

Sabbath Observance among the Akan's of Ghana and Its Impact on the Growth of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana

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ABSTRACT—Akan traditional religion is rooted in their custom and traditions. Sabbath rest was an integral part of Akan tradition and custom in antiquity. When the Seventh-day Adventist Church message came to the coast lands of the then Gold Coast, now Ghana, it did not make much impact until it moved to the Ashanti hinterland. The question of interest to this study is, why is the Adventist message still gaining much ground among some Akan tribes in spite of the fact that this tradition of Sabbath rest is no more practiced? Are there certain conceptual commonalities shared by the Akans and the Adventist church with respect to Sabbath observance? What role has the Akan culture played in the history and spread of Adventism in Ghana? The study concludes that Akan traditional religion and Sabbath veneration, one way or the other continue to serve as a catalyst for the spread of Adventism among the indigenes.

Keywords: Akan, Seventh-day Adventist, Missionary, African traditional Religion, Sabbath, Onyakopon (God)

I. Introduction

Sabbath observance was one of the distinctive marks of Akan traditional religion. Ever since the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA)

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Church came to Ghana, their message has had firm root among the Akans especially the Ashantis. The Akans have their own traditional religion which is rooted in their culture and traditions. Among the tenets of the Ashanti traditional religion is the observance of the Sabbath on Saturday (Danquah, 1968, pp. xxix; Owusu-Mensa, 1993, pp. 5, 38). When the Seventh-day Adventist Church came to the then Gold Coast, now Ghana, though it started in the coastal areas, it did not yield much fruit until it moved to the Ashanti hinterlands that the church-gained root in the country. The trend of growth of the church among the Asantes continues to boggle minds (Kristensen, 1973, p. 36; Sundquist, 1977, p. 15; Tilstra, 1999, pp. 8-12; Finley, 1999, p. 11; Nudd, 2001, pp. 18-20).

Several questions may be raised: why has the Adventist message been thriving and growing in meaning among the Akans of Ghana even today, although many of the Akans today are not holding onto the traditional Sabbath observance? Why are the Akans more receptive to the Sabbath message than the other tribes in Ghana? Are there certain conceptual commonalities shared by the Akans and the Adventist church with respect to Sabbath observance? It is in search of satisfactory answers to these questions that this study is conducted. This study is mainly a historical evaluation of the impact of Akan culture on the growth of early Adventism in Ghana.

Apart from the introduction and conclusion, the study is divided into three sections. The first takes a look at a brief history of the Akan people of Ghana, that is, their culture and religious beliefs. The second section looks at the early history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and its growth in Ghana from 1888-1950. The final section will be a synthesis of the study to ascertain the impact the Akan culture has had on the growth of the Adventist Church in Ghana.

II. Brief History of the Akans (Ashanti) of Ghana

According to the Ghana demographic record, the Akans make up about fifty per cent of the population of Ghana (Nkrumah, 2005, pp15-16; Aboagy-Mensa, and Hama, 2000, p. 289). The Akan tribes are found mainly in the southern half of Ghana, excluding the southeastern corner. They are composed of the Asante; the Bono; the Twi groups such as the Akwapim, and Akwammu; the Fante; the Denkyira; the Wassaw; Akyem, Nzema, Kwahu and the Anyi-Baule ethno- linguistic groups. Their basic occupation is agriculture, though

some also engage in some fishing on the coast. When it comes to inheritance, they are by and large, matrilineal.

Defining who the Akan is, J. B. Danquah (1945, p. 5; Debrunner, 1967, p. 2), a respected politician and sociologist, points out that “the word *okanni* [Akan] ordinarily means a nice, refined, well-mannered man, a civilized or cultured person.” In view of this definition, an immense value is placed on “ordered behavior and on character training in Akan education. By this a man should prove himself polished and gentlemanlike.” As a result, emphasis is placed on well cultured speech that makes use of idioms and proverbs to demonstrate ones upbringing (Debrunner, p. 2).

Akan tradition and society are engraved in Religion. As John Pobee (1979, p. 44) points out, Akan cultural activities and social institutions are “inextricably bound up with religion and the spirit-world. Birth, puberty, marriage, death, widowhood, harvest, and installations to traditional offices all partake of a religious nature.” This suggests that religion is part of the Akan tradition and worldview.

Akan traditional society is based on kingship. Every family within the tribe has its own head who is regarded as a counselor. Furthermore, Akan society is hierarchized. “According to a maxim, *obi da obi akyir*- one man lies or stand behind another. That saying affirms the hierarchy in society (Pobee, 1979, p. 143).” Beside these councilors or family heads, the leadership of Akan society is mainly vested in the chief who holds primacy of place in the society. The chief commands the respect and obedience of all his subjects. However, the chief’s authority is not “absolute power and dictatorship. Power is to be used for the benefit of the society. With power goes responsibility (Pobee, 1979, p. 146).” Nonetheless, chiefs have considerable authority within their localities. They are seen as spiritual and political heads; “fathers of everyone” and peacemakers of the community and they have influence on the development and growth of the locality as well as over the people. (Nkrumah, 2005, p. 4; Boafor-Arthur, para. 2; Kyeremateng, 1996; Busia, 1951, p. 39; Gyekye, 1987, p. 68).

