

African Religion Defined

A Systematic Study of Ancestor
Worship among the Akan

Second Edition

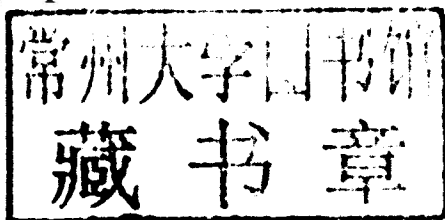
Anthony Ephirim-Donkor

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among the Akan*

SECOND EDITION

Anthony Ephirim-Donkor



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Guide to Pronunciation

Ā, ā pronounced as “a” in *space*.

᠐: Pronounced as “o” in *organ*.

ε: Pronounced as “e” in *early*.

Preface

This book is a systematic and integrative study of ancestor worship, a text that focuses ritually on an African (Akan) religious and cultural praxis wholly. By religion, I am referring to the unique cultural way that a people (the Akan) go about worshipping their ancestors, deities (gods and goddesses), and God (Nyame), as taught to them by their deities and through whom (deities and ancestors) that God is worshipped.

As one who teaches African religion, it is, sometimes, time consuming to find texts that explain African religion wholly for a course; that is, how religion is inseparable from the lives of people. Thus, I usually put together a collage of materials that best fit my specific needs. Therefore, this book is one way of satisfying the need for a systematic and integrative African religious text that approaches the subject holistically, pragmatically, and, above all, religiously. In other words, a religious praxis that is inextricably and comprehensively tied to the way a people live as mandated by their ancestors and deities (gods and goddesses).

During research for this project, two definitions of religion by E. A. Wallis Budge and Clifford Geertz greatly influenced me. In their works, *From Fetish to God in Ancient Egypt*, and *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays by Clifford Geertz*, both authors defined religion in ways that made practical sense (although religion does not make any sense) to me as an Akan traditional king. For example, Budge defines ancient Egyptian (African) religion, which he referred to, as “Ancestor Worship,” as the “worship of the souls of the dead,” while Geertz maintained that religion is a “system of symbols.” Now, as one who “sits” on the ancestors’ stool of the people of Gomoa Mprumem, Ghana, there is no greater definition of religion than these, although ancestor religion in particular, and religion in general, encompasses more than symbols and worship of souls, as I discovered. For the Akan, however, the ancestors’ stool is the ultimate religious symbol. But more than the most numinous symbol par excellence, the ancestors’ stool is, indeed, the ultimate symbol housing the souls of the ancestors, whom the Akan refer to as the Nananom Nsamanfo (Ancestors).

In light of this, the book demonstrates that ancestor worship, African religion, is the viable and pragmatic religion for the Akan. It further shows that ancestor worship is as systematic, theological—with God Almighty (Nana Nyame) at the helm, dogmatic, teleological (because living has a definite destination), soteriological—because of the belief in reincarnation (*Bebra*), which allows for multiple chances of rebirths to achieve an existential career blueprint (*Nkrabea*)—and symbolic as any other religion in the world. Ancestor religion follows certain prescribed rites and rituals, formulas, precepts and laws designed to ensure maximum ritual efficacy, alignment of deities on mediums, and dances and music meant to entice deities, ancestors, and other spirits into joining festivities honoring them.

Often misunderstood, non-Africans have, through the centuries, repeatedly described African religious beliefs and their obsession with ancestors, and gods and goddesses as “animistic,” “superstitious,” “primitive,” “tribal,” “savage,” “barbar-

ic,” “veneration,” etc. Yet, African religion, as known today, is the same as those practiced by their ancient ancestors, like the ancient Egyptians, whom we now admire.

The Akan dead cross a river, climb a ladder (*Owu atwer*), and undertake difficult journeys aided by prayers and libations by the living for weeks and even years to facilitate safe passage to heaven, the *Samanadzie*. Likewise, the ancient Egyptian dead, in addition to traveling dangerously, went through forty-two separate gates, each time facing a deity and surmounting its tests until finally the dead faced Osiris, head of the world of the dead. Before Osiris, the heart of the dead was weighed against a feather of the goddess *Maāt*. It was only then that the dead lived happily in heaven (*Tuat*), if the heart balanced perfectly against the feather. However, if a dead person was thought to have lived less than an ideal life—meaning, if a heart weighed more than the feather—then the dead was devoured by the deity *Āmmit*.

