

GA AND DANGME PROVERBS

FOR PREACHING AND TEACHING

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AFRICAN PROVERBS PROJECT

PROVERBS FOR PREACHING AND TEACHING SERIES

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C O N T E N T S

| | | |
|------------------|-----|-----|
| Foreword | ... | ... |
| Acknowledgements | ... | ... |
| Introduction | ... | ... |

PART I

| | | | |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Chapter 1 | Emphases of Ga and Dangme Proverbs | ... | ... |
| 2 | Emphases of Biblical Proverbs | ... | ... |
| 3 | The Gospel And Ga and Dangme Proverbs | ... | ... |
| 4 | Suggestions for Further Study and Reflection | ... | ... |

PART II

| | | | |
|---|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| 5 | Examples of Annotated Ga and Dangme Proverbs for Preaching and Teaching | ... | ... |
| | Additional Ga and Dangme Proverbs not annotated | ... | ... |
| | Index by Theological Topic | ... | ... |
| | Index by Purpose/ Occasion of Use | ... | ... |
| | Index by Biblical Texts Cited | ... | ... |
| | Short Bibliography | ... | ... |

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If anything has been done or omitted which has reduced the usefulness of this book, it is my fault.

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INTRODUCTION

The people of every race or culture have their own modes of communicating among themselves. Some of these modes are the song, art, sculpture, and drumming. But by far the most commonly used mode is verbal language. There are different forms of verbal language; for instance, common language, idiom, secret or esoteric language, and the proverb. This book is concerned with one class of proverbs: traditional African proverbs.

General Features of African Proverbs

Much of the language and thought of Africans are expressed in proverbs. In many ways, African traditional proverbs are just like those of the people of other cultures and races. Like others, African proverbs are short sayings which contain the wisdom and experiences of the people of old. Although there are also long proverbs - which look more like short stories or poems - the overwhelming majority of African proverbs are short, pithy statements.

African proverbs usually have two meanings: the literal or primary meaning, and the deeper or real meaning. The real meaning of African proverbs is not always apparent. This is precisely why they are called proverbs. For instance, the Ghanaian Akan, Dangme and Ga expressions for "to cite a proverb," **bu abe**, means "to bend," "curve," or "twist words," to make them complicated. Similarly, the Lugbara (Uganda) term that is used to designate proverbs, **e'yo obeza**, literally means "mixed words," "twisted speech" or "indirect talk." The meaning of a proverb is not fixed, and so it can be modified. The user is free to reconstruct a proverb in order to make it appropriate in the particular context in which it is being used. To modify a proverb, one may delete, paraphrase, elaborate or transfer elements in it. The hearer must be witty to interpret and grasp the meaning of a proverb.

Another important feature of African proverbs is that for a proverb to be appropriate when cited, the situation depicted in the primary meaning as well as its deeper meaning must match that of the context and situation to which it is being applied. Take, for instance, the Bassa proverb: *"An elder knows where to locate a crab's heart."* The proverb is pointing to difficult and complex problems whose solution can hardly be imagined. They are like a crab's heart which can hardly be located. Yet in both cases an elder has the solution: from his store of knowledge and experience he can locate a crab's heart; and from his experience and wisdom, coupled with patience and careful scrutiny, he can get to the root of a complex problem and offer solutions. This characteristic of the

African proverb and its application calls for a technique that comes with long periods of training and practice, whether formal or informal. Similarly, to understand a proverb correctly is also a task, and calls for discernment; for those who hear the proverbs do not always understand them. This is because the truths and advice expressed in the proverbs are not always stated in plain common language but rather in figures of speech, metaphors and images. Sometimes, things that are alike or opposites are compared and contrasted. One needs to reason and use the imagination in order to get their real meaning.

Source and Authority

In Africa, proverbs are not usually ascribed to any particular individuals, but collectively to the ancestors, the wise men and women of old. In most cases, it is not known who composed a particular proverb. But whether known or not, all proverbs are credited to the elders of old, even if a particular composer is still alive. In many African societies, when a proverb is cited, it is preceded with a statement like, "So said the elders...." This may be a way of according proverbs authority. It is also a way of saying that all the people own the proverbs, and that they contain experience, wisdom, and valid counsel which are to be acknowledged by all. Thus, the collective thought, beliefs, and values of an African people can be discerned from their proverbs.

Scope and Content

There are thousands, perhaps millions, of African proverbs. New ones are still composed, and old ones are adapted or given new meanings to suit new situations. Anyone who is ingenious - that is, one who is creative, observant and has the ability to reflect and deduce a moral lesson from common happenings - can compose a proverb.

African proverbs contain observations gathered from common everyday events and experiences concerning the nature, life and behaviour of human beings as well as those of animals, birds, plants, and other natural objects; and even supernatural objects and beings. Some of the proverbial sayings are statements of historical facts about the people, while others contain information about their culture. For instance, the Ewe proverb, "*When Nôtsie chiefsends you to war, you yourself have to find a way of hiding from your enemies*" tells of events in their history some 600 years ago when many Ewes lost their lives in wars that they fought for the chief of *Nôtsie* (an ancient walled city situated in present-day Togo). A great number of them express their philosophical thoughts, religious beliefs and values. The Akan proverbial saying that "*God pounds fufu for the one-handed person*" is a theological statement of their experience of God's provision, loving kindness and gracious dealings with humankind. Other proverbs reflect the social structure of traditional African societies. For example, there are proverbs that suggest how to deal with elders, children, a spouse and so on, and there are some which indicate the position and role of various members of the society. The Ga proverb: "*When a woman rears a goat, it is a man who slaughters it,*" shows the position and role of the woman in Ga

traditional society as a subordinate but indispensable companion and partner of the man. Similarly, the Dangme proverb "*The stream side drinking gourd does not make one die of thirst*" (i.e., it saves one from dying of thirst), shows the importance of women in the created order; for it means that a man who has a wife at home will not die of hunger. At a deeper level, it means that a man finds his complement, his fulfillment in woman, a wife.

A close look at African traditional proverbial sayings shows clearly that the main concerns expressed in the proverbs relate to every aspect of human life. The ultimate purpose of the proverbs is to teach wisdom and moral lessons. Thus they contain, and are used to convey, moral lessons and advice on how to live a good and prosperous life.

The proverbs touch on all conditions of life: wealth and poverty, health and sickness, joy and sorrow; occupations: farming, hunting, fishing, building, trading, and so on; and other kinds of activity: healing, cooking, walking, sleeping, marriage, childbearing, upbringing, etc. There are proverbs which speak about and to all manner of people: kings and citizens, nobles and slaves, women and men, children and adults, apprentices and master craftsmen, and so on.

African proverbs contain observations and good counsel against undesirable vices like anger, backbiting, greed, ingratitude, laziness, lying, pride, procrastination, selfishness, stealing and so forth. The Ugandan proverb, "*Anger killed a mother cow,*" warns against anger, while the South African proverb, "*Horns which are put on do not stick properly,*" condemns hypocrisy and arrogance. Many other proverbs also praise and advise people to cultivate virtues that promote progress and ensure wellbeing; as for instance, circumspection, co-operation, gratitude, humility, patience, perseverance, prudence, respect and unity. The Igbo proverbs, "*The palm wine tapper does not say everything he sees from the top of the palm tree,*" and "*If the mouth says the head should be beheaded, when it is beheaded, the mouth follows it,*" both teach prudence and the need not to speak just anyhow or say everything one sees or knows.

Context and Use

In traditional African society, one can hardly hear anyone speak a few sentences without citing a proverb. For the initiated, the citing of proverbs comes naturally without any conscious or special effort. This is as true during ordinary conversation as during formal and solemn discourse. However, proverbs tend to be more purposely cited during serious or formal discourse, such as during proceedings of the council of elders, a chief's court, an arbitration, family meetings, or during exhortations on how to live a morally good life.

A cursory examination may suggest that some proverbs contradict others. For example, some proverbs counsel self-reliance, while others counsel community effort. The truth, however, is that in their own contexts and particular situations, each is apt. In real life situations, too, there are paradoxes and apparent contradictions. For instance, in certain situations, the best thing to do is to be silent, while in others, speaking out is the wise thing to do. Thus, although silence and speaking out may appear conflicting when

put together, in the appropriate contexts, each is positive. It is no wonder, then, that since proverbs relate to real life situations, they sometimes seem to conflict with each other; but they are only apparent and not real contradictions. This fact underscores the need to use proverbs in the right context and appropriate situation.

It is also important to note that one proverb can have several meanings and can, therefore, be applied to different situations. For instance, the Ga proverb, *"If you want to send a message to God, tell it to the wind,"* can be used in different situations: to teach that God is everywhere; to teach one the correct Ga procedure that if you want to see the chief, you must first see the linguist; or to advise that if you have a bothersome matter that you cannot speak out, you have to tell it to those who can pass it on.

On the other hand, in some cases, many different proverbs teach the same moral lesson, and can, thus, be used for emphasis. The Gas say: *"A kitchen that leaks (or a shed in ruins) is better than a thicket."* The Ewe have a proverb which says that: *"Even a good-for-nothing fellow can carry a pot of palm wine to the funeral."* The Dangme say: *"Mud-water also can be used to quench fire."* All these proverbs teach the same moral lesson, namely, that every person is of some use; therefore, everyone should be given due regard, and people should have a sense of their own worth and be contented with what they are.

African proverbs can be used for several purposes. They can be used for the linguistic analysis of a particular language or dialect. Historical information as well as the thought, customs, beliefs and values of a society can also be obtained through their proverbs. Besides, African proverbs are a literary device used to embellish speech. This is because many of the idioms of an African language are embedded in its proverbs. As it were, African proverbs are used as sweeteners to communicate effectively. As one Ga writer (E.A. Nee-Adjabeng Ankra) put it, speaking without citing proverbs is like eating soup that has no salt in it. Proverbs are cited to confirm, reinforce or modify a statement; or to heighten and attract attention to a point or message; or simply to summarize a speech. Sometimes, too, they are used to communicate a fact or opinion which it might be impolite or even offensive to state in direct speech or plain language. They are also used to make people appreciate speech, or facilitate understanding, and lead to conviction. As one Yoruba observation has it: *"A proverb is the horse which can carry one swiftly to the discovery of ideas."*

Although all these uses are important, they are, in fact, means to an end. The ultimate purpose of proverbs is to impart wisdom; teach good moral and social values; warn against foolish acts; provide a guide to good conduct; and to influence people's conduct, and help them to succeed in life.

African Proverbs and the Mission of the Church

African proverbs can be extremely useful and effective for all the things they can be used for, particularly as a tool for teaching moral and social values, and how to conduct oneself successfully in the business of life. They are short and not easily forgettable; they are easy to remember. They are also popular for their humour.

Moreover, they provoke vivid images in the mind, such that things that are otherwise abstract and difficult to grasp become relatively easy to understand.

Proverbs have the power to change people's conduct, because the truths portrayed in them are so plain and unchallengeable that those who understand the morals and advice they contain, feel compelled to conduct their lives in the manner prescribed in the proverbs by the wise elders of old.

It cannot be doubted that desiring to live the good life is not enough, for one can know and even will to do good, and still be unable to do it (See Romans 7: 14-25). It is those who accept the gospel of Jesus Christ and have the Holy Spirit in them who have power to do the good. Yet, it is important to note that Jesus Christ who brought this new power to work from within a person, himself also used the method of influencing people from the outside by appealing to their minds and hearts through teaching. In doing this, he used stories and proverbial sayings. There can be no doubt, then, that the present-day Church may attain its goal (which is to make all peoples the followers of Christ and teach them to obey what he has commanded), if it encourages the proper use of proverbial sayings. In using these indigenous proverbial sayings, however, the Church must correct and replace what is not so good in them, and add on from the Scriptures what is more excellent.

At this point in Africa's history when there are cries everywhere for moral and social reform, the use of proverbs in moral education is urgent. The many positive features of African proverbs, such as those cited above, make them most invaluable and unavoidable as instruments of teaching. The Church which has always been interested in people living the morally good life, must use African proverbs even more earnestly, especially in preaching and teaching. Their use will help immensely to teach the truths of many biblical themes and stories, and to affect the moral, social and spiritual lives of the people for the better; for when a proverb is used correctly, it speaks to the intellect, the soul and the heart - that is, to the understanding, the feelings and the will. (See also Archbishop Trench in Malcolm: 1949.) Over the centuries, African proverbs have successfully done this. They can, thus, be used to great advantage in Christian preaching and teaching.

Joshua N. Kudadjie
Series Editor

PART I

CHAPTER 1

EMPHASES OF GA AND DANGME PROVERBS

Introduction: The People and their Language

Dangme and Ga are two of some fifty languages and dialects spoken in Ghana. The two hundred proverbs on which notes have been written in this book for teaching and preaching (as well as the additional one hundred) have been selected from the store of Ga and Dangme proverbs.

The Ga and Dangme live in the south-eastern corner of Ghana in a kind of triangle. The base of the triangle is formed by the Atlantic Ocean, stretching from Accra, the capital city of Ghana to Ada Foah in the east, at the estuary of the River Volta and the ocean. The Volta forms the right side of the triangle and runs south to north from Ada Foah to the Volta Lake at Akosombo, with the left side running down south along the Akwapim hills to Accra.

For a long time the Ga and Dangme people were regarded as a twin-ethnic group called Ga-Adangme, and treated as such. Together, they form about 13% of the population of Ghana. At present for practically all purposes, they are two separate ethnic groups. The Dangme are made up of eight traditional areas: Ada, Ningo (Nugo), Prampram (Gbugbla), Kpone, Shai (Sâ), Yilo Krobo, Manya Krobo (Yilô and Manya Krôbô), and Osudoku. Each of the eight Dangme sub-groups speak dialects of Dangme which are linguistically similar and mutually intelligible, with only slight differences of

usage and pronunciation; but there are more significant differences in names of things. The Ga traditional area comprises Ga Mashie, Osu, La, Nungua, Teshie and Tema, all of whom speak Ga with little dialectical differences.

Although the Ga and Dangme languages are related and have some linguistic similarities, they are not mutually intelligible. It is easier for a Dangme to understand Ga than the reverse. Both Ga and Dangme are taught in schools in Ghana up to diploma level at the university. Discussions have been going on to teach them up to degree level.

According to Dangme and Ga traditions, which are preserved in old songs, as well as some written records, the Ga-Adangme came from a far-distant land, east of their present settlements. Some traditions mention Chad as their original home, and others mention Dahomey (now the Republic of Benin), though most traditions say that their original home was Benin - commonly identified as a place in the south central part of modern Nigeria. Whichever the actual location, it is commonly said to lie somewhere on the eastern side of the Volta River, to the north and east of present Togo, probably somewhere within Nigeria.