The chief’s ritual functions are connected with various ceremonies through which the people declare “their reverence for their ancestors and gods and their dependence on them and also their sentiments of solidarity and continuity (Busia, 1951, p. 39; Pobee, 1979, p. 68).” The role of the chief is seen as sacred. For instance the chief’s stool is seen as the symbol and emblem of the office. The stool also “represented the community, their solidarity, their permanence, their

continuity. The chief was the link between the living and the dead and his highest role was when he officiated in the public religious rites which gave expression to the community values (Busiah, 1967, p. 23).” Considered as a Supreme Being, the Akans approach God through sub-chiefs and his official spokesman, called *Okyeame* [linguist], who in public matters is as the chief and exercise royal authority, even if it is subordinated to that of the paramount chief (Pobee, 1979, p. 95; Antubam, 1963, pp. 93ff; Christensen, 1973, pp. 572-573; Gyekye, 1987, p. 68) .

The largest tribe among the Akans is the Asantes. The origin of the Asante nation dates back to the fifteenth century reign of King Osei Tutu I. The establishment of the Asante Empire or kingdom has been explained by two theories. Some Ghanaian historians argue that the Asante nation was among the group of people called *Akans* who migrated from the Old Ghana Empire (which included Ivory Coast) to the present Ghana. Others support a common oral argument that some states merged to form the Asante nation with the purpose of fighting their overlords, *Denkyira*, another Akan tribe, for independence (Nkrumah, 2005, p. 2).

Asante is endowed with minerals like gold and diamonds. The main export product is cocoa and it is the traditional heartland of Ghana. Kumasi is the capital city of the Asantes. The Asantes make up about 4,839,100 out of the nation’s population of 24,791,073 according to the 2011 census statistics (Ghana Statistical Service website).

III. Traditional Religion among the Akans (Ashanti)

Religion defines the way of life of the Asantes. As noted, the Asantes recognizes God as the Supreme Being- Onyame or Otwereduampon. Worship and religion are part of the Asante’s way of life because they assume that religion brings them into relationship with God. Jacob J. Nortey (1990, p. 180) observes that “religion is native to the African and it regulates his relations with society and with God who, he believes, exists and intervenes in the affairs of men.” It seems reasonable to say that even before the coming of Christianity, the Asantes saw themselves as responsible to God in their existence. Akan tradition does not distinguish between the sacred and the secular. Hence the supernatural sphere “is much

broader in Akan context than in any European or American context (Pobee, 1979, pp. 45-46).”

A. The Concept of the Supreme Being in Akan Tradition

The Akans held God very high in their religion and this is evident from a study of the attributes of God. God is seen as the One whom “you lean on and do not fall” [*Twerampon*]; He is seen as One who responds when called- [*Abomubuwafrɛ*] (Dickson, 1984, p. 55; Opoku, 1974, p. 286; Sarpong, 1972, p 42). To the Akans, God is the “first spirit-being” or the Supreme Being, called *Onyame* [something that when you gain you become satisfied] or *Onyankopon*. He is *Oboadee*, [Creator of the universe], the final authority and Overlord of society, who has power over life and death. Atheism is foreign to the Akan because, as its proverb puts it, *obi nnkyere abofra Onyame*-since God is self-evident, no one teaches a child to know God (Pobee, 1979, 46).” The Akans believe that the Supreme Being exists and He is intuitively known to everyone.

The concept of monotheism was helpful in the evangelistic campaign launched by the early missionaries who visited the Gold Coast (Aboagye-Mensa and Hama, 2000, p. 389) (Ghana). Ghana was formally called Gold Coast. It received its current name when it became independent in 1957. In this study, the two names are used interchangeably. The early missionaries were “delighted to discover that the Ghanaians believed in one God only and that all the other so-called ‘gods’ or ‘fetishes’ (*Twi: Abosom*) are strictly speaking not ‘god’ but only tutelary spirits, or guardian angels (Debrunner, 1967, p. 3).” As Debrunner (1967, p. 3) indicates further, “in their justifiable enthusiasm, they wrote: the religious system is one of the purest of the religions of nature . . . it is quite evident that God is more than a mere idea for the African (*Evangelisches Missionsmagazin*, 1877, p. 163).” The existence of the Supreme Being was attested to by the European missionaries. However, they did not look for ways of contextualizing the Akan religion with their own. Rather, the religion and all its content was branded as evil.

Danquah (1966, p. 186) intimates that “the spirit of God is aboard, even in the Akan of the Gold Coast.” Kwasi Dickson (1983, p. 36) explains that this statement of Danquah implies that “there is one God of the whole earth whom the Akans also are seeking to worship; in effect, there is Religion of which Akan religion is an expression.” Indeed, “long before Christianity came, we can be certain that God

had Himself been His own witness, He had given evidence of His existence and His goodness to lead to the development of a high religion in the Ghanaian Society (Danquah, 1968, p. xxv; Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 49).”

In Akan Religion, “*Onyame* transcends time and is thus free from the limitations of time, an eternity without beginning, without an end (Gyekye, 1987, p. 70).” These words are used to explain this *tetekwaframua* and *odomankoma*-[Infinite, Boundless, Absolute, and Eternal].