Recently, and perhaps in the spirit of religious pluralism, a more polite, though still paternalistic term, “traditional” has been used to describe African religion. Another term used to describe African religion is “veneration,” meaning African religion does not yet rise to the level of what Europeans and Arabs consider “worship” or religion; meaning, Africans are incapable of organized religion or “worship.” Thus, the stage was set for the introduction of non-African religions and “proper” ways of worship, in the Western sense. What this suggests is that ancestor worship (African religion) has evolved—or continues to evolve—from its so-called primitive state into modern religions, like Christianity, Islam, and all the non-African religions of the world. And yet, ancestor worship—whether called *Akwāsidai*, *Akomasi*, *Homowo*, *Voodoo*, *Akwāmbɔ*, *Candomblé*, *Nyantɔr* (*Aboakyir*), *Santeria*, etc. in Africa and the African Diaspora—still centers around certain historical and mythical ancestors, like most founded religions, with its own precepts and laws, ritual formulae, rites, symbols, and a highly trained and organized clerical body, just like any other religion in the world.

Among the Akan (and Africans in general), the ancestors and deities are worshipped because they established paradigms for ideal living, taught their descendants exactly what ethical living should entail, and the kinds of festivities designed to honor the ancestors and deities. So, under the auspices of their earthly representatives, kings and queen mothers (living ancestors), the souls of the ancestors and gods and goddesses are summoned periodically to receive sacrifices, offering, and gifts of various kinds from living descendants, individually as well as corporately.

More than recalling names (souls) of ancestors during propitiatory purposes, ancestor worship also uses symbols and objects that serve as physical emblems that remind the living of the presence—physical or spiritual—of the ancestors and gods and goddesses. These emblems, when touched, exposed, revealed, sat upon, or approached, evoke the kind of fanatic awe that is existentially and spiritually transforming. Psychologically, it reassures contemporary generations about the continued presence of the ancestors and deities in their lives. Moreover, symbols instill faith in the living and, during moments of high ritual crescendos, the founding ancestors and deities descend from heaven to dwell among the living in the very symbols that the ancestors themselves originated. As objects of hierophany, symbols

house the souls of the ancestors, thus religious symbols represent covenantal relationship between communities and their respective ancestors and deities, because the objects serve as tangible evidence of the ancestors and deities in the lives of the living.

Chapter 1 takes an in-depth look at Akan cosmology—with emphasis on the structure of the corporeal and incorporeal worlds—inhabitants of the universe relative to deities (Abosom) and God, how spiritual and corporeal beings converge in the corporeal world, and meaning of life in the corporeal (Wiadzie) relative to the world of the dead, the Samanadzie.

The next chapter, 2, explores the nature of ancestor worship as a matter of praxis. That is, how it centers on the dead by looking at the Akan ritual attitude toward death, remembrances for the dead, and the notion that dead elders, apotheosized as ancestors, now influence the daily lives of their descendants. In response, the living put on propitiatory rites and festivities annually to commemorate their ancestors. In this way, ancestor worship is a way of life that explains the very identity of a people, taught psychosocially as a continuum of an ancient socio-religious tradition.

Chapter 3 looks at the phenomenon of witchcraft; why witchcraft is an essential part of ancestor worship, and how witchcraft uses both spiritual and corporeal means to frustrate realization of existential goals and objectives. The role of the supernatural in African life, just like the belief in the spirit world, is very real, and as such, witchcraft is feared as a supernatural agent capable of thwarting anything and anyone with the potential for good deeds. In the context of ancestor worship, the chapter examines the ways in which witchcraft prevents the ancestors and deities from receiving their propitiatory honors through their human hosts.

While chapter 4 deals with sacrifices in which practical instructions are taught as to how to propitiate the ancestors and deities. The aim of sacrifices is to make life meaningful and worth living on earth when individuals or groups acknowledge their ancestors and deities through propitiatory worship. A life worth living is one that is free of witchcraft and maladies that impede progress. Corporately, then, the responsibility falls on living ancestors (kings and queen mothers) to honor and offer ritually wholesome sacrifices of all kinds to their heavenly counterparts. Thus, this chapter examines the ways in which propitiatory rites are officiated by kings and queen mothers—with the help of the clergy.

