



Divinity in Akan Proverbs: The Concept of God

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Abstract

This paper assesses the Akan conception of divinity as reflected in their proverbs. It considers the attribute of God from the lens of the Akan as highlighted in their proverbs and its bearing on their religious beliefs. The paper is a dilation of the Akan concept of God before the arrival of the early missionaries. It considers how the concept of divinity found manifestation in the Akan proverbs. This is because a society's conception of God is the focal point that navigates their religious beliefs and beyond that, their socio-political endeavors (Agyarko, 2013). Human society's perception of God and divinity forms the bases to direct their spheres of life. The Akan society has a belief not only in the supreme being but other supernatural creatures thus by divinity, the paper discusses the placement of the supreme being in relation to other deities in the framework of the Akan proverbs. Against the background of the complexity of the social life of the Akan society, the paper seeks to draw a relationship between the Akan conception of divinity and human behavior through the construction and conceptualization of divinity in Akan proverbs. To attain this, thirty (30) proverbs were sourced from the Akan setting and analysis made through focus group discussion to the conclusion that Akan perceive the Supreme Being to have sharable and non-sharable attributes. Moreover, most of the contemporary beliefs in religion have a close bond with the Akan concept of divinity which according to Idowu (1973), Olupona (1990), Bowler (1990), Geertz (2009) were described as primitive, retrogressive, fetish and superstitious.

Key words: Proverbs; Divinity; Attributes; Sharable; Non-sharable

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INTRODUCTION

This paper examines the concept of divinity within the Akan society. It assembles a number of Akan proverbs for this assessment. The gathered proverbs reflect the Akan conceptualization of divinity. The evidence as presented in these proverbs suggests that the Akan society had a notion of God. This is however, in contradiction of the impression projected by early scholars and anthropologist like Samuel Baker and Hocart who opine that the Africans had no belief in a supreme being neither had they any form of worship nor is the darkness of their mind enlightened by even a ray of superstition. The data on proverbs which has been with the Akan society from time immemorial challenge this postulation.

Nevertheless, in a continuum of the unfolding of other findings, Pritchard (1965) after identifying that Africans had a concept of God describes the African perception of divinity and beliefs as barbaric, primitive and fetish. More so, Cox (2007) states that nonwestern perception of a supernatural force in Africa is reported to be inferior and derogatory and were forced to become what they were not in a western colonization of religion. Again, according to Idowu (1973) African continent was identified as the "Dark Continent" whose people can only conceptualize the devil but not the Christian God. Against this backdrop of a despicable impression ascribed the African and in this respect Ghanaian Akan society's concept of divinity historically, this paper examines the facet of the Akan concept of divinity from the dimension of Akan proverbs and it equal traces of similarities in

today's western religion in this 21st century considered to be age of enlightenment and purity. It does so through the Akan society's theory of the attributes and characteristics of the Supreme Being as fashioned out in their earliest prehistoric proverbs.

Besides the comparison of the contemporary conceptualization of divinity and the Akan society from time passed through their proverbs, the paper also seeks to draw the relationship and the contribution of the proverbial conception of divinity towards the construction of the social life of the contemporary Akan society. That is how their historic sacred notion has affected their contemporary secularity. In so doing, we spell out how their spiritual heritage encoded in the Akan proverbs from time past has permeated their current material life. This is done through focus group discussion. In a summary, the paper finds answers to the question of how Akan proverbs demonstrate that the Akan society had a concept of a divine being and how their conceptualization of the divinity finds manifestation in the contemporary social construction of the Akan society.