Though the Asantes have no temples dedicated to *Onyame* (*Nyame*), they have the *Nyamedua* [God’s Tree], “a three-forked branch supporting a pot into which food items are put as offerings to God (Dickson, 1984, p. 53; Parrinder, 1961, p.15).” The *Nyamedua* is a significant way of worship among the Akans, it serves as a symbol of their total dependence on God. The tree is grown in palaces, shrines and houses, or a stump of it with a forked branch is placed at the entrances to these places. A pot containing rainwater (*Nyankonsu*-God’s water) is placed on the tree or stump, and periodically the water in it is used to bless inmates of the house and any other person who needs to be blessed. In Akan tradition, the *Nyamedua* symbolizes the physical presence of God. It, therefore, serves as “a symbol of worship (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, pp. 27-28).”

The Akan religion depicts a monotheistic phenomenon. Beside the Only One Supreme Being, other deities appear in dreams, and sometimes through the possessed. This suggests that there is “an absolute class difference between the Supreme Being and the lower orders of divinities. . . . It was natural, therefore, to use the name . . . *Nyame* . . . for the God of the Bible (Walls, 1996, p. 95; Ryan, 1980, pp. 161-171).” Dickson states in the introduction to Danquah’s work that, “the Akans did not originally know the worship of lesser divinities, and that this came in as a corrupting influence.” Interestingly, there are no traces of the active rivalry between “God” and “the gods,” no trace of the knockout competition among divinities that seems to have marked Semitic religious history in Akan traditional Religion (Dickson, 1984, 53,).

Robert Sutherland Rattray, a British anthropologist after studying the Ashantis in the early 1920s, concluded that the Ashanti concept of the Supreme Being was not in any way influenced by their contact with Western missionaries. Neither should it be attributed to their contact with Christians or Muslims. Nonetheless, in agreement with Gyekye (1987, p. 135), “Akan religion, like any other indigenous

African religion, is not a revealed religion such as Islam or Christianity.” The Akans do not believe in any prophet or a “Supreme Master or Lord, residing in your heart or residing in Heaven, who sits there waiting for you at the end of your life to judge you as either a goat or a sheep, and to send you to Paradise or Hell (Danquah, 1952, p. 3).” Though the deities may communicate with their priest concerning an issue in a community but that is not revelation in the context of the Bible’s revelation. Though the Akans know that God lives in Heaven, there is no teaching that man can have access to Heaven or goes to Heaven when he dies and there is no talk of reconciliation between God and man as in the Bible in Akan religion (Busia, 1976, p. 192; Sarpong, 1974, p. 10).

Akan ontology is characteristically hierarchical to the extent that the Supreme Being is “at the apex, and our phenomenal world at the bottom of this hierarchy. The Supreme Being, the deities, and the ancestors are spiritual entities. They are considered invisible and unperceivable to the naked eye (Gyekye, 1987, p. 69).” Hence, the name *sunsum* (Spirit) implies “the mystical, the unempirical, the nonphysical” nature of God or the spirit world. Thus, we can agree with Gyekye that Akan ontology is “essentially or primarily spiritual, the Akan universe is a spiritual universe, one in which supernatural beings play significant roles in the thought and action of the people. What is primarily real is spiritual (Gyekye, 1987, p. 69; Gbedegesin, 1991, p. 93).” The ontological nature of Akan religion explains their respect for God and ancestral spirits in their everyday life.

It is God the Creator alone who deserves worship in Akan religion. Owusu-Mensa (1993, p. 21; Danquah, 1968, p. 151) articulates “if Deity is to be worshiped at all, it is the God *Kwaame* (God Saturday) who should get the veneration.” God in Akan tradition is called *Kwame* because every child born in Akan society comes with a day name, which corresponds to the day one was born, and they believe that God is God of Saturday hence He is called *Kwame*.

B. The Akan Religion and Ancestral Worship

Ancestral worship is significant in Akan religion. The Akans esteem ancestors in their religion. The ancestors are always held in deep reverence and are even worshiped. “The ancestors are that part of the clan who have completed their course here on earth and are gone ahead to the other world to be elder brothers of the living at the house of God (Gyekye, 1987, p. 68).” The other world is called

Asamando (Place for the dead). There is no pain or hardship in the other world but bliss. The ancestors lead normal lives that they were leading on earth there at *Asamando*.

This is part of the reason why when a king dies; it was believed that some of his servants were executed to accompany him to *Asamando* and serve him there (Sarpong, 2002, pp. 98-99). The Akans believe that the ancestors can reveal themselves to humans or appear in dreams or can give one “a promising life”. It is however wealthy of note that in Akan religion, the Supreme Being, the deities, and the ancestors are considered as spiritual entities (Gyekye, 1987, p. 69). Though they are around us, we cannot see them with our naked eye. The universe is considered to be spiritual.

We need not forget that ancestors are also worshiped in Akan society, but it should be seen as remembrance worship. Ancestral worship is chiefly done to secure favor of any kind from the ancestors since they live in the spirit world. However, it is maintained in the Akan religion that the proper worship is rendered to *Onyankopon* (the Great God). Through libation, the Akans worship God. The libation is the Akan way of praying to God and the other so-called lesser gods (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 21). Akan Tradition and Saturday Worship [Veneration].