Although spiritual beings, the ancestors are manifested physically in the persons of their earthly representatives, kings and queen mothers (living ancestors) who commemorate the lives, deaths, and vindications in heaven of the founding ancestors and deities of their communities. The commemorations entail festivities honoring the ancestors and deities presided over by living ancestors, thus chapter 5 focuses on the selection of living ancestors. Furthermore, the chapter takes an in-depth look at the politics of choosing certain individuals as kings (not the so-called misnomer term *chief*, because it that does not confer any royal dispensation, but rather a term forced on Africans by Europeans to degrade African kingship institutions. Unfortunately, Africans have accepted the term obediently, with no awareness of the condescension associated with the term, *chief*).

To be nominated, elected, and installed a king or queen mother among the Akan,

ideally, one must have been born into a royal family. Even where a non-royal person is nominated for the kingship, a royal family must still perform secret rites of king making in order to legitimize a candidate. Whether royalty or not, the competition for the right to be seated on an ancestors' stool is fierce and hence the politicking.

Finally, chapter 6 takes a symbolic look at the very definition of religion. From this perspective, the ultimate religious and political symbol of choice for the Akan and their kindred peoples is the ancestors' stool because it belongs to all the ancestors. This singular stool, the ancestors' stool, evokes the kind of fanaticism that all ultimate religious symbols evoke and more: it is the very symbol of temporal and spiritual power. Thus, the final chapter focuses on the nature of the ancestors' stool as the object of transformation for living ancestors, as well as object of manifestation for the ancestors and deities.

The book is an invaluable resource for those interested in the phenomenon of ancestor worship, symbolically, because it provides insights into African religion in ways that are different from studies that take non-symbolic and perfunctory view of African religion. Here, I offer a systematic and comprehensively integrative look at African religion as praxis by someone who is an active participant of ancestor worship as the king of the Akan community of Gomoa Mprumem. For this reason, those interested in religious studies, Africanists, sociologists, anthropologists, ethnographers, those not ritually conversant with ancestor worship, as well as Africans and African descended peoples would find the book very insightful.

The final research for this book ended in the summer of 2011 and therefore the need for this edition and because the first edition was a work-in-progress. In completing this project, I am grateful to all those with whom I held formal and informal discussions in Winneba, especially some members of the clerical (Akɔmfo) profession. I also learned a lot from the cases that I heard when I held courts at Mprumem through the years. For those who visited and complained to me about personal matters, witchcraft, festivals, stool matters, funeral rites, and others, I say thank you.

My thanks also to my colleagues, Professors Isidore Okpewho and Nkiru Nzegwu, Binghamton University, State University of New York; and my student assistants, Kim M. Clark and Jennifer A. Bofah, for reading drafts of chapters and offering insightful comments and suggestions.

Finally, I am extremely grateful for being the recipient of the Dean's Research Semester Award, which enabled me to complete the first edition of this book by affording me the time to bring the book to its successful conclusion.

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CHAPTER 1

Cosmology

The Dinka creator God, called Nhialic ... created Adam from clay and Eve from the man's rib. Nhialic told them not to eat the fruit of a certain tree, but a snake ... persuaded Eve to eat it, and Adam ate it too. Knowing that the couple had disobeyed, Nhialic confronted them, and they admitted their wrongdoing, for which Nhialic punished them. He told Adam that he would have to labor to cultivate food, Eve that she would suffer pain in childbirth, and both that they would experience suffering and death.¹

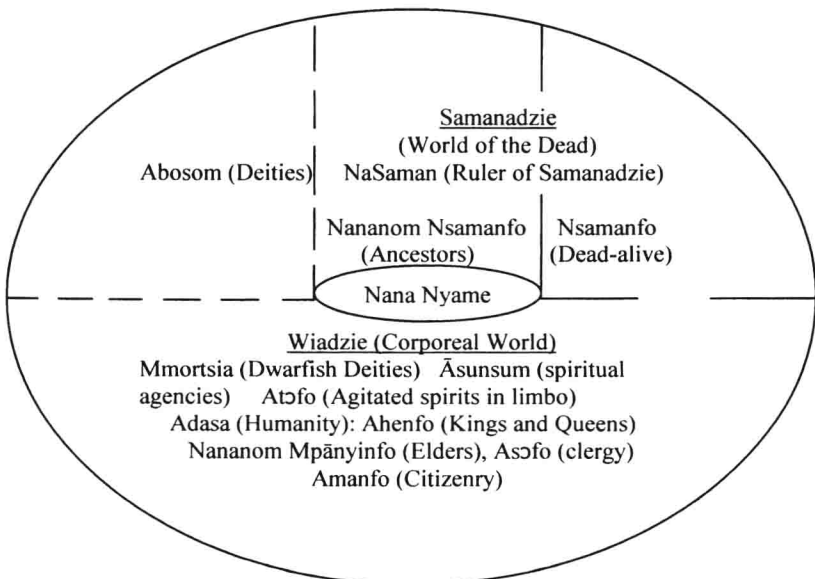
Cosmogonies, like the one told by the Dinka above, are commonplace in Africa and at the very heart of African metaphysics, because they deal with beginnings, essences, and existential conditions. Similarly, when the Akan think about the universe, they have in mind a single world that is divided into two parallel worlds: one spiritual, the *Samanadzie*, and the other corporeal, the *Wiadzie*. The corporeal world is the domain of humans suggesting that the corporeal would naturally take precedence over the spiritual or incorporeal since it is the domain of the living. However, in the African scheme of thought this is actually not the case, because the spiritual reigns supreme in all matters, corporeal. This is because the corporeal world is merely a reflection of the spiritual, the original and "real" world of humans, because everything corporeal emerged from the spiritual. How is it possible that tangible things could emanate from the intangible? Furthermore, if the spiritual world is the real and ideal home of humans, as Africans believe, then how do we explain the presence of humans in the corporeal world?

In the search for answers, we turn to the Yoruba who also view the cosmos in spiritual (*Orun*) and corporeal (*Aye*) terms relative to humans and their role in the corporeal. The Yoruba maintain that: "The world is a marketplace ... [while] the other world is home"² In other words, the corporeal world is where life exists en-

trepreneurially and when existence is over in the corporeal, then one goes back home to the spiritual world for rest.³ Actually, the corporeal is where one works, engages in business, trades, and manages all kinds of enterprises, knowing that life in the corporeal is fleeting, because one is destined to return home to the Orun. The promise of ideal life at the Orun is predicated on the notion that after buying and selling in the corporeal, one must return home in order to prepare what one purchased in the mundane. Returning home also assumes that if one purchased good items, then one would enjoy the fruits of one's labor in the corporeal, first, and ultimately, the spiritual. Existentially, then, one must cultivate certain "goals and aspirations in the world" leading to "long life, peace, prosperity, progeny, and good reputation. Ideally, these can be achieved through the constant search for *ogbon* (wisdom), *imo* (knowledge), and *oye* (understanding)."⁴ Similarly, if one arrives at the marketplace (corporeal) and engages in unethical business practices, then one would reap the benefits of one's activities.

The ethical imperative for the Yoruba, and how they journey through the corporeal Aye, is also true of the Akan. In general, the Akan envision two worlds: the spiritual (and true world), and the other, corporeal and fleeting. The spiritual realm the Akan refer to as the *Samanadzie*, while the corporeal is the *Wiadzie*. Although the two worlds are the same, the *Wiadzie* is a reflection of the *Samanadzie*, the original and permanent home of the Akan. From the *Samanadzie*, a human enters the *Wiadzie* enjoined to be morally and ethically responsible for existential and spiritual matters and accept the consequences of all deeds undertaken in the corporeal realm. This moral and ethical imperative is what the Akan refer to as *Jbra* (ethic).

The Akan Universe



The interfacing of these worlds is important because the corporeal world cannot exist without the spiritual, the “real” home of both physical and spiritual beings because the corporeal (*Wiadzie*) reflects the spiritual, which also receives those who were *once dead but are now alive* (Dead-alive) in the spiritual world. Although a miniature form of the spiritual, the corporeal (*Wiadzie*) reveals so much about the spiritual, including the *Samanadzie* and other spiritual realms existing within an infinite cosmos. The spiritual realm has several spheres, including spheres for the *Dead-alive* (*Nsamanfo* or posthumous abstract personalities), and the *Samanadzie*, which encompasses the world of the Ancestors (Nananom *Nsamanfo*).

The world for the *Abosom* (Gods and Goddesses), however, is an entirely separate realm, apart from the *Samanadzie*. As for the corporeal world, there is the *Wiadzie*, which encompasses the living and all tangible things, as well as intangible beings like the agitated and revengeful spirits of the dead in limbo (*Atfo*), dwarfish gods, and spirits (*Asunsum*) of other natural agencies.

The *Wiadzie* (corporeal universe) name itself is illustrative of a cosmos that falls within the influence of the sun (*Awia*), hence *Wiadzie*—or everything under the influence of the sun. On the contrary, the *Samanadzie* does not come under the influence of the sun because the *Samanadzie* is too remote for the sun to have any effect on, as will be shown below. God (*Nyame*), finally, holds all these spheres or universes together at the center, where the Almighty occupies, exclusively.

Finally, the relationship between the corporeal and incorporeal worlds, that is, the spiritual (invisible) and solid (tangible) world, has to do with the notion that tangibility (corporeality) emerged out of nothingness or the spiritual. Corporeal existence is fleeting because it has a beginning, and anything that has a beginning must have an end. There is a beginning because living things are constantly changing, growing, and dying. To live in the corporeal is to die; however, the spiritual is eternal and therefore must be aspired. If one cannot see the spiritual, then, how is one to know that the unseen is eternal? The answer, again, is that living things do die; meaning, they have points of origination, which means, at some point the living will arrive at the end. In itself, it is a teleological idea.

The question: Can a solid entity be formed out of nothing, the spiritual, is answered in the affirmative, in that just as all names are spiritual—meaning, we only respond to unique sounds as names—with which we are identified as tangible entities who in fact become the names we bear, it means that the spiritual is manifested in tangibility. It also means that we become that which is spiritual, intangible; or, something that we do not observe yet very real, our names as ourselves. As evidence, upon death, when an individual is no longer around, that which is eternally fused with the dead is the name of the deceased. Therefore, during divinations and religious rites, it is the name of the deceased ancestor invoked and not the tangible personality. Even where there are apparitions of some sort, such apparitions are invariably intangible (spiritual) images of the deceased responding to names. Thus, a name becomes a soul and vice versa. This, then, as we will see in chapter 2, is the basis for religion, as the worship of dead souls or names.

The inability to see nothing in space does not mean nothingness or emptiness. It only means that we, humans, are blind to the invisible world the moment we are

born, or prior to birth, even. The inability to see in the dark does not mean that there is nothingness out there in the dark, because with night vision apparatus we may see tangibles in the dark. In the absence of an apparatus, one feels one's way around in the dark hoping to touch something solid. Again, the fact that a person cannot hear anything does not mean that there is no sound or noise. Albeit spiritual, the Akan believe that there is a film (*Wantam*) covering the eyes of most living things, especially humans. To "see" and "hear" one must have the eyes and ears "opened" spiritually and the *Wantam* "removed" or sensitized using, incidentally, solids like the saps of herbs in the eyes and ears. This ritual is usually performed for mediums (Akɔmfo) and some traditional kings and queen mothers. However, it does not make one a clairvoyant necessarily, with the ability to hear and perceive otherworldly things—only perceiving things during high ritual moments. The point is that to conjure up tangibles out of nothingness, though not commonplace, may be normal during divinations. This is possible because there is a spiritual world, out there.

Describing a conjuration where a tangible entity emerged out of nothing, with regard to the Golden Stool of the Asante, Rattray wrote that:

Anotchi [Ɔkɔmfo Anokyi], in the presence of a huge multitude, with the help of his supernatural power, is stated to have brought down from the sky, in a black cloud, and amid rumblings, and in air thick with white dust, a wooden stool with three supports and partly covered with gold.⁵

The Abosom (Gods and Goddesses)

When I was growing up, I was taught to disparage the idea of an *Abosom*; because, as a Christian, it meant the worship of idols, (*Abosomsom*) and Christians do not worship idols. In fact, other children and I sang songs to the effect that our ancestors worshipped *Abosom* (plural of *Abosom*), or the so-called idols, while we, as Christians, worshipped Nyame (God), or what the Akan called *Nyamesom*. Nowadays, interestingly, it is no longer foreign clergy inculcating these beliefs; rather, it is the local clergy who assiduously enforce the brainwashing policy bequeathed to them by their foreign role models. Pedagogically, is it—and was it—necessary to have to revile one's ancestors in order to introduce foreign ancestors to new groups?⁶ As children, we were naïve, because we joyfully and obediently sang songs against our ancestors and their alleged idolism without knowing the psychology behind what was taught to us.

However, as a teenager, I became conflicted. As an altar boy, I helped the clergy to perform worship services, including the Stations of the Cross periodically. I would return home not knowing what to make of idol worship, when we moved from one station painting to another depicting the suffering of Jesus. Other times, we, the altar boys, placed a miniature statue of Jesus in front of the altar during church service for congregants to kneel, kiss, or touch in our attempt to identify with the suffering of Jesus.

As an adult, I realized that those indoctrinations were completely wrong and condescending, meant to confuse children, if not deceive us. I did not have to be taught

to disparage my ancestors in order to join the church, which I joined on my own accord because the church offered programs for children that I could not find anywhere else. For me and other children, the church was a haven for us and I went to the church's mission compound on my own after I finished with my chores, which included selling bread and other items. Perhaps, though, the church's mission mandate was to mischaracterize and demean other religions to the point of impressing on children like me to hate our ancestors and heritage.

The objective for missionary activities in Africa was to strip persons or groups of their values and then own and control them psychologically. This meant using ruthlessness and any means necessary to achieve the Christian goals.⁷ That is, in order for any new religion to be introduced to fertile grounds, first, the old religion had be stripped away completely, and often this meant disparaging ancestral beliefs of Africans before taking ownership of converts and controlling them psychologically. As evidence, converts assumed Christian or Muslim names in order to own Africans wholly, because psychologically the person who names anyone or anything also owns that which he or she named. To make it easier for non-Africans, most of the names assumed by Africans were non-African first names, but sometimes last names were also Europeanized or Arabicized. For example, an Akan last name like Forsu became Forson, Ɔbu (rock) changed to Rockson, Mensah to Mason, while someone named after a river becomes Rivers or Riverson, and Koom as Koomson. Cleansed of all local beliefs, non-African beliefs were inculcated without any competition.

Fearful of the colonial master, the Akan would even say that to see a white man is to have seen God. Sometimes, in admiration of the white man's innovation, creativity, and ingenuity, the Akan would also say that, "*Obronyi ara nnyi John*" (the white man is, indeed, John). There lies the theological dilemma as to whom the Akan now worship. In fact, some Ghanaians become indignant when asked if they worship their ancestors because, for them, to worship the ancestors is to be irreligious, as Christians. For those Ghanaians, the white man, then, is the new god and ancestor and therefore worthy of worship. Psychologically, this is more a symptom of the cumulative effects of slavery and colonialism than just the color and physical appearances of Europeans and Arabs. Curiously, did Africans abandon worshipping their deities and ancestors completely or only pretended to do so because of their subservient status relative to Europeans and Arabs?

The question for me as an adult was: Were the *Abosom* what my Polish priests made them out to be? Was the missionary message, simply that the Akan and Africans in general worshipped many gods or idols, while Europeans worshipped one God? If so, what would have been the most effective way of communicating the Christian message without denigrating local ancestors and deities? As subjugated peoples, Africans had no input as to how Europeans and Arabs governed them.

Conceptually too Europeans had problems theologically. Which God did Europeans introduce to the Akan? Was it Jesus or the Old Testament God, Lord God or Lord? Moreover, if the ancestors of the Akan worshipped *Abosom*, as Europeans maintained, and not Nyame, the Akan God, which Christians, ironically, also acknowledged, then how could the same ancestors—thought to have no conception of God, let alone worship him—have originated such an entirely Akan God (Nya-

me) long before the advent of Europeans? Was—and is—Nyame the same as the Islamic, European or Christian God? If not, then, did the Akan triumph theologically and Europeans fail communicating monotheism to the Akan, or any other African people when they allowed African names for God to be substituted for European or Christian God, Lord God, Lord, or whichever it may be? Did Europeans misunderstand the role of the *Abosom* vis-à-vis Nyame (God)? Alternatively, did the Akan interpret the *Abosom* the same way as missionaries, as just inanimate images, idols, or symbols? Or, was the Christian stance simply hypocritical? Who or what, then, are the *Abosom*.

About the nature and relationship of God and the *Abosom*, Rattray stated that:

From the very fact that Nyame, the Sky God, is considered too remote to be concerned very directly in person with the affairs of man, and has delegated His powers to His lieutenants, the *Abosom*, or lesser gods, it would perhaps be natural to expect that His worship, sacrifice, priesthood, and temples should be lacking.⁸

For the Akan, the name Nyame does not mean “Sky God” as Rattray would want non-Akan people to believe. However, the *Abosom*, as we will see below, have indispensable role in the religious lives of the Akan and Africans in general. What exactly then is the basis for the so-called “remoteness” of God claim often made by non-Africans? Is the idea purely symbolic or a notion to be considered seriously by non-Africans? Surely, Africans do not feel that God is too remote to be concerned with human affairs. As Rattray points out, God is not “directly” concerned “with the affairs of man,” meaning God is too remote or aloof. If this is true, then the role of the *Abosom* in the lives of the Akan is proved. Ultimately, whether God is remote or indirectly unconcerned with people, the role of the *Abosom* in society is assured.

The Akan would say, *Bosom-po bɔtoɔ abu* (literally, the ocean goddess, *Bosom-po*, met a cluster of rocks). It means there was a cluster of rocks (*Abu*) already stationed as earth prior to the arrival of the ocean or sea goddess, *Bosom-po*, resulting in the union of the ocean and the cluster of rocks (*Abu*). What this means, furthermore, is that the ocean came from somewhere else, while the cluster of rocks was already in place. Most importantly, the only entity capable of stopping the dynamic ocean or bodies of water is rocks. In this case, the concentration of rocks (*Abu*) in one place was strong enough to withstand and contain the raging power of the ocean. Essentially, then, the tangible universe is composed of rocks and water (ocean), with everything else falling in-between the two elements. For the Akan, these two primeval elements, the *Abosom* or Gods, are worthy of worship, because they are visible expressions of a more powerful primeval spiritual forces whom the Akan collectively called *Abosom* (Deities).

Chronologically, there was a cluster of rocks, as earth, then the ocean (*Bosom-po*), and then order, suggesting that, the world—or rather, what became earth—existed as a cluster of rocks before the arrival of primeval mass of ocean as the female counterpart of the cluster of rocks, *Abu*. However, this chronology does not preclude order because I make it quite clear in *African Spirituality: On Becoming Ancestors* that Nyame (God) has arranged all things accordingly, meaning things are supposed to be where they are, especially since God created all things instantly.⁹

The Akan would assert that *Se biribe ankaka mpapaa, nkyer mpapaa anyer kirii* (a frond cannot rattle on its own unless touched by something). When applied to the cluster of rocks, the Akan would maintain that something caused the original rock, earth, to shatter. We know that the ocean arrived as a single unit, according to tradition. However, the same is not true of the cluster of rocks, and so the question is, why? Was the clustering the result of a cosmic collision with a much more powerful rock, and if so was the moon, Osren, involved? If the moon was involved, then why was it spared the fate of the clustered rock? Or did the moon exist, as a separate entity though not far from the other rock that later became clusters? Whatever the relationship or proximity of the moon was to the cluster of rocks or vice versa, there was clearly a relationship between the cluster of rocks and the moon, according to tradition. The shattering of the rocks did not affect the moon, to the extent that the resultant cluster did not also shatter the moon. Moreover, the causative agent could not have been the ocean, because the ocean met an already stationed cluster of rocks. Whatever the cause of the cluster, it was such that it held the ocean in place, although it does not explain the enigma of the moon's apparent escape, especially since the moon was very close to earth.

