



The Emergence of the African Church as an Early Expression of Edward Wilmot Blyden's Religious Philosophy: Case of the Gold Coast (Ghana)

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Abstract

Recently many studies have been conducted to examine Edward Wilmot Blyden's philosophy. Yet, these studies neglected the contributory role Blyden had on giving shape and substance to the religious wellbeing of the African. Blyden, through systematic tours in Sierra Leone, Nigeria and the Gold Coast, articulated a thorough understanding of the malicious impact of European Christianity and its derogatory role in picturing God in Western terms. He envisioned a future of religious excellence where the African religious world did not interject with his environment but found in everything African an asset to his future progress. The present study thus examines Blyden's religious philosophy and its impact on the emergence of the African Church in the Gold Coast. The study further concludes that Gold Coasters, like other West Africans, saw in Blyden's religious philosophy an outlet to form purely African churches. These churches imparted a metamorphosis change to how an African Christian conceived his religious world uncontaminated by Western influences and eager to resurrect African religious philosophy that had long been damaged by European presence.

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Introduction

The history of European contact with Africa and Africans is replete with many forces of change that made the life of Africans in a process of change. European presence did not evince through the mere economic exploitation of African riches, but also revealed through the systematic diffusion of European culture and the erosion of African culture. The whole process favored the alteration of all what was African and the adoption of all what was Western. In this respect, religion was not an exception. Europeans, greatly convinced of the role assigned on them as “civilizers”, embarked on a mission to let people of Africa and West Africa in particular know about Christianity. Alas for Africans the new religion did nothing but made people live in strict psychological conflicts as they could neither accept a religion that was completely alien to their environment nor forget about their old religious practices.

It was within this atmosphere that Edward Wilmot Blyden professed against European Christianity and called on all Africans to understand the need to create their own Christianity that was African in all its aspects. For Blyden, Africans' experience with European Christianity was a malign as they were never able to understand it. As Christians, Africans were forced to be Westernized and no attempts were made to enforce the relation of man with God. As a result, Blyden appealed on all Africans to form

purely African churches that would present a break with European Christianity and its negative effects. Fortunately, Blyden's appeals were not ignored. Right after the inception of colonial rule in Africa, many Africans and particularly Gold Coasters revolted against white supremacy in the churches and campaigned to make the new established churches purely African. This article contributes to the existing literature through a conceptualization of Blyden's religious philosophy as revealed in the activities of the emerging African Churches in the Gold Coast. Based on historical analysis methodology of describing, synthesizing, and interpreting, the article tries to describe existing literature about Blyden's philosophy and then link his thoughts into the emerging African Church of the Gold Coast as to reveal similarities and the major themes shared by the two. As such, the article does not cover Blyden's overall ideas especially those of the African personality and education and is only limited to his religious thoughts.

2. Christian Civilizing Missions

2.1 The Civilizing Mission

Before the Advance of Christianity and Christian missions into West Africa and particularly the Gold Coast, people knew African traditional religions. An amalgam of spiritual and supernatural beliefs that were believed to bring man into maturity and understanding of self and surrounding. This whole system of beliefs, however, underwent a complete change when Christianity and the Christian faith entered the region by the beginning of the fifteenth century. Indeed, the beginning of the

nineteenth century was an age of the “mission civilizatrice” (Adeleke, 1998,p.13). Mainly driven by social, economic, psychological and political motives, European nations had taken the lead to disperse civilization. This dispersion was grounded on humanitarian appeals to spread the West most “superior” and “developed” values to the more “primitive” and “backward” societies of the non-Western world (Adeleke,1998,p.13). The civilizing mission was thus defined by Butt (1973) as “a growing feeling that the peculiar style of society, culture, and thought being achieved by Westerners was somehow superior to that of peoples of the Old world of Asia and Africa”. Westerners saw it as a duty to “carry their civilization to the rest of the world, and, if need be, to impose it upon Others for their good as well for the good of the West”. It was generally believed to be a call from “God” or a “national destiny” to hold the responsibility and spread the knowledge, values and life style of the West for the elevation of non-Europeans of their status of ignorance and low-esteem. It was further seen by Europeans as a “reaction against the evils and inhumanities wrought by the new industrial urbanization and by the revival of slavery but also a growing confidence by the West in the superiority of its own Christian civilization” (p.485). These underlying beliefs had stirred up the mind and the hearts of European nations, with all sects of the population, to indorse their mission to civilize and bring an end to “barbarism” and “backwardness”. As a result, European presence in West Africa did not remain driven by economic motives. Rather, it became “a cultural

