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Religious roles of Christianity and Traditional communities in the community of the Krobo

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Abstract

This paper examines the traditional practices and the Christian responds to the customs of the Krobo of Ghana. The study traces the backgrounds of both Christian and traditional societies in the Manya Krobo traditional area. This paper attempts to show the impact of religious roles and practices on the traditional and the Christian communities. Some major issues in religious life style in the Old and the New Testament was considered in relation to the Krobo Christian community. The paper demonstrates how traditional community embrace customs and how its participants interact with Christianity in their efforts to make life meaningful in the two extreme religious worlds. In the religion of the Krobo beliefs, practices and forms such as communality have some similarity in Christianity. This paper argues that, enculturation and contextualization should be used by Christian teachers and preachers among the people in an effort to establish the Christian faith in the Krobo communal communities. Separating the Krobo Christians from their traditional families have created disunity in the community. This study identified denominational and religious differences which hold individual, congregations and community apart. God created humanity with cultural diversities, tribal differences and gender to live under one God and one community. It is being recommended that, Christianity in Manya Krobo traditional area should engage in a positive dialogue for mutual enrichment, treating the engagement as a learning experience to live amicably and respectfully despite differences in the community.

Keywords: *Community, Communal, Christian, Contextualization, Gospel, Tradition, Krobo, Living.*

Introduction

The African societies in general place a lot of emphasis on communal and community values. The success of these values depends very much on each member of the community, demonstrating a high sense of responsibility towards the well-being of others and the society.¹ In the Krobo Christian community in Ghana, however, one can see traces of divergence regarding some religious practices of the Church. It was noted that, the Christian missionaries which converted the early Krobo Christians made the believers to leave their tribes and kinsmen to build a new community. This new community was called Salem. It was located around the mission stations in the effort of separating them from their traditional brethren and kinsmen.² However, some scholars have writing against this practice of the Christian Church. According to Emmanuel Oklemeh Tettey, The aim for the Salem communities was to separate the Christians from the “heathen”, that they may be safe from enticement by the heathen lifestyle of their family members. Despite difficult times with the “heathen practices”, the Christian community numbered 279 members in church and 87 pupils in the schools in 1879 after

¹ Kwame Gyekye, *Philosophy, Culture and Vision*. (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2013), 229-234.

² E. M. L. Odjidja, *Mustard Seed: The Growth of the Church in Kroboland*. (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1973), 35.

twenty years missionary labour.³ Another disunity found among the people is denominationalism and individualism which seems to be on the increase. The extended family relationships cannot be said to be the best shape regarding some traditional practices among some Christians. Even in the church where communalism is preached, collaboration is minimal amongst the Krobo people.

Economic independence seems to make the nuclear family override the extended family. How can the church portray a more closely-knit than we currently see? Are there real tendencies of division? Should community be expressed more of experience than in physical realities? In the contemporary times, there is a lot of talk about enculturation, and it is important to examine how the Christian message finds expression within the Krobo community in Ghana and how the unifying principles shapes the kingdom of God among men and women. No one would deny that there is a cultural and traditional reality in Africa which colonial rule and the more recent influences of urbanization, westernization, education, Christianization and technology have not been able to destroy. There has been an important model of evangelization accompanied by cultural imposition that has led to lifestyles that are both inconsistent and alienating to community or communal living. The idea of the Christian community like Salem created in the olden days within the Presbyterian Church of Ghana at Odumase, in the Manya Krobo traditional area gives impression of this system against the idea of community.⁴ Christian community in some senses have taken a western nature and the Krobo Christians are losing their sense of belongingness or community.⁵ The attempts to hold on to enculturation does not seem to be appreciated in traditional and Christian communities. Therefore, this paper will examine and investigate religious practices in the traditional and Christian communities of the Krobo from a Christian perspective to make meaningful responses for this indigenous people. This study would like to provide an academic resource to help the church and the traditional communities, and to use a paradigm for Christian living and to understand the links between the two extreme religious worldviews. This study stems from my personal experience as a Krobo Christian who observed or participated in some of these traditional and religious practices several years ago.

The Krobo Christian Community in Context

The Greek word for church is “*Ekklesia*,” which may be translated “the congregation,” “the assembly of elected people” or “parliament” in our contemporary time and in this connection, “those who are called out” of bondage of sin.⁶ In its New Testament setting it was always applied to a community of people. The Church as a fellowship of those responding to the challenge of the Kingdom of God in the ministry of Jesus can express itself in all forms of community. The community is important as

³ Emmanuel Oklemeh Tettey, *The Basel Missionaries' Christian Education Approach in the Krobo Religio-Cultural Context*, An unpublished MPhil Thesis from Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, August 2010, 82.

⁴ Odjidja, *Mustard Seed*, 34-35.

⁵ Odjidja, *Mustard Seed*, 34-35.

