

Oral Theology in the African Church: An Examination of the Divine Attributes in the Song *Yehowa* by Suzzy and Matt

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Abstract

Orality is one of the key means of expressing ideas in most African traditional societies. For this reason, the development and promotion of oral theology are crucial for the promotion of the Christian faith in Africa. The use of oral theology is one of the key factors that make Christianity thrive in an oral community because it facilitates the contextualization of the Christian message and makes it relevant and meaningful to the receptor community. As a contribution to the development and promotion of this emerging field of theology, this study explores key divine attributes embedded in the song *Yehowa* which was composed by a Ghanaian duo, Suzzy and Matt. The article used a literature-based research approach to gather data on the subject. The methodology for the study comprises of a

critical socio-cultural study of the lyrics based on the African worldview. In the process, a biblical-theological analysis was conducted to critique the insights gained from the socio-cultural analysis. In the end, the study offers theological-missiological reflections for Africa based on the exposition of the lyrics of the song. The article argues that though symbolic and oral theologies are legitimate theologies, they must always be scrutinized in the light of Scripture to avoid syncretism. The article contributes to African Christian theology by providing a framework within which oral theology may be espoused and promoted in Africa.

Conspectus

Keywords

Africa, oral theology, immanence, YHWH

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Bible-based. Christ-centred. Spirit-led.

1. Introduction

The belief in the Supreme Being who created the universe is found in almost every African society. The Supreme Being is self-existent and, being the source of life, has existed since the eternal past. In the African worldview, the existence of God is self-evident even to a child. The pervasiveness of the concept of God among Africans is underlined by the Bono-Twi (Akan) saying *Bi nkyerε abɔfra Nyame* (No one points out God to the child). Africans had a concept of God long before the arrival of Christian missionaries on the continent for the (re)introduction of the Christian faith (Mbiti 1991, 45–47). Mbiti (1991, 46–47) attributes the possible ways by which Africans grew in their understanding of God to the following. Firstly, Africans believed in God through their personal reflections on the complexity of nature. Secondly, human limitations made Africans perceive a higher and greater Being who is free from limitations. Thirdly, Africans might have expressed belief in God through their observation of heavenly forces. African traditional ideas about God prepared the ground for early missionary activities.

Most Africans rely on oral tradition to transfer information from one generation to the other. Africans have no sacred texts in written form. African beliefs about God are preserved in proverbs, short statements, stories, religious rituals, prayers, songs, and myths. For this reason, the prospects of Christianity in Africa could be enhanced by the development and promotion of oral theology. Oral theology—that is, reflections about God using such oral means as songs, prayers, stories, and other oral forms—is crucial in the development of Christianity in Africa because of the oral nature of most African societies. It is an applied and context-based theology that addresses the most pertinent questions about life in the receptor culture through oral traditions (Naudé 1996, 23). This kind of

theology is not documented but stored in memory and expressed through various oral means, unlike Western systematic theology which is stored in books and kept on the shelves of libraries.

According to Pobee (1989, 89), “It is often asserted that churches in Africa have no theology. When one probes what is meant by this remark the response is that they have not produced theological treatises and tomes, systematically worked out in volumes which stand on the shelves of libraries. But it is not exactly true.” Pobee’s assertion can be well appreciated when one considers how Western missionaries who visited Africa prior to the twentieth century thought about Africa and Africans. They considered Africans to be people of no religion; the African mind was considered as a *tabula rasa*, an empty space that had to be filled (Hastings 1967, 60). The absence of written texts about African primal religion at the time of the arrival of the missionaries was the main reason for the *tabula rasa* perspective on Africans. But another reason is that African indigenous preachers did not at first document their sermons, interpretations of Scripture, and thoughts about God. Pobee (1989, 89) continues by saying, “Sermons are being preached every Sunday, which are not subsequently printed. Such sermons are the articulations of the faith in response to particular hopes and fears of peoples of Africa.” The fact that these sermons are not printed does not mean that they are not theological formulations. Pobee (1989, 89) insists, “They are legitimately called Theology, Oral Theology. This oral theology and oral history may be said to be the stream in which the vitality of the people of faith in Africa, illiterate and literate, is mediated. As such the material cannot be ignored.”

Music is one of the many means of expressing theological ideas orally. For Saint Augustine, cited in Wells (2019, 143), “the one who sings prays twice.” Augustine reasons this way because the lyrics of a Christian hymn/song are prayers, and when they are sung, they are given

an additional level of honor and adoration in the form of prayer. In fact, music can reach where words do not. Music becomes the soul's language when prosaic words are not sufficient for the task. It is, therefore, not surprising that Augustine, cited in Comstock and Metcalf (2008, 2), says, "He who sings, prays twice."

As a way of contextualizing Christianity in Africa, there is a need to explore what contributions oral theology can make to theological discourses in Africa. Yet, not many African songs have been explored from the theological perspective, though many of the lyrics have been documented and are used by churches in many African societies. There is, therefore, a lack of theological exposition on African Christian indigenous songs/hymns. This study fills the literature gap by exploring key divine attributes that are embedded in the song *Yehowa*, and reflects on these attributes from African and biblical perspectives and then offers a theological-missiological reflection on what was found.

With this brief introduction, the article proceeds to examine the lyrics of the song in question.

2. Lyrics of the Song

The song *Yehowa* was composed by a Ghanaian duo, Suzzy and Matt, who started composing songs at an early age. From their childhood, they lived with a Ghanaian pastor, Reverend Yaw Owusu Ansah (their godfather) in the Greater Accra Region of Ghana. They composed many other beloved songs apart from *Yehowa*. What follows are the lyrics of the song under consideration. The Akan version is translated into English to make it accessible to non-Akan readers.

