion that was already present in Jewish categories of thought and fills it with new meaning and content. The archive, for the Jews, was an invaluable treasure representing not only their pre-Christian religious tradition, but also their cultural heritage. To claim that Jesus represents the true and inviolable archive is to place him within the very centre of Jewish life and thought. By so doing Ignatius succeeded in shifting the debate from the realms of religious, social, and political institutions and events to a person about whom these institutions and events testify.

In one of his encounters with the Jews, Jesus Christ drew attention to the Scriptures and argued that the Jews search the scriptures, because they think that in them they have eternal life, and yet it is the Scriptures that bear witness to him, yet they refuse to come to him that

they may have life.¹¹ If we understand the Scriptures in this sense to mean the Jewish archives, then Jesus' claim has far reaching implications. It is in this light that we should see Ignatius' description of Jesus as the archive. Interestingly enough it is the new dimension of the Christ event- cross, death, resurrection - introduced by Ignatius into the debate that stands in marked contrast to Jewish notions of history and religion.

CHRIST AS THE $\theta\acute{\upsilon}\rho\alpha$ (DOOR) OF THE FATHER

The priests deserve respect, I allow; but much more the High priest. He alone is entrusted with the holiest things of all, the hidden mysteries of God, *He Himself is that door of the Father, through whom patriarchs and prophets and apostles and the whole Church must alike enter into the unity of God*, But the Gospel has the pre-eminence in that it sets forth the advent, the passion, the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The prophets indeed foretold Him; but the Gospel is the crown and completion of immortality. All things together are good, if your faith is joined with love.¹² (emphasis mine)

In his letter to the Philadelphians, Ignatius uses the metaphor $\theta\acute{\upsilon}\rho\alpha$ (door) to describe, not only Jesus' entry into the presence-chamber, but the person of Jesus Christ himself.¹³ In that passage he compares Jesus to the high priest and makes the assertion that it is through him (Christ) as door to the Father that the patriarchs, prophets and apostles and the whole Church enter into the unity of God. The image has parallels in the New Testament and some early sources, and as conjectured by Schoedel it "may well have been prompted by Ps. 117:20 LXX."¹⁴ If, as the background of Ignatius indicates, he has been exposed to the Johannine tradition, then it is most likely that the choice of this image may have been influenced by it. It is likely, therefore, that Jesus' claim in the following passage is what has been alluded to in Ignatius' letter:

Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not heed them. I am the door; if any one enters by me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture.¹⁵

William Barclay's commentary on the passage gives a useful hint on the image in question. He talks about two types of sheepfold with different entrances to the sheep. There is that sheepfold with an entrance "protected by a strong door of which only the guardian of the door held the key",¹⁶ and another type of sheepfold enclosed a wall without any door of any kind. In this case it was the shepherd himself that lay across the opening of the entrance at night. The shepherd in this sense was literally the door to the sheep. If the metaphor is understood to mean access to, or opportunity for, then the picture becomes clearer when viewed against the background of those who enter. The patriarchs, priests and prophets constitute the religious and historical tradition of the Jews, while the apostles and the church represent the new people of God. The opportunity that God provides for the entire human race can be accessed only through Christ as door to the Father. It is the same meaning that we see employed in the writings of Clement of Alexandria:

"For I am," He says, "the door," which we who desire to understand God must discover, that He may throw heaven's gates wide open to us. For the gates of the Word being intellectual, are opened by the key of faith. No one knows God but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal Him. And I know well that He who has opened the door hitherto shut, will afterwards reveal what is within; and will show what we could not have known before, had we not entered in by Christ, through whom alone God is beheld.¹⁷

In the message to the church in Philadelphia (Rev.3.8), there is a promise of an open door, an apparent use of the metaphor, and in the allegory of the Shepherd of Hermas there is an exhortation to those who glory in their wealth to give heed to the groans of the needy or else they risk being "shut out with all your goods beyond the gate of the tower."¹⁸ In his letter, Ignatius underscores the meaning implied in the metaphor by setting the Gospel alongside the

whole of the Jewish religious tradition and stressing its pre-eminence which consists in the significance of the three-fold event of the advent, the passion and the resurrection.

JESUS CHRIST AS THE UNERRING MOUTHPIECE OF GOD

I no longer wish to live, as men count life. I entreat you to fulfil my desire, that God may fulfil yours. I have written briefly to this effect; but Christ, the unerring mouth-piece of the Father, will show you that I speak the truth. Pray for me, that I may succeed. I write not this after the flesh, but after the will of God. If I suffer, it is your favour; if I am rejected as unworthy, it is your hatred.¹⁹

It is most likely that if Ignatius was influenced by the Gospel of John or the tradition from which it was written, we may have grounds to suggest that this section of his letter alludes to Jesus' own testimony as the spokesman of God:

Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own authority; but the Father who dwells in me does his works...He who does not love me does not keep my words; and the word which you hear is not mine but the Father's who sent me.²⁰

As noted by Lightfoot the letter to the Romans "is a passionate cry for martyrdom." Ignatius entertained the fear that his death sentence might be commuted to a lesser one for which he was not prepared. For him, "Martyrdom is the new birth, is the true life, is the pure light. Martyrdom is the complete discipleship, the final enfranchisement", and nothing should stop him from obtaining this crown.²¹ In his eagerness to convince the Romans of the truth of his convictions, he appeals to Christ who himself is an infallible witness and genuine representative of the truth of the Father. Ignatius thus invokes an image of Christ as mouthpiece of God, a notion that occurs in the early period and seemed to have acquired mythological overtones. Like the term 'Word', Ignatius has used the image apparently to

make a distinction between his own truth-telling and the truth that Jesus imparts by virtue of his special relationship with the Father. The word φανέρωσις which translates mouthpiece also means a revealing, making manifest or disclosing.²² Schoedel disagrees with Bartsch who seeks to give a Gnostic interpretation of ‘mouth’ as an aeon emanation standing between the Father and the Word within the divine pleroma.²³ The image of Christ as mouthpiece of the Father leads us on to a similar one to which we now turn.

JESUS CHRIST AS λόγος (WORD) ISSUED FORTH FROM σιγή (SILENCE)

Be not seduced by false doctrines and antiquated fables. If we still live after the manner of Judaism, we avow that we have not received grace. Yes, the holy prophets themselves lived a life after Christ. For this they were persecuted, being inspired by His grace, that so in the time to come unbelievers might be convinced that there is one God who manifested Himself through His Son Jesus Christ, His Word that issued forth from silence and did the will of the Father in all things.²⁴

We have had opportunity to suggest elsewhere that since Ignatius came into contact with the Gospel of John or its tradition, it is likely that he came under its influence. In this passage, which forms part of his letter to the Magnesians, we see an indication of this influence. The passage before us may well have antecedents in the Johannine prologue, but a Gnostic reading cannot be ruled out. In this passage Ignatius describes Jesus Christ as the λόγος (Word) issued forth from σιγῆς (silence). Lightfoot observes that σιγή and λόγος are correlative terms, λόγος implying a previous σιγή, and accords with the idea of the period before the incarnation as the silence of God.²⁵ This picture-language of silence followed by a disclosure or a break in silence is very much in keeping with the style of Ignatius. Lightfoot is opposed to a Gnostic interpretation, which suggests that the ‘procession from silence’ refers to the Divine generation of the Word. He argues that such interpretation does not accord with

the language of Ignatius. In Ignatius, λόγος implies the manifestation of Deity whether in his words or His works and therefore the “expression ‘proceeding from silence’ might be used at any point where there is a sudden transition from non-manifestation to manifestation.”²⁶ This is the sense in which the expression is used in *Wisdom* 18: 14-15, and refers to the Incarnation as the manifestation of God through his word. This interpretation, argues Lightfoot, agrees with the interpretation of parallel passages like *Eph.* xix and *Rom.*vii.

These interpretations notwithstanding, we need to probe further the whole notion of σιγή (silence), which is a key concept in Ignatius. The concept of God as silence is evidenced in three of Ignatius’ letters; *Magn.* viii: 2, *Eph.* xix.1 and *Rom.* viii.2. God’s silence is only broken by the revelation or manifestation of his Word. L.W. Barnard offers solutions to the origins of the concept of silence in Ignatius. He suggests that it is quite possible the idea might have stemmed from Ignatius’ own mystical experience. However, he is of the opinion that Ignatius owes the use of the term to contemporary speculation. The idea occurs in Valentinianism and in Greek cosmological speculation. In the Magical Papyri the incorruptible God is symbolised by silence. In Gregory Nazianzen σιγή is given space in the magical art of Simon Magus, Cerinthus and others. In Valentinian speculation, believed to have been borrowed from earlier Gnostics, Bythos and Sige gave birth to the aeons Nous and Aletheia who in turn gave birth to Logos and Zoe. In Valentinian thought σιγή is therefore the mother of all the aeons.²⁷

The image of God as silence and Jesus as the word emanating from God helps us to appreciate the profundity of the mystery of the Incarnation. For Ignatius, God is not only Father who reaches out to humankind; his very existence and nature are *sui generis* and lie in silence and stillness beyond any human comprehension.²⁸ It is in silence that the real meaning of a person lies and so when God broke this silence and issued forth his Word made manifest

in his Son we were ushered into the very being of God. In other words the being of God shrouded in utter silence is made manifest in his spoken Word, his Son Jesus Christ.

IMAGES OF JESUS FROM BUILDING CONSTRUCTION AND PAGAN RELIGIOUS PROCESSION

At the same time I learn that certain false teachers from a distance have been passing through your city; but ye stopped your ears and did not suffer them to sow the seeds of evil in you. For ye are stones of a temple, prepared for the building of God, hoisted up by the Cross of Christ, the Spirit being the rope and your faith the engine, while love is the way leading to God. Ye all take your part in the holy procession, bearing each his God and his Christ, his shrine and his sacred things, dressed in the festive robes of Christ's precepts, while I by letter am permitted to share your rejoicing and to congratulate you on your unalloyed love of God.²⁹

Two different metaphors are employed in this letter to the Ephesians, namely images drawn from building construction and images from pagan religious procession. In the building metaphor he likens the members of the church to the building blocks, which are hoisted up or carried up by a crane, which is the cross of Christ. For Ignatius the rope is the Holy Spirit and the faith of the members is the engine. Ignatius' imagery of the building of the temple should be placed within the overall Christian tradition found in the Pauline epistles and in 1Pet. 2.³⁰ In these passages Christ is presented as the Cornerstone. In Ignatius, some details of the building process are employed with the introduction of images like the *μηχανῆς* (crane) likened to the cross of Christ. The crane metaphor finds expression also in Gnostic thought. Schoedel observes that these ideas "illuminated the description of the cross as a 'crane of salvation'", an idea present in semi-gnosticism.³¹ It is important to note that in Ignatius the crane has been used to image the cross on which Jesus hanged and not his person necessarily. The cross, however, is significant since it indicates the work done by virtue of Jesus' death.

If in the first metaphor he likens the members of the Ephesian church to building stones, then in the second metaphor Ignatius paints a vivid picture of the members of the church “bearing each his God and his Christ, his shrine and his sacred things, dressed in the festive robes of Christ’s precepts.” Certainly, this language is drawn from the Greek pagan procession in which the pilgrims carry religious objects such as miniature temples, sacred vessels or emblems, a statue of a god as a model of a shrine. Lightfoot is of the view that Ignatius’ use of this imagery would have been sharpened by the vividness with which it was celebrated in honour of the goddess Artemis.³² In that religious procession, the treasures belonging to the temple of Artemis were solemnly borne in procession into the city by one road and taken back by another at stated times. An instance of such religious procession is given during the reign of the Emperor Trajan. Gaius Salutaris, a prominent Roman citizen of Ephesus is reported to have given to the temple of Artemis a number of gold and silver ornaments. These were mainly images of the goddess Artemis herself, and others representing the Roman Senate. Gaius instituted an endowment for the maintenance and upkeep of the images. He ordered that the images should be carried on a solemn procession by the curators of the temple, the victors, and other officers. Lightfoot observes that such religious processions were a common feature of Hellenistic society, and were held in honour of the gods. Ignatius’ choice of this metaphor was meant to draw attention to a familiar picture and to “speak with more than common directness to the imagination of his Ephesian readers.”³³ Schoedel notes that the symbolism of the language evidenced in this Ignatian text is also known to other pagan writers. In Philo, for instance, the idea expressed by the use of the image is that the “Jews carry the commandments in their souls, as the pagans bear the images of their gods on their shoulders.”³⁴ Certainly Ignatius had this idea at the back of his mind when he wrote to the Ephesians. Lightfoot intimates that in “alluding to these pagan festivals, he tells them that as Christians they all alike are priests and victors, for they carry,

not in their hands, as the votaries of Artemis carry their images and treasures, but in their hearts, each his god, his Christ, his shrine.”³⁵

THE IMAGE OF JESUS AS “GOD” IN THE TEMPLE OF GOD

In his letter to the Ephesians Ignatius reminds them that they are the temple of God in which Jesus Christ dwells.³⁶ In yet another passage he gives warning to his readers regarding the desecration of God’s temple:

Be not deceived. To violate the house of God is to forfeit the kingdom of heaven. If those who desecrated the temple of their bodies were punished with death, the temple of the faith, what fate must await such as defile the temple of the faith, for which Christ died? They are filthy indeed, and will go into unquenchable fire- they and their disciples.³⁷

The picture we get unfolding, as suggested by Lightfoot, is that Christ is “the God of the spiritual temple in which he dwells, just as the image is the god of the material shrine in which it is placed.”³⁸ The language is typically Pauline, and is drawn from the first epistle to the Corinthians:

Don’t you know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy him. For God’s temple is holy, and that temple you are.³⁹

The Greek word οἰκοφθόρος, which translates “violation of the house of God”, commonly refers to the squandering of property, but it also means ruining a house. From the previous section we noticed that the temples of the pagan gods were richly decorated with gold and silver ornaments, and endowments were set up for their upkeep. In Acts 19 we have reference to an institution of craftsmen whose business it was to mould such images for sale to worshippers at the shrine. In Acts 19:37 we get the impression that sacrilegious acts against the gods also involve ruining the temples or robbing them of the sacred things.⁴⁰ It would

appear that in Greek pagan religion there were frequent robberies of the temple of the gods, acts that were considered sacrilegious. It is this idea of sacrilege, present in Paul that finds expression also in Ignatius. J.B. Lightfoot makes a distinction between the Pauline use of the Greek word οἰκοφθόρος and its classical usage.⁴¹ In St. Paul, “it denotes those who violate the temple of their hearts and bodies, which is God’s house, by evil thoughts or evil habits.”⁴² As already indicated the word in classical Greek “commonly refer to the squandering of property.” It is interesting to note that both in Paul and Ignatius, sacrilege has been given a moral dimension and reinvested with a new meaning. Herein lies an example of the conversion and transposition of a word from its traditional form to Christian usage. Whereas in classical usage sacrilege denotes offence against the god whose shrine was burgled, the new meaning employed by its Christian usage suggests an act against God, but which is also detrimental to one’s own body.

THE IMAGE OF JESUS AND MUSICAL METAPHORS

In his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius takes us to the world of music and uses its metaphors to discuss the unity of the church in relation to Jesus Christ:

Act in concert with your bishop, as you are now doing. Your presbytery stands in the same relation to the bishop, as the strings to the lyre. *The theme of your song is Jesus Christ.* The several members of the Church will form the choir. God will give the scale. Thus one harmonious strain will rise up from all and reach the ears of the Father. He will recognise your good deeds; and by your union among yourselves you will unite yourselves with him.⁴³(my emphasis)

In writing on the harmony that should exist between the bishop and his elders, Ignatius draws attention to the instrument κιθάρα (cithare) and its χορδαί (strings). κιθάρα is an elaborate form of a lyre, but it is also used as an image expressing harmony and concord of the cosmos.

In Clement of Alexandria the language is drawn from the story of David and his relationship with Saul to express the harmony of the human individual:

And he who is of David, and yet before him, the Word of God, despising the lyre and harp, which are but lifeless instruments, and having tuned by the Holy Spirit the universe, and especially man, - who, composed of body and soul, is a universe in miniature, - makes melody to God on this instrument of many tones; and to this instrument - I mean man - he sings accordant: "For thou art my harp, and pipe, and temple."⁴⁴

The other musical term Ignatius mentions is the $\chi\rho\omega\mu\alpha$ (scale), from which is derived the chromatic scale, and which "designated an interval between two full tones."⁴⁵ Musical instruments by themselves alone, however, do not make melody or harmony unless a choir and conductor are present. For Ignatius the choir is the congregation, God is the conductor who gives the $\chi\rho\omega\mu\alpha$ (scale) and Jesus Christ is the theme of the song. The notion that Christ is Song is present in Clement of Alexandria:

Well, inasmuch as the Word was from the first, He was and is the divine source of all things; but inasmuch as He has now assumed the name Christ, consecrated of old, and worthy of power, he has been called by me the New Song.⁴⁶

The context of Clement's idea is a discussion on how the Christ event produces harmony in the universe. We may, however, wish to stretch the musical metaphor to its logical conclusion by exploring the type of singing Ignatius had in mind. Socrates, the Church historian, relates an incident in which Ignatius saw a vision of angels praising the Trinity in antiphonal hymns, and this he believed Ignatius left as a tradition to the church.⁴⁷ J.B. Lightfoot, however, asserts that antiphonal singing was in vogue long before the Christian advent. He notes; "It existed already among the heathen in the arrangements of the Greek chorus", and "was practiced with much elaboration of detail in the psalmody of the Jews."⁴⁸

We may therefore conjecture that the type of singing Ignatius had in mind was antiphonal singing.

The notion that Christ is himself the song that is sung is interesting. The language employed by Ignatius suggests that the unity of the church is achieved as Christ is sung. In stretching the metaphor to its logical conclusion we may well consider what it is about Christ that is sung and which fosters the unity of the church. There is evidence to suggest that some of the doctrines of the early church were developed in the context of worship. The New Testament epistles to the Philippians, Colossians, and Timothy record some of the earliest christological hymns.⁴⁹ If, as we have noted, Ignatius was opposed to Judaism, then we can begin to see how he took over Jewish antiphonal singing and filled it with new content and meaning.

JESUS CHRIST AS ΘΥΣΙΑΣΤΗΡΙΟΝ (ALTAR)

As the Lord Jesus did nothing without the Father, so must ye do nothing without your bishop and presbyters. Let no man study any private ends; but let there be one common prayer, one common mind, one common hope. Jesus Christ is one; be ye therefore one. *Gather yourselves together as to one Temple, even God; as to one Altar, even Jesus Christ, who came forth from One and is in One, and returned to One, even the Father.*⁵⁰ (my emphasis)

In his letter to the Magnesians the image that Ignatius uses to express Christ is *θυσιαστήριον* (altar). But this is used in the context of God being the *ναός* (shrine or temple). The image of Christ as altar is significant because the altar constitutes the single most important structure in the Jewish sacrificial system. It was on the altar that sacrifices and offerings were made to God, and thus provided the access for intimacy and interaction between the worshipper and God. The use of altar in religious ceremonies is prevalent in almost all religions. It was in Athens that Paul saw an altar with the inscription, “To an

unknown God.” (Acts 17:23) In Israel, however, cultic practice was centralised and that meant that it was only in one place, the temple in Jerusalem, that sacrifices could be made, and only on one altar. In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Clement of Rome employs this imagery in dealing with the question of maintaining orderliness in the church:

Not in every place, brethren, are the daily sacrifices offered, or the peace-offerings, or the sin-offerings and the trespass-offerings, but in Jerusalem only. And even there they are not offered in any place, but only at the altar before the temple, that which is offered being first carefully examined by the high priest and the ministers already mentioned. Those, therefore, who do anything beyond that which is agreeable to His will, are punished with death.⁵¹

In Ignatius the metaphor on the unity of God and Christ has been heightened to deal with any threat of sectarianism, by way of false doctrine, that threatened the unity of the church. The use of such metaphor would have been familiar to the Judaizers who posed a threat to the Christian faith. It is important to note that Ignatius was writing at a time when the church in Magnesia was under threat of heresy, the kind described by Lightfoot as “Docetic Judaism,” which questions the authenticity of the birth, passion, and resurrection of Christ.⁵² Ignatius seems to base his argument on the notion that if in Judaism there is only one centrally recognisable place of worship, Jerusalem, and only one altar on which sacrifices can be made to God, so in Christianity there is only one Jesus Christ through whom access to God is gained. The purpose in using this metaphor, much as it deals with the unity of the church, is also meant to draw attention to the role and significance of Jesus Christ. In the epistle to the Hebrews (13:10f) where the writer discusses the image, he exhorts his listeners to “continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God through Jesus Christ.”⁵³ In this text the author of the book to the Hebrews certainly has his mind fixed on the Jewish temple and he imagines the worshippers standing before the altar (Jesus) offering their sacrifice to God.