imposition and it used culture to buttress the political, economic and social superstructure which colonialism represented”(Boahen,1985,p.508).

2.2 *Christian Civilizing Missions in the Gold Coast*

The presence of Christianity and the Christian Missions was a Portuguese initiative (Mobley,1970). Henry the Navigator had been driven to the Gold Coast by the desire to spread the Christian faith. Along his commercial, political and scientific motives, he had been thoroughly endowed with the belief that his mission was “to make increase in the faith of ... Lord Jesus Christ and to bring to him all the souls that should be saved”. He glorified the missionary role of the Portuguese and their role as crusaders of the Christian faith which had almost been strengthened by the Papal Bull that set him against threats that might bring the “destruction and confusion of the Moors and the enemies of Christ, and for the exaltation of the Catholic faith” (Gomes,1896,p.53). By 1575, a renewed attempt to spread Christianity came with the Augustinians. The latter launched their first mission to the Coast in 1575. They settled in a village and assumed a complete education program to instruct children to read, write, sing and pray. They introduced Christian baptism, erected a huge cross and welcomed the newly baptized men and women to attend ceremonies. Another attempt by the French Capuchins followed soon. In the Western coastline, the Capuchins arrived at Assini by 1633. They faced many difficulties before they could secure peace terms with native inhabitants

who finally had shown their readiness to accept Christianity (Gomes, p.16).

Though Anglicans and Moravians did many attempts to spread Christianity during the eighteenth century, the beginning of the nineteenth century was a success for missionary activity. The Basel Evangelical Missionary Society began its activities in Accra in 1828. Four missionaries were sent after an invitation from the Danish government to help meet the increased need of preaching Christianity among the mulattos and white settlers of Christiansburg. The Basel Mission activity coincided with the Bremen missionary activity. The Brethren mission, a mission from North Germany, had set foot in the Gold Coast by 1847. Their mission centered on the Eastern part of the Gold Coast where the Ewes had settled. Under the leadership of Lorenz Wolf, the Bremen established a station there but shortly suffered from increasing rate of health problems, which caused his death shortly after. Moreover, The Wesleyan Missionary Society had led the introduction of Methodism. Their mission was highly supported by a "Bible Band" which gave a sound and a firm ground to their activity. Thomas Birch Freeman carried the work of the Wesleyan mission. His mission reached the inland territories where he planned to reach the Asante territory. Shortly after his arrival, his wife died. He never ceased to stop and he rather by 1838 built a chapel at the Cape Coast and was successful in getting more members to join his mission (Samwinin,2006). At Kumasi a number of converted Fantee Christians formed a

religious society where they, including some of the King's members, organized Christian ceremonies, and speeches on the Christian faith. A school was established at Kumasi. Moreover, the number of converts increased notably. The king's nephew converted to Christianity. He showed great effort to follow Christian teachings that he believed would supersede all African superstitious practices. He mastered reading and writing and started preaching among his people the essence of Christianity (East,1875).

2.3 The Last remnant of Native's System of Life

Missionary bodies sought the destruction of native culture. Missionaries considered traditional religions, art and music as "evil" and "satanic". Missionaries banned many forms of dance and training because they were regarded as "bulwark of Satan". For the missionary, "all dancing must lead to fornication" (Malinowski,1936). It was stated that everything associated with African culture was debasing and frightening and that the African should be distanced from all these influences. The process would alienate new converts from their environment and facilitate their indoctrination and character formation. By erasing native culture and customs and replacing them with Western values and norms, the missionary intended to establish a new world for the native different from his environment and intended to prepare natives for the eventual changes brought by Western economic and cultural presence.