<p><i>Tete Kwaframo</i> <i>Nyankopɔn no,</i> <i>ɔte ase ampa ara</i> <i>ahene mu Hene ei, Dɔmbarima</i> <i>Nyankopɔn ei</i> <i>Kantamanto, Agya ei, Agya ei</i> <i>Wone nea wone, na wote ampa ei</i> <i>ei</i> <i>Anyame mu nyinaa ara Nyame ne</i> <i>wo</i> <i>Okokroko, Ahuntahunu, Yuda mu</i> <i>gyata</i> <i>Wo na woka a ɛba mu oo</i> <i>Wohye nso a ɛgyina oo</i> <i>Okasa prɛko, Nyame ne no,</i></p> <p><i>Ayɛbiafo, Opunpuni Nyame ei</i> <i>Tweduapɔn, Onyame a yɛtwere</i> <i>no a yɛmmpa nhwe da.</i> <i>Wo din ne Yehowa; Wo din ne</i> <i>Yehowa Rapha aa, Shakana,</i> <i>Tsidkenu, El Shaddai</i> <i>Tweduapɔn Nyame ne no.</i> <i>Jehovah Adonai, Ade nyinaa so</i> <i>Tumfoɔ ei;</i></p>	<p>The Ancient living God truly lives King of Kings, Lord of hosts Father, the covenant keeper Indeed, you are who you are and you really live You are God of gods The greatest, all knowing, Lion of Judah Whatever you say comes to pass, and your commands are kept The God that speaks and no one challenges, The Creator, the wonderful God The reliable God, when we lean on you we will never fall Your name is Jehovah. You are <i>Jehovah Rapha, Shekinah,</i> <i>Tsidkenu, El Shaddai;</i> You are the Dependable God Jehovah Adonai. The one who has power over all things</p>
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<p><i>Elohim, El Ola</i> <i>Wo na Wote ase daa daa ... ei.</i></p> <p><i>Yehowa ei, Wo mma yema wo so</i></p> <p><i>Yehowa ei, Awurade ei, Wo mma yema wo so</i> <i>Mese, Tete Kwaframo</i> <i>Nyankopɔn,</i> <i>Nyankopɔn no, ɔte ase ampa ara</i> <i>Ahene mu Hene, Ɔkatakylie,</i> <i>Okokroko</i> <i>Onyame a ɔkasa ma ade nyinaa</i> <i>yɛ dinn wae</i> <i>Ɔno na ɔkasa ma epo ne asorɔkye</i> <i>tae dinn</i> <i>Onyame bɛn nnie, Onyame bɛn nnie</i> <i>Yuda mu gyata no ei, ɔma Nipa</i> <i>so firi atekye mu na ɔde no asi</i> <i>ɔbotan so, na W'asiesie no wate</i> <i>Ɔma bonini wo nta wate, ɔma deɔ</i> <i>onni bie nya bie</i></p> <p><i>Na mese, Ne ho yehu oo</i> <i>Enti mo mma yɛnkoto no oo</i> <i>Enti momma yɛn mpagyapagya</i> <i>no wae</i></p>	<p><i>Elohim El Olam</i> You are the one who lives forever and ever.</p> <p>Jehovah God, your children exalt you.</p> <p>Jehovah, Lord, your children exalt you.</p> <p>The Ancient Living God,</p> <p>The Ancient living God truly lives King of Kings, the Brave one, the Majestic.</p> <p>At your word there is peace/ silence</p> <p>He speaks and the storm on the sea becomes still.</p> <p>What kind of God is that?</p> <p>Lion of Judah, who lifts man from mud and places him on a rock, and makes him better.</p> <p>He makes the barren give birth to twins and he makes the poor wealthy</p> <p>He is wonderful.</p> <p>Let us bow down to him.</p> <p>Let us exalt him.</p>
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<p><i>Enti momma yɛnsɔre no oo</i> <i>Mese ɔyɛ Onyame, mese N'akyi ne N'anim,</i> <i>Nyame biara nnɪ hɔ wate</i> <i>Obiara nni hɔ a ɔne no sɛ wate</i> <i>Ɔyɛ kokroko, Ɔyɛ Ahenfo mu</i> <i>Hene</i> <i>Mese Ahenfo Yesu na ɔreba no oo</i></p> <p><i>Mese momma yemma no so oo</i> <i>Yɛkotokoto Wo oo, Na mese</i> <i>yɛkrɔn wo oo</i> <i>Awurade ei, me Nyankopɔn ei,</i> <i>bɛgye W'ayɛyie dwom wae, bɛgye</i> <i>wo nnase dwom wae.</i> <i>Womma, yɛredanedane Wo wae</i> <i>Mese yɛkotokoto wo oo, mese</i> <i>yema Wo so ara</i> <i>Yehowa ei, Wo mma yɛ ma wo so</i> <i>oo</i> <i>Yehowa ee, Awurade ee, Wo</i> <i>mma, yɛ ma wo so oo</i> <i>(Yehowa, Yehowa Yehowa, Wo</i> <i>din yɛ kɛse)</i></p>	<p>Let us worship him. He is God. There is none before him and after him</p> <p>There is none like him. He is great, he is the King of Kings Jesus, the King of Kings is coming Let's exalt him. We bow down to you and extol you. My Lord, my God receive your praise and thanksgiving songs</p> <p>Your children honor you We bow down and exalt you</p> <p>Jehovah, your children exalt you.</p> <p>Jehovah God, your children exalt you (Jehovah, Jehovah, Jehovah, your name is great)</p>
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3. Key Theological Themes

3.1 *The eternity of God*

The song begins by referring to God as *Tetekwaframo* *Nyankopɔn no*. The word *tete* means ancient, as in, eternal past, or before the universe began. The expression *kwaframo* might have come from *nkwa* (life) and *farebae* (source), meaning source of life. Christaller, cited in Danquah (1968, 206), holds that it comes from *ntetekoraframo* which means “does-not-tear, preserve, mix, helper,” while Dankwa (1968, 206) believes it means “he endures forever.” Asare’s (1978, 15) view is that *Tetekwaframo* means “he who is there now as from ancient times,” which is the view adopted in this article. *Tetekwaframo* is similar to *Tetentrede* (since ancient times).

The noun *Nyankopɔn* has been explained differently. One school of thought is that *Nyankopɔn* derives from the expression *nyanko a ɔpɔn*—*nyanko* being the Fante word for friend (or neighbor, or acquaintance) and *ɔpɔn* meaning the great one. From this perspective, *Nyankopɔn* means the Great Friend. This view emphasizes the relational character of God by considering him as the Great Friend.¹ If God is a friend, then he also has an influence on people because someone’s character is usually informed by the kind of friend(s) the person associates with. This fact is underlined by the Bono-Twi assertion, *kyerɛ me wo w’adamfo (yɔnko) ne menkyerɛ wo wo subane*, meaning “show me your friend and let me show you your character.” The Akan, keenly aware of peer influence, would usually regulate with whom their children may or may not associate. This forms a key part of the nurturing of children in Akan communities.

¹ This derivation is supported by Casely-Hayford, Beecham, and Cruickshank; see Danquah (1968, xii).

