

## PROJECT ABSTRACT

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

Adventist University of Africa

Theological Seminary

**TITLE: THE EFFECTS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FESTIVALS ON THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH AMONG THE KABYES IN NORTH OF TOGO: A CASE STUDY**

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It is important for every pastor or missionary to see the church grow spiritually, numerically, and geographically in the African traditional context. To be successful, the pastor or missionary must know the African worldview and how its rituals affect the church. By examining some puberty rites and other traditional dances, this work provides pieces of information that will assist every pastor to be aware of the dangers threatening the growth and wellbeing of the church in Togo and the entire African milieu.

This descriptive research deals with traditional festivals and how they affect the church physically, numerically, and spiritually. After research into the rites concerned, the researcher met with two prominent writers who wrote extensively on Evala and Kondona rites as well as on the Habye dance, these meetings have been of great help in writing this paper. The researcher then traveled from the capital Lomé to Kara to watch some of the festivals and meet with local traditional priests, chiefs and

Christian leaders. He also administered questionnaires to them and to the Seventh-day Adventist Church members in the region.

Most of the local chiefs and priests were open to the researcher and ready to give him the needed information. It was an opportunity for the church elder who accompanied the researcher during the journey through the villages to know more about these traditional practices.

Finally, this research opened avenues to build a relationship with the local community and its leaders. This information was shared with the Seventh-day Adventists who were interested to know these effects and how to avoid them. We believe that this work will be of great assistance to all gospel workers, especially Seventh-day Adventist pastors or missionaries among the Kabye community.

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AMONG THE KABYES IN NORTH OF TOGO:  
A CASE STUDY

A project

presented in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology

by

Komi Essolakna Lokou

May 2020

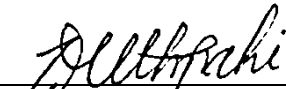



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This work is dedicated to God Almighty, the Author of life, and Giver of Wisdom and the Author of the Great Mission. It is also dedicated to all the Adventist Pastors working in the African terrain who may benefit from this work. And finally, it is dedicated to my wife, Esther Ofori, for her support and prayers.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Background of the study**

Before Christianity came to Africa, Africans had the knowledge of the existence of God, the Supreme Being; but they had and still have their own way of worshipping Him. This traditional way of worshipping God through the intermediary of spirit beings is known as African Traditional Religion. This belief system has its own culture with a lot of festivals and rituals. These festivals and their rites constitute the riches of the African communities.

It has been argued that a people without a culture are a people without a soul. Every group of people has its culture and tradition. Tradition is what we inherit from past generations. To keep and to perpetuate this tradition shows the dynamism of that group and therefore helps the coming generations know their history.<sup>1</sup>

But the history of these traditions shows that spirits are always their basis. When Christianity came to Africa, it got a lot of members among the indigenous people. Today the church in Africa faces a lot of challenges because some church leaders, in order to get more members, allow a mixture of these traditions and Christian doctrines.

This syncretistic development results in confusion among members and especially among the non-members who should be witnessed to. Besides this confusion, the church is affected in other ways by these festivals and rituals which

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<sup>1</sup> Magnim, "Akpéma Ou l'initiation de La Jeune Fille Kabyè," *IciLome.Com*, last modified 2015, accessed September 29, 2015, <https://www.icilome.com/actualites/811448>.

involve spirits. This work will look at the consequences of African traditional festivals and rituals on church advancement and growth. To do this, some festivals in the northern part of Togo will be considered as well as the rituals attached to them. Such festivals are Evala, Akpema, Kondona and Habye among the Kabye people.

### **Statement of the Problem**

According to Grebe Karl and Wilfred Fon, “some religious people in Africa argue that all the religious practices of their forefathers were part of God’s revelation to man and Christianity has only added certain aspects to their traditional way of worship”<sup>2</sup>. For them, combining the two systems of worship is nothing, but this generates challenges for the church. The major problem these traditions generate for the church is syncretism. Other related problems that may affect Protestant churches and the Seventh-day Adventist Church, in particular, are demonic possession and the growth of the church.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This paper looked at the effects of the traditional festivals and rites on God’s church. It will expose the doors through which demons enter the church. This study will help Christians know how to detect and avoid syncretism and especially avoid coming into contact with demonic spirits. It will finally call attention to the right attitude the Christian denominations need to adopt in order to keep the teachings of the church pure and avoid God’s judgments.

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Grebe and Wilfred Fon, *African Traditional Religion and Christian Counseling*, 2nd ed. (Bamenda-Nkwen, Cameroon: INSIGHT Books OASI, 1997), 25.

### **Justification**

Given the dangerous effects of malevolent spirits, Christians need to know that traditional festivals and their rituals are based on some spirits which often turn to possess those who are involved in the various ceremonies. Besides, it will help the church leaders know how to educate the members in order not to be involved in some of these festivals that may not be in line with the teachings of the Bible, and finally how to relate to these traditions and at the same time keep the growth and wealth of the church in progress.

### **Delimitation**

Though a lot of festivals are celebrated in Africa which is not compatible with Christian teachings, this study will consider only four festivals among the Kabye people in the North of the Central Region of Togo, a country located between Benin Republic and Ghana in West Africa. Kabye people are in the district or prefecture of Kozah, one of the six prefectures in that administrative region. The festivals under study are “Evala”, “Akpema”, “Kondona”; and “Habye”. The foundation of these festivals will be examined and their importance in the life of the Kabye people, especially the young ones.

### **Methodology**

This research paper adopted a combination of methodologies, namely, the participant observation method, primary and secondary research. It examines some writings on African Traditional Religions and other written work useful to the study. This study especially considered what the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy say about festivals. It also compared the practices of the Christian bodies, namely the Roman Catholic Church, examines Protestants and the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Fieldwork helped the researcher to have first-hand information by attending some of the ceremonies and taking notes.

### **Definition of Terms**

Some foreign terms are to be used in this paper and need to be defined.

*Akpema* is the ritual performed to young ladies who have reached the age of twenty. They are not supposed to know any man before that stage.

*Evala* is the passage of the young Kabye from adolescence to adulthood. These puberty rites were performed by the Kabye people through the ages and take place around eighteen years of age. This rite covers a period of three years and starts with the permission of the uncle. Evala is the plural form of Evalu while Kondona and Akpema are plural forms of Kondo and Akpenu.

*Habye* is a festival held every five years and opened to only those who possess some spiritual powers, that is, Habye is an exhibition of the African mystic power or witchcraft.

*Kondona* or the celebration of manhood is the last stage of this initiation. During this festival, the young man is ushered into manhood after having gone through the three years of Evala.

## CHAPTER 2

### THEORETICAL FOUNDATION OF FESTIVALS

Throughout history, traditional festivals have been part of human life, but what is their theoretical foundation? Discussing this theoretical foundation is the task of this chapter. Starting from the Bible; this section will cover history, the Spirit of Prophecy, and then other writings.

The first thing to note in this chapter is that the word festival comes from the Latin *Festus* and means joyful. Festival is a public celebration which is held to commemorate or to signal notable events. Festivals are also defined as religious services accompanied by demonstrations of joy and gladness.<sup>1</sup>

#### **The Bible and Festivals**

The Bible says a lot about rites that are very important for the Church and humanity. The first rite mentioned in the scriptures is the rite of circumcision which is known as the Abrahamic covenant. God called Abraham out of his father's house in Ur to a land unknown to him.

The Creator promised to multiply Abraham exceedingly, make him the father of many nations, and be God to Abraham and to his posterity forever. To seal this promise, God asked Abraham that every male child born in his house be circumcised at the age of eight days, this was the sign of his covenant with Abraham, the father of Israel's nation (Genesis 17:1-14). And this has been practiced everywhere in the

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<sup>1</sup> Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 1999), 280.

world today known as male circumcision, but more emphasis will be put on it in the Jewish culture. Some people practice female circumcision, but this is seen as a bad practice, and whoever does it is prosecuted and arrested.

Another rite that originated with John the Baptist is the rite of baptism through which a believer declares his faith in Jesus and is joined to Him and his church. The example was given by Jesus himself when He came to be baptized by John in the Jordan River (Matthew 3:13-17). In the Bible, baptism is the rite through which Christians confess their faith in Jesus Christ. Through it, they enter into the church which is the body of Christ. Jesus says that it is very important for salvation. Mark 16:15-16 affirms that the gospel should be preached to every creature, and whoever believes and is baptized will be saved.

Child dedication and the naming ceremony is a third example that can be performed. In the gospel according to St. Luke (2:20-24), the same Jesus was sent to the temple at the age of eight days where he was dedicated to God and given the name foretold by the angel Gabriel; but the naming ceremony, as it is done in some cultures today, is not considered as fundamental teaching in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Another very important rite found in the Bible is the rite of the Lord's Supper that Jesus instituted as the memorial of his death to redeem mankind from the wages of sin. Any time Christians partake in the Lord's Supper, they remember and proclaim the death of Jesus until he comes back. Through it, the Lord strengthens them and renews his alliance with them.

The four rites mentioned above are very important in the life of the individual Christian. They were crucial for the progress of the early church then, the same way they are part of what theology calls sacraments in the church today. They are in



contrast with the rites and festivals performed by the pagan nations, festivals in which sometimes Israel, the holy nation of God, joined.

Exodus chapter 32 records the situation in which the Israelites said to Aaron “Up, Make us gods to go before us” (Ex.32:1) He received from the people their gold, fashioned it with a graving tool and made it a molten calf. “After that Aaron, unfortunately, announced a feast which strangely enough was to be a feast to the Lord. This spirit of compromise, the endeavor to harmonize the worship of the Lord with that of idols, was not manifested by Israel in this case alone: it was also to motivate much of the idolatry that plagued them in the future.”<sup>2</sup> (1Kings 12:26-33, 2Kings17:32-33; Zeph.1:5).

Another example is found in Numbers 25 where the king of Moab organized a feast in honor of Baal, the Canaanite fertility god, whose worship Israel always found very alluring (Judg. 2:13, 1 Kings 18:2, Jer. 2:8). Israel participated in this festival and “yoked or coupled himself to Baal of Peor. In doing so they fragrantly repudiated the essential heart of the covenant, total and exclusive allegiance to the Lord and a severe plague broke out killing twenty-four thousand people”<sup>3</sup>

The book of first Kings makes it clear that King Solomon turned his heart from God “by building a high place for Chemosh the abominable idol of Moab, on the hill opposite Jerusalem, and for Moloch the abominable idol of the Ammonites”(1 Kings11:7). As a consequence, God promised Solomon that He will rend or tear the Kingdom. In the next two chapters, while Rehoboam, the son of Solomon was ruling, Jeroboam, son of Nabat, rebelled and the kingdom was divided; Jeroboam reigned

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<sup>2</sup> Francis D. Nichol, “Feast,” *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, DC: Review & Herald, 1978), 509.