C. Akan Religion and Saturday Rest

Joseph Buakye Danqua points out that “all men are issue of the first progenitor, the ultimate ancestor and creative *Nana* [chief or King] whose day is Saturday: *Nana Nyankopon Kwame*. . . . the divinity whom Akans call *Nyankopon Kwaame*, the ‘Great’ God of Saturday (Danquah, 1968, p. xxix).” That is the name the Akans give to God. Kofi Owusu-Mensa indicates that “if God is not remembered in Akanland for anything, it is for His day of worship, Saturday, the seventh and last day of the Akan week.” Saturday in Akan language is *MEMENEDA*, which is translated as a day in which traditionally you just eat or swallow food and rest (*Mene* means swallow) (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 36). Saturday was not just for swallowing food but it was a day that the Akans, typically worship God. It was a day of rest for them and they also worshiped God on that day with some ritual purification.

K. A. Busia (1976, p. 192) points out that the Supreme Being in Asante “. . . is also personalized as *Onyankopon Kwame* the Great One who appeared on Saturday.” Debrunner (1967, p. 1), a

Presbyterian missionary, also mentions that the *Akuapem* chief was noted for opening his libation with “Almighty God, worshiped on Saturday, accept this drink of palm-wine.” All through their history, the Akans have known and worshipped the Supreme Being- God. In Ashanti tradition, *memeneda* is also referred to as *dapaa- Memeneda Dapaa* [‘a good day,’ a real or special or precious day] (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 37).

Akan affiliation with Saturday is well known in history and this was given further impetus when in the 1920s the Queen Mother of Ashanti sent a silver stool as a present to Princess Mary of Britain. The message accompanying the gift read,

We pray the great God *Onyankopon*, on whom man leans and do not fall, whose day of worship is Saturday, and whom the Ashantis serve just as she serves Him, that He may give the King’s child and her husband long life and happiness, and finally, when she sits upon this silver stool, which the women of Ashanti have made for their white Queen Mother, may she call us to mind (Abraham, 1966, p. 108; AkamBa, 2010, p.473)

This is a documented fact attesting to the Akans’ identification of Saturday as the revered day of worship for God Almighty.

The greatness and solemnness of Saturday in Akan tradition and culture are so paramount that it is on record that the Asantes will not fight on Saturday in war times. In all the Ashanti lands, no market day is slated for Saturday. Other days of the week are used for market. Also, Saturday was never used for funeral service in Asantilands. It is no wonder that all Europeans are called *Akwasi Broni*, meaning one born on Sunday. This name implies that the Europeans brought Sunday worship into Akanland.

An issue of interest is how the Akans came in contact with Sabbath rest which is difficult to prove. Proving how the Akans came in touch with Saturday worship has become a challenge because they are oral people and so most of their history were not documented. This will also be another area of interest for further study. With this brief history of Akan and their religion, I seek to look at the early history of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Ghana and the role Akan religion played in Adventism.

IV. History of the Adventist Church in Ghana (1888-1950)

This section looks at the origin of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the United States of America and how it came to Ghana. It traces the history of foreign missionary activities and the expansion of the Church in Ghana.

A. Origin of the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) church is “a conservative Christian body, worldwide in extent, evangelical in doctrine, and professing no creed but the Bible. It places strong emphasis on the Second Advent, which it believes is near, and observes the Sabbath of the Bible, the Seventh day of the week (Neufeld, 1976, p. 10:1325).” In the year 2010, the SDA church has established itself in 213 out of the 236 countries recognized by the United Nation. The Church has 70,188 organized churches and 65,157 companies, with a membership of 16, 923,239 as of December 2010 (Annual Statistical Report-2010).

The SDA church owns its beginning to the Advent movement of the nineteenth century, especially the Millerite movement of the 1840s. The church sees itself as “heirs also of an earlier widespread awakening, in many countries, of interest in the Second Advent, of which the Millerite movement was a part. (SDAE, 10:1326).” Prominent founders of the church include James and Ellen White, Joseph Bates, J. N. Andrews, Stephen Haskell, Uriah Smith and John Loughborough.

The period between 1831 and 1863 serves as the organizational years of the worldwide SDA Church. This period saw the unfolding of the Millerite Movement and the advent message, the Disappointment of 1844, the renewed Advent Movement, the emergence of James and Ellen White, the birth of periodicals and other types of literature for the dissemination of Christian evangelistic and missionary messages, the adoption of the name “Seventh-day Adventist,” and the organization of the General Conference (GC) of Seventh-day Adventist as the official name of the world church at Battle Creek, Michigan, USA in 1863 (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 57; Maxwell, 1977; Schwarz, 1979).

B. Adventist Missionary Activities in Ghana

It was in the year 1863 that copies of *The Present Truth* and *The Second Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* found their way into the coast of West Africa through Hanna Moore (Maxwell, 1977, pp. 177-178; Schwarz, 1979; pp. 148-149). Hannah Moore, worked as a missionary with a Christian denomination in Liberia. When she went to the USA for vacation, she came in contact with the Adventist message through Stephen Haskell. As a result of her new faith, she got fired and went back to USA. But before she left Liberia, she left many Adventist Journals in her possession on different shores of West Africa (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 58; Davis, 1979; for further information on Hannah Moore read Davis, 1979).

To propagate the gospel to other parts of the world, the early Adventist Pioneers made use of ship captains to drop Adventist literature at various shores of the world. Oral tradition has it that one Francis I. O. Dolphijn of *Apam* in the Fanteland, a coastal town of Ghana found one of these pieces of Literature and read it. It was after reading this literature that he initiated communication with Adventist headquarters and later on became a Sabbath keeper. It is also believed that a man by the name William *Akwasi Atta* Dawson of *Fetteh* was the first Adventist in Ghana. However, GC documents support Dolphijn as the pioneer Adventist in Ghana (Owusu-Mensah, 1993, pp. 58-59; 2005, pp. 11-18; 217-218). Unfortunately, as Owusu-Mensa points out, Dolphijn of Apam left no documents about the origins of Adventism in his hometown. Dawson is said to have lived in the USA where he discovered the Adventist faith. When he returned home in 1887, he brought it with him and shared with his people. In any case, it may be said that Dolphijn was the first Adventist in Ghana.

Dolphijn joined the Adventist faith in 1888 and that is the date used officially by the SDA church for the beginning of Adventism in Ghana (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 59). However, Debrunner (1967, p. 216), writing on the History of Christianity in Ghana, points out that the SDA church started its mission activities in Ghana in Sekondi in 1898. In another place, he indicates that “unfortunately, no early records of this work seem to be available at that church’s headquarters at Watford, London. Later, the SDA began work also at Cape Coast and Sekondi, but their proper expansion took place only after 1914 (1967, p. 239).” Debrunner’s date is the acceptable date among Protestants in Ghana for the commencement of SDA Church

in Ghana. Robert Aboagye-Mensa and Jude Hama (2000, p. 390) also confirm this assertion by Debrunner. Close to the 1898 date is Barret's view that the SDA Church began its ministry in Ghana officially in 1894 which supports the date for the first Adventist missionaries' entry (Barrett, 1982, p. 326). It is possible to assume that while non-Adventist records may reflect a general picture of the launching of Adventism as far as missionary work is concerned, the SDA records may highlight its specific genesis prior to the coming of the Adventist missionaries. In this case, it seems plausible to settle on 1888.

Lawrence Chadwick was a member of the Foreign Mission Board of the GC. In 1892, when he visited Ghana, he also visited Liberia where Hanah Moore worked and Sierra Leone on a fact-finding mission. According to the *Review and Herald* (Chadwick, 1890, p. 198), the Adventist leaders in Battle Creek got to know of Dolphijn's conversion when he wrote to them that he got converted into the faith in 1888. After Dolphijn's conversion, he shared his faith with others and others were won into the fold, so he sent several letters to the GC asking them to send someone to inaugurate the church. Thus, Chadwick was sent to do feasibility study in West Africa to help the SDA Church begin its work in that part of the world. His coming was a response to letters Dolphijn sent to the church's headquarters (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 60).

When Chadwick visited Dolphijn and his team in *Apam* in the then Gold Coast, at the GC session in 1893, he reported, "I found the work on the Gold Coast in a much better condition than I expected. A few of the brethren there can speak English. I gave them some instruction, but did not baptize anyone, preferring to leave that till a later time. There are on this coast about fifty or sixty people obeying the truth (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 61)." The report led to the GC sending three missionaries to the three nations he visited.

Officially, the GC sent Karl G. Rudolph and Edward Leroy Sanford to *Apam*, Ghana on Thursday, February 22, 1894 to work as the first resident missionaries in the country and also to work in West Africa (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, 62). However, Sanford could not stay for long because he was infected with malaria. After six month labor, he left for home (Rudolph, 1894, p. 259). From the *Home Missionary* of November (1894, p. 259), Rudolph wrote about his experience in Gold Coast, which was encouraging. He wrote "I am of good courage in the Lord, and am too busy to become lonesome or homesick." He was indeed alone but the joy of the work kept him on. In September

1894 Rudolph moved the headquarters of the Adventist work from *Apam* to Cape Coast, the center of education and the most developed city in the country. Many government offices and foreign missionaries were based there.

October 3, 1895 saw another batch of missionaries coming to join the work. They were Dudley Upton Hale, G. P. Riggs, George Thomas Kerr and his wife, Eva Elmore, and their son William Franklin. Hale was an ordained minister so he took over the leadership of the work from Rudolph. The Kerrs, on the other hand, were nurses who came to begin the medical missionary work in the Gold Coast and Riggs was a literature evangelist. All of them began to work in their various specialties to promote the work in the Gold Coast. Prior to the coming of Adventist missionaries, other Christian missionaries had been in Ghana. This presented some difficulty to the Adventist missionaries. Eleven months after their arrival, Riggs got malaria and left the shores of the Gold Coast almost dead, and passed away in Liverpool, Britain on January 8, 1897 without reaching his home in Florida USA (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 63).

George and Eva Kerr also lost two kids within four months in 1896, but kept on with the work. Their own health was also failing so the GC reassigned them to South Africa on April 16, 1897. Rudolph, the first missionary, also developed a mental health problem. Hale was called back to the USA on June 10, 1897. Prior to his departure, he conducted the first baptismal service in the country in which he baptized Francis I. U. Dolphijn, his three children, and others (Hale, 1897, p. 700).