It is said that some seven hundred years ago, they were driven out by invasions of the Fulani tribe under a chief named Dafeleo. They wandered through Nigeria, Yorubaland and Dahomey. After various stops, they crossed the Volta and most of the tribes founded the Lanimo Kingdom in what is present-day Osudoku. After a bitter war that arose among them, they broke up some three to four hundred years ago and went in several directions until they settled in their present locations.

The Ga and Dangme have a great deal in common in their culture. For example, they both have a patrilineal system of inheritance. Again, originally, their societies were ruled by traditional priests, but later, under the influence of their Akan neighbours, they came to be ruled by secular chiefs. In many respects their cultural outlook is similar to that of other Ghanaian and, for that matter, African ethnic groups. Their traditional occupations are fishing and farming, but they can now be found in every kind of occupation. Although they are quite enterprising, the Ga and Dangme are characteristically modest and abhor inordinate ambition, especially for material gain.

Christianity was introduced into Ga and Dangme land over one hundred years ago first by the Presbyterians followed by the Methodists. Now there are many denominations: mainline, African instituted, Pentecostal, charismatic and all. It is estimated that some 55 % of Ga and Dangme people are Christians. As in all traditional African societies, the Ga and Dangme use proverbs a lot. However, the extent of use of proverbs in preaching is very little, compared with their use in everyday life.

Emphases of Ga and Dangme Proverbs

Ga and Dangme proverbs, like those of other African traditional societies are attributed to the ancestors. Like all other proverbs the world over, they are usually short sayings, although there are a few long ones. They contain the experiences and wisdom of the people of old. But even today new proverbs are composed by those who are

observant, experienced, thoughtful and creative. The experiences and wise advice contained in the proverbs are derived from observations made about the nature and behaviour of human beings, animals, birds, plants, and other natural as well as supernatural objects and beings. Some of the proverbs state facts from the history, customs and practices of the Ga and Dangme. Others express their philosophical thoughts, their religious beliefs, and their values.

The statements made in the proverbs reflect true everyday occurrences. They usually have two meanings: (a) the literal or primary meaning, and (b) the deeper or real meaning. Take, for example, the Ga proverb, "***Kâ onyiâ shuô sââ lâ owuuu bô.***" (*If you follow in the trail of an elephant, you do not get smeared with the dew.*) The statement is literally true. The elephant is a very big animal, and as it goes through the forest stepping on the grass and destroying the shrubs, it gets smeared with the dew. Therefore, if you follow in its trail, you stand less risk of getting smeared with the dew, since the elephant has already cleared it off the grass and shrubs. But the proverb has a real or deeper meaning: if you associate with an important personality, say, a rich, or knowledgeable, or powerful person, you will not lack. It can also be applied to mean that if you believe and trust in God, you will not be disappointed but will succeed.

This feature of proverbs having both a literal and a deeper meaning sometimes makes it difficult to distinguish them from sayings, idioms, riddles and puzzles. In particular, it seems there is no cut and dried line between proverbs and sayings. All of these have hidden meaning and are difficult to understand. Nevertheless, it is possible to distinguish one from the other. One of the main differences between them lies in how they are used. Riddles and puzzles are usually cited for fun and entertainment, but not so with proverbs. Proverbs are cited in serious discourse. Again, among the Dangme and Ga, the words or sounds used in some puzzles are onomatopoeic; that is to say, they sound like or describe the thing talked about in the puzzle. Idioms are usually used in public when it is impolite or indecent to say something in plain words; in such cases similes or idioms (euphemisms) are used to make it respectable. For example, you may not say that one is a "thief" but you can say (literally in Ga) that "his hands pick things." Perhaps the most important difference between these other forms of speech and proverbs is that every proverb contains some wisdom and good advice. Take, for instance, the proverb, "*The one who is clothed in cotton wool does not hover over a flame.*" It has to do with temptation and discretion; it warns against foolishly exposing oneself to things that will ruin one.

As in other traditional African societies, the Ga and Dangme use proverbs, among other things, to embellish speech, make a succinct point, or to summarize or emphasize a point. But the ultimate purpose of composing or citing proverbs is to counsel people to live good and successful lives.

An analysis of Dangme and Ga proverbs shows that certain themes regarding the successful life occur again and again. Different people may classify the themes differently. We have identified 15 major themes to be the most common ones. These are stated here with selected examples of the proverbs that express them.

1 Making Right Use of Opportunity and Acting Appropriately

Judging by the number of proverbs there are on various themes, it would seem that for the Ga and Dangme, the most emphasized thing for a person to do in order to succeed in life, is to make the right use of opportunity; to act appropriately in a given situation or circumstance; and to make the right effort. There is a right time and an appropriate way to do everything. Some of the proverbs that teach these are as follows. **Kâji onine shâ Akle nô lâ ogbeô lâ nyô lo.** (*If you lay hands on the animal of your hunt, you do not allow it to escape but kill it right away.*) This Ga proverb teaches that every opportunity that presents itself must be used to advantage. Some opportunities, like game, may never come one's way again, hence it is wise to do everything in one's power not to let opportunities slip by, but to make maximum use of them.

Each and everyone must know what they can do and do it well. On the other hand, one must refrain from what one cannot do, lest one wastes energy, becomes a failure and thus embarrass oneself. This counsel is expressed in the Dangme proverb: **Kuôwi (ovônô) ke nâ Mawu bô lâ sibulô he je ô e dâ si ngâ e nane nô se si nâ ebuu.** (*The frog says, since God created it to squat, it never stands on its legs but only squats.*)

Procrastination has often led to losses, disaster and misery. The wise person is, therefore, mindful not to delay unduly in acting on certain issues, because, as the Ga proverb says: **Kâ nu tsâ yâ tô mli lâ eshaa.** (*If water keeps too long in a bottle, it goes bad.*)

2 Cause and Effect, and Boomerang Reaction

Another common teaching that comes through in a great many Dangme and Ga proverbs is that there are certain natural arrangements or laws of nature which cannot be escaped. Certain consequences follow certain acts. The Ga say: **Kaa fôôô loofôlô.** (*A crab does not give birth to a bird.*) In certain circumstances, a person must not be blamed for some harm he or she has done; for, as both Dangme and Ga proverbs say: **Payalô nâ ywiaa buâ** (Dangme); **Faa yalô jwaa gbâ** (Ga). (*It is the one who fetches water that breaks a water pot.*)

It is also common for people to blame others for a supposed harm done by them. But their supposed harmful act may not be blamable since it may have been caused or provoked by some other act or event which is not theirs. To caution people not to blame others too quickly, the Dangme use the proverb, **Nyaka nui gbe yaka.** (*The crocodile does not catch a dog for no cause.*)

There are also boomerang effects of certain acts. In view of such experiences, the Dangme warn people to mind what they do because of a moral law of nature that ensures boomerang effect. Such warning comes in a proverb such as: **Apletsi ke e ngâ nô ko tita nô puââ se e li kaa lâ nitsâ e hlemi nya nâ e ngâ puââ.** (*The goat says it is messing up someone else's compound without realizing that it is soiling its own tail.*)

Those who are wise and know these truths are not surprised or overtaken by events; they are not unduly worried; and they are careful how they behave, knowing that whatever they do will bounce back at them.

3 Circumspection, Cautiousness and Discretion

Life is full of dangers of all kinds. If one is not careful, one would get into trouble. There is, therefore, great need for anyone who wants to keep out of trouble or have the best of life, to exercise extreme caution, discretion and circumspection, and to avoid being credulous. To counsel people in this regard, there are scores of Dangme and Ga proverbs. Some of these are: **Kâ odonti yâ odunaa lâ ohuruuu otâkeee la.** (*If cotton wool is in your anus, you do not jump over fire.*); **Ala mai bi shwââ mli.** (*The young of the white seashore crab does not play sport in the forest.*); **Akpa a kââ: 'Nô ni he ejô lâ no ayeô.'** (*The vulture says: 'That which is soft (or cold) is the more enjoyable.'*); **Kâ mô ko kââ ebaabu bo mama lâ, kwâmô epioto ni ewo.** (*If someone promises to give you a cover-cloth, look at what kind of pants he himself is wearing.*); **Henôkwâmô jee yakagbômô feemô.** (*Being circumspect does not mean one is a coward.*) Similarly, the following Dangme proverbs advise on circumspection: **Mo nitsâ o sa mi ngmo ji o gbenô.** (*The leech in your own bed is (the cause of) your death.*); **Nubwô ywiâ dudô.** (*A visitor does (should) not break the water-storage pot.*); **Nya nâ gbaa mo ô, lâ k nâ gbiâô mo.** (*The mouth that blesses you is the same one that curses you.*); **Ke o yâ Nakonyâ we mi ô, o be Nakonyâ pa he fu nuâ.** (*If you do not go to Nako-mother's house, you will not smell the foul smell of Nako-mother's sore.*)

Those who are sufficiently circumspect, cautious and discreet will avoid many of the pitfalls in conduct that so often put people into unnecessary trouble and pain. One who has ears to hear and the will to be guided by the wisdom in proverbs such as these, is likely to enjoy a happy life.

4 Co-operation and Community

Even though one has to be wary in dealing with others, one cannot get very far without depending on other people. Indeed, life in traditional Dangme and Ga societies necessitates co-operation and inter-dependence at every turn. As fishermen, they need to form themselves into crews to row their canoes far out to sea and work together to catch fish and earn their living. Again, in the scorching tropical sun, one person cannot do very much by oneself alone. Therefore, those who are farmers need others to help clear the bush at the beginning of the farming season. To build or repair one's hut, one needs the help of others. Nursing mothers, bereaved families and all know in their daily experiences how blessed it is to have the support of others. Even in seemingly private matters such as whom or when to marry, when to observe a funeral and so on, one needs the counsel and support of others. No one can make it alone.

It is no wonder, then, that a very large number of proverbs are about co-operation

and inter-dependence. The Dangme say: **Nine kake nui ngmo.** (*One hand (or finger) does not catch a louse.*) and **Yi kake yâ da mi.** (*One head does not sit in council.*) Among the Ga proverbs on the theme of co-operation is one which counsels that: **Kâ oyâ lââ mli lâ oloô emli nu.** (*When you are in a canoe you (are obliged to) bail water out of it.*) In the community, one is assured of, and advised to accept, the support of others in time of trouble, as indicated in the Ga proverb, **Kâji onyâ gbo lâ, jee bo obaatare lâ.** (*When your mother dies, it is not you who will have to carry her body (to the cemetery).*) Even though individual effort is also exhorted, the ideal, clearly, is co-operation, as is shown by this Dangme proverb within a proverb: **"Tsopatsâ mo tsa mo nitsâ o he" ô, abâ gbi i.** (*"Physician, heal yourself" is a proverbial saying.*) This proverb is stating that you cannot, in fact, save (or heal) yourself; someone else has to save or heal you. Truly, for the Ga and Dangme, no one is an island unto himself or herself; what affects one affects all. Therefore, all must co-operate and pool resources together; for as the Gas say: **Mô kâ mô woô nô ni eyaa wâi.** (*It is when one and another lift something together that it goes up, i.e., gets lifted. Or, When two people lift something together, it gets lifted.*)

5 Self-reliance and Individual Responsibility.

Notwithstanding the emphasis on co-operation, many Ga and Dangme proverbs stress the importance of individual responsibility and self-effort. One cannot expect others to do everything for one. Thus the Ga say that, **Mô ko enuuu tsofa ehaaa helatsâ.** (*No one drinks medicine on behalf of a sick person.*), and **Ahaaa mô yoo ni aha lâ saa hu afata he.** (*No one gives away a woman to a man in marriage and provides him with a bed besides.*) To press home the fact of individual responsibility, the Dangme have the proverb: **Apletsi ke e nyâ nâ a he, se pi lâ nâ a he.** (*The goat says that it was its mother that was bought, and not it.*) All people must be self-reliant, bear their own burdens, and take responsibility for their actions.

6 On Virtues

In every human society, there are virtues that are cherished. If these are inculcated and lived out, the society progresses. Ga and Dangme people use numerous proverbs to commend these virtues, among which are the following: fortitude, generosity, hardwork, honesty, humility, patience, perseverance, self-effort and taking one step at a time. The virtues are taught in Ga proverbs such as the following. **Fortitude: Abiii wo ni ahe nu.** (*One does not solicit for honey and then accept water instead.*) **Generosity: Kâji okotsa ekwôô shô lâ, osiliki duku kplekeee.** (*If your soft sponge does not travel beyond the seas, you will hardly see your silk headkerchief coming down.*) **Hard work: "Aekoo" hi fe "Sââ fââ?"** (*To be told "Well done!" is better than to be asked "How was back?"*) **Patience: Bâlâoo adôdô fee ni ekâye gbee toi.** (*It is by doing it bit by bit and softly that the housefly ate the dog's ear.*) **Self-effort: Ahaaa mô yoo ni aha lâ saa hu afata he.** (*No one gives away a woman to a man in marriage and provides him with a bed besides.*) **Humility:** No matter how highly placed a person may be, one is urged to be humble, as in the Dangme proverb: **Kposuô ke hesibami hu hi, se lâ**

ngua nâ ô tatu gbee lâ. (*The elephant says it is good to be humble, for huge as it is, a tiny ant kills it.*)

7 On Vices

Experience has shown that if the individual members of a community as well as the community as a whole are to prosper, certain bad character traits and habits have to be eschewed. Many Ga and Dangme proverbs have been composed to admonish people not to cultivate such vices. The most commonly cited vices include: greed or selfishness, hardheartedness, haste, hypocrisy, ingratitude, laziness, pretense, pride and treachery. They are abhorred because they lead to evils that destroy community. Some are even self-frustrating, like greed and selfishness.

The Ga say, **Akâ hi mâii enyô kwâââ tô mli**, meaning, *You do not look inside a bottle with both eyes.* You cannot see inside a bottle properly if you use both eyes, because of its narrow mouth; you see better if you use one eye. In the same way if, in your **greed**, you want to have too much, you may end up getting nothing. It is similar with **selfishness**: if you are selfish, you will suffer alone and be frustrated, as this Ga proverb warns: **Kâ okââ okome obaaye lâ, oyeô ni odôôfu.** (*If you alone want to eat all there is, you eat and suffer from obesity.*) A common Ga advice against **haste** is given in the proverbial saying: **Kâji oye oyai lâ, oyeô yâlâ naabu.** (*If you rush, you come to eat the tail, i.e., watery and sometimes bitter portion, of the yam.*) Young people who behave as if they were adults are usually told: **Adaa dani akp** ; that is, *One must grow up before one cackles* (like a hen that is mature and about to lay eggs.) In other words, one must take one's time in life and be ripe for something before seeking to do it.