Another view derives *Nyankopɔn* from the expression, *nyame koro a ɔpɔn*, meaning, “the only Great God” or “the only Great one that when one gets, he/she is satisfied.” The word *nyame* may be derived from *nyam* which means glory or brightness. In relation to God, *nyame* means glorious, majestic, or wonderful. This perspective on the meaning of the noun *nyankopɔn*, therefore, emphasizes the majesty of God which is taught in many biblical passages (e.g., 1 Chr 29:11, Ps 21:5, 45:4, 145:5, Mic 5:4, and Jude 1:25). A variant explanation divides *nyame* into *nya*, meaning to receive or to get, and *mee*, meaning be satisfied. Therefore, *nyame* is taken to mean to receive and be satisfied (Danquah 1968, xii). As an appellation, then, *Nyame* means he who gives satisfaction (Danquah 1968, xii). Danquah’s view is that the letters NYNM (*Nyame*) are the Akan version of the Hebrew tetragrammaton, YHWH (Danquah 1968, xii). Casely-Hayford derives *nyame* from *nyi-oye-emi* (he who is I am) and considers *Nyame* as the Akan expression of the Hebrew I am (Danquah 1968, xii). These variant meanings of *nyame* give different nuances of the noun *Nyankopɔn*—including The Great One who gives satisfaction, The Great YHWH, and The Great One Who is I am.

A third view on the derivation of *Nyankopɔn* (*Onyankopɔn*) comes from Danso (2016), who considers *Onyankopɔn* as a derivative of the pentasyllabic word *Oiamekopɔn*. The first syllable *O* is the basic name of God, a powerful being capable of doing and achieving anything. The syllable *ia* (transformed into *nya*) signifies wisdom as in the word *nyansa*. The syllable *me* (me) stands for self-consciousness and satisfaction. The fourth syllable *ko* means life as in *kosua* (egg). The fifth syllable *pɔn* means greatness, dependability, or sovereignty (Danso 2016). *Onyankopɔn*, then, refers to a powerful, wise, great, dependable, relational, and sovereign Being who satisfies people who receive him.

The use of the definite *no* (meaning he) in the phrase *Tetekwaframo* *Nyankopɔn* underlines the singularity of God—there is no other God besides him. The description of God as ancient or the ancient of days means his existence predates time; he has no beginning. Another Akan appellation that alludes to the eternity of God is *Tetebotan* (meaning the Rock of Ages or Ancient Rock). The *Tetekwaframo* *Nyankopɔn* transcends time and is thus free from the limitations of time. He exists from eternity to eternity and has no beginning or end. It is in this light that the Kono of Sierra Leone refers to God as *Meketa*, meaning the Everlasting One. The foregoing discourse confirms the general African belief that “the Supreme Deity is the Ever-living Reality Whose Being stretches to eternity” (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979, 52; Ps 90:2; 102:12; Jer 10:10).

The song continues, *ɔte ase ampa* (he lives indeed). The letter *ɔ* is the shortened form of the Akan third-person singular pronoun *ɔno* (he/she/it). Here, *ɔ* (*ɔno*) refers to *Tetekwaframo* *Nyankopɔn* *no* who is now described as one who *te ase ampa* (lives indeed). The Akan *emphathic* particle *ampa* (indeed, really, or actually) is meant to underline the certainty of God’s continual existence. The Yoruba (Nigeria) have a divine appellation *Alaaye*, from *ala*, meaning owner, and *aiye*, meaning life. Hence it has the meaning of the Owner of life or the Living One and expresses their belief in the immortality of God (Olowola 1993, 13). Since God is the owner of life, his existence is not controlled by anyone. He exists on his own and lives ceaselessly. The idea that God lives forever is expressed by the Nupe people of Nigeria in the proverb “God will outlive eternity.” The idea is that if eternity indicated a certain point in time, God would definitely live beyond that time. However, since eternity transcends time, there is no time that God will cease to exist.

The continual existence of God resonates with the Akan traditional religious belief that God lives forever. To place this in context, it is

important to consider the Akan view of humanity. The Akan believe that a person is made up of material and immaterial parts. The material part, *nipadua* (body), includes the flesh, bones, water, and blood while the immaterial components comprise of *ɔkra* (soul), *sunsum* (an individual spirit), *honhom* (spirit), and *ntorɔ* (semen, a symbol of fatherhood or character resemblance) (Owusu-Gyamfi 2020, 66–67). The material part comes from a person’s mother and it is buried after death to decompose. The *ɔkra* (soul) comes from God and serves as God’s presence in every person. It is immortal because its existence depends on God’s existence. That is, as long as God lives, the *ɔkra* (soul) also continues to live. The *ɔkra* (soul) survives after death, unlike the *sunsum* which is believed to perish after death. As a spark from God, the concept of *ɔkra* (soul) is similar to the biblical doctrine of *imago Dei*, the theological assertion that God created humanity in his own image and likeness (Gen 1:26–27). Both the concepts of *imago Dei* and *ɔkra* underline that every person, regardless of the person’s social status and background, carries God’s image and likeness. The expression “*Nyame bewu ansa na mawu*” (God will die before I die) underscores that until God dies the *ɔkra* will not die and because God does not die the *ɔkra* will live forever. Physical death transitions the *ɔkra* into another world but does not kill it. The continual existence of *Nyankopɔn*, therefore, ensures the continual existence of the *ɔkra*. The Zulu of South Africa also express this belief when they say God “made us, and is, as it were, in us his work. We exist because he existed” (Lugira 2009, 40). Thus, from the African perspective, God’s existence should not be in doubt at all.

3.2 *The superiority of God*

Another theological theme in the song is God’s omnipotence expressed in terms of his unique kingship, military might, and dependability (e.g.,

Exod 15:3). The expression *ahene mu Hene* (King of Kings) draws on the Akan/Africa concept of kingship and the biblical worldview (see discussion below). The Akan political structure is hierarchical. There is a paramount chief (*ɔmanhene*) with divisional chiefs working under him. The divisional chiefs also have their sub-chiefs. The description of *Nyankopɔn as ahene mu Hene* means God is superior to all kings, no matter how powerful they may be. In the Ancient Near East, it was common to find a group of kings forming a hierarchy within an empire ruled by an overlord which then becomes the king of kings (Handy 1994, 112). The overlord of the Babylonian and Persian empires may be considered a king of kings. This undermined the uniqueness of God as the King of Kings. Therefore, the expression מְלֶךְ מְלָכֵי הַמְּלָכִים (the King of Kings of Kings) emerged in Judaism as a reference to God, who alone is the universal and incomparable King of the universe. Here, the use of the double superlative is meant to put the title one step above the royal title of the earthly kings referred to in the Bible. The superiority of God as King means that all earthly kings are ruling under the power of God who has delegated political power to them to take care of his people.