Hale departed with no replacement in 1897 until 1903. After several pleas from the indigenous to the GC, Hale decided to come back to continue from where he left the job. Meanwhile, in his absence, the indigenes continued the propagation of the gospel. On March 3, 1903, Hale, together with his family, came back to Cape Coast for a second missionary journey in the Gold Coast. James and Marion Hyatt, an African-American couple, also followed after few days. This time Hale decided to move to the interior in a railroad station called *Formayea*, while the Hyatts stayed in Cape Coast to labor there. Unfortunately, the Hales stayed only for six months due to their failing health and they left and never came back. The Hyatts stayed for two years before they left for Freetown, Sierra Leone in 1905. But before they left the country, they made their presence felt both along the coastal towns and also in the interior. One of his converts, Christian Abraham Ackah of *Kikam* in the *Nzima* area

(south-Western) of Ghana took the Adventist message to a lofty height Owusu-Mensa, 1993, pp. 65-67).

Some positive impacts are noted in this short missionary work. According to the Review and Herald of May 11, 1905, the ten year missionary activities of Ghana had resulted in one company, seven members, four isolated Sabbath-keepers in a group, a Sabbath school of thirty members, one licensed minister, one canvasser, two laborers, one school, two teachers, and twenty-five students (Statistical Report of SDA, 1905, pp. 26-27).

C. Indigenous Participation and the Expansion of Adventism in Ghana

The next ten years (1903-1914) saw Christian Ackah of Kikam and Samuel Duncan Morgue of Cape Coast, converts of the Hyatts becoming prominent workers. Duncan helped pioneer the Adventist work in other West African nations like Nigeria in 1914, while Ackah worked in Ghana. In 1908, Ackah told the GC that “I was known by the public as a Sabbath-keeper in the year 1903, when Bro. James M. Hyatt and his wife were in town, but now I am known by individuals as a minister while I am not (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 68).” Owusu-Mensa (1993, p. 98) believes that it was Ackah’s desire to become the leader of the work in Ghana when he told the GC in 1908, “I am here to put this before you, that I would like to be trained up and baptized as a minister for the Gold Coast Mission schools and churches after our school building at *Kikam*, which will be completely built before September. The house is built at my own expenses.’ Ackah continued from where the Hyatts left and built a school in Cape Coast, and also in his hometown *Kikam* and won many souls into the church. In 1905, the GC sent to West Africa Pastor David C. Babcock to oversee the work. He stayed in Sierra Leone and paid occasional visits to Ghana. This did not go down well with the converts in Ghana, especially Ackah. Ackah succeeded in making the church in his hometown *Kikam* the first organized Adventist church in the Gold Coast in October 19, 1909 officiated by Babcock, with thirty-four baptized members. Babcock followed on the Sabbath of October 23, 1909 to organize the second church in Ghana at *Axim* (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, pp. 69-70).

Three years after the organization of the two churches, Ackah saw his ambition to lead the work in Ghana thwarted by Babcock who

was sending Americans and Sierra Leoneans to Ghana to oversee the work. After several letters to the GC complaining about Babcock's work in West Africa, Ackah decided to go to the GC in 1911 to discuss it with the officers. It was on his way to the USA that Ackah was reported to have died in Wales, Britain in 1912 at the age of twenty-nine. His death was a big blow to the work in Ghana. Ghana Adventism lost a great leader, educator, and the potential first indigenous ordained minister of the church in 1912. At age 24, Ackah started a church and a school in his hometown *Kikam* in 1908. Unlike Dolphijn, Hayford, and Bonney, Ackah was young and could have achieved much for Adventism in Ghana, but his trip to Britain became a disaster for the church he loved (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 71).

The GC attached the work in West Africa to the European Division with the headquarters in Hamburg Germany under L. R. Conradi. At a meeting in December 1913, he met all the workers in West Africa in Sierra Leone and subdivided the work into three, Ghana with W. H. Lewis as leader; Nigeria with Babcock as the leader to pioneer the work there and Sierra Leone. The Adventist work in West Africa at this time had 165 members and Ghanaians were 75, with the remaining 90 coming from the other three nations (Nigeria 5; Sierra Leon 83, and 2 from the Canary Island) (Agboka, 1975, p. 45).

Adventist work in the coastal area suffered a major setback due to the early infiltration of the coastal lands by the other earlier Christian missionaries (Methodist, Roman Catholic, Presbyterian and Anglicans). As a result, Lewis and his team moved to the hinterland. They had thought that they could exploit the Akan worship of the Supreme Being among the Akans of the Coastal lands but it yielded no dividend because Sunday worship which started in the 1400 had taken much root. However, a number of the Asante lands had not been penetrated by Christianity due to the King's refusal to allow the Europeans to enter and spoil or make their people lazy with Christianity as had happened in the Fanti lands in the coast (Debrunner, 1967, p. 116; Aboagye-Mensa and Hama, 2000, pp. 389-390).