JESUS CHRIST THE NATIVITY ἀστὴρ (STAR)

This divine economy was hidden from the prince of this world. The virginity of Mary, her child-bearing, the death of the Lord - these three mysteries, though destined to be proclaimed loud, were wrought in the silence of God. The announcement was first made to all the ages by the appearance of a star, which outshone all the celestial lights, and to which sun and moon and stars did obeisance. They were terrified at this strange apparition. Magic vanished before it; ignorance was done away; the ancient kingdom of evil was destroyed, when God appeared in the form of Man. Thus the eternal counsel of God was inaugurated. And the whole universe was confounded because the dissolution of death was purposed.⁵⁴

The imagery of the star and its appearance is associated with the birth of Christ. In Ignatius' thinking the appearance of the star was a proclamation which broke the silence of God and revealed the three mysteries; the virginity of Mary, the birth of Christ and his death which were hitherto hidden in the stillness or silence of God. Lightfoot contends that this Ignatian passage has been more regularly referred to or quoted by later church fathers than any other in his writings. The focus of the debate in this passage has been the Τρία μυστήρια κραυγῆς which is "generally interpreted as meaning 'three mysteries to be proclaimed' or 'proclaiming themselves'."⁵⁵ David Daube suggests that by this statement Ignatius was referring to the cries associated with Mary's virginity, her giving birth, and Jesus' birth. In case of the virginity recorded in Luke's account, it was Elizabeth who "exclaimed with a loud cry" while blessing Mary.⁵⁶ The *Protevangelium* of James records in the infancy narrative that a great light appeared at the birth of Jesus thus making it possible for the Hebrew midwife to see the baby and to cry out praising herself.⁵⁷ The third mystery is associated with the cry of Jesus on the cross. David Daube notes the significance of this mysterious cries in the writings of Ignatius:

It may be added that there are not many 'cries' in the accounts of the life of Jesus besides the three that would qualify: the importance attached to them is therefore understandable. Further, I have a feeling that the idea of these three 'mysteries of a cry' being wrought in God's calm is more consistent with

other texts where Ignatius contrasts speech and silence (such as *Magnesians* 8.2) than would be the idea of ‘mysteries of proclamation’ being wrought in God’s calm; but this is a minor point.⁵⁸

The emphasis here, however, in the Ephesian text is on the metaphor of the star as used by Ignatius to describe Jesus Christ. Why should the appearance of a star cause so much commotion, or as Schoedel puts it, “what then is the relation between the star and the theme of the disturbance of the powers?”⁵⁹ It has been suggested that Ignatius’ use of this imagery may have been informed by two traditions, namely, the Gnostic redeemer figure and the epiphany star. But an allusion to the Old Testament story of Joseph and his brothers cannot be ruled out.⁶⁰ The heavenly bodies of stars, moon and the sun find space in early writings. In 1 *Enoch* the stars are under the jurisdiction of angels. 1 *Enoch* 18-21 links the stars, especially planets with fallen angels. In Clement of Alexandria the stars are said to express the influence of the powers, and in Valentinianism it is the great star that shatters the attempt by the powers to hold the world to ransom. The appearance of the star, for Ignatius, dealt a blow to magic, every bond and ignorance, such that the old kingdom had to succumb to its brightness. The overthrow of μαγεία (magic) by the advent of the Christ event is a frequent theme in the Fathers, and the worship by the magi at the feet of the baby Jesus symbolises this defeat, for their visit was regarded from the earliest times as the inauguration of a new kingdom. Origen was of the view that it was the appearance of the nativity star that began to weaken the powers responsible for magic.⁶¹ Such image of the ἀστὴρ (star) as employed by Ignatius in this epistle to the Ephesians has immense implications and significance especially for an audience that was familiar with the world of magic, spells and powers that were held to control the fate and destiny of humankind.

JESUS CHRIST, THE χαρακτήρ (STAMP) OF GOD

All things come to an end. The great alternative of life and death awaits every man at last; and each goes to his own place. There are, as it were, two coinages of mankind; the unbelievers who have issued from the mint of this world, and the believers who are stamped with the image of God in Christ. We must first die to Christ's death, if we would rise with His life.⁶²

The word χαρακτήρ (stamp) as used by Ignatius appears only once in the New Testament in the book of Hebrews (1:3). The comment of F.F. Bruce on this New Testament passage is as follows:

He is the very image of the substance of God - the impress of his being. Just as the image and superscription of a coin exactly correspond to the device on the die, so the Son of God "bears the very stamp of his nature".⁶³

Bruce contends that the word χαρακτήρ has a more forceful impact in expressing the relationship between the Father and the Son than the word εικῶν that is used in a similar way. Commenting on the Magnesian passage, Lightfoot takes the view that "Christ is Himself the χαρακτήρ of God, and this image is stamped upon the Christian by his union with the Father through Him."⁶⁴

It is probable that at the time Ignatius wrote this epistle he had his mind focused on two metaphors. The first relates to the parable in the gospel of Matthew about the division of humankind into two groups at the last judgement⁶⁵, and the second is in reference to the minting of coins. Apparently aware of his own impending death, it is likely Ignatius was thinking about judgement and the last things, convinced that his martyrdom would usher him into the presence of his Lord. He is, however, concerned about the people to whom he is writing, especially the need to keep a Christian identity that is distinct from a pagan world that is hostile. He, therefore, reminds them about the reality of God's judgement and the

consequence for every individual. A person's place after death is determined by which group he belongs, whether to unbelievers who bear the χαρακτήρ (stamp) of this world or to believers who bear the stamp of God through the work done by Jesus Christ. The only necessary pre-requisite for enjoying the life with Jesus is by dying his death, by which he probably meant dying for Christ which may entail martyrdom, to which he himself looked forward with grim expectation and consuming passion. A denial or rejection of the reality of the Lord's passion and death "would erode the willingness of Christians to confront the hostility (real or imagined) of pagan society."⁶⁶

William Schoedel has described the passion and death of Christ as "the central religious symbol" that makes Christian existence meaningful; the only true rationale which enables Christians to keep their identity in the face of deceit, animosity, and all forms of hatred.⁶⁷ Schoedel observes that in the letters of Ignatius one can see glimpses of church and state relationship although as he argues "the border between the church and the world is still open in a way that the border between true and false Christianity is not."⁶⁸ Whereas, for Ignatius, the door of salvation is still opened for all men, the same cannot be said of schismatics and heretics. In this epistle to the Magnesians, however, it is clear that the use of the image χαρακτήρ connotes a division of a sort in the mind of Ignatius regarding those who belong to the world and those who belong to Christ.

JESUS THE ἰατρός (PHYSICIAN)

Certain false teachers are going about who profess the Name of Christ in guile. Avoid them, as wild beasts. They are like mad dogs, whose bite is hard to heal. There is only one sure Physician, flesh and spirit, create and increate, God in man, Life in death, the Son of Mary and the Son of God, passible first and then impassible, even Jesus Christ our Lord.⁶⁹

If in the previous section Ignatius is concerned about the Church's identity with regard to external threats from the world, in this section of his letter he presents Christ as *ιατρός* (physician) who deals with the internal threats posed by schism and heresy. Ignatius describes the false teachers as "mad dogs, whose bite is hard to heal", and associates their false teaching with a drug disguised with honeyed wine which "not only reflects well-known medical practice but appealed to other ancient writers as a metaphor for pleasantly disguised doctrine."⁷⁰ For Ignatius, Jesus Christ is the only *ιατρός* (physician) who can cure the ailment inflicted by these heretics. Christ's curative power is, however, concretely manifested in the Eucharist that celebrates his death and passion. Schoedel suggests that Ignatius' "well-known description of the Eucharist as 'the medicine of immortality' (*Eph.* xx. 2) may well refer to a famous drug called 'immortality' by the ancients." It has been suggested that it is likely Ignatius had in mind the pagan healing gods when he wrote his letter, and it may well be that he was setting Christ in contrast to the pagan healing gods. Schoedel suggests that Ignatius is using an older and familiar theme in this description of Christ as healer.⁷¹ In Philo, the image of God as "the only physician of the soul's infirmities" is expressed.⁷² It is also likely that apart from Philo, Ignatius' use of the image may have been drawn from poets.

CONCLUSION: THE THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF IGNATIUS

If, as suggested by Lightfoot; "The direct interest of his theological teaching has indeed passed away with the heresy against which it was directed",⁷³ then where lies Ignatius' significance? Lightfoot, however, readily admits that it is the indirect interest in the twofold nature of Christ's humanity and divinity expressed by Ignatius that still has some relevance. Of equal significance, notes Lightfoot, is the martyr's advocacy of ecclesiastical order. He notes in particular that, "Of all fathers of the Church, early or late, no one is more incisive or

more persistent in advocating the claims of the threefold ministry to allegiance than Ignatius.”⁷⁴

The subject of our inquiry, however, is not so much the contents of the doctrinal issues, as the method employed by Ignatius in addressing these concerns. Whether in dealing with the subject of ecclesiastical order, or unwholesome doctrines that threatened this order, Ignatius used images at the heart of which lay the person of Jesus Christ. We may conveniently divide the images we have discussed so far into five main categories, namely those that deal with ecclesiastical order and unity, access to God, identity of the believer, false and unwholesome teaching, and the place of Jesus in the pre-Christian religious tradition.

It is hard to read Ignatius and not come to the conclusion that the subject of unity and ecclesiastical order was uppermost in his mind. As he journeys to martyrdom he is concerned about the safety and survival of the infant church. In his eagerness to convey to them the importance of obedience to the bishop and orderliness in the church, he draws upon very powerful imagery to express his thoughts. In these metaphors the uniqueness of Jesus Christ is stressed. Jesus is the harmonious chorus that blends into one the various shades and backgrounds of the individual members, so that they are seen not as atomised units, but as one in concert. It is in this act of Jesus Christ that the church receives its identity, which comprises the various identities of the individual members.

Two metaphors express the identity of the Christian in the writings of Ignatius, namely *χαρακτήρ* (stamp) and *οικοφθόρος* which translates “violation of the house of God.” Bearing in mind that Ignatius was writing at a time when the question of Christian identity was critical, the use of such metaphors become very crucial indeed. We have noted how each of these words was used to express Christ in relation to God and the Christian. Ignatius has shown us that we cannot discuss Christian identity apart from Jesus Christ himself. Just as Jesus is the exact manifestation of the Father, so the Christian is required to bear the full

χαρακτήρ (stamp) of Jesus Christ. Those who do not bear the stamp of Jesus have their identity shaped by this world. It would appear that Ignatius echoes the warning given to Christians in Rome not to conform to this world, but rather to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom. 8:29;12:2). The word *συνσχηματίζεσθε* that translates “conform” also means, be shaped by or live after the pattern of. The other metaphor that employs the use of *οικοφθόρος* relates to the notion of the Christian being the temple of God in which Christ dwells. The Hellenistic milieu within which Ignatius lived was noted for the multiplicity of gods, each with its own temple and priests. Ignatius, like Paul from whom he probably borrowed this metaphor, knew he was not discussing Osiris, Artemis or any of the Greek deities, but the God who had made himself known to Israel. In this religious setting, the Greek City states were known by the god(s) they worshipped. In a sense it was these gods that gave the adherents their identity. For just as in the Greek religious setting the temple is not complete without the idol or statue of the god to whom worship is made, so the temple of God that gives the Christian his new identity is not complete without Jesus Christ. There is a danger of destroying or violating this identity by the Christian himself, and that is where the word *οικοφθόρος* as a metaphor becomes significant, for in the Christian sense its meaning has undergone some transformation. The threat of violation or destruction of Christian unity and harmony was real, and this Ignatius describes in vivid language using especially medical metaphors. There is danger of the Christian body becoming diseased as a result of unwholesome teaching, and the only remedy for such ailment is Jesus the *ιατρός* (physician). It is the image of Jesus we come across in the New Testament scriptures as one who heals physical infirmities that is invoked as a metaphor to deal with the threat of heresy and schism and thus preserve Christian identity and its heritage. The purity that Ignatius sought to instill in the churches, and which drove him to draw sharp lines of demarcation between sound doctrine and unwholesome teaching, between the church and the world, is

unprecedented in the earlier history of the church. The question that needs to be addressed in contemporary times, however, is how to keep this purity in the face of challenges posed by religious and ethnic pluralism. Is it possible for the Church to carry out its mission and yet retain her distinctiveness?

The uniqueness of Jesus as one who builds and sustains the church's unity and identity, is powerfully expressed by Ignatius in his writings. Christ is the only unerring mouth-piece of God and the only true access to the Father. As archive he embodies in himself the pre-Christian religious tradition of not only Jews, but also of all peoples everywhere. To use that image of Christ is, therefore, to affirm that God, in and through Jesus Christ, has been involved in the shaping of the history, religion, and cultures of all peoples.

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¹⁰ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.271

¹¹ See Jn.5:39

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¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 275

¹⁴ William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch- A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, p.210

¹⁵ See John. 7-9

¹⁶ William Barclay, *The daily Study Bible- The Gospel of John*, Vol.2, Revised Edition, Edinburgh: St. Andrew Press, 1975, p. 58ff

¹⁷ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen.*, 1.13 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, Vol. II Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1979

¹⁸ Shepherd of Hermas, *Sim*, ix. 12 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, Vol. II

¹⁹ Ignatius, *Romans VIII* cited in J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.228

²⁰ See Jn. 14: 10;24

²¹ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.186

²² G.W.H Lamp (ed), *A Patristic Greek Lexicon*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961, p.1470

²³ Bartsch, Hans-Werner, *Gnostisches Gut und Gemeindefradition bei Ignatius von Antiochien*, (Gutersloh: Bertelsmann, 1940) 70-71 cited in William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch- A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, p.189

²⁴ Ignatius, *Magnesians VIII* cited in J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.124

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.126

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.127

²⁷ L.W. Barnard, *Studies in the Apostolic Fathers and their Background*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1966, p.27

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.26

²⁹ Ignatius, *Ephesians IX* cited in J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.52

³⁰ The image of Christ as the Cornerstone is found both in the Gospels and in the Epistles. In Jesus' self-understanding of his work and mission he appropriates this notion as the foundation stone on which men ought to build; "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."(Mt.7:24) It is most likely that the Pauline theme of Christ as the foundation stone, (1Cor.3:11;1Tim.6:19; 2Tim. 2:19; Eph. 2:20), was probably influenced by the Old Testament reading of the prophet Isaiah: "So this is what the Sovereign Lord says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation; the one who trusts will never be dismayed."(Isa. 28: 16)

³¹ William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch- A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, p.66

³² J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.17ff

³³ *Ibid.*, p.18

³⁴ Philo, *Leg. ad Cai.* 31 (II. P. 577) cited in J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p. 55

³⁵ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p. 18

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.69

³⁷ Ignatius, *Ephesians XVI* cited in J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.70

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p.71

³⁹ See 1 Cor. 3;16-17

⁴⁰ The Lukan account recorded in Acts 19: 23ff gives us a vivid picture of Paul's encounter with the patrons and worshippers of the Ephesian god Artemis. Mentioned in the passage is one Demetrius, a silversmith who made silver shrines of Artemis. Luke gives us the impression that the trade in such religious objects was a lucrative business venture for the craftsmen, and the picture generally accords with the source provided by Lightfoot. It is not surprising, therefore, that the craftsmen should turn their anger on Paul who they accused of denigrating their gods. It is the statement attributed to the town clerk, when Paul was brought to the theatre, that makes interesting reading: "For you have brought these men here who are neither sacrilegious nor blasphemers of our goddess." The word ἱεροσύλους (sacrilegious) as used involves any act tantamount to dishonouring the goddess including robbing the temple of those precious religious ornaments.

⁴¹ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.71

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 40

⁴⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *Protrep.*, 1.7 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, Vol. II

⁴⁵ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.41

⁴⁶ Clement of Alexandria, *Exhortation to the Heathen.*, 1.9 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, Vol. II

⁴⁷ Socrates, *H. E.* VI. 8 cited in J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 1: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p. 30

⁴⁸ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 1: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.31

⁴⁹ See Philippians 2: 6-11, I Timothy 3:16, Col.,1: 15-20

⁵⁰ Ignatius, *Magnesians* VII cited in J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.121

⁵¹ Clement of Rome, *First Epistle*, xli. 5-10 in Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (eds), *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of The Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, Vol. II

⁵² J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.103

⁵³ See Heb., 13:10ff

⁵⁴ Ignatius, *Ephesians* XIX cited in J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.76

⁵⁵ David Daube, "Τρία μυστήρια κραυγῆς: Ignatius, *Ephesians*, xix", in *Journal of Theological Studies* N.S. 16 (1965), p. 128

⁵⁶ See Luke 1: 42

⁵⁷ David Daube, "Τρία μυστήρια κραυγῆς: Ignatius, *Ephesians*, xix", p. 129

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch- A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, p.92

⁶⁰ See Gen. 37: 1ff. In that account Joseph narrates a dream to his family in which he sees the sun, the moon and eleven stars bowing down before him.

⁶¹ Origen, *Celsus* 1. 60 cited in William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch- A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, p. 93

⁶² Ignatius, *Magnesians* V cited in J. B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.116-

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⁶³ F.F. Bruce, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament- The Epistle to the Hebrews*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM.B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1964, p.6-7

⁶⁴ J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.117-118

⁶⁵ See Matthew 25: 31ff

⁶⁶ William Schoedel, "Theological Norms and Social Perspectives in Ignatius of Antioch", in E.P. Sanders (ed), *Jewish and Christian Self-Definition: (Vol. 1) The Shaping of Christianity in the Second and Third Centuries*, London: SCM Press Ltd., 1980, p. 45

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ignatius, *Ephesians* VII cited in J.B. Lightfoot, *The Apostolic Fathers*, Part 2: S. Ignatius, S. Polycarp, p.46-47

⁷⁰ William Schoedel, "Theological Norms and Social Perspectives in Ignatius of Antioch", p. 48

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⁷² Philo, *Sacr.* 70 cited in William Schoedel, *Ignatius of Antioch- A Commentary on the Letters of Ignatius of Antioch*, p.60

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CHAPTER 4

MADAM AFUA KUMA AS ILLUSTRATION OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION AND APPROPRIATION OF THE AKAN FOLKLORIC TRADITION

INTRODUCTION

Quite a lot is happening by way of witnessing to the name of Jesus, which has not yet found its way into the mainstream theological discussions. As Christians encounter situations in their ordinary day to day living, they draw upon their faith in Jesus so as to be able to confront those realities. One such Christian whose faith has been celebrated in recent times is Madam Afua Kuma. In this chapter we focus briefly on her background and her interpretation and appropriation of the Akan folkloric tradition of Ghana from the Christian perspective.

A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY

Madam Afua Kuma also known as Christina Afua Gyan was born in 1900 in Obo, a town on the Kwahu ridge in the Eastern Region of Ghana. She was brought up in a farming community and therefore took to the cultivation of food crops, especially cocoa which was the main cash crop in the area. Her parents were members of the local Presbyterian Church, where her father Mr. Mari served as an elder. By virtue of her parents' religious commitment she was exposed early to Christian training. In her adult life she got married to Mr. Kwadwo Frempong and they relocated in the Afram plains in the Eastern Region.

Madam Afua Kuma joined the Church of Pentecost as a result of an incident that occurred in her family life. Two of her male sons who had caused her so much heartache and anxiety, suddenly had a completely new orientation to life as a result of their association with the Church of Pentecost. It was this transformation in the lives of her sons that eventually led

Afua Kuma also to part ways with the Presbyterian Church. There was yet another incident in her life believed to be the immediate cause of the composition of her praise songs. The demise of her brother tore her up emotionally and psychologically. She invested her energies in the church as a way of coping with the crisis. It was in the context of one such church activity that she and the members of the congregation were exhorted to give praise to God in all circumstances. Her response to the invitation to pray after the sermon “astounded everyone when she burst out in praise of Jesus in a language so powerful, and unknown in the Church.”¹ Until her death in 1987, she devoted the last seventeen years of her life not only to composing new poems, but also to performing at Christian gatherings like camps, retreats, Easter conventions and rallies.

A study of her poems indicate that she must have been influenced by the traditional court praise poems known as *apae*, and her significance lies in her ability to transform and put this to Christian use. We can only appreciate her contribution to the Universal Church, and Africa in particular, when we have been able to explore the context that shaped her poems.

APAE (RHETORIC) IN AKAN TRADITIONAL FOLKLORE

Apae as noted by Kwesi Yankah is “poetry recited for the chief as he sits in state on occasions of durbar.”² Appellations to the Chief are however not limited to *apae* alone; they are performed sometimes on talking drums and on other instruments like flute and horn. Royal personages are not the only subjects or patrons addressed in appellations. People from all categories of the society, including children, may have praise names by which they are called by their confidants. An individual may be addressed by a friend using an *abodin* (strong appellations) or *mmrane* (names) in reference to an achievement or task performed. In this regard stage performance is limited to friends, relatives or acquaintances. Generally speaking, however, traditional courthouse praise performance is the most notable in Akan

society. One of the major functions of *apae* as observed by Akosua Anyidoho “is to extol political rulers by ascribing unsurpassed abilities, responsibilities and capabilities to them in order to cause others to stand in awe of them.”³ The content of the poem indicates the ancestral pedigree, the military prowess and achievements and any heroic activity undertaken by the chief especially against his enemies. The performers of *apae* are usually male professional reciters attached to the court and who have been trained to acquire the skills of rhetoric. The verses themselves are considered sacred and their use is therefore limited to the court where they belong. In performing the *apae*, the *abrafo* (executioner), with a sword in his right hand, points to the chief and half covers his mouth with his left hand. Since the poem would have been heard time and again, a lot of emphasis is placed on acting and the skills of presentation, for that enhances the performance. Gestures, miming, footworks, facial configurations are some of the artistic skills employed to enhance the performance. In some Akan societies, reciters put on special attires and condition themselves to gain the right composure and mental frame of mind so as to enable them perform. The pitch at which the poetry is recited is higher than what pertains in ordinary conversation. The rate at which the poem is delivered is also faster, but “accuracy and smooth recital are insisted upon”⁴ to such an extent that in the past *abrafo* or reciters who fumbled while they were performing were put to death.