⁶ Vine, W. E., *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament*. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Inc., 1996), 42-43.

an integrative motif for theology not only because it fits with contemporary thinking, but more importantly because it is central to the message of the Bible. E. M. L. Odjidja's definition of a Church is a "Christian Community", its biblical interpretation is that it is the body of Christ and that Christians are its members, both individually and as a congregation.⁷ The church is believed to be a community of worshippers. These ideas of communal living and communal values find expression in the life of the Israelites. A person matters as long as he or she belongs to a household. The family was the fundamental social structure or unit that was composed of those who were of one lineage, place and house and share the same fundamental character or faith. Its composition includes the husband, wife or wives, the unmarried children, the married sons and their wives, the slaves and their wives and children, outsiders who are sojourners or residents aliens. Naomi, Ruth, the daughter in law, and Obed, the son of Ruth were all considered part of the family of Elimelech (Ruth 4:5, 17). When God made a covenant with Abraham it did cover his descendants, slaves and even the unborn (Genesis 17:3 -8). The servant of Naaman, the Syrian army commander, who has a Jewish servant considered Naaman as the father (2 Kings 5:13). The early New Testament church which was of one heart and did everything in common depicts the life in a community. (Acts 4:32 -37). It is of equal importance, the Kingdom of God which is already present but still anticipated and is depicted as the eschatological community (Revelation 5:8 -11; Mark 1:15).

Taking a critical look at the salvation history that unfolds in the Scriptures, one can see that it revolves around the community. God through an individual establishes relationship with humankind and this has been the pattern. Adam is said to be an opening page for God's relationship with humankind. The Hebrew word *adam* means humankind and it also stands as a personal name.⁸ The selection of Abraham out of his father's house was to make him the father of nations (Genesis 12:1-3). Here Abraham's selection was a means to God's people. Later, Israel's selection out of many nations was for them to become the light for all nations (Isaiah 49:6). Also God through Jesus was to reconcile the whole world to God himself (2 Corinthians 5:18, 19).

The community of God's people as Koinonia

According to Dan J. Antwi, African cultural personality follows the agenda of Koinonia.⁹ For him, the core of self-understanding weaves around the saying "Unity in Diversity" in the sense that a clear understanding of the African heritage of community and communality can be seen in the "varieties of understanding of community with respect to detail on the continent of Africa". Antwi also sees the cardinal point of the African experience of Koinonia in Mbiti's statement: "I am, because we are; and since we are, therefore I am". As a creature, the human person in community with God, the creator, whom the varied African creation stories and appellations point to. Antwi also describes the material part of the human person in terms of relationship with the earth of which the body returns to at death. Then he makes mentions of other persons who are in relationship with the human person

⁷ Odjidja, *Mustard Seed*, 158.

⁸ Vine, *Vines Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament*. 146-147.

⁹ Dan J. Antwi. *A Sense of Community: An African Perspective of the Church as Koinonia*. Trinity Journal of Church and Theology. Vol. VI, No. 1 (January 1996), 8-9.

which include those who lived in the past as well as those who will come after us. This makes the extra-human dimension of community as he put it “a metaphysical reality with wider boundaries, with more extensive scope than any ordinary secular society than one can imagine”. This however does not deny the individual of a person but rather describes how individuality is expressed through the empowerment of community, a gift which requires the participation of all to make it possible.

For the wellbeing of society, the people in the community should “ensure that the customs are maintained, goals are attained and the spirit powers given regular and adequate recognition.”¹⁰ As such children are brought up within this framework through education and the elaborate systems of these rites of passage. This education and rituals are the responsibility of all the members for the development of all members. There is also the concept of leadership of which the clan uses to express the strong sense of community and togetherness. Leadership is seen as a shared responsibility and service that exists to ensure the cohesiveness of the society.

The Psalmist says “God sets the lonely in families” (Psalm 68:5). Becoming a member of the church suggests the idea of being part of the family of God. This is evident in the rite of baptism and confirmation which the church celebrates. The African in the twenty-first century can be said to be going through lots of social changes and the church cannot be left out. According to Antwi, it is no gainsaying that the cohesion, communality and interdependency of the African and or the Krobo culture have been shaken somewhat by the political and economic policies which have their roots in the colonial past.¹¹ Such a blow to the African or the Krobo has generated a lot of personal and interpersonal conflicts. The church and the society in some sense have taken a western nature and African or the Krobo Christians are losing their sense of communality. Theologians’ attempts to hold on to enculturation does not seem to be appreciated.

In the New Testament, the church is made up of individuals who collectively confess Jesus Christ as Lord. These individuals come with diverse backgrounds which greatly influences the kind of church that is built. Traditionally, it is said, “one’s home is that which is required and not wealth.” This is because each person is raised with a particular belief system, custom and way of life and is through such that the individual can be properly understood. The understanding of the human phenomenon must reflect a more adequate balance between its individual and social dimensions.¹² It is this social acts, beliefs, morals, etc. society develops that shapes the individual into personhood.

According to John Mbiti, the African believes that God is the explanation of man’s origin and sustenance.¹³ Humanity is the original work of creation of God. This idea is also witnessed in the Old Testament that “God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him, male and female, He created them” (Genesis 1:27). Among the Krobo, all persons are children of God and no one is a child of the earth. Some African myths depicts the idea that originally God was living among human or visiting them from time to time. Mankind, animals as well as all creation lives in community

¹⁰ Antwi, *A Sense of Community: An African Perspective of the Church as Koinonia*, 8-9.