<sup>3</sup> Gordon J. Wenham, *Numbers: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2008), 184.

over Israel, the larger part and Rehoboam ruled over Judah made up of only the house of David. A long time before God warned his people through Moses not to give any of their children to pass through the fire and sacrifice them to Moloch, nor to profane the name of God (Leviticus 11:21; 20: 2, 3).

These examples are sufficient enough to say that God is against His people joining in such festivals. Some, considering some of the festivals, may say there is no harm in them for Christians; but what about the rites performed during these festivals? What are the spirits evoked in performing these rites, especially in the initiative rites and Habye? In fact, James says “The friendship of the world is enmity with God; whosoever will, therefore, be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.” (James4:4).

Historically it is said that there aren't any people without culture and nobody can talk about culture without mentioning traditions, for, traditions and their festivals, constitute the riches of the culture of a particular community. So traditions and festivals play an important role in a community's life, but as James said, joining in these festivals and their rites bring Christians into enmity with God.

### **Festivals in the Spirit of Prophecy**

The Spirit of Prophecy makes clear statements about traditional festivals. Considering the scene in Numbers, 25:1-3, E.G. White makes the following statements: “In the public worship of Baal the leading deity, the most degrading and iniquitous senses were constantly enacted. These surroundings exerted a polluting influence upon the Israelites. Their minds became familiar with the vile thoughts constantly suggested; their life of ease and inaction produced its demoralizing effects, and almost unconsciously to themselves they were departing from God and coming into a condition where they would fall easy prey to temptation,” and “before many

weeks elapsed, the history of the people of Israel was marred by the most frightful departures from virtue and integrity.”<sup>4</sup>

According to the Spirit of Prophecy, the church which is holy like the nation of Israel of old must avoid being entangled in such practices that do not glorify God. Ellen G. White brings attention to the fact that “it is by leading the followers of Christ to associate with the ungodly and unite in their amusements that Satan is most successful in alluring them into sin. God requires of His people now as great a distinction from the world, in customs, habits, and principles.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Rites of Passage in Judaism**

Besides these pagan practices condemned by the Creator, Hebrew people had their initiation and passage rites. The oldest is the circumcision or “b’ritmilah.” Dating back almost four thousand years, circumcision was first mentioned in Genesis 17 when God commanded Abraham: “Every male among you shall be circumcised. You shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin, and that shall be the sign of the covenant between me and you. At the age of eight days, every male among you throughout the generations shall be circumcised, even the home-born slave. An uncircumcised male has broken my covenant” (Vv 10-14).

The Torah reports that Abraham immediately obeyed God’s instructions by circumcising himself, his firstborn Ishmael, and all the males of his household. Though some people do circumcise their boys at the age of thirteen, it wasn’t meant to be a puberty rite.

Abraham was ninety-nine years old at the time of his circumcision, while Ishmael was thirteen, which may serve in part to explain the common practice

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<sup>4</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Ontario, Canada: Pacific Press, 1958), 453–454.

<sup>5</sup> Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Complete Published Ellen G. White Writings [CD ROM] (Silver Spring, MD: Ellen G. White Estate, 1999), 256.

among some people of circumcision at puberty. From that time forward, however, Jewish males were circumcised at the age of eight days, not as a symbol of fertility but as a sign of their membership in a covenant people.<sup>6</sup>

This circumcision was normally performed by the father until at one time fathers were replaced by a *mohel* on the eighth day after birth. The *mohel* was trained in the surgical procedures of *b'ritmilah*, and became a professional representative of the fathers of the community. This rite at a time took a long time with all the ceremonies attached to it and ended with a festive meal.

While the circumcision is a ritual that welcomes the baby boy into the Jewish community, the “bar mitzvah” ritual introduces the thirteen-year-old boy into adulthood. Though it is not necessary for a ritual to be performed to enter Jewish adulthood, some Jewish communities thought that a boy must demonstrate his growth by fully participating in the religious service by reading a portion of the Torah or the prophetic reading at a Sabbath service.

The age thirteen is determined based on the stories of Abraham, Esau, and Jacob. According to Moskowitz, Abraham was thirteen years old when he was called by God to leave the father’s house and he made a Covenant with Him; Jacob and Esau also separated at age thirteen, Jacob went on to study the scriptures and later on became Israel while Esau went into idolatry.<sup>7</sup>

These rituals typically signify the growth of a child to an adult. Often these rituals take place during adolescence. The first ritual of passage is the celebration of bar or bat mitzvah which, in Christianity, is denoted with the sacrament of confirmation. One last example of initiation is marriage. Even though the actual

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<sup>6</sup> Daniel B. Syme, “B’rit Milah: The Circumcision Ritual,” *ReformJudaism.Org*, last modified 2012, accessed July 14, 2016, <https://reformjudaism.org/brit-milah-circumcision-ritual>.

<sup>7</sup> Moskowitz, “Initiation Rites in Judaism,” *Moskovitz*, accessed July 14, 2016, <http://ronaldrivas.tripod.com/initiationritesinjudaism/>.

marriage ceremony is often modern and contemporary, the rite of marriage is an old religious tradition. Marriage is a ritual contained in nearly all religions.

The last type of rites of passage described is rituals of mourning and death. These rituals mark the end of one's life and are performed in the moments of death and after death. Rituals of mourning and death are performed even in the most secularized cultures. The process of mourning is ritualized in various ways in different religions. Taoists, for example, perform elaborate ceremonies signifying the soul's journey into the underworld and its rescue and delivery into heaven.<sup>8</sup>

These rites of passage constitute the culture of Jewish communities, and they define the Jewish identity. Having looked at what the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy say about traditional festivals, it is time to consider the history of the Kabye people located in the district of Kozah, region of Kara.

The few materials written about the Kabye culture focus only on the folkloric parts of the festivals which attract the attention of the readers and tourists but it is important to go beyond the visible to discover the philosophical, religious and social meaning of these symbolic rituals in the life of this traditional community. Dadja Simtaro says that "these rituals and dances are only the external symbols of the habits, behavior and mentality which reveal the identity and authenticity of this community; the cultural and ancestral heritage given from generation to generation."<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Adam Cap, "Rites of Passage and Their Religious Association," *Adam Cap*, 2008, accessed July 14, 2016, <https://adamcap.com/schoolwork/2910/>.

<sup>9</sup> Simtaro Dadja, *Les Rites d'Initiation Evala: Un Aspect Du Patrimoine Culturel En Pays Kabye* (Lomé, Togo: Lekwauwa, 1987), 1.

## **The Kabye, a Community of Initiation Culture**

In this community of socio-cultural heritage, the different stages of initiation of a man from his adolescence to adulthood are very important in an individual's life. For the young man to be considered as an adult, he has to go through two different initiations, namely Evala and Kondona. The initiation ceremony "efatu" or "evalu," a symbol or renaissance, puts the young or new man on the way of life; leading him to the rite of "kondotu," the final stage of his initiation after which he can sit in the council of elders. As far as the female gender is concerned, the young lady will go through one rite called "akpendu," before her marriage.

### **The "Evala" Rituals**

Evala, as said earlier is the initiating passage of the Kabye young man to adulthood and these rituals have always been part of the Kabye people's life since times immemorial. This ritual takes place when the candidate is around 18 to 20 years old and lasts for three years. During the three years, the "evalu" must dance, eat dog's meat and wrestle. This shows that the young man has become an adult and can sit among the wise men. The public wrestling is the apotheosis of the whole ceremony taking place in the raining season.

This traditional wrestling, which lasts for two weeks in the month of July; is a competition between the villages of the Kozah district, the home of the Kabye community in the northern part of Togo. The villages or cantons making the district are Lama, Lassa, Tchade, Kidjan, Bohou, Piya, Yadè, Kouméa, and Tchitchao. These are the localities concerned with all the rituals under consideration.

Though "Evala" is an initiation, it culminates in a two-week competition during which the wrestler is instructed not to give any voluntary knock to his

adversary. This means that apart from the acquisition of physical aptitude and endurance, the young Kabye acquires some important values for communal life. He obeys the instructions given by the local chiefs who are the referees during this final stage of the initiation. At the end of the competition, the best wrestlers or “evala” are glorified in songs by traditional singers and given names like “tooyou; mouzou, kouni, mayi” or “kpem-tooyou” and “tou,” meaning lion or bear and elephant.

This festival, the public wrestling, has social functions described by Simtaro as follows: The first function is that the Evala must understand at the end that this test is a social game that unites them on the way of the new life before them. Secondly, the community discovers a generation of men who are physically, intellectually, and morally prepared to defend it efficaciously.

They are no more adolescents neither children but young adults, new men, responsible vis-à-vis to their community. Finally, not only are they the pride of their parents and families, but they have proved that with the blessings of the parents they are ready to marry and enlarge their families and perpetuate the community.<sup>10</sup>

From these social functions, it is good to look first at the different stages of the growth of a child, and then the stages of the ritual called “Toozu” or initiation. In this traditional community the child between zero and six years is called “pua-éléwu” meaning a spirit-child, that is, he can at any time go back to where he came from, for he came to explore this world. From six to twelve the small boy is called “pua-éféléa” and the girl “pua-péléa” or the child that has grown up. In between twelve and seventeen he is “éwaziyé” or “éhoziyé,” meaning young useful man.

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<sup>10</sup> Dadja, *Les Rites d'Initiation Evala: Un Aspect Du Patrimoine Culturel En Pays Kabye*, 7.

At this stage, he takes part in activities like farming and hunting. The father observes his endurance, dexterity and sees that the son is now a grown-up. The father then reveals his intention of initiating him to the mother and especially to the maternal uncle who plays an important role in the Kabye community. The latter approves the idea after thinking for some time; without his approval no ceremony can be done to his sister's children. With the uncle's approval, the father chooses somebody who secretly will initiate the son; the latter is a "kpangbamu" or tutor.

### **The Stages of the Initiation or "Toozu"**

This initiation ceremony is made up of four meaningful stages listed as follows: the kidnapping, the retreat, the tattooing and the azola ceremony.

**The kidnapping.** The initiation generally starts with the hunting in February and March. The tutors watch all the movements of adolescents. At the appropriate time the tutor captures his godson and shouts to his friends who come from their hiding places to help him master the young man. At this moment the grandmother is in joy for the grandson who is now an "evalu" or a "new man." Then comes the next stage, the retreat.

**The retreat.** Before the young men are sent to their uncle's houses, their places of retreat, they are taken to the "rock of dogs" or "hawoyé," they are made to run around these rocks several times. They are then led to the uncles' houses after being anointed with the lard of a dog. The initiate will enter the uncle's house by climbing one of the walls. As soon as he receives this sacred anointing the new man enters the world of absolute silence and obedience. He accepts and obeys the instructions and lessons of their tutors and elders of the community.

**The tattooing.** The next day of the retreat, before the sunrise, the initiate goes through a test of tattooing during which he receives some scarifications on the face



without shedding any tears or crying. After the face is washed with cold water, it is smeared with shear butter.