One of the most highly valued virtues in Ga and Dangme society is gratitude. When a person has done you a good turn, you wake up early next morning to go and thank that person. By the same token, **ingratitude** is severely condemned. One of the many proverbs that advise against ingratitude is the Ga proverb: **Kâji mô ko fee bo ekpakpa lâ, atsôôô duna kâdaaa lâ shi.** (*When someone has done you a favour, you do not turn your bottom (or buttocks) to the person in showing your appreciation.*) Turning your buttocks on another is a sign of contempt. Another proverb showing disapproval of ingratitude bothering on **pretense** is the Dangme proverb, **Ali nô piani nâ a suu kane gbokuâ kâ hyââ e hâ mi.** (*You do not know a fellow during the day and light a lamp at night to identify him.*)

8 The Value of Human Beings

One of the greatest desires of Dangme and Ga men and women is to have children of their own. When a baby is born, there is a lot of merry making. Some people boast about the sheer number of children they have. People are happy to meet others, especially strangers, and to show them kindness. When a person dies, elaborate funeral rites are

observed and there is much mourning. All these attitudes and practices reveal one thing: the high value that is put on human beings.

There are a number of proverbs which indicate this high respect for human beings, irrespective of their social standing. The Ga express this in the proverb: **Gbômô fô hi fe shia folo.** (*A bad fellow is better than an empty house.*) That is to say, it is far better to have a human being around than to have no one at all around, even if the person around is not a particularly good fellow. Similarly, the Dangme say that: **Godô tsâ hi pe we mi gu.** (*A mad person is better than an empty house.*) The Dangme say also that: **Môsô nô nyu hu gbeô la.** (*Muddy water also can be used to put out fire.*) One of the many meanings of this Dangme proverb is that it is better to have a bad or supposedly worthless person around than to have nobody around. It also means that poor persons also do give good advice that helps the community.

All these proverbs express the conviction of the Ga and Dangme people that human beings as such have great value and must be highly respected, even if they are not highly placed in the society. Such proverbs constantly remind the people not to place riches or social position above humans; for in many situations the rich and noble cannot survive or function without the help of very ordinary people. They also underscore the fact of inter-dependence.

9 Contentment

It has often been observed that the Ga and Dangme have the disposition to be modest and humble. This disposition makes them contented with their honest lot, and generally averse to greed or haste. Indeed, contentment, modesty, humility and such like virtues are so highly valued among them that a Ga or Dangme born is exhorted to cultivate them, when it is counselled at its outdooing and naming ceremony on its eighth day. Whether the preoccupation with contentment is a cause or consequence of composing proverbs with that theme is hard to say. What is a fact is that there are a good many proverbs with that theme. So the Dangme say: **Bôbôyo hí nya mi nâ a kpaá anyagba.** (*You do not whistle when there is a morsel in your mouth*), and the Ga say: **Aboloo kuku hi fe kwraa.** (*A slice of loaf is better than nothing.*) Both proverbs counsel against clamouring for more, and, instead, approve of contentment with the little one has in hand. The Ga proverb, **Adamôô ekome nô akaneô enyô** (*You depend on one to count two*), advocates contentment with small beginnings, while working gradually for the bigger things; it discourages hasty or greedy clamour for bigger things. Yet another advice for modesty and taking pride in one's lot, however simple, comes in a common Dangme and Ga proverb: **Nô ko je we e muô nine ngô tsôô we e je blô** (Dangme) and **Mô ko kê ebâku etsôôô etsâmâi awe.** (Ga) (*No one uses his left hand to point to his fathers' home.*) In Dangme and Ga culture, the left hand is associated with that which is dishonorable, contemptible and worthless. Thus one is advised never to despise little things, but rather to be contented with, and hold in high esteem, whatever is one's own.

10 Being Calm and Letting Things Take Their Natural Course

It is a proven fact that quite often, people who remain calm and are cautious, and who trust nature to take its course, or are contented with their lot, spare themselves much pain, frustration and regret which those others experience who want to have their own way in everything. Experience has also shown that life is full of vagaries, uncertainties and disappointments. Those who desire to be able to cope with the ups and downs of life and live peaceful and victorious lives must be aware of such facts of life.

Many proverbs are designed to impart such experience and wisdom. For example, the Ga observation: **Kâji nu nâ lâ, etsôô enaamôhe.** (*When it rains, the rainwater itself reveals safe spots.*) This proverb teaches that one should be calm and cautious in face of a problem, for the problem itself will indicate its own solution. People are admonished to be contented and to accept situations as they are; as for instance, in the proverbs already cited: **Bôbôyo hí nya mi nâ a kpaá anyagba and Aboloo kuku hí fe kwraa.**

Sometimes, things go wrong, and there is injustice. But such is life. There is a Ga proverb that is meant to help one accept and absorb such unjust situations: **Ejurôfeelô lâ gbâhe ewôô** (*The generous, hospitable person often sleeps by the way side.*) In other words, it is a fact of life that a good person is often treated unjustly; and one must learn to live with that fact.

It is said that to be forewarned is to be forearmed. Those who know such proverbs and are guided by their wisdom would not be shocked by the vagaries of life. They are able to cope and to go through life successfully, no matter how unfair or cruel it may seem.

11 Against Worrying or Being Too Certain About the Future

Human knowledge is limited. Much more so, about the future. Therefore, when dealing with the future, the actor is constantly advised not to be too certain. Among the numerous proverbs that emphasize this theme are the Ga proverbs: **Anuuu nu atooô Aharabata.** (*One does not drink water in anticipation of Harmattan drought.*); and **Agbeee tsina atooô hô.** (*You do not slaughter a cow in anticipation of a pregnancy.*) The same counsel is conveyed by the Dangme proverb: **A yi yâ nya ngâ zu mi.** (*You do not bargain over the price of a yam while it is in the soil yet to be harvested.*)

In a similar way, some Dangme proverbs caution people to behave themselves well, since the future is unknown, and can bring changes in one's fortune. **He nâ je naa ngâ ô lejâ ô n diblii woô ngâ.** (*Where the daylight breaks is also where the night falls.*) This means that it is possible that where there is wealth, poverty will set in. Such observations have led to the Dangme saying: **Je ngâ se kê nya.** (*The world (or life) is backwards and forwards.*)

12 Preparing for the Future

The fact of the uncertainties of the future does not mean, however, that one must, therefore, do nothing about the future. Indeed, that very fact should urge one to plan for

the uncertain future. Thus, there are quite a number of proverbs that counsel planning for the future. The Ga take a lesson from the monkey and say that: **Adu le akâ hómô ko yâ ni baaba wôsââ ko, no hewô ni kâji eye nii lâ ekâ eko toô ekpaii amlî lâ.** (*The monkey knows that famine will break out some day and for that reason it reserves some food in its cheek while eating.*) Also: **Hewaomô hewô atoô waonaa.** (*It is because of a future need to scratch oneself that one grows finger nails.*) The Dangme have the saying: **Piani kuma he nâ a yaa pa môtu ngâ.** (*It is because of afternoon thirst that you (have to) fetch water in the morning.*) Thus, wisdom and experience warn life's participants to be forward-looking and to plan for the uncertain future.

13 Respect for Experience and the Elderly

One of the cardinal virtues inculcated in African traditional societies is respect for old age and experience. Old age is associated with experience and wisdom. The current attitude and saying that 'the wisdom of Solomon has nothing to do with the age of Methuselah' is not the common view of African societies, and, for that matter, the Ga and Dangme. That the African viewpoint is different is evidenced in many African proverbs. There is the general conviction that to succeed in the present or future, the past cannot be ignored. So the Ga say that: **Blema kpaâ nô atsaâ.** (*You (have to) pattern your rope according to the original (ancient) twist.*) The Ga experience is that life is but a recurrent series of precedents and experiences. Many of the proverbs in this group stress that no matter how knowledgeable, experienced or wise a young person may be, he or she cannot be better than an older person. For instance, one Ga proverb says: **Onukpa leee nô ko lâ ele wôdôî wôô.** (*If an old person knows nothing at all, he knows how to slumber.*) Slumbering is associated with thinking, and thinking with wisdom. Since old people slumber a lot, they are believed to have wisdom in greater measure than youth can have. This view is confirmed by the Dangme proverb, **Detsâ pi jokuâ.** (*A hunter is not a kid.*) It is out of experience and skill and wisdom that a hunter kills the game, even dangerous ones. An elderly person must be respected and his advice heeded because he has more experience in life's ways than a youth. Again, the Dangme have a saying that: **Tsapi mimâ m a jua ji jale.** (*The frankincense is not a co-equal of the soap.*) However sweet-scented frankincense is, it cannot be as effective as the soap in getting rid of dirt or bad smell. So it is with a child compared to an adult. The Dangme say also that: **Kpâni tui hungmâ se bwômi blema munyu.** (*The beard does not tell the eyebrow ancient stories.*); for before the beard grew, the eyebrow was!

All this shows the great respect that the Ga and Dangme, as indeed other traditional Africans, have for old age and experience. To heed the advice of the elderly is to find success and life; to ignore it is to court failure and death.

14 Keeping Domestic Matters Private

Although there is a great deal of 'we-feeling,' i.e., solidarity, togetherness, and sharing in Ga-Dangme society, the discreet person knows that certain matters are private rather than public, and keeps them as such. There is a class of proverbs that stress this

theme, and counsel people to know and keep the distinction. The following two Dangme proverbs, among many others, express the idea: **A wui jemâ to kpa ngâ ma nô.** (*A goat that belongs to an esoteric society (or a cult) is not tethered in the market place.*), and **Kuku nô ha a, kuku nô nâ e laa ngâ.** (*A knife that is found in a rubbish heap must needs get lost in a rubbish heap.*) A person who exercises discretion and can keep secrets is highly respected and trusted. It is to such that many a great family secret is told. This value of secrecy is so important that at a child's outdoor and naming ceremony on its eighth day, the child is exhorted, among many other things, to hear much and see a lot but speak little. Great discretion is expected in deciding what to make public and what to treat as a purely private and domestic affair.

15 God's Providence and Care

Not least among the class of themes that most frequently occur in Ga and Dangme proverbs is the theme of God's providence and care. Proverbs in this class are cited to give hope and encouragement that God will provide, no matter how hopeless a situation seems to be. The Ga say that: **Kâ Nyô mô tere bo jatsu lâ, ehaa bo tako.** (*When God gives you a load He also gives you a soft pad to carry it.*) This indicates the belief that the sovereign God can overrule, and that if He allows someone to encounter a problem or be given some heavy responsibility, He also gives the grace and ability to bear or discharge it.

In a similar vein, the Dangme say that: **Makâtelô nâ heô gbi ngâ Odame dâ.** (*The one who wakes up at dawn is the one who receives a word from Odame*), meaning that God gives food to the one who struggles. This theme of God providing for the helpless is also expressed in other proverbs such as these two Ga proverbs: **Be ni ahuko La ma tâi amlî lâ jâi aduji lâ yeô nii.** (*Before La ma (i.e., a stony hilly area on the western boundary of Ga land) was cultivated, the monkeys that lived there had food to eat.*); and **Ohiafo kpeee tâ.** (*The poor do not chew (i.e., eat) stones.*)

All these expressions of trust in God may be said to be summarized in the Dangme proverb, **Mâmââmâ t ngo buâ mi.** (*The salty taste never ceases in a salt-pot.*) One of the meanings of this proverb is that God's grace and mercy towards humankind never cease, for loving kindness is of the very essence of God.

Conclusion

Numerous lessons can be learnt from the thousands of proverbs that have been composed to preserve experience, and guide the conduct of life in Ga and Dangme societies. These proverbs relate to virtually every aspect of life. Obviously the themes presented above do not represent all the themes that Ga-Dangme proverbs address. The fifteen themes stated above only represent the topics that occurred most frequently when Ga and Dangme proverbs were examined. It is possible to regroup them in other ways, and to include other themes that are not included here. Themes like the value of children, the dignity of womanhood, justice, peace, human freewill, the inevitability of death, and

many others occurred rather infrequently in the sample. But there can be no doubt that they and many others are important in Ga and Dangme society. If other schemes of rating are used, these would find their rightful place.

Notwithstanding the above observation, the fifteen themes summarized above give rather important insights into the realities and ideals of life in Ga and Dangme society. In Chapter 3, we shall state what we think the Bible affirms in these African emphases, what it adds, and what it corrects. We believe that if people would govern their lives by the above insights and values, such as they are, stated in Ga and Dangme proverbs, life on this earth would be truly enjoyable.

CHAPTER 2

EMPHASES OF BIBLICAL PROVERBS

Introduction

Proverbs and proverbial sayings have been used in both the Old and New

Testaments. They can be found in various books of the Bible - for example, in Ezekiel 16:44 ("*Like mother, like daughter.*"); Ezekiel 18:2 ("*The parents ate the sour grapes, but the children got the sour taste.*"); 2 Peter 2:22 ("*A dog goes back to what it has vomited.*"). However, the best known is the collection of proverbs in the Book of Proverbs and some in Ecclesiastes. Jesus also used extensively in his teaching some kind of proverbial sayings, commonly called parables.

Apart from the parables of Jesus which are usually long, and a few other long ones in the Book of Proverbs, the proverbs used in the Bible are short, easily remembered statements. They contain truths gathered from life's experiences. Examples of the long parables are: the parable of the unforgiving servant (Matthew 18: 21-35), the parable of the tenants in the vineyard (Matthew 21: 33-46), and the parable of the talents (Matthew 25: 14-30). There are also a few fairly long proverbs in the Book of Proverbs; for instance, 6: 6-11: the ant and the sluggard; 24: 2-6: the vineyards of a lazy man.

The Sources of Biblical Proverbs

In their present form, the bulk of biblical proverbs have been ascribed to specific individuals; namely, King Solomon (Proverbs 1:1), Agur (Proverbs 30:1), the mother of King Lemuel (Proverbs 31:1), and Jesus Christ (Matthew 13: 1-3).

In Bible times, proverbs were composed by wise men, and were widely used in Israelite society and among other ancient peoples. King Solomon, for example, acclaimed to be wiser than the wise men of the East and Egypt - indeed, acclaimed to be the wisest of all men - is said to have composed three thousand proverbs (1 Kings 4: 29-33, Ecclesiastes 1: 1; 12:9).

Solomon and the other composers of proverbs formulated their proverbs from life's experiences. These experiences were based on their observation of human life and behaviour, animals, birds, reptiles, and fish (1 Kings 4: 33). Solomon is said to have been given his unusual wisdom and insight by God himself (1 Kings 4: 29).

From the parables of Jesus - which are a kind of extended proverbs - four sources can be discerned:

- (i) observations from the world of nature: for example, the parable of the sower (Mark 4: 1-9); the parable of the seed growing secretly (Mark 4: 26-29);
- (ii) knowledge of familiar customs of everyday life and events: like the parable of the yeast (Matt. 13: 33); the parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25: 1-13);
- (iii) from well-known events in recent history: e.g., the parable of the high-ranking man about to be made king but who was not liked by some of the citizens, and who gave gold coins to his servants to trade with (Luke 19: 12-27); (historians have identified this person to be Archelaus, son of Herod the Great); and
- (iv) from normal probable events, as in the parables of the labourers in the vineyard

(Matthew 20: 1-16); the prodigal son (Luke 15: 11-32), and the unjust judge (Luke 18: 2-8).