Missionaries further forbade polygamy. For the missionary (as cited in Kimble,1963), polygamy was antithetical to the teaching of Christianity. It was further regarded as “neither a social necessity nor a matter for the individual conscience”. According to the 1885 synod, no man having more than one wife should be admitted as a member of our church , and it should be left with the superintendent minister to decide whether, on an investigation of the case, the wives of polygamists should be received into Church fellowship (p.157)

A woman could not adhere to be a member in the church if she married a man who already had a wife. Restrictions further widened to forbade any man or woman from marrying a heathen. The latter two measures were considered as “scriptural principles”. Matters further worsened with the 1893 Synod. It stated that new converts should adhere to Christian rite of marriage. Though many who had been already married using native laws were accepted to the church, newly couples were instructed to use English form of marriage before they could adhere to be church members. As regards the ones who used native laws, they were accepted “on the distinct understanding that they cannot pass beyond the trial stage until they confirm to the Christian rite” (Kimble,1963,p.157). According to Kimble, missionaries intended to bring a “change of life” for the new converts. Their attack on such “a social institution” was a means to suppress the old and made new converts sacrifice for the new. In all, the new Christian convert made to feel guilty about being part of a

system that seemed, by the introduction of Christianity, “evil” and encapsulated inherent inferiority. Consequently, many rejected polygamy and indorsed for the use of European form of marriage. Such a situation, however, brought much detriment to the ordinary Gold Coaster. There existed three types of marriage: Native marriage, marriage in the Church and the last category was introduced by the 1884 Marriage Ordinance. These types made nothing but distorted the old system of social conventions and made people unable to adopt the new neither to forget the old (Kimble,1963,p.160).

Within this prevailing atmosphere that favored the alteration of all what was African and the adoption of Western modes of life, Edward Wilmot Blyden began to question the essence of European Christianity and its basics that did nothing but enforced the inferiority of Africans and made them to believe that they could not stand alone as human beings unless they became Westernized. Indeed, Blyden’ revolts mushroomed in the creation of purely African Churches that shaped a new, much African, religious world.

3. Blyden: the Man and his Religious Philosophy

3.1 Early life

Edward Wilmot Blyden was born on 3 August 1832 in the West Indies in an Island known as Charlotte Amalie ((Lynch, 1967). Many scholars agreed that Blyden’s neighborhood of the Jewish families shaped his religious philosophy as he

thought that the Jewish experience resembled that of the Africans in matters of displacement and their pursuit freedom. Yet, Blyden's experience in America, believed to go there in the 1850's with the main objective of pursuing higher education, was one of disappointment and hope. His first stays in America disillusioned him as the man faced the disheartening fact that Africans were not equal to the white and the latter did not welcome their presence. Hope in the sense that Blyden decided to repatriate to Liberia in 1851 to finish studies there and live in a place where his intellectual and philosophical reflections could be disseminated among his African fellows. At Liberia, Blyden made notable achievements as scholar, politician and theologian though his overall stays in Liberia and other parts of West Africa were met with great opposition because of the great talent he showed as a scholar and his attack on European Christianity

3.2 Blyden's Religious Philosophy

During the 1860's, Blyden showed positive attitudes towards European Christianity. He compelled all his African peers living in the U.S.A. to return to Africa so that they could disperse Christian ideals and wipe out all forms of "backwardness" and "evils". This vision did not last for long especially when Blyden deepened his knowledge about African traditions and civilization. The 1870's, however, were years of great vigilance to the nature of

European Christianity introduced to Africans. Blyden's visits to North Africa and Syria in 1866 promulgated new perceptions about African education and Christian doctrine in general. Moreover, his contact with Liberian Muslims of the interior re-generated and pictured new realities about the detriment of the whole meaning and intent of Christian doctrine in Africa. Blyden met Muslims and was very inspired by the self-esteem and pride that the Muslims owned out of their religion. These travels set clear for Blyden that the fault of Christianity in Africa was caused by a false interpretation, and lack of methods of those who took the burden of Christianizing Africans.