D. Entering the Hinterlands of Asante

In Asante, the traditional Saturday as a special day of the Supreme Being had not been adulterated. Their regard for *Onyame Kwame* was still strong. Therefore, Asante, the traditional stronghold of the Akan

people of Ghana, became the base of Lewis and his team from 1914. The siege of Asante by the British prepared the way for Adventism in Asante lands. The British had at that time exiled the Asante king to the Seychelles Islands in 1896. Again, the British-Asante war in 1900 created a more sober atmosphere in Asante. As Owusu-Mensa (1993, p. 75) points out, the time of Adventist incursion into Asante was “providentially directed.” On October 23, 1914, Adventist missionaries arrived and worshiped in Agona Asante the next day which was a Sabbath.

Seeing an abandoned Colonial house in *Wiamoase*, Lewis wanted to settle there and begin his ministry. But the paramount chief of Agona, *Nana Kwame Boakye* refused and gave them land in Agona the district capital to stay. The work in Asante began in Agona and it was fruitful for twenty years before the headquarters was moved to Bekwai, which is also in Asante Region. Lewis reported in 1915 that he had won forty-fives souls in three towns namely Agona, Asaman and Ntonso. A number of the surrounding villages became SDA communities (*Wiamoase*, *Kofiase*, *Yonso*, and *Asokore*). The Adventist work in these areas was given much impetus when Lewis attached schools to the churches (Lewis, 1915; Mensah, 1962, p. 7). Furthermore, the work in Agona paramouncy became successful due to the interest the Chief developed in the church and his friendship with Lewis. However, if it were not for his many wives, the Chief of Agona would have become a member of the church, though all his wives were members of the church. Lewis and his family left Ghana in 1917. At the time of his departure, the work in Ghana could boast of 100 members and many non-baptized believers because at that time it could take more than a year to prepare baptismal candidates. There were also three primary schools in the Agona District with about 100 pupils (Mensah, 1962, p. 8).

An indigenous worker by name J. A. Boney took over from Lewis between 1914 and 1918 until other missionaries came in. In the next ten years, more than eight missionaries came to help the work with L. F. Langford as the leader. In 1924, the headquarters of the church moved from Agona to Kumasi the capital of Ashanti. One indigenous worker called Garbrah became the first indigenous ordained minister of the SDA church in Ghana on May 7, 1921 in Sierra Leone (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 81). He became a model minister and the pioneer worker in Kumasi in 1921.

Clifford writes that 1921 was “the best year” of Adventism in Ghana. Clifford indicates that the work begun in 1921 with 197

baptized members, and 364 Sabbath school members. At the end of the year, they recorded 242 baptisms with 544 Sabbath School members. The tithe of the previous year increased by \$189, and Ingathering also brought in \$489. That year \$1900 was raised. In 1921, the church had resident ministers in eight places minding big districts and seven primary schools with 136 students (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 82-83).

As a result of the indefatigable work of Garbrah in Kumasi, the headquarters was moved to Kumasi in 1925. In the same year, when the statistics of Christians in Ghana was made, there were 30,000 and out of this, Adventists were a little more than a thousand, supported by 26 indigenous and 3 non-indigenous workers with 350 students (Munson, 1925, p. 17). The success and growth of the SDA work in Ghana from 1918 to 1931 cannot be written without Garbrah, a pillar in the growth of Adventism in Ghana. This success was achieved because the Asantes were receptive to the Adventist message.

In the year 1931, J. Clifford took over from J. J. Hyde and moved the headquarters of the church from Kumasi to Agona and brought J. Garbrah back from Fanteland to head the work in Kumasi again. Clifford served the church in Ghana from 1919-1923 and went to work in Nigeria until 1931 when he returned again to Ghana. He helped the Agona SDA School to become a government recognized institution and began a Teacher training college to help train future church workers. With many young people employed in the ministry, 1931-1948 saw Clifford's evangelistic prowess at work. He moved the headquarters from Agona to Bekwai in the Asante Region in 1932 (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, pp. 85-86). Despite this movement, the work in Agona continued in earnest. It was during this period that the work spread up to Takyiman in the Brono Ahafo area, Koforidua in the eastern Region, Accra the national capital and the Volta region.

Adventist education in Ghana also gained roots within this period. The government approved three teacher training colleges for the church, which were located in Agona, Bekwai and Koforidua in 1939. In 1953, the church in Ghana added a secondary school to the Bekwai Teacher Training College (Odamtten, 1976, pp. 181-182). By 1949 more local workers had been ordained into the ministry. In 1947, the African Western Coast Union Mission, based in Ibadan Nigeria, was moved to Ghana. When Jesse O. Gibson took over from Clifford in 1949, there were twenty organized churches with 1,947 baptized, and 2,790 non-baptized members (SDA Yearbook, 1950, pp. 237-238). Again the headquarters was moved by Gibbson from Bekwai to

Kumasi in 1949 and districts were created with indigenous people heading them. From 1952 to 1959, C. B. Mensa, took over the leadership of the work in Ghana. Adventism grew from 30 organized churches with 3,002 baptized members to 49 organized churches with 5,526 members (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, pp. 90-91).

The influence of the Ashanti region in the history of Adventism in Ghana cannot be over emphasized. Though the church came there later, yet it was there that the work of the church gained momentum and the missionaries saw their efforts blessed. Although a number of significant events have transpired from 1950 to the present, time and space will not allow for exploration. One of the remarkable events witnessed in this span of time is the inauguration of the Ghana Union Conference, first in Sub-Saharan Africa in 2000. This Union Conference consists of six conferences and one mission. Out of the six conferences, two are based in Kumasi the Ashanti regional capital. These two conferences continue to top the statistical chart of the work in Ghana (GC of SDA Archives, 2001, pp. 390-395). With this brief presentation of the history of Adventism in Ghana, the study seeks to study the relationship between Akan religion and Adventism in the next section.