Each stanza in *apae* is marked by a drum or horn interlude, during which the reciter dances and displays with his sword while preparing to recite the next line of the poem or give way to another performer. The stanzas are not arranged in a fixed sequence, however, they are “united by their general applicability to the subject of the poem.”⁵ The last verse of the *apae* is always recited in preparation of the chief’s departure and the end of the performance. Before the chief rises to make his exit with his entourage, the audience stand as a sign of respect for the chief who makes majestic strides accompanied by the talking drums.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AFUA KUMA AS A CHRISTIAN AND THE MAKING OF *JESUS OF THE DEEP FOREST*

That incident in church, already referred to, marks the genesis of a new tradition in Christian worship; a cross fertilisation of Akan folkloric tradition and Christianity. In order to appreciate Afua Kuma's work we must of necessity address the factors and influences that shaped her thought and eventually led to the creation of this classical genre. Her daughter, Miss Fantoaa attributed Afua Kuma's work to divine inspiration, and why should we doubt the validity of such a claim when prior to the event aforementioned, "her mother never watched traditional appellation performances nor rehearsed her praises."⁶ Akosua Anyidoho contends, however, that given "the similarities between her poetry and the traditional Akan praise appellation poetry,"⁷ Afua Kuma must have been influenced unconsciously by the grammar of *amoma*, which is the Akan praise poetry. *Jesus of the deep forest*⁸ is couched in a typical *amoma* style and fashion. Anyidoho's comparative study of Afua Kuma's work and a traditional *amoma* text led her to conclude that there were basically four areas that the works share common grounds, and these include content, structure, imagery, and lexical selection.

A study of the content indicates that both Afua Kuma's poems and the traditional *amoma* ascribe "unrivalled power and authority to their patrons."⁹ This style is very much in keeping with one of the major functions of Akan traditional courthouse praise poems that chronicles the royal ancestry, their conquests and gives praise to political rulers for their deeds. The purpose is therefore a re-enactment of history, and as would be expected, the *apae* catalogues the notable historical events of the stool, the "royal ancestry, their military manoeuvres and exploits, their unrelenting stand against their enemies, their annihilation of non-conforming subjects, as well as their affluence and magnanimity."¹⁰ In Madam Kuma's poetry, feats

unrivalled in human history are attributed to Jesus. For instance, Jesus is portrayed by Afua Kuma as the Wonderworker whose performance surpasses the normal. It is only in the supernatural realm that one can conceive of a basket holding water,¹¹ or a spider's web as a fishing line that catches crocodiles.¹² Madam Kuma's poems are replete with acts attributed to Jesus that show his might and greatness.

Just as in traditional court poetry, much use is made of metaphors and imagery, Afua Kuma uses imagery to articulate her faith in Jesus Christ. What is striking in her presentation is her ability to put to Christian use notions that already exist in the traditional realm. Metaphors drawn from war, hunting, and fishing would be most familiar to any Akan speaker. It is the whole Akan constitution and war formation that is called into play when titles like *Adontenhene*, (Field Marshal), *Kyidomhene* (Captain of the rear guard) and *Katakyie* (Brave One) are used. Madam Kuma's style of construction is similar to the traditional *amoma*. This, argues Akosua Anyidoho, is to be noticed in the structure of the clauses. Study of the text shows similarity in the way the compositions are structured. She makes use of long words that are multisyllabic in nature arranged in a very complex way. For example, the word *Oduponkese* could be etymologically broken up into *dua* (tree), *pon* (mighty), *kese* (big), while the word *Ɔkokodurufoɔ* can be rendered as *koko* (chest, but here representing the heart as the centre of all emotions), *duru* (heavy), with the prefix “ɔ” and the suffix “foɔ” referring to an agent or one who does something. The phrases *wo na/a* (you,who...) and *ɔ(no) no* (That's him) are frequently used in the text.¹³ The following lines demonstrate the point:

Akan: *Wo na yede aborabo agye wo taataa*

English: You, who is received and encouraged with bullets

Akan: *Wo na wowo asubonten, mmesa*

English: You, who weave the rivers like a plaited hair.

Akosua Anyidoho asserts that since *amoma* is aimed at giving unrivalled praise to royal personages, the phrase “you, who” is constructed in such a way as to enable the artist realise this objective. Another feature of the *amoma*, which Afua Kuma fully utilizes in her work, is the use of complex and multiple syllables. This is found at the beginning of most of her lines. The following serves as illustration:

Tutu...gya...gu wo na wo...tutu obore se
(pull...fire...away you who you ...pull viper’s teeth)

It is clear from arguments advanced so far that Afua Kuma drew very largely on the existing Akan folkloric and rhetorical tradition to compose her poems. Her significance and importance is however, to be noticed in the nature of her innovations and creativity.

“One of the most significant contributions of Madam Afua Kuma to Akan praise appellation poetry is that she transgresses and subverts traditional expectation as far as participant eligibility and context of performance are concerned.”¹⁴ By this statement, Akosua Anyidoho implies two things. Firstly, Madam Kuma succeeded in enlisting herself in an activity, which was the sole prerogative of selected male courtiers in the traditional courts. To perform the *amoma*, not in the traditional court or at festive royal ceremonies, but in the church was in itself an innovation that cannot be easily overlooked. By shifting the contexts, the subjects or patrons had to change. While conventional *amoma* were addressed to human personalities like chiefs, warriors and those on the higher echelons of the social structure, Madam Kuma addresses her prayers and praises exclusively to Jesus Christ.

Anyidoho’s description of Afua Kuma’s poetry as a subversion of the *status quo* must be taken seriously especially when “Akan traditional scholars and critics are often intolerant of what they view as the negative influence of Christianity on traditional forms.”¹⁵ The question

this poses borders on the gospel-culture interaction, and this is where Madam Kuma becomes significant for our study. If Madam Kuma's work is seen as an attempt "to use conventional forms in non-conventional ways and contexts", then from a Christian perspective her actions cannot be construed as a "breach of faith with tradition." The Gospel mandate of discipling the nations is not so much the annihilation of the pre-Christian religious traditions and institutions as a redirection and reorientation or conversion of what is already there. The central theme of the gospel mandate is the discipling of the nations, a task that involves a turning over to Christ of the shared cultural presuppositions and those elements that shape the very existence of a people. It is a task that is premised on the supposition that God's redemptive activity has always been present in human history, and therefore seeks to affirm this history by entering and transforming it. By putting to Christian use elements in the Akan pre-Christian religious tradition, Afua Kuma was simply fulfilling in obedience the gospel mandate. It is significant to note that in doing this she was being faithful to her traditional past; but she was also keenly aware that such past had to be reinterpreted in the light of the Gospel. As an Akan and a Christian she belonged to both traditions, and her identity as a Christian did not make her less Akan. Madam Kuma therefore felt able to appropriate this heritage, and that cannot be described as "non-conventional."

Furthermore, it is important that we note Afua Kuma's awareness and use of modern institutions to express her knowledge of Jesus Christ. The judiciary, the security service, the medical profession and other modern institutions feature in her praise poems. As a farmer, and one who was aware of difficulties facing the subsistence farmer, Madam Kuma draws on her knowledge of the bulldozer to express Jesus' ability "to make the 'stony and mountainous' areas in the lives of Christians smooth and level."¹⁶ This gives a clear indication that Afua Kuma's faith in Jesus Christ transcends tradition and incorporates

notions of modernity. For Afua Kuma, therefore, Jesus is both ancient and modern. Jesus belongs to her traditional past but he equally belongs to the present.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter we have tried to establish the fact that *Jesus of the deep forest* is a response to faith in Jesus arising out of a real and concrete situation. The performance itself, rendered in the context of worship, employs elements of the traditional world-view particularly the *apae*, and knowledge of the scriptures. The significance of Madam Kuma, however, is to be noticed in her ability to subvert the *status quo*, and appropriate to Christian use that which hitherto had been confined to the traditional nobility. In her poems, Jesus is allowed to engage the traditional world-view and to assume titles and perform roles that would have been denied him by traditionalists and probably by Christians who take a uniformly negative view of Akan pre-Christian tradition.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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⁶ Akosua Anyidoho, "Techniques of Akan Praise Poetry in Christian Worship: Madam Afua Kuma", p. 75

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¹⁰ Ibid., 78

¹¹ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 5

¹² Ibid., p. 6

¹³ Akosua Anyidoho, “Techniques Of Akan Praise Poetry In Christian Worship: Madam Kuma”, p. 78-79

¹⁴ Ibid., p.81

¹⁵ Ibid., p.84

¹⁶ Ibid., p.83

CHAPTER 5

SOME IMAGES OF JESUS IN AFUA KUMA'S *JESUS OF THE DEEP FOREST*

INTRODUCTION

Whereas in the previous chapter we sought to establish the background that moulded and shaped Madam Afua Kuma's life as a Christian poet, in this chapter we shall primarily be engaged in a discussion on the images she employed to express her faith in Christ. We discuss in the first instance images that have direct bearing on the Bible, and secondly those that derive from the traditional folkloric tradition. Our aim in this section is to explore as far as possible the meaning and usage of these verbal pictures in the pre-Christian religious tradition, and the influences they have undergone by reason of their use in the Christian tradition. We seek to show that apart from influences from the traditional world-view, Afua Kuma was keenly aware of the extent to which modern institutions of state hold sway in the lives of people including Christians, and the need to bring Jesus into such institutions if their needs must be met.

IMAGES OF JESUS FROM THE BIBLE

A close study of *Jesus of the deep forest* shows Afua Kuma's knowledge of the Scriptures although she was illiterate. It will be noticed that it is not easy making a distinction between lines that can be said to have been influenced solely by the Bible and those which derive purely from traditional sources. What we attempt to do in this section is to discuss those lines of her poem which allude to some Biblical narratives or have a more direct bearing on Scripture.

In the lines that follow there is an obvious reference to the feeding of the five thousand (Jn. 6, Mat. 14; 13ff) and the story of the prodigal son (Lk. 15):

He is the one
who cooks his food in huge palm-oil pots.
Thousands of people have eaten, yet the remnants fill twelve baskets.
If we leave all this, and go wandering off-
if we leave his great gift, where else shall we go?

We will wander around until hunger kills us,
and our clothes are old and worn.
We are going to eat with pigs, we are going to be disgraced!¹

In these lines Madam Kuma has in mind the gospel narrative of the feeding of the five thousand people. Whereas in the biblical account it is a boy who provides the five barley loaves and two small fishes, in Afua Kuma's reading of the account it is Jesus himself who cooks and provides the meal for the crowd, not in ordinary cooking utensils but in "huge palm-oil pots." It makes interesting reading to see how she connects this account to the story of the prodigal son. Madam Kuma's message is quite clear. It is Jesus alone that feeds us and we risk walking in tattered clothing and dining with swine like the prodigal son if we reject what he offers. The interpretation given to the father's image has, however, been deepened and enlarged:

Jesus! You are the Mother
whom we will return to,
and say, "Please take us!"
You are the one who raises your hand holding a cutlass,
the cutlass you give to your workers,
to cut down the forest.²

The Akan word translated "Mother" that Afua Kuma uses is *ƆBAATANPA*. Perhaps the word is the only feminine image ascribed to Jesus by Madam Kuma. The meaning of the

word derives from its etymology *ɔbea* (woman), *tan* (net), and *pa* (good). From its etymological rendering *ɔbaatanpa* conveys an image of a good woman under whose care one is safely sheltered or protected. (Fig. 1a) The *ɔbaatanpa* image is further bolstered from concepts derived from the Akan view of womanhood. Mercy Oduyoye notes that, “Akan society sees women in the same way it views other female animals: fulfilling biological roles as mothers, caring for their children, feeding, training, and disciplining, but never destroying.”³ The concept finds expression in a number of proverbs such as the following; “A hen might step on her chick, but not with the intention of killing it,” or “when you catch the mother hen, the chicks become easy prey.”⁴ Although the Akan word *akokɔ*, which translates ‘hen’ in the proverbs cited is generic, it actually refers to the hen, and this is confirmed by the fact that in Akan the words ‘mother’ and ‘woman’ are synonymous. The notion of *ɔbaatanpa* is found in folktales and proverbs, which ascribe to women the biological and natural role of caring and nurturing not only young ones, but also members of the entire family including adult males. A woman who is found neglecting these responsibilities is not reckoned as ‘mother’ by the society.⁵ The image of *ɔbaatanpa*, although derives from feminine natural and biological roles and expectations, is nevertheless not limited to the feminine gender alone in its usage. The term might be used for a male or any human institution that performs those roles and functions carried by the image. It is in this sense that we appreciate Afua Kuma’s use of the word to describe Jesus. For Afua Kuma, therefore, Jesus functions in ways that fit the Akan notions of *ɔbaatanpa*. In that sense Jesus would be reckoned as the good mother hen, under whose wings the wanderer finds shelter and comfort. In Afua Kuma’s words, Jesus is “the Mother whom we will return to, and say, ‘Please take us!’.” It is important to observe that *ɔbaatanpa* resonates with Jesus’ own perception about his life and work:

Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!⁶ (Fig.1b)

The image of Jesus as *ɔbaatanpa* is significant in two ways. Firstly, Afua Kuma draws our attention to the fact that Jesus identifies himself with the status, roles and function of women. Secondly, although the Jesus of history comes to us as a male, our conception of him as Jesus of faith transcends gender. In the Jesus of faith, there is no distinction between male and female, for, in him all are one. To invest the Jesus of faith with the *ɔbaatanpa* image is to attest to the fact that in Him both genders cohere.

It is interesting to note that when the wanderer returns to Jesus he is not only given shelter; provision is also made to cover his nakedness and to clothe him in the finest costume:

A naked person says, "I'll give you a cloth!"
So I follow him. Then I meet a priest who says,
"That man is naked—what can he give you?
Turn back and go to Jesus,
and this very day you will be wearing *kente*."⁷

Whereas in the gospel narrative it is the best robe that is given to the prodigal son to wear, in Afua Kuma's reading we get the impression that it is the finest of the Akan costume, *kente*, that is given to the son. *Kente* is a costly hand-woven costume of varying shades and colours usually worn by chiefs, nobles and the rich in the society.(Fig.4) But it is not only the prodigal that wears *kente*; in Madam Kuma, orphans are clothed with the costly garment when they come to Jesus:

Chief among chiefs, when you stretch forth your hand,
widows are covered with festive beads
while orphans wear *kente*!

Ohemmerɛfo: humble King,
your words are precious jewels.
We don't buy them, we don't beg for them;
you give them to us freely!⁸

Kente as symbolism means honour, dignity, grace and splendour. It appears, therefore, that in using this metaphor Afua Kuma is drawing attention to what Jesus does for the downtrodden and the socially marginalised. It is the scum and the filth of the earth that Jesus clothes with honour and dignity; it is not the rich and the powerful. Here, Afua Kuma presents us with an image of Jesus who takes sides with the lost, the wanderer, and those who find themselves at the very periphery of society.

In her commentary on the biblical account in Mat. 14, Madam Kuma presents us with a portrait of Jesus as *Nkonyaayini* (Magician), a traditional Akan notion that will engage our attention later, but for now we focus on how she makes use of the biblical narrative. In the context of that account Jesus had dismissed the crowd after he had fed them, and he had then gone on to the hills alone to pray. It was in the evening that his encounter with his disciples on the lake took place. Matthew describes this encounter thus:

And in the fourth watch of the night he came to them, walking on the sea. But when the disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were terrified, saying, "It is a ghost!" And they cried out for fear. But he spoke to them, saying, "Take heart; it is I; have no fear."⁹

In Afua Kuma's reading of the account, Jesus engages the whale, and right in the middle of the sea he "plunges his hand into the deep" and catches it. In this hermeneutic, one cannot fail to make the connection between this passage and an obvious reference to the book of Jonah in which is recorded the account of how the prophet was swallowed by the big fish.¹⁰ For Afua Kuma, Jesus presents an image far greater than that of Jonah. Jesus is Lord of the seas and the creatures that inhabit them.

We have already drawn attention to the fact that the encounter on the Lake occurred in the night, possibly at a time when visibility is likely to be poor. In the lines that follow Afua Kuma provides for her audience an image of Jesus that puts to rest any question regarding poor visibility:

When he walks in darkness he carries no lamp.
He is led by the sun and followed by lightning
as he goes his way.¹¹

When Afua Kuma makes reference to Pharaoh and his army, it is the Old Testament story of the Exodus that is being called into play:

He is the Thumb, without which we cannot tie a knot.
O you-who-show-the-way: *Akyerekyerekwan!*
You teach us how to prophesy.
Supporter-of-friends, who come in glory and strength!
Source-of-great-strength: *Okuruakwaban,*
who struck Pharaoh and his army to the ground!
You are the Eggs of the green mamba,
which only the wise may gather.¹²

It is the *Akyerekyerekwan* Jesus that shows the way and also deals with the enemies of Israel. We know that in the Exodus account it was God himself that led Israel by a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night so as to show them the way.¹³ In Afua Kuma, the Old Testament reading has been given a new interpretation with Jesus playing a vital role in the history of Israel. Yet in another section of her poem Moses' encounter with God on Mount Sinai has been given a new meaning:

The shining brightness of our asofo is our mirror.
Through you, we tell prophecies to the nations.
Who are they that stand on the rock before Jesus?

They are *asofo* coming to save us, and bring us to Jesus.
They help us to drink from the fountain
which flows from the throne of God.
“Whoever drinks from this fountain
will never thirst!” says Jesus.¹⁴

In these lines it is the *asofo* (priests) who play the role of Moses by declaring the will and purposes of God to the nations, but they receive this from Jesus. The lines also allude to the episode at Rephidim where Israel rebelled for lack of water.¹⁵ It is interesting to note how Afua Kuma links all this in apparent reference to John’s gospel and the book of Revelation (22:1). Here, as in other sections of her poem, Jesus is imaged as playing a key role, not only in the history and religion of Israel, but also in the Akan religious heritage.

We now turn to consider two biblical titles, *Kronkron* and *Otumifo Nyankopon*, used by Afua Kuma to describe Jesus.

KRONKRON- (HOLY ONE)

Jesus!
He is the Man of the sea,
bravest of hunters on the ocean,
leader of a thousand priests,
the most handsome of the young men,
among miracle-workers, a prophet,
wisest of sorcerers.
Among soldiers and police, the commanding officer.
Teacher of teachers.
Holy One!¹⁶

The appellation *Kronkron* (Holy) used of Afua Kuma in praise of Jesus is an interesting word. In its pre-Christian usage the definition of the word is preponderantly tilted more towards the purity of the ethnic group than the moral purity of the individual being. J.H.

Nketia translates *kronkron* as pure blood.¹⁷ In Christaller we are given examples of what it means to be *kronn*.¹⁸ The word may be used of water that is pure, without impurities and of a drink that is unadulterated. When used in reference to human beings one can talk about the genuine *Twi* man. The Ga make a distinction between those of their number who have pure unadulterated blood, and those of mixed blood as a result of the Akwamu invasions and the subsequent interactions that ensued. In this regard we are well served by Marion Kilson:

In modern Accra, Ga distinguish between “true Ga” (Ganyo krong) and other Ga. The former are descendants of the Ga who in the mid-seventeenth century lived either on the coast or in the inland town of Ayawaso, which is known in European sources as Great Accra; the latter are descendants of later immigrant non-Ga settlers.¹⁹

In C.A. Akrofi’s *Twi Kasa Mmara*, the word means classic or that which has a high quality or standard that can be used to judge others²⁰. *Kronkron* is used by Akrofi to make a distinction between towns that speak classical Twi and those that do not. The etymology of the word itself, it has been suggested, originated from the sound made by water as it drops from its source. The moral dimension that the word has come to assume has eclipsed its reference to the purity of the ethnic group. At least, that is the sense in which the word has been used by Afua Kuma and that is the meaning conveyed by its use in the Bible. The word holy as used in the scriptures derives from the Hebrew root קדש , (*qadash*) and the Greek ἅγιος (*hagios*), with the basic meaning of separateness and withdrawal. When applied to God the word means both purity and righteousness, loaded with an ethical content.²¹ But the purity of God that invokes a sense of creature feeling in humankind is inexorably linked to his nature of justice, righteousness, and salvation. It is this sense of the fear of the Holy displayed by Peter in his encounter with Jesus. In that account the disciples had worked all night without success, but it was Jesus’ appearance on the scene that had made all the

difference.²² It is in such context that Afua Kuma's image of Jesus as *Kronkron* should be understood, and we find this clearly indicated in the following lines:

The spider's web is his fishing line.
He casts it forth and catches a crocodile.
He casts his fishing net, and catches birds.
He sets a trap in the forest and catches fish.
Holy One!²³

Oyamyeni, the generous and merciful Jesus,
who gives a thousand gifts, has come;
he brings with him presents for his people.
This morning you will find
what you have been searching for.
Holy One!²⁴

It is the miraculous use of the spider's web as a fishing line that strikes in Afua Kuma the creature feeling of human sinfulness and the Holiness of Jesus. But holiness here is not an abstract quality. As Afua Kuma has shown, it is mediated through the concrete realities of God's redemptive activity through Christ. Certainly, to say that Jesus is *Kronkron* does not mean that he has pure blood which makes him a pure Akan, since we know that the historical Jesus does not belong to the Akan ethnic group. It is significant therefore to note how the word has been transformed in its Christian usage. Whereas in its pre-Christian form it connotes the purity of the group and therefore tended to emphasise ethnic ties and affiliations,²⁵ the Biblical sense takes a departure from this meaning and stresses the moral dimension of purity of actions, thoughts and deeds. Herein lies the Christian contribution to the cleansing of language and culture from those elements that bring segregation and that tend to divide humanity on the basis of blood and kindred groups.²⁶

OTUMIFO NYANKOPON (ALMIGHTY GOD)

A great and shining nation belongs to Jesus;
the rainbow protects its rampart
while lightning marches round.
Signs and wonders open its gates,
for these are the keys of his kingdom.
One does not have to take a mirror there
to see one's face:
the brilliance of the city is his mirror!