For Blyden (1888), European behavior was completely antithetical to the teaching of the church. Blyden posited that negroes received menacing and harsh treatment from their educators. For, there was great "dissimilitude" and "disproportion" between what Negroes were taught as a God Christianity and the actual appliance of it by its followers. Accordingly, the Christian faith had been dispersed among Negroes with vehement intent to impose it brutally upon them. Blyden (1888) wrote : "The sword of the conqueror and the cries of the conquered have attended or preceded the introduction of this faith". He continued, it was "the triumph of Might over Right" that characterized European diffusion of Christianity into Africans (p.103). Blyden (as cited in Frenkel, 1974) recognized the interlocking nature of European Christianity and colonial or

imperial system of subjugation. He averred that European Christianity “was trying morally to disarm the African and to make him easy prey to the European”(p.68). In Europe, Blyden (as cited in Holden, 1966) continued these missionaries revealed zealous attempts to Christianize “poor benighted Africa”, but as soon as they got to Africa, the missionary “unhoes a sensible refrigeration. He losses all practical sympathy and all activity” (p.197).

Blyden’s approach to Islam at this point stood in marked contrast to European Christianity. For Blyden (1888), the disparity between Islam and Christianity was in conditions of propagation. He posited that the Negro was coerced to disciple Christianity in a manner that was acquiescent and servile. Where Christian Africans received Christianity by Europeans in a tone of dependent and submission. Muslims, on the other hand, acquired Islam “at home in state of freedom and independence of its teachers” (Blyden,1888). Blyden (1888) further explained that Christianity re-enforced the idea of black inferiority:

Christianity, on the other hand, came to the Negro as a slave, or at least as a subject race in a foreign land. Along with the Christian teaching, he and his children received lessons of their utter and permanent inferiority and subordination to their

instructors, to whom they stood in the relation of chattels (p.14)

According to Blyden (as cited in Conyers,1998), the African mind in the European eyes was a tabula rasa. It was a space where they could load European staff. In this respect, it became susceptible where “everything is to be destroyed, replaced by something new and foreign” (p.150).

Christianity precluded the African from standing as a “proper individual”. For Blyden, the Negro was never taught about his history and culture that constituted the essence of race development. Instead, he was exposed to a knowledge that did not fit his own socio-economic and cultural estate. Blyden (1876) melancholy posited that the African was never taught “to be himself”, but somebody else”. The African was endowed with the belief that to be good was to be a Whiteman:

From the lessons he everyday receives, the Negro unconsciously imbibes the conviction that to be great man he must be like the white men. He is not brought up – however he may desire it- to be the companion, the equal, the comrade of the white man, but his imitator, his ape, his parasite (p.563)

Blyden (as cited in Conyers,1998) further never doubted the role that European Christianity had on discarding the African of his own traditions. Blyden averred that

European Christianity had made the African materialistic-minded, with a “lost touch with the spirit world” (164). For Blyden (1908), the spirit world meant a holistic system that was largely communistic. African religions assisted on men, women and children to serve religion so that religion would guide the African to “morality and patriotism”. If this system was, “recklessly and indiscriminately interfered with”, Blyden continued, “the result is what we are witnessing everywhere in West Africa...dislocations, degeneracy death” (p.73). In contrast, the Negro Muslim was “a disciple, not an imitator”. For Blyden (1876), a Muslim Negro became Producer because of his correct education whereas the African Christian was never to go beyond “copyist” because of the ill-suited education imparted upon him. Blyden continued that Negro Muslims discipleship became innate in his character, while an imitator rested parasite. What was worse was that European Christian education terminated individual’s capacity, and let him become “merely sciolist”(p.563).