The Form, Structure and Style of Biblical Proverbs

As has already been stated, some of the proverbial sayings in the Bible are rather extensive. But most of them are short. The Hebrew word for "proverb" comes from a word which means "to be like." Thus, often in the Book of Proverbs, the message of a proverb is given by comparing two things and showing how they are similar in some respect. For example, *"An idea well-expressed is like a design of gold, set in silver."* (Proverbs 25: 11), or *"People who promise things that they never give are like clouds and wind that bring no rain."* (25: 14).

Another style commonly used in Proverbs is that of contrast, showing the difference between two things. This is common in chapters 10-15. For example, *"A gracious lady is respected, but a woman without virtue is a disgrace"* (11: 16), or, again, *"Sensible people keep quiet about what they know, but stupid people advertise their ignorance"* (12:23).

Sometimes conditional statements are used. For instance, *"If you repay good with evil, you will never get evil out of your house"* (17: 13), and *"Get good advice and you will succeed; don't go charging into battle without a plan"* (20: 18).

Another feature is the use of parables, such that behind what seems to be one plain truth lies another, deeper or more general truth. For instance, the proverb, *"Never eat more honey than you need; too much may make you vomit"* (Prov. 25: 16), is saying something true about honey. But it is also a general warning not to indulge in too much pleasure, lest one becomes fed up or end up in disgrace.

Similar styles are used by Jesus in his parables. The kingdom of heaven is as invaluable as a piece of land with hidden treasure, describing the need to sacrifice everything else in order to possess it (Matthew 13: 44); and if you want to enter the kingdom of God, you must not defer the decision to accept the invitation, as portrayed in the parable of the wedding feast (Matthew 22: 1-4).

Purpose of the Proverbs

The Book of Proverbs is quite clearly a guidebook to successful living, especially to young people, as the opening verses declare:

Here are proverbs that will help you to recognize wisdom and good advice, and understand sayings with deep meaning. They can teach you how to live intelligently and how to be honest, just, and fair. They can make an inexperienced person clever and teach young men how to be resourceful. These proverbs can even add to the knowledge of wise men and give guidance to the educated, so that they can understand the hidden meanings of proverbs and the problems that wise men raise. (Proverbs 1: 2-6 TEV)

The one who heeds the voice of wisdom as revealed in the proverbs, and avoids the temptations listed, is assured the rewards of long and pleasant life, wealth, honour and happiness (Proverbs 3: 16-17).

The Most Emphasized Themes

We summarize the teaching on nine of the most emphasized themes in biblical proverbs. We have limited the sources to the Book of Proverbs and the Parables of Jesus. The facts stated and observations made in the themes are truths that must be made known to all who desire knowledge about life. The instructions and advice given contain basic unchanging principles which, if heeded, can make one wise and guide one to live an acceptable and successful life; for they emphasize wisdom, understanding, insight, intelligence, discipline, honesty, justice, righteousness, goodness and fairness.

1 God

For the Hebrew, like other ancient people, nothing can be more real than God. To handle things properly and succeed in life, one must understand the nature and ways of things, and the universal laws that operate behind them. Such understanding comes only from God, the maker of all things. That is why the Hebrew wise man declares from the very beginning of the discourse on successful living, that "*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*" (Proverbs 1:7). That is the very first step in successful living. To fear God is to remember him and show proper regard for him. A person who wishes to do that, is advised, as it were, to practise the presence of God, not only sometimes or in some things only, but in all things and at all times. If one is thus conscious of God, relying not on his or her own thoughts, but trusting God with all his or her heart - at home, work, in politics, etc., - God will show him or her the right way (3:5-6). Thus all he or she does will be according to God's will, and, since it is God's will that in the end prevails (19:21), the one who relies on God will succeed.

If a person has experienced how reliable God is, he would avoid doing anything that could spoil his relationship with God, such as lying, disowning or disgracing God. He would pray constantly that God may deliver him from any conditions of life that could lead to such denial or dishonour, as for example, extreme riches which would make him proud; or extreme poverty that might make him steal (30:7-9). So his prayer would be, "give me only as much food as I need" (30:8).

Another important truth that the ancient Hebrew wise man learnt is that a nation without God's guidance is a nation without order; but happy is the one who keeps God's law (29:18). How true, and how much this counsel needs to be heeded today, both in the lives of individuals and of nations!

2 The Fool

If there is one person who is to be pitied most in life, it is the fool. Going by the

description of the Hebrew wise man, a very large number of people in the world are fools - including some of the world's leading scholars, politicians, businessmen and women, and even religious leaders. Among the many characteristics of the fool are the following. He is mentally weak and easily misled (1:10), morally irresponsible and refuses discipline (1:22-32). He has no regard for truth and is satisfied with his own opinion (14:8), does not search for wisdom but speaks nonsense without much thought (15:2, 14); he is proud and dislikes correction and advice (15:12). He is also a fool who is impatient, quarrelsome (12:16; 20:3) and bent on doing evil (17:12). Above all, a person who rejects the Lord is a fool (1:29), for as the Psalmist observes, "the fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" (Psalm 53:1-3).

Because of his very nature and his conduct, the fool has nothing good to offer (14:7), and is not liked because of his bad influence, as for instance, in bringing grief and bitter regrets to his very parents (10:1; 17:25).

Just as the fool's greatest vice is rejecting God, so also his greatest punishment for his folly is that God gives him up and has no use for him (3:34). Since he neither gets on with people nor finds favour with God, the fool cannot know true success in life.

3 Various Warnings

There are many warnings not to do things that can destroy one. Four of them are particularly to be noted. Among them is the **warning against joining thieves** (1:8-19). Those who attack and kill and rob others for riches or for the fun of it, "*are setting a trap for themselves, a trap in which they will die*" (1:18), for "robbery always claims the life of the robber" (1:19).

There are also strong **warnings against adultery** in chapters 5 and 6:20 to 7:27. One is warned to stay away from another man's wife, no matter how beautiful she may be (6:25) or how sweet her lips or smooth her kisses, for they lead to nothing but death (5:3-6). Adultery, experience has shown, is as dangerous as carrying fire against one's chest, or walking on hot coals, and always leads to suffering (6:27-29). A man who commits adultery will lose not only his wealth (5:10; 6:26), but also his honour (5:9,14; 6:33), and his very life (5:9; 6:34-35; 7:26-27). For this reason, one is strongly advised to keep to one's wife alone, and to be completely satisfied with her alone (5:15-19).

Another warning is against **laziness**, for it leads to ruin (24:31-32). The lazy person is known by his many bad habits. He does not start things early but keeps postponing (6:9-10), and when he starts something, he does not finish it (19:24). Because lazy people only think about what they want but do not work for it, they are ruined, and remain helpless and in want (13:4, 21:25-26; 24:31-32). Such people are advised to learn from the way ants live: not waiting to be told what to do, but taking the initiative to plan ahead, work hard while it is possible, and save up for the time of need (6:6-8).

The final warning to note is that against **deceit** which includes: lying, being untruthful and unreliable, disloyalty, making false promises, trickery, hypocrisy,

misleading others, and insincere talk that hides what you are really thinking. The experience of the wise has shown without mistake that those who cultivate such evil habits do not get very far in the end; for the Lord God hates such habits (6:1-5, 12-19). Therefore, those who do them end up in destruction; for they are caught in their own traps, and get crushed by the landslides that they themselves start (26:17-28).

In numerous proverbs, the one who desires life is advised to refrain from these evils and, instead, follow the path of wisdom and righteousness wherein is life and success.

4 Wisdom

In a sense all the themes of Proverbs are about wisdom. Yet, the theme of wisdom is treated in a special and detailed way in chapters 1-9. No one can go through life successfully without wisdom, hence the call of wisdom to all (1:20f). Wisdom promises many virtues, including understanding, knowledge, learning, discretion and wise dealing. Through these, one would steer through life and find security, treasures, moral uprightness, etc. (chapter 2) and life itself (4:10; 8:35).

From the observations of the wise men of old, anyone can obtain wisdom, provided he or she is willing to depart from evil (8:13) and the company of ignorant persons (9:4-6), while devoting oneself to wise teachings. If one desires to be wise, one must be determined and teachable (9:9), and accept advice and criticism (13:10; 17:10), especially God's correction (3:11f). But, although training, instruction and discipline can yield wisdom, the real source and ground of wisdom is God - hence the declaration that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (2:6). He who seeks wisdom, then, must first seek God.

5 Friends and Good Neighbours

God made us human beings to live in community. For community life to be possible, it is necessary, among other things, to have neighbours and friends. But what sort of friend or neighbour? Proverbs gives a detailed description of who may be called a friend. A friend is one who is kind, generous, truthful and reliable (27:10). He would not do anything that would hurt a neighbour (3:29) or spread news of a misunderstanding (25:8-9). He would be silent rather than criticise (11:12) or condemn anyone (14:21). A good friend has tact, knowing when to be close and when to keep his distance; when to say "yes" or "no" (3:27-28); 6:1-5); he does not over-stay his visit (25:17); he knows when a joke is going too far (26:18-19); and he would not do anything that would be inconvenient to a neighbour (27:14).

Besides all this, the good friend must be aware that friendships can be broken and neighbourliness spoilt by bad habits like gossip and doing the wrong thing. Accordingly, he avoids these (16:28; 17:9).

6 Words

By word God created the universe. By word Christ healed the sick, raised the dead, and cursed the fig tree. Life in community is hardly possible without words; for through them we communicate and even put our ideas in the minds of other people. With them we praise and pray to God. Such is the power of words that in Proverbs, three of the seven things which the Lord God hates and cannot tolerate have to do with the wrong use of words: lying, evil thought and false witness (6:16-19).

Since words can be used so powerfully for good or ill, the wise men of the ancient near east warned people of their power, and counselled people to use them aright. They advised that one's words must be few, calm and honest. For "*the more you talk, the more likely you are to sin*" and so the wise keep quiet (10:19). "*A gentle answer quietens anger*" (15:1), and "*Patient persuasion can break down the strongest resistance and can even convince rulers.*" (25:15) "*A good man's words are a fountain of life*" (10:11), and a source of wisdom (18:4), while wisely spoken words can heal (12:18). When words are wrongly used by evil and godless people, they can ruin a person (11:9); when used thoughtlessly, they can wound as deeply as any sword (12:18).

Experience has shown, however, that for all their power for good or ill, one needs more than just words to live a good life. For mere words cannot replace hard work (14:23), nor can lies change the truth (26:23-28).

All that *Proverbs* says about words can be summarized in Paul's advice: "Do not use harmful words, but only helpful words, the kind that build up and provide what is needed, so that what you say will be good to those who hear you." (Ephesians 4:29).

7 The Family

The Hebrew wise men of old recognized the importance of the family as the basic unit of society. As such, they stressed the need for it to be united, for faithfulness within it and for good training of children.

For a family to be good, marriage is to be monogamous and permanent, and couples are to be faithful to each other (5:15-23; 2:16-22). Sexual sin within marriage is evil and dangerous, leading to disgrace and even death (5:9-23), 6:26-35). A husband must love and be faithful to his wife (5:15, 19), while a wife must be generous, good to her husband and contribute to his good standing in society (31:10f).

It is important for parents to speak with one voice and teach what will improve their children's character - such that the children will pay attention to them (1:8-9). Training must begin from early childhood (22:6; 13:24), and is best if it combines both discipline (i.e. the rod, or punishment) and gentle but firm direction (1:9; 13:4; 22:15).

On their part, children are urged again and again to obey their parents and respect

them (1:8-9); 4:1), for such obedience is blessed with long and prosperous life (3:2).

Family members and relatives should be helpful and loyal to each other (17:17; 18:24).

Even though sometimes, some children refuse to learn and are disobedient, and some parents also do not give the right training or set a good example, if parents and children follow the advice of the sages of old, as presented in *Proverbs*, the quality of life in the modern world should be far better than it is now with all the violence, immorality and lawlessness that abound.

8 Life and Death

Another theme emphasized in Proverbs is that of life and death. The words "life" and "death" are used both in their ordinary and figurative senses. Thus, "life" means both living here on earth and a good quality of life. "Death" refers to the physical event of dying, i.e., the end of one's earthly life as well as to a state of conflict in life. In whichever sense one takes it, mature opinion is that all should seek life and avoid death.

If one desires to live and live long, then the way is to be obedient and seek wisdom (3:2; 4:10; 9:11). There are certain conditions and styles of life which add quality to life. For example, close observation has shown that one who finds wisdom finds life (8:35). So also, peace of mind (14:30), honest earning and avoiding bribery give long life (15:27). Again, it is good to be in the favour of those in authority, for that yields blessing, just as clouds give needed rain in spring time (16:15).

On the other hand, certain conditions and experiences are as bad as dying, for people in those states of life have gone astray and missed the way to true life. Consequently, they are in conflict. Such is the case, for example, with the person who is wicked (5:22-23), or has not found wisdom or who hates wisdom (8:36). One can save a child from death and going astray from true life, by timely discipline (23:13-14).

We can escape death and enjoy real life, if we heed these observations and counsels.

9 The Kingdom of God

Outside the ancient Wisdom books of the Old Testament (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes), the most concentrated collection of proverbial sayings in the Bible can be found in the Parables of Jesus, recorded in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke. There, the major and single theme is the Kingdom of God. We conclude this survey of emphases of biblical proverbs and proverbial sayings with a brief look at these parables.

The collection of Jesus's teachings known as the Sermon on the Mount, ends with a parable of two house builders. One is a fool, for he built on sand, and his house collapsed. The other is a wise person, for he built on rock, and his house survived the storm and the flood (Matthew 6: 24-27). Hearing and obeying the teachings of Jesus is

like building on rock; it is wisdom and life; while hearing but not obeying the teachings of Jesus is foolishness and death. To Jesus, the wisest thing a person can do is to seek and get into the Kingdom, and the most foolish thing to do is to remain outside it (See Parable of the Ten Virgins, Matthew 25:1-13).

The parables of Jesus teach about a dimension of life that is higher than physical earthly life, or even a good quality of it. They teach about eternal life - life with God, which is the truest life of all; that is life in the Kingdom of God.

When Jesus talked about the Kingdom of God, he did not mean any physical area on earth. Rather, he meant a spiritual realm. In that kingdom, God is the ruler, and his will is done by his subjects (Matthew 6:10); his power is experienced and his Holy Spirit destroys the works of Satan (Luke 11:20). Those who are members of the kingdom have God's Spirit who gives them power to live lives that are noble, righteous, godly, peaceful, joyful, and so on (Romans 14:17; Galatians 5:22-25, etc.)

Jesus taught that belonging to this Kingdom is the most important thing. Therefore, one should be prepared to give up everything else in order to get into it. (See parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl in Matthew 13: 44-45). The sacrifices that one will have to make may include habits that give benefits but which are ungodly; or a position of authority; or riches, etc. (Matthew 19:16-21; Luke 3:10-14,18; Acts 2:38).