¹¹ Antwi, *A Sense of Community: An African Perspective of the Church as Koinonia*, 8-9.

¹² John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*. (Oxford: Heinemann Publishing Ltd., 1988), 45-59.

¹³ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 53-54..

with God.

Another understanding that comes up in this belief is the idea that God did not create each individual to be an island to him or herself. It is important to recognize that the African regard all persons as ‘brothers’ or ‘sisters’. According to Kwame Gyekye, the word brother or sister is used to cover family relations beyond the male children of one man.¹⁴ It includes cousins and other relatives, male or female, linked by blood ties. The awareness that the African person as defined by the communal structure or social dimension cannot be over emphasized.

The community in an African context

Alistair Campbell links community with commune and defines it as a group of people having a common life.¹⁵ Gyekye also defines community as “a group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds – which are not necessarily biological but share common values, interests and goals.” The sociologist would use this term ‘community’ in a combined sense – describing it as a web of social interaction in which primary face-to-face relationship predominate, in which participants encounter others as whole persons who have an influence in the totality. What distinguishes a community from a mere association of individuals is the obligation, understanding and commitment that is shared and the willingness to seek the good of the society. Here the ‘human being’ as well as the ‘place’ moulds the culture that exists within the community. Culture, as it were is an evolving process that is acquired or learnt and above all that has assumed some permanence. Larry L. Rasmussen observes that, community as a place and community as an experience had been one and the same.¹⁶ But in the great shake-up of the world through industrialism community and modern society could coexist if only community was no longer a place and a tradition but instead an experience.¹⁷ What Rasmussen seems to depict is that community which formerly was thought of as a place has given way to community as an experience. This idea that community is an experience is also shared by the African but it is needful to recognize that the African usually goes further than that. The community living experience is set within various points of transformation of the individual which include birth, puberty, marriage and death. Within each of these are some underlying principles, which are communally based and have an integrating dimension. It is at these points of transformation that one becomes part of a community or recognized within a certain community.

Kinship among the people

Peter K. Sarpong believes that one outstanding feature of the African community is the ever-present consciousness of a bond in term of kinship, which evolves in the family.¹⁸ Community expresses a kinship mesh and determines almost everything, be it economic, legal, political, property holding and

¹⁴ Kwame Gyekye, *Philosophy, Culture and Vision: African Perspective*. (Accra: Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2013), 116.

¹⁵ Campbell, Alistair. *A Dictionary of Pastoral Care*. (London: SPCK, 1987), 121.

¹⁶ Larry L. Rasmussen, *Moral Fragment and Moral Community. A proposal for the church in Society*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 92.

¹⁷ Rasmussen, *Moral Fragment and Moral Community*. 91-92.

¹⁸ Peter K. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*. (Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1974), 45-49.

relationships. Sarpong adds that, “kinship therefore can be seen as the key to the understanding of traditional communities because it offers the principles forming the basis of the organization of almost all spheres of social life.”¹⁹ These principles cut across boundaries or definite terms. The physical world overlaps the spiritual world. In the African context, the unborn, the living and the dead all belong to the community. The kinship system provides the basis in particular relationships. So one can say that choosing a marriage partner, naming of children, transfer of property, who succeeds whom, who should be invited for specific duties, funeral celebrations, social etiquette, etc. are all informed by the community’s values. For Mbiti, the kinship cord binds even animals, plants and non-living objects through the totemic systems.

Communalism among the people

Communalism may be defined as the doctrine or theory that the community is the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society.²⁰ Here the emphasis is more on the community or group than on the individual, not necessarily to the detriment of the rights of the individual. Gyekye further states that “Communalism, thus, appreciates and espouses values that in African cultures are seen as essential in act and intrinsic to a human society of which membership is considered natural. From the above-mentioned, it is worth noting that the term community, seem more preferable, embracing and more involving in terms of relationship building among the Africans and or the Krobo and the Krobo Christians. The interpersonal bond in terms of community stretches further than blood relations or biological descent, event to strangers who share common values. Community, used in this sense is more experimental than that which is built on familial terms. The Triune God having called individuals out of various tribes and places and made them into the body of Christ which is the church, expects humanity to live under a new focus – the “new community”. Such a community is possible in this world but not of this world (John 17:14-17). The Triune God gives us this example. God created humanity into different cultures with diversities and expects us to use our diversities for a common good. We therefore see our unity more as a community than as a family. It is more communalism than a movement, for the new community is a creation of God. We however become truly human by socialization. Society invests in us and we turn to pay back what the community has put into us.

The Individual and the Community

Community cannot be understood outside the individual factor. It would be untrue to say in view of the strong sense of community in Africa and or the Krobo, that the individual has no self-awareness.

Being in a bond or sharing in a common values, therefore cannot rob the individual of his fundamental

¹⁹ Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, 34.

²⁰ Gyekye, *Philosophy, Culture and Vision: African Perspective*. 224-225.

and inalienable rights that he or she is entitled to as a person. According to Gyekye, rights belong primarily and irreducibly to individuals, a right is the right of some individuals.²¹ Each individual has the right to life and to express his or personal views. The possibility of evaluating or analysing communal relationships or values should be viewed as a positive sign. Through analysis one could thoughtfully affirm, amend or refine existing communal goals, values and practices. It is also possible that one could reject a practice totally or distance himself from the community. It is true that the community cannot allow the right and autonomy of each individual to shape its line or course and it is equally true that community cannot set its face against the dignity and right of the individual's way of life totally. So Gyekye asserts that, recognition of the dual features of the self as an autonomous self-determining entity capable of evaluation and choice and as a communal being, is a commitment to the acknowledgement of the intrinsic worth of self and moral right which can be said necessarily to be due to it.²²

The individual being allowed to be self-assertive and autonomous does not call for egoistic tendencies because at the end of it all, the common good and welfare of the society should be the aim. This is in sharp contrast to Immanuel Kant's position that a person ought to be treated as an end in himself. Man and in general every rational being exists as an end in himself, not merely as a means for arbitrary use by this or that will, he must in all his actions, whether they are directed to himself or to other rational beings, always be viewed at the same times as an end.²³ Scripture enjoins us however, to do to others what we want others to do to us (Luke 6:31). It affirms and recognizes the intrinsic value of the person but may rather stress more on the duties of the community. The individual is a person because society has made him or her so. Mbiti sums this up by saying, the individual exists only because others exist.²⁴

The Traditional Krobo Community in Context

Traditionally, the African finds his or her identity within the African community. With such understanding, persons are first identified in relations. To be a person is to belong in relationship and to be part of a community. The reasons for creating such close neighbourhood are not only the scarcity of space, but also their feelings of common descent, which are expressed in ancient proverbs and axioms like, for example, the following: *Asikɔmabia kɛ hɛ-dza he nɛ awoɔ kutuu ɔ nɛ* (literally meaning the *Asikɔmabia* tree said, because they feel homesick for each other, that why they grow in bunches.²⁵ There exists among the Krobos some closer interrelations and the consciousness of common social and ritual responsibilities. The underlying factor is an interpersonal kinship, bond, a type which Mbiti has summarized in a very powerful statement – “I am because we are; and since we

²¹ Gyekye, *Philosophy, Culture and Vision: African Perspective*, 234-236.

²² Gyekye, *Philosophy, Culture and Vision: African Perspective*, 235.

²³ Gyekye, *Philosophy, Culture and Vision: African Perspective*. 224-228.

²⁴ Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 53-54.

²⁵ Huber, *The Krobo*, 71.

are, therefore I am.”²⁶ Finding one’s place within the community makes the individual express him or herself better and it is best understood within the context of the family. The nature of the social unit of the Krobo family in Ghana is a closely-knit one. Father, mother, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, in-laws as well as close friends are all considered to be part of this social unit. Each significant activity is expected to be done in common. Not common to the Akans, the basic principle of the Krobo family and inheritance in general is patrilineal which in short means: a child belongs to, enjoys first rights and owes first duties to his paternal relations. It means that, if your father has forgotten about you and you are in his house, you do not belong to someone else but you belong to his house. The Krobo concludes that, the fact that one belongs to his paternal (*we*) house (literally meaning all the descendants through the male line), defines one’s rights and responsibilities within it. Any improper conduct of a person in a house or the community is *a ducc ba kpa* (literally meaning unacceptable to the society).

Furthermore, human beings relationship with the earth will therefore mean there is a sense of relationship between the human person and nature. The human being’s environment is an integral part of his/her world order and the relationship with nature is often echoed in terms of identity and kinship, friendliness and respect, an attitude of nature. Nature is personified as a tangible reality and this helps in promoting community. For example, the fishermen who sacrifice part of their live catch each time by throwing the fish into the sea which in another way serves as a way of replenishing the stock, the taboos in farming like cutting off the palm fruits from its whole bunch before returning home from the farm which is a source of replenishment, the sacred groves which preserves land and water bodies also provide pharmaceutical raw materials as examples. Human life as such depends on the maintenance of cosmic harmony. For Antwi, a person cannot affirm himself or herself without affirming others, and it is this wonderful experience that has held on to the African and or the Krobo sense of community despite the challenge from the western world, and cultural shock.²⁷

Some features of the traditional Krobo community

A great deal of emphasis is placed on conflict resolution within the social structure of Christianity. Communitarity may be seen in the sense of partnership, unity, participation or association. The African upholds this motive and as such all efforts are harnessed to achieve it. The communal values, in the words of Gyekye are those values that underpin and guide the type of social relations, attitudes and behaviour that ought to exist between individuals who live together in a community, sharing a social life and having a sense of common good.²⁸ Africans and or the Krobos have a rich culture of which slight variations occur from place to place or clan to clan. Certain features or sketches of life may be universal and impersonal in the sense that one cannot claim patent rights to a particular lifestyle and culture. In the words of Sarpong, where you come from, where you live, your environment, all have

²⁶ John Mbiti, *African Religion and Philosophy*. 2nd ed. (London: Heinemann, 1989). 106.

²⁷ Antwi, *A Sense of Community: An African Perspective of the Church as Koinonia*, 6-7.

²⁸ Gyekye, *Philosophy, Culture and Vision: African Perspective*. 211 -234.

a lot to do with who you are.²⁹ Some other features which will be discussed, include conflict resolution, work ethic, and some rites of passage, and speech pattern.

Ethics of work among the Krobo

The African and or the Krobos frowns on laziness and exalts solidarity and hard work. So from the very beginning children are trained to endure hard work for it is said: “Hard work does not break bones”. Anyone who is hardworking is accepted in the community and accorded much respect.

A son proved his respect for the authority of his father, particularly in the past, by faithfully working for him on his farm, by submitting to his decisions especially in the choice of a marriage partner and if he was a hunter by presenting to him the head of any animal he killed in the forest.³⁰

Consequently, male children are expected to join their hardworking father and learn of him. Female children are expected to know more about womanhood and caring for the home from their mother. Training of children is a duty of all the extended family members. When you see a person with a load, you ought to go and help the person carry the load. It is an affront to see an elderly carrying a load and a young person idling around. When you happen to see others at work, you have to greet them and wish them well. This shows the sign of solidarity. These greetings are ways of extolling the virtue of hardworking and encouraging people to work harder. With this idea of shared responsibility and communality, work plays a major role in fostering the social unit.

The evidence that morality and religion in African communities are associated could be established in the proverbs and everyday sayings of the people. Essential values and virtues are inherent in the proverbs and articulated in the form of morality. Krobo proverbs serve as expressions for action and as judgment..... In African society, kindness and generosity are virtues precious of pursuit and are articulated in many proverbial sayings of the people. The values repeated are all about the kind of persons who will get their due reward and will receive the praise of both God and men of the society. In the pursuit of all these virtues expressed in the proverbs, people in the community do well to avoid evil because of the adverse consequences.³¹

For example, we say, *Pi nɔ kake na dzi yomoyo* (literally meaning the old lady is not only one person's grandmother). Among the Krobo, courtesy in speech is highly recommended. A great deal of sociability and fellow feeling is reflected in the various forms of politeness among Krobos. In another vein, the one speaking acknowledges his or her unworthiness before going on with the speech. The use of gestures like bowing down the head, kneeling, standing up with hands behind you, removing

²⁹ Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, 37.

³⁰ Huber, *The Krobo*, 81.

³¹ Mate-Wayo, Robert Opatá., *Sacrifice among the Krobo of Ghana: A Christian Theological Study*, An unpublished Master of Theology Thesis, Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, November 2015, 39-40.

a sandal off the feet before speaking, or maintaining a distance are employed to depict reverence and courtesy.

The community interpretation of father and mother, being all embracing, suggest that every adult capable of fathering and mothering an individual can be said to be a father or a mother. For life to be enhanced and the individual to grow as expected, there should be harmony between parent and that individual. When the father or mother pronounces a blessing or a curse on the child, it is considered to be effectual. A parent should not be given the opportunity to grieve over the conduct of the child as that will not promote enhancement of life. On the other hand, children bear some direct relationship with the ancestry. Typical among the Akans, a child is named after a prominent elderly person or an ancestor. Sometimes children are named after their parents. So the child becomes a symbol of the one whom the child is named. So to talk to the child calls for acknowledging the authority the child is purported to bear. Since it is a virtue to honour and show respect to the elderly and the ancestors, the child who stands in for such must be accorded the same reverence. This is sometimes done by openly acknowledging the person whom you are addressing if you know the name and appellations of the person.

The concept of community in the Old Testament

A casual look at the Old Testament gives an impression that it is a record of the history and organization of the people of Israel and their relationship with God. In Exodus, God made it known to Moses that Israel was His people and that God wants them released from bondage so they could worship Him. (Exodus 3:7, 10 -12). These people were the descendants of Jacob (Exodus 1:5 cf. Genesis 46:27). The various records of genealogies in the Old Testament show a record of ancestors or descendants from common ancestor, or the records of descent into a common family. It also gives us the dynamics of the families and expanded families from the tribes. A sub-division of the tribe is usually referred to as the family (Genesis 18:19; Exodus 6:14 -25). However the entire people of Israel, like other nations, was also designated as a family (Amos 3:1-2).

The unity of the family finds expression in the kind of relationship that is built. The people of Israel related to Yahweh as their Father (Exodus 4:22). Members of the same parents look to themselves as brothers or sisters, likewise a person who is from the same country with one or from the same tribe (Exodus 2:11; 2 Samuel 19:12). The Israelite nomadic family was an open one. It extends widely to embrace even foreigners and sojourners and all who wish to identify with the family. The relationship factor among the people of Israel hinges on the covenant relationship between Yahweh and the Israelites (Genesis 9, 17; Exodus 6). The covenant relationship which sought to make the people worship Yahweh as their God alone was to be a lived experience. It was to direct their day to day living and life and also inform their worship life.

A typical Jewish home gives a real picture of religious life. Religion was not divorced from family

life. In the Old Testament, circumcision sets the tone for a real religious life. It made the Jew separated from other nations, for “any uncircumcised male, who has not been circumcised in the flesh, will be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant” (Genesis 17:14). The circumcised is thus dedicated to God and should worship the Lord Yahweh.

Family prayer from time to time was interspersed with private prayer in the morning and evening as part of the worship life. Before meals, a Jew is expected to be ritually cleansed. This is a religious rite. Prayers were said before meals and after meals. After the celebration of the Sabbath, the family settled at the table spread with the best meal and drinks each family could afford. After the celebration the father of the household blesses the members of the household which became an important religious activity. All these is to show how the home was the centre of religious practice and ceremony.

The father’s words and instructions were revered (Genesis 50:16). His rebuke and compassion was characteristic (Numbers 12:14 cf. Psalm 103:13). The mother was directly in charge of the household training of the children till they were grown (Proverbs 1:8) and “watch over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness” (Proverbs 31:27). Children were a blessing from God (Psalm 127:3-5). Brotherly solidarity is stressed (Proverbs 17:17) and harmony among brothers was the ideal (Psalm 133:1). The term “brother”, like within the African and or the Krobo context was extended to more distant relatives (Genesis 13:8), fellow tribesmen and other tribes (Deuteronomy 23:7). Family values superseded individual rights although the worth of each person was recognized. The most striking perhaps the most successful tradition, which deeply established religion in the home, was the context of religious education. The Jews were admonished concerning the Law of God to impress them in your children. “Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the door frames of your houses and on your gates” (Deuteronomy 6:7 -9).

This guideline was not only information-oriented but also life-oriented. God and God’s commandment was to become an active part of their daily walk, life and experience. God presenting Himself to the people of Israel as their father presents a sacred bond of relationship similar to relationship of earthly parents with their offspring. Parents in the society were to watch over the children closely in their finiteness while God always cares for His children (Isaiah 49:15).

The religious festivals particularly the Passover was also family –oriented. Passover was the first of the annual feasts and historically very prominent in the history of the Israelites (Leviticus 23:4 -8); it was celebrated on the first month on the religious year, on the 14th of Nisan and commemorated the deliverance of the people of Israel from bondage in Egypt (Exodus 12: 1 -40). On the night before the Israelites were permitted to leave Egypt, God through Moses and Aaron instructed all the Israelites to gather their family members, each in the father’s household to celebrate a feast with a lamb (Exodus 12:1 -6). The common faith, the sharing of common meal, the use of a common tribal shrine to which

all members of the family make pilgrimage probably was a major factor that shaped their unity.

The focus of the religious life of the Israelites expanded from that of the household to the tabernacle during the Exodus and after they had settled in Canaan the Promised Land. Individual or private prayer, as well as temple rituals, as prescribed in the laws, were still emphasized. It must be admitted that the Israelites could not maintain their monotheistic and unique relationship with Yahweh. They blended their religious life with that of the other nations whom they related with. They worshipped other gods, married women from other nations and were dawn to live like other nations. Yahweh through His prophets called His people to return to a sincere worship time and time again, after the Israelites had continually rejected Yahweh and were reluctant to return to the ways of the Lord. This opened up the opportunity for non-Jews who preferred to worship Yahweh to receive approval and became the people of God.

The concept of community in the New Testament

The word “church” in the New Testament is generally derived from the Greek word *Kuriakon* literally translated as belonging to the Lord of the Lord’s house. Church in the New Testament rather translates the Greek word *ecclesia* denoting an assembly or the congregation of the Lord.³² Generally speaking, it is used in various senses. One denotes the church universal or the ‘future’ Christian community (Matthew 16:18; Acts 20:17). This is used in the broadcast sense to encompass all the believers in Christ of the Global church (Romans 16:16). Church could also signify all Christians in a city (1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). This could be one church or group of churches in Galatia (Galatians 1:2) or in Judea (Galatians 1:22). A fourth usage could be the church in a house or house-church (Philippians 2; Colossians 4:15; Acts 11:26).³³

It must be noted that the New Testament church, no matter how it exhibited itself was built on the foundation of the covenant community relationship of the Old Testament.³⁴ The church thus is historical as well as a contemporary community. The covenant relationship between God and the people of Israel finds fulfilment in Jesus Christ (Hebrews 9, 10). Jesus, is described as having sealed the “new covenant with His blood and as its mediator and provides for all humanity the basis of our relationship with God (Hebrews 9:14-5). This sacrifice is a better provision in relation to that of the Old covenant which God made with the people of Israel. The movement, which Jesus inaugurated, is a calling to all people into the “Kingdom of God”. Those who responded became the foundation of the church. Hence, the goal of God’s activity in the world is to establish community. The actualization of His purpose to reconciliation and fellowship. The beginning of the church showed men and women, who moved by the Holy Spirit, travelled from place to place evangelizing and making converts for the Lord.³⁵ These itinerant apostle evangelizers kept to the ‘preaching of the word’ and

³² Hezekiah Harvey, *The Church: Its Polity and Ordinances*. (Michigan: Backus Book Publishers, 1982), 25-29.

³³ John Foster, *The First Advance: Church History I*. (London: The University Press, 1972), 20.

³⁴ Harvey, *The Church*, 26.

³⁵ Foster, *The First Advance: Church History I*, 36-47.

left the organization and leadership in the hands of the local converts. Whenever they bring together the converts, they identify some, train them, appoint and empower them to be leaders over their people. Worship in the home was a well-established pattern in Paul's ministry. The house where a Christian family lived was open to other Christian brethren for worship services together. In most cases, the head of the household acted as the leader of the church (Acts 12: 12; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Philemon 2). Although the Christian church was greatly informed by the liturgical practices of Judaism, out of which Christianity emerged, each community adapted its own lifestyle peculiar to the life-situation within which it found itself.

One distinguishing factor was the social unity that was built among the Christian brethren right from the beginnings of the church. In Acts 4:32-37, all the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. It was the duty of all members, young or old, male or female, slave or free, to employ his or her gifts to uplift the whole body of Christ. All distinctions were void in the Christian community (Galatians 4:4) and the responsibility of leadership and direction was not centred on the father of the household alone. Here the transactional type of ministry was operative in the early church where everyone was involved in ministry to one another. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost empowered all to participate in ministry. Each one understood and recognized his or her mission towards the neighbour and relationship was more experimental, like a free-flowing natural grace which draws people together for a common purpose.³⁶ The togetherness of the Christian fellowship can be enjoyed and developed when we face one another.

The issue of Christianity and traditional beliefs and practices

Christianity has always been a syncretic religion. It freely borrows whatever may help express the faith better. Although born out of Judaism, it exists as a separate religion despite sharing some basic Jewish practices.

We live in a different time and no longer expect the rapture round the corner. So, we have had to borrow funeral rites from Germanic and Celtic ancestors and Cahristianize them. The same we did with such Christian feasts as Christmas: December 25 is not in the New Testament, but it was an important holy day of our forefathers. Even the Bible discloses examples of syncretism. Think of the Magi who according to Matthew found the way to the cradle of Jesus on the basis of pagan astrology while the Bible-reading scribes in Jerusalem got themselves mixed up in a plot to kill the child. Or think of the alliance Christianity has forged with capitalism. It is extremely difficult to discover reflections of the New Testament directives on property and income in our present neo-liberal economic system, in which the churches play an important role. After all Adam Smith, the first theoretician of capitalism, was a Christin theologian. All this does not suggest that syncretism is by

³⁶ Foster, *The First Advance: Church History I*. 46.

*definition an acceptable thing. But it does suggest that before we criticize the AICs because of their syncretism we examine our praxis and then ask ourselves and other: under which conditions and when is syncretism not only acceptable but necessary?*³⁷

Wherever Christianity went, it borrowed and used existing structures but transformed it in the light of the gospel. The church in the Krobo traditional area initially inherited a tradition and culture of a gospel that had been formulated and shaped in Europe. So to be a Krobo Christian meant you have to live different apart from your own African culture. Such alienation had serious consequences on the Krobo mind-set and social structure and has unfortunately persisted to this day. Scholars believe that Africans are suffering from a defective Christology due mainly to the fact that early missionaries Christological hermeneutic was contextually defective.³⁸ Africans could not own the gospel and has thus been seen as foreign religion.

The rise of the African Initiatives Churches or African Indigenous Churches or African Independent Churches (AICs) of self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating the gospel was a response to what has elsewhere been called the North Atlantic captivity of the church in Africa.³⁹ Thus, to correct the shortcoming the AICs really stood for by paying greater attention to the faith healing, prophecy, lively music with considerable local flavour and flexibility in procedure. The influence of the Second Vatican Council which marked a big development in the history of the divided church in its mission and quest for unity opened new doors. African and or Krobo Christians were permitted in the Catholic Church the use of vernacular languages to a degree not permitted before, which in a way assisted the growth of African initiatives in the life of the African church. By responding to the concerns of African Christians, the church took a giant step of enculturation. This study understood that, the best word to describe the process of making the Christian faith our own is enculturation and or contextualization. Enculturation is the insertion of new values into one's heritage and worldview. It signifies the movement which takes local cultures and their values as the basic instrument and a powerful means of presenting, reformulating and living Christianity. For Christianity to be what it is meant to be for the Krobo, it must bear the element of faith expressed in the Krobo symbols. The Krobo Christians really needs a new gospel which presents a holistic concept of salvation. For when the gospel is incarnated with the Krobo culture, it will truly satisfy the kingdom which Jesus sought to bring.

The Krobo in an attempt to express spirituality have been struggling to become what they want to be. Some do not want anything that captures African and or the Krobo symbols and values. Some have broken relations with families especially those who do not share their faith and also traditional activities of their tribe. For example, some Krobo Christians cannot see any good about the ban on noise-making of the Traditional Council during annual festival celebration. Others have put on a

³⁷ Walter J. Hollenweger, foreword in *African Initiatives in Christianity* by John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositelu II. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), Xii.

³⁸ John S. Pobee and Gabriel Ositeli II. *African Initiatives Christianity*. (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1998), 14-24.

³⁹ Pobee and Ositelu II, *African Initiatives Christianity*, 1.

‘holier-than-thou’ attitude shunning communal labour and community durbars on the grounds that such meetings are ‘worldly’ and ‘idolatry. Some attribute witchcraft to whatever failure they encounter and will ostracize family members supposed to be witches or wizards. There is also the wearing of black cloth to funerals and burial services which some Christians preach against. The black cloth generally signifies sorrowing, loss, grief, mourning, etc. However, the Christian conception of death as victory and a sign of hope as a result of Christ’s victory over death for humanity seem contradictory when the mourner wears black. Yet it is not helpful to say that one is banned from grieving over the loss of a dear one. Therefore, we can wear black clothes as Krobo Christians and still profess our Christian faith.

Recommendations

The way forward for Christianity to influence both the traditional Krobo and Krobo Christian communities is to:

Study carefully the African and or the Krobo worldview of the community.

In Africa and amongst the Krobos, it is difficult to draw a distinction between the sacred and the secular. African Traditional Religion is expressed vividly in day-to-day life of all the people, whether Krobo Christians, traditionalists or of other faith. The Manya Krobo traditional council reserves all the right to take steps to preserve and perpetuate the Krobo tradition, but it should also take cognizance of the changing trends in established patterns of social behaviour, rules and perceptions of the crop of the new generation of people and cultural diversity in the community. In as much as we have a duty to help preserve our customs, poets, proverbs, songs, wisdom sayings and expressions etc. we also need to modify them to suit current trends.

Use positive dialogue as a paradigm shift for Christian living in the Krobo community.

There should be positive discussions and engagement between these two extreme communities, especially Christianity on one side and the traditional Krobo on the other side directed towards exploration of a particular subject, setting, or context of a problem. It is an undeniable fact that the church epitomizes almost all the good values of the African or the traditional Krobo community.

Contextualization of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the truths of Holy Scripture to the two extreme Krobo communities.

In Acts 17: 15-34, when Paul arrived on his second missionary journey, preaching about Jesus Christ and the resurrection in Athens. The Athenians loved a discussion and called him to speak before their council. Paul used their pagan altar, dedicated ‘To an Unknown God’, as his starting-point to contextualize the gospel in the community of the Athenians. He used the symbol of the altar of their deity to speak about the God who made the world and is near to each one of us. He further referred to their traditional poets and Dionysius, a powerful member of the council was converted to

Christianity when Paul addresses the council. Again, this paper takes inspiration and the paradigm from Galatians 6:11 -28 and Acts 15. In both cases Paul condemns the condition that one must adopt the Jewish culture before one could become a Christian. The Christians who might still want to worship by drumming and dancing could use it for the purpose.

The Holy Scripture should inspire all Krobo Christians to live in harmony with one another. Meaningful Christian living in the Krobo communities completely depends on the understanding that the standard of high devotion to self must be extended to both internal and external neighbour. There is the need for all to keep and protect the community co-existence. The two extreme communities must dialogue with each other positively, Catholics to Protestants, Christians to Traditionalist, and Traditionalists to Christians. The communities must always remember that it is not good to be divided. There is the need for religious bodies to respect each other as a means of ensuring effective inter-religious development, which is vital for national development.

Conclusion

Traditional societies in Africa place a lot of emphasis on communal values and virtues. Social success of these values depends on how each person of the community demonstrates responsibility towards the cohesion of people and the community. The Krobo Christian community in Ghana have witnessed traces of separations regarding some traditional and Christian practices in the society. The paper has observed that the early Krobo Christians left their traditional families to build a new community (Salem) around themselves as Christians separating from their kinsmen. While some Krobo Christians oppose certain practices, for instance, Dipo – a puberty rite for the girls, others uphold them thus creating confusion and divisions in the community. These inconsistencies can be addressed when the gospel is truly enculturated and contextualized in the Manya Krobo traditional area. The Krobo Christian life also springs from the experiential encounter with the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this experience that enabled the disciples to witness about Christ and for people to call them Christians. The Old and the New Testament experience a life committed to the sense of belongingness. As much as the Bible does not teach renouncing one's uniqueness before living as a true Christian, the Krobo Christian identity must be clearly upheld. Although the church is playing its godly role as a living example it has a role for cohesion of the Krobo communities. The church should help to exhibit the sense of belongingness and love that transcends all barriers within and without church communities. The Krobo who belongs to such Christian community, the youth and children as well as the women are not marginalized as each becomes one another's keeper. It is such unity of heart, trying to do away with all that is evil and sin that contributes to the growth of the traditional and Christian communities. An experience like this is always considered fruitful. The religious roles and differences of the traditional Krobo and Krobo Christian communities will not hold individuals and congregations apart. God created humanity with diversities, yet we all have One God. For us living in a traditional and Christian communities does not rule out our differences.

The new Krobo community should be seen as an experience involving a people with one heart and mind. This means the people must be one and embrace all. This new community with one mind also denotes sharing common values and goals together. This community ought to be seen as a family living together in an attempt to live out the love, peace and justice of Jesus of the gospel. The good news here is that the traditional and the Krobo Christian communities should promote growth and peaceful living. The new community also ought to be an instrument of growth for its people with an ever-increasing responsiveness to the growth of each person. Every individual is useful in the sight of God and thus useful for community building. Together with collective effort of the traditional Krobo and the Krobo Christians, we can fulfil the goal for which God made us what we are.

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