1. METHODOLOGY

There are about thirty Akan proverbs that have a bearing on the Akan concept of divinity. Among the thirty proverbs, eleven were mobilized from Agyekum (2011) and the remaining nineteen were sourced from oral sources within the palace and the public. Those proverbs sourced from the public and palace came from the aged in society and traditional rulers and leaders who have the Akan language as their mother tongue. In some of these proverbs, there was the overt reference to *Nyame*; a title for God in Akan which in most instances is translated as God in the gloss. Other proverbs also make reference to other supernatural beings and deities such as demons, *sasabonsam*, idol *bosom* wizard *beyi*, dwarfs *mbotsia* charm *suman*. There are other titles and officials whose responsibilities have a relationship with the Akan concept of divinity. This includes the fetish priest *ɔkɔmfo*. The focus group participants used for the study clarified and confirmed other proverb obtained from other direct oral sources. Due to this verification and clarification proceedings, some of the proverbs appearing distorted were reviewed for accuracy by the native speakers and the aged encountered at the palace as part of the focus group participant.

In our quest to find the relationship between the Akan concept of divinity as represented in the Akan proverbs and the contemporary conceptualization of God and divinity from western religion, we conducted two focus group discussions with some students of Ghanaian Language at Ajumako campus of the University of Education, Winneba and compared with the aged officers and old generation at Mampong chief's palace. The first group of students representing the present contemporary

western concept of divinity was made of 15 first year students 10 second year and 5 third year students. The participants in the first group had varying ethnic backgrounds and religious affiliations and denominations. However, group two consisted of 28 officials advanced in age both at the palace, within the public and two fetish priests. Members of this group (group two) represents the Akan society's views on the proverbs as their concept of divinity. To solicit for their understanding of the proverbs, the participants were charged to give an interpretation for the proverbs and how their understanding of the proverbs affect their conduct in society. They were also to indicate whether or not the proverb has any bearing on their conception of divinity in contemporary times. They were also to tick the corresponding attribute for each of their given interpretation. The response of the participant were captured in an audio recording and transcribed for analysis.

In order to conceal the identity of the participant as agreed on keep participant anonymous and their information confidential, pseudonyms were adopted for the participant whereby each participant in a group is allocated a number as a label of identity. For instance in labeling group 1, (P) represents and (Y) also stands for year so in this sense P1Y1 in group one represents participant number 1 in year 1 P2Y1 stands for participant number 2 in year 1 in that order whereas Y2, Y3 Y4 in group 1 stands for year 1, 2, 3 and 4 respectively. However, in group 2 (G2) is used to represent whilst still applying (P) for participant. Therefore P1G2 refers to participant number 1 in group two and P2G2 refers to participant number 2 in group 2 and it continues in that order.

In the analysis of the collected data, we categorized the participants' interpretation ascribed to each of the proverbs into various attributes accorded the Supreme Being by considering and comparing the recurrence of the themes and the underlining message behind the given interpretation. In attaining this objective, our training in Ghanaian Language (Twi and Fante) coupled with our competence in the language as natives was very resourceful. Moreover, the interaction with our focus group participant, other competent language users we encountered during data collection as well as an extensive reading of literatures on the subject of proverbs was very helpful. The categorization is presented in the succeeding sections below.

2. PROVERBS

The study of proverbs which can be dated as far back as Aristotle is term as paremiology. This is a word which has its origin from Greek with the later part "paromia" signifying "Proverb". The definition of a proverb has caused scholars from many disciplines much chagrin over the centuries. Many attempt at definition has been made from Aristotle to the present time ranging from philosophical consideration to cut and dry lexicographical