The supremacy of God is also echoed in the expression *anyame² mu nyinaa ara Nyame ne wo* (you are the God of all gods). This expression draws from both the traditional African religious beliefs and practices and the biblical worldview. Some African societies recognize the existence of a pantheon of divinities. From the African worldview, the Supreme Being is the Ultimate Ruler. For a successful administration of the universe, the Supreme Being created messengers or ministers who are intermediaries

² The author is aware of the scholarly debate surrounding the authenticity of the pluralization of *nyame* as *anyame*. The scope of the study does not include a consideration of this issue. The article therefore proceeds with the expression, *anyame*, given by the songwriters.

who are given powers to discharge duties on his behalf. These beings, who are also responsible for different aspects of life, such as fertility, hunting, and rain, are referred to as lower divinities or gods. They are often associated with natural phenomena and are believed to have the power to influence the course of events in the world. The belief that God administers the universe with lower divinities and other entities is not biblically sound. The songwriters acknowledge the existence of other divine beings but state emphatically that God is above all of them. God has no co-equal; he is in a class of his own. This position, in the view of the writer, serves to emphasize the need to worship God alone who is in a class of his own.

The supremacy of God is again emphasized by referring to him as *Okokroko* (the great one). In the African worldview, the *Okokroko* (greatness) nature of the Supreme Being is evident in his acts of creations, providence, healing, and power over all his creations (living and non-living, seen and unseen). This nature of God makes him worthy to receive worship and reverence. The African concept of God as *Okokroko* is a key reason why they do not approach God directly. The African traditional societal setup is hierarchical. The father serves as the head of the household, the family/clan head, and the *odikro*, the head of the village. The *odikro* works under a divisional chief who also comes under a paramount chief. One therefore does not approach the paramount chief with issues that can be resolved at the other levels of the societal structure. For example, one is not expected to send matters that can be dealt with at the family level to the paramount chief. Matters that are taken to the chief are sent to him through a linguist.³ Even in the household, children do not approach their father directly; they pass

³ The term “linguist” (Bono-Twi: *kyeame*) is an Akan term used to designate the person who serves as the spokesperson of the chief.

through their mother who acts as a societal intermediary between the children and the father. With this societal structure, Africans traditionally hold that God cannot be approached directly. He is a Great King, the King of Kings who is so *high* that one cannot approach him directly. To approach God, one needs to pass through intermediaries such as ancestors, lower divinities, and traditional priests. The use of intermediaries in approaching God is rooted in his nature as *Okokroko*.

The songwriters continue to emphasize the supremacy of God by addressing him as *Okasa prɛko* (the one who speaks and no one challenges). From an African perspective, the phrase “the God who speaks and no one challenges” can be seen as a description of a powerful and authoritative deity or king. In many African traditional religions, there is a belief that the gods and ancestors are active participants in the lives of people and can communicate with them through various means, such as dreams, visions, and divination. In this context, the idea of a God who speaks and no one challenges implies that this deity’s words are final and unquestionable. It suggests a sense of divine sovereignty and a recognition of the supremacy of God’s will over human desires and intentions. Overall, from an African perspective, the phrase “the God who speaks and no one challenges” highlights the power and authority of God as a central figure in the religious beliefs and practices of many African communities. All the above appellations are captured in the biblical description of God as the Most High God (*Oboroadenyinaaso Nyankopɔn*; see Gen 14:18, Ps 47:2). He transcends all things, not in the sense of living higher than everything but in the sense of being supreme in everything over all things. God’s *Oboroadenyinaaso* nature is underlined in the Zulu’s reference to him as *Unkulunkulu* (the Great-Great-One or the Greatest of the Great), a Being whose ways are incomprehensible and mysterious (Kuper, Hughes, and Velsen 1954, 103).

3.3 The omnipotence and military might of God

The omnipotence of God is developed using the name *El-Shaddai* (Gen 17:1, 28:3, 35:11). An understanding of the Hebrew nouns אֱלֹהִים and אֱלֹהִים is required for a proper understanding of the compound name *El-Shaddai*. The name אֱלֹהִים is the most common designation of God in the Old Testament. Appearing about 250 times in the Old Testament, אֱלֹהִים comes from *ul* which means power, strength, or might (Berkhof 2000, 48). Therefore, אֱלֹהִים carries the sense of being first or lord in strength, power, or might. In polytheistic communities, אֱלֹהִים was used as the generic reference for anyone belonging to the divine species just as the term human applies to anyone belonging to the species sapiens (McKenzie 2011, 1285). For example, the Canaanites referred to the chief god of their pantheon of gods as אֱלֹהִים, the father of Baal (Youngblood 1995, 504). But for the Jews, only Yahweh was אֱלֹהִים. Therefore, אֱלֹהִים may refer to the true God or false gods. It may appear as a compound name as in אֱלֹהִים עוֹלָם, meaning everlasting God, or God of ancient of Days (Gen 21:33, Isa 40:28) or אֱלֹהִים רֹאֵי, the God of seeing or the God who sees (Gen 16:13). The plural אֱלֹהִים, which means supreme one or mighty one, may refer to the God of the Hebrews (e.g., Gen 1:1) and false gods (Exod 23:24, Josh 24:20, Dan 5:23).

When used for the God of the Hebrews, אֱלֹהִים is understood as a plural of intensive or of majesty, underscoring the fullness of God’s power and pre-eminence, rather than plurality in personality (Berkhof 2000, 48). The root of the Hebrew name אֱלֹהִים is the Akkadian word *shadad*, which means to be powerful or to devastate. The compound name אֱלֹהִים אֱלֹהִים underlines God’s supremacy over all celestial powers (Berkhof 2000, 48). It depicts God as subjecting all powers in nature under his control. He is the one who makes mountains quake and rivers overflow their banks. The Akan express this attribute of God by referring to him as *tumi nyinaa Wura* (Owner of

all powers). Berkhof (2000, 49) concludes that “while portraying God as a great One, *Shaddai* does not represent Him as an object of fear and terror, but as a source of blessing and comfort.” In line with this thought, Ankrah avers that *El-Shaddai*’s visitation leaves one fruitful, great, and prosperous (Ankrah 2013). That is to say, *El-Shaddai* always bestows blessings on those he visits. Ankrah also considers this name as alluding to YHWH’s covenant faithfulness. And for Paul, God’s righteousness is to be understood as his covenant faithfulness (Rom 3:3–5, 25; 15:8).