Above all, Jesus revealed that he himself is the one whom the Father has sent to bring the Kingdom to us (Matthew 21:33-46; John 3:16; 4:25-26). He is also the way to God the Father (John 14:6). If a person believes in Jesus and obeys him, that person is abiding in Jesus, and God himself will work in that person to enable him or her to will and to live the kind of life that pleases God (Phil.2:13). This is the good and truly successful life that both African and biblical proverbs counsel. To live in Jesus, then, is to fulfill the counsels in the proverbs.

CHAPTER 3

THE GOSPEL AND GA AND DANGME PROVERBS

In Chapter 1, we stated themes and values that most frequently come up in Ga and Dangme proverbs. In Chapter 2, some of the most commonly emphasized themes and values in biblical proverbs were stated. In this chapter, we shall state what we think the Gospel affirms in the values contained in Ga and Dangme proverbs, what it adds to them, and what it corrects or replaces in them. We shall also state some important traditional values that should receive more attention than the Church has given them.

This Christian evaluation is based on the whole of Scripture, and not just on the Book of Proverbs or other proverbial material in the Bible. Also, the themes to be evaluated are not from just the 200 proverbs explained in this book, or those analyzed to be the most emphasized themes and values in Ga and Dangme proverbs, but rather from the whole cultural store of Ga and Dangme proverbs.

What the Gospel Affirms

In both the Old and New Testaments, proverbs have been used to teach important lessons. New Testament writers like Paul, Peter and James used Old Testament proverbs. Jesus himself also used proverbial sayings frequently. Sometimes he used or modified old ones, and sometimes he composed new ones. Thus, the Bible supports the use of proverbs in teaching both social and religious values. The themes and values expressed in Ga and Dangme proverbs can be supported with biblical themes and values. We shall support this claim with a couple of examples from the fifteen most emphasized values and themes, and a few others from the wider store.

The Ga and Dangme call to make the right use of opportunity and act appropriately is affirmed in biblical texts like the popular passage that "there is a time for everything under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 3: 1-8); in Jesus' response to his mother at the wedding in Cana that his time had not yet come (John 2: 1-5); and in Paul's exhortation that believers should live not as ignorant people but like wise people, finding out what the Lord wants them to do and using every opportunity they have (Ephesians 5: 15-57; Colossians 4: 5-6).

Again, the teachings on cause and effect and boomerang reaction are echoed in the deuteronomic principle which runs through the Bible: namely, that if you obey the Lord, you will prosper; if you disobey, you will suffer. (See, for example, Deuteronomy 28.) The Bible teaches also that a person will reap exactly what he sows (Galatians 6:

7-10). Then, again, the theme of co-operation, inter-dependence and community is commanded in Romans 12: 3-8 and 1 Corinthians 12: 12-31.

Quite apart from the fifteen themes in Chapter 1, there are many other important values that are taught in Ga and Dangme proverbs which the Gospel affirms. The following are some examples.

(1) **Justice, Fairness and Impartiality** are counselled in the Ga proverbs: ***Kâ okââ wâi nô lâ, okâô shikpô hu nô.*** (*If you speak in respect of heaven, you must say something about the earth, too.*) The idea expressed here is essentially the same as the one expressed in Deuteronomy 16: 18-20 concerning the appointment of judges and administration of justice in Israel: justice must be seen to be done to all without fear or favour.

(2) The Dangme realize the blessings that come from **the truth**, as stated in their saying: ***Anôkwale jôô k tsui he.*** (*Truth-telling cools down an angry heart.*) The Bible also teaches that knowing the truth makes one free (John 8: 32) and speaking the truth to one another makes for harmony (Ephesians 4: 20-32).

(3) The desire and counsel for **peace and reconciliation** is expressed in the Ga proverb: ***Ajô, ajô lâ, esââ bâ sane.*** (*Peace, peace, brings no trouble in its wake.*) Similar sentiments can be found in Matthew 5: 25-26 and Romans 12: 14-21 where people are advised to make peace and not seek litigation or revenge.

(4) **Knowledge and wisdom** are not the monopoly of any one person. Therefore, the wise thing to do is to confer with others in order to benefit from their wisdom. This awareness is shown in the proverb: ***Yi kake yâ da mi*** (Dangme), or ***Yitso kome eyaaa ajina*** (Ga), meaning, *One head does not sit in council.* In 1 Corinthians 1 and 2, Paul shows the limitation of human wisdom. Proverbs 3: 7 and Romans 12: 16 advise people not to claim any special wisdom. Instead, as in Philippians 2: 3, one ought not to boast but must be humble and even consider others to be better than oneself. In other words, one must appreciate and make use of the knowledge and wisdom that other people, too, have.

(5) Human beings have certain God-given rights, among which are the **freedoms to express oneself and to seek redress.** The Ga say: ***Ayiii mô ni atua lâ yafo hu.*** (*You do not beat a person and besides prevent him from crying*), meaning, you do not trespass on someone's right and restrain him from complaining. Many biblical injunctions and stories clearly state the principle that people have the right to complain and to seek redress for their grievances. Examples are the appointment of divisional judges (Exodus 18: 16-26) and of helpers in the Church to settle disputes and distribute food and funds to the needy (Acts 6: 1-6).

(6) In a Ga or Dangme household, parents and children have mutual **rights and privileges** as well as **obligations and responsibilities.** Parents are to provide for their children, bring them up and train them properly, while children are to obey and respect their parents, and look after them in their old age. Sayings such as the following two

express these important Ga and Dangme traditions: **Akâ k mi elââ bi**. (*You do not bring up a child on kenkey, a Ga staple food*), meaning that training is more important than feeding. **Bi ni nuuu nii lâ eyaa anuuu nii ma**. (*The child who does not listen or pay attention to advice goes to 'they-don't-listen-town', that is, such a child experiences the undesirable*). The Bible affirms these teachings: that parents are to train their children (e.g., Psalm 78: 5-8; Proverbs 22: 6; Ephesians 6: 4), and provide for the family (2 Timothy 5: 8); while children are to obey their parents, heed their wise insights (Proverbs 5: 1-14; Ephesians 6: 1-3), and take care of their aged parents (1 Timothy 5: 4).

What the Gospel Adds

As far as social and moral values are concerned, it may be difficult to find any entirely new value that the Gospel adds to those of the Ga and Dangme. What may seem new are really differences of degree rather than of kind. That is to say, they are corrections of, or improvements on, the indigenous values and ideas. Such examples will be discussed below under "What the Gospel Corrects or Replaces."

However, the Gospel has brought new ideas in religious and spiritual teachings. For example, while in the traditional African context, the sources of the proverbs are accepted to be the human composers, in the Bible, God is acknowledged to be the final source, at least of some, of the proverbs. (See Proverbs 1:1 and Ecclesiastes 12:11). Again, proverbial sayings have been used in the Bible in a new way to communicate the important message of God's gracious provision of salvation and eternal fellowship with himself through the sacrificial death and resurrection of his son, Jesus Christ.

Jesus used proverbial sayings to teach important lessons about the Kingdom of God. For example, in Matthew 13, He uses the parables of the hidden treasure (v.44) and the pearl (v.45-46) to teach that when one hears God's message of salvation, one should not wait but react quickly and accept it; what is more, one should be willing to give up whatever is necessary in order to become a follower of Christ, a Christian. Where people respond positively to the message, God gives them the power to become His children (John 1: 12) and to live out good lives (Philippians 2: 13 and Ephesians 2: 10). Thus, if, following the biblical example, Ga and Dangme proverbs can be created (or existing ones modified) to tell the message of Christ, it will be an important addition to proverb use among the Ga and Dangme.

What the Gospel Corrects or Replaces

In his teaching, Jesus corrected and replaced some of the Old Testament teachings in important respects. (See, for example, Matthew 5: 17-48.) He did that not to do away with the Law of Moses and the teachings of the prophets, but to make their teachings clearer. In the same way, the Gospel can be said to have corrected and replaced some of the values in Ga and Dangme proverbs. The following are examples.

(1) Inferiority of Women

It seems natural that wherever people live together and relate to one another,

some should take a leadership role and others a subordinate position, as is usually the case between men and women. This kind of arrangement is meant to ensure harmony and smooth running of their affairs. Such an arrangement is reflected in various proverbs and sayings, as for example, in the Ga proverb, ***Kâ yoo lâ too lâ, nuu gbeô.*** (*When a woman rears a goat, it is a man who slaughters it.*) This particular proverb teaches, not so much that the woman is the subordinate (not inferior) partner, but also and rather, equally important, that she is an indispensable companion of the man. Sometimes, however, this beautiful God-given, natural arrangement is misunderstood, and women are treated as if they were inferior to men. The Bible has corrected this view by revealing that both men and women were created in the image of God (Genesis 1: 26-28), and that both have fallen and have been redeemed by grace through Christ and made heirs of the Kingdom (1 Peter 3: 7). So before God, there is no difference between men and women (Galatians 3: 28). They are equal and must have mutual regard for each other (Ephesians 5: 21), while playing different roles that best suit their peculiar natures and abilities.

(2) **Selective Truth-telling**

There is a Ga saying that: ***Anôkwale ni jwaa ma lâ awieeee.*** (*Truth that can destroy the town (community) is not (to be) told.*) This suggestion that the truth should not always be spoken needs to be corrected and replaced with one that commands the truth in all circumstances. The Gospel teaches that we must no longer tell lies but rather always speak the truth to one another (Ephesians 4: 25-32) because truth makes us free.

(3) **Discrimination**

Again, the tradition to respect the elderly and those who have distinguished themselves in society has come to mean discrimination against the less fortunate. So people such as the rich, elderly and political leaders are unduly favoured, as these Dangme proverbs show: ***Adowa se mi pôâ.*** (*The antelope's back does not get wet*), meaning the evil doings of an elder or important personality do not easily leak out. Also: ***Blô he ngmôhulô hu we ngmô kp kp*** . (*One who farms by the path does not plough a crooked farm*), which means that a wealthy person is never guilty. While the Bible supports respect for the elderly and the noble (see e.g., 1 Timothy 5: 1-2 and 1 Peter 2: 17), it disapproves of discrimination and favouritism. Instead, the Gospel teaches fair, just and equal treatment for all (Acts 10: 34; James 2: 1-13).

(4) **Fatalism**

The Ga proverb, ***Ofôï yitso mli kpaaa lá*** (*There is always blood in the head of a tsetse fly*) and the like, were meant to caution people when dealing with a person known to have done some evil. Unfortunately, this caution has been taken to suggest that people can never change from bad to good: once bad, always bad! But the Gospel has shown this view to be mistaken; for when anyone is joined to Christ, he is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come (2 Corinthians 5: 17).

In ways such as those shown above, the Gospel can correct traditional values and practices that have been misunderstood or misapplied. It can also replace those that are not so good, with more acceptable ones based on the Word of God which is, after all, for

all people on earth.

Values which Local Proverbs Add to Biblical Emphases

It may not be possible to find positive values in local proverbs which are entirely absent in the Bible. However, there are a number of values that are of special relevance to African societies which the Church in Africa must emphasize more than it is doing at present. This is necessary for two main reasons: (1) In some cases, the Bible does not lay as much emphasis on the values as in traditional African society. (2) Owing to the strong influence of non-African cultures, especially European culture, and other factors on African societies, these values - important as they are for keeping up the society - are getting lost; thus, causing break-down in African societies.

We draw attention to the following, and suggest that Churches add to them, and find effective ways of protecting them.

- (1) Marriage: its seriousness and permanence;
- (2) The family: its closeness and strength;
- (3) Human community and fellowship rather than individualism: the tradition that all are their brother/sister's keeper;
- (4) Respect for the elderly, authority and procedure;
- (5) The reality of the world of the spirit: the mistake and failure of the view that only material things are real or the things that matter;
- (6) Dependence on the supernatural: hence, e.g., knowing how to appropriate the power of the Holy Spirit in one's life; and
- (7) The need for development of the whole person: body, mind and spirit.

Conclusion

As has been shown above, there is much that the Bible affirms in Ga and Dangme beliefs and values. These must be firmly preserved. But the Bible also corrects and replaces some of the values, as we have shown. In traditional society itself, proverbs are changed to suit new situations. In much the same way, the values and beliefs they contain ought to be changed, where new light and understanding shows them to be incorrect. There is no need to hold on rigidly to them. Where, on the other hand, it is desirable to draw on traditional values to stress or strengthen biblical teaching, in order to enhance the quality of life, the Church must not hesitate to do so. Rather, it should constantly look for ways of establishing the Kingdom of God and of implanting the new life in Africa.

This search for renewal is one of the most beneficial tasks the Church in Africa can perform for the progress of society.

CHAPTER 4

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY AND REFLECTION

In the preceding chapters, we pointed out many qualities of the African proverb. We argued that African proverbs are like Old Testament Jewish proverbs and those of the people of other cultures. We pointed out, for instance, that because they are vivid and have humour, they arouse interest and influence the hearer to try and follow the advice contained in the proverbs. We noted also that Jesus and other New Testament writers used proverbs in line with the Jewish practice. Some of the proverbs they used were from the olden days while others were new. We urged that the Church in Africa should take good advantage of the African practice of using proverbs to explain, confirm or summarize a point, and use them to teach biblical truths and moral lessons. In comparing the African proverb with the biblical proverb, we noted some similarities and differences. We also noted some shortcomings in the African proverb, and what the Gospel supplies. We further noted some key African values which are not so prominent in the Bible or have been underemphasized and which should be stressed in African Christian teaching. We suggested that the Church should combine what the Gospel has added with the traditional use of proverbs.

In this last chapter of the introductory section of this book, we shall make a few suggestions to help readers engage in some further study of, and reflection on, African proverbs and the Christian message. But first, let us deal with some difficulties connected with the use of traditional African proverbs in preaching.

Possible Objections to Using African Proverbs in the Church

We are aware that, for various reasons, not all who read this book may like the idea of using proverbs in preaching the Christian message. First, objectors may contend that since African proverbs are part of the African traditional culture, Christians must not go back to them. Secondly, they may be reluctant to use African proverbs because of fear that they may overshadow Bible texts or themes, since some of the proverbs are so vivid that they may be more easily remembered than the Bible texts they are meant to

help explain. Thirdly, some Christians may be uncomfortable with the traditional proverbs, for the reason that some of the teachings they contain conflict with the teachings of the Bible. For example, one Ga proverb says that: "*The truth that can destroy the town (i.e., community) is not (to be) told.*" According to Christian teaching, the truth must be told; Christians must not tell lies.

Responses to the Objections

These possible objections to the use of indigenous African proverbs in the Church are quite strong. What do you yourself think of them? For our part, we think that there are responses to them that are equally strong and worthy of careful and sympathetic consideration.