In some places, after this ceremony, there is training between the initiates of different areas of the village and sometimes, because of the brutality of these pieces of training, the young men's faces bleed. In order to accelerate the healing of their scars, they may stay up to one week without bathing. This isolation or retreat ends after one week when they take part in the second traditional hunting activities. In the bush they go through a lot of exercises without food or water; all this under a burning sun in order to develop their endurance and harden their character.

**The azola ceremony.** The end of the isolation is marked by a simple ritual; the pounding of "azola," a fine leguminous plant which is very sticky. It is the maternal aunt who is charged to pound this leaf in a small mortar in the middle of the compound; but this leaf, being rare, can be replaced with baobab leaves. Before she pounds, the uncle will invoke the divinities and spirits of the dead to thank them and implore their protection on the initiate, the "evalu." Then, a priest of the house kills a chicken. The chicken's blood drips in the form of a cross on the edges of the mortar and on the leaves, some drips are put around the young man.

The aunt, with the pestle in the hand, will advise the nephew asking him to be obedient and submissive to the parents and avoid cowardice among his age mates. Then she pounds five times with regular intervals before she continues until the leaf is completely crushed. They prepare a soup with which they eat a traditional meal called "mutu;" the ingredient for that "mutu" is millet. Part of this ceremonial meal is symbolically given to the ancestors before the initiate is served; part of the soup is poured before and behind him. The family also prepares another meal with baobab

tree leaves and all the parents are served. This “azola” ritual gives the young man the opportunity to go out and take part in the community’s activities.

The initiate is subjected to fasting as soon as they put on him the necklace and an armlet right after the azola ceremony. He fasts only outside his house and this for five to six weeks according to the cantons. After the three years of wrestling, the “evalu” becomes “esokpo” after the “azaza” dance and continues the fasting. This second fasting lasts for one to three years, it continues when the person becomes a kondo. As in any tradition, all these rituals have a sense for the initiate and the community.

### **Meaning of the Different Ceremonies**

The expression or verb “toozu” means to put something in someone’s mouth and force him to swallow it. In the Kabye community where the consumption of dog meat is forbidden, the initiate is forced to eat that meat. So when dog meat is mentioned among the Kabye of Kozah, it refers to the Evala for whom this house animal plays an important role in their initiation. The fat of the dog that is spread on the body of the young man from the first day gets him in contact with the animal. He takes from it the following qualities: endurance, strength, courage, extraordinary intelligence and also a faultless faithfulness.

According to the interpretation given to the information received, the “azola” ceremony confers to the initiate the qualities of invincibility and ineluctability, for; something that is sticky cannot be mastered and defeated. The meal that is prepared and shared means that the young man is in the service of the community.

Finally, through the tattooing rituals, the young men cultivate the virtues of stoicism and self- control on one side. On the other side, the scarifications are a sign of their belonging to a new social group. Simtaro says that the scarifications are “an

indelible mark of a crucial stage of their rebirth to the life of mature and responsible men. That is the concrete testimony, the living proof of the identity of an evalu.”<sup>11</sup>

The ceremony is both traditional and cultural. The wise men and the rules guiding the ceremony represent the tradition while the cultural aspect comprises the sacrifices done by the initiatives such as fasting, sexual abstinence and the scarifications.<sup>12</sup>

Traditionally, the dates are set after the consultation of the gods and permission given by the local priest called “tchodjo;” at the end of the ceremonies, the priests go round the traditional sanctuaries to thank the gods for allowing these ceremonies to take place.

In fact, Kabyè initiation of a young man has five stages, which are:

1. Evatu
2. Sangayitu
3. Esokpotu
4. Kondotu
5. Gnouhouming

### **The Rituals of “Kondotu”**

In the cultural anthropology of the Kabye community, it is said that the “evalu,” or the new man, is integrated into the society of adults. According to the elders, an “esokpo” is an evalu who completed his three years of wrestling and is looking forwards to becoming a kondo in the next three, two or one year. The elders say about the Kondo, who is respected and revered by the society, that he is an

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<sup>11</sup> Dadja, *Les Rites d’Initiation Evala: Un Aspect Du Patrimoine Culturel En Pays Kabye*, 16.

<sup>12</sup> Jean Florentin Agbona, “Togo Les Evala : Entre Rites Initiatiques, Compétitions et Fête Culturelle,” *Togocultures.Com*, 2015, accessed September 22, 2015, <http://togocultures.com/togo-les-evala-entre-rites-initiatiques-competitions-et-fete-culturelle/>.

intermediary person between the “esokpo” and the “egulu;” “egulu” being the last stage of the initiation rites. What does the word kondo mean and what are the stages of this important ceremony?

**The Meaning and stages of “Kondo” rituals. *Etymological meaning.*** The word “Kondo” is composed of three elements: Ko + N+ Do: Ko is the imperative of the verb “kom” meaning to come; N is the personal pronoun you and comes from the verb “tom”, to say or “tov” meaning to shoot an arrow or to fire. So according to the occasion, kondo can mean come and say or come and fight.

If it is confirmed that kondo means come and say, it is therefore admitted that he is mature, an adult who can say his mind in the council of elders; that is he takes part in the decisions concerning the life of the city. If kondo also means come and shoot the arrow, this implies that the initiate is mature enough to lead a team to war; to protect the young ones in the war by regulating their conduct.<sup>13</sup> So the Kondo is a mature warrior.

***The stages of kondotu or kondo rituals. The internment.*** This stage of the Kondotu takes place a few days before or after the coronation according to the cantons. It is the grouping of the best men (esopkaabiyaa) which marks the beginning of the ceremony. These best men are called to clean and take care of the instruments that will be used as the kondo’s getup. These things are a gong, a necklace, a bangle or an armlet, a small basket, two small horns, an animal skin thong, etc. The internment, whether it starts before or after the ceremony, lasts only for one week during which the initiate eats soberly and, for any need at any moment, he goes out covered with a raffia mat.

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<sup>13</sup> Blanzoua W.M. Kao, *Anthropologie de La Parenté Kabyè : La Valeur Archéologique de l’Intronisation Du Kondo* (Lomé, Togo: Sakom, 2008), 80.

*The ceremonial coronation.* Early in the morning, in some cantons, and late in the afternoon in others, an elder called “egulu” first puts a big necklace on the initiate’s neck, then an amulet on the hand, a gong in the right hand and something to cover the eyes in the left hand of the initiate; the necklace, the amulet, and the gong are made of iron. The eye cover is a flat iron fixed on a short piece of wood. Another iron object in the form of half an X sawn on animal skin is attached to his waist. Two small horns sewn on a small basket is fixed on his back with a thread from the skin of a hind. With this getup on him, the initiate is called a “kondo.”

*The mayle dance.* It is good to remember that as soon as the “evalu” wears the necklace, he starts fasting after the “azola” rituals. He fasts only outside his house and this lasts for five to six weeks according to the cantons. After three years he takes part in the “azaza” dance and starts the fasting again; this second fasting may take two to three years and continues into the Kondo’s period. Not only does the kondo not eat outside his house; but also he does not talk outside the house even if he is greeted. He answers with the head. To say, give way, he plays a small instrument and whoever provokes him is severely punished by all the initiates.

These initiates, four years later, have a dance called the “Mayle” dance. For example, in 2019, it is the Kondona of 2015 who takes part in this dance. The elders remind the initiates of their sufferings and weaknesses during the fasting throughout the different stages of their initiation from being an “evalu,” an “esokpa” to “kondo”. This is done through songs. It is also the time when elders give names to the Kondona, names that denote their moral behavior.

What is the meaning of “mayle”? During the dance, a soloist gives the tune for a song and all the initiates answer in the form of a chorus saying “mayle” meaning here I am; still alive after this hard period of fasting. The same soloist calls everyone

by his moral name and all respond: “Mayle” which means “Here I am alive after the long and hard period of fasting beside my shortcomings and imperfections”.<sup>14</sup>

The dance takes place early on a Monday morning around a huge mound built not far from the local sanctuary, the place of the coronation. “Mayle” is part of a group of morning dances. The dancers are divided into three groups: the local priests, who are the nearest to the mound, dance while drums are beaten; then come the Kondona singing and beating their gongs. The “esokpa” follows with the “azaza” dance and the newly initiated “Evala” ends with theirs.

This dance, which lasts from the Monday after the “Evala” festival to the following Sunday, marks the end of the long period of fasting. This allows the Kondonato divide themselves into groups of two or three and go from house to house begging for food to eat, accompanied by some children. To announce their presence in the houses they shout “hayi, mondowe,” meaning what would I eat? Now that I have the permission to eat everything, give me anything to stop my hunger. Then people come out and fill their sacks or whatever they are holding with all kinds of food.

To conclude his initiation, the “kondo” has to go through the last ritual called “Gnouhouming,” from there he is totally accepted among the elders, the second social group of the community. On that day, ceremonies of appreciation and thanksgiving are done to thank the gods for their protection and kindness. For this occasion, fowls, goats and sheep are killed and a lot of local drink (Tchoukoutou) is prepared. Libation is poured and a prayer is offered by the father and the uncle of the initiate. In their

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<sup>14</sup> Kao, *Anthropologie de La Parenté Kabyè : La Valeur Archéologique de l’Intronisation Du Kondo*, 83.

prayer they ask the gods to bless them with abundant rain, fruitful and happy marriages and give peace and health to everybody.

Here the aim of the African Traditional Religion is clearly shown: “The Spiritual Beings should work for the wellbeing of the human beings. Sacrifices are offered to them for them to protect, to give power, strength, prosperity, and happiness. This influences the African convert.”<sup>15</sup>

During this last ritual, a hen is first killed, and then a goat or sheep, and finally, the drink is distributed. At this time, the kondo is seated on a stool in the middle of the compound and the aunt shaves him. This last ritual makes the kondo an “Egulu” or an elder in the community.

As said earlier, while the young Kabye man goes through these five stages of his initiation, the young lady goes through a ritual call “Akpendu” or “Akpema” Rituals which take place right after the “Evala” festivals.

### **The Akpema Rituals**

From its origins, the Kabye community has given an important place to the young lady who is initiated through some rituals to integrate her into the society of adults. The word “Akpenu” means a nubile, that is a mature lady or somebody who is ready to get married and procreate. This initiation has a double objective: it helps the young lady to remain a virgin till the day of her marriage and to present her to her age mates.

The ritual is done right after Evala towards the end of July and beginning of August. Two groups of ladies are concerned: 17 to 18 years old and 18 to 22 years old for those who are late. Once in a while, a lady who has a child can be initiated. As

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<sup>15</sup> Y. Roger N’dri, *Africa Study Bible* (Abidjan, Cote d’Ivoire: Gospel, 2014), 1144.

Evala and Kondona, the Akpema rituals comprise some stages and ceremonies which are as follows.

The parent who has noticed that his daughter can be initiated must go and talk to her uncle who will give five francs to buy the traditional blade that will be used to shave the head of the young lady. The “Akpenu” is sent to the uncles and back to the parents. After the shaving, the family prepares a flat cake with the powder of beans (tindiné) or rice ball. This food is shared with the whole village. At this stage the initiate takes the “Kegbessi” who will always be on her side and a godmother, “Kpangbamou.” The “kpangbamou” is married while the “kegbessi” are young girls not yet initiated.