In the olden days, the power of a king in many African societies was demonstrated in the context of war. A powerful king was able to conquer other kings and put them under his control. People were proud to associate themselves with kings with war prowess. The African concept of kingship was, therefore, intertwined with militarism. Even though in Africa today a king’s power may not be determined by military success, there is still the idea that a king should have military skills. Drawing on this background, the songwriters describe God as *Dɔmbarima* which derives from *dɔm* (multitude [of warriors]) and *barima* (a man). *Dɔmbarima* means the head/leader of warriors. Referring to God as *Dɔmbarima* means God is a warrior-king; he is both King and the head of his warriors. He is the head of the warriors, comparable to the President of Ghana who is also the commander-in-chief of the Ghanaian armed forces. God is the one who leads his people to war.

He is the warrior who delivers on his war promises; hence, he is also referred to as *Kantamanto*. This is derived from *ɔka ntam a ɔnto*, meaning he/she never fails on his/her promises made by oath. Being *kantamanto*, the king ensures that he gets the victory for his people. This appellation is similar to *Ɔseadeeyɔ*, meaning when he says he does it, *Ɔkatakylie* which refers to a war hero who makes “a clean sweep of their enemies and return from battle victorious” (Laryea 2000, 80), and the Igbo title *Ekwueme*, meaning the One who says and does. As *Kantamanto*, God is not *nsa-akyi-*

nsa-yam (yes and no at the same time), reminiscing the biblical text “God is not a man, so he does not lie. He is not human, so he does not change his mind” (Num 23:19 NLT). Building on the concept of *Kantamanto*, the songwriters later say *wo na woka a eba mu, wohye nso a egyina*, (you are the one who says and it comes to pass, the one who commands and it stands), a statement that highlights God’s ability to make his sovereign will come to pass. The reference to God as *Kantamanto*, therefore, underlines his faithfulness, unchangeableness, trustworthiness, and dependability (Ps 33:4, 89:33, Lam 3:22–23).

The power, strength, and military might of God are further underlined by the use of the Christological title *Yuda (abusuakuo) mu Gyata* (the Lion of [the tribe of] Judah). Metaphorical symbols play an important role in African traditional religion, cosmology, beliefs, and practices. These expressions intertwine fundamental human thought, social communication, and concrete linguistic embodiment through a rich semantic framework based on the physical, cognitive, and cultural experience of humans according to Dobrić, cited in Wessels (2014, 714). Lions were common in ancient Ghana, especially in the forested middle belt. In some African societies, kings are metaphorized as lions because of their power and bravery. In many African traditions, the lion is considered the king of the jungle, and its image is associated with bravery, leadership, and royalty. The lion is also revered for its ability to protect its pride and its territory, which is essential in many African societies. Therefore, from an African perspective, the phrase *Yuda mu Gyata* can be understood as a symbol of strength, power, and protection, which are highly valued in many African cultures.

A biblical study of the lion metaphor brings out several characteristics including strength (Judg 14:18), boldness (2 Sam 17:10), ferocity (Ps 7:2), and stealth (Ps 10:9, Lam 3:10). The fierce nature of lions is seen in King

Darius's surprise at the lions' refusal to kill Daniel (Dan 6:22). Though the lion is a dangerous animal, God has given his people power over all animals, including the lion (Ps 104:21). In Daniel 7:4–6, where Daniel saw four creatures come out of the sea, the lion was used as a symbol for an angelic being. The lion symbolizes God's wrath and punishment of wrongdoers (Rev 4:7) as well as the power of evil (1 Pet 5:8).

The expression *Yuda mu Gyata* (Lion of Judah) was a national and cultural symbol for ancient Israel, more especially the tribe of Judah. Judah was one of the twelve sons of Jacob. The connection between the tribe of Judah and the lion can first be found in the blessing given by Jacob to his fourth son, Judah, in the Book of Genesis. Here, Judah receives the first blessing of all of Jacob's sons (Gen 49:8–12). Judah's blessing, which is perhaps the greatest blessing, included the reception of the praise of his brothers (who will bow down to him) and victory over his foes and kingship among the nation. The phrase the Lion of the tribe of Judah is a biblical metaphor that refers to Jesus Christ as the Messiah and the Savior of the world (Rev 5:5). The genealogy of Christ connects him to the tribe of Judah through David and Solomon and eventually, Joseph, his earthly father (Matt 1:6, 7, 16). The reference to Jesus as the Lion of the tribe of Judah underscores his conquering and victorious kingship in fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy about a powerful king to descend from Judah's lineage (Gen 49:8–12). To sum up, metaphorizing God (and/or Christ) as a lion highlights his divine power, sovereignty, and his ability to protect and defend his people.

3.4 *The self-existence and sovereignty of God*

The songwriters express the self-existence and sovereignty of God by using the expression *Wone nea wone, na wo te ase ampa ara* (You are who you are, and you are alive indeed). The expression *Wone nea wone* (You are who you are) is reminiscent of the answer God gave Moses when he asked his name,

אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה, which has been translated variously as “I am; that is who I am” (NEB), “I am who am” (NAB), or “I am he who is” (NJB) (Exod 3:14).

The singers continue to mention other names of God. The singers use various (compound) names of God saying *Wo din ne Yehowa*. *Wo din ne Yehowa Rapha, Shekinah, Tsidkenu* (Your name is YHWH, you are YHWH Rapha, Shekinah, Tsidkenu). In Africa and ancient Israel, names are very important because they represent the attributes of the bearer. Sam Korankye Ankrah (2013) outlines three key requirements for God to reveal himself in any of his names to someone. These requirements are loving him unconditionally, living faithfully to him, and living a holy, righteous, and blameless life.

The name *Yehowa* (YHWH) is the most sacred and the most distinctive name that God does not share with anyone (Berkhof 2000, 49). While it is difficult to trace its etymology, YHWH is often connected with the Hebrew verb הָיָה, which means to be (Exod 3:13–14). It is the first-person singular of the verb to be. The name YHWH, used in God's reply in 3:15, is “an early form of this same verb in the third person singular” (Osborn and Hatton 1999). YHWH is interpreted as I am that I am, or I shall be what I shall be. It means God has existed from eternity past, he still exists and will continue to exist forever. It is an expression of the sovereignty, self-existence, and supremacy of God. God's existence is not caused by any being. He was not created by any being and hence cannot be sustained by anyone. He is self-sustaining. Being self-existent implies being sovereign. YHWH is the personal name for the Supreme Being while Elohim is a generic title for what is divine.