European Christianity concocted a racial image of God for the African. The European would have remolded Christianity to be religion of the oppressor, and not the oppressed (Frankel, 1976,p.700). In this respect, the image of God ostensibly became European. Blyden (1875) wrote:

No one can deny the great aesthetic and moral advantages which have accrued the Caucasian race from Christian art...but to all these exquisite representations exhibited only the physical characteristics of a foreign race; and while they tended to quicken the tastes and refine the sensibilities of that race, they had only a depressing influence upon the Negro, who felt that he had neither part nor lot, so far as his physical character was concerned... (p.608)

Accordingly, the African perceived God’s image merely in white man estate. The problem of the African thus generated from “a stifled independence based upon the psychological strait-jacket of seeing God portrayed as other than self” (Akbar,1979,p.54). For Blyden (1908), “the Christ we worship must be an African” (p.32). The correct image of God, for Blyden, embodied strengthening ties with African history and culture. It should boost the idea that God is an ally for the African for its cultural and intellectual regeneration and could not merely be circumscribed in color terms.

The creation of an independent African church was the only way to get out from Euro-Christian influences. Blyden compelled on Africans to create their own image of Christianity and mold Christianity to suit the African socio-cultural estate. He was definitely aware that the project would

drop off Euro-Christian influences and yield Africans to build Christianity of their own, financially independent and intellectually allegiant to the African race. Through a set of visits to West African colonies, believed to visit the Gold Coast twice in his life, Blyden persuaded many African intellectuals to pursue the call for creating purely African churches. Blyden's calls created a sense of consciousness of the need to recreate Christianity of their own devoid of Western influences. Indeed, the tide of Blydenic religious philosophy was so strong that people of West Africa and particularly the Gold Coast struggled to bring European Christianity and Christian teaching into severe criticism. The only cry remained for the creation of new church movements to resurrect the remnant of African traditional religious practices.

In Nigeria, the United Native African Church seceded from the Anglican Church in 1891. Its adherents called for equality with the whites and their right to be treated as humans. In one of its meetings, its adherents called on behalf of all Africans of the need to create purely African churches. In the same manner as Blyden, one (as cited in Oke, 1936) told members that:

this meeting in humble dependence upon the Almighty God, is of the opinion that Africa is to be evangelized; and that the foreign agencies at work at the present moment, taking into consideration climatic and other influences cannot grasp the

situation, resolved that a purely Native African Church be founded for the Evangelization and Amelioration of the African race to be governed by Africans (p.71)

Moreover, in Sierra Leone, Blyden's influence was much bigger. Orishatukeh Faduma, a Western educated elite, led many attempts to disperse Blydenic thoughts and was convinced that Africans could rid themselves out of European Christianity only if they build their own Christianity. Like Blyden, Faduma (as cited in Meberbeche,2010) opined that missionary presence was debasing and that it was a force to "make men content to be made tools for the destruction of others...parasites, incapable of ameliorating their own unfavorable environments and those of their neighbors, incapable of working out the salvation of their race, and resigned to an invisible and invincible fate" (p.139). In 1888, Faduma became an active member in both A.M.E Church in Sierra Leone and the African Methodist Episcopal Church Review. Abayomi Cole was another Sierra Leonean who sought Blyden's ideas as a solution to the distorted manhood of the African. He established the Muslim-Christian Association in 1889. The main aim of the association was to create a place where Africans and Muslims could meet to discuss current issues and produce correct images about African traditional religions and Islam. In one of the Association's

meetings, many praised the work done by Blyden in giving a correct picture of European Christianity and letting people know about its defects. Blyden's influence was so strong that not only Nigerians or Sierra Leoneans were ready to follow. Indeed, the Gold Coast became the hub of Blydenic religious philosophy right from the inception of British colonial rule.

4. Blyden's Religious Philosophy and the Emergence of Purely African Churches in the Gold Coast

The Gold Coast (now Ghana) is located in West Africa. It is bordered by the Gulf of Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean in the south, Burkina Faso in the north, Togo in the east and the Ivory Coast in the west. During the fourteenth century, it became at the hub of European activity. Mainly as a result of the Renaissance and greatly motivated to grasp at African riches, the Portuguese, the French, the Spanish and the Dutch made many attempts to circumnavigate the coast of Africa as to find a sea route to India. Nevertheless, their expeditions resulted in the discovery of the west Coast and thus introducing people of West Africa and the Gold Coast to the early stirrings of European economic, political and cultural presence. Though European powers raced to build permanent settlements in the Gold Coast, it was only the English who could be said to have succeeded in moving from mere trade relations into formal colonialism by 1874.