The next stage is the “Azola” ritual during which the initiate is supposed to open her heart to the parents; through a dialogue she must tell them if she is a virgin or not. While the girl is seated on the initiation stool, a sheep is killed and the aunt scarifies her. After this, the initiate is put into a hut naked from where she comes out at a late period in the night when the young ones sing to accompany her. Some days after “Azola,” all the initiates are gathered at the mountain. Every one of them sits on the initiation stool where the godmother shaves her head and puts on her waist the ceremonial pearl (Kpatarè). With the skin of the animal that was killed on the knees, a red powder is sprayed on the head by the godmother who completes the initiate getup with “kpandama” or pearls on the bust, “kptos” or armllets on the hands, the traditional necklace or “lugbono” and, finally the “roca” or the white sacred stem in the hand, this is the sign of her purity and the sacredness of the rituals.

After the ritual, the initiate takes away everything except the traditional armlet on her arm and this is the sign of her initiation. The young ladies walk in a line, from different areas of the villages, singing a ritual song with the heads bowed down until



they get to the mountain. Formerly, when they get to that place they were naked, but nowadays they wear pants. Throughout that difficult journey, a young adult lady, the leader, takes with her some water that she will present to the initiate who will not drink until the sacred place.

At that sacred place, the ladies sit down on a sacred stone one after the other. This marks the end of both the adventure on the mountain and the rituals. Right after that, the initiate can go to the house of her future husband if she has one. She can take part in the “Tchimou dance” if the parents are rich. The young lady then is ready to get married.

On that very day, the ladies who are betrothed must have their fiancés or the fiancés’ representatives among the crowd. As soon as the ladies sit on the sacred stone the fiancés have to go fast and remove them from it. This is done to make sure the ladies get married to those men who already are known to the future in-laws. In fact they contribute largely to the organization of the rituals by providing sacks of millet used for the local drink –“tchoukoutou” or animals for the different meals. But they will go to the husbands’ houses only after the rituals are completed.

According to the testimony of one initiate, no special ceremony is performed on the mountain, but you can simply feel an unseen hand touching you as you sit on the sacred stone for a few minutes.

**The importance of akpema rituals.** Like Evala and Kondona, the Akpema rituals play an important role in the life of the young Kabye lady. On the day of the initiation, the young lady is not made “Akpenu” to defend the community like the man, but she is considered as a grown-up, therefore a wise lady. In addition, Akpema rituals have a sacred meaning. On the day of the ceremony the lady walks naked to the sacred place, and in the Kabye community the hairs around the sex organ are of

great value. While the honor or dishonor of the initiate depends on the quantity of these hairs, her nakedness is the symbol of her virginity.

The Akpenu always has a chewing stick in her mouth. This stick means that the future woman is ready to tame her tongue. He is supposed not to talk too much. By taming her tongue she can keep secrets and avoid quarrels and divisions in the family.

The traditional festivals considered above are mainly the initiation rites into manhood or womanhood while the following one, “Habye,” is rather a demonstration of the spiritual power, a ceremony with deep spiritual and environmental meaning.

### **The Habye Dance or Rituals**

This last festival is considered by the Kabye community as a ritual of environmental purification. It takes place every five years. All the villages in the Kozah district celebrate Habye on the same day. There is a reason for this and the reason is the elimination of death, pestilences, and other sicknesses from the environment. Starting from Lama and Lassa, all the eight cantons cited earlier dance one after the other the same day.

The story about Habye, as told by elderly people, is as follows: “Long time ago, people were not dying. About a hundred years after, people started disappearing and some becoming spirits. It was in the time of Sau, one of the first ancestors of Lamaa people. During some initiation period, two initiates, that is, two “Kondona,” died. One day Malaka the other ancestor went to tell Sau about a spirit moving around the mountains, it is this spirit that enters the houses and kills people. A plan was set up. Both ancestors and their children set a trap to arrest the spirit of death. They put a

fermented liquid in a pot and when the spirit came to drink it was pushed into the pot.”<sup>16</sup>

After catching the spirit of death, the same night it was thrown away to the next village, Soumdina. Some ceremonies were done in the night and people stopped dying for decades. A long time after when people started dying again, the ceremonies were shifted from night to day time and it is wizards who do these ceremonies to arrest death and clean the environment from sicknesses. A dance was added. When they were dancing a lot of mysterious things were done, this dance and ceremonies are together called Habye.

Why Habye is danced the same day in all the villages? Because it is death, they all do the ceremony the same day in order to sack it completely from the human environment; so it starts from Lama and Lassa who throw death to Soumdina, Soumdina sacks death and sends it to Kidjan. Kidjan dances and sends it to Tchade and Pya who, in turn, sends this spirit to Bohou. From there death is sent to Yadè. Yadè people dance and push it to Tchitchao, and it is there that the celebration ends; this will take place after five years.

This chapter has considered the theoretical foundation of the initiation rites in the Kabye Community of North Togo. The next section will look at the local setting, that is what happens during their celebration; and what influence does this have on the Church. To do so, the project paper will consider the Roman Catholic Church, the Seventh-day Adventist Church as case studies.

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<sup>16</sup> Blanzoua W. Kao, *Le Kabyè et Ses Cérémonies* (Lomé, Togo: La Conception, 1993), 418.

## CHAPTER 3

### DESCRIPTION OF LOCAL SETTING

#### **Kara, the Home Town of the Kabye Community**

The Kabyeland is located in the fourth administrative division of Togo. The distance between Lomé the capital city and Kara is about 390 kilometers. The journey between the two cities takes six to seven hours by road. The project takes care of the economy and culture of the Kabyeland, as well as the changes that occurred in this culture with time.

#### **Administrative Divisions of Togo**

Togo is divided into five administrative regions. From South to North the regions are as follows:

1. The Maritime Region, located along the coast with towns like Lomé, Aného, Agbodrafo, Baguida, Tsévié, Togoville, Vogon, Tabligbo, and Afagnan.
2. The Plateau Region with its exceptional green environment of tropical forests comprises towns like Notsé, Atakpamé, Kpalimé, Badou, Kpimé and Anié.
3. The Central Region is made up of Blitta, Sotouboua, Sokodé, Bafilo, Bassar and Tchamba, Pagala, Adjengré. It covers about 13,500 km<sup>2</sup> among which 20% are classified forests with the national park of Fazao.
4. The Region of Kara with big towns such as Kara, Niamtougou, Pagouda, Bassar, and Kanté.
5. The Savanna Region, the Upper North comprising Cinkassé, Dapaong, Mango, and Mandouri has exceptional vegetation.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vidéha Kodjo Séname, "Togo: Région Des Savanes," *Togo Tourisme*, accessed January 30, 2018, <http://www.togo-tourisme.com/regions-togo/savanes>.

## **The Region of Kara**

### **Geographical Description**

Located between the Central and Savanna regions, and sharing boundaries with the Republic of Benin on the East and Ghana on the West, the Region of Kara is mostly inhabited by the Kabye. The name means workers in stones, that is the Kabye used to farm among stones that they gather in form of a raised flat-topped bank of earth with sloping side for agriculture. The region is crossed by a chain of mountains called Mount Kabye among which Defalé Mountains extend from the East, known as the Land of Tambermas and included among the patrimony of UNESCO. The Subdivisions of the region are the following:

1. Prefecture of Assoli: Chief town: Bafilo
2. Prefecture of Bassar : Chief town: Bassar
3. Prefecture of Binah: Chief town: Pagouda
4. Prefecture of Dankpen: Chief town: Guérin-Kouka
5. Prefecture of Doufelgou: Chief town: Niamtougou
6. Prefecture of Kéran: Chief town: Kandé
7. Prefecture of Kozah: Chief town: Kara (also the regional Capital town)

### **The Population and its Growth**

The Region of Kara covers 11738 km<sup>2</sup>. Its population has grown from 237,304 inhabitants in 1970 to 426,651 in 1981, and finally to 769,940 inhabitants in 2010. Among the seven districts listed above, the district of Kozah is the most populated with 225,259 inhabitants. The same source reveals that the population of Kara itself has grown sharply and astronomically from 28,902 in 1981 to 94,878 inhabitants in

2010.<sup>2</sup> Another source indicates that the population of Kara today is 109,287 inhabitants.<sup>3</sup>

Tchalla Kokou opines that the population's rate of growth in Kara, which is 4% per year, is due to two main reasons: the massive rural exodus towards the biggest and busiest city of the region and secondly the opening of the University of Kara in 2004. The foreign people in the region live in urban zones, mostly in Kara. This movement of foreigners towards the cities shows the functional relations between the cities and the rural milieu of the region (Sintès P. 2008).<sup>4</sup>

### **Economic Life**

The economy is purely based on agricultural products such as yams, groundnuts, millet, corn, mangoes, and other fruits. A lot of big markets are found in the region where these products exchange hands. Some of these are the markets of Niamtougou, Kétao, Bassar, Bandjéli or Nadoba (Koutammakou)

### **Cultural Life**

Though there are different ethnic groups in the region with their cultures, the Kabye people have distinguished themselves above others with their puberty rites (Evala, Akpema, and Kondona) and the Habyè dance which, as said above, is a demonstration of the African magical power. These rituals and the traditional dances like Tchimou, Kamou and Sau constitute the essential components of Kabye culture;

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<sup>2</sup> Tchalla Kokou, "Dynamique Démographique et Peuplement de La Région de La Kara : Une Analyse à Base Des Données Des Recensements Généraux de La Population de 1970 à 2010," *Sciences Humaines* 1, no. 4 (2015): 173.

<sup>3</sup> Wikipedia, "Région de La Kara," *Wikipedia*, accessed January 30, 2018, [https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%A9gion\\_de\\_la\\_Kara](https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%A9gion_de_la_Kara).

<sup>4</sup> Kokou, "Dynamique Démographique et Peuplement de La Région de La Kara : Une Analyse à Base Des Données Des Recensements Généraux de La Population de 1970 à 2010," 174.

they are a living testimony that Kabye people are attached to the ancestral mode of life and traditions.

## **Socio-Cultural Background**

### **The Origin of the Evala Rituals and Nature of the Kabye**

According to history, the most popular of the rituals, the one that attracts people from all over the country and abroad is Evala: Jean Baptist tells how the Evala ritual developed

The Evala traditional wrestling might have grown out of an ancestral sport practiced with sticks. During this ancestral sport, competitors used to throw their opponents on the ground using a baton. Once, the batons fell off the hands of two competitors who decided to finish it up by grabbing each other vigorously. Thus was born Evala that, over the years, became an exercise aimed at preparing the young Kabye man physically and mentally in order to introduce him into adulthood.<sup>5</sup>

Another source describes the Kabye as a valiant people who were living in a relatively hostile environment where the search for food required hard work and intelligence. They needed to work hard in mountains, valleys, and forests in order to grow millet, corn and other cereals and tubers and to face wild animals and eventual enemies. Therefore, the need to develop the virtues of endurance, courage, valiance and stoicism was necessary. The education and training consisted of inculcating these important and valuable virtues to the young Kabye. The Kabye community, by faith and conviction hold to these values.

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<sup>5</sup> Jean-Baptiste Bat, "Initiation Wrestling in Togo," *The African Magazine*, 2016, accessed July 13, 2016, <http://www.myafricanmagazine.com/initiation-wrestling-in-togo/>.

Concerning the origin of these puberty rites, it has been impossible to determine the time they started. Takou Palawiya of the village of Lassa Kandolao, one of the chiefs interviewed says that even the ancestors cannot tell the origin of the puberty rites because they have been part of the Kabye history since time immemorial. But research by Jean Florentin Agbona proves that the Evala rituals started in the middle of the eighteenth century with the triumph of two fighters: one called Tchablime from the village of Kpédaw and his adversary, Fawokezié from Kolidé. Tchablime was 2m high and Fawokezié 1.40m. The first traditional wrestling opposing these two people took place in 1785 with the victory of the short man, Fawokezié. People everywhere started shouting on the giant; this is what generated a spirit of revenge and competition in all Kozah.<sup>6</sup>

The Kabye community is deeply rooted in the African Traditional Religion in which rites of passage are sacred and of great importance. Lawrence Cunningham and John Kelsay state in their book, *Sacred Quest*, that rituals are necessary to shape the believes and values of a person or a community and

Rites of Passage are necessary for a follower of a religion to move from stage to stage of his life. They are very important rituals because they mark milestone moments in a person's life in the church. Despite how secular a family may be, rites of passage are moments of life still highly associated with religion.<sup>7</sup>

As an initiation rite, Evala takes place in two weeks during which every initiate has to wrestle for one week; this is repeated three years as mentioned earlier. This long process forges, shapes, and models the individual in his preparation for adult- age responsibilities. This is both a sports competition and an initiation ritual

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<sup>6</sup> Agbona, "Togo Les Evala : Entre Rites Initiatiques, Compétitions et Fête Culturelle."

<sup>7</sup> Lawrence Cunningham and John Kelsay, *The Sacred Quest: An Invitation to the Study of Religion*, 6th ed. (Princeton, NJ: Recording for the Blind & Dyslexic, 2006), 79.



that stands as a required passage in the young man's growth into adulthood and a full-fledged member of his community.

During the competition, the most valuable Evala or wrestlers are energized by the crowd of fans gathered around the arenas cheering them to the tune of drums, flutes and other instruments. With the support of these crowd and music the Kabye young man shows his ability to defend his community by beating his opponents and also his ability to remain dignified in defeat.

When did Akpema, the ladies' initiation start? No exact period can be pointed to. But as young men have to be initiated, the community also made provision for young ladies to follow some rituals that will usher them into adulthood.

### **The Beginning of the Festivals**

The year is divided into a dry season extending from October to March and a rainy season from April to September. Activities such as traditional dances (Kaming), funerals for aged people, and traditional hunting occupy most of the dry season, while farming, puberty rites, and quinquennial ceremonies (Kondona) occupy the largest part of the rainy season. Each of these activities can cover two weeks or one month; but, only the scrupulous respect of the time period can allow a good performance of the rites and a good harvest.

As stated above, the festivals take place in the months of July and August, but it is important to know what marks their beginning every year. In all the cantons concerned, there are two ceremonies that start the festivals; they are "Tchobiye" and "Lim low" or libation.

### **The "Tchobiye" Ceremony**

The "Tchobiyé" ceremony is the descent of the traditional priests into markets to gather foodstuff from the market women. It starts in the Canton of Kouméa,

especially in the house of Tchalim at Tutuya on a Friday. From this house, the traditional priests go to the market where they collect some grains from women such as groundnut, millet, beans, and some specific fruits. These products are shared between three villages: 1-Sèèdina, 2-Sondè -Kpawdè, 3- Loou and Pitah surrounding Kouméa. It is important to note that at Siou, the Azaza dance and Akpema rite take place in October, not in August.

The priest of Kouméa gets to Pya Laou the same Friday evening. On his instruction, a young man and a young lady are locked in two different rooms for one night. This is done in the house of Pitah Taana Languiedè and, this officially announces that the period of the puberty rites has come. This priest, who came from Kouméa, spends the night in the house of Missinandè. The next morning (Saturday) he visits fifteen houses. In each, he is offered some groundnut, millet, cassava, a small pot of the local drink (Tchoukoutou) and a chicken. The following are the fifteen houses:

1. Laouwayi Tchotchodè
2. Laouwayi Tiwandaa
3. Laouwayi Kesiedè
4. Feenda Kidèzouyoo
5. Feenda Piyay
6. Tchalimdè téloubohou
7. Pooyoo Agbéyéde
8. Pooyoo Touyoude
9. Pooyoo Taakoudè
10. Soodè
11. Soodè Taarukède
12. Laou Kagnalah

13. Laou Kaognandè

14. Laou Haoudè

15. Laou Paanlandè.

It is good to know that these fifteen houses are constant. According to Kao Blanzoua, the Kabye anthropologist, who spent most of his time to explain this ceremony to us, all the chickens are killed in the house of Laouwayi Tchotchodè by the priests of Laouwayi and Kidjan after their own prayers.

### **The Libation Ceremony**

Libation is poured before the priests go to the markets to collect the grains and foodstuff that will be used for the ceremonies. From the market, they go back to the house of the priest of Laouwayi to share these products and the chickens, then the priest from Kouméa goes back. On his way home, he stops at Pitah Pissiyèdè where he is given a drink by his colleague in the place. It is only after sharing this drink that the two young people who were put indoors at the eve are released, not forgetting that some elderly people are charged to give them ceremonial food in the morning.

On Monday the same priest of Kouméa continues his trip to Pitah, then to Piya Hodo where the same collection and sharing of foodstuff is done. Finally, on Wednesday this priest reaches Kétao, a canton on the border with the Republic of Benin, to give report of his journey and activities to the priest there. One must note that after the collection of foodstuff on Saturday at Piya, the same thing is done in the markets of other cantons where the market days are Sunday, (Kujuka), Monday (Hodo), Tuesday (Piya) and Wednesday (Cila)

This report marks the end of the ceremonies launching the festivals. Friday is a day of rest for both the priests and the general population. On Saturday the “Evala”

rituals start in the cantons of Kouméa and Pya, while the same rites start on Tuesday at Lassa and Lama.

The word “tchobiyé” comes from “Cobu” meaning to take quickly and by force the items sold by women in the markets. So the “Tchobiyé Ceremony” consists of taking by force anything sold by women in the markets that can be used for rituals at the beginning of the traditional rites. The “Tchobiyé” ceremony can last from the fifteenth of June to the fifteenth of July. Therefore, it takes four weeks to start “Evala” the first of the three puberty rites, after the first appearance of the priest in the market, as confirmed by Takou Palawiya, the chief and priest of Lassa Kandalao.

The Sunday marking the end of the rites in every canton is the day of another libation. The millet collected in the markets is used to prepare the local drink which will be used to thank the gods for allowing good festivals and also to purify or clean the sacred places from anything that would have been done against the tradition or the gods.

### **The Meaning of Puberty Rites**

Puberty or initiative rites play an important role among the Kabye as elsewhere in Africa. According to John Mbiti:

These personal rituals draw the attention of the initiate onto his becoming a unique person. They tell him and the world around him that he matters, that he is valuable, and that he is a member of the wider community. They also separate him from one status and introduce him into another. The new status brings new responsibilities and rights, and these are ritually handed over to him<sup>8</sup>

All these rituals aim at transforming the teenager or the adolescent boy or lady into adults capable of facing life in its various aspects. The young men after going

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<sup>8</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 2nd ed. (Portsmouth, UK: Heinemann, 1991), 67.

through the rituals of Evala and Kondona are ready to sit among the elders, take decisions concerning the community, defend it, found families, and care for them.

A further description of the Akpema rituals shows that it starts from infancy when at birth an agreement is done between the girl's family and that of a small boy through which the girl is promised to marry the boy when they become adults. The boy during his adolescent age will serve his future in-laws for three or five years. This service will consist of farming for the girl's family, providing them with some foodstuff which can comprise rice, yam or millet; by doing so he is paying the dowry. At the same time, even before the Akpema rituals, the young lady's family or other women in the society train and educate her according to the values of the entire community, preparing her to play well in her future role as a wife. Akpema is not only an initiation rite but also a sign that after the rituals, the young lady will be ready to marry the man she was meant for.

The importance of her role as a future wife is shown through the different stages of the rituals mentioned earlier in this work. The retreat or isolation period during which she is locked in a room shows that one day she, as a wife, will have to face some difficult situations alone and take decisions. This separation period starts on a Saturday in the month of August. After she has been shaved and made completely naked, the female members of the family tie around her waist and legs some black ropes covered with the skin of an animal killed for the occasion. At this point, parents are happy to see their daughters entering the hierarchy of life.

Following this, the young lady with her age mates must climb hilltops until they reach the sacred mountain at Lama- Sawoude where the last but most important ceremony takes place: the test of virginity. If the test proves the initiate to be a virgin, she is said to have kept the taboos of the community and her virginity for her future

husband. This is also an honor and respect for herself and her family. If not found a virgin, the young lady brings shame to her family and to the community; it is also believed that she faces the anger of gods.

A similar ceremony is performed among the Gans of the Greater Accra Region in Ghana where young ladies are forbidden to get pregnant before puberty rites are performed. Whether among the Kabye of Togo or Gans of Ghana “a young lady who becomes pregnant before the initiation ceremony has broken a taboo; it is considered as an offense and disaster could befall the whole society”<sup>9</sup>

Kabye parents are proud of these rituals. For example, a parent that gave the following testimony saying that a child does not choose his parents, neither his place of birth nor his ethnic group and culture; this dimension of life is formed without him. Therefore, as parents, we are proud to show him his roots; let him know he is mature and has to face the life before him.

### **Reunions and Festivities**

The traditional wrestling in the Kabye community is really a time of popular festivities or rejoicing, for it is an occasion on which all the sons and daughters of the community, even the migrants, come home. This period of festivities continues with Akpema, and sometimes with “Kondona,” at the end of a five-year period.

The Kabye are people who can organize big spectacles. During the “Evala” festivals, apart from the wrestlers in the arenas, one can see a lot of people playing all kinds of musical instruments including castanets and gongs. During this time men and women dance and sing the choruses of melodies sung by traditional musicians. These

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<sup>9</sup> Amposah Kwabena, *Topics on West African Traditional Religion for G.C.E.A. Level: Religious Studies, General Paper and African Studies*, vol. 1 (Accra, Ghana: Federation of European, 1977), 56.

songs are meant to mock or laugh at the opponents being defeated. The period of school vacation is a period of jubilation among the Kabye.

The rhythm of the music corresponds to the season and initiations. Evala music is different from that of Akpema, this last one differs completely from Kondona music and dance; that is why the visitors used to say that with the Kabye, rhythm is very important, for it has different meaning and understanding for the community and the initiates.

### **Changes in the Festivals and the Rites**

According to John Mbiti changes are rapidly taking place in Africa, and initiation rites are some of the areas of life most affected by modern changes. Two facts are responsible for these changes: the children at the age of initiation are at school, and some missionaries and government have attacked the practices.<sup>10</sup> These traditional practices include initiation rites and other customs. Considering the initiation rituals mentioned above, one can notice no change in the time of the festivals, they continue to take place at the same period of the year, July- August; and follow the same order; Evala, Akpema, and Kondona in the fifth year after Evala. But gradual changes took place in the rites themselves. These changes are important and need to be examined.

### **Changes in the Evala Rituals**

The changes in Evala are mostly seen in the meat eaten. Traditionally the young Kabye eats dog meat, and this is not a pleasure but a must. The dog, in reality, is a symbol for the Kabye “This animal represents on one side, faithfulness to its

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<sup>10</sup> John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 2nd ed. (Portsmouth, UK: Heinemann, 1989), 128.

master, on the other, it is a good housekeeper, always vigilant and watchful. Finally, this domestic animal has a strong desire to attack and overcome. Therefore, by eating dog meat, the young Kabye copies these qualities of the dog and practices them in daily life.”<sup>11</sup>

The month of initiations, July, is the period of an organized decimation of dogs. Before the starting of the rituals, the local priest descends from the mountain and symbolically sacrifices a dog. After this, every village chooses a day when hundreds of dogs are sold and killed. The flesh is eaten and the lard used as an ointment on the body before going to the arena. One wonders why they do not use any other animal. An expert in the tradition of the Kabye community Mr. Adjola gives the reasons: “Only a domestic animal can be sacrificed. No bush animal can be offered to spirits. The dog is particularly regulated because it is the animal used in initiating teenagers, and its consumption is forbidden for non-initiated men and women.”<sup>12</sup>

Today young people prefer eating either goat or sheep meat instead of the dog; the reason is that some simply don't like dog meat, others are not hundred percent natives of the land; their mothers are from other tribes where dog meat is not consumed, and lastly others are afraid of spirits that may end up possessing them. This changes the whole meaning of the ritual. First, the young Kabye who decides not to eat the dog meat shows disrespect to the tradition; he degrades the elders' institution. Second, the young man symbolically rejects the qualities of this animal. By doing so he shows himself not worthy to defend the community and protect his household. Those young men in the past were not considered as responsible members of the community, but today they are accepted because of Christianity.

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<sup>11</sup> Agbona, “Togo Les Evala : Entre Rites Initiatiques, Compétitions et Fête Culturelle,” 4.

<sup>12</sup> Magnim, “Akpéma Ou l'initiation de La Jeune Fille Kabyè.”



## Changes in Akpema

According to Masan Diane Siamevi, the Akpema ceremony, like most of the other African rituals, is an initiation ritual that has gone through several changes. The initiation itself is based on the young lady's virginity. It is even the ritual related to this virginity that is the last and most significant part of the whole ceremony."<sup>13</sup> The ceremony itself consists of a procession of young naked ladies with only pearls around the waist from a particular place of meeting to another one: some end their march in the main or ancestral 'house, others in the mountain where they are made to sit on a stone.

Today, the values have changed and the education of the Kabye young ladies is not as strict as it used to be, for their virginity is no more considered as an indispensable virtue or the non-virginity a sign of disgrace or dishonor for the young lady and her family. This phenomenon can be observed in all societies where more and more young ladies get prematurely pregnant due to early sexual life. Being pregnant before Akpema rituals are no more considered as breaking a taboo nor an offense to society. Therefore, this ritual can no more fulfill one of its principal objectives, the preservation of virginity and prevention of premature pregnancies. Thus virginity, recommended by both the Bible and tradition, has lost its value.

An important question one may consider is: What are the reasons for these changes? We observe a lot of changes around us today: the environments and peoples' needs have changed. Social transformation has become universal and touches all aspects of life. The African continent is going through a process of combining modern and traditional cultures.

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<sup>13</sup> Masan Diane, "Siamevi," in *Femmes de Nos Afriques, Rites de Passage de La Jeune Fille à La Femme ; De l'Afrique Traditionnelle à l'Afrique Moderne* (Libreville, Gabon: Lycée Blaise Pascal, 2011).

This conciliation is rather a transition from traditional culture to modern culture. The ethnologist Josephine Nkoghe talks about “incompatibility between scientific and rational culture and a culture of symbols and rituals.”<sup>14</sup> She declares that when the two meet, modern culture overtakes the traditional culture especially in the urban areas. Though tradition does not disappear completely, in the same way it cannot exist together with modernity.

In conclusion, modernization can, therefore, be cited as one important source of change in traditional rites. The urbanization and rural exodus are other causes for the changes in these ceremonies. For example, the village, precisely the mountain which is the most appropriate place where the most important Akpema ritual was held, has developed into an urban city. Such developments naturally displace ancient cultures that tended to preserve the morals of the people.

The church also plays an important role in bringing about changes: some Christian families consider the ancestral practices as a mystic; this is particularly the case of the sacred stone in the Akpema rituals. Most of Kabye parents today don't want their young daughters to partake in these ceremonies which go against their Christian beliefs. The fact nowadays is that sitting on a sacred stone is no more an obligation; the ceremony still takes place and only those who know they are virgins do sit on the sacred stone and bring pride and honor to their different families.

Another very important change in this Akpema rite is the abolition of the nakedness. Because of modernism and the church, most young ladies reject the idea

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<sup>14</sup> Karina Devautour, *Femmes de Nos Afriques, Rites de Passage de La Jeune Fille à La Femme ; De l'Afrique Traditionnelle à l'Afrique Moderne* (Libreville, Gabon: Lycée Blaise Pascal, 2011), accessed March 15, 2017, [https://femmesdenosafriques.webmodes.fr/partie-ii/l'Akpema%2cenpayskabyè au Togo](https://femmesdenosafriques.webmodes.fr/partie-ii/l'Akpema%2cenpayskabyè%20au%20Togo).

of being naked during the ceremonies. By this, some of these young ladies show their non-virginity.

As said earlier, only those who are virgins can sit on the sacred stone, but one may wonder what happens to the non-virgins sitting on the same stone. Here is the declaration of three chiefs: Telou, the chief of Yadé- Bohou, says that if the young lady is not virgin and sits on the stone, she will bleed through the sex. Other people, including the traditional priest of the same village, think she will be bitten by bees. In fact, there is a small sacred room through which the Akpema pass before getting to the stone.

Takou Palawiya mentioned earlier, says that a non-virgin cannot enter that room if she does the straw on the roof will sweep away the ashes on her head as she is coming out. Feou Michée, a Roman Catholic, chief of the village of Elimdè, declares that the non-virgin who attempts to enter is pushed out by an invisible power. If this happens, parents have to provide for the animals that the priests offer in sacrifice to appease the ancestors.

Lois Fuller, a Nigerian writer on Africa Traditional Religion says that because of the ancestor and ATR related nature of many puberty rites, often Christians do not want to participate. These Christians may be considered weak or childish. She continues by saying that because of modernization, initiation rites in many tribes are fading away, and if a Christian refuses to participate, with time he will be accepted by his people; even after having suffered rejection and disgrace for Christ.<sup>15</sup>

Lois also suggests that some negotiations with the community's elders should be done in order to organize substitute services for Christians. This is exactly what the

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<sup>15</sup> Lois Fuller, *A Missionary Handbook on African Traditional Religion*, 2nd ed. (Kaduna, Nigeria: Baraka Press, 2001), 95.

Roman Catholic Church has been doing for decades in the Kabye community. Apart from Evala, the rituals of Akpema and Kondona are done in a different way in the church. But how is it done in other Christian bodies and how does this affect the church among the Kabye? This section of the chapter will consider the Roman Catholic Church, the Protestant churches and the Seventh-day Adventist Church as case studies.

### **The Roman Catholic Church and the Puberty Rites**

Knowing that the puberty rite is deeply rooted in the blood, the spirit, and the heart of the Kabye community and its youth, the Roman Catholic Church decided not to advise its members to stay away from these rites, but to perform them in another way. Initiated by the late Catholic Priest Adjola Raphael and approved by the Vatican, as Jean Bat says, these rites were introduced into the church since 1960s. This did not please the traditional leaders who fought against the so-called Christianization of their rites; but in 1976 after being persecuted several times, Raphael won the battle and said: "Believe in Christ and you will win." Since then the rites became part of the church's practices. For example, on July 29, 2011, about hundred young girls were gathered in the cathedral of Kara for the initiation rite mass.

Traditionally this ritual takes place in the next two weeks after Evala in the same month. The church follows the same chronology. This mass is carried out at the same time in all the Catholic churches of the Kozah district. Three days before, the girls are brought together in retreat for prayers, devotions, instruction; there they receive training and advice for their future adult life. After this, the mass was celebrated in a joyful mood. The reason given for this is that the Catholic Church does not want to forbid or stop the traditional rites but to make them perfect; for the Lord

Himself says in Matthew 5: 17 that He did not come to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the Prophets but to complete and fulfill them. This sounds a misinterpretation and misapplication of the words of the Lord.

It is important to note that the views are different among fervent Catholics: some do not agree at all with this practice; while others appreciate it. The view of the clergymen is expressed by Marc Lakassi who says that it is the duty of the church to protect its members against idolatry. The traditional community and its priests see the church as interfering with their traditions and destroying their values. They fought a long battle against what is known as the Christianization of traditional rites; but because of the expansion of Christianity, this religious war is being lost by the African traditional community.

Knowing that performing initiation and puberty rites in the church is a subtle way of cutting man from his roots without frustration, we will turn to other Christian bodies, the Protestants to see what they do or believe should be done.

### **The Protestant and the Seventh-day Adventist Churches**

The only thing that one can say about the Protestant Churches in the Kabye community is that all of them are against this way of Christianizing the tradition. All other churches, that are Presbyterians, Assemblies of God, Methodists, Baptists and Evangelicals in the town recognize that it is not acceptable to bring traditions into the house of God. They consider what the Roman Catholics do as scandalous, but they don't have any solution.

In fact, these denominations themselves present some problems that can be mentioned as follows:

First, they are not capable of speaking against Roman Catholic practices. Second, they hardly convince their members about the dangers in these traditional rites. Third, some of their doctrines are avenues that can lead young men and ladies to seek protection from their ancestors. For example, if the dead ones are alive somewhere in heaven, they can protect the youth through these rites. These rites, in fact, build a bridge between the people and the invisible world of gods and ancestors that are considered by the Kabye to be his main protectors. Another example is that some of the Christians who are initiated eat the dog meat because in these Protestant denominations, the teaching is that everything, including every animal created by God is good and can be eaten, after having prayed over it.