Almighty God, you are a great Chief.
To you belongs the holy city.
Truly it is a glorious city.

Gold nuggets are strewn about,
while streams of precious beads flow through.²⁷

In the foregoing, Afua Kuma makes allusion to the book of Revelation, and praises Jesus to whom belongs the city of Jerusalem. The relevant section of the biblical passage reads thus:

And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.²⁸

What is of prime interest to us, however, is the title *Otumifo Nyankopon* that Afua Kuma uses to praise Jesus. *Nyankopon* is the Akan word that translates the English "God." Christaller defines *Onyankopon* as, "God, the Supreme Being, the creator and Sovereign of the universe."²⁹ J.B. Danquah notes that Akan have three main designations for the Supreme Being, namely, *Onyame*, *Onyankopon*, and *Ɔdomankoma*.³⁰ When Akan Christians, including Afua Kuma, mention *Nana Nyankopon* or *Onyame* in their worship, they mean the

God who was known to, and worshipped by their ancestors as *Onyankopɔn Amponyinam*.³¹

However, another section of Madam Kuma's poem seemingly contradicts this position:

. Our ancestors didn't know of Onyankopɔn: the great God.
They served lesser gods and spirits, and became tired.
But as for us, we have seen holy men, and prophets.
We have gone to tell the angels how Jehovah helped us reach this place.
Jehovah has helped us come this far;
with great gratitude we come before Jesus,
the one who gives everlasting life.³²

If, as Afua Kuma claims, "Our ancestors didn't know of *Onyankopɔn* " then how did they come by his name? Unlike the European concept of God, *Nyankopɔn* is not merely a mental or ideological construct. His name is mentioned in the real and concrete situations of life, an indication that he was known long before the arrival of missionary groups and societies.

Andrew Walls' insight regarding this question is instructive:

In primal societies in quite diverse parts of the world, the Christian preachers found God already there, known by a vernacular name. Often associated with the sky, creator of earth and moral governor of humanity, having no altars or priesthood, and perhaps no regular worship, some named Being could be identified behind the whole constitution of the phenomenal and transcendental worlds. More often than not, that name has been used in Scripture translation, liturgy and preaching as the name of the God of Israel and of the Church.³³

If, indeed, it is the God of Israel who has been known in primal societies everywhere, and this is the position taken by Paul in his missionary journeys,³⁴ then the knowledge that Afua Kuma talks about must be interpreted and understood differently. It is important to note, however, that Jon Kirby's translation of the Akan word *anhu* as "didn't know" is misleading.³⁵ *Anhu* literally means "did not see" and may be rendered as the "inability to perceive." Afua Kuma possibly takes for granted the existence of *Nyankopɔn* whose presence

Nananom (ancestors) were unable to perceive. What the ancestors were able to “see” were rather the *abosom* (lesser gods) and *nsamanfo* (spirits).³⁶ She makes the claim, however, that “we” that is, Christians have “seen” *adiyifo* (holy men) and *nkɔmhyefo* (prophets) and acknowledges how Jehovah has “helped us reach this place.” This claim is very significant and needs to be verified especially because it makes a distinction between “we” (Christians) and “they” (patrons and adherents of the traditional religion) on the all-important subject of revelation. It is not very clear who the *adiyifo* and *nkɔmhyefo* refer to but it is fair to assume from the context of her poem that they probably refer to both biblical personalities and those in the traditional society who have appropriated the gospel message. If our assumption is correct, then for Afua Kuma and the Christian community it is through the *adiyifo* and *nkɔmhyefo* that the revelation of *Onyankopɔn* has been made manifest and complete; a mystery that angels know nothing about.

Our understanding of Afua Kuma is further deepened when we consider the fact that the word *Yehowa* which she uses and which is translated as “Jehovah” is synonymous with *Onyankopɔn* (God). In a sense, what Afua Kuma seems to be saying is that Akan Christians have known and associated *Onyankopɔn* (God) with their religious pilgrimage, and this is made evident in her usage of phrases like “reach this place” and “come this far” which connote a journey. It is at this point that she introduces Jesus into this complex but beautiful religious matrix of richly interwoven strands drawn from both Akan and Christian traditions. The fact that “great gratitude” is expressed to Jesus suggests that, for Afua Kuma, Jesus is not alien to the Akan heritage; he must be considered as one who has all along identified himself with the aspirations of Akan people in their religious pilgrimage. And if we understand that the main objective sought in any religious undertaking and encounter is life, then in Jesus this objective finds fulfillment since, in the words of Afua Kuma, Jesus “gives everlasting life.”

What is interesting in this section of her poem, as already noted, is how Madam Kuma links Jesus to the Akan cosmic world of *Nyankopɔn* (God), *abosom* (lesser gods), *nsamanfo* (spirits), and *Nananom* (ancestors). For Afua Kuma, the Lordship of Jesus in the midst of these cosmic forces is portrayed in his ability to give life, for after all, this is the perceived function of the cosmic powers and forces in the traditional society. Jesus, however, does more by giving life in its fullness. And yet when Afua Kuma ascribes the title *Otumifo Nyankopɔn* to Jesus it is not only because we owe gratitude to him for our salvation, but also in apparent recognition of the fact that it is Jesus that truly and fully manifests *Nyankopɔn*. As the Gospel says, “No one has ever seen God; the only son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.”³⁷ Our knowledge of *Nyankopɔn* therefore derives from our knowledge of Jesus Christ. “So intense is this new consciousness of God in Jesus Christ”, asserts Kwame Bediako, “that it makes all previous knowledge of God pale into insignificance.”³⁸

IMAGES OF JESUS FROM AKAN TRADITION

We now focus on the Akan tradition from which have been drawn a large number of the images Afua Kuma uses to describe Jesus.

THE IMAGES OF JESUS IN AKAN CONSTITUTION AND WAR FORMATION

Afua Kuma uses language and imagery drawn from Akan constitution and war formation to portray Christ. This imagery is captured in the following lines:

Jesus, you are on the right and on the left.
where the sun rises, and where it sets!
You are the chief of the rear-guard!
You are *Korobetoe*, who live for ever,
Chief of defence and chief of body-guards,

A friend to old men and women!³⁹

...

Adontenhene Jesus, Field Marshall

With a gold mirror as protection;

You guide us,

And give us lamps of gold to lead the way.⁴⁰

A proper understanding of the Akan Constitution and War formation will enable us appreciate the imagery that Afua Kuma employs in her description of Jesus Christ. R.S. Rattray's work on Ashanti offers a good illustration of the Akan constitution.⁴¹ The constitution of Ashanti is graphically portrayed in state functions and major festivals. The sitting arrangement is such that the Omanhene occupies the key central position flanked on all sides by other chiefs who owe allegiance to him. To his left and right are the *Benkumhene* (Left wing chief) and *Nifahene* (Right wing chief) respectively. The Adontenhene takes the seat in front of him, while the *Kyidomhene* sits behind him. The *Krontihene* and *Ankobeahene* occupy seats immediately in front of him and behind him. What is witnessed at the state durbar is a manifestation of how both the town and military are structured. The wing chiefs are placed at the boundaries of the town to protect it from attack by enemy forces. A modified formation is carried into a war situation. As noted by Rattray, the army is made up, first, of the *akwansrafo*, mainly made up of hunters whose duty it was to scout the path to be taken by the army. They are closely followed by the *twrafo*, the advance guard whose guns are charged with 'medicine'. Then comes the main body, which comprises the *Adonten* and the *Kronti*. They are followed by the chief and his bodyguards. To the right and left of the main body are the *nifa* and *benkum* wings of the army respectively. *Kyidom* is the rear guard. (Figs. 2a & 2b) It is the most important divisions of the *dom* (army) that find expression in Afua Kuma's work. These comprise *Kronti*, *benkum*, *nifa*, and *kyidom* led by their respective captains. She also mentions the *ankobea*, the chief's bodyguards. In this section of her poem, Afua Kuma

draws on the rich tradition of Akan constitution and military formation to praise Jesus whom she portrays variously as *Adontehene*, *Kyidomhene*, and *Ankobeahene*. And although the titles *Benkumhene* and *Nifahene* are not explicitly stated, they are implied in her presentation. Whereas in any military expedition these roles are assigned to various people, in Afua Kuma all roles and functions find fulfillment in Jesus Christ. The picture language is so graphic and profound, for in Christ we find all the features and characteristics of the Akan army. In a sense Jesus is portrayed as the very embodiment of the Akan army. What Afua Kuma seeks to convey about Christ becomes even more profound when one considers the fact that the constitution of the traditional society is based on its military organisation and its survival on the strength of the army.⁴²

It is quite obvious that the issue being addressed in this section of the poem is protection and spiritual warfare. The closest Biblical parallel we find to this christology by Afua Kuma is what is contained in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. In chapter six of the epistle, Paul pictures the Christian engaged in war with powers and principalities. The picture he uses to illustrate the kind of weapons that the Christian needs is drawn from the Roman army. The Christian, he argues, must be battle-ready at all times like the Roman soldier with his helmet (salvation), belt (truth), sword (word of God), shield (faith), breastplate (righteousness), and his feet protected with the gospel of peace. Although this is not reckoned as one of Paul's christological passages, our understanding of it is deepened when it is read from the background of Afua Kuma's christology, fashioned within the context of Akan military tradition. The Pauline passage also brings to mind the question of military gear, a subject which finds space in Madam Kuma's poems and on which we now focus attention.

The gear worn by the priest diviners, the *batakari*, is the traditional military dress. The *batakari* (smock) is a long flowing gown mostly worn in the northern regions of Ghana. The type used for religious and military functions are studded with talismans, believed to ward off

attacks from spells and incantations, and to arrest or redirect bullets, arrows or weapons.⁴³ The Asanti *batakarikesie* (great batakari), believed to have been used first by King Osei Tutu, is a regalia worn by the Asantehene as commander-in-chief of the Asante army (Fig.3). With the cessation of inter-ethnic wars, it is now a ceremonial dress which is worn only three times during the reign of every Asantehene. He wears it during the ceremonies marking his enstoolment, the funeral celebrations of his predecessor and the death of the Queen Mother.⁴⁴ In Afua Kuma's poem, Jesus' *batakari* are studded with the sun and the moon that "sparkles like the morning star."⁴⁵ In Afua Kuma's mind it is Jesus Christ who leads Christians into battle wearing his *batakarikesie*. The following lines underscore the point:

O great and powerful Jesus, incomparable Diviner,
 the sun and moon are your batakari.
 It sparkles like the morning star.
 Sekyerε Buruku, the tall mountain,
 all the nations see your glory.⁴⁶

Okokodurufo: The strong-hearted One
 Whose works are indeed stout-hearted
 You stand at the mouth of the big gun
 While your body absorbs the bullets aimed at your followers⁴⁷

IMAGES OF JESUS FROM THE REALM OF MAGIC AND DIVINATION

Jesus of the Deep Forest indicates that Madam Afua Kuma is very much aware of the activities of magicians and diviners. The poem draws attention to two Akan words that relate to the practice of magic, *Nkonyayifo* and *Ntafowayifo*.⁴⁸ A distinction is however drawn between the two words. *Nkonya* is what may be referred to as magic proper while *Ntafowa* is a magical practice that hails from the northern regions of Ghana. As the etymology of the word suggests, *Ntafo* (Twins) is a derogatory word that southerners, especially Akan, use for Northerners.⁴⁹ The kind of magic Northerners perform is regarded therefore by the Akans as

weak or inferior, and this is indicated by the suffix *wa* which in Akan means weak, small or little and it is the same suffix used to make a distinction between masculine and feminine proper nouns. Another source was of the opinion that *Ntafowa* may actually refer to the objects used in divination. Since there are always two sides to the ritual objects used, the word may refer to one-half.⁵⁰ However, whatever differences exist between the two practices would have been eroded with the passage of time, and this is confirmed by the fact that Christaller does not make any distinction between the meanings of these words.⁵¹ What is interesting is the way Afua Kuma uses the images to articulate her understanding of Jesus. Jesus' feat as *Ntafowayifo* is captured in the following lines:

Ntafowayifo: Wonder-worker!
The streets flow with water though there's no rain
Indeed, Jesus, you are amazing
You take a single grain of corn, grind it, roast it,
And then go and plant it and, look!
Now the grain has borne fruit, and filled two hundred bags
With some left over⁵²

It is as *Kramokesie* (Incomparable Diviner) that Jesus comes to us:

O great and powerful Jesus, incomparable Diviner,
the sun and moon are your *batakari*.
It sparkles like the morning star.
Sekyere Buruku, the tall mountain,
all the nations see your glory.⁵³

Christaller defines *Kramo* as 'Mohammedan',⁵⁴ a clear reference to a Moslem convert. There is no indication in the definition that the word has anything to do with a diviner in the sense in which, interestingly, it has been used by Afua Kuma. The popular usage of *Kramo* is one who has converted to Islam, and the root word *kra* or *kana*⁵⁵ (to prostrate) from which the word *Kramo* derives suggests the religious posture and attitude of Moslems in prayer. We

must address, however, the question of how *Kramo* came to be linked with diviner.⁵⁶ Principally there are two agents of Islamisation in West Africa, the Muslim traders and Muslim clerics who are regarded as holy men. It was always not easy distinguishing between the two.⁵⁷ The latter seemed to have influenced most societies in West Africa through mysticism and magic (*ruqya*). The perception of the Islamic cleric is aptly described thus:

Whatever the ethnic affiliation of clerics, however, their contemporary image in the popular mind as custodians of Muslim charisma, through their access to the mystically charged symbols of Islam, particularly the Quran, and their ritual functions widely applied to healing the sick and preventing or assuaging misfortune, as well as soothsaying, by means of Quranic charms, talismans, and prophylactics, indicates without doubt one range of their activities which has made a singular impression and attracted followers.⁵⁸

We have already noted that it was not always easy to differentiate between the Islamic trader and the mystic cleric, and therefore it is quite possible that the term *Kramo* would have been used for both. Afua Kuma, like others, would not have been able to make the distinction either. What is important for our purposes is the Christian usage of this image. Whether in Islam or in the African tradition, a diviner is perceived as “advisor, diagnostician, seer, prognosticator, and sometimes priest and doctor.”⁵⁹ They are able to acquire all these epithets through inspiration and by the manipulation of objects. Their ability to reveal the past and control the future puts them in the very centre of the life of the community. By this image Afua Kuma seeks to present Jesus as fulfilling in himself all roles and functions of the traditional diviner. For Afua Kuma, Jesus is even more than *kramo*, he is *owesekramofohene*,⁶⁰ the diviner who is in control of both the past and the future, and therefore can handle the present, with its anxieties, fears and hopes.

It is interesting to note that in these lines Jesus has been associated with “*Sekyere Buruku*, the tall mountain.” *Sekyere* refers to the area around Mampong, Juaben and Kumawu that share boundary with Kwahu. It is quite likely that Afua Kuma’s thought was captured by the

beauty, majesty and splendour of the Kwahu mountains. It is important to note that it is probably the same fascinating experience that led the local people to deify the mountain and subsequently make it the abode of their god *Buruku*. We see in this an example of how one religious experience can lead to Christ, and how the same experience can lead away from Christ. In one instance the image of Christ is portrayed; in the other a completely different image is mirrored. Though Afua Kuma recognises the existence of such local deities she denounces them and points to Jesus.

ROYAL TITLES AND IMAGES OF JESUS CHRIST

Another cluster of images used by Afua Kuma to describe Jesus Christ derives from royal functionaries and their titles. The image of Jesus as *Ohene* (chief) and *Okyeame* (spokesman) will engage our attention in this section.

Jesus "Ohene"

Background knowledge of the chief's status and position is necessary for our understanding of how the image is employed in Afua Kuma's poems. The chief occupies a unique position in the lives of his subjects. Akan believe that the chief is divine, and this notion is expressed in the proverb *Nyame ne hene* (God is King). According to J.B. Danquah *Nyame* is addressed as *Nana*, a title that is used to refer to chiefs, and which literally means begetter, root, seed or producer.⁶¹ When a person is therefore enstooled as *ohene* he becomes a representative of *Nyame* or *Nyankopon* and has the divine mandate to rule as such.⁶² As the one in whom is the spirit of *Nyame*, the Chief's body is sacred and is believed to radiate blessing to his people. He is the vital link between his subjects and the ancestral world. The chief functions in this role as an intermediary especially during religious and festive

occasions like *Adae* and *Odwira*. He is central and of paramount significance at such functions. Busia's point is instructive:

In the ritual, as in the constitutional aspect of his life, the chief is the focus of the unity of the tribe. His ritual functions are connected with ceremonies through which the people express their reverence for the ancestors and gods and their sense of dependence on them, and also their sentiments of solidarity and continuity.⁶³

Since he is the pivot around whom life revolves, and his very person serves to integrate and knit his people together, his death consequently signifies a reverse effect of all this. His death is seen as a national catastrophe. Such is the image conveyed in the portrayal of Jesus as chief by Afua Kuma:

It is true: Jesus is the Chief!
Sovereign among great Chiefs!
Of all the most generous persons He is the greatest,
The most beautiful of thousands;
The commander of seventy warriors⁶⁴

Okokurokohene: powerful Chief!
The sun shines before you, the morning star at your back.

Chief among chiefs, when you stretch forth your hand,
Widows are covered with festive beads
While orphans wear kente!
Ohemmerfo: humble King,
Your words are precious jewels.
We don't buy them, we don't beg for them;
You give them to us freely!⁶⁵

As has been noted earlier, apart from his royal title, every *ohene* is celebrated in what is known as *apae*, (appellations) the traditional courthouse praise poems. As he sits in a durbar or any state function, the *ɔbrafoɔ* (chief executioner) sings his praise in the *apae*. Afua Kuma

praises Jesus with these *apae*. Jesus is called *Okatakyi* (the Brave one or the Hero). The word comes from two words *kata* (to cover) *akyi* (back), which literally means to cover one's back. This particular praise appellation is used for war heroes who make clean sweep of their enemies and return from battle victorious. It is only a brave person and man of valour who fights and covers his back while facing the enemy or does not turn his back to the enemy in battle.

Jesus is *Damfo-Adu*, the one on whom one can rely. The term, which is the traditional title for God, literally means the one on whom one can lean. The image being portrayed here is of the trustworthy person. But he is also *Odupɔnkeseɛ*, the huge tree used in reference to a powerful chief, and *Okuruakwaban*, the source of great strength. *Okuruakwaban* literally means one who lifts giants. Jesus is *Tutugyagu* (pulls out fire), the fearless one. He is *Okokurokofo*, the strong-hearted one, and *Adubasapɔn*, the one who has big muscles and therefore can carry ample weapons. He is *Toturobonsu*, the one who causes the rain to fall and the rivers to overflow. He is also *Ebun Keseɛ*, the pool of great depth. As *Korɔbetoe*, he is the everlasting or eternal one who remains forever. Jesus is *Nyansabuakwa*, the storehouse of wisdom. He is *Awurade*, the Lord to whom all lords belong. He is *Okokurokohene*, the powerful chief, but he is *Ɔhemmerefoɔ*, the humble chief as well. The list is almost inexhaustible. Whereas traditional chiefs have their own unique appellations which may not be used of other chiefs, Afua Kuma ascribes to Jesus all these *apae*. By so doing she places Jesus over and above the chiefs:

Mere chiefs and Kings are not his equals,
Though filled with glory and power,
Wealth and blessings, and royalty
In the greatest abundance
But of them all, he is the leader,
And the chiefs with all their glory follow after him⁶⁶

In his *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political system of Ashanti*, Busia discusses the negative perception of the chief, which came largely as a result of the impact of social change. The modern institution of chieftaincy is plagued by endless lawsuits, land litigation, charges of bribery and corruption, misappropriation of stool funds, and the flagrant abuse of royal authority.⁶⁷ Although Busia's sociological analysis of the chief's position must be taken seriously, we must draw attention to other factors other than the sociological. While in J.S. Pobee there is a positive affirmation of the chief's image, attention is also drawn to the dangers inherent in the institution itself:

The chief analogy is dangerous because it is a *theologia gloriae*, lacking a *theologia crucis*. In other words, the chief analogy denotes authority and power derived from other ways than the way of suffering.⁶⁸

While we agree that the chief's image is inadequate to express Jesus, we note that by associating it with Jesus the chief's image is cleansed and enlarged to accommodate other dimensions, which hitherto were not associated with it.