V. The Relationship between Akan Religion and Adventism

The foregoing analysis has shown that the Asantes were receptive to the Adventist message. It is unfortunate that the work in the coastal areas, where the Church began, has not been encouraging even today. Several people attribute the success of the work in Ghana to the Akan's belief in the Supreme Being. J. J. Nortey perceptively comments that "Saturday was the day of worship of God. . . . This accounts for the acceptance of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ashanti (Nortey, 1990, p. 182; Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 20)."

One thing that baffles minds is how the Akans came in contact with Saturday as the day of worship for the Supreme Being. It is a mystery that needs to be further investigated to ascertain if there was any contact between the Akans and Jews in any part of their history. The Akans are known to have traded in Gold in the thirteenth century and are believed to have come in contact with Jews but not much has been done in this area of research. Many Akan scholars are unable to point out accurately, how the Akans came to worship on the Saturday.

To many it is enigmatic. However Akan Saturday worship has been honored in antiquity (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. 19).

It is clear that in Akan religion God is regarded as the Creator. In this case, when the Sabbath message is preached with its emphasis on creation in connection with the Sabbath, the message can easily be appreciated. The reason is that the Akans identify the Supreme Being with the “Sabbath day.” They even name the day after Him. This makes the day significant for the Akans. This presents a conceptual link between the God of the Biblical Sabbath and that of the Akans. This observation suggests that the Akans will be receptive to the Adventist message because there is a common ground to start with (Gen 2:1-3; Exod. 20:8-11). In addition, the idea that in Akan religion people rest from their labor has affinity with the observance of the biblical Sabbath (Exod. 20:8-11).

When Adventism started in Ghana, oral tradition had it that the missionaries begun their evangelist meetings with the Supreme Being (*Nyankopong*), they then moved on to talk about the Sabbath and the fact that, it is the Whiteman who brought Sunday worship to Ghana. This method took the listeners from the known to the unknown. Missiologically, taking one from the known to the unknown yields much dividend. Andrews F. Wall points out that “Even markedly local features can be transmitted to another culture and take on a life of their own there (Walls, 1996, p. 236).” In the same way, we can say that though the Asantes had their tradition of worshiping God on the Sabbath, it was the coming in of the Adventist missionaries which solidified their stand and believe in the Supreme Being or God.

This missiological foundation is backed by the fact that the Akans call every Whiteman *Akwasi* (*Akwasi* is the name given to every male born on Sunday and because the Whiteman brought Sunday worship the Akans call him Sunday Redman-*Akwasi*). Though this method of bible presentation sequence has changed, however, preachers today when presenting the Sabbath, illustrate with the fact that, the Akans were keeping the Sabbath before the coming of the European and American missionaries.

It is interesting to note that with the introduction of Christianity, today the Akan peoples veneration and worship on Saturday has died out. This can be attributed to the fact that the missionaries attempted to do away with anything traditional to the people with the notion that it was tainted with idolatry. The traditional Akan Saturday is no more importantly celebrated as it used to be except for the Ashanti King who has to perform some rituals on this sacred day. Funerals are

mainly organized today on Saturdays. However, anytime a preacher illustrates his Sabbath presentation with the name of the Whiteman, it makes sense to the Akan hearer and it takes them back to their root.

Although there may be other social factors that might have led to the growth of Adventism in Ghana (Debrunner, 1967, pp. 320-321) the Akan religion with its Sabbath orientation may have contributed to such growth to some degree. It is clear from the foregoing discussion that it was after Adventism had successfully been rooted in the Akan territory that its message became receptive in other parts of the country.

It is no wonder that in 1988 when the Adventist church celebrated its centenary anniversary in Ghana, the membership stood at one hundred and forty-two thousand baptized members (Owusu-Mensa, 1993, p. i). According to the 2010 statistical report of the GC, Adventism in Ghana could boast of 368,121 members with 1166 organized churches and 1660 companies. Mark Finley when he conducted the ACT 2000 campaign in Kumasi Ghana indicated that “I was amazed that 5000 people exposed to the elements would sit spellbound, listening to the Word of God (Finley, 1999, p. 11).” To some degree, it is possible to say that Akan religion has contributed to the spread and stability of Adventism in Ghana.

VI. Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact Akan culture has had on the history and spread of Adventism in Ghana. Adventism begun in the coastal areas of Ghana; nonetheless, Ashanti became the center of its growth and stability. It appears that the Sabbath idea among the Ashantis may have contributed to such growth. It has been established that the Akans observed the Sabbath. Akan Sabbath observance seems to share some similarities with the biblical Sabbath. It has been established also that the Ashanti region became the springboard for the spread and growth of Adventism in Ghana. For example, several modern Adventist evangelists, who come for evangelist campaigns in Ashanti, usually remind the people of their Sabbath heritage and the respect accorded God in Akan tradition and use it as a bait to convince them of the Sabbath truth. In conclusion, we can assert that Akan culture has had an impact on the history and spread of Adventism in Ghana.

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