The name YHWH is about divine providence, the doctrine that everything is under God's sovereign guidance and control (Gowens 2011, 87). The Akan share this view about God with some other African societies. For example, the Nandi of Kenya express this belief when they consider

God as “the far-off driving force [power] behind everything, the balance of nature” (Lugira 2009, 40). This means that the universe depends on God’s sovereign control and sustenance. Therefore, as the Bambuti of Congo say, “If God should die, the world would also collapse” (Lugira 2009, 40). The Bambuti people are not challenging the immortality of God. Rather, they are making the point that God is the one who determines whether the universe should continue to exist or cease to exist. In other words, God is the ultimate decider of what happens in the universe. This view points to the sovereignty of God. For the Yoruba, God is *Ojojo Oni*, meaning the One who owns and controls today, and *Eleda*, meaning the Creator, the self-existing One, and the Source of all things (Olowola 1993, 13). Nothing can happen outside God’s control. Everything that happens is under God’s control. The decision whether to allow any specific event to happen is his own prerogative. No one determines that for him; neither does he consult anyone before acting. As one appreciates the sovereignty of God, one is encouraged to hold fast to his faith because there is no other power than God’s power.

3.5 *The omniscience and omnipresence of God*

The invisibility and omniscience of God (see 1 Sam 2:3, Job 12:13, Ps 147:4, Isa 29:15, 40:27–28, 1 Tim 6:16, Heb 11:27) is highlighted by the appellation *Ahuntahunu* (the one who is invisible but sees all things), meaning, nothing is hidden from God. It also alludes to God’s omnipresence, the idea that God is simultaneously present everywhere. The Akan say, “If you want to say something to God, tell the wind”⁴ to allude to God’s universal presence. Here, the wind is used to teach the

⁴ It must be said that the comparison between God and wind is not a perfect comparison, though it helps in conceptualizing the omnipresence of God.

concept of God’s invisibility, something that may be comparable to Jesus’s use of wind to illustrate the nature and operations of the Holy Spirit (John 3:8). The Akan refers to God as *Brekyirihunadeε*, meaning the One who sees all, even from behind. It is assumed that just as wind is virtually everywhere so God is everywhere. It is related to the concept of ubiquity, the ability to be in many places at once.

Ahuntahunu relates to *Nyansaboakwa* (infinite wisdom) which the Zulu and the Banyarwanda people of Rwanda acknowledge when they say, “God is the wise One” (Mbiti 1990, 31). The Akan anthropomorphic description of God as hidden but observing all things underlines that God has universal knowledge. God is absolutely omniscient. Thus, the Yoruba people say that “Only God is wise” and “he is the Discerner of hearts” who “sees both the inside and outside of man” (Danquah 1968, 55; Aye-Addo 2013, 14). Among the Barundi, God “is the Watcher of everything” and the Ila community says God’s “ears are long” (Islam and Islam 2015, 4). Mbiti (1990, 31) sums it up by saying God “knows everything, observes everything, and hears everything, without limitation or exception.” *Ahuntahunu* also underscores the Akan conception of God as Spirit (John 4:24). The invisible-but-all-knowing nature of God makes him the ultimate judge of all things. He calls everyone to moral accountability. African cultures often emphasize the importance of living a virtuous life and upholding moral values. The belief that God sees and knows all things means that individuals are held accountable for their actions and that they will ultimately be judged by God based on their moral conduct.

3.6 *The dependability of God*

The appellation *Tweduampɔn*, which derives from *Twere* (lean), *dua* (tree), *mpɔn* (fall not), means “Supreme Being, upon whom men lean and do not

fall.” In the forest, there are many trees, young and mature, soft and hard. The mature, strong, and firmly grounded trees are not usually affected by storms. During heavy storms, the weak and soft trees are easily uprooted, fall down, and dry up. On its way to falling down, the weak tree may lean on a strong and firmly rooted tree close to it so that it does not fall and die. The appellation *Tweduampɔn* metaphorizes God as that strong and firmly rooted tree on which other trees (i.e., people) can lean and not fall. Another picture can be taken of the walking stick that old people use as support when walking. In old age, one becomes weak and may not be able to walk or stand without a walking stick. The old man or woman leans on a walking stick and so does not fall. To humanity in general, God is that support which does not fail. The appellation *ɔbotantim*, is derived from *ɔbotan*, meaning rock, and *tim*, meaning firm and immovable, and is used for an immovable rock. It also underscores the *Tweduampɔn* nature of God. The Yoruba describe God, saying, “the Mighty Immovable Rock that never dies” (Islam and Islam 2015, 6). As *ɔbotantim Nyame* (Dependable God), nothing can make God change his position apart from his own sovereign will. The Akan consider God as a Saturday-born child, and so usually add *Kwame* to *Tweduampɔn* to have *Tweduampɔn Kwame*, because *Kwame* is the Akan name for a male child born on Saturday.

3.7 God’s immanence and care

The God who really lives is an immanent and actively involved being (Mbiti 1982, 11; see Deut 4:7 and Acts 17:27). In many African cultures, God is perceived as actively involved in the world, working to bring about good and maintain balance and harmony. When one says “God is indeed alive” (*ɔte ase ampa ara*) the person is affirming this belief in the living, active presence of the divine. The person is acknowledging that God is not distant or disconnected from human lives, but rather intimately involved in every

aspect of our existence. It underscores that God really cares for humanity (Isa 41:10, 13; Matt 6:25–34). He is *Totrobonsu*, the giver of abundant rainfall, *Amosu*, the giver of rain, *Amoamee*, the giver of sufficiency, and *Nyaamanekɔsee*, the one in whom one can confide in times of trouble. The Giver of rain and sunshine, who also addresses the economic, social, psychological, spiritual, and health concerns of his people. “The Vugusu consider that material prosperity comes from God; the Nandi invoke God daily to grant fertility to the women, cattle and fields; and the Langi believe that rich harvests come only from God” (Islam and Islam 2015, 6). As “the Great Friend,” *Nyankopɔn* is a friend in need and so will not overlook the plight of his friends. The song gives the worshipper the hope that no matter how hard the situation is, God will calm the situation down.

The believer’s reference to God as *Father* (Matt 6:9, Rom 8:15–16) metaphorizes God as a Parent. In the song, the parenthood of God is underlined by the title *agya* (father). *Agya* is a generic term for anybody who can be the father of another person. There is another Akan word for father (*se*), which refers to one’s biological father. The word *agya* comes from the word *gya*, meaning to leave something behind (usually a property). Another word for father is *papa* which was introduced through colonialism. The term *agya* is used for anyone older than the person. It points to God as the universal father of all humanity. The parenthood of God is underscored by the Ga reference to God as *Ataa-Naa Nyɔɔmɔ*, meaning Father-Mother God, noting both masculine and feminine attributes of God. As *Ataa* (father), *Nyɔɔmɔ* (God) provides continual defense and protection for his people. God’s motherhood is evident in the sympathetic, accommodating, caring, and loving attributes of God. The expression *Ataa-Naa Nyɔɔmɔ* signifies the relational nature of God from a Ga perspective.

As Father, he is compassionate and so the Akan call him *Ahummoboro* *Agya* (Compassionate Father). God loves and cares for his children. There is no way God will abandon his people. He is always faithful and requires his children to be faithful to him. He is not just present with his people, but he also provides for their needs. God's goodness (Ps 145:8–10) is expressed by the Akan idea that God has endowed every creature with a special gift to adapt to their lives. *Se Nyame amma akyenfena biribi ara mpo a, omaa no ahodannanee*, means "If [one thinks] God did not give the swallow any gift at all, the person should consider the gift of swiftness of movement that the swallow has." He is a Judge (*Temufo*) and so people look to him for judgment, saying *mede m'asem ama Nyame* (I have handed my case to God). He is all-knowing and sees the secret deeds of the members of the community. Since nothing is hidden from him, his judgment is fair.

The singers use the compound name *YHWH-Rapha* (YHWH who heals), emphasizing God's ability to heal physical, emotional, and spiritual ailments. Besides its basic meaning of to heal, *רפא* could also mean to restore or to mend. So, *YHWH-Rapha* can mean the Lord who restores or the Lord who fixes broken things. The first usage of this name comes in the context of God promising to heal and restore his people if they would be faithful to him (Exod 15:26). After crossing the Red Sea, the Israelites walked three days without finding water. They found water later, but it was bitter so they complained to Moses (v. 24). Moses turned to God who told him to throw the branch of a particular tree into the river. Moses did so, and the waters became fresh and sweet. That is when God told the people to follow him so that he might heal them.

YHWH-Tsidkenu is also used in the song. This appellation is derived from the noun *צדק*, which means to be stiff, straight, or righteous. Thus, the Hebrew word *צדקנו* means our righteousness, and when combined into *YHWH-Tsidkenu* it means YHWH our righteousness (Rembert 2009, 115). It appears twice in the entire Bible, both in the book of Jeremiah (Jer 23:

6, 33:16). This name relates to the atonement because Jesus is the root of David. God became our righteousness when he bore our sins on the cross. The name, therefore, invites everyone to receive God's gift of righteousness (that comes by faith apart from works). At the same time, this name depicts God as the sovereign Judge of the world.

The appellation *YHWH-Shekinah*, which is used in the song, derives from the Hebrew word *שכן*, meaning dwelling, residing, or settling, and denotes the presence of God in a place. God promised to dwell among his people (Exod 25:8). God accompanied Israel in the form of a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire as they passed through the wilderness (Exod 13:21, Num 9:15–23). The fire and the cloud symbolized divine leadership and protection. The cloud also symbolized God's presence and showed God's glory to the people (Exod 40:34). God's glory appeared above the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place in the sanctuary (Lev 16:2), and later in Solomon's temple. Therefore when the ark was captured by the Philistines, Phinehas's wife, just before dying, called their son (*אֵי-כָבוֹד*) Sam 4:21, meaning there is no glory. This was because the symbol of God's glory was no more with God's people. This name shows God's immanence, his presence with his people. It is similar in meaning to Immanuel (God with us) (Matt 1:23; see also Isa 7:14).

4. Theological-Missiological Reflections

4.1 Anthropomorphism

One of the key theological issues that needs to be mentioned at the outset of this section is the anthropomorphic nature of the song under consideration. Anthropomorphism means giving human characteristics such as emotions, thoughts, or behaviors to a deity (Beegle 2001, 67). Anthropomorphic features are used in everyday speech to make

the nature of God comprehensible to humanity's limited minds. Such language is not peculiar to the Akan/African people. It is used in almost all societies. The description of God as, for example, a friend, father, or *Okatakylie* (a war hero) are examples of human attributes given to God in the song. It is important to note that the anthropomorphic expressions used to describe God are not to be interpreted literally. For example, one should not think that God is a Father in the literal sense of the word. The theological fact expressed by this anthropomorphic description is that God performs functions similar to those of human fathers. Since God is perfect, he perfectly performs these roles. As an infinite person, God's roles cannot be limited to those of a human father. In fact, God cannot be comprehended completely by the human mind, so one needs to watch out that these anthropomorphisms do not create the idea that God is limited.

4.2 *God and pandemics*

The different divine attributes outlined in the major section above are encapsulated in the divine personal name *Yehowa* (YHWH). *Yehowa* is, *inter alia*, eternal, sovereign, good, all-powerful, all-knowing, immanent, King of Kings, and dependable. Writing in the context where many people are still in recovery from the shocks that COVID-19 brought upon them, it is relevant to reflect on the theological/philosophical question of how the belief in the existence of *Yehowa* and the reality of evil and suffering in a world created by *Yehowa* and operated under the sovereignty of *Yehowa* can be compatible. If *Yehowa* is good and sovereign, then why does he allow pandemics/pain/suffering/evil to hit the world?

While this study cannot adequately explain God's reasons for allowing the pandemic to occur, some theological facts can be outlined. First, God did not create humankind to suffer on earth. God's declaration that all that he created was very good (Gen 1:31) suggests that evil and suffering were

not part of God's original creation. Sin and suffering in human society are traceable to the misuse of human free will as depicted in the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3.