Jesus "Okyeame"

Flag of young men which has led us to victory!

Okyeame Nɔkwafɔ: the truthful Linguist

who judges things rightly!

He has a share in all of God's creation.⁶⁹

The image of Jesus as *Okyeame Nɔkwafɔ* portrayed by Madam Kuma is "the truthful Linguist who judges things rightly!" It must be stated from the very onset that Jon Kirby's rendering of *ɔkyeame* as linguist is misleading because it paints an image quite different from that carried by Afua Kuma in her poems.⁷⁰ The misleading of the term is traced to past

ethnographies and historical accounts, and a distinction between the two words is necessary for our understanding of Afua Kuma. *Okyeame* means more than the present day linguist who may be endowed with the knowledge of more than two languages. The concept is an institution in itself and plays a vital role in Akan tradition and culture.⁷¹ *Okyeame* as an institution is believed to have been established by *Awurade* Basa, a chief of the first Akan State of Adansi. He was so powerful that direct access to him was not possible unless through a spokesman, and the first spokesman he is believed to have appointed was one Mfrane. The etymology of the word itself is not easy to trace. As a result, several notions of the origins of the word exist but the possible root source can be traced to the Akan word *akyea*, which means that which is twisted, unclear, distorted or hazy. The full expression of the term *akyea ma me* may therefore mean “he bends (my message) for me”. *Okyeame* may therefore refer to an expert in the art of twisting or bending messages or words.⁷² *Okyeame*, accordingly, is a royal spokesperson who majors in the art of speech delivery especially reported speech. By virtue of his unique position in relation to the chief he also doubles as a royal confidant, diplomat or emissary. Two major reasons may be given for the founding of this institution: the sacredness of chiefs and the potency of the spoken word.

By virtue of their unique position as occupants of the ancestral stool, chiefs are regarded as sacred persons. Direct contact with the chief must therefore be avoided at all cost since the power that they radiate can be disastrous. It is in consequence of this that a chief is not allowed to speak directly to his subjects, nor vice versa unless through the *okyeame*. This also ensures that the sanctity of the chief is preserved and is therefore saved from the errors that befall ordinary men. Yankah’s observation is relevant:

Among certain groups, including the Akan, a chief’s slap or curse is believed capable of causing madness. In moments of royal wrath, an agent is needed to contain the destabilising forces capable of being activated. Thus boisterous and undignified remarks indiscreetly made by the chief are instantly

softened and passed on without retroactive damage; for, since the royal speech act is not complete until relayed by the chief's *okyeame*, it does not take effect until that point either.⁷³

The spoken word whether uttered by the chief or anybody else is believed to be powerful and capable of causing harm. Its effect is therefore lessened by the adoption of proverbs and euphemisms. An *okyeame* specialises in these various ways of speaking so as to minimise the effect of the spoken word. As asserted by Yankah it is, "through him that the potency of the incoming spoken word is stepped down and rendered safe for royal consumption."⁷⁴ The importance of the *okyeame* to the stool is evident in the rites and rituals performed prior to his appointment. The rites resemble a traditional wedding ceremony, and thus signify the close relationship between the *okyeame* and the chief. The fact that he is referred to as *ohene yere* (chief's wife) underscores this point. The *okyeame* is made to undergo widowhood rites just like any of the chief's wives when the chief dies.⁷⁵ His insignia of office, which represents his authority, is the *okyeamepoma* (the staff). Yankah observes that, "where the orator does not make a speech, he can rely entirely on the rhetoric of his visual icon to state, in very general terms, the official policy he represents."⁷⁶ (Fig. 5)

The foregoing is the image mediated to us when Afua Kuma portrays Jesus as *Okyeame*. We, however, cannot gloss over the fact that in Afua Kuma the term *okyeame* is qualified by the word *nokwafo* (truthful). She certainly must have been aware that the image she employed in her faith ascription derives from a human institution and was therefore fraught with human frailties. The qualification she enters is very vital and must be seen firstly as a recognition and affirmation of the traditional institution, and secondly, but more importantly, that the institution stands in need of cleansing from the elements that blur and distort the image of the *okyeame*. By assuming the extra epithet as *nokwafo*, Jesus is presented as the cleansing agent who rescues the institution and reinvests it with that moral quality, truth, which is the very essence of his being.⁷⁷

IMAGES OF CHRIST DRAWN FROM FARMING AND FISHING

We have already indicated that Afua Kuma's background was in farming; she was therefore conversant with activities regarding the forest. Some of the images she uses to address Jesus derive from these associations:

You are the deep forest, which gives us tasty foods
The forest of cane and thorns,
Where wander *kente* weavers
In search of shuttle and loom.⁷⁸

The idea that Jesus is himself the *Kwae Kεsee* (deep forest) is very profound. In a sense the very livelihood of the Akan depends on the forest because from it he derives food and game. As *Ɔɔkɔtobonnuare*, Jesus is "the hard-working Farmer, who gives food to the carefree in the morning."⁷⁹ The expression itself means a farmer who can cultivate land that formerly grew only thorn-bushes. The picture that unfolds as we read the poem is the virgin forest that poses problems for peasant farmers. The prayer that follows sums up the travail of many a farmer:

Jesus! You are the chief of farmers.
One of your labourers weeps
He says he has stepped on a thorn.
Another says he's cut his hands;
Another says brambles have scratched him,
And all the rest are caught in a thicket of thorns.⁸⁰

But Afua Kuma moves beyond the traditional notion of *Ɔɔkɔtobonnuare* and employs language from a modern and sophisticated machine to articulate her faith in Jesus as "the Caterpillar who plough up the land."⁸¹ For unless Jesus gives them a bulldozer they will be

unable to clear the troublesome forest. As *Okatakya mu agyaabena* Jesus brings the cleared land to fruition. It is in this context that we apprehend Jesus as *Onyankopɔn Amponyina*, the one who has medicine against hunger. The forest that ensures the life and wellbeing of the Akan is also greatly feared by hunters because it is the abode of mysterious creatures- the *mmoatia* and *sasabonsam*. The *mmoatia*, referred to as *ntia-ntia* which mean little animals or short ones, are believed to be a race of humanoids in the Akan World. These are extremely short creatures measuring between twenty-two and twenty four inches with their feet shaped in such a way that they point backwards. It is believed that they live in two spheres, one that is invisible to human beings, and the physical, in which they interact with human beings.⁸² Christaller defines *Sasabonsam* as “...an imaginary monstrous being, conceived as having a huge body of human shape, but of a red colour and with very long hair, living in the deepest recess of the forest, where an immense silk-cotton-tree is his abode, inimical to man, especially to the priests.”⁸³ It is Jesus that makes the forest safe for the hunters after he has cut the *mmoatia* into pieces and has twisted off the head of *Sasabonsam*. As *Osekyere Sakyi* he is the great Elephant hunter who kills buffaloes.

It is interesting to note that although she comes from a farming community, Afua Kuma indicates in her poem that she is quite conversant with the fishing industry. From her lines it is not very certain whether the industry in question has to do with the river or the sea particularly when she makes reference to fishing nets which are associated with both sources. What is puzzling, though, is her expression of faith in Jesus as **BONSU** (the whale):

He is Bonsu, the whale.
 We don't frighten him with rumbling trucks.
 We are weighed down with booty
 when warring in his name.
 For he comes when we call,
 to perform impossible deeds.⁸⁴

We are quite certain that the natural habitat for *Bonsu* is the sea and not the river. We must however, establish the source of this title which strangely enough is used by Ashanti chiefs who had very little or no connection with the sea. Evidence to this effect is provided by W.E. Ward who mentions Osei Tutu Kwamina Asibe “usually called Osei Bonsu - Bonsu being the name he took later on during his wars.”⁸⁵ If, as indicated by Ward, during the reign of Osei Bonsu the Ashantis sought to stretch their empire to cover the coastal peoples especially the Fante, then it is quite likely that the title *Bonsu* was borrowed from the coast. *Bonsu* then, must have been a powerful traditional notion among the Fante seafaring people to warrant its usage as a title by an Ashanti chief. There is evidence to suggest, however, that such notion of the power of *Bonsu* was prevalent among the Ga too, who must have learnt it from the Fante since fishing is the traditional occupation of both peoples. M.J. Field records that in rites associated with the sea performed at Tema, a Ga coastal fishing community, “the Fanti fishing-gods, *Tantrabu* and *Abɔdiɲkra*, are fed on mashed yam, the bones of *Bonsu* (the whale, supposed to be the incarnation of the *jemãwɔŋ* of the sea) and on freshly ground corn.”⁸⁶ (Fig. 6) If indeed, *Bonsu* is regarded by the Ga as an incarnation of *jemãwɔŋ*,⁸⁷ then we can begin to understand and appreciate the reverence that is paid to this sea creature not only by the fisherfolk but all those living in the community.⁸⁸ Guidance, success, and prosperity at sea are indications of the blessings of *jemãwɔŋ* made manifest in *Bonsu*. It would appear that what was regarded as a powerful religious symbol among the coastal sea fishing communities eventually became one of the most notable stool names for Ashanti chiefs. It is significant to note the transition of the concept from success at sea to success at war when the Ashantis adopted the title, and Madam Kuma’s reference to war booty is indicative of this fact. That is the sense in which we see Madam Kuma using the title to express her faith in Jesus as the one who leads Christians in spiritual warfare.

JESUS “NYANSABUAKWA” (THE STOREHOUSE OF WISDOM)

Jesus, the Seer among prophets
who always speaks the truth.
Wisest of soothsayers, the resurrected body,
who raised himself from three days in the grave
Storehouse of wisdom!
Jesus is the one who shouted at Death,
and death ran from his face.⁸⁹

The first-born Child who knows Death's antidote.
Jesus is the wall which bars Death from entry,
and makes many hearts leap for joy.⁹⁰

Etymologically the word *Nyansabuakwa* (Storehouse of Wisdom) derives from *nyansa* (wisdom), *bua* (to cover), *kwa* (out of nothing); the word therefore means one whose wisdom is absolute or unlimited. If, as we have observed from her background, Afua Kuma was influenced from the folkloric tradition in which she was brought up then we can be certain that she was aware that in the Akan tradition no one person is credited with absolute wisdom.⁹¹ She must have been conversant with the Twi proverb, “*Nyansa nni ɔbaakofo tirim*” which means that wisdom is not the “exclusive possession of one person or race of human beings.” Another proverb which is often quoted to buttress the foregoing is “*Ti koro nkɔ agyina*” (one head does not go into council), which is symbolised by a linguist staff depicting two heads in consultation.⁹² The notion finds expression in the way decisions are made at various levels of the traditional society. Chiefs, clan and family heads hold consultations with their council of advisors, usually made up of old and experienced people, so they can make very good and well informed decisions. It is, therefore, incomprehensible to make such a claim within such a context, as Afua Kuma did. If, indeed, Afua Kuma could

ascribe to Jesus a title that no one in the traditional society could wear, then that shows her perception of Jesus.

It is significant to note that Jesus' wisdom is discussed in the context of his resurrection from the dead, for it is Jesus that "blockades the road of death with wisdom and power."⁹³ Is Afua Kuma making a link between the attribute of Jesus as *Nyansabuakwa* (Storehouse of wisdom) and his ability to rise from the dead?⁹⁴ The link, however, becomes obvious when one considers the fact that death, which is regarded as an enemy in the traditional society because it disrupts the network of kinship relationships and disturbs social harmony, can effectively be handled by wisdom. Several myths and legends abound in Akan society on attempts that have been made by heroes to find an antidote to death; the most popular of these stories being Okomfo Anokye's duel with death.⁹⁵ It will, therefore, be reckoned as a mark of wisdom to handle death the way Jesus did. If all the heroes in Akan mythology have wrestled with death and have failed, we have in Jesus one who confronted death and came back alive.

JESUS "OKYEREMA NYANNO" (GOD OF ALL DRUMMERS)

Jesus! You are Okyerema Nyanno:
the God of all drummers
who are seen in the moon beating your drum
as your young maidens dance around you.
Soldiers, police and crowds of young men
leap in jubilation.
Priests and pastors in procession,
thousands of them,
lift state swords high in salute.
You have adorned your young maidens
with golden finery,
and strewn precious beads before them.⁹⁶

Drumming as an activity plays a very dominant role in the religious and cultural life of the Akan both as means of communication and entertainment. J.H. Nketia identifies three main

types of drumming: popular bands, drumming associations, and state drumming.⁹⁷ To these belong the various categories of drummers, with the most important being the state drummers or those who usually play on the talking drums. The state drummer is often referred to as the *Ɔdomankoma Kyerema* (the Creator's drummer or the Divine drummer). (Fig. 7) Nketia notes that the Divine drummer plays in association with other beings of creation including the *Ɔkyerema Nyannɔ*, the title ascribed to Jesus by Afua Kuma. *Ɔkyerema Nyannɔ* is believed to be the man seen in the moon, and who is variously described as god of the drummers or the master drummer for *Onyankopɔn* the Supreme God. Generally speaking state drummers are regarded as the greatest because of the depth of their knowledge and their ability to communicate on the talking drums. The state drummer is essentially a court historian. As J.H. Nketia notes: "On the approach of the Akwasidae festival, for example, he recounts the names of the ancestor chiefs one by one, praising each one, mentioning his accomplishments, his origin or place of domicile and so on."⁹⁸ Apart from being a historian he plays a very important role in cultic and ritual functions by invoking the presence of the Supreme Being, the lesser gods, ancestor drummers and other spirits. State drumming is, therefore, reckoned as a sacred function and as J.B. Danquah puts it: "A drummer in the act of drumming is considered a sacred person and is immune from assaults and annoyances – nor must he be interrupted; they are not as a rule regarded as sacred persons, but while engaged in the actual act of drumming they are protected by the privileges of sacred persons."⁹⁹

The foregoing gives an insight into the image employed by Afua Kuma to describe Jesus. As God's master drummer, Jesus would be reckoned as the one who links us with God and the means by which the divine will is communicated to humankind. But he is also the historian into whose care is entrusted the sacred history of the Akan people; Jesus is thus linked to the Akan past by virtue of his special function as *Ɔdomankoma Kyerema*.

JESUS “BARIMA” (TRUE MAN)

If *ɔbaatanpa* emphasises the feminine nature of Jesus as one who exercises care over the flock, then *barima* stresses his masculinity. The meaning of *barima* as used by Madam Kuma derives from the following lines:

Truly, Jesus is a Man among men,
the most stalwart of men!
He stands firm as a rock.¹⁰⁰

Akan make a distinction between men who are brave and perform heroic deeds, and those who are cowards. In the context in which *barima* has been used, Jesus is the brave Hunter who has gone into the forest to subdue *Sasabonsam* who has troubled hunters for a long time, and to kill the elephant, while the hunters who ran in fear leaving their guns behind them would be described as cowards.

THE IMAGE OF JESUS AND MODERN INSTITUTIONS OF STATE

The ingenuity and creativity of Madam Afua Kuma is to be seen, not only in the use of traditional categories of thought, but also in her knowledge of some modern institutions of state and their functions.

Chief of Lawyers, to whom we bring our complaints;
You stand at court and defend the poor.
Chief of Police, a big rifle stands at your side!
Jesus! You are the greatest warrior among the soldiers.
You are the **Moon of the harvest month**
Which gives us our food.
Prisoners depend on you as the tongue on the mouth.¹⁰¹

My enemies say they will kill me,
but Jesus is the Chief of Police,
and my enemies have fled,

leaving me in peace.

Sergeant-Major of the soldiers,

when he appears on the scene

my enemies have turned away trembling.¹⁰²

Pencil of teachers

which brings knowledge to the children!

Spokesman of lawyers!

Helper of police!

Victorious Chief of soldiers!

Food of prisoners!¹⁰³

If you are in trouble with the government,

you go and tell Jesus.

When you reach the court

they will say,

“Go back home!” No one will question you;

you won't have to say a word.

I'm going to tell Jesus about it:

today my Husband is a lawyer-

how eloquent he is!¹⁰⁴

In these lines, Afua Kuma makes reference to five key institutions. Four of them, the Bar, the Military, the Police and Education are clearly mentioned, while the fourth, the Economy is implied in the context. Jesus is portrayed as the chief of lawyers to whom we bring our complaints, the chief of Police and chief of the soldiers. He is also the Pencil of teachers, which bring knowledge to our children. To appreciate these images, we focus on three of these institutions and explore their roles and functions in the contexts in which they have been used.

The image of Jesus and the Police

Ansah-Koi Kumi, writing on the role of the Police in Ghanaian society, has indicated the society's perception and image of the Police:

Summarily put, police performance in the polity has also involved a protection (and sometimes the abuse) of fundamental human rights, the enforcement of immigration and other laws made by the State, and the control and direction of vehicular traffic. Other routine functions of theirs have been to combat trade malpractices, to grant various licenses, and the provision of such welfare activities as maintenance of lost persons and a subsequent search for their relations. In addition, in the pursuit of their professional concerns, they have been instrumental in surveillance for the government, in the protection of life and property...¹⁰⁵

According to their operational manual, the police perceive their social function as the prevention and detection of crime, the apprehension of offenders, the preservation of law and order, the protection of person and property, and the enforcement of laws and regulations.¹⁰⁶

As chief of Police, Jesus would be seen to be fulfilling these roles and expectations of the police, especially the basic function of protection of person and property. We however live in an age marked by a crime rate that is assuming alarming proportions such that our society is beginning to lose confidence and trust in the police. This has resulted in an image and perception of the police that is quite different from the ideal. In an article published in the *Legon Digest*, A. A. Afrifa takes the Ghana Police service to task in what he describes as a “culture of brutality” in the Police Service. He contends that although it is the responsibility of the Police to uphold the constitution with regard to the protection of fundamental human rights and the enforcement of laws guaranteed to maintain public peace, the perception of the general public is however different. He writes:

...In many places, the public image of the policeman is not that of a public servant whose duty is to protect the life and property of individuals. There is probably only a small minority of people in this country, who can honestly say they regard the man in blue and black as their friend and protector.¹⁰⁷

Afrifa gives two reasons for this. Firstly he blames the structural and procedural bottlenecks within the judicial set-up, and secondly, the kind of personnel that the Police attract in their recruitment drive. Whatever reasons may be given, the fact remains that there are two

portraits of the police. First, there is the ideal image which may be inferred from their statutory role and function in the protection of life and property, and then, the public perception. Obviously what Afua Kuma had in mind is the ideal image of the Police as the institution established to protect life and property, and since Jesus' mission is to give life in abundance to humankind, he would be perceived as fulfilling this role. The contradiction, however, arises when we are confronted with other images of the Police that seem to negate the ideals for which the institution was set up in the first place. Such contradiction in perception is, however, resolved when we reckon with the fact that by being imaged as the "chief of Police" and "helper of Police", Jesus cleanses the distorted image of the Police service and re-invests it with the ideals for which it has been established.

The Image of Jesus and the Army

What image does Afua Kuma convey by describing Jesus as, "Sergeant-Major of the soldiers" or "Victorious Chief of soldiers?" Apparently she had in mind the role of the army as an institution that protects the nation mainly from external aggressors. Just as the state depends upon the army to deal with external aggression so as to ensure the security and protection of its citizens, so in the spiritual realm it is Jesus as the Sergeant Major of Christians who puts to flight the principalities and powers. But, like that of the Police service, the Army's image is far from what is expected. W.F. Gutteridge states the ideal of the profession thus: "The profession of military officer, unlike most other professions, involves a wide range of different qualifications and expertise, though these are essentially ancillary to the central purpose which is 'the management of violence' in the interest of the state."¹⁰⁸ The involvement of the military in the post-colonial and post-independent states of Africa, however, gives another picture. A lot has been written on military regimes in Africa and the role played by military despots, especially, in the making of Africa's image in the twentieth

century. Army brutalities in coups d'etat in Africa have been well documented. There are many in Africa who are still grappling with the hurt and pain inflicted upon them in the course of violent military interventions. For such people, the army itself is the enemy, rather than the institution that deals with the enemy. It is this impression of the army in Africa which must be dealt with, and we see in Afua Kuma's poem an opportunity for a Christian engagement with the military institution. To say Jesus is a "Sergeant-Major of soldiers" is to bring Jesus into that institution and correct the negative notions and perceptions that alienate the general public from the army.