During this period, philanthropic movements started a campaign in the Gold Coast as well as in other parts of West Africa to end the slave trade and introduce Africans through Christianity into western civilization and modernity. Through the establishment of Churches and schools, the missionary began a systematic process destruction of African religious beliefs and practices and the creation of western Christian beliefs and practices. These all made the Gold Coaster in a state of devastation as he could not understand the new religion nor forget about old beliefs and practices.

Right from the introduction of European Christianity into the Gold Coast society, it was severely criticized by the bulk of the educated community. Similar to Blyden, their criticism was grounded on two main tenets. The first was that European Christianity did not help make a tie between the African and his environment. All what missionaries did was the creation of God different to what people expected. The second reason owes to the first and propounded that the only solution to the problem was the creation of a purely African Church that would offer Africans a place where they could create Christianity of their own. The Church would further help them escape white abuses in the Churches, which found pace with the enforcement of laws issued in the 1885 and 1893 synods. The latter restrictions widened the gap between

Christian natives and missionaries who began to see the existence of European Christianity as detrimental to their growth and progress.

Missionaries did not understand the existence of the African system of life. Like Blyden, many blamed missionaries of their blatant attempts to prove that “everything African is necessarily evil, and must, therefore, be replaced with indecent haste” (Mobley, 1970). New converts had developed a feeling that everything associated with their customs, especially forms of celebration, were all-evil. In describing the harmful situation of the Christian Negro, Attoh Ahuma averred, “there was something peculiarly “delvish” about the celebrations...it would be awfully disgraceful and paganism for a Christian family to join in it” (Ahuma, 1911). In the same manner, Sarbah (1906) described the apparent failure of missionaries. He espoused to tell missionaries that their mission in Africa would never reach its goals. He wrote:

At one time...they expressed the hope that in the course of a few years they would be able to bring thousands of the inhabitants into the habits of changing their own for European dresses...this hope ...has not been realized nor is it likely to be for many a long day (p.237)

Similar to Sarbah, Hayford (1911) described missionary activities as nothing but “ignorance” which stems from the fact

that they overwhelmed themselves with a mission “which scoffs at what it does not understand” (p.19). Missionaries had never tried to think of African peculiarities. Indeed, their activities centered on how to supersede them: “yet what a different state of things would prevail if the missionary had first studied the Religious system of the Native before trying to impose it, or, which is worse, before introducing new one”, opined Hayford (1903). Missionaries obstructive and detrimental Christianity did not understand any other system but their own which resulted in, as stated by Blyden, the creation a Christian Negro dissatisfied with his own state and always longing to find the real image of God that had long been distorted by missionaries.

Identical to Blyden’s view, many propounded that European-Christianity portrayed God in European terms. The Christian native saw God in European dress, style and patterns of behavior. Many doubted the truth behind a Christianity which “denationalized” its followers and made them blindly discard their own origins. In “Nzima Land”, Nana Annor Adjaye (1931) questioned the whole system of Christianity introduced to natives. According to Adjaye (1931), “there is a Church here which believes in the playing of drums to the glory of God. But they have selected European drums in preference to African drums. Is God a European?” (p.98). Hayford also shared Blyden’s view and openly asked why the

African Christian was forcefully made to mimic European system of life. He saw no reason why the African should participate in this “denationalization” process and became mere follower of European unreasonable tactics. In his masterpiece, the Gold Coast Native Institution (1903), he questioned:

Why, for example, should not the native convert sing his own native songs, and play his native airs in church? Why should he not attune his horns, his adziwa, his gomey, or for that matter, his adankum, to the praise of God, much as the Israelites of old praised Jehovah upon the cymbal and the harp? Why, in the name of reason and common sense, should the native bear his own name and wear his own native garments? Why, indeed, except that the simple missionary has, from the beginning, ruled that all these things are against the letter, if not the spirit, of the Gospel? (p.105)

Accordingly, a true Christianity was the one that enhanced Christian converts' relation to their own institutions. A process that would make native Christians receive a religion that was in conformity with their own system of life. A religion that dictated to all new converts that true Christianity was a matter of attachment to origins not mere mimic of a foreign institutions. As hoped by Ahuma (1905), Christianity that would infringe “a national religion and an embarrassing success” (p.257).

As stated by Blyden, many saw the attitudes of missionaries as antithetical to God' Christianity. The missionaries were “self-righteous” which altered any successful attempts to present a true Christianity as professed by “Almighty God”. The time when the missionary thought he served God in Africa, “he has pursued his dubious course, dealing death on every hand, and all the while, lying the flattering unction to his soul that he is doing God service” (Ahuma,1905,p.257). To remedy the delinquencies of European Christianity, Ahuma (1905) proposed the essence of a true mission for the missionary. He saw the missionary as the Guardian of God's message and thus should “put fresh meanings, breathe new life and energy into existing laws, prophecies and institutions of all nations” (p.258). Similar to Blyden's view, the missionary should not take the role of conqueror who forcefully destroy, eradicate and make possible destruction of existing systems. Instead, the missionary ought before embarking on systematic supplanting of native institutions should return back to “Almighty God” message and be the savor of peoples' origins. According to Ahuma (1905),

The first role of every man who assumes the role of a Christian teacher should at all times and in all places be founded upon the characteristics announcement of the Master: “Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets; I am not

come to destroy but to fulfill ...” Not the destruction but completion (p.258)

The sole role of the missionary rested on killing pre-assumed ideas about the “evilness” and “backwardness” of everything African and find “goodness in things evil” which no one except the missionary who could “servingly distil it out”(p.258).

The creation of a purely African Church, thus, became the cry of the time. Many African ministers favored to leave the church as a response to white abuses. The immediate reaction by the African ministers was the foundation of a new Reference Group. The group consisted mainly of members of African educated elite who were a production of both the Methodist and Castle schools, with some other members who had the opportunity to study in England (Brunett, 1997). The members believed that Africans should receive Christianity in an African outlook. Consequently, they indorsed for the translation of the Bible into Fante, and were eager to let Africans understand Christianity using their own languages. Among the members who made notable contribution to the expression of an independent African church were Attoh Ahuma and Egyir Assaam. In 1888, the two men, after returning from England where they studied at Richmond College, changed their names from William F.Penny and S.R.B. Solomon to Attoh Ahuma and Egyir

Assaam respectively (Brunett, 1997). This action marked a new form of thinking that prevailed upon Gold Coasters of the necessity of dropping out European influences and fashioning new forms of life that was African in character. Indeed, the new initiative looked for an African uncontaminated by European influences and was in all its circumstances “the unspoiled son of the tropics, nursed in a tropical atmosphere, favorable to the growth of national life, he it is who may show us the way”(Hayford,1911)

Early revolts against white supremacy in the churches mushroomed in the foundation of the African Methodist Episcopal Zionist Church in 1890’s. Egyir Assaam was appointed as the representative of the A.M.E.Z.C, after he had resigned from the Methodist Church. By 1898, Rev, T.B. Freeman, with a mission to help finance Gold Coast African churches, established an A.M.E. Zion church at Keta. In its inaugural meeting at the Cape Coast, the Rev. Freeman shared Blyden’s view and propounded that the A.M.E. Zion Church objective was to get Africans back to their origins. He (as cited in Brunnet,1997) wrote,

The Church is composed of Africans and entirely governed and worked by Africans. It is indeed bone of our bones and flesh of our flesh which would naturally take a much greater interest in their missions in their motherland than can be possible (sic)

with Missionary Boards and missionaries of an alien race who are not above the color question (p.66)

In the same manner, Egyir Assam told Gold Coasters about the promising future of the newly established church. He (as cited in Brunnet,1997) wrote in the Gold Coast Aborigine:

It is indeed, an entirely Negro Church; organized by Negroes for Negroes, manned, governed, controlled and supported by Negro energy, intellect, liberality and contributions. In fact, it is the sentiment of the church, that however great may be the friendship, intellect or interest of any white man, in the well-being, Christianization and enlightenment of the Negro race be he European, American or Asiatic, he cannot successfully reach the emotional feelings of the masses of our People(p.66-67)

The Church sent many of its members to be trained in the U.S, AME Zion Churches. Among these boys was Emmanuel Kwegyir Aggrey who arguably was among the greatest nationalists of the twentieth century Gold Coast and the one who helped found the Achimota College later years. Frank Arthur who was an instructor at Collegiate School was sent to the U.S.A where he was trained by the A.M.E. Zion Church. After he returned to the Gold Coast, he changed his name to Frank Ata Osam Pinanko and was able to help found by 1903 the A.M.E. Zion Church School

and church. Soon similar branches were opened at Twifu (1906), Winneba (1908), Accra (1908) and Kumasi (1912).

Under the leadership of Rev. Christian Hayford another group that took nationalistic frame ceded from the Methodist church to form its own congregation. Hayford, a Baptist originally from Lagos, Nigeria, through his contact with Edward Wilmot Blyden at Lagos was supportive to the idea of creating a purely African Church. His zeal to achieve this project led him to form the Native Baptist Church in the Cape Coast. Right from its foundation, the church influenced many people and was able to deep into the interior to reach far more than Atebubu, a city in the North of the Gold Coast. His movement further made many attempts to contact other separatist groups in West Africa for their cooperation and support. As its driving objectives were nationalistic, the church sought for native cooperation, their immediate gathering for self-empowerment and a long for independence.

The Nigritian Church was another articulation for Africans attempts to form their own Christianity. Unable to bear white abuses in the Methodist Church, a number of 40 Anomabo dissidents decided to form their own independent Church. Their grievance mushroomed when the Methodist missionaries refused to let them incorporate some Fante forms of dancing to

the church bands. Tension amounted when the church also refused to let bury or having any permission to bury dissidents in the Methodist Cemetery. The church name derived from the word “Negro” which utterly let the church activities to be centered on giving birth to African religious beliefs, and a mounting zeal to use African languages, mainly Fante, as the only medium for religious practices. The Church attempted to form its own African character and thus appointed Rev. J.B. Anaman to help support its main scheme by 1907. Anaman emphasized the role of new body and affirmed that “Every part of the services in this church is in Mfantasi...pure and simple” (as cited in Helen & Jemima, 2011, p.82)

5. Conclusion

The study examined Blyden’s religious philosophy and its impact on the emergence of the African Church in the Gold Coast (Ghana). The study exposed Blydenic religious philosophy and tried to address how the man gave through understanding of the religious world of the African. Through discussing the introduction of Christianity and Christian missions into the Gold Coast, the study provided an insight into missionary groups and their attempts to create a “Westernized world” for the African through supplanting and if possible erasing all forms African life. The findings revealed that Blyden’s religious philosophy had great impact on

people of West Africa at the time. West Africans in general fashioned a culture of protest against the systematic attempts by Christian missions to “de-nationalize” African life. Like Blyden, they contended that God must be African and all religious practices should be African too.

The findings further showed how Gold Coasters were avid followers to Blyden’s religious philosophy. Many disdained the apparent repulsive and dehumanizing nature of European Christianity. Similar to Blyden, these intellectuals, most notable were Hayford and Ahuma, propounded that missionaries’ lack of understanding of the African world led them to introduce a religion different to their environment. A religion that alienated Africans and made them struggle to identify with a strange world that only reinforced their disillusionment. To remedy the delinquencies of European Christianity, many groups appeared to call for the creation of purely African Church. As revealed by Blyden, Gold Coasters saw these Churches as mediums to teach their fellow Africans purely African Christianity. These Churches became an outlet to address religious and socio-cultural issues pertaining to the African world, produced by Africans, and addressed to Africans. Indeed, this examination revealed the great impact Blyden's philosophy had on the time and would open further investigations on the topic as Blyden's impact could not be

restricted to colonial Africa, but could extend to summon post-colonial Africa too.

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