definitions (Meider, 2004). For instance Meider (2004) defines proverb as a short generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals and traditional views in a metaphorically fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation. This comprehensive description of proverbs outlines its number of gems embodied in it. By identifying proverbs as a generally known sentence of the folk, the definition highlights the collective ownership of the proverb by the society of use. The speech society has a unanimous endorsement for the belief, credence and conviction embroiled in the proverb by mutual consensus. This implies that the proverbs of the Akan society in general including those with supernatural inclination represent the common knowledge, understanding and familiarity of the folk. The stance of societal mutuality and shared acceptance in Akan proverbs is also in line with Durkheim (1933) cited in Diabah & Amfo (2018) describing a proverb as a condensed statement of a collective idea or sentiment relative to a determine category of objects. The communal value of proverbs is espoused in this perspective. It is in this value of proverbs that contains the wisdom, truth, morals and the traditional experience of the use society. Thus the proverb is the medium that parcels the facts, insight, principles, standards and intelligence of the use society in a brief memorable statement to trickle down generations. The collective origin of proverbs debunking status of individual thought is supported by Asante (2002) and is also in the views of Agyekum (2011) and Amarachi, Egwu & Ogechukwu (2016) that the entire world view of the people is encompassed in their proverbs that may serve as a warning in areas of human activities, may disclose how to treat or relate with peoples, criticize or adorn a conduct. It therefore signifies that despite the varieties of definition and characteristics in attribution to proverbs from Aristotle, the communal value of proverbs is certain. Our settlement on Akan proverbs as a tool to a gainful insight of the Akan society concept of divinity is informed on the foundation that its collective embracement of a speech society's sentiment and standards from time immemorial. Employing a society's proverbs as a medium to understand their spiritual or historic background and secular endeavors is deemed contextual and appropriate. This is not new as various scholarly works like Diabah & Amfo (2018) on masculinity and implications, also Amarachi et al (2016) on African traditional philosophy, Agyeman, Asumeng & Amponsah (2015) on the relevance of Akan proverbs in contemporary human resource principles, Gorham (1956) on proverbs and psychology and others works which have utilized the wisdom in proverbs to unfold intriguing societal constructs. All these have been possible because the Akan proverb is an embodiment of belief systems, culture and tradition potentially applicable in various spheres of society. A component of the belief system, sentiment and values encapsulated in the Akan proverbs

is their conceptualization of divinity. It is this collective gem that we seek to unravel from the genre and assess its implication on contemporary social interaction of the Akan society and religion.

3. AKAN

Akan as a descriptive characteristics refers to an ethnic as well as a specific linguistic group of people in Ghana. Geographically, this group of people dominantly occupy the southern (including the Oti section scrapped out of the Volta region) and middle part of Ghana and stretches to cover some minority Akan group in Ivory Coast. The Akan with its various sub divisions have an identical culture and a language with intricate relationship to mutual intelligibility. The Akan consist of ethnic groups such as Agona, Ahafo Ahanta, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Aowin, Asante, Assin, Fante, Kwahu etc. According to the 2012 report of the Ghana Statistical Service, the Akans constitute 47.5 percent of the Ghanaian population. The matrilineal custom of inheritance and succession is common to the Akan tribal group. However, according to Pobee (1979) the only exception to this form of inheritance is the Akuapem of Larteh and Mampong who inherit from the father side. Eight out of the sixteen regions in Ghana including the existing and newly created regions are predominantly occupied by the Akans as their region of origination. These regions are Central, Eastern, Asante, Western, Western North, Brong East, Brong West and Ahafo regions. Though they hail from these regions and have farming and fishing as their traditional occupation, owing to migration, the Akans are now all over the country doing other jobs than their traditional occupation (Omenyo, 2001). Due to their presence across the country, the Akan language has now root nationwide. Hence it is appropriate for Simon & Fenning (2018) to assert that Akan and English are the main languages in Ghana. Today Akan is widely spoken proficiently by even non native speakers as second language and in support of that researchers like Guerini (2008), Essegbey (2009), Bibiebome (2010) and others all acknowledge the dominance and the rate of acceleration of the Akan language breaking through the traditional seat of other non Akan languages. Speaking of the coverage of the Akan language, it is worthwhile to indicate that Akan has eleven dialects but it is only Akuapem, Asante and Mfantse among the eleven that has a literary status. Assessing the spread and dominance of the Akan language, Obeng (2005) indicates that in estimation, half of the then population of Ghana speaks the Akan language as a mother tongue whilst two thirds use it as a lingua franca. On this approximation, it is not out of place for a claim to be made that Akan is the language of the majority of the Ghanaian nationals hence we can safely conclude that data from the Akan language community can signify the views and position of the entire nation by simple majority

and domination. To attain that representation, data from the study were sourced from the Akan language precisely Asante and Mfantse. That notwithstanding, there was a background verification to the position of the other Akan dialects on the subject.

Another common characteristic besides their matrilineal pattern of inheritance is their belief system. Their stance represents the views of the Akan group and all its sub divisions. We therefore dilate on these belief systems which are common to them all observes Eshun (2011). It is out of these belief systems that the Akans had their proverbs fashioned out to convey their sentiment and position on divinity.

4. THE AKAN BELIEF SYSTEM

The Akans view the world from two perspectives. These perspectives is the visible and the invisible and behind the visible is the invisible. In conformity to this, Pobe (1992) describes the Ghanaian in a larger sense as having a religious ontology and epistemology. In the view of the Akan, whatever happens physically has a spiritual dimension. In that regard, the determinant to visible occurrences in the physical realm is the invisible spiritual beings. Highlighting the close bond, relationship and interaction between the visible and the invisible realm, Douglas (2005) notes that to the Akan, the visible cosmos and the invisible world merely constitute one and the same universe and the antinomies of good and evil, life and death, which spring from antagonisms inherent in existing beings do not vitiate the unity of this world vision. The arrangement of spiritual being takes the following order according to Parrinder (1949), supreme being (Nyame), deities (Abosom), ancestral spirits (Nananom nsamanfo) lower spirit powers (amulets and talisman) which is worn around the waist, *suman*; a power believed to be obtained from small forest beings, dwarfs, witches and wizards and the use of magic.

4.1 Supreme Being

The Akans attribute the creation of the world to a Supreme Being and in support of this assertion the Supreme Being is given accolades such as creator *Oboadee* and owner of the world *Asaase wura*. Opoku (1978) states a myth associated with the Akans creation account that *Ɔdomankoma* first created the sky as his abode and followed it with the creation of the earth, rivers, plant, man and animals etc. Finally, out of love for mankind, the Supreme Being infused spirit powers into rivers, forest rocks and other natural creatures as a protection for man. The following myth which is universally known among the older people of the Akan illustrates their belief in the Supreme Being.

“Long, long ago *Onyankopɔn* used to live on earth and he was very near to us. Now there was a certain old woman who used to pound her *fufu* and the pestle used to constantly knocking

up *Onyankopɔn* (who was not then high up in the Sky). So *Onyankopɔn* said to the old woman, why she was always doing so to him. Because of what the woman was doing *Onyankopɔn* took himself away up in the sky.”

4.2 Deities

The Akans have a belief in deities and lesser gods referred to as *abosom*. Omenyo (2006) indicates that the deities residing in natural objects are deemed as children of the Supreme Being with specialized responsibilities such as fertility, protection, wealth, agriculture, healing etc. assigned to them by their father. The Akans view the deities secondary to their creator and are therefore a means to an end and report to their creator. They reject actions undermining the peace of the community and must be appeased or offered sacrifice for protection (Wilks, 1988).

4.3 Ancestors

The ancestors are members of a family who have demised and naturally pass on to the spirit realm. The Akans consider the world to be in fold, the physical world and the underworld (world of the dead) and man is in a cyclic trip so a birth in the physical world is a death in the underworld and a death in the underworld is a birth in the physical world. Opoku (1978) notes that a member of a family is regarded as an ancestor at death only when he lived an exemplary life, had children and died naturally with befitting burial. The ancestors are regarded by the Akans to be an intermediary between man and the supreme being getting prayers, petitions, quickly and effectively to the Supreme Being and watching over the living (Danquah, 1963).

4.4 Lower Spirit Powers

The Akans belief in several other spirits understood to lesser than the above. Though hierarchical as highlighted by Parrinder (1949) it includes charms and amulet, talisman, demons *sasabonsam* dwarfs, witches and wizards. All these have strong powers and according to Awuah (2009) the Akan belief in the existence of these powers around them makes them cautious of their activities giving them vitality fore actions and inactions.

5. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Per the themes attained from the solicited response of the participant on the interpretations, the attribute of God were categorized into five. These include the omnipresent of God, Omnipotent of God, Creator, Omniscient of God and God as a caring provider. Each of these attributes originate from how the Akan perceived God the Supreme Being from time immemorial and therefore fashioned out proverbs to reinforce their sentiment.

5.1 God as Omnipresent

The Akan society had a concept of the Supreme Being even before the institution of western religion says

Pritchard (1965) in a rebuttal to Hocart assertion that Africans are a people without a concept of God (Pritchard, 1965). As a reflection of their knowledge of an existence of a Supreme Being, the early Akan settlers composed some proverbs to buttress the existence of the Supreme Being. Besides these proverbs are expression such as *Nyame nndae* (God is not asleep) *Nyame bekyere* (God will provide) all indicates that they had a perception of a supreme being believed to comfort the distressed. However, Akan proverbs apart from confirming the existence of God also highlight the properties of the Supreme Being. The following proverbs attest that the Akan deemed the Supreme Being to be omnipresent.

a. Worepe asem aka akyerε Onyankopn a, na woka kyerε mframa.

If you wish to tell anything to the Supreme Being, tell it to the winds.

b. Wobu akɔɔ kwasea a, Onyame hwε wo to.
If you cheat a crab, God sees your buttocks.

c. Wo tiri mu fann a suman nkyere wo.

With a clean conscience you cannot be charged guilty by a charm.

d. Sε wodwane Onyame a, wohyε no ase.

If you run away from God, you are still under him.

The above proverbs reinforce the conviction of the Akan that the presence of the Supreme Being is everywhere. For instance in example one, the proverb likens the presence of God everywhere to the air. This proverb highlights the invisibility and in the omnipresence of God. In this, God is considered to be invisible to the physical eye just as the air is unseen by man yet its existence is not in doubt. Hence like the air, the presence of God everywhere is not seen but it is felt everywhere. The implication therefore is that making your petition known to the air or communicating with the air presupposes a communication with God because He exists in the air. Similarly, example (b) suggests that due to the presence of the Supreme Being everywhere, whatever that is done under the sun is overt to His sight. The crab residing in its habitat in the hole is oblivious of whatever happenings on surface yet for God it is plain to him. It is then demonstrated by the proverb that whatever that is done in concealment regarded to be covert, unknown and unreachable to man and other entities is fully glare to the sight of God.

Additionally, in responses obtained from the groups in our focus group discussion (FGD), participant from the two groups unanimously endorsed the theme of omnipresence in the above proverbs. For instance, P4Y1 reporting on example (b) remarks that the use of the tiny hole of the crab in the proverb epitomizes the fact that the sight of God is everywhere and that small habitat entitle to the crab alone is not a limitation to the presence of God. Hence if the maltreatment of the crab in the hole is visible to the presence of God then no place is concealed

to God as man may cogitate to be. In a buttressed, P3G2 acknowledged that example (b) reveals that unlike man God has no deficiency in the width, length and depth of sight; a quality to infer His limitless presence. Example (b) makes the conclusion that no man can escape the notice of God. Neither can any human abscond from Him. Commenting on the social implication of the proverbs on human behaviour, participant from the two groups in the FGD, again admitted that the knowledge of the omnipresence of God is a course of encouragement to desist from offensive behaviours neither in public or private. Thus the contribution of the cultural knowledge of the omnipresence of the Supreme Being in the proverb towards the definition and promotion of virtue is in agreement with the argument of Oudenhoven, De Raad and Carmona (2012) that national culture shapes virtues. It is therefore not surprising that the contemporary participant and the older generation agree that awareness of the omnipresence of God facilitates responsible social conduct.

5.2 God as Omniscient

The Akans imagination of the qualities of the Supreme Being ends not with his omnipresence. Still examining the Akan proverbs lead to confirmation that the Akan society from an unknown onset had the conviction that the Supreme Being has the quality of omniscience. According to scholars, omniscience as an attribute of the Supreme Being means that God owns all knowledge hence he has a full knowledge on all happenings on the earth (Nagasawa, 2003). With this understanding, the Akans portray God as having this divine attribute of omniscience. It is this inclination of the Supreme Being that to the Akans enables Him to know even in advance and foretell the future accurately. This the Akans manifest by framing the following proverbs.

e. **Obi rekra ne Nyame na obi nnyina hɔ.**

When one is taken leave of one's God no one stands by.

f. Wodwane Nyankopn a wohyε no ase.

Absconding from God brings you to him

g. Obi nkyerε ɔtomfoɔ ba atono, sε ɔnim atono a Onyankopn na akyerε no.

No one instructs the son of a smith how to forge; if he knows how to forge it is the Supreme Being who taught him.

h. Wobu akɔɔ kwasea a, Onyame hwε wo to.

If you cheat a crab, God sees your buttocks.

i. Onyame mmere na eyε mmere pa.

God's time is the best.

All the above examples have the orientation that the Akan imagine the Supreme Being to be all knowing and without any limitation in knowledge. For instance, this is confirmed in example (g), God is assumed to be an astute smelter who teaches and imbibe the skill and competence

of smelting into the children of the smelter without any paternal participation. Again, it is inferred from this same example that the intrinsic property of omniscience in God permits Him to identify and have knowledge of the talents in each family lineage and with His limitless skill and expertise award all the offspring of the lineage accordingly. This interpretation is also endorsed in example (i) that God solely before the birth of a child without the presence of nobody determines the fate in addition to the inherent vocation of the unborn baby far in advance. This God has the ability to execute competently due to his omniscience quality aliening Him to access all knowledge and prophesy accurately.

It is therefore in line that participants in both groups of the FGD, though with varied inclinations and demographics, overwhelmingly ascribed same and similar interpretations in approval of it. However, with reference to example(g, h) particularly all participants made the claim that the omniscience of God socially encourages all his subscribers to be patient and wait on Him since he knows the appropriate time in a divine calendar for all admirers. Moreover, responding to the social behavioural implication of the omniscience of the Supreme Being, P1Y2 and P5G2 states in part that “The omniscience of the supreme being means that he has knowledge of everything and nothing can hideout from him and this quality therefore calls on all His followers to be aware that every deed of mankind either covert or overt will be accounted to Him and deserving reward given respectively.” Every deed of man is known to the Supreme Being and will hold man to account.

5.3 God as the Creator

The Akan had a concept of God and divinity before the introduction and plurality of western religion and all its attendant sacred books. Thus it could be asserted that the Akan society in Africa had a sentiment in an imagination for the Supreme Being and related divine forces earlier than the argument that the Africans had no belief in a supreme being neither had they any form of worship nor is the darkness of their mind enlightened by even a ray of superstition. A misconception which reports a lack of divinity in Africa. A rebuttal to this especially in the case of the Akan in Ghana is their imagination of God as the creator in their proverbs of ancient origin. This is proven in the representation of the Supreme Being in the following proverbs.

j. **Obi nkyerε abɔfra Nyame.**

No one shows a child God.

k. **ɔdomankoma bɔɔ owuo ma owu kum no.**

The Creator created death only for death to kill him.

l. **Onyankopɔn amma asonofena katakyie biribi a, ɔmaa no ahodanedane.**

If the Supreme Being gave the swallow nothing else, He gave it swiftness in turning.

m. **Onyankopɔn nkum wo na ɔdasani kum wo a, wonnwu.**

If the Supreme Being does not kill you but a human being kills you, you do not die.

n. **Onyame bɔ onifurani no, na wabɔ ne poma.**

God created the blind together with his directional stick to show the way.

The notion of creation is dominant in the above proverbs. This is indicating that the Akan society had knowledge about the Supreme Being and as part of their conception of God and divinity had portrayed the Supreme Being as the creator of the universe since time immemorial. Such an attribution to God is also maintained in the report that God the creator who created the universe is omniscient and omnipotent (Bai, 2003). This position in the Akan concept of God harmonizes with most western postulations from the Christian fathers and Islamic scholars with the exception of the evolutionary view and atheistic stance antagonistic to the designation of creation to the Supreme Being. Crediting the account of creation to God is attested to in the example (j) of the proverbs stating that for the blind, God created him not alone but in addition to his directional stick to assist him out. Though He is not explicitly pointed out for all creation but that generalization can be made because example (m) in the interpretation of P6G2 clarifies with a very popular belief that “He gives and takes since God is the giver of all lives, without him causing or permitting the demise of a live no man can do so”. Additionally in example (j) it is also explained by P12Y1 that “God created man and endowed him with the natural instinct for God and therefore a Child need not be taught God”. Further, in example (i) it adds that the Supreme Being created the swallow with an inherent swiftness. All these individual attributions lead to the conclusion that the Akan society as evidenced in their proverbs recognized the Supreme Being as the creator of the universe. The notion of the Akan in creation is supported by Islam that Allah created the universe in order to manifest his attributes; creation is the consequence of His being creator, paradise manifest His mercy and grace; hell shows His justice; mankind’s error His forgiveness, living and non-living things His generosity etc. In parallel account on its social implication, respondent P7Y3 affirms that knowing that the natural environment was created by God underscores the need for preservation and use for example as herbs to accomplish the purpose for which they were created.

5.4 God as a Caring Provider

Though the Supreme Being remains an invisible spirit to the Akan per earlier dialogue, yet He is conceptualized as a caring supreme force at the aid of mankind all the time. The caring quality of the Supreme Being is emphasized in the fashioning of the Akan proverbs. As a caring spirit force, he provides both materially and spiritually for the needs of his creatures especially all his cohorts. The physical provision is done spiritually according to the Christian doctrine and it is out of this that the Supreme

Being is given the Hebrew title ‘Jehovah Jireh’ meaning ‘the great provider.’ Among all the attributes of God perceived through the Akan proverbs, it is only His caring attitude that he likely shares a minute with mankind because man was created in his likeness. Before the advent of the sacred books and its attendant proliferation of western religion in Akan land, the Akan society had a sentiment of this sacred secret and it found reflection in their oral tradition in their proverbs. Evidence to this course is the following proverbs:

o. Onyankopɔn hyɛ wo nsa kora ma na ɔteasefoɔ ka gu a, ɔhyia wo so bio.

When God fill your gourd cup full of wine and a human being comes and pours it away, He will fill it up again for you.

p. Onyame ma wo yare a, ɔma wo aduro.

If the Supreme Being gives you sickness, He also gives you medicine.

q. Onyame na ɔwɔ basini fufuo ma no.

It is God who pounds fufu for the one without arms.

r. Aboa a ɔnni dua, Onyame na ɔpra ne ho.

It is God who cleans up the tailless animal.

s. Woyɛ afuo na Onyame anahunu mu a, ɛnye yie.

If you farm and leave God out, you will not succeed.

t. Wo tiri nyɛ a, wohaw Onyame.

If you are unlucky, you disturb God.

All the above Akan proverbs illustrate that God is perceived as a provider to mankind. The kind of assistance mankind receives from his creator is represented in several mediums and it is deemed to surpass the generosity or mankind’s ability to provide. For instance in example (q, r) it is established symbolically that it is only God who can help he who is regarded as helplessly hopeless in human stand point. That is the use of the tailless and armless in these examples symbolize a condition beyond human caring ability or restoration. Man is dependent on God as a helper in all life endeavors including economic activities. Thus example (s), upholds that failure to recognize God in business (farming) is preparation to fail. Therefore the Akan ought not to forsake God in any sphere of life. Contributing on the notion of God as the great provider among the Akans, P9G2 gives the summary that God is an economic facilitator, a restorer of good health, an infallible protector, a changer of fate and every need of man that is why he bears the title ‘Jehovah Jireh’ meaning ‘the great provider.’ However, P2Y4 confirms that the credence in God as the provider has degenerated into overdependence, sluggishness and unproductivity among adherent shirking all responsibilities to the care and provision of the Supreme Being. This conviction in response was shared by other respondent like P10Y1,

P7Y2, P4G2, P8G2 and several other respondents on the social implication of the conceptualization of God as the supreme provider. Though the reliance on a supernatural force as a provider is a common ontology for all who cling to a form of worship, it is contemporarily very prevalent among a section of western protestant in religion.

6. THE TRADITIONAL AKAN PERCEPTION ABOUT GOD VS. CONTEMPORARY WESTERN RELIGION

According to the assembled proverbs, the traditional Akan society had a sentiment of God and divinity since time immemorial or undocumented. These Godly emotions found reflection in their proverbs. Though in a broader sense the Akan concept of divinity entails other supernatural forces, they still recognized God as the Supreme Being with all other forces under His superiority. It is also identified that the Akan concept of God as realized in their proverbs could be outlined from the dimension of the attributes of God embedded in those proverbs of Akan origin. In this regard, as reflected in the above discussion on the proverbs and proven by the Focus Group Discussion (FCD), the Akan portray the Supreme Being as omnipotent, omnipresent, Creator, Omniscient and as a caring provider.

However, contemporary western religion on the other hand, upholds these same attributes of God in their teaching and doctrines. But despite the similarities and sameness in the conceptualization of the Supreme Being between the African and for this matter Akan indigenous society’s concept of God and that of the contemporary western religion, the latter despises all the traditional perception of God as primitive, inferior, barbaric and derogatory. Hitherto this stance was the assertion that the African region is a dark continent with no inclination for God. The similarities in the concept of God besides questioning the condemnation of the African or Akan concept of God, it suggests that the African Akan was not completely lost if contemporary western religion is to be standard. With the bearing between the representation of God in the Akan proverbs and western concept of God, the foundation was accidentally established for the acceptance of contemporary western teachings. The contemporary western religion which castigated all sentiment of divinity in Africa, running it down to nothing but turn round to build and develop the already existing sentiment of God they themselves condemned has made some critics and observers descend heavily on the western religion describing it as a factor for the unproductivity and inefficiency since the over reliance on the Supreme Being as a caring provider in the teachings of contemporary religion shirks responsibility to God. This is seen in the

remarks of P9G2 on the social implication of the notion of God as a caring provider describing the addition made to the existing sentiment about the Supreme Being within the Akan setting as a cause of the over reliance undermining productivity and even healthcare among some contemporary believers in western religion and calling for a reverse of the trend. A support to this claim was given by P6G2 stating in part that "...Because of His caring provision, some believers today even refuse to seek medical care at hospital when indisposed, spend productive hours at place of worship, pay for consultation, prayers etc. in quest to solicit for the intervention of the Supreme Being because He is deemed as a caring provider". This development needs to be checked for reconciliation.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the ideas, concepts and philosophy behind some Akan proverbs collated as a data for this study suggest that Akan societies in Ghana had an aboriginal conceptualization of divinity with their own understanding hitherto the arrival and institution of contemporary western religion and its doctrines. This contest the proclamation made by earlier scholars such as Parinder (1962) that African continent and its societies are a dark populace with no array for God and divinity at all. Additionally, the similarities and direct connection between how the Akan through their proverbs from time unknown portrayed God as omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient and a caring provider and its link with attributes of God in contemporary western religion challenges Clarke (1930) derogatory and primitive description of the African concept of God. Considering the attributes of God from the perspective of the Akan can be categorized as sharable and non-sharable with respect to man and His creatures. The sharable includes his caring provision and the non-sharable, his omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient. The latter as highlighted in the study are qualities unique to the Supreme Being and no man manifest them. Though non-sharable, each of these attributes has an implication on human behavior and conduct in society since every deed is deemed visible, accessible and knowable to the Supreme Being. However, His caring attitude as a provider is sharable with man and it is even encouraged in contemporary religious for believers to emulate and do same to fellow men. These are all belief systems common to all religions and believers of the Supreme Being. Hence co-existence in religious stance is essential than condemnation and denunciations. Similarly, considering the usefulness of proverbs in the assessment of the conceptualization of the Supreme Being among the Akans, other aspects of their divinity is worth studying in the future.

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