The Image of Jesus and the economy

Afua Kuma must have been aware of the economic constraints that shaped the context from which her poem originated. From the following lines we get a feel of the economic plight. Her faith in Jesus enables her to address the situation:

Jesus is the day of month when I get my pay.
The Chief of Christians
whose shade-tree grows money,
whose knife cuts great chunks of meat:
The big House which takes in travelers.
The unused farm where grows the wild yam.
The Sea, which gives us fat fish.¹⁰⁹

We have bought things in the market,
and we are going to show them to Jesus
so that he gives us money to pay for them.
He comes holding seven hundred-
not seven hundred cedis,
but seven hundred pounds!
What kind of rich man is this,
that when you are with him
he spends seven hundred pounds on you!¹¹⁰

If I buy your goods on credit, have no fear;
if I don't pay you, you shouldn't complain:
for I'm going to ask a very generous Man,
and get the money to pay you.¹¹¹

Chief of Lawyers, to whom we bring our complaints;
you stand at court and defend the poor.
Chief of Police, a big rifle stands at your side!
Jesus! You are the greatest warrior among the soldiers.
You are the Moon of the harvest month
which gives us our food.
Prisoners depend on you as the tongue on the mouth.¹¹²
(emphasis mine)

For many salaried workers, the day of the month on which they receive their pay packet is a day of joy, which is often associated with the rain. When workers say that it will rain on a particular day it is implied the day on which they receive their pay packet. It is the joy and blessing seemingly associated with this day that Afua Kuma uses to express her faith in Jesus as the “Moon of the harvest month.” The money that is received at the end of the month, for most working Ghanaians in particular, is not enough to counteract the forces that determine the prices on the market. One wonders, however, whether Madam Kuma was aware of the exchange rate mechanism that determines the value of our local currency, and the presence on our market of the so-called convertible currencies. At least we have indication that she is aware that what Jesus brings along, the pound, and probably the British pound, is stronger than the cedi and can whether the storm unleashed by adverse economic forces.

CONCLUSION

It is quite certain that in Afua Kuma's prayers and praises we are not dealing with an academic treatise. Nevertheless a careful reflection on her poem reveals what can be termed a

“grassroots theology”, in so far as it focuses on the expression of faith in Jesus in dealing with the concrete realities of life. We can conveniently distil from her poem, two major concerns, namely **protection** and **provision**. These are the themes that are most celebrated in her work.

We have already noted that Madam Kuma’s poems were triggered by certain calamities she faced in her life, and she interpreted these events in the light of her new faith. For most African Christians like Afua Kuma, protection is not merely an academic subject. She demonstrates in her poem the reality of an unfriendly world peopled by evil spirits, and which constantly threaten the life and well being of people. The world of *abosom* (lesser gods), *nsamanfo* (spirits), and evil spirits like *Sasabonsam* and *Mmoetia*, is engaged by Jesus Christ in a spiritual combat vividly described in a language and metaphor drawn from both the traditional as well as the modern setting. The battle to survive the relentless onslaught of disembodied powers and forces is fought on all fronts. Some of the images we have examined involved the activities of traditional medicine men, whose duty had to do with the provision of ritual objects to ensure that one is secure and safe from evil. The significance of Afua Kuma lies in her ability to articulate faith in Jesus by invoking such powerful images to deal with these forces of instability that are destructive of social harmony and peace. The space that protection occupies in the life of the Akan is equal to that given to the provision of basic necessities. In Afua Kuma’s images of Jesus, we meet one who provides in abundance and beyond imaginable expectations, food, water, clothing and shelter.

If, as spelt out in the *Constitution of Ghana*,¹¹³ the modern institutions of state are mandated to create a congenial atmosphere in which basic human rights are guaranteed, then Afua Kuma’s inclusion of the army, the police, the judiciary and the economy in her presentations of Jesus, would be reckoned as an important theological contribution. The Kingdom of God inaugurated by Christ is not complete until it has brought into its fold the

various institutions that regulate the life and conduct of humankind. By her proclamation, Afua Kuma shows that it is risky to leave the events and institutions that control and shape the life and destinies of peoples everywhere in the hands of the principalities and powers of this world. By associating Jesus with these institutions, Afua Kuma, like Origen, points us to the very final consummation of the Kingdom, the *apocastasis*, an event to climax the final restoration when the end will be like the beginning, and when all things will submit to Christ including all human institutions.¹¹⁴ For Afua Kuma, the process of restoration is to be witnessed in the existential realities of life where Jesus engages these power structures by correcting and reinvesting them with new images. This is a clear witness to the power of the Gospel and an indication that the rule of God in Christ has begun.

In Afua Kuma it is not only institutions that are cleansed. Language, that inadequate tool of human expression is also cleansed. We may not be far from wrong in saying that human imperfection is also mirrored in language use. A classic example is the word *Kronkron* (Holy). In the pre-Christian tradition we observed how its use is alienating, sweeping to the periphery those who by birth do not belong to the blood lineage. That in itself is a testimony and pointer to human depravity and sinfulness. Language as expressed in the mother-tongue is not morally neutral, and if indeed it is the vehicle that bears the very weight of culture then it must also bear the burden of human frailty and fallibility. Interestingly, it is the same word *Kronkron* that finds its way into the Bible, this time with a transformed meaning having been influenced by the Gospel. In this vein we must give credit to those who recognised the potency and salvific value of mother-tongue as the medium through which the Gospel can be mediated to people. It is significant, therefore, to note the influence of Bible translators on the native language. Noel Smith's evaluation of Christaller's work among the Akan attests to this:

Christaller's work achieved three things: it raised the Twi language to a literary level and provided the basis of all later work in the language; it gave the first real insight into Akan religious, social and moral ideas; and it welded the expression of Akan Christian worship to the native tongue.¹¹⁵ (emphasis mine)

If indeed, it is through the mother-tongue that we can gain real insight into the religious, social and moral psyche of people then there is need to critically evaluate the medium through which theological discourse takes place and is subsequently transmitted. J.S. Pobee echoes this concern when he writes:

Ideally, African theologies should be in the vernacular. Language is more than syntax and morphology; it is a vehicle for assuming the weight of a culture. Therefore, this attempt to construct an African theology in the English language is the second best, even if it is convenient [and] if it should secure as wide a circulation as possible.¹¹⁶

If Christaller and Pobee should be taken seriously, and we see no reason to the contrary, then the assumption by some of the educated elite in the Church that they find it more convenient to use the English language as means of expressing their faith is false.¹¹⁷ Christaller has indicated that it is possible to develop an authentic Twi scholarship in any sphere of endeavour including theology. It is in this regard that Madam Kuma's work becomes significant, for in a sense it was anticipated by Christaller. This significance is underscored by Kwame Bediako in his observation:

Madam Afua Kuma is an example of the importance of the vernacular in the apprehension of the Christian faith in Africa. Her book can be examined to understand how Christianity in African life is a genuine answer to African religiousness.¹¹⁸

It is important to observe that the world inhabited by *abosom*, *nsamanfo*, and evil spirits is also inhabited by *Onyankopɔn* (God), except, as claimed by Afua Kuma, that *Nananom* (ancestors) "did not see" *Onyankopɔn*. By this claim Afua Kuma makes a significant theological point bordering on the Christian doctrine of revelation, for it is in Jesus that this

revelation of God is made manifest. This is an eloquent expression of belief in the deity of Jesus Christ, his pre-existence and incarnation. Akan Christians should be able to see in Jesus a true manifestation of *Otumifo Nyankopɔn*; the God who hitherto had had very little or no connection with his people has now taken a permanent abode among his people. It is significant to note that Afua Kuma does not only deal with the question of the Supreme Being; she also takes seriously, as we have sought to show, the reality of the spirit world. In Afua Kuma, *Sekyere Buruku*, *Sasabonsam*, and *mmoetia* are addressed, whereas, in African academic theology this multiplicity of divinities and spiritual agencies is a problem that has not been adequately confronted. Kwame Bediako argues that in their eagerness to stress the “centrality and uniqueness of God in African tradition, African theology has, however, left the natural forces – unaccounted for.”¹¹⁹ The way to resolve the issue, Bediako contends, is to conceive of the primal world as a unified cosmic system, and not a Transcendent ‘spiritual’ world separated from “the realm of regular human existence, since human existence itself participates in the constant interplay of the divine-human encounter.”¹²⁰ The significance of Afua Kuma lies in her ability to articulate this world-view in which the divine-human relationship is utilised to the fullest for the benefit of the human community.

It appears that in investing the image of Jesus with terminologies and notions derived from Islam such as *Kramokesie*, Afua Kuma is engaged in inter-religious dialogue, an exercise often marked by tension, fear and suspicion. Whereas in such dialogue there is a drive within Christianity to sound triumphalistic, and a tendency to make claims for a religious system, in Afua Kuma, it is Jesus himself who stands in the centre of the dialogue.

If theology can be defined as the discourse about God’s redemptive activity in Christ, then we must be concerned not only about the content of that discourse but also about the mode and form in which such presentation is made. Our discussion on Afua Kuma has so far been limited to the content of her prayers and praises to Jesus, and nothing has virtually been said

about the style of her presentation. However, as has been indicated, *Apaē* or the traditional court appellation is much about the content as it is about style of performance. Much emphasis is therefore placed on costume and style of presentation. The impact of Afua Kuma's work, so far as Christian witness and the contribution that this makes to the shaping of Akan theology is concerned, should also be assessed from the standpoint of the style and delivery of her poem.

The point being made has a bearing on liturgy and the contribution that Akan spirituality can make in this direction. It appears that the energies invested by African theologians in the development of authentic ways of expressing the faith have seemed to stress the content analysis of the African story more than the form and style of presentation of such religious experience. The Church in Africa, probably with the exception of some African Independent churches, is still tied, to a very large extent, to the apron strings of Western and European liturgies and ways of worship. A study of *Jesus of the deep forest* must also include, therefore, the form and style of presentation and not only the content. In this field belongs the whole range of non-verbal means of communication including drum language, pantomime, gestures and foot works found in dances, and other forms which have not yet been fully explored. The discourse about God's redemptive activity in Christ takes place also in the non-verbal as much as it does in the verbal, and granted that this is the case, then the Akan folkloric tradition has the potential of shaping the liturgy and the worship of the church.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

¹ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest: Prayers and praises of Afua Kuma*, Accra: Asempa Pub., 1981, p. 38

² Ibid.

³ Mercy Amba Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa; African Women & Patriarchy*, Maryknoll, N.Y; Orbis Books, 1995, p. 59

⁴ J.G. Christaller, *Akan Proverbs*, cited in Mercy Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p. 59

⁵ Mercy Oduyoye, *Daughters of Anowa*, p. 60

⁶ See Matthew 23: 37

⁷ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 30

⁸ Ibid., p.11

⁹ See Matthew 14: 25-27

¹⁰ See Jonah 1: 17

¹¹ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 6

¹² Ibid., p. 7

¹³ See Exodus 13: 17ff

¹⁴ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 28-29

¹⁵ See Exodus 17: 1-7

¹⁶ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 21

¹⁷ J.H. Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities of Ghana*, London: Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., 1963, pp. 159,192. The following drum language illustrates the point:

Ɔsebenso Adwera,

Ɔsee Kum-anini Berempon

Ɔsee *Kronkron*

Go mu brɛbre, go mu brɛbre

(emphasis mine)

What follows is Nketia's translation:

The watery shrub that thrives on hard ground,

Noble Ɔsee, that lays men low,

Ɔsee, true and of pure blood,

Take it easy, take it easy.

(emphasis mine)

In this drum language *Ɔsee* is described not only as pure blood, but also as “true.” The word “true” as used must be understood not as a moral value but in contradistinction to what is fake, an imitation or adulteration. My attention has also been drawn to a Twi proverb, which carries similar notions: *Esono ekora, ena esono akotokora, ena esono ekora kɔɔɔ*. The proverb simply means that there are different categories of mice, so beware of imitation.

¹⁸ Johannes Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language called Tshi (Twi)* (2 vols), Basel: Evangelical Missionary Society, 1881, p. 258. Cf Dennis M. Warren, *Bibliography and Vocabulary of the Akan (Twi-Fante) language of Ghana*, Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Univ. Publication, 1976, p.166

¹⁹ Marion Kilson, “Taxonomy and Form in Ga Ritual” in *Journal of Religion in Africa* vol III fasc. 1, 1970, p. 48.

²⁰ C.A. Akrofi, *Twi Kasa Mmara: Twi Grammar*, Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1965, p. 1

²¹ Gerhard Kittel (ed), *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: WM. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, Vol., 1, 1964, pp. 88-115

²² See Luke 5: 8

²³ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 6

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 25ff

²⁵ See Akosua Perbi, “Researching the historical background of cultural issues”, in *Journal of African Christian thought*, Vol. 2, No., 2, Dec., 1999, pp.33-34. Akosua Perbi shows in her presentation that the only basis for incorporating people into a society as equals is blood. Slaves were considered as having impure blood and were therefore not accorded full rights as citizens.

²⁶ Marion Kilson, *Kpele Lala: Ga Religious Songs and Symbols*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971, p.14 &19. The point that Kilson makes is interesting and is worth noting: “The differentiation between true Ga and other Ga is relevant to the practice of traditional cults, for *kpele* worship is the responsibility of true Ga families.” At the very heart of Ga traditional religion is the purity of the cult. It will appear that cultic purity is predicated on the purity of the group and that seems to me the reason why every effort was made to keep the purity of the group from any adulteration so as to ensure that the sanctity of the cult is preserved.

It is important to cite in this presentation the translation of John 1:47. The Greek adjective ἀληθῶς, that translates Jesus’ description of Nathaniel, is a word which could be translated to mean truly, in truth, actually, surely. It is interesting to note that in both the Twi and Ga translations of the text, the word *kɔɔɔ* which in my

opinion best translates the Greek word has been dropped in preference to the words *nokore* and *anɔkwa* which carry the same meaning in both the Twi and Ga respectively. My guess is that both Zimmermann and Christaller avoided the use of the adjective *krɔɣɣ* apparently because of its cultural baggage of “ethnic cleansing”. Today when Twi or any vernacular translation of the Bible is read, the word *krɔɣɣ* means moral purity and holiness.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 12-13

²⁸ See Revelations 21: 22-23

²⁹ J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language called Tshi (Twi)*, pp. 342ff

³⁰ J.B. Danquah, *Akan Doctrine of God- A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion*, London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1968, p. 30

³¹ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 27

³² Ibid., p. 30

³³ Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis books, 1996, p.71

³⁴ See Acts 14: 8ff and 17: 22ff. Paul’s contention in Lystra that the God of Israel has never left himself without a witness is the same position advanced in his encounter with the Athenians. It is an acknowledgement on the part of the Apostle that the God he sought to present had already taken his place in the receptor culture. And although he affirms this pre-Christian religious heritage, he is also quick to correct it in the light of the gospel.

³⁵ I am grateful to Prof. J.H. Nketia who drew my attention to this translation.

³⁶ For me the inability of *Nananom* to “see” God and yet were able to see and experience the lesser gods and spirits presents a theological difficulty. What is it that made it impossible for them to recognise God? Is it possible to turn to Rom. 1:18ff for insight?

³⁷ See John 1:18. The Akan translation of John 1:18 uses the word *nhunuu* or *anhu* (not seen) which translates the Greek word ἑώρακεν which is the perfect form of the verb ὁράω. The word could be translated as see, observe, notice, perceive, understand, recognise or experience. Our understanding of Afua Kuma is enhanced by reading John 1:18, for in this Johannine passage the evangelist is not making the claim that the Jews had not heard of God or did not know him. The word that he uses ἑώρακεν suggests that they did not perceive, understand, recognise or experience God. It is only in Jesus that this recognition has been made possible. It seems to me that it is precisely the same point that Afua Kuma is making.

³⁸ Kwame Bediako, "Cry Jesus! Christian theology and presence in modern Africa", in *Vox Evangelica*, vol. 23, April 1993, pp. 15-16

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13

⁴¹ R.S. Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929, pp. 121ff

⁴² See M. J. Field, *Social Organization of the Ga People*, London: Crown Agents, 1940, p.73. The point I have made is underscored by Field who notes that the Ga word *maŋ*, borrowed from the Twi *oman* "implies a military confederation."

⁴³ See A.A. Anti, *Kumase in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries (1700-1900)*, Accra: Damage Control Ltd, 1996, pp. 57-58. It is interesting to note that the ordination gown in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana is referred to as *Batakari*. It is most likely that the usage has been influenced by the pre-Christian religious tradition.

⁴⁴ See Kwame Amoah Labi, *Asante Kings of the twentieth century. Power, Pomp and Pageantry: Continuity and change in Asante Kingship*, Legon: Institute of African Studies (Culture Heritage Series), 2000, p.3

⁴⁵ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 6

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9

⁴⁸ See Acts 13:6; 19:19. The word *Nkonyayifo* appears as *Ŋkunyaayelɔ* in the Ga translation of the Greek word *μάγος* (magician). Obviously the Ga word has been loaned from the Akan which interestingly uses another word *adunsifoɔ* to translate the Greek word.

⁴⁹ See W.E. Ward, *A Short History of the Gold Coast*, London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1935, pp. 30-33;100. Ward contends that the "ancestors of the Akans seem to have called themselves Nta-fo." He noted that apart from the Akans the Agni ethnic group from the Ivory Coast and the Guans may have descended from the *Nta-fo*, and probably that is the reason why the "Ashantis to-day still call the Gonjas Nta-fo, and the Guan language has some connection with Akan."

⁵⁰ My sources on *Ntafowa* and *Nkonya* derive from two separate interviews involving Rev. S.K. Aboa and Nana Addo Birikorang, conducted on 18th of August 1999, and the 22nd of September 1999 respectively.

⁵¹ J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language called Tshi (Twi)*, pp. 247ff & 469

⁵² Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 14

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p.6

- ⁵⁴ J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language called Tshi (Twi)*, p. 257
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 254
- ⁵⁶ See Acts 16:16. The Ga translates the Greek πύθων (spirit of divination) as *klamo* which as indicated by Mary Kropp Dakubu is a loan word from Akan. See her edited *Ga-English Dictionary with English-Ga Index*, Accra: Black Mask Ltd., 1999. Interestingly the Akan uses the word *akom* which means to divine.
- ⁵⁷ I.M. Lewis, "Agents of Islamization" in I.M. Lewis (ed) *Islam in Tropical Africa- (Studies presented and discussed at the fifth International African Seminar, Ahmadu Bello Univ., Zaria, Jan 1964,)* London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966, p. 20
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 29
- ⁵⁹ Jon P. Kirby, *God, Shrines, and Problem-Solving among the Anufo of Northern Ghana*, Berlin:Dietrich Reimer Verlag, 1986, p. 105
- ⁶⁰ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 23. The word *Owesekramo* derives from two words; *wesee* (dry) and *kramo* (moslem). The word, therefore, refers to the clear, true or untiring moslem. Used in reference to a diviner the word probably means the true and unadulterated diviner. I am indebted to Mr. Kofi Agyekum of the Language Department, Univ. of Ghana, Legon who assisted me in finding the roots of this word and several others which have been used in this dissertation.
- ⁶¹ J.B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 22
- ⁶² Patrick Akoï, *Divine kingship and its participation in Ashanti, in The Sacral Kingship*, Leiden:E.J. Brill, 1959, p. 135
- ⁶³ K.A. Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti- A Study of the Influence of Contemporary Social Changes on Ashanti Political Institutions*, London: Frank Cass, 1968, p. 26
- ⁶⁴ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, pp. 20-21
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11
- ⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 20
- ⁶⁷ K.A. Busia, *The Position of Chief*, pp.210ff
- ⁶⁸ J.S. Pobee, *Towards an African Theology*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1979, p.97
- ⁶⁹ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 27
- ⁷⁰ Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief- Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory*, Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1995, p. 2ff

⁷¹ See Acts 24:1ff. The word *Okyeame* has been used to translate the Greek ῥήτορος (spokesman), a word from which the English “rhetoric” derives. It is interesting to note that whilst the old Ga translation uses the word *Otsaame*, which obviously is a corruption of the Akan, the new Ga translation renders ῥήτορος as *mlaleɔ* which literally means one who knows the law. Although the range of meanings of ῥήτορος include lawyer and attorney, I think *Okyeame* (spokesman) best translates the Greek word. In most contemporary societies where the judiciary, as an arm of government, has been well developed, it is independent of the executive. However, in the past most traditional societies did not have the judiciary separated from political authority which was fused in the chief or the King who was judge in all situations. Since the *Okyeame* was the spokesman of the traditional court he doubled as the state prosecutor, a function not dissimilar to the one we see being performed by Tertullus in Acts 24: 1ff.

⁷² Kwesi Yankah, *Speaking for the Chief- Okyeame and the Politics of Akan Royal Oratory*, p. 28ff

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 19

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89ff

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31ff

⁷⁷ The idea of Jesus as *okyeame* finds expression in the writings of J.S. Pobee:

In our Akan Christology we propose to think of Jesus as the *okyeame*, or linguist, who in all public matters was as the Chief, God, and is the first officer of the state, in this case, the world. This captures something of the Johannine portrait of Jesus as the Logos, being at one and same time divine and yet subordinate to God. Cf. *Toward an African Theology*, p.95

⁷⁸ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 37

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 10

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 38

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38

⁸² Gabriel Bannerman-Richter, *Mmoetia: The Mysterious Little People*, Elk Grove, California: Gabari Pub. Co. 1987, p. 2. Cf. R.S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*, London: Oxford University Press, 1927, p.25ff

⁸³ J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language called Tshi (Twi)*, p. 413

⁸⁴ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the Deep forest*, p. 19

⁸⁵ W.E. Ward, *A Short History of the Gold Coast*, pp.60-61. Nana Osei Bonsu, the seventh Ashanti king is the first to have used this title. Fifty years after his death (1874) it was used by Nana Mensah Bonsu. (*Daily Graphic*, Souvenir edition, Wed., 24th March, 1999)

⁸⁶ See M. J. Field, *Social Organization of the Ga People*, London: Crown Agents, 1940, p.22. cf. pp.69-70 where she gives a detailed description of the worship of *Bonsu*. In this ritual it is the sacred vertebra of *Bonsu* which is kept and annually re-whitened and fed with rum.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p.4. Field translates *jemāwɔŋ* as 'god'.

⁸⁸ Margaret Field has noted that, "whenever whalebones are washed up on the beach the fishermen put them into a hut built especially for them on the shore, give them periodic rum, and treat them as fetishes." *Ibid.*, p.69. Field's observation is confirmed by an article written by Joe Panford. See his "Sack Cloth And Ashes Over A Dead Whale" in *The Ghanaian*, May 1959, pp.5-6. In this article Panford describes the rites that was performed for a whale calf that was washed ashore in a suburb of Accra on 2nd April, 1959. The description of this ritual is noteworthy:

A grove of palm branches was erected over the decomposing carcass. Naaye Wulomo (chief fetish priest of the sea), assisted by the head fisherman of Jamestown, Nee Okai Shie, poured libation and then let loose a longish, weird incantation. A herbal concoction was sprinkled on the carcass and a white calico cloth draped round it. After that it was all throbs of joy. Drums peeled. Fishermen and their women danced. They sang. They chewed cola nuts. They slaughtered bullocks. They cooked. They ate. And they drank. They would not go fishing for a whole month while the obsequies lasted.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 29

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31

⁹¹ See R.S. Rattray, *Akan Ashanti Folk tales*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969, p.5. The tale of how wisdom spread is common to many societies in Africa. The Akan tale in particular, talks about how Ananse the Spider decided to monopolise wisdom. He is said to have deprived everybody of his wisdom and put it in a gourd with the intention of hiding it on top of a tree. With the gourd tied with a rope and placed in front of him Ananse had difficulty climbing the tree. It took the intervention of his son Ntikuma. When he realised that he had not succeeded in his scheme, he abandoned the idea and threw the gourd down thus spreading wisdom everywhere.

⁹² Kofi Asare Opoku, *Hearing and keeping: Akan Proverbs* (vol. 2), Accra: Asempa Pub., 1997, 69-70 & 125

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 19

⁹⁴ A Ga variant of the Akan folktale on how wisdom spread, makes interesting reading. In that story it is death that keeps custody of all wisdom until *Anaanu* (spider) wrestles it from him, whereas in the Akan version the story actually starts with *Ananse* and makes no mention of death. See *Asenta, Oba!* (Folktales in Ga), Book 3, Accra: Bureau of Ghana Languages, 1964, pp. 12-17

⁹⁵ See R.S.Rattray, *Ashanti Law and Constitution*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929, p.279 Okomfo Anokye, regarded as the most powerful priest in the history of Ghana, is reported to have locked himself up in a room with the instructions that nobody was to weep for seven years and seventy days during which period he would be away looking for a remedy for death. A niece of Anokye who felt that the uncle had been long in coming declared him dead, and subsequently organised his funeral. This situation made it difficult for Anokye to accomplish his task. It is believed that if Anokye had succeeded, Asante would have been ushered into an age of immortality.

⁹⁶ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 33

⁹⁷ J.H. Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities of Ghana*, p.152ff

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154

⁹⁹ J.B. Danquah, *Akan Laws and Customs, and the Akim Abuakwa Constitution*, London: Routledge, 1928 p.51.

Cited in J.H. Nketia, *Drumming in Akan Communities of Ghana*, p.158

¹⁰⁰ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, p. 19

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 18

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 27-28

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43

¹⁰⁵ Kumi Ansah-Koi, *The Police and Society: A Study of the Role of the Police in the Ghanaian Polity, (1957-1979)*. An unpublished Thesis presented to the Univ. of Ghana, Political Science Dept., 1981, p.185

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 74

¹⁰⁷ A.A. Afrifa, "Social Psychology of Police Brutality", *Legon Digest*, No. 3 Oct. 1-14, 1998, p.11

¹⁰⁸ W.F. Gutteridge, *Military Regimes in Africa*, London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1975, p. 27

¹⁰⁹ Afua Kuma, *Jesus of the deep forest*, pp. 30-31

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 44

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.30

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p.12

¹¹³ See the preamble of the *Constitution of the Republic of Ghana* (1992). The relevant section reads, “In exercise of our natural and inalienable right to establish a framework of government which shall secure for ourselves and posterity the blessings of liberty, equality of opportunity and prosperity...” It is within this framework of government that the judiciary, the military, the police, and the financial institutions are supposed to function.

¹¹⁴ Origen’s thought on the *apocastasis* is worth noting:

For the end is always like the beginning. Therefore, just as the end of all things is one, so the beginning of all things must be regarded as one; and as there is one end for many, so from a single beginning there are many varieties and differences; and these by the goodness of God, by submission to Christ, by the unity of the Holy Spirit, are once again recalled to one end, which is like the beginning—these, I mean, who by ‘bowing the knee at the name of Jesus’ have in this way declared their submission, and who belong to ‘those in heaven, those on earth, and those under the earth’. By these three categories the whole universe is signified, those (creatures), that is, who from a single beginning... have been arranged in various orders according to their deserts. (*De Principiis* I, 6,2)

Cited in Jean Daniélou, *Gospel Message and Hellenistic Culture: A History of Early Christian Doctrine before the Council of Nicaea* Vol. 2, London, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1973, p.422

¹¹⁵ Noel Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*, Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1966, p. 55

¹¹⁶ J.S. Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1979, p. 23

¹¹⁷ It is fashionable in some churches especially those of the charismatic persuasion for the sermon to be delivered in English and interpreted into the local languages. It would appear that the reason for this practice relates to the cosmopolitan nature of some of these churches, but a critical look into other areas of church life suggests otherwise. This is clearly demonstrated, for instance, in the way group Bible studies are handled. It is usually the “illiterates”, who cannot express themselves in English, who conduct their studies in the mother-tongue, while the educated conduct theirs in the English language.

¹¹⁸ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995, p. 60

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 97

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.101

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION:

IGNATIUS AND AFUA KUMA: REFLECTIONS ON SOME COMMON THEOLOGICAL STRANDS IN SECOND CENTURY CHRISTIANITY AND MODERN AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY

Up to this point our discussion of the Christian imagination regarding the person of Jesus Christ has proceeded on parallel lines and has focused on Ignatius and Afua Kuma and the contexts they both represent. We take the view that although these images derive from two different contexts separated by twenty centuries, yet they bear a common witness to Christ. In this concluding chapter we seek to demonstrate this reality by setting the second century Christian experience as analogue of the modern African experience and showing the relevance of one context for the other.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF IMAGES FOR THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING

Images by their very nature make concrete impressions on the mind. Unlike philosophical and abstract ideas, images have the power of persuasion. The point made by Thomas Mathews about the power of visual images could apply to verbal images as well:

Images, no matter how discreetly chosen, come freighted with conscious or subliminal memories; no matter how limited their projected use, they burn indelible outlines into the mind. Often images overwhelm the ideas they are supposed to be carrying, or dress up with respectability ideas that in themselves are too shoddy to carry intellectual weight. Images not only express convictions, they alter feelings and end up justifying convictions. Eventually of course, they invite worship.¹

Mathews' comments have relevance for our study of Ignatius and Madam Afua Kuma.

IMAGES BEAR THE WEIGHT OF THE CONSCIOUS AND UNCONSCIOUS

Mathews' postulate that images are 'freighted with conscious or subliminal memories', could be interpreted to mean that images come weighted or loaded with conscious and unconscious memory. The conscious and the unconscious aspects of the human personality act as a storehouse of the people's past; their history, culture, religious background, personal experiences, world-view, beliefs, fears, hopes and aspirations. The conscious and unconscious memories deal with their past, but this enables them handle their present and their future as well. Images, according to Mathews, are like vehicles that carry along with them the cultural, religious, and historical baggage. Images are to be seen, therefore, as indices or icons representing all the factors that go to inform and eventually build the individual personality. Images appeal to the mind, striking familiar cords or resonating with features that can easily be identified by the memory. We have already noted that in Akan rhetoric, one of the objectives is to narrate the historical achievements of the stool and their occupants. The content of the narrative may therefore, deal with actual historical events, but the medium used in conveying these ideas are metaphors and pictures that strike the memory cords of the audience.

By invoking the imagery of the pagan religious procession in his letter to the Ephesians, Ignatius was similarly striking familiar cords. By using these pictures to describe Christ, Afua Kuma and Ignatius were re-incarnating and refurbishing ideas that were already in existence to appeal to the mind. In this way, Jesus is enabled to make his entry into the memory storehouse of the Akan, Philadelphian or Roman, and to deal with their past and present commitments. Conversion as a process begins here, and is not complete until the past has been effectively dealt with. If Jesus must come into the worlds of those to whom the gospel is preached then he must be re-incarnated in forms and images that resonate with the familiar. Images by their very nature reinforce our notions of the incarnation.

It is at this juncture that we must take seriously Mathews' caution on the dangers inherent in the use of images.² He contends that images are not neutral. The verbal pictures that both Ignatius and Afua Kuma employ to express their faith in Jesus have the potency of carrying along with them all the cultural and religious trappings inherent in that tradition. Anton Wessels' question as to whether when we preach the gospel Christ is portrayed, or Christ is betrayed becomes relevant.³ It is pertinent to ask whether in their bid to articulate their faith both Ignatius and Afua Kuma portrayed Christ or betrayed him. In answering the question we must bear in mind the fact that no single image or expression of faith in Christ is adequate to portray him. It is possible, therefore, to talk about degrees of portrayal and betrayal rather than complete portrayal or betrayal. Each image that has been used by either Ignatius or Afua Kuma, in my view, carries both elements of portrayal and betrayal. We recognise the attempt on the part of Ignatius and Afua Kuma to be faithful in their description of Christ, but this is simply a case of a distorted *imago Dei* attempting to express the *imago Christi*. The attempt to translate or incarnate Christ in any cultural setting is essentially a human effort and often carries with it all the trappings of human frailty and contradictions. It is possible to argue that the betrayal of Jesus is a measure of human fallibility, and that the proper portrayal of Christ is indicative of human goodness and trustworthiness, for in every human being lies also the potential to do that which is good. Even this, however, is made possible by the *imago Christi* as it cleanses and transforms the distorted *imago Dei*.

IMAGES AND WORSHIP - THE ROLE OF THE IMAGINATION IN THEOLOGY

Although the subject of our discussion is limited to verbal images, issues regarding art paintings or drawings of Christ may well apply here. The Iconoclastic controversy of the fourth century mainly had to do with the question as to whether images can be used in worship. The Iconoclasts took the view that to portray Christ in concrete forms is to

emphasise his humanity and thus to minimise his divinity. The Iconodules opposed this view and argued that it is not necessarily the images that are worshipped but the personality they depict; they contended that the images were subsequently to be seen as visual aids to worship and devotion.⁴

It is important to observe that Afua Kuma's poem originated in the context of worship, and certainly there must have been a connection between those vivid images she portrayed of Christ and her worship. She must have painted those images of Jesus in the minds of other worshippers who heard her, especially those who were quite conversant with the Akan religious tradition from which the images originated. If, as indicated by Thomas Mathews, images invite worship then we must realise the importance of this in the development of theological thought. Serving the Lord involves not only human might and emotion but also the mental faculties. The mind is, therefore, to be reckoned as an important component in worship, for it is the mind that is fired by images in worship. When Jesus enters any culture he captures the imagination in worship,⁵ and it is the creativity that is unleashed which eventually finds expression in the composition of poems, hymns, and works of art. Imagination in this regard is fruit of witness to Jesus mediated through a new cultural idiom, and which makes it possible for Jesus to be conceptualised in those concrete realities of human existence. Afua Kuma reflects the experience of Ignatius in so far as the use of the imagination is concerned. In one context, the second century, the imagination is captured and Christ is conceptualised in Hellenistic models. Twenty centuries on, the phenomenon is exhibited in modern Africa, in the life of a saintly woman, who though illiterate, passes her experience of Christ through the filters of the Akan folkloric tradition. The phenomenon of the imagination of Christ in this instance, is the same although the cultures in question vary. More often than not, we have attempted to describe worship only in terms of the emotion, but the emotive force has a mental dimension which is often overlooked. It is this role of the

imagination that must be explored and appropriated not only in liturgical formulations but also in pedagogy. In this regard audio-visuals, which are essentially image making tools, become useful.

“CHRIST CHAMELEON”- THE CHANGING FACE OF JESUS IN HISTORY

Whereas the Jesus of history comes to us as man with all the limitations, the Jesus of faith, however, transcends time and space and incarnates every cultural milieu in which he is proclaimed. In New Testament times he is imaged as the hope of the Jews and the one to fulfill the expectations of the promised Messiah and subsequently made to wear the various titles of the pre-Christian Jewish religious tradition. The Apostolic and the Ante-Nicene periods witnessed new images of Jesus as Christians wrestled with the question of Jesus' identity in their own contexts. Ignatius provides us with a new set of eyes to see Jesus Christ differently from the normative way in which he has often been described. Jesus is the *Archive*, the one who fulfills in himself the hopes and aspirations of all peoples including Jews. He is the image and the *Stamp of God* who gives the Christian his true identity, and as *Door* and *Altar* he opens up opportunities for us and gives us access to the Father; by him individual as well as corporate harmony is achieved. Jesus is the second century *Unerring-mouthpiece of God*, but he is also the *Okyeame* who speaks for God in modern Africa. He is allowed to enter the Akan religious world and appropriate to himself all that is cherished in the pre-Christian past. Jesus is *Chief*, but he is also the mouth-piece by whom the chief speaks. He is imaged as *Obarima*, true man, but he is also *Obaatanpa*, true mother, obliterating the false dichotomy that divide the genders.⁶ As observed by Thomas Mathews, “in his hallucinatory changeability Christ chameleon embraces all contradictions.”⁷

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SCRIPTURE AND TRADITION

The second century is unique because it witnessed the period and interface between the oral phase of scripture termed “tradition” and the written books of the New Testament. We have observed that during this period it was not easy to make any neat dichotomy between the two, and it was likely Ignatius might have drawn on both sources in writing his letters. If, as we noted, Afua Kuma was not literate then it is most likely that she must have dwelt on some form of oral sources through which scripture is mediated, and these may come in the form of the public reading of the scriptures, through sermons and Bible study sessions.⁸ It will be most helpful to research into ways in which scripture is appropriated and used especially in non-literate cultures where the Biblical narratives are largely transmitted in oral form. We may be able to find out why certain stories of the Bible are used more often, whilst others are hardly used at all. In this regard the second century becomes a pattern for our consideration of the relationship between Scripture and tradition in modern Africa; for what is tradition in second century Christianity may well have a bearing on what is tradition in African Christianity. In this direction the Church of the second century has lessons for the emerging Church in Africa, and the latter may help us in clarifying and understanding the relationship that existed between Scripture and tradition in the former. In my opinion, the area that needs to be explored and in which some work has already started, are the various approaches to reading the Bible in Africa. Insight provided by Gerald West on *Liberation Hermeneutics*, especially the relative roles of both the ordinary reader and the academic reader, may well serve our purpose.⁹ Equally relevant is Justin Ukpong’s *Inculturation Hermeneutics* that seek to develop an indigenous approach that takes seriously the historical critical method but which is also faithful to challenges posed by the context within which the reading is done.¹⁰

When it comes to Biblical hermeneutics in Africa we may well find that we cannot ignore insights provided by Afua Kuma who represents the many ordinary and unlettered Christians.

THE IMPORTANCE OF GRASSROOTS THEOLOGY

Theology as practiced in the academia loses vitality when it loses contact with worship and religious experience. For academic theology to survive, therefore, it must necessarily have its roots firmly imbedded in the activities closely associated with worship and religious experience such as prayer, songs, and testimonies. It is in worship that we find passion, fire, zeal, enthusiasm richly expressed and it is within this context of religious activity that the heart lays bare those innermost thoughts and feelings without any inhibition. Those who manifest such Christianity can conveniently be described as “grassroots theologians” insofar as the practice of their faith indicate a conversation and reflections on the central tenets of the Christian faith such as God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation and deliverance. Our work has so far shown that the works of both Ignatius and Afua Kuma are a result of the practice of their Christian faith. This enables us to place them within the category of the “grassroots”. Like poets burning with passion there is practically no restraint in their choice of images. Ignatius could therefore, exhort the church to carry Christ in their religious pilgrimage just as the pagans carry their gods and their ritual objects, thus creating the impression that Christ could simply be reduced to an object of worship. We have already noted that through the use of such picturesque imagery Ignatius provided the link between the New Testament tradition and what became known as orthodox tradition. By so doing he laid the foundations for academic theology although we may not describe him as an academic theologian. He thus combines in himself the “fluid” era of his time and the “concrete” era of the fourth century. In that sense he is from the “grassroots” but in actual fact represents more than that. By reading Ignatius through the eyes of Afua Kuma we come to appreciate the

significance of Ignatius as a grassroots theologian especially in the use of images for which he is mostly noted. With hindsight we may query his use of language and imagery, but against the backdrop of twentieth century Africa our understanding of him is enhanced. Like Afua Kuma, there is no restraint in his choice of imagery. Academic theology cautions against the use of such language and imagery, because at that level of theological reflection the fires of passion and exuberance noticeable in worship may have given way, and it is a critical mind that occupies the stage. It is such critical minds that caution against the use of the image “chief” in describing Christ, because in their opinion that is dangerous. Both Harry Sawyerr and John Pobee¹¹ in their theological reflections caution against the use of such image. Sometimes in the Church’s attempt to safeguard and protect the frontiers of what has been defined as orthodoxy, she has rather ended up emasculating and quenching the inner drive that often finds expression in worship. In this connection Ignatius and Afua Kuma represent the “theologians at the grassroots” whose works need not scare the academic theologian. In this connection Daniel von Allmen’s word to theologians is apposite:

The theologian has no right to fear the spontaneous manner in which the Church sometimes expresses the faith. If the apostles had been timorous and shut the mouths of the poets through fear of heresy, the Church would never have found footing on Hellenistic soil. Thus the way things happened in the primitive church teaches us that in the Church the life of faith is the primary thing.¹²

Von Allmen takes the view that such works that are a result of the exercise of faith in Jesus, need to be recognised by the Church as raw materials necessary for the development of the theological enterprise. In this category belongs poems such as those rendered by Afua Kuma, pastoral letters moulded in the fashion of Ignatius, hymns, choruses, sermons, “testimonies” and “thanksgivings”,¹³ prayers, and generally works belonging to the aesthetical realm like fine art and sculpture. All this and more constitute the media through which people express their faith in response to what Jesus means to them, and this is by no means inferior to

systematic thought. It is possible to compare the earliest Christological hymns in the book of Hebrews and the Pauline epistles¹⁴ with African Christian choruses and poems such as those of Afua Kuma and observe the common and divergent themes. It is possible to arrive at a conclusion on the basis of this comparative study that “what the first Christians (and possibly ordinary African converts like Afua Kuma) precisely did not begin by doing was to express their faith in the form of a systematically worked out theology.”¹⁵

This study may also confirm Edmund Schlink’s observation that “the basic structure of God-talk is not the *doctrine* of God but the *worship* of God.”¹⁶ It is very important that we recognise the fundamental difference between God-talk arising from the context of worship as people express their faith in God, and the God-talk which is a result of a systematic ordering and arrangement of such religious data into doctrinal codes. When critics of the Christian religion contend with theologians on questions regarding the Christian faith they are essentially contending primarily with peoples’ religious experience. Both Celsus¹⁷ and Okot p’Bitek,¹⁸ representing non-Christian writers of the second century and modern Africa respectively, may well find the answers to their query not from a well couched academic theological response, but from the vital religious expression of faith. Bediako argues that “the absence of a major *theological* response to Okot p’Bitek may also reveal a more fundamental lack which needs to be addressed in the agenda of the future.”¹⁹ Apparently Bediako is looking for a “full-scale response to Okot p’Bitek and other African non-Christian critics of the African theological enterprise.” In drawing up this agenda towards the realisation of a full-scale response to the critics of African theology, we may well have to consider the role of grassroots theologians. We may not assume that the response given by those in academic theology necessarily involves the grassroots because we have noted that it is possible for us to operate with an academic theology that has no vitality because it has lost contact with the grassroots. As we have already indicated, both are needed in any meaningful theological

enterprise. We need to address the question, however, as to what Okot p'Bitek and his friends are contending with. Are they querying a theology that has lost its vital link, or a theology that is still in touch with vitality? What happens when Okot p'Bitek meets Afua Kuma, and what is likely to be the nature of the dialogue? Okot p'Bitek may bask in the glories of the African pre-Christian past,²⁰ but he may well realise that there are others like Afua Kuma who glory in such past too, but in ways that cannot be described as “Western” or “Missionary misrepresentation” of African tradition. Such an encounter is likely to produce its own questions and answers and may give insight into areas that have not yet been explored by academic theologians. Is it not the case that when African scholars with Western training and orientation, Christian or otherwise, engage in dialogue the rules of the debate are often conditioned by European and Western philosophical outlook? Is it possible then to look up to people like Afua Kuma to provide us with not only new rules for dialogue and debate, but also new tools and methods for studying the text of scripture? If indeed, the Christian faith can be expressed in non-Western categories of thought then are we still justified in thinking of Christianity as a Western importation when in actual fact people like Afua Kuma, who are trail-blazers in this new enterprise, have not passed through the mill of Western education? If we must accept that we have been ushered into a new way of doing theology, then for how long must we rely on rules dictated by the Western theological enterprise? Works like the prayers and praises of Afua Kuma give insight into the way theological education may be done in Africa. It also gives us the tools to critique culture from within and to redefine the parameters within which culture can be defined. In Afua Kuma we see contextualisation and indigenisation of the Gospel effortlessly being made without the apologies which usually characterise the works of some theologians. It is true to say that for Afua Kuma the Gospel has become part of her culture, and is no longer to be considered as an offshoot of the colonial enterprise and a legacy bequeathed to Africa by the empire builders.