It is true that some aspects of traditional culture must be left behind when one becomes a Christian; for example, calling up the spirits of the dead, or cursing people who have wronged us. The Bible forbids such practices. (See, for example, Deut. 18: 9-13; Luke 6: 27-36; Rom. 12: 17-21.)

But this does not mean that all aspects of African culture are unchristian. It is good to remember, too, that culture is very broad. It includes (1) **the beliefs** of a people, e.g., about God or the nature of humans; (2) **their values**, e.g., what they regard as good or bad, right or wrong and, therefore, ought or ought not be done; or what they consider to be true, or beautiful; (3) **their customs**, e.g., how they behave, relate to others, talk, greet, dress, eat or build houses; and (4) **the institutions** that help them express the above, such as the social structure, the institution of chieftaincy, the family, system of government, courts, markets, clubs and associations, etc. It is this system of beliefs, values, customs and institutions that binds a people together and gives them a sense of identity, dignity, security and continuity.

As can be seen, no part of a people's life falls outside their culture. Therefore, it will never be possible to reject the whole of a culture; to try to do so would mean to refuse to live in this world. One must remember also that many aspects of African culture are in line with biblical teaching, as for example, the African emphasis on the family, community, fellow-feeling, respect for elders, awareness of the supernatural and belief in God.

On the second issue, it is true that there can be a real danger, if proverbs are not used well. The answer is that preachers should not build their sermons around proverbs. They must use Bible passages for sermons, and use the proverbs to explain, illustrate or reinforce the biblical truths with concrete examples. This must be done to help make it easier for their hearers to understand the message of the Bible. Proverbs that teach what is in opposition to what the Bible teaches should not usually be used. But one may cite them, if the intention is to show a better way through biblical revelation: Jesus did a similar thing when He declared: "You have been told of old ... You have heard that ... But now I tell you" (Matthew 5: 21-22, 27-28, etc.) For the Christian, the Bible as the revealed word of God must remain the highest authority when it comes to considering which religious claims to believe or conduct to follow.

As a solution to the third problem of the possibility of a proverb teaching something that is opposed to biblical teaching, we would suggest the following. In selecting proverbs for use in preaching, the preacher must ask and answer the following questions. (These same questions could be asked whenever one is considering whether or not any particular cultural practice can be followed by a Christian.)

1. Does it undermine the claim that Jesus is the Saviour? Does it suggest that something else is needed for redemption or deliverance, besides faith in Jesus Christ and in the power of his sacrificial death and blood shed on Calvary's cross?
2. Does it suggest that Jesus Christ is not the supreme Lord?
3. Does it water down or oppose the teaching that the Bible is the highest authority in matters of faith and conduct? In other words, does it teach a way of life that is opposed to what the Bible teaches?

If the answer to any of these questions is 'Yes,' then that proverb (or cultural practice) must be rejected. If the answer is 'No,' then the proverb (or practice) can be used.

The Advantages in Using African Proverbs

The use of African proverbs in African congregations has great advantages. The citing of relevant proverbs makes the audience interested, stay awake, and pay keen attention to the message. They also get involved by using their imagination. Thus, they enjoy the message, remember it, and see themselves agreeing with the truth being proclaimed. It is because of these advantages that our Lord Jesus himself used proverbial sayings frequently. And he succeeded in getting his hearers to understand and respond to his message - even if they did not always accept it.

If you are a preacher, you can try using proverbs sometimes, and find out what difference it makes to your preaching. You may use some of the samples in Part Two of this book.

Suggestions for Further Study and Follow-up

This book is one of three which have been published mainly for preachers and teachers as part of a wider project on the study of African proverbs. We would encourage scholars and educational institutions to find ways of keeping this effort going. We make the following suggestions to encourage further study of African proverbs as a follow-up to this book.

For Theological Colleges, Seminaries and Other Educational Institutions

It will be a good idea if institutes of African Studies and African Religious Studies Departments, Theological Colleges and Seminaries undertake the study of African proverbial sayings, and design courses for teaching them and how they may be

used in the Church and in schools. Seminaries can prepare seminarians to apply them in preaching and teaching. This can be done as part of courses in biblical exegesis (i.e., explanation of the meaning of Bible texts), the techniques of preaching, and in Jesus' use of parables. Lecturers and students could use existing collections of proverbs, or undertake projects to collect proverbs of their own people.

Schools and other institutions of higher education could revive interest in the study and use of proverbs among the youth. This can be done by teaching proverbs as part of their cultural studies, and during periods when moral and social values are taught.

If institutions do this, they will not only improve upon the quality and relevance of the education they give their students; they will also be helping in an important way to preserve the experience and wisdom of our ancestors as well as preserve proverbs that are in danger of getting lost. This will be of great benefit to the present and future generations.

For Teachers and Preachers

Individual teachers and preachers as well as the general reader can do some further studies in the use of proverbs. For them, we suggest these:

- (1) Following the pattern used in this book, readers may try writing notes on some of the additional 100 proverbs listed towards the end of the book for their own use.
- (2) Readers, especially teachers and preachers, can collect proverbs in their own mother tongues and record them.
- (3) They may write notes on proverbs they have collected and/or those already in print. The notes may follow the pattern used in this book or some other style. Those who can, should publish their collections and notes in the form of books for wide circulation and the benefit of others.
- (4) Teachers can group proverbs (making use of those in this book or other collections) into topics that they can use to teach moral and social values to their students.
- (5) It will be a useful exercise for teachers to critically reflect on proverbs and draw out their special strengths that must be stressed in contemporary society, as well as weaknesses which need to be modified or dropped.
- (6) Preachers, teachers and scholars should critically evaluate African proverbs and find out:

- (i) what the Gospel affirms about their values, or adds, or corrects, or replaces;
and
(ii) what values and themes in the African proverbs should be given more emphasis
in the African Church than are given in the Bible.

(7) It is suggested that Preachers find additional Bible texts or stories which can be used with the proverbs explained in this book.

(8) Preachers are encouraged to select hymns or other songs that can be used with each proverb explained in this book.

(9) We would further encourage both preachers and teachers to find and cite at least one appropriate indigenous African proverb in every sermon or major address that they may give.

As stated in the Foreword to this book, much progress has been made in the effort to make Christianity part of the African's way of life. But much still remains to be done. This project is making an important contribution to that effort of making the Christian message take deep root in the African soil - just as is being done by the use of African choruses, drums, local language Bibles and Hymnbooks, and having Africans as Heads of the Churches in Africa. It is our prayer and hope that the African Church will meet the spiritual, intellectual, moral and emotional needs of Africans, through the use of the rich store of African proverbs.

PART II

CHAPTER 5

ANNOTATED GA AND DANGME PROVERBS FOR PREACHING AND TEACHING

Introduction to the Format of Annotated Proverbs

In this Part of the book, two hundred Ga and Dangme Proverbs are presented. Each of them has notes written on it in five sections.

1. First, the common version of **the proverb in Ga or Dangme** is given. (In the English edition, a literal translation of the proverb is given in **English**.)
2. Under **Explanation/Origin**, a literal explanation of the proverb is given. In a few cases, this section also gives the story of the origin of the proverb. In most cases, the origin is not known; in such cases, only the literal or primary meaning is given. Thus, the

explanation is limited to the image used, the actual life situation depicted, custom or history referred to, etc.

3. Under **Meaning**, the deeper or real meaning and moral lesson of the proverb is given.
4. Then, under **Purpose/Occasion for Citing the Proverb**, the actual or probable occasions on which the proverb is used in the traditional society are stated. Also, the specific or possible purposes for which the proverb is cited are stated. Possible occasions or purposes for which the proverb can be used in Christian preaching and teaching are also suggested.
5. Finally, under the heading **Related Key Biblical Themes/Stories**, a number of Bible passages, themes, stories, etc. are cited. These are examples of texts, etc. which one can use the proverb to explain or emphasize.

Preachers and teachers are encouraged to use these proverbs either in the forms stated here, or in modified forms. The Bible texts, etc. can also be added to, but care should be taken to see that the proverbs used suit them.

GA PROVERBS

1. Proverb: ***Abaa bem ayeô.***

English: You can deserve your innocence.

Explanation: If a person keeps offending you and you forgive him/her several times before you react, you will be justified. In the same manner, you will not be blamed, if you acknowledge the wrong that you have done and plead for mercy, or ask for the matter to be settled, but the one you have offended does not accept your plea.

Meaning: (1) Do not retaliate or blame others too quickly.
(2) Repent and quickly plead for a settlement when you are at fault.

Purpose/Occasion for Citing the Proverb:

used to
period of time,
offender does nothing

This proverb teaches that patience and repentance are good. It is counsel an offended person to give the offender a long after which one may react or seek redress - if the offender does nothing about the matter.

The proverb can be used to teach that if we forgive others, God will also forgive and justify us.

Related Key Biblical Themes/Stories:

- still
- (1) If you do warn an evil man and he doesn't stop sinning, he will die, sinner, but your life will be spared. (Ezekiel 3: 19).
- Father in
- (2) If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your heaven will also forgive you. (Matthew 6: 14).
- repents,
- (3) So watch what you do! If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he forgives him. (Luke 17: 3-4).

2. Proverb: ***Abiii wo ni ahe nu.***

English: You must not solicit for honey and then accept water instead.

Explanation: Honey is quite different from water, and costs more. Therefore, if you need honey but accept water instead, it shows that you do not know what you really want.

Meaning: One must be steadfast and persevere to get exactly what one really needs.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ The proverb is used to encourage people not to allow themselves to be cheated. It is used also to show the need to persist until one gets what one wants.

prayer,
in heaven will

It can be used to emphasize the teaching of the Lord Jesus on that if we persist in prayer for our needs, our Father who is grant us our needs.

Biblical Theme/Story:

- you bless
- (1) The man said, "Let me go; daylight is coming." "I won't, unless me," Jacob answered. (Genesis 32: 27).
- (2) And so I say to you: Ask, and you will receive; seek, and you will

find; knock, and the door will be opened to you. (Luke 11: 9).

3. Proverb: ***Adaa dani akp a.***

English: You must be mature before you cackle.

Explanation: When a hen begins to cackle, that is an indication that it is grown and is about to lay eggs. If a chick tries to cackle when it is not old enough, it will struggle in vain.

Meaning: If you are not ripe to perform some function and you force your way to do it, you will put yourself to unnecessary stress and trouble.

Purpose/Occasion:

This proverb has to do with patience. It is used to advise young men and women to take their time in life and to do things at the right time, as otherwise, they will find life difficult. It is used, for example, to reprimand an immature or unmarried girl who has started having children, and to admonish others to wait until they are married before having children.

The proverb can be used to remind Christians, and pastors also, that it is important to give teaching that is appropriate to the newly converted as 'spiritual babes' and that which is appropriate to the spiritually mature in Christ.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) He has set the right time for everything. (Ecclesiastes 3: 11).

(2) As a matter of fact, my brethren, I could not talk to you as I talk to people who have the Spirit; I had to talk to you as though you belonged to this world, as children in the Christian faith. (1 Corinthians 3: 1; Hebrews 6: 1).

(3) When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am a man, I have no more use for childish ways. (1 Corinthians 13: 11).

4. Proverb: ***"Aekoo" hi fe "Sââ fââ."***

English: To be told "Well done" is more honourable than to be asked "How was back?"

Explanation: When a person has done a good piece of work, that person is saluted with the words "**Aekoo.**" One who has not gone outdoors (implying he has not done any work), is asked, "How was back" by those who have gone out, on their return home after the day's work.

Meaning: It is the person who works hard that everyone wants, not the idler.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb is used to show that a person ought to do useful work. It is also used to encourage people to engage in some gainful employment, however small.

Preachers and teachers can cite it to support St. Paul's teaching that one ought to work and not be lazy.

Biblical Theme/Story:

- (1) The parable of the ten talents (Matthew 25: 14-31).
- (2) "Whoever refuses to work is not allowed to eat." We say this because we hear that there are some people among you who live lazy lives and who do nothing except meddle in other people's business. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ we command these people and warn them to lead orderly lives and work to earn their own living. (2 Thessalonians 3: 10-12).

5. Proverb: ***Afi kââ: "Mô ni gbe mi edôôô mi akâ mô ni famô mitsâji."***

English: The partridge says. "I am not so much offended by the one who kills me as by the one who plucks my feathers."

Explanation: The partridge is a very clever bird. It destroys crops, and flies away quickly at the sight of a human being. But it is easy to catch and kill it, once its feathers have been plucked. Hence, plucking its feathers pains it more than its being killed.

Meaning: A traitor is a more evil person than a murderer.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb is cited when talking about the evils of betrayal. It is used to warn people to be careful so as not to do anything that may put someone into trouble - lest they be blamed.

saying, "The terrible for that been better for that man This proverb about the partridge can be compared with Jesus' Son of Man will die as the Scriptures say he will, but how man who betrays the Son of Man! It would have if he had never been born!" (Mark 14: 21).

Biblical Theme/Story:

food, (1) Even my best friend, the one I trusted most, the one who shared by has turned against me. (Psalm 41: 9).

(Matthew (2) A man's worst enemies will be the members of his own family. 10: 36).

Man?" (3) But Jesus said, "Judas, is it with a kiss that you betray the Son of (Luke 22: 48).

6. Proverb: ***Agbeee shwuô ni aja eloo gbi kome.***

English: You cannot kill an elephant and distribute its meat all in single day.

Explanation: The elephant is a huge animal. When killed, it takes many days to cut up and distribute the meat.

Meaning: When there is a problem or some matter to attend to, one must take one's time to deal with it. The proverb is like another which says, ***Nyô tserè ejeee ni efo gbâ mli gbi kome*** (A new moon does not become a full moon in one day.)

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ The proverb teaches that it is wise not to rush unduly when performing a task that is important, or when venturing into something that will have far-reaching consequences; for example, marriage, starting a new business, r preaching to convert hardened unbelievers.

learn It can be used to advise newly converted Christians not to hasten to become spiritual giants or church leaders, but rather to take time to and practise the new faith, as it is by gradual progress that they

will grow into maturity in their new faith and way of life.

Biblical Theme/Story:

_____ (1) God established the Church, and put all things in place to prepare all God's people until we shall become mature people, reaching to the very height of Christ's stature. (Ephesians 4: 11-13).

(2) The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins. (2 Peter 3: 9).

7. Proverb: **Agbeee tsina atooo hô.**

English: One does not slaughter a cow in expectation of a pregnancy; or to await one's wife's delivery.

Explanation: Newly married couples rejoice when the wife is pregnant. Some even slaughter some animal, say, a fowl, to rejoice. However, since one cannot tell exactly when the wife will give birth, one does not slaughter a cow to await the day of delivery in order to have a feast.

Meaning: (1) One cannot provide for the totally unforeseen event.
(2) Everything has its time.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb means exactly the same as another which says, **Anuuu nu atooo Aharabata** (One does not drink water in anticipation of Harmattan drought.) (See No. 26 below.) It is used to give the advice that one need not worry too much when preparing for something about whose occurrence one is not at all certain. It is also used to teach that one should not worry too much about the future, since no one knows what the future will bring.

Preachers can use it to teach also that one should not boast about tomorrow.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) "So do not worry about tomorrow." (Matthew 6: 34).

(2) What you should say is this: 'If the Lord is willing, we will live and do this or that.' (James 4: 15).

8. Proverb: **Agbooo ayeee.**

English: The dead do not eat.

Explanation: When one dies, one can no longer eat or enjoy the fruits of his/her labour.

Meaning: It is no use overworking oneself, only to use the money earned to cure an illness resulting from such fatigue.

Purpose/Occasion:

This proverb is cited when someone is overworking without resting. It is used to advise such a person to take some rest. It is also used in situations where people are straining to do things they cannot do.

The proverb can be used to encourage people to take time off from time to time and to seek spiritual renewal by going on retreats in order to rest, and to meditate and commune with God.

Biblical Theme/Story:

There were so many people coming and going that Jesus and his disciples didn't even have time to eat. So he said to them, 'Let us go off by ourselves to some place where we will be alone and you can rest for a while.' (Mark 6: 31).

9. Proverb: **Ahaa mô yoo ni ake lâ saa hu afata he.**

English: No one gives away a woman to a man in marriage and provides him a bed besides.

Explanation: Parents may so admire a young man for his good conduct and industry that they may give him their daughter for a wife. But they would not give him the bed on which to lie with his wife; he must provide one himself; otherwise, he would be regarded as good for nothing.

Meaning: If someone is helping you, you yourself must play a part.

Purpose/Occasion:

This proverb is usually cited in contexts where someone who is being helped does not make any effort at all, but expects everything to be done for him/her.

Preachers can use it to exhort people that even though God the

Father has
each person must
like life in order to

provided a way of salvation as well as his saving grace,
believe in Christ, and endeavour to live the Christ-
attain salvation.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.
(John 3: 16).

(2) So then, dear friends, as you always obeyed me when I was with you, it is even more important that you obey me now while I am away from you. Keep on working with fear and trembling to complete your salvation, because God is always at work in you to make you willing and able to obey his own purpose. (Philippians 2: 12-13).

10. Proverb: ***Ajatô tsofa tsaaa kanto.***

English: The cure for yaws will never cure rickets.

Explanation: Both yaws and rickets are diseases, but they are different from each other. The medicine that cures yaws cannot cure rickets.

Meaning: (1) There is a right way to handle each case.
(2) You cannot make the impossible possible.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb is usually cited when someone has proposed a solution or procedure that is not appropriate for the case on hand. It is used to suggest that there is need to look for another solution for the problem on hand.

animals Preachers can cite it to drive home the teaching that the blood of blood of Christ is no longer used to cleanse sin, but that only the spotless can take away sins.

Biblical Theme/Story:

_____ (1) No one pours new wine into used wineskins. (Matthew 9: 17).

(2) For the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sins.
(Hebrews 10: 4).

11. Proverb: **"Ajô. ajô" lâ, esââ bâ sane.**

English: "Peace, peace," brings no trouble in its wake.

Explanation: When someone who has been offended says. "ajo" ("let's have peace," or "never mind") that settles the issue, and there is peace.

Meaning: One must help resolve problems, and not create difficulties.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ The proverb is often cited when there is a quarrel. It is used to make
the point that vengeance and a tit-for-tat attitude bring about
destruction, while a live-and-let-live attitude brings peace.

to Preachers can use this proverb to exhort peace and forbearance and
live in encourage Christians to bless those who curse or persecute them;
things peace with all; and not seek revenge. Instead, they should do those
that will bring peace and help believers to grow in the faith.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) A gentle answer quietens anger, but a harsh one stirs it up.
(Proverbs 15: 1).

(2) But I tell you ... bless those who curse you, and pray for those who
ill-treat you. (Luke 6: 27-31)

(3) Ask God to bless those who persecute you ... not to curse. Do not
repay evil for evil ... Never take revenge ... Do not let evil defeat you;
instead, conquer evil with good. (Romans 12: 14, 17-21).

12. Proverb: **Akâ blema me ehoo wonu.**

English: Old palmnuts are not used for preparing soup.

Explanation: Palm fruits do not remain fresh for a long time. When they go bad,
they are no longer good for making soup.

Meaning: (1) Do not insist on using a rule that is no longer in use to judge a
current case.

(2) Do not insist on following ancient procedures at all times, since
life itself is changing all the time.

(3) You do not use the cure for one disease to cure another.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb is cited when some act has been avenged because of
some past incident. It is also cited when someone wants some ancient
procedure to be followed in a present-day situation. It is also used to
show the need for adopting new procedures to manage new situations.

declared Preachers can use the proverb to stress the point that it is no longer
sin. The Holy necessary sacrifice animals to cleanse evil, for God himself has
believe in the Lord that it is only the blood of Jesus Christ that can wash away
38). Scriptures have shown us what God wants us to do - to
Jesus Christ and our sins will be forgiven (Acts 2:

Biblical Theme/Story:

_____ (1) Jesus said, "You have heard that people were told in the past ... But
now I tell you... ." (Matthew 5: 21-48).

(2) No one pours new wine into used wineskins. (Luke 5: 36-39).

(3) It was believed that the blood of bulls and goats could take away
sins, but now God has shown that only the blood of Jesus can take
away sins. (See Hebrews 10: 4-18.)

13. Proverb: ***Akâ gbômô hiâ etooô lâ sama.***

_____ English: Do not judge a person's character by his/hr appearance.

Explanation: What is in one's mind may be quite different from what one's face
looks like. As such, you cannot look at the fact alone and know what is
in one's mind.

Meaning: Appearances are deceptive.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb is used to caution people to be careful about others, for
no one knows exactly what is in a person's mind.

there Preachers can use it to warn Christians not to trust anybody because
are false prophets.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) A friend means well, even when he hurts you. But when an enemy

puts his arm round your shoulder - watch out! (Proverbs 27: 6).

like (2) Be on your guard against false prophets; they come to you looking
wolves. sheep on the outside, but on the inside they are really like wild
(Matthew 7: 15).

14. Proverb: ***Akâ kômi elââ bi.***

English: You do not bring up a child on kenkey alone.

Explanation: Kenkey is a Ga staple food, which parents constantly serve. But a
child must not only be fed with food to grow physically big; teaching and
good character training are even more important.

Meaning: Good training is more important than food.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ If a parent feeds her children and provides all their needs but does
not teach them to know right from wrong, and, as a result, they do not
have good morals, the proverb is cited to show disapproval.

given It can also be used when talking to parents regarding their God-
responsibility to bring up their children well.

Biblical Theme/Story:

that you (1) He made you go hungry, and then he gave you manna to eat, food
teach you that and your ancestors had never eaten before. He did this to
everything that man must not depend on bread alone to sustain him, but on
the LORD says. (Deuteronomy 8: 3; Matthew 4: 4).

body (2) Joseph and Mary brought up Jesus so well that "Jesus grew both in
52). and in wisdom, gaining favour with God and men." (Luke 2: 51-

angry. (3) Parents, do not treat your children in such a way as to make them
Instead, bring them up with Christian discipline and instruction.
(Ephesians 6: 4).

15. Proverb: ***Akâ shaajo emaaa abo o.***

English: *Shaajo* is not used for building silos.

Explanation: Although *shaajo* is a big tree, it is not a hard wood. As silos are

used to build them. If will collapse and efforts.

store crops for long periods, only hard wood is used to *shaajo* is used, it cannot bear the weight of the crops. It the stuff may perish, thus wasting the farmer's

Meaning: Being big does not necessarily mean that one is strong.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb is usually cited on occasions when someone is being considered for a position simply because of his/her stature or wealth, even though he/she may not be capable of discharging the responsibilities attached to the position. It is also cited to caution a big fellow who is boasting and threatening others because of his size.

take up as others.

On the other hand, it is used to encourage a person who is afraid to some responsibility because they are not as big or wealthy

the and that but that it is

The proverb can be used when preaching or teaching the truth that brave and those with military might do not always win the battle, a person does not succeed by his or her own strength alone; by the Spirit of the Lord that one succeeds.

Biblical Theme/Story:

- useless.
- (1) If the LORD does not build the house, the work of the builders is (Psalm 127: 1).
- always win
- (2) Fast runners do not always win the race, and the brave do not the battle. (Ecclesiastes 9: 11); Zechariah 4: 6).
- foolish when the floods
- (3) Anyone who does not believe or obey the words of Christ, is like a man who built his house on sand, which house collapsed came (Matthew 7: 24-27).

16. Proverb: ***Akâ tsâ kâ nyâ eyaaa gbala.***

English: You do not go into your marriage with your father and mother.

Explanation: When going into marriage, one leaves one's parents behind and goes to live with one's husband or wife rather.

Meaning: When you marry, you must forget about the wealth or poverty of your parents, and start your own life together with your partner.

Purpose/Occasion:

used instead, their own ability

This proverb is often cited when counselling a married couple. It is to advise them to forget about conditions in their parents' home; they are to strive and build their own home according to and taste.

newly father become together. The the marriage

The proverb can be used during a wedding address to remind the married couple what the Scriptures say, that a man will leave his and mother, and be united to his wife, and the two of them will become one. This shows that they must go and start their new life together. The proverb can be used also to warn parents not to interfere in the life of their sons or daughters.

Biblical Theme/Story:

his

That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with wife, and they become one. (Genesis 2: 24; Matthew 19: 4-6).

17 Proverb: ***Akpaki fââ akpaki kâ enaanô.***

English: Every calabash or gourd container has its own lid.

Explanation: Gourds and calabashes look very much alike. But their lids do not fit each other; each has its own lid to match it.

Meaning: (1) Everything has something that suits it.

(2) Every problem has its own solution.

Purpose/Occasion:

when

This proverb has to do with propriety. It teaches, for example, that there is a problem, one should look for the correct solution. It is sometimes used to advise young men and women to pray and look up to God to lead them to the right marriage partner, because for every person there is a suitable man or women with whom one can have a successful marriage.

Biblical Theme/Story:

beforehand whatever is yours; they will

(1) And when you are arrested and taken to court, do not worry about what you are going to say: when the time comes, say then given to you. For the words you speak will not be come from the Holy Spirit. (Mark 13: 11).

(2) Do not try to work together as equals with unbelievers, for it cannot be done. How can right and wrong be partners? How can light and darkness live together? How can Christ and the Devil agree? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? (2 Corinthians 6: 14-15).

18. Proverb: ***Akpa a hefu lâ ekâjâ enyâ wôlô mli; aloo, Kâji kooloo he fu lâ, ekâjâ enyâ wôlô mli.***

English: The stench of the vulture is from its mother's egg. Or, If an animal stinks, it inherited the stench from its mother.

Explanation: If one has some defect, one can pass it on to one's children.

Meaning: (1) A person's behaviour depends very much on the type of training he/she had.

(2) A person's family background determines his/her character.

Purpose/Occasion:

The proverb is used to make the point that a person's bad character can be traced to bad training. It is cited when one wants to blame someone's parents for his/her bad conduct. Sometimes, however, it is used in praise of parents for the good training given to their children; for like father, like son!

Preachers can use it to confirm the claim that the evil things that people do come from the bad training received from their parents, or from Satan who ill-advises them.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) The LORD said, "People will use this proverb about you, Jerusalem: 'Like mother, like daughter.' You really are your mother's daughter." (Ezekiel 16: 44-45).

(2) You are the children of your father, the Devil, and you want to follow your father's desires. From the very beginning he was a murderer and has never been on the side of truth, because there is no truth in him. (John 8: 44).

19. Proverb: ***Ala mai bi shwââ a mli.***

English: The young of the white seashore crab does not play sport in the bush.

Explanation: The home of the white seashore crab is the seashore, and so it cannot find its way in the bush. As such, it will perish, if it dares play in the bush.

Meaning: (1) Do not indulge in something about which you know nothing.
they (2) It behooves each person to know what they can do and what they cannot do.

any (3) Do not go where you have no right to go; for if there should be trouble there, you would not know your way out.

Purpose/Occasion:

this When a person is engaging in something that he/she should not, proverb is cited. Sometimes, an innocent or shy-looking child falls into the company of hardened and notorious children. The proverb is then used to warn him/her to desist.

centres, or It can be used to advise Christians who go to evil entertainment who keep the company of ungodly persons, such as idolators and sorcerers, to stop such relationships.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) Young people should avoid the company of a prostitute or immoral woman, for her house is a short cut to death. (Proverbs 7: 24-27).

(2) Do not try to work together as equals with unbelievers, for it cannot be done ... So then, let us purify ourselves from everything that makes body or soul unclean, and let us be completely holy by living in awe of God. (2 Corinthians 6: 4 to 7: 1).

20. Proverb: ***Alônte miisumô akâ efa wonu, shi eshwâ lâ d kôkô.***

English: The cat would like to eat soup, using the palm, but it has no palm.

Explanation: When there were no spoons, people ate soup by scooping it with their palm and fingers. As the cat has no palm, it does not scoop soup but rather laps it with its tongue.

Meaning: You wish to do something but lack the wherewithal.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ When someone desires to do something but lacks the ability or means to do it, this proverb is cited.

Jesus made It can be used in a similar context as the one in which the Lord the statement, "The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak."

Biblical Theme/Story:

- (1) The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak. (Mark 14: 38).
- (2) I don't do what I would like to do but instead I do what I hate ...
For even though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it.
I don't do the good I want to do; instead, I do the evil that I do not want
to do. (Romans 7: 15, 18-19).

21. Proverb: **Amaa mô tu akâgbeô loofôlô.**

English: One may borrow someone else's gun to kill a bird.

Explanaion: Because of fellow-feeling and the communal life among the Ga, when one is in need, ne can freely borrow and use what belongs to someone else.

Meaning: Everyone finds him/herself in need at one time or another. As such, it is no disgrace or sin to borrow things.

Purpose/Occasion:

This proverb is about interdependence. It is usually used to point out that if a person borrows from another, it does not in any way mean that that person is a worthless fellow. It is also used to encourage people to seek help when they need it.

The proverb can be used to encourage Christians to help their neighbours who are in need. Similarly, it can be used to encourage needy Christians to feel free, out of Christian love, to ask for help and to accept help from their fellows.

Biblical Theme/Story:

- (1) This day is holy to the LORD your God, so you are not to mourn or cry. Now go home and have a feast. Share your food and wine with those who haven't enough. Today is holy to our Lord, so don't be sad. The joy that the LORD gives you will make you strong. (Nehemiah 8: 9-10).

fields
and
one

(2) There was no one in the group who was in need. Those who owned or houses would sell them, bring the money received from the sale, hand it over to the apostles; and the money was distributed to each according to his need. (Acts 4: 34-35).

22. Proverb: ***Amôô gugô mli akâhuô sâbo mli.***

English: You (have to) hold your nose to be able to cultivate a field that is full of excreta.

Explanation: In the olden days when there were no lavatories, people used to excrete at the outskirts. After some time such places were used for cultivating crops. Because of the stench, one had to hold one's nose while cultivating. Although it was difficult to keep that kind of farm, it yielded abundant crops.

Meaning: It is by persevering that one is able to achieve some great thing.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb teaches that, if you persevere you will succeed. It is sometimes used to encourage people experiencing some hardship or a difficult occupation.

faith; for
also in a
married life
at their
experience the joys

It can be used when exhorting Christians to stand firm in their faith; thus will they inherit the kingdom of heaven. It can be used in a wedding address to advise the couple, that even though the solution is not always easy, if they identify the difficulties and work with resolve and trust in the Lord, they will experience the joys of marriage.

Biblical Theme/Story:

_____ (1) Jesus said, "If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget self, carry his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16: 24).

Everyone
end will be

(2) You will be arrested and taken to court. You will be beaten ... will hate you because of me. But whoever holds out to the end will be saved." (Mark 13: 9-13)

come
such

(3) My brothers, consider yourselves fortunate when all kinds of trials come your way, for you know that when your faith succeeds in facing such trials, the result is the ability to endure. (James 1: 2-3).

23. Proverb: ***Amooo mo ko nine akeshiii tsitsi.***

English: No one uses another man's fist to beat upon his chest (to show his manliness).

Explanation: When boasting, people beat their chest to show their manliness and ability. They use their own hand, not someone else's hand.

Meaning: (1) Do not depend on someone else to make your boast.
(2) Boast with the fruit of your own labour, not with somebody else's achievements.

Purpose/Occasion:

The proverb is cited when someone is boasting because of what someone else has achieved. It is used to encourage people to endeavour and make their own mark. Sometimes, it is used to teach the lesson that it is not wise to rely on other people.

Preachers can use it to drive home the truth that no one can believe in Christ or earn salvation on behalf of another. One has to exercise one's own faith in order to be saved. Again, a Christian must be able to testify about Christ from his/her own personal experience of Christ.

Biblical Theme/Story

(1) For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. (John 3: 16).

(2) And they said to the woman, "We believe now, not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him, and we know that he really is the Saviour of the world." (John 4: 42).

(3) The man who used to rob must stop robbing and start working, in order to earn an honest living for himself and to be able to help the poor.

24. Proverb: ***Anaaa tso ni awo hi mâi ayagbu mli.***

English: Nobody sees a pointed stick and runs his eyes against it.

Explanation: Every person jealously guards against his/her eyes. No one, therefore, would intentionally run his/her own eyes against a stick.

Meaning: Nobody intentionally runs him/herself into trouble.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ One may cite this proverb when one realizes that something in which he is involved or intends to do may put one into trouble and therefore, withdraws. It is used to caution people to exercise great discretion and avoid some obvious danger.

Word of _____ Pastors and ministers can use it to admonish people to heed the temptation but God and not ifully continue to sin or put themselves into rather flee from it.

Biblical Theme/Story:

_____ (1) Should we continue to live in sin so that God's grace will increase? Certainly not! (Romans 6: 1-2).

(2) A Christian ought to avoid sin (1 Corinthians 6: 18; 2 Timothy 2: 22-26).

(3) For there is no longer any sacrifice that will take away sins if we purposely go on sinning after the truth has been made known to us. (Hebrews 10: 26-31).

25. Proverb: ***Anihao mli bâ nô ko fe mamashwâ.***

_____ English: The fruits of laziness are nothing but torn or thread-bare clothing.

Explanation: If a person is lazy and refuses to work, he cannot buy a new piece of cloth. The old one he has will get torn and become thread-bare.

Meaning: _____ If you are lazy, your possessions get finished and you become empty-handed and poor.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ The proverb is cited to teach the lesson that it is not good o be lazy, or to stress the importance of work. When someone is being lazy, he is reminded, by using this proverb, that he will end up in disgrace, if he does not stop being lazy. It can also be used to explain that very often, it is one's own laziness that brings suffering upon oneself.

Biblical Theme/Story:

_____ (1) A farmer who is too lazy to plough hif fields at the right time will

have nothing to harvest. (Proverbs 20: 4).

(2) The apostle Paul ordered that, "Whoever refuses to work is not allowed to eat." (2 Thessalonians 3: 10).

26. Proverb: **Anuuu nu atoo Aharabata.**

English: No one drinks water in anticipation of Harmattan drought.

Explanation: The Harmattan is the season when a cold dry wind blows down from the Sahara desert. During the period, it is very dry, and water can be scarce in areas where people depend on streams for water. But no one can drink enough water against the Marmattan drought in order not to be thirsty during the drought. After all, how much water can one store in one's system to last for the two or three months of the season?

Meaning: (1) You cannot prepare against something you do not know.
(2) Everything has its time.

Purpose/Occasion:

This proverb is like the one which says, "No one slaughters a cow in worry expectation of a pregnancy." It is cited to advise that one need not worry at all too much to prepare for something about whose occurrence is not sure.

Teachers and preachers can use it to teach the lesson that one should not boast or be proud; for no one knows what will happen tomorrow.

Biblicaal Theme/Story:

(1) So do not worry about tomrrow. (Matthew 6: 34).
(2) Now listen to me, you that say, 'Today or tomorrow we will travel to a certain city, where we will stay a year ...' What you should say is this: 'If the Lord is willing, we will live and do this or that.' (James 4: 13-15).

27. Proverb: **Ashââ obishi afôô ni ayamô kwakwe.**

English: No one throws away a rat and go after a mouse.

Explanation: A rat is bigger and more valued than a mouse. Therefore, if you throw away a rat and later only succeed in catching a mouse, you have thrown away something precious.

Meaning: No one should allow him/herself to be tricked into letting go some precious only to get something less.

Purpose/Occasion:
This proverb is cited in contexts where, through bad judgement and haste, someone gives up a position or opportunity and go after another that is not as good as the one given up. It is used to caution against unnecessary haste, and to counsel patience in order to avoid disappointment.

Pastors can use the proverb to warn and appeal to Christians never to deny Christ and take on another religion.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) The apostle Paul feared for the Galatian Christians that they were leaving behind the grace of Christ and were sliding back into the worship of other spirits (Galatians 1: 6; 4: 8-11).

(2) Keep what is good. (1 Thessalonians 5: 21).

28. Proverb: ***Ashiii gônti sââ a môôô kpô.***

English: Do not leave out the thumb when tying a knot.

Explanation: It is difficult to tie a knot without using one's thumb. Even if one succeeds, the knot will not be very tight.

Purpose/Occasion:
This proverb is usually cited when something has gone wrong because someone who is normally depended upon was left out; such as a family elder, a well-educated person, a rich person, or other competent person.

It is also used to show that if help is not sought from the Almighty God, anything that is done will not succeed, because only God knows all things and is able to do all things perfectly. It can be used to exhort people to trust God and rely on him at all times. God is the real thumb, and without him no know can be tied!

Biblical Theme/Story:

- man, (1) Jesus looked straight at them and answered, "This is impossible for but not for God; everything is possible for God." (Mark 10: 27).
- 15: 5- (2) The Lord Jesus said, "... for you can do nothing without me." (John 7).

29. Proverb: ***Awieô a tsitsi he ni ayaninaa koo gbidii.***
English: You may negotiate for a burnt grassland and find that you have virgin forest.

Explanation: Edible animals and many others useful products can be found in forests. For this reason, forests are not usually given out to be cleared for farming. Therefore, people usually only ask for portions that have already been fully exploited, cleared, or burnt. Such portions are not of much use to, say, a hunter, since they cannot hunt in them. Yet, on occasion, a person who has asked for such grassland or remnant is given a virgin forest.

Meaning: One may stumble upon some great thing while looking for a small one.

Purpose/Occasion:
 This proverb is like another one which says that "You may go fishing for) the long-finned herrings and rather catch weakfish or turbot." It is used to press home the lesson that something that has small beginnings can turn out to be big.
 One can use it to demonstrate one's faith that by the grace of the God, something significant will come out of that which is insignificant; and that many blessings can come from little things.

Biblical Theme/Occasion:
 (1) God raises the lowly and makes them great. (Psalm 113: 7-9).
 (2) The Lord Jesus fed over five thousand people with five loaves and two fishes, and there were left-overs! (John 6: 5-13).

30. Proverb: ***Ayii mô ni atua lâ yafo hu.***
English: You cannot flog a person and besides prevent him from weeping.

Explanation: A person who has been flogged may wish to weep in order to get out his grief and to console himself. It is too bad, if he is not allowed even to weep.

Meaning: It is wrong to restrain an aggrieved person from complaining or seeking redress.

Purpose/Occasion:

People cite this proverb when someone who has been treated unfairly is denied the opportunity to seek redress. The victim may have been guilty but the punishment meted out may have been excessive. He may even be innocent. So the proverb is usually cited to say that it is wrong to deny justice to anyone, or to block someone's opportunity.

The proverb can be used to comment on the attitude of churches that prevent their members from observing un-Christian traditional rites, and yet do not teach them the power of Christ and how to appropriate it.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) God punished and destroyed King Pharaoh and the Egyptians because they treated the Israelites unjustly, in that they did not give them any more straw and yet tried to force them to make the same number of bricks as before (Exodus 5: 11, 14).

(2) Jesus called the Pharisees hypocrites, because they had locked the door to the kingdom of heaven in people's faces, and yet they themselves did not go in (Matthew 23: 13).

31. Proverb: ***Be ni ahuko La ma tâi amlî (loo Aja ôte) lâ, jâi aduji lâ yeô nii.***

English: Before the La ma or Aja ôte hills were cultivated, the monkeys that lived there had food to eat.

Explanation: La ma is the hill that forms the boundary between the Gas (Accra) and the Efutus. In the olden days, when the Gas were yet to settle and cultivate the land there, monkeys that lived there had food to eat.

Meaning: If some expected help is not forthcoming, there is some way out. One can survive in the face of poverty.

Purpose/Occasion:

matter how
who has the
help. The
withheld, one can
that one ought to rely

One cites this proverb to encourage oneself or others, that no hard it is, there is hope. It can be cited also when a person power or the means to help in some situation is unwilling to proverb is then used to show that even if that help is manage without it. Sometimes, it is used to advise on oneself rather than on others.

will
not

One can use this proverb to express confidence that the Lord God supply the needs of the faithful: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall want." (Psalm 23: 1).

Biblical Theme/Story:

37: 23-

(1) The Almighty God will supply the needs of the righteous (Psalm 26).

needs of
17-19).

(2) Even if all things be destroyed, the Lord God will provide the those he loves (Deuteronomy 8: 3-5; 29:6; Habakkuk 3: 17-19).

stay alive,
will provide you
birds. (Matthew 6: 25-34).

(3) Do not be worried about the food and drink you need in order to or about clothes for your body ... Your Father in heaven with all these things just as he takes care of the birds. (Matthew 6: 25-34).

32. Proverb: *Be ni onyiââ jogba ni okâ oshaayoo kpeô.*

_____ English: It is when you are improperly dressed that you meet with your
mother-in-law.

Explanation: Among the Ga and Dangme, there is a great deal of respect between a person and his mother-in-law. For this reason, when going out, one dresses properly since one does not know whether one will unexpectedly meet with one's mother-in-law. It is a big disgrace if you unexpectedly meet your mother-in-law when you are improperly dressed.

Meaning: One should be always prepared for any eventuality.

Purpose/Occasion:

usually

This proverb teaches that one must always be prepared. It is referred to when someone has been taken unawares,

especially if one
given thought to it

could have made provision for the situation had he
earlier.

death; or
himself said he

A preacher can use it when warning people to prepare for their
for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, since he
would come unexpectedly.

Biblical Theme/Story:

Lord will (1) Be on your guard, then, because you do not know what day your
come. (Matthe 24: 42).

Lord will (2) One must live a holy life, dedicated to God, for the Day of the
come suddenly like a thief. (2 Peter 3 esp. v.10-11).

33 Proverb: ***Be ni oshwieô wuô gbonyo lâ wuô kpakpa nyiâ sââ.***

English: As you drive away the troublesome fowl, a well-behaved one
follows.

Explanation: When you drive away a fowl that keeps bothering you, even those
that are not troublesome also run out with the troublesome one.

Meaning: Be careful when meting out punishment, in order not to wrongfully
punish an innocent person.

Purpose/Occasion:

There are times when something has gone wrong at home, and no
one knows who caused it. Parents may be tempted to punish all the
children. In such situations the proverb is cited to dissuade parents
from taking such action, lest an innocent child is punished. The
proverb can be used also to express the desire that sinners are not
punished together with the righteous.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) Abraham approached the LORD and asked, "Are you really going
to destroy the innocent with the guilty? ... Surely you won't kill the
innocent with the guilty. That's impossible! You can't do that. If you
did, the innocent would be punished along with the guilty. That is
impossible. The judge of all the earth has to act justly." (Genesis
18: 23-26).

pull up (2) "No," he answered, "because as you gather the weeds you might
some of the wheat along with them." (Matthew 13: 29).

34. Proverb: ***Bâlâoo adôdô fee ni eye gbee toi.***

English: It is by doing it little by little that the common housefly succeeded
in eating up the dog's ear.

Explanation: It is common to find sores on a dog's ear, with flies on it. Although
a dog's ear is so much larger than a fly, yet with patience and
determination, the fly eats up the dog's ear.

Meaning: With patience one can achieve great things. Patience is victory.

Purpose/Occasion:

The proverb shows the importance of patience and persistence. It is
used to counsel patience, when someone is in haste to accomplish some
great feat in a short time. It is used to teach Christians not to be unduly
in haste, but rather to be patient because patience brings blessings.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) The seeds that fell in good soil stand for those who hear the
message and retain it in a good and obedient heart, and they persist until
they bear fruit. (Luke 8: 15).

(2) When your faith succeeds in facing such trials, the result is the
ability to endure. Make sure that your endurance carries you all the
way without failing, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking
nothing. (James 1: 3-4).

35. Proverb: ***Bo osumôô 'oekoo' ni oyahu gbâhe.***

English: It is your own desire to be saluted that made you farm by the road
side.

Explanation: It is a custom among the Ga and Dangme to say "**Aekoo**" (Well
done!) to anyone found working. The worker has to respond "**Yaaei**"
(Thank you.) As he will have to stop work and respond each time
to as many people as may pass by and salute him, a person who farms
by the road side will lose a great deal of working time.
Consequently, he will do very little work. But he will have himself to
blame for the waste of his time, for he should have known better.

The proverb is like another one which says, **Bo ni oyahé okplotoo.** (You love the grunting sound, bought a pig.)

osumôô `ok ôk ô'
hence you

Meaning: _____ We may unintentionally invite trouble onto ourselves by our own actions.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ When a person gets into trouble as a result of refusal to listