



## CHIEFTAINCY AND CHRISTIANITY: A RELIGIO-CULTURAL DILEMMA FACING GHANAIAAN CHRISTIANITY

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### Abstract

Chieftaincy is an integral part of the African society especially in the Ghanaian society for that matter. However, with the presence of Christianity and other religions in Ghana, the institution has come under criticism. The questions the study sought to address were: Should the church permit a Christian to become a traditional chief? Is it possible for a Christian to be a traditional chief and still be fully committed to the God of the Christian faith? In order to do this, the paper reviewed related literature on chieftaincy in Ghana, and conducted interviews. Four views in relation to the subject were identified and assessed, and the paper found that it is practically impossible for a Christian to become a traditional chief and still be committed to the Christian doctrine and faith because of the traditional religious customs, values and practices that are interwoven with the institution. Most of these religious customs, values and practices are incompatible to the Christian faith and practice. Therefore, Christians should refrain from vowing and/or accepting chieftaincy positions in Ghana.

### Introduction

Chieftaincy is a vital institution in the Ghanaian socio-culture structure. Boadi defines chieftaincy as “an institution by which people of a community are ruled by a chief.”<sup>1</sup> Ghanaians like other Africans have been ruled by chiefs and kings. Despite the presence of modern national government headed by an elected President, the institution is still an important institution in Ghana. Both the illiterates and the literates, as well as some Christians and people of other religions are interested and vowing for chieftaincy position today. However, the relationship between the traditional chiefs and Christianity has been issues of great concern. Bediako has made this clear when he said:

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<sup>1</sup> Boadi, J. A. *Christianity or Traditional Beliefs and Customs?* (Ghana: U.G.C Publishing House, 2001), p.104.

Since Busia wrote in the 1950's, the ambiguity that characterizes the relation of the Chief to the Christian community in our society has continued. It has remained as a crucial area of confrontation between the Christian faith as generally understood in our context, and the religious traditions of Akan culture. ... many Chiefs have been baptized and confirmed, but their positions prevent them from becoming full members of the Church.<sup>2</sup>

Bediako's statement brings out clearly the problem to be addressed in this paper. Traditional chiefs play key role in the socio-cultural and political aspects of any African community. However, the institution is interwoven with the African Traditional Religion. The traditional religious aspects seem incompatible with the Christian doctrines and practices. The issue at state is, whether Christians should be allowed to vow and become traditional chiefs. The question that derives out of this dilemma is, is it sinful for Christians to become a traditional chief? The response to the "dilemma" makes the institution of chieftaincy a subject of controversy in Ghana and perhaps in countries where both the institution of chieftaincy and Christianity exist. This paper, therefore, discusses the institution of chieftaincy in Ghana, presents the views in response to the arising problem, makes an evaluative analysis of the views and draws a conclusion.

### **Brief History of Chieftaincy in Ghana**

Traditionally Ghanaians have been ruled by chiefs. The institution of chieftaincy existed in Ghana before the advent of colonialism. Boateng states that the system of traditional governance in Asante was well established having started from the formation of the kingdom in 1701.<sup>3</sup> The Asante people possessed an unwritten but elaborate law and constitution, which was worked by a traditionally arranged hierarchical. It must be understood that prior to the formation of the Asante Kingdom, the leadership of chiefs might had been in existence since chieftaincy is part of the socio-cultural and political structure of the African people.

"By the Dutch map of Gold Coast in 1629, the Ga people were than fully settled with their heads of towns."<sup>4</sup> There were high-level political organizations in Ghana prior to the arrival of the colonial power. At the head of these political organizations were chiefs ranking

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<sup>2</sup> Bediako, Kwame. *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1990), p.23.

<sup>3</sup> Boateng, Barfuo Abeyie. *The Institution of chieftaincy in Ghana: An Overview* (Accra: The Institute of African Studies, 1994), p.1

<sup>4</sup> Amah, Charles Nii. *Ga Homowo and Other Ga-Adangme Festivals* (Accra: Sedeco, 1982), p.1.

from town chief to the paramount chief. “The chief’s councils were so constituted that the chief’s decision, could be seen as those of the community as a whole; the rules within which they acted were expected to preclude arbitrariness.”<sup>5</sup> Thus, chieftaincy in Ghana is deeply embedded in the socio-cultural fabric of the Ghanaian people. As Chief Dankwah asserts:

Socially and culturally, the institution of chieftaincy has a very important part to play” in Ghana. The institution is deeply woven into the social fabric of the Ghanaian society because chieftaincy is based on the family system. In all our social setting, be it Dangomba, eve, Ga, or Akan, chieftaincy can be linked to a pyramid of families.<sup>6</sup>

Ghanaian chieftaincy formally settled on the solid social foundation of the extended family structure. It has family units with family heads as the base of the chieftaincy ‘triangle’ and the paramount chief at the apex. “In Ghana, the head of the family is, to all intents and purposes, a chief of a sort except that he has not been officially proclaimed as such”<sup>7</sup> Chieftaincy in Ghana emerged from the social fabric of the land. “The Ghanaian chieftaincy is nobody’s creation and therefore cannot be easily destroyed.”<sup>8</sup> Chieftaincy in Ghana, like in other African countries, arose out of a need for leadership. “Among many human societies, the paramount reasons for getting together are security and protection against external enemies or aggression, and the need to have leadership.”<sup>9</sup> In any socio-cultural environment the need for a leader who will keep the law and order of the community is a vital need. Hence, leadership has always been a need. The concept of chieftaincy in Africa is an Afro-cultural concept. The idea is not borrowed from Europe or from the West.

Chieftaincy is perhaps the only indigenous institution which has been able to stand on its own feet at the onslaught of alien cultures which started to bombard our traditional institutions since our first contact with Europeans and Arabs. It has been described as the embodiment of our culture and the custodian of the best in our traditional institutions.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Arhin, Kwame. *Chieftaincy* (Accra: Ghana Information Service, 1973), p.5.

<sup>6</sup> Dankwah, Oseadeeyo Addo. *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana-The Future* (Accra: Korad Adenauer Foundation, 2004), p.11.

<sup>7</sup> Dankwah, *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana-The Future*, p.1.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Boateng, *The institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana*, introduction page.

## **A Traditional Chief in Ghana**

In considering the institution of chieftaincy in Ghana, it is necessary to be cognizant of who a chief is in Ghana. In different era of the nation's history, the personality of a chief has been understood differently. These different understandings have various effects on the institution. In the pre-colonial era, "a chief was somebody who, in accordance with custom, had been nominated, elected, enstooled or enskined as a chief or as the case may be appointed and installed as such."<sup>11</sup> This definition pre-supposed that a chief could hold office based on traditional ordination. Hence, the community had the right and the power to make and unmake chiefs. While this may have its own advantages and disadvantages, the fact that can be deduced is that the institution was solely controlled and managed by the tradition and custom of the community.

A chief in the colonial era "was somebody who in accordance with customary law, had been nominated, elected and installed as such and who, for the time being, was recognized by the government."<sup>12</sup> Chief Dankwah asserts that this era made chiefs answerable in some ways to the governing council in matters of instoolments. This implied that a chief could cease to be a chief once his government recognition was withdrawn. The dethronement of a chief rested not solely in the hand of the community, but in the hand of the ruling authority. If a chief was rejected by the community but his government recognition was still intact, he could continue to be a chief. This system reduced the power of the traditional chief "as a chief's loyalty was placed in the government for fear of rejection."<sup>13</sup>

According to the Chieftaincy Act 1971 (Act 370), "a chief means a person who has been validly elected, enstooled or enskined and installed as a chief or Queen Mother in accordance with requisite applicable customary law and usage, or as the case may be appointed and installed as such and whose name appears for the time being as a chief in the register of chiefs."<sup>14</sup> Arhin has established that the position of the chief in the past is different from that of the chief today.

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<sup>11</sup> Dankwah, p.19.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, p.21.

<sup>14</sup> *Chieftaincy Act 1971 (Act 370)*.

The chief was the undisputed leader of men, worthy of service, and of reverence. He embodied in theory and practice communal ideals of supreme manliness. The chief's council were so constituted that the chief's decision, could be seen as those of the community as a whole; the rules within which they acted were expected to preclude arbitrariness. The chief-in-council (at the paramount chief level), was a sovereign law-maker, and also an administrator, a war-maker and a war-leader, priest-chief, an economic planner and a distributor of goods and services.<sup>15</sup>

He states that "chiefship today differs in essentials from the portrait"<sup>16</sup> of the past. He identifies the factors responsible for the change:

Those factors are the complex of colonialist institutions, of the nationalist movement and their economic, political and social consequences..... The imposition of formal colonial rule immediately ended the legal and political sovereignty of the chief-in-council which also meant the end of his activities as legislator, as "judge," as war-maker and as war-leader.<sup>17</sup>

During the colonial era, the British colonial administration simply used the native institution to carry out their policy. In this case, the colonial authorities became the ultimate "chief-maker" and the final determinant of the chief's tenure of office. Thus, the chief became an executive agent, and a listening post for the colonial authorities and the chief's councils became councils of arbitration, making and deciding on breaches of bye-laws, within the colonial legal framework.<sup>18</sup>

Boadi also affirms that the government of Ghana has affected the chieftaincy institution. In his view, "the introduction of the central government system of administration reduced much of the power and authority of the chiefs."<sup>19</sup> Christianity and Western form of education, Arhin says, indirectly added to the problems of the chief. According to him, Christianity created a body of zealous converts who often denied judicial obedience to the chief. Education created a socio-economic group with some characteristics. Some migrated to the newly created administrative and industrial centers and escaped their traditional obligations to the chief. Those who became richer than the chief could not respect the chief anymore. Others acquired ideas potentially subversive of the authority of chiefs. "Within this group, nationalistic and democratic

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<sup>15</sup> Arhin, *Chieftaincy*. p.4.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.12.

<sup>19</sup> Boadi, *Christianity or Traditional Beliefs and Customs?*, p.104.

stirrings produced resentment against the chiefs who were considered puppets of the colonial authorities.”<sup>20</sup>

Boateng notes the conflicts between the chiefs and the revolutionary organs, such as the CDR, 31<sup>st</sup> December Women’s Movement, etc, and further states, “The institution appears to these radicals as an anachronistic institution, operated by unprogressive element.”<sup>21</sup> He adds that the conflicts shifted with the coming into force of the constitution:

The areas of conflict now are between the various governmental structures. The chief and the Assemblyman, the chief and the District Chief Executive, the chief and the Regional Minister. The chief’s position has been weakened by these arms of government. That is why the chief may have to consult these arms before certain things can be done.<sup>22</sup>

As Boateng asserts, the chief cannot levy special rates for development projects without the permission from the District Assembly. But those organization act without serious consultations with the traditional rulers.<sup>23</sup> Based on the points highlighted, one can conclude that the position of chiefs has been affected by the presence of the colonial authorities, and the presence of the modern central government and its constitution. However, the institution is still recognized and, to some extent, effective today.

### **The Process of Electing a Chief**

In every society or community, there is a group responsible to elect chiefs. This group is referred to as King-makers. The customary procedure culminating in installation of a chief begins when a stool or skin becomes vacant. In the matrilineal inheritance system, like that of the Akan, when the seat of a chief is vacant, the Queen Mother and her advisors (the King-makers), meet to make nomination. However, “the Queen Mother’s voice carries weight in the process.”<sup>24</sup> Under the patrilineal system, the situation is different. Women have very or little, if any role at all, to play in nominating a chief. In this case the election must be done by the heads

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<sup>20</sup> Arhin, p. 12.

<sup>21</sup> Boateng, *The institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana*. p.29.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Dankwah, *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana-The Future*, p. 21.

of the various sub-divisions within the communities concerned (King-makers). There are certain qualities that are expected in a chief and these inform the decision of the king-makers. A chief is expected to “be wise, brave, respected, kind and handsome.”<sup>25</sup> Tradition demands that a man to be elected as chief in Ghana should be a man of good character who can carry out the wishes of his people as spelt out by the tradition and customs of the community. Chief Dankwah puts it emphatically clearer:

A chief is an embodiment of what is proper and is a role model of a community; for, a man with a blemished past can neither command the moral authority nor as a shining example to his subjects. People with questionable character should therefore be discouraged from becoming chiefs.<sup>26</sup>

These qualities are similar to the biblical criteria for church leaders (Pastors, Deacons, and Bishops).<sup>27</sup> The Process of electing chiefs is taken a new dimension today. “In the olden days the name of the candidate was kept secret, and he was taken unaware on the day of his enstoolment. Today more than one candidate contest for the stool and the contest at times involve bribery and corruption.”<sup>28</sup> It implies that in the past, becoming a chief was not really a choice, but it seems to be a choice today.

The installation of an elected chief is done by all chiefs and elders assembled within a given community. “The chief by inheritance must be introduced to the Black stool of their ancestors before an installation becomes complete.”<sup>29</sup> The enstoolment is also done in a particular way. The enstoolment ceremony is done in the night attended by very few privilege chiefs and elders.

### **Types of Chiefs in Ghana**

There are two types of chiefs in Ghana. The first category of chief is “a traditional office holder who belongs to an established dynasty.”<sup>30</sup> This connotes that a chief in this category must be a direct descendant of the original chief of that particular community or family. The other is a

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<sup>25</sup> Boadi, *Christianity or Traditional Beliefs and Customs?*, p. 105.

<sup>26</sup> Dankwah, p.23.

<sup>27</sup> 1 Timothy 3:1-15

<sup>28</sup> Boadi, *Christianity or Traditional beliefs and Customs?*, p.105.

<sup>29</sup> Dankwah, *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana-The Future*, p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

traditional office holder who does not belong to any established dynasty but for exceptional qualities display within the community, a chieftaincy title is conferred on him. Chief in the first category occupies his position by inheritance and sits on an established stool while chief in the second category occupies his by appointment. The appointments of non-royals to be chiefs are done by the senior chiefs in consultation with their immediate advisors. This chief does not occupy an established Black Stool, but a new Black Stool can be made for him depending on his performance.<sup>31</sup>

### **Duties of a Traditional Chief**

The traditional chief in Ghana has socio-political and religious responsibilities. Politically, the chief is the head of the community and is responsible to provide security for his community. He ensures peace and stability in his town or district. Moreover, he administers justice and settles disputes among his subjects by the help of his elders and sub-chiefs. The chief also “performs traditional weddings and sees to the development of his town or village including such projects as roads, drinking water and latrines.”<sup>32</sup> The chief in the old days was “a sovereign law-maker, an administrator, a war-maker, a war leader. .... an economic planner and a central distributor of goods and services.”<sup>33</sup> Socially, the chief takes the lead in festivals. There are periodic occasions when the citizens gather together for fellowship, renewal of their allegiance to the chief and worship of the gods and the ancestors together.

Religiously, the chief serves as a religious leader. Traditionally, chieftaincy is a sacred office. Hence, the chief has a religious duty in the community. Referring to the Akan traditional society, Bediako writes:

The chief’s sacred office has religious significance. Because the traditional belief is that the well-being of the society depends upon the maintenance of good relations with the ancestors on whom the living depend for help and protection. The chief acquires a crucial role as the intermediary between the state and the ancestors. He is

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>32</sup> Boadi, p.106.

<sup>33</sup> Arhin, *Chieftaincy*, p.12

the central figure at the organized religious ceremonies which ensure the maintenance of harmony between the living and the spirit-fathers.<sup>34</sup>

Chieftaincy is bound up with religious significance. The chief serves as a traditional priest of his subjects assuming leadership of traditional festivals in times of worship. He is religiously obliged to offer sacrifice on the Black Stool and offer prayer of libation on behalf of his subjects for their good health, protection, peace and prosperity. On festal days, he gives thanksgiving offerings to the gods and the ancestors.<sup>35</sup>

### **The Church and Chieftaincy**

The main issue of concern is: Should the church permit a Christian to become a traditional chief? Is it possible for a Christian to be a traditional chief and still be fully committed to the God of the Christian faith? There are four major views on this matter. One view holds that the church should not permit a Christian to become a traditional chief. Another view holds that a Christian can be a traditional chief. The third view holds that a Christian can become a traditional chief if the religious aspect is detached from the chieftaincy. The fourth view holds that a Christian can become a traditional chief, but pastor should not or cannot be a chief. This view further stresses that if the Christian who becomes a chief accepts two wives, then he cannot be a full member of the church. These views are considered in this section of the study.

Many Christian churches (especially the Pentecostal/Charismatic churches) hold the view that the church should not allow a Christian to become a traditional chief. This view argues that chieftaincy is interwoven with traditional religious practices and these practices are not compatible with Christian doctrine. Therefore, a Christian should not be a traditional chief. The one hundred Pentecostal/Charismatic Pastors surveyed in Greater Accra Region unanimously held to this view. In their view, the religious duty of the traditional chief makes it impossible for the church to permit a Christian to accept chieftaincy title. Therefore, Christians must not accept chieftaincy position. As one Pastor puts it, "If a Christian becomes a chief his religious loyalty is divided. He has to execute his traditional religious duty as a chief and at the same time serve

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<sup>34</sup> Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective*, p.22.

<sup>35</sup> Boadi, *Christianity or Traditional Beliefs and Customs?*, p.107.

God. This is unacceptable. It is, therefore, prohibited for a Christian to take traditional chieftaincy title.”<sup>41</sup> Some were of the view that if a Christian becomes a traditional chief he ceases to be member of their church. Some denominations in Ghana do not have a clear policy on whether the church should or should not permit its members to take traditional chieftaincy title. One of them is the Ghana Baptist Convention.<sup>36</sup> However, some of the Baptist ministers interviewed personally held the view that the church should not permit its member to take chieftaincy title.

Boadi and others hold to the view that a Christian can become a traditional chief because “chieftaincy as an institution of leadership is not sinful since God instituted it (Romans 13:1). Nowhere in the Scripture do we find any teaching against the institution itself.”<sup>37</sup> This implies that Christians should be permitted to take chieftaincy position. To bring his argument to bed, Boadi writes:

...Scripturally chieftaincy is a divine institution. Therefore it is not sinful for a Christian to be chief. Preferably, all leaders including chief should be Christians in order that they may rule with divine love and justice. ....To be a chief is honorable and the office offers many opportunities of service. It should be encouraged as service to humility and service to God...<sup>38</sup>

Chief Dankwah champions the view that Christian can become traditional chief if the chieftaincy is devoid of the African Traditional Religious practices. His argument may be based on his status, a Christian and a traditional chief. As he puts it:

It appears that the problem of division of labor or specialization has caught up with us. The solution to the problem is that any problem requiring divination and propitiation has to be handled by a special person who is not necessarily part of the chieftaincy outfit, but professional in his own right.<sup>39</sup>

He believes that the religious aspect of the institution of chieftaincy in Ghana as well as Africa prevents people of other religions to take traditional chieftaincy title. In essence, Chief Dankwah is arguing that the traditional chief should have nothing to do with the religious aspect of the

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<sup>36</sup> Information guttered from Rev. Enoch N. N. Thompson, Vice President of the Ghana Baptist Convention in an interview held on May 19, 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Boadi, *Christianity or Traditional Beliefs and Customs?*, p. 109.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*, p.110.

<sup>39</sup> Dankwah, *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana-The Future*, p.60.

institution. The chief rather should be a socio-political leader. “The institution of chieftaincy, which to all intents and purposes is a socio-political set-up has assumed pseudo-religious nature due to the history of leadership position of the early chiefs.”<sup>40</sup>

The fourth view is held by the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana and perhaps other group that this study did not discover during the period of the investigation. Fayose, a renowned minister and educator of the E.P. Church explains the position of the church on the issue: “The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana holds the view that a Pastor cannot be a traditional chief. But a member can be a traditional chief. If the chief accepts two wives then he cannot be a full member of the church.”<sup>41</sup>

## **Evaluation**

This section evaluates the four views surveyed relating to chieftaincy and Christianity. In this evaluation, the first view shall be treated last. The view that Christians should or cannot be a traditional chief derives its support from the fact that the Bible does not condemn the institution of chieftaincy. As Boadi indicated, “chieftaincy as an institution of leadership is not sinful.” It is true that the Bible does not condemn leadership. There has always been leadership in human history; even the Bible is replete with God ordained leaders. However, it seems that Christians can only be traditional chief in a purely Christian village or community where the Christian doctrine and practices influence every activity. Boadi who argues in favor of Christian becoming a traditional chief also recognizes that a “Christian chief in Ghana faces a problem with regard to his religious duties.”<sup>42</sup> The difficulties are vividly explained in his statement:

In the first place, the Black Stool on which he symbolically sits is an idol. On sacred days he has to pour libation of alcoholic drinks on it and offer sacrifices to the divinities and the ancestors. Since these acts of worship are pagan, it would be wrong for a Christian chief to thus betray his faith in God. On the other hand, if he refuses to do them it will lead to his destoolment. This is a real dilemma in Africa

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid, p.45.

<sup>41</sup> Interview with Rev. Dr. Cyril Fayose Feb. 8, 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Boadi, *Christianity or Traditional beliefs and Customs?*, p. 100.

because the Bible teaches that a Christian should worship only God (Exodus 20:4, 5).<sup>43</sup>

This statement seems to undermine his argument that Christian should or can be a chief. The religious obligation of the chief implies that a Christian can be a traditional chief where the religious duties are detached from the position of the chief. All important chiefs must be in position of the Black Stool or its equivalent. If the Black Stool is an idol, then it follows that it is not befitting for a Christian to possess it. Boadi does not show how the dilemma can amicably be addressed. If the chief is obliged at all cost to perform the religious duties contrary to the Christian doctrine, then it follows that it is impossible for a Christian to be both a committed chief and at the same time be a committed Christian.

The position of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church is a more relaxed position. From a glimpse, the view appears flexible, in that it allows for “ordinary Christians” to take chieftaincy title but prohibits Pastors from becoming a chief. The prohibition of pastors could also imply that deacons cannot be traditional chiefs since the biblical qualifications for Pastors and deacons are similar.<sup>44</sup> However, their position still poses a difficulty for Christian to be a chief. For instance, the condition that the Church labeled makes it difficult for Christian to be and at the same time be an active member of the church. The E.P. Church insists that if the chief accepts two wives then he ceases to be a full member of church. Fayose himself confirmed that the “Stool comes with two women and that the chief by custom is obliged to take them as wives.”<sup>45</sup> The implication is that anybody taking the Stool must obey the traditional custom of the Stool. Hence, if the church insists that chief with two wives cannot be a full member of the church, then it simply implies that the Church does not permit its full members to be traditional chiefs. It means that a Christian can take traditional chieftaincy title at the same time be full member of the E. P. Church only in a purely Christian community where the traditional religious values, customs and practices are relaxed or detached from the Stool.

The position that a Christian can be a traditional chief if the African Traditional religious aspects are distinguished from the duty of the chief, seems to be a revolutionary attempt to refine

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid

<sup>44</sup> 1 Timothy 3

<sup>45</sup> Rev. Dr. Cyril Fayose stated this in an interview with him in his office at the Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, on February 8, 2007. He was the President of Trinity Theological Seminary at this time.

the institution and make it befitting for others (like Christians) to accept chieftaincy position. This view recognizes that African traditional practices that are interwoven with the institution pose serious danger for the future of the Chieftaincy Institution. The ‘diplomatic revolutionary nature’ of this view is depicted in Chief Dankwah’s argument:

The earlier the institution of chieftaincy disengages itself from African Traditional Religion and sticks strictly to culture without any religious bias, the better it will be for the future of the institution. The institution of chieftaincy could therefore, be saved in the future if as traditional leaders, we should, in the near future, concentrate on culture devoid of religious undertones.<sup>46</sup>

Chief Dankwah is mainly concerned about the future of the institution of chieftaincy. As he further puts it, “To preserve the Chieftaincy Institution, any cultural act in the palace that impedes the attainment of Muslims and Christians must either be modified or abolished.”<sup>47</sup> He appeals to the Bible to make his “revolutional position” clearer from a defensive view point:

Even though the Kings of Israel were anointed by God, yet due to the complexity of the societal arrangements, a thin line of demarcation between religious and secular leadership was noticeable. ... He did not have the high priest and the prophets as members of his court. ... King David did not have religious role to play as such. He was personally a religious person, but he did not, as King, have to pontificate over his subjects like Bishops.<sup>48</sup>

Based on the argument of Chief Dankwah, it can be deduced that it is at yet difficult for a Christian to become a traditional chief and remain committed to God since the process of the evolution from religious leadership to social and political leadership has not happened in Ghana.

The first position states that a Christian should not or cannot be a traditional chief because the chieftaincy is interwoven with the African Traditional Religious practices. This view is a stand against religious syncretism. If a Christian becomes a chief his religious loyalty is divided and he will have to execute his traditional religious duty as a chief and at the same time serve God. This view sees it impossible to separate the religious aspect from the position of the chief. In this book, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective*, Bediako records Busia’s conclusion on the Ashanti kinship:

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<sup>46</sup> Dankwah, *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana-The Future*, p.60.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 58

No one could be an adequate chief who did not perform the ritual functions of his office. There have recently been elected as chiefs in different parts of the Ashanti men who are both literate and Christian. But they have all felt an obligation to perform the ritual acts of their office. They were enstooled in the stool house, where they poured libations to the ancestors whom they had succeeded... It is as successors of the ancestors that they are venerated and their authority respected, and they could not keep the office without maintaining contact with the ancestors through the traditional rituals.<sup>49</sup>

Busia's statement legitimizes the position that a Christian cannot be both a faithful traditional chief and a faithful Christian. His statement indicates that the position of the chief is bounded up with strong religious sentiments. It supports the view that one cannot separate the religious aspect from the position of the chief. During the swearing of the oath of allegiance the chief must vow to adhere to what the tradition demands. On this occasion, the chief vows that whenever he is called upon to perform his duty as a leader whether during the day or night, he will never turn his back. He then solicits the help of the Almighty God, the gods of the land, the ancestors.... in discharging his duties. Since the chief has a major traditional religious role to play, then it sounds impossible for him to be a committed Christian and a traditional chief.

### **Reflection**

Having assessed all of the four views, the study considers the view that a Christian should not be a traditional chief as appropriate. Boadi supports the view that a Christian can be a traditional chief but points out a religious dilemma, which his view has not amicably addressed. The Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana presents a moderate view in a relaxed attitude, but this paper has discussed that the church is simply seemed to be saying Christians should not be a traditional chief. These two views can be applicable in a purely Christian community or areas where the position of the chief is seen as a socio-political position. Chieftaincy is seen and accepted as a socio-political responsibility.

It has also been discussed that Chief Dankwah's position is a "diplomatic revolutionary attempt to refine the Chieftaincy Institution in Ghana. He sees a future danger for the institution. Therefore, he calls for the practices and rituals of chieftaincy to be devoid of any religious

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<sup>49</sup> Busia cited in Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture*, p. 22.

undertones to make it acceptable to all people irrespective of their religious affiliations.<sup>50</sup> This is a good proposal to the solution of the problem that exists between the institution and Christianity. However, the institution of chieftaincy in Ghana has not reached to the place where the chief is seen only as a socio-political leader. Therefore, the argument that Christians should be a traditional chief does not seem relevant in the Ghanaian situation now. As Kudajie and Aboagye-Mensah confirm, “When a chief is installed, he is required to undergo certain rites which bring him into contact with ancestral spirits and other gods.”<sup>51</sup> The chieftaincy is bound up with the African Traditional Religion and it seems impossible to break this religious tradition. Boateng has rightly said, “It must be stated however that one of the reasons why chieftaincy as an institution has stood the test of time is because of its mystical and secret nature.”<sup>52</sup> This implies that the traditional religious aspects of the institution are its surviving agent. “The chief of a village is automatically the chief priest. The king is also a priest to his people since his person is considered as sacred.”<sup>53</sup>

## Conclusion

This paper was intended to investigate the feud between the church and the Chieftaincy Institution in Ghana. The study has established that chieftaincy is an integral part of the African society especially in the Ghanaian society for that matter. However, with the presence of Christianity and other religions in Ghana, the institution has come under criticism. The questions the study sought to address were: Should the church permit a Christian to become a traditional chief? Is it possible for a Christian to be a traditional chief and still be fully committed to the God of the Christian faith? There were four views assessed. The first view holds that Christian should not become a chief. The second holds that Christian can be a traditional chief on ground that chieftaincy as a leadership institution is not sinful. The third view indicates that “ordinary Christian” can be a chief provided if he will not take two wives that come with the Stool. But Pastors cannot be a chief. The last view believes that Christian can be a chief when the African traditional religious aspect is removed.

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<sup>50</sup> Dankwah, *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana-The Future*, p. 127.

<sup>51</sup> Kudajie, J. N. and Aboagye-Mensah, R. K. *Christian Social Ethics* (Accra: Asempra Publishers, 1992), p. 2.

<sup>52</sup> Boateng, *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana*, p.1.

<sup>53</sup> Quarcoome, T. N. O, *West African Traditional Religion* (Ibadan: AUP, 1987), p. 76.

Having assessed all the views, this paper finds the view that Christians should not be a chief appropriate. In that all the views recognize that that African traditional religious aspect of the institution is incompatible and unacceptable to the Christian faith. In my view, until the prophetic occurrence when the institution shall have gone through the evolution from religiosity to socio-political institution, Christian should refrain from being a traditional chief. This is because the study found out that it is practically impossible for a Christian to be a traditional chief and still be committed and faithful to the Christian doctrine and faith due to the traditional religious obligations, customs and practices that come with the chieftaincy position.

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