The moon was originally very close to earth, so close, in fact, that there were periodic collisions with earth.¹⁰ We also know that both the earth and the moon had occupants: the rocky earth occupied by humans—the Abrewa (Old woman) and her children—who probably lived eternally, while the moon had non-human agency, probably God because, for the Akan, the moon is the emblem and abode of God. Most importantly, the occupant of the moon, God, raised concerns about the intermittent collisions by earth, which God warned, repeatedly, could cause to the moon, his abode, to move further away from earth. But, were the collisions the result of a wobbly rocky earth, as it tried to position itself permanently relative to the moon? Or, was the wobbling the result of the moon's close proximity to earth and therefore the need for earth to create some space between them? What was certain is that the earth collided with the moon, since the moon does not rotate on its axis, like the earth. The resultant impact of the earth bumping into the moon repeatedly was such that it pushed the moon away from earth, and since it was the earth that bumped into the moon, the earth broke up into a cluster of rocks, *Abu*. Ironically, the resultant distant between the moon and the earth proved beneficial to both moon and earth. The moon, now 250,000 miles away from earth, has indeed stabilized earth, although initially earth's inhabitants attempted to erect a tower of mortars to bridge the gap between the moon and earth until the mortar tower collapsed killing some of the Abrewa's children and probably the Abrewa herself. What this suggests is that initially the distance between the moon and earth was not great, but with time, the gulf widened considerably until now the 250,000 distance.

The Akan account of cosmic collision raises interesting questions. It appears that the occupant of the moon, God, had insights that the residents of the earth, the Abrewa and her children, did not have, although the Abrewa justified her refusal or inability to stop the bumping by saying that she and her children had to eat *fufu*, the Akan staple. That is, she knew of the danger that she and her children faced, but the need to feed her children outweighed everything else and hence her repeated pound-

ing of *fufu* which caused the pestle to hit God and the periodic bumping. However, since God is omniscient, his predictions came true about what ultimately occurred, the separation of the two abodes. Are the Akan then justified in worshipping the moon as the emblem of God? If so, do the Akan worship the moon because of collective psychological guilt for causing the separation from God and the resultant death? And, like death, was the collision inevitable?

While there are no qualms theologically about the basis for the statement, *Bosom-po bɔtoɔ abu*, politically it has major implications when quoted during royal discourses, as well as when matters of state are deliberated and adjudicated upon. Ordinarily, to state that the *Bosom-po bɔtoɔ abu* is to speak of the premier of two competing objects, claims, or situations as to which version is older. In a court of law, the quotation in itself does not suffice, as one must proceed to demonstrate how the former precedes the latter, especially so during royal disputes determining which particular lineage is oldest amongst competing families. Actually, many of the royal internecine struggles with, sometimes, fatal consequences among the Akan today are the direct results of exactly such claims and counter claims.

In terms of attitude towards objects, every huge piece of rock is viewed as sacred and therefore an *Abosom* (deity), an immovable visible altar on which an otherwise intangible power or force is expressed. After all, the sacred is believed to reside somewhere, symbolically, and the very reason why people set up altars in their homes or some other place. Subsequently, on a sacred rock or rocks, a spirit periodically expresses itself when devotees invoke and offer sacrifices to it. This is why whenever people come upon rocks, they turn them into altars and worship there.¹¹ In this vein, devotees view a primeval mass of rocks as being more than a barren mass: it is imbued with spiritual properties that devotees are keenly aware. In fact, any cluster of rocks is a constituent of a family of *Abosom* explaining why the primeval cluster of rocks stopped the ocean goddess, *Bosom-po Abena Mansa*.

The very mentioning of the ocean or water in the beginning by the Akan is not an isolated event. When we examine other cosmogonies in Africa, we find the ocean featured prominently. In both the Yoruba and ancient Egyptian creation accounts, for instance, water played leading roles in creation. For the Yoruba, the deities came down periodically and visited the water below, until God *Olodumare* gave some loose soil to *Orisa-nla* to create earth. Similarly, in ancient Egypt, the ocean was primal, containing the seeds of the future world in both sexes. In fact, without the ocean, life, as we know it, would have been impossible. So, what did the joining of the two deities—cluster of rocks and ocean—produce?

The primeval cluster of rocks, *Abu*, was imbued with *Abosom*, although the rocks themselves were not the *Abosom* but rather symbolic abodes of deities. The symbolic relationship between the deities and rocks falsely gave the impression that the ancestors of the Akan worshipped rocks. On the contrary, the ancestors of the Akan were more insightful than their foreign critics were because they recognized what sacred spaces and objects meant and took steps to acknowledge the holy, but in so doing, Africans were termed as idol worshippers.

In the West, countless visitors stream annually to nature reserves or parks and ritually perform the same rituals that the Akan and other African groups have been