Secondly, sin may attract divine punishment that will make people suffer. Even though suffering, pain, and death are the result of the broken and fallen world, there are some cases where sickness results from sin. For example, Jesus warned the healed invalid, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you" (John 5:14 NIV; cf. 1 Cor 11:30). The examples of sin-prompted sickness are meant to provoke repentance, so the fatherly discipline can be lifted. However, one has to be sure that a particular suffering is the result of divine punishment before considering it as such. Here, it must be noted that though all sins merit God's punishment, not all sins will be punished immediately. God may decide to give people abundant time to repent and may even not punish them on earth if they fail to repent. All these depend on God's plan and purpose for the person's life. He is sovereign and free to do what he will.

Thirdly, suffering may be allowed to make the glory of God manifest or to draw people closer to God. In his response to the question as to whether the blind person in John 9 had become blind because of his own sin or his parents' sin, Jesus said that it was meant to make the glory of God manifest to the world. Given that Jesus's miraculous healing of this man drew people to him to receive the gospel, it can be argued that suffering may be allowed for evangelistic reasons. For example, many people might have accepted Christ because they realized in the heat of the pandemic that human beings have no power to protect themselves against death. In light of this, they may have considered accepting God who is the source of life. The increase in the usage of Christian hymns in the United States and other parts of the world (Meyer 2020) attests to the fact that the pandemic drew people closer to God in some sense. It is difficult to explain why God would make people

suffer for his glory to manifest or why he may allow some of his creatures to suffer to draw others closer to himself. However, Paul teaches that God's sovereignty makes this possible (Rom 9). Here, God is metaphorized as the potter who makes different objects into different vessels using the same piece of clay (vv. 19–24).

4.3 Pastoral care

Furthermore, God's care for his people has implications for pastors. Since God cares for his people, and since pastors are God's representatives on earth, they must show concern for God's people. As shepherds of God's flock, pastors are to replicate God's care for his people (Acts 20:28–29, 1 Pet 5:2). They must stand in solidarity with the poor, speak for the voiceless, and release the captive. God's shepherds must feed the flock with nutritious meals (the unadulterated word) that will help them to grow spirituality. Pastors must be concerned with the qualitative growth of the church, not just the quantitative growth. This requires effective discipleship where church members are equipped to directly access God's blessings rather than using pastors as intermediaries. Church members must be equipped to study the Bible on their own and apply their findings effectively, and to pray to God to access his blessings directly. To this end, the concept of the priesthood of all believers (1 Pet 2:4–5) must be developed and promoted. Finally, pastoral care must include social actions such as making donations to needy church members. The church must not concentrate on building edifices when its members live in abject poverty. God's interest lies in humans, not infrastructure.

4.4 Oral theology and missiology in Africa

The foregoing discourse—comprising a socio-cultural and a biblical-theological analysis of the lyrics of the song *Yehowa*—points to the need

to explore oral theologies in Africa. Documented theologies should not be considered as the only valid form of theology. In a highly educated community, the documentation of theology is an effective way of communicating to the church. However, since not all communities are highly educated, it is wrong to consider documented theology as the universal standard for theological discourses. Therefore, pastors who work in a highly oral context like Africa must give room for the oral expression of people's experiences with God. Missionaries/pastors may learn from the indigenous people as they express their own theologies about God. This will allow for grassroots participation in African Christian theological formulations. For example, people get the opportunity to share their testimonies with others and so build up the church. Though the interpretation of these testimonies may be subjective, they certainly contribute to the spiritual growth of the faith community. The testimonies also reveal to the church what theological deductions the people make out of their experiences with God; these testimonies help shape people's theology.

Again, since oral theologies are usually expressed in indigenous languages, there is a need to develop the various African indigenous languages. The early missionaries who came to Africa realized that their missionary activities could not be successful without developing the African indigenous languages. Most of them pioneered this course by learning and reducing various indigenous languages into writing. The mother-tongue Bibles and Christian literature that resulted from their efforts played a key role in the development of the Christian faith in most African societies. The use of oral theology is one of the key reasons why many African Initiated Churches thrive. These churches have their liturgies and sermons in the indigenous languages, making them accessible to most of their members. The African church needs to develop mother-tongue commentaries and Bible

study materials, where oral theological formulations can be incorporated to make them widely accessible. Funds for such projects could be raised from the church and other Christian organizations, both at home and abroad.

5. Overcoming Theological Pitfalls in Oral Theology

As indicated earlier, oral theology involves tailoring a personalized understanding of God's revelation to a particular context. While such personalization of the Scripture makes God's revelation relevant and meaningful for the community, it may lead to theological pitfalls if not checked. For example, there is the tendency of people to rely so much on their personal experiences with God and not reading the Bible for further insights. In other words, over-reliance on oral theology based on individual religious experiences may water down the value of the Scriptures in the life of the church. Another problem is when people take biblical texts out of context and arrive at conclusions applicable to their local contexts. The above possible pitfalls are not meant to negate the validity of oral theology in the African church. After all, no theological framework is perfect or free from potential abuses. These potential pitfalls are outlined to help the church identify and guide its members to avoid such pitfalls and deal adequately with them when they arise.

A key principle for dealing with possible pitfalls in oral theology is that the Bible must be the final authority in all theological and ethical formulation. The authority of the Bible means all theological formulations must be scrutinized by God's revelation through the Scriptures. One's experience should not be used to judge the Bible. Rather, the Bible must be used to scrutinize every kind of theology, whether oral, symbolic, or written. The present study applied this principle by authenticating every

aspect of the oral theology in *Yehowa* by Suzzy and Matt with a theological and/or biblical reference. Thus, while appreciating the socio-cultural aspect of oral theology, one must avoid syncretism. One must note the continuities and discontinuities between the African traditional worldview and biblical concepts about God to be able to sense the non-theological aspects of a theology under consideration. The aspects of oral theology that agree with biblical theology must be promoted and used to facilitate the contextual expression and relevance of the gospel. The aspects that contradict the gospel must be revised or discarded.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to reflect on the appellations given for God in the song *Yehowa* from a theological-missiological perspective. It has shown that in an oral community like Africa, the development and promotion of oral theology have the potential to enhance discipleship and make Christianity more relevant and meaningful to the *ordinary* person. While arguing for the legitimacy of oral theology, the article has argued that the final authority of theological formulations (whether oral, symbolic, or written) is the Bible. Therefore, African oral theology must be scrutinized in the light of Scripture. This means dealing with any syncretic tendency that may arise in the process of theologizing. The article calls on African theologians to join in the exploration of oral and symbolic theology embedded in African traditional songs and cultural symbols as the church in Africa continues to strive for a contextualized Christianity.

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