It is my view that the credibility and authenticity of “grassroots theology” has been established. We may also take seriously Kwame Bediako’s caution against the tendency to regard such theology as, “an oral phase, a transition stage, on the way to the academic or written theology, which then becomes the real theology.”²¹ Bediako should be understood to mean that already, in the so-called “oral phase” or “transition stage” lie those elements that make for “real theology” capable of giving a ready response to questions on the Christian faith. Unless we reckon the fact that “grassroots theology” has contributions to make in witnessing to Christ, especially among non-Christian academic writers, then we shall continue to regard such religious expression as belonging to only non-literate societies, as if the passion, zeal and exuberance which occasion the expression of such theology are elementary characteristics of the unrefined or the uncultured, and must necessarily give way to the rational and sublime once they have been tamed.

Ignatius and Afua Kuma become significant because they draw attention to this vitality of religious expression and convictions. Whereas academic theologians of the fourth century and modern Africa illustrate the systematic way of doing theology, Ignatius and Afua Kuma illustrate quite another way of their own. Whilst in the former there is a deliberate attempt to construct a theology and work it into the doctrine and liturgy of the church, the latter works quite in the opposite direction. It needs to be realised, however, that both theologies belong to the same continuum, the one informs and revitalises the other, while the other has the responsibility of “understanding, clarifying and demonstrating the universal and academic significance of the grassroots theology in the interest of the wider missionary task.”²²

In her contribution to the discussion on the relationship between academic theology and what she calls “the everyday”, Kathryn Tanner has stressed the need for academic theologians to “incorporate this idea of a theological continuum”,²³ because in her view that would “lessen the gap between itself and theological activity elsewhere.”²⁴ The distinction

brought to bear on the two systems as “theory” and “matter” and as “second-order” and “first-order”,²⁵ according to Tanner is not helpful because it creates the impression that the two belong to different planes and are therefore mutually exclusive. She argues that they both raise the same questions and concerns with the “second-order” placing “premium on clarity, systematicity, and consistency of expression.”²⁶ She is, however, of the view that whatever differences exist between academic theology and “the everyday” is one of degree and not of kind, since in academic theology there occurs a certain level of “social practice” and “the everyday” has its own theoretical dimension.²⁷

In this discussion we have been concerned to show the importance of grassroots theology as a credible force in the evolution and development of systematic thought. The views so far expressed, however, indicate the need to view both grassroots theology and academic theology as belonging to one broad spectrum shedding light on the religious experience of the faithful as they encounter the risen Lord.

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¹ Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, Princeton, NJ:

Princeton University Press, 1993, p. 11

² See L.F. Rømer, “On the Negroes’ religion in general”, in *Institute of African Studies Research Review*, New series Vol. No. 2, July 1987. (translation by Irene Odotei). Rømer gives one of the earliest account of the pre-Christian religious tradition of the Ga people. In this account, recorded during his service in the Gold Coast in the first half of the eighteenth century, he tells us how the image of the devil was used by the natives to frighten the devil and keep him away:

I have not seen any picture of God but of the devil painted like a pousee of clay and gum with a pair of horns on the head and a tail almost as our painters paint it. They say that the devil is white and paint him with the whitest colour. Their picture of the devil usually a span high covered with hair and

feathers. When I asked them if the fetish had instructed them to paint such a picture, they answered that it was an old woman who produced them and hired them for eight days or more to those whom the devil disturbed at night and gave no rest. *The devil is so afraid of his own picture that he never revisited a house in which he had once seen his picture.* (p.117) (my emphasis)

It is very interesting to observe that whereas there was no portrait of God, there was one for the devil. The notion that the devil is afraid of his own image makes interesting reading as well. The place of images in the pre-Christian religious heritage of the Ga is an area that needs to be researched. For instance, the chief priest of La, the *Lakpa Wulomɔ*, is forbidden by custom to look at his image in a mirror and Ga generally loath the making of pictures and portraits. It is revealing that the Ga word *susuma* which translates the English “shadow” is the same word that is used to translate the word “soul”. It will appear, therefore, that for the Ga the human shadow is simply more than a shadowy image. A Ga who is well attuned to such notions and is deeply rooted in his tradition will not allow anyone to stand on his *susuma*. Such is the seriousness with which the Ga views images. The Ga may not have difficulty, therefore, in understanding that Christ is the image and true representation of the Father.

³ Anton Wessels, *Images of Jesus: How Jesus Is Perceived and Portrayed in Non-European Cultures*, Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1986, p.13ff

⁴ Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church: The story of emergent Christianity from the apostolic age to the foundation of the Church of Rome*, London: Penguin Books, 1967, p.283

⁵ In his *Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto speaks about the nature of the “numinous” in stirring or gripping the human mind. For him, it is the “Mysterium Tremendum” that is encountered in worship, which creates the fascinating experience which eventually leads to “creature-feeling” or “creature-consciousness”. It is this experience of the “Holy”, the manifestation of God’s presence through Christ which leads people like Ignatius and Afua Kuma to burst forth in praise using themes that are very familiar in their local context. Cf Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the non-rational factor in the idea of the divine and its relation to the rational* (tr. by John W. Harvey), London: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. 1950

⁶ See Gal.3:28 Paul in this passage stresses the oneness of our common humanity in Christ.

⁷ Thomas Mathews, *The Clash of Gods: A Reinterpretation of Early Christian Art*, p. 177

⁸ See Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Pietermaritzburg; Cluster and Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995, p.195. In writing on the approach adopted by the African Independent Churches in the reading of the Bible, West cites Itumeleng Mosala who

contends that the “source of their knowledge of the Bible is not the biblical texts themselves. Members have an oral knowledge of the Bible. Most of their information about the Bible comes from socialisation in the churches themselves as they listen to prayers and to sermons.”

⁹ Gerald West, *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation: Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, pp. 175ff

¹⁰ See Justin Ukpong, “Rereading the Bible with African Eyes: Inculturation and Hermeneutics”, *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 91, 1995

¹¹ See Harry Sawyerr, *Creative Evangelism: Toward a New Christian Encounter with Africa*, London: Lutterworth Press, 1968 pp. 72-73 and John Pobee, *Toward an African Theology*, Nashville: Abingdon, 1979, p.97

¹² Daniel von Allmen, “The Birth of theology: Contextualisation as the dynamic element in the formation of New Testament Theology” in *International Review of Missions*, 64, January 1975, p. 44

¹³ In some Churches in Ghana opportunity is given to people during worship to testify to what Jesus has done for them, and it is this that is referred to as “Testimonies.” “Thanksgiving” on the other hand refer to offerings, whether cash or kind, given in recognition of God’s deliverance or provision through Christ. Thanksgiving is usually accompanied by a Scripture text or a quotation from a hymn in support of what is said. Both activities give indication of the theological stance of the worshipper. Also included in this category is “prayer”, the kind that is not conditioned by the prayer book or the liturgy. Such extempore prayers have very deep theological insights that are yet to be explored and acknowledged.

¹⁴ See Hebrews 1:1-3, Philippians 2: 6-11, I Timothy 3:16, Col.,1: 15-20,

¹⁵ Daniel von Allmen, “The Birth of theology: Contextualisation as the dynamic element in the formation of New Testament Theology” p. 41

¹⁶ Edmund Schlink, “Die Methode des dogmatischen ökumenischen Dialogs”, *Kerygma und Dogma* 12 (1966), p. 209 cited in Daniel von Allmen, “The Birth of theology: Contextualisation as the dynamic element in the formation of New Testament Theology” p. 41

¹⁷ See Henry Chadwick, *Origen: Contra Celsum*, (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1953) p.XXI. In his attack against Christians Celsus contends that even though he could make a case for the Jews because their worship is peculiar and ancient, the same could not be said for the Christians. He argued that the Christians had ‘no authority for their doctrine, which is a perversion, and caricature of the ancient tradition’. Celsus is

concerned that Christianity as a new movement is disruptive of traditional norms and social structures. His position is ably articulated by Henry Chadwick:

Let the Christians return to take their stand upon the old paths and abandon this newly invented absurdity of worshipping a Jew recently crucified in disgraceful circumstances. Let them return to the old polytheism to the customs of their fathers. Christianity is a dangerous modern innovation, and if it is not checked it will be disastrous for the Roman Empire.

T.R.Glover says of Celsus that, “He mistrusted new movements – not least when they were so conspicuously alien to the Greek mind as the new superstition that came from Palestine.” See his *The Conflict of Religions in the Early Roman Empire*, (Methuen & Co. Ltd: London, 1909), p.241

¹⁸ See Okot p’Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, Kampala: East African Literature Bureau, 1970. p’Bitek is concerned about maintaining the distinctive features of African Religions rather than casting them in the mould of Western philosophical ideas. He contends that rather than studying African Religions for what they are African scholars have been preoccupied with finding Western models to fit African notions with the results that African Religions have been conscripted as a mercenary force serving, not the issues and concerns of Africa, but Europe and the West. His concerns are captured in the following words:

African peoples may describe their deities as “strong” but not “omnipotent”; “wise”, not “omniscient”; “old”, not “eternal”, “great”, not “omnipresent”. The Greek metaphysical terms are meaningless in African thinking. Like Danquah, Mbiti, Idowu, Busia, Abraham, Kenyatta, Senghor and the missionaries, modern Western Christian anthropologists are intellectual smugglers. They are busy introducing Greek metaphysical conceptions into African religious thought. The African deities of the books, clothed with the attributes of the Christian God, are, in the main, creations of the students of African religions. They are all beyond recognition to the ordinary Africans in the countryside. (p. 88)

¹⁹ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa*, Oxford: Regnum Books, 1992, p. 438

²⁰ It is significant to note what Ali Mazrui says in his epilogue on p’Bitek’s passion for Africa’s pre-Christian heritage: “...p’Bitek would prefer to revel in what was African, even if it denoted a lack of inventiveness; rather than discover Western doctrines in African traditional customs.” See Okot p’Bitek, *African Religions in Western Scholarship*, p. 128

²¹ Kwame Bediako, "Cry Jesus! Christian Theology and Presence in Modern Africa" in *Vox Evangelica*, vol. 23, April 1993, pp. 22-23

²² Ibid., p.23

²³ Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A new agenda for theology*, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997, p. 71

²⁴ Ibid., p.71

²⁵ Ibid., p.72

²⁶ Ibid., p.71

²⁷ Ibid., p.72



FIG.1a A hen brooding over her chicks



FIG. 1b *Akoko Baatan*. A symbolic expression of fig. 1a which shows care and protection.

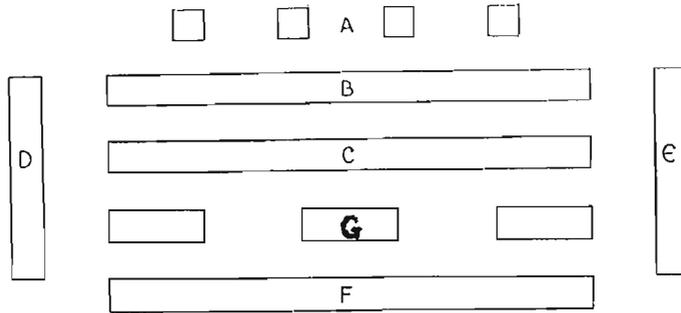


FIG. 2a Akan war formation
 A. Akwansrafo (Scouts) B. Twafo C. Adonten D. Benkum (Left wing) E. Nifa (Right wing) F. Kyidom (Rear-guard) G. The chief

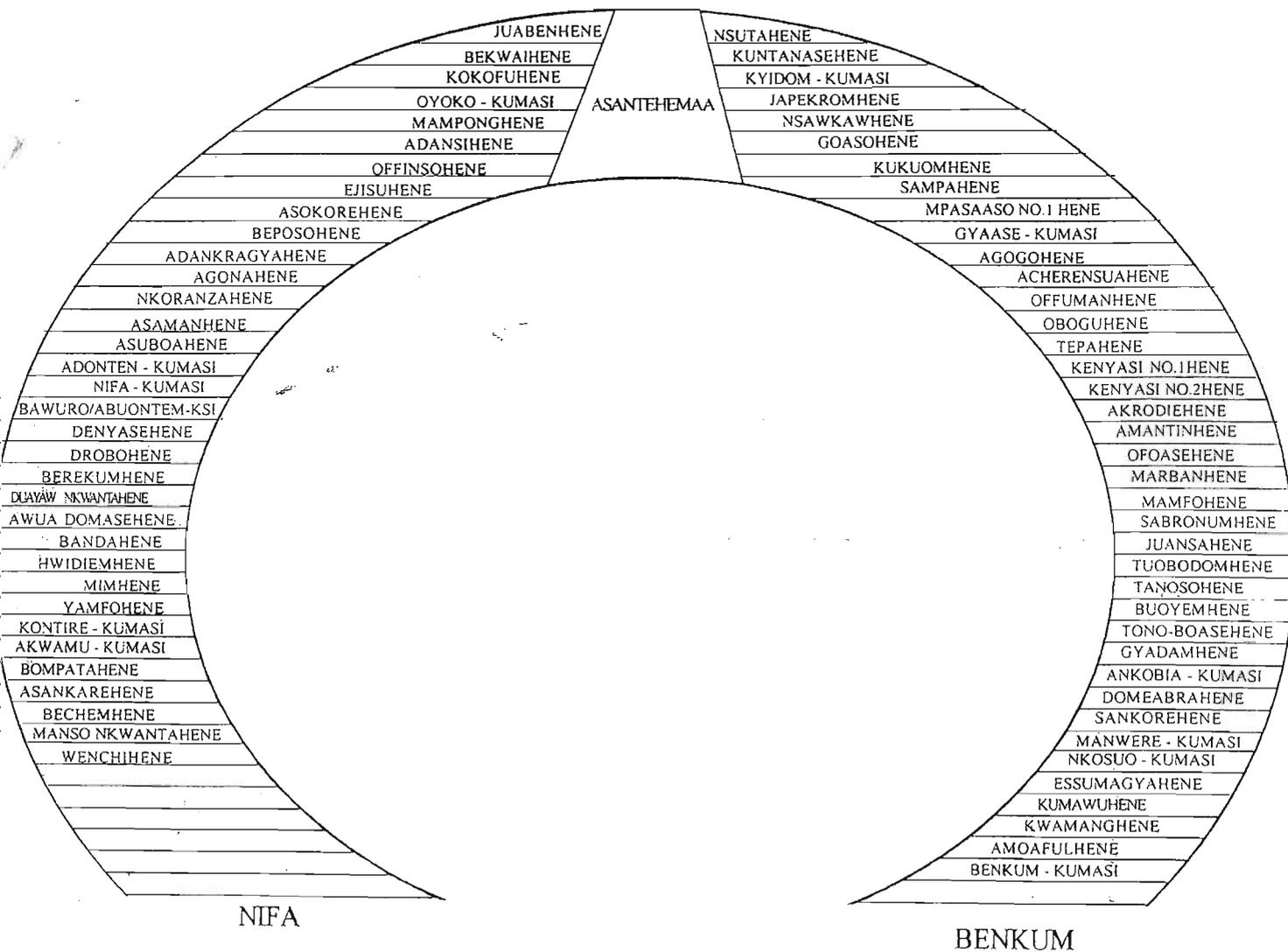


FIG. 2b. Asanteman council- seating plan



FIG. 3 Otumfoɔ Osei Tutu II dressed in the *Batakarikesie* during his installation as Asantehene. Notice the talismans which decorate this ancient military outfit. Afua Kuma imagines Jesus' *Batakarikesie* studded with the Sun and Moon instead of the talismans.



FIG. 4 A chief in palanquin draped in *kente*



FIG. 5 *Okyeame* (spokesman) with *Okyeamepoma* (staff)

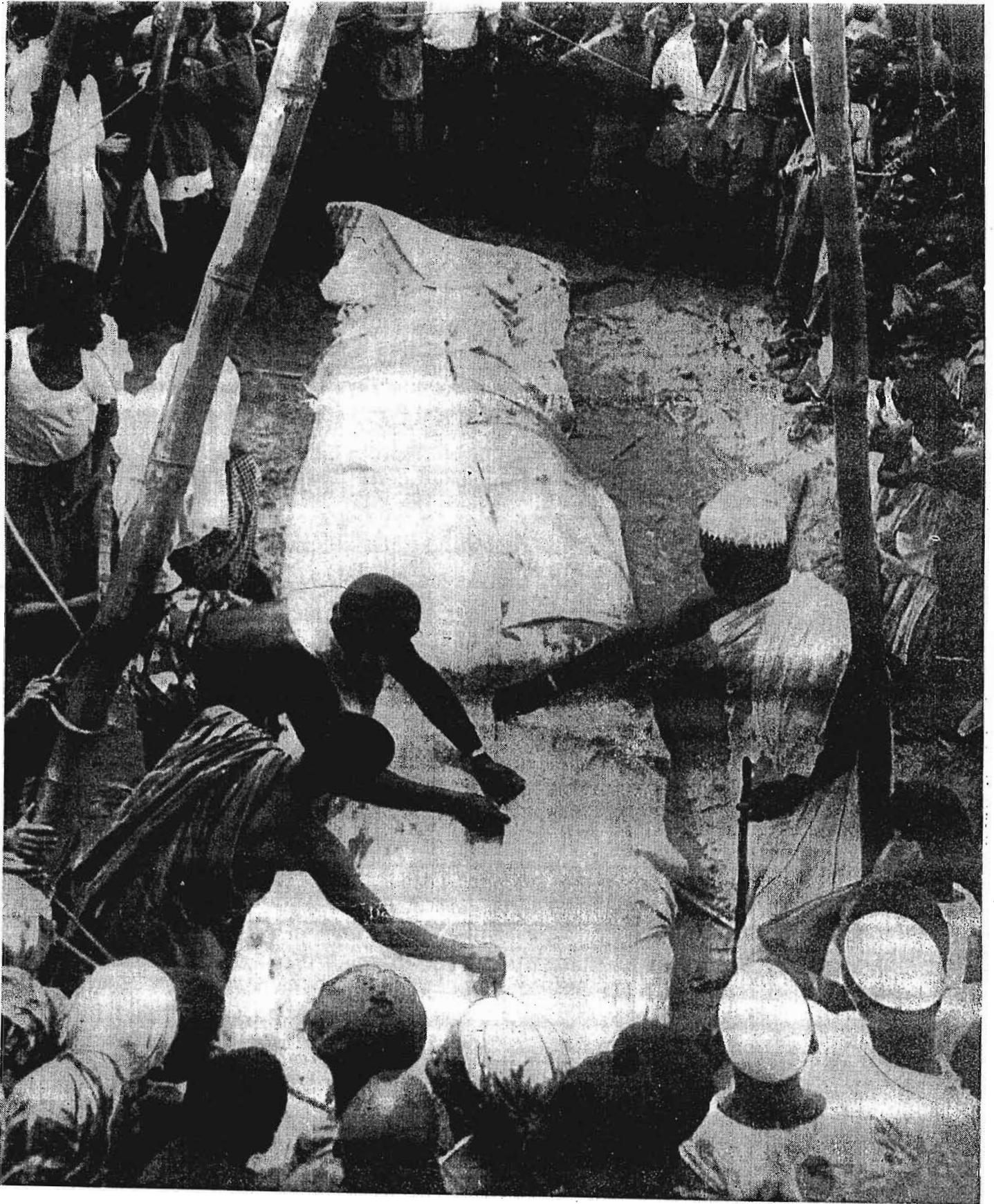


FIG. 6 The chief priest of Gã Mashie, *Nai Wulomɔ*, performing rituals for a dead *Bonsu*.



FIG. 7 *Okyerema Nyannɔ*, the Divine Drummer in a company of drummers

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