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Review of the Christian Chiefs and Traditional Rituals in Ghana

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Abstract: This review examines the challenges of chiefs who are Christians in the exercise of their traditional duties. It has been found out that chieftaincy, especially among the Akans, is involved with religious rites. Since the Chiefs are by tradition the living representative of the ancestors, it is their mandate to always “feed” them through regular offerings. Again, his leadership duty regarding the governance of the state in which he is the ruler involves carrying out the dictates of the ancestors for the living descendants of the community. The study contends that being a chief and also professing the Christian faith puts one in a challenging position; since his loyalty and allegiance is brought into question. Whereas some Christian chiefs are of the view that they do not see anything wrong with carrying out their traditional “official duties, others think otherwise. This review seeks to consolidate the traditional rituals of a Chief to modern day Christian practice. It attempts to put the traditional rituals into perspective of Christian practice to avoid religio-cultural conflicts.

Keywords: Chiefs, Rituals, Christians, Chieftaincy.

1. INTRODUCTION.

The chieftaincy institution which was once the revered form of traditional leadership in Ghana has been shaken by modernity, Islam, and Christianity. (Obuaba, 2013). In the past there was nothing like Christian chiefs in Ghana. The advent of Christianity has however led to formation of the Association of Christian Chiefs and Queen Mothers in Ghana (ACCQM) (Awuah-Nyamekye, 2010). Asante (2006) has mentioned in his work that Christians who have been enstooled as chiefs have all as part of their traditional role performed traditional religious rituals in order to bring prosperity to their people. This means that Christians who had been made chiefs were obliged to perform rituals. He added that none can be a proper chief in good standing if such person does not perform rituals. This means that any chief who does not perform the necessary rituals pertaining to chieftaincy may not be recognized by the community. It could even lead to destoolment of that chief. Although Asante has argued that the tension between chieftaincy and Christianity is

on the decline, he however admits that there are some areas still under contention. These are libation, polygamy, ancestral veneration, dependence on deities for well-being, and festivals. He concludes that these aspects of traditional culture have not received the church’s approval in Ghana.

Agorsah (2010) describes a ritual as the practical relationship one has with a supernatural force. Thus, all religions operate through several forms and ceremonies. He added that since ritual is performed in all religions, it is a misconception to tag the institution of chieftaincy as the only institution that performs rituals. We cannot disagree with Agorsah that other religious institutions perform rituals. Christianity for example has baptism and confirmation as rituals.

Chiefs are also expected to perform rituals after they have been enstooled as chiefs during the celebration of festivals. Abotchie (2006) has rightly pointed out that the

chief is responsible for maintaining link between his people and the ancestors. His religious functions include performing rituals on important occasion such as Akwasidae, Wukudae, and Odwira festivals. Does a Christian chief perform these rituals on festive occasions after he has been enstooled?

Some Christians are also of the view that the rituals associated with chieftaincy are fetish and that the chief becomes the object of worship. However, it has been argued by Addo-Dankwa III (2004) that, the acts and rites performed by the chiefs such as veneration, pouring libation among others do not in any way make the chief fetish and for that matter, in performing them, the Christian chief does not compromise his faith. The enstoolment of chiefs does not make them the object of worship, since traditional beliefs have it that the living should not be worshipped.

Ritual is the practical relationship between the supernatural forces (Agorsah, 2010). The chief derives his sacredness from the ritual processes of confinement and enstoolment. He gains his authority to serve as the intermediary between the people and the ancestors from the rituals. As a chief, he is expected to perform rituals during Akwasidae, Awukudae, among other festivals. Some scholars are of the view that, the ancestors are worshipped and others claim that they are venerated (Assanful, 2017). Some Christians are of the view that the chief becomes an object of worship because he is the intermediary between the ancestors and the people. (Abotchie, 2006). Again, findings of a critical comparison of four African theologians on libation and African Christian theology revealed divergent positions on libation rituals. It is therefore the rationale of this review to modernize traditional rituals into Christian practices perspective to ensure proper harmonization and co-existence.

2. TRADITIONAL RITUALS IN RESPECT OF CHRISTIAN CHIEFS IN GHANA

There are various rituals associated with the institution of chieftaincy. Some of these include the processes of confinement and enstoolment, celebration of festivals, offering of sacrifice to deities, pouring of libation and the cult of ancestors among several others. Some Christians find some of these rituals as contradictory to their religious beliefs and practices. Yet, some Christians want to rule indigenous communities and maintain their Christian identity.

2.1 Confinement

This is where a Christian Chief elect is kept in a room for some time before he is out-doored. During this period of confinement, he is taught the history, tradition, customs, and practices of his people. He is cleansed spiritually for his new role. The installation of a chief is accompanied by performing rituals. (Abotchie, 2006). After the death of a chief, the selected candidate to replace the chief is expected to go through the ritual process of confinement and enstoolment. The ritual process is very important because through the process the chief automatically becomes the intermediary between the ancestors and the people. Also, the chief derives his sacredness from the ritual. This reflects what Busia indicated that from the moment the new chief is enstooled his status becomes sacred. The sacred nature of the chief makes him the intermediary between him and his people. It is in that capacity that a chief takes on a priestly character and mandated to perform the religious rituals that are very significant. The chief therefore plays the role of a priest. This is similar to the role of the Christian priest. This can be link to a person to be called to the highest office of priesthood. Such person shall go through a period of confinement for a period before he/she is finally installed as a Priest. The period can be in years, months or weeks. In catholic priesthood for example such person shall be confined in a seminary for almost seven years before he can installed as a Chief. Such is a period of schooling into the dos and don'ts of the priesthood and the knowledge and skills therein is instilled in them. It can therefore be said that a Christian can be confined for a period of time and be installed as chiefs subsequently. I am of the opinion that a Christian can go through the period of Confinement as ritual to become proper chiefs on the notion of getting the needed and the requisite skills and knowledge to rule successfully under his tenure of office.

2.2. Installation By Enstoolment Or Enskinnment

The custom of installation takes the following forms; first, the selected chief is initially presented by the Kingmakers and the elders to the entire populace for their acceptance or rejection (BROBBEY, 2008). The second stage is that the stool will be brought from the stool room and presented to him. In many Akan areas, the production of the black stool from the stool room is accompanied by the performance of some rituals. It is said that the rituals include the pouring of libation and slaughtering of cow, sheep or fowl whose blood is besmeared on the stool and on the legs of the chief-

elect. In some areas, part of the blood is besmeared on his arms and his neck. Amid incantations and prayers, the chief-elect will then be lowered on the stool on three occasions but he should be cautious not to sit on the blood-besmeared stool. (Brobbey, 2008). A Christian who has been nominated, selected or elected must go through this rituals before he can be recognized as proper chief. In Christianity sense the installation can be done by evoking the power of God during the installation. When Christians are ushering new pastors or priest into office such person is three times lowered on a stool for three times as a sign of installation to high office of priest. This can be done same for Christian in their quest to become a chief. It is therefore not wrong for Christian to be installed as a Chief.

2.3. Celebration of Festivals

A festival is an event ordinarily celebrated by a community and centering on some characteristics aspect of that community and its religion or cultures. It is a festive season or occasion where chiefs used to remember the ancestors. It is an occasion where special food is prepared to the gods and ancestors of the land. (Abotchie, 2006). A Christian chief must celebrate such occasions since his failure to do that can lead to destoolment. This festival can be modernized in Christianity sense of celebration such as Easter, Pentecost and Christmas days. A Christian chiefs can celebrate festival in context of the modern day Christianity to ensure all-inclusive celebration. In the light of above, festive seasons in Traditional settings can be celebrated in connection with the Christian rituals to ensure proper keeping of faith.

2.4. Pouring of Libation

Libation prayer is another ritual that some Christians consider as against their beliefs. Libation is simply prayer in African indigenous religion. It is the sacrificial pouring out of liquor to the supernatural forces or spirit. (Agyarko, 2005). In discussing some of the challenges encountered between Christian engagements with African culture, Oduyoye rightly stated that libation prayer was such that it is capable of bringing together all the benevolent ones who live in the realm of the spirit. It begins with God who is the Supreme Being, followed by the relevant deities to the ancestors, and the recent departed. The bringing up of these spirits is what baffles Christians and declared unacceptable.

3. OFFERING OF SACRIFICE TO DEITIES.

This is where a precious materials of life is offered to deities such as stones, trees, water and other inanimate objects. Such sacrifice can be slaughtering of human and animals to these objects. It is a mandatory for Christian chiefs to offer these sacrifices. Such sacrifice can be done in Christian's perspective by making such sacrifice to God. To offer something to a deity is to show and profess loyalty, gratitude and love. These are usually given in rituals. But in doing so, you must remember the following:

- a. What does my deity want and appreciate?
- b. How and how often do I have to make offerings?
- c. What materials will I use on my altar?
- d. How frequently do I have to do it?

Kinds of Offering

Offerings come in many, many ways. The way spirits, gods and goddesses reply varies, either by your method or form of offering. Normally, offerings are given in the form of food and drink, but some offerings also come as your most valued possession, such as jewelries. However, some offerings come in unique ways. For example, there are fertility god/goddess who appreciates seeing you in pleasure, which is why masturbating or engaging in sex can also serve as an effective offering.

What Deities Like

It is very important that you understand your deity. When offering, you have to understand first what your deity is like, what he/she represents, what kind of gift will suit them and what they surely would accept. Surely it would not be correct when you offer flowers to a war god. In offering something to a deity, you have to really pay attention and be alert with your senses.

4. CONCLUSION

For now, it can be said with some confidence that there are changes already on the way in some individuals, religious groups, communities, and traditional authorities' whiles others steadfastly cling to their conservative notions. This review examined some of the percurial traditional rituals that a Christian chiefs cannot not avoid. These rituals can be put in the perspective of Christian faith and believe so that Christians can be installed as a chief without recourse to their faith and beliefs. Traditional rituals can therefore be performed and could be seen as similar to Christian rituals such as baptism, communion, confession and confirmation.

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