Among the Protestant churches only the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been able to help the members understand, through its teachings, the spiritual dangers they will go through by taking part in these traditional rites. The first generation of Adventists, those of the years 1986 to 1995, had to struggle hard against these practices. In the church at Kara and Yadè – Bohou, a nearby village, seventy-five percent of the members were initiated against their will. With the new generation of Adventists in the community, things are becoming better; because year after year, there is more understanding on part of the families. But the fight must continue until the negative effects of these puberty rites on the church are banished completely.

### **Conclusion**

The Kabye community is well known by its puberty rites which started centuries ago. These rituals are changing quickly, as elsewhere in Africa due to the modernization of societies and urbanization. Some Christian bodies such as the Roman Catholic Church have accepted these rituals in their masses. Though it seems that there is no solution, the church must be aware of the negative physical, spiritual,

and numerical effects resulting from the traditional rituals and find appropriate solutions. This is the objective of the next section.

CHAPTER 4  
EFFECTS OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL FESTIVALS  
ON THE CHURCH

Everywhere in Africa, traditional festivals such as puberty rites, funeral rites, hunting, and harvest ceremonies are always guided by spirits. By so doing, they affect the individuals taking part in them. As a result, they affect the church and its members. This chapter will deal with the effects of the puberty rites and then consider the possible solutions.

**Effects of Traditional Festivals  
on the Church**

Generally, traditional festivals such as Ewala, Akpema and Kondona have negative effects on the church. These effects can be classified as follows:

1. The effects on the individual member
2. The effects on the Roman Catholic and other Protestant Churches, and
3. The effects on the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Concerning the individual member, there is a sort of community consciousness in Africa. According to the Bible, it is not good for a man to be alone, so a person must not live in isolation, hence the importance of community in every human society. This importance of community is stressed by Sindima when he says:



“We cannot understand persons; indeed we cannot have a personal identity without reference to other persons.”<sup>1</sup>

This sense of community is the first characteristic of traditional Africans so that Mbiti says that the strong sense of community is the greatest gift of Africa to the world. Commenting on the Akamba initiation rites in his book, *African Religions, and Philosophy*, he stipulates that

the dancing and rejoicing strengthens community solidarity, and emphasize the corporateness of the whole group. Making of offering and libation to the living- dead emphasizes and renews the link between human beings and the departed, between the visible and invisible worlds.<sup>2</sup>

The question is how does this strong sense of community affect the African believer, especially the Seventh-day Adventist? One knows in Africa that a person exists corporately as a member of the extended family and cannot do anything without being approved or disapproved by that family. What happens to the individual happens to the extended family. For Mbiti, the community consciousness is the cardinal point, for “I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am”<sup>3</sup> So the African convert, the Adventist, cannot decide to go against the practices of the traditional community because if he does that, he is rejected by his family and the community.

Davidson Razafiarivony, writing about experiences in Madagascar, makes it clear that none is allowed to break the rules of the community, and nonparticipation in traditional practices is not tolerated.

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<sup>1</sup> Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 64; Quoted in Kwabena Donkor, *The Church, Culture and Spirits: Adventism in Africa* (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2011), 42.

<sup>2</sup> Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion*, 120.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 108; Quoted in Donkor, *The Church, Culture and Spirits: Adventism in Africa*, 42.

If a member dares to go against the tradition, such a person would be rejected and would lose all the rights and prerogatives of the members of the circle. It is the fear of that rejection that brings concretization of the gospel message.<sup>4</sup>

This means that the Christian convert or the African Adventist is not free to decide not to take part in these communities' traditional practices. But taking part in the traditional practices makes them enter into contact with the spirits of the dead who are invoked during some of the rituals and other evil spirits by which they are later on possessed. Perhaps Paul was referring to something like that as happening in the traditional religion of Corinth when he stated in 1 Corinthians 10:20: "the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God and I do not want you to be participants with demons."

This explains the reason why sometimes most African Christians, especially the Christian converts in the Kabye community described by this paper, that is, those who went through these rituals, are often demon-possessed and create a lot of problems for the church leaders.

### **Effects on Roman Catholics: Syncretism**

We have seen earlier that some of these ceremonies such as Akpema and Kondona rites are taken from the local authorities and performed in a way in the Roman Catholic Church. The effect of this practice is termed by Karl Grebe and Wilfred Fon as the dilemma of syncretism. Syncretism, according to O'Donovon Jr., is a name given to a mixture of two or more religions.

The Bible says that the Israelites practiced what can safely be called syncretism today. "They worshipped the Lord, but they also appointed all sorts of

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<sup>4</sup> Davidson Razafiarivony, "Ancestors Worship in Madagascar: An Adventist Perspective," in *The Church, Culture and Spirits: Adventism in Africa*, ed. Kwabena Donkor (Hagerstown, MD: Review & Herald, 2011), 43.

their own people to officiate for them as priests in the shrines at the high places. They worshipped the Lord, but they also served their own gods in accordance with the customs of the nations from which they have been brought.” (2 Kings 17:32-33). Young Kabye have been brought out of their community by being converted into Christianity, but one can notice that they are still worshipping other gods as they go through the same traditional rituals taken from the local priests into the Roman Catholic Church.

The Israelites did the same thing and God’s punishment fell upon them in the form of captivity for seventy years (Jer.25:1-11). O’Donovan says “it is therefore very important for a Christian to have nothing to do with those rituals and practices which are associated with the traditional religious beliefs of his or her people.”<sup>5</sup>

### **Protestant Denominations**

The trend towards liberal theology in many older denominations in Africa has produced a way of thinking that what matters is what you believe, provided you are sincere to God. Because the new converts in these Christian bodies are not well taught the doctrines of the Bible, they don’t really know that the Lord God does not want to be worshipped together with other gods.

Syncretism also leads to the problem of dual allegiance. The initiates show their allegiance to God as Christians but at the same time through the rituals, they are put into contact with ancestral spirits. Sometimes, due to lack of Bible studies, the African converts don’t truly know who Jesus is and what he can do for them. They frequently turn to these spirits for protection, strength and wisdom to go through life

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<sup>5</sup> Wilbur O’Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster Press, 1995), 254.

successfully and be able to carry out their duties in the community and have their material needs provided.

Another problem generated by these rituals is the consumption of unclean animals such as dogs which are forbidden by the Bible. In Leviticus 13:45 the Lord gives the reason these animals must not be eaten: “You must be holy because I am holy.” For all other Christian bodies this is not a problem, but for the Seventh-day Adventist Church, it is against her health message that it received both from the Bible and through the vision that God gave to Ellen G. White on June 6, 1863. The initiates who do eat dog meat compulsorily have their health negatively affected.

### **Effects on the Seventh-day Adventist Church**

Considering the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Evala festival, and other puberty rites such as Kondona, the last stage of young men’s initiation and Akpema for young ladies constitute an important problem. The SDA Church does not allow its members to be partakers of those festivals, and many find it difficult to accept the teachings of this Church. Some people are either afraid of their parents or community’s reaction or want to be both in the church and continue to practice those traditional rites.

The problems Seventh-day Adventist Church has to deal with, apart from the health problem, can be classified into two categories. The first one is the period of the festivities where people have to travel from far and near for the celebration. They also have to buy animals such as dogs or sheep at an expensive amount, but most of the time they complain of not having money for tithes and offerings. This money used in traveling can be used to sponsor the Church activities in one’s local church.

Secondly, the wrestling and most of the initiation rites take place on Sabbath. Some members who come from other parts of the country do not even show up at the

church meetings. Non-Adventist parents often force their children to go to the arena or stay home and support their elder brothers or sisters. While the refusal of this instruction generates between parents and children; some, out of curiosity, go out on Sabbath afternoons to see what is happening in the arenas. This results in the low attendance to Sabbath worship and Sabbath afternoon programs. This situation used to last for almost one month.

It is true that because of modernism and religious freedom, some parents have stopped forcing their children to be initiated, but there are some who still are rejected because of their faith and decision not to go through these rituals. These young men and women become a burden for the church which has to pay school fees and provide for the needs of these outcasts of the community, even though it is for some time.

The third problem is the expansion of the Church. The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Kabye community is very slow in growth. Many are reluctant to adhere to the church because its teachings are based solely on the Word of God, and do not give room for associating with other gods. In the prefecture of Kozah, with Kara as the chief town, up to Mach 31, 2018, we have only two organized Churches and thirteen companies with a total number of three hundred and sixteen members. This statistical report given by the pastor in charge of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the district of Kara shows that the church is not growing at all, knowing that the first missionary got there in 1986. This can be summarized as geographical and numerical growth problems.

### **Possible Solutions**

How can the Church deal with the challenges mentioned above? Put differently, what are the possible solutions to the problems posed by the traditional festivals to the Church? To do this, we will explore what has been written down by

others especially and bring suggestions that will really help Seventh-day Adventist Church in the area, and in Togo as a country, within the West African region.

In many tribes and in the Kabye community, even though these initiation rites are passing away, the Christians who refuse to participate in these rituals are rejected for a while; hence the church must be prepared to give support as said above. Lois Fuller admonishes “the new Christian community to take action about training their young people in good sex education and family life preparation from a biblical point of view.” To her, the new convert must be sure that what he has gained through the Holy Spirit in his new birth is greater than what the traditional initiations offer.<sup>6</sup> The new Christian needs bible teachings to understand Christ and what he is capable of doing for him.

Some parents and even their children think that these traditional rituals do not conflict with the teachings of the Bible, or that the Word of God does not say anything about it. It is good to know that not all practices are mentioned in the Bible; for that reason, it is wise to consult several mature Christians to see the advice they will give after evaluating the practice. They can advise us to participate if there is nothing wrong with it; but after evaluation, if these elders do not encourage participation, it is better not to participate in it so as to avoid committing unconscious sins.<sup>7</sup>

The Seventh-day Adventist Church among the Kabye of North Togo can go through the following possible solutions or programs. First, the church leaders need to build a bridge between the church and the local communities. As Adventists leaders visit the local leaders and the native people, they will have opportunity to study the

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<sup>6</sup> Fuller, *A Missionary Handbook on African Traditional Religion*, 112,113.

<sup>7</sup> O'Donovan, *Biblical Christianity in African Perspective*, 255.

Bible and communicate the Gospel to them. When the traditional leaders understand and accept the gospel of Jesus, the church will also have the opportunity to explain to them why it is very important to let the young men and women give their lives to their Creator, God. In fact, some of the local priests, for example the one of Lassa Kandalao, have allowed their children the freedom to worship the true God.

Secondly, the members should be taught to believe in Jesus Christ, not only as their personal Savior but also as the one on whom they lean in every situation. It is only by teaching them the Bible that their faith in Jesus will grow. From day to day they will know Him and be saved, for, Jesus says: “And what is eternal life? It is knowing you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.” John 17:3 (NIV).

In teaching the Bible to the new converts and their parents, they must be taught the dangers they can go through in participating in the traditional rituals. The practice of Syncretism links the African converts with the living- dead and the spirits that dwell in the sacred places. For example, it was said earlier that during one of the Akpema rituals, an initiate gave the testimony that she felt that an invisible hand touched her as she was sitting on the sacred stone. Syncretism leads into spiritual bondage that will need to be broken by prayers. Christ should be raised above all powers as the only One capable of subduing all other spirits.

Some may say that there are sacrifices and rituals in the Bible. It is true that in the Old Testament there were sacrifices and rituals ordained by God for the forgiveness of sins. But Colossians 2:17 indicate that these rituals were a shadow of the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ. This death is our salvation and the source of the Christians’ power over evil spirits. Christians are supposed to take part in some rituals

that are very important to African converts as well: the first of these is water baptism, the symbol of regeneration in Christ (John 3:5 and Romans 6:1-10).

Another ritual that Christians are requested to participate in is the Lord's Supper. Jesus admonished His disciples that as they partake of the Lord's Supper, they remember his death on Calvary. This is repeated regularly to remember and announce Jesus' death until He comes back for the saints. This is the ritual the church should put emphasis on and encourage every member to participate in.

Other plans the church is putting in place are some projects that will involve both members and non-members. Working together with local people will create an opportunity to share the gospel and especially make the Church well known. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a youth organization that can be used to reach other youth. This youth can be useful in the following programs:

Communal labor which consists of choosing a place to be cleaned. They can do this in the AYS uniform to draw people's attention to the church. After attracting people to them the youth can organize sports and reading clubs, invite friends to youth activities and progressive classes. Communal labors open avenues to reach not only the local community but also the authorities of towns.

The same youth can organize hiking and excursion during which many other youths can be involved. These youth activities, when well organized, can attract non-Adventist youth and build a strong relationship between them and the Adventist Youth. They may finally be enrolled as Seventh-day Adventists, having well understood the Adventist philosophy of life and their beliefs. Youth centers in the church where AY activities are performed, where the church literature is accessible, can be good means to attract young men and ladies to the Adventist Church.



Ellen G. White says: “With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the world.”<sup>8</sup> So to be able to win the Kabye youth even before they go through the puberty rituals, the youth of the church must be given proper training and education in order to reach out to their peers.

One of the best ways to deal with the problems posed by the traditional rituals for the church is the construction of schools and clinics. The church in Togo has very few schools, and these schools are found only in the capital Lomé. The church in the district of Kara must try to put up schools. In these schools, the children will learn the Bible. As they grow up they will discover the person of Jesus, accept him as their personal Savior and thus have less attraction for traditional ceremonies.

### **Conclusion**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church has a lot to do in terms of preaching the special message that God has given her to proclaim to all creatures in the Kabye community. This is not progressing at all in the district of Kara where the first Adventist got to in 1986. This is due to the culture of the local community.

While some of the solutions for the spiritual, numerical, and geographical growth of the church are given above, it is also advisable to study well this particular community’s culture, mingle with them and find appropriate ways in reaching them without throwing the bathwater away with the baby.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education, Learning from the Master Teacher* (Boise, ID: Pacific Press, 1995), 169.

<sup>9</sup> Jim Harries, *Vulnerable Mission, Insight into Christian Mission to Africa from a Position of Vulnerability* (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2011), 219.

## CHAPTER 5

### SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### **Summary**

The last words that Jesus Christ left with his disciples and the church today are:

All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. So you must go and make disciples of all nations. Baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And you can be sure that I am always with you, to the very end of the age (Matthew 28:18-20. NIV).

It is good therefore to preach the gospel to every human being on earth including African traditional communities. It is also good to know that Africans have their own religious worldview, which is not always biblical. This knowledge of the African religious worldview will help the church, especially the Seventh-day Adventist Church to preach the gospel in the African context without diluting the message of God.

This work studied the Kabye community in North Togo with its puberty rites and the purification dance of Habye, a dance in which only wizards can take part. These rituals constitute a barrier to the expansion of the church. It is also about how the traditional rituals are performed by the local community and how they were appropriated by the Roman Catholic Church.

This work considered the deep social and spiritual meaning of these puberty rites as well as the changes they are going through in this twenty-first century. Finally,

the paper enumerated the effects of the traditional festivals on the church among the Kabye and some possible solutions were suggested.

These suggestions will help the religious leaders of all denominations, especially Adventist leaders in the area in order to fully preach the gospel and win souls for God's Kingdom. They must put emphasis on education and some projects to draw people's attention to the personality of Jesus Christ.

### **Conclusion**

Jim Harries says that the effects of living under the magical worldview of Africa are many, wide-ranging, and deeply penetrating into a society and its people.<sup>1</sup> This is probably the same way that this African worldview is penetrating some Christian denominations and affecting others negatively. Effective evangelism by Seventh-day Adventists among the Kabye traditional community must consider these effects and prepare to meet them effectively and build the faith of converts on the solid word of God and on Jesus Himself. There is no need to think that everything is well when an indigenous person is converted. There is a great need to nurture and encourage spiritual growth in God's church for such a person.

Discipleship programs for the spiritual nurture of the members need to be implemented and emphasized in the Adventist Churches in order to keep the new converts.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Harries, *Vulnerable Mission, Insight into Christian Mission to Africa from a Position of Vulnerability*, 208.

<sup>2</sup> Kelvin Okay Onongha, *Pentecostalism in Nigeria: Phenomenon, Prospects and Problems to Mainline Churches* (Ogun State, Nigeria: Babcock Consulting, 2011), 150.

## **Recommendations**

For the Adventist Church in the district of Kara to effectively fulfill the Great Commission following the puberty rites and traditional ceremonies considered in this study, the following are recommended:

1. A careful study of the traditional community should be done well before any further penetration.
2. The actual size of the district should be reduced or divided into two.
3. Any pastor sent into that district should try to build a good relationship with local and traditional chiefs and priests.
4. Contextualization of the Adventist Ministries is required without falling into syncretism.
5. All Adventist pastors working in the traditional communities need to be trained in the ministry of prayer and deliverance.
6. Messages about how to build confidence in Christ and how to live victorious Christian lives must be preached.
7. Pastors and elders should give particular care to the new converts; this includes visiting and encouraging them.
8. Discard cultural practices that are not in line with biblical faith.
9. Spiritual programs like prayer conferences, all night prayers should be organized.
10. The administration of the Seventh-day Adventist Conference in Togo must have a particular look in the district of Kara and give more help to the workers there.

## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A  
IMAGES OF INITIATION RITES

People are well known for their culture.



*Figure 1. Traditional Wrestling between Two Evala with a Chief as a Referee<sup>1</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> Dadja, *Les Rites d'Initiation Evala: Un Aspect Du Patrimoine Culturel En Pays Kabye*, ii.

Figure 2 shows two teams of evala in action.<sup>2</sup>



*Figure 2. Two Teams of Evala in Action*

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<sup>2</sup> Admin, "Evala," *Togo Tourisme*, last modified 2016, <https://www.togo-tourisme.com/culture/fetes-traditionnelles/evala>.



Figure 3 shows an Akpenu dressed up for the rituals.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 3. An Akpenu Dressed Up for the Rituals

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<sup>3</sup> Tingayama Mawo, "Togo: Akpéma ou initiation de la jeune fille vierge chez les Kabyés," *togocultures.com*, July 20, 2014, <http://togocultures.com/togo-akpema-ou-initiation-de-la-jeune-fille-vierge-chez-les-kabyes/>.



Figure 4 shows Akpema walking to the place of the ritual<sup>4</sup>



Figure 4. Akpema Marching toward the Place of the Ritual

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<sup>4</sup> Admin, "Rituals," *Togoone.Com*, <http://www.togoone.com/sitesit.html>.

Figure 5 shows the sacred stone where the Akpema sit.<sup>5</sup>



*Figure 5. Sacred Stone upon which the Akpema Sit at Lamasawoude*

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<sup>5</sup> Mawo, "Togo."

Figure 6 shows Akpema dancing tchimou after the rituals.<sup>6</sup>



*Figure 6. Akpema Dancing Tchimou after the Rituals*

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<sup>6</sup> Mawo, "Togo."



Figure 7 shows a kondo in his getup climbing the artificial mound to play his gong.<sup>7</sup>



*Figure 7. A Kondo in His Getup Climbing the Artificial mound to Play His Gong*

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<sup>7</sup> Kao, *Anthropologie de La Parenté Kabyè : La Valeur Archéologique de l'Intronisation Du Kondo*, i.

APPENDIX B  
CORRESPONDENCE



EGLISE  
ADVENTISTE  
DU SEPTIEME JOUR

FEDERATION DU  
TOGO

105, rue Kamé  
Quartier des Etoiles  
B.P. 1222 Lomé  
Tél. : (00228) 22 21 85 54 / 22 21 63 73  
Cel. : 91 04 96 16 / 91 55 76 55  
90 18 83 78  
E-mail : missiontogo@gmail.com

Lomé, le 25 Janvier 2018

**Au Pasteur LOKOU Maximin**  
**Chef de district de Lomé-Est 2**

**Objet : Permission**

Cher Pasteur,

Recevez nos salutations fraternelles en Christ !

Suite à votre lettre du 20 janvier 2018 portant demande d'une permission de 15 jours pour raison d'exigence académique, nous sommes heureux de vous faire part que l'administration de la Fédération du Togo vous accorde ladite permission de quinze (15) jours pour la période du 1<sup>er</sup> au 15 février afin de vous rendre à Kara pour effectuer vos recherches.

Que l'Éternel vous assiste et vous bénisse !

Secrétaire Exécutif FTG

**AGBEDIGUE Enyonam**



LETTER OF PERMISSION

TO

Pastor Maximin K. E. Lokou

Lomé Est II District

January 25, 2018

Subject: Request for permission

Dear Pastor,

Receive our greetings in the name of the Lord Jesus- Christ!

In response to your letter of 20<sup>th</sup> January 2018 requesting for permission of 15 days for academic reasons, we are honored to inform you that the administration of Togo Conference has granted you permission of fifteen (15) days covering the period of February 1<sup>st</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup>, 2018; this should allow you to travel to Kara for your researches.

May the Lord be with you and bless you.

Executive Secretary:

AGBEDIGUE Enyonam

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## VITA

### **Education**

Bachelor of Arts (BA) in Theology from Valley View University, Accra, Ghana; 2005

Bachelor of Arts in English Studies, Université du Benin, Lomé, TOGO; 1997

Baccalaureate, BAC II, Senior High School of Notsé, TOGO; 1992

BEPC (Junior High School Certificate), Junior High School of Notsé; 1986

CEPD (Elementary School Certificate), Elementary School of Kara; 1980

### **Professional Experience**

1997 -1999: Junior High School teacher

1997- 1999: TOGO Adventist Students' Association Leader.

1999-2001 "Gospel Outreach" workers at Fada N'Gourma, Burkina Faso

2005-2008: Associate Pastor.

2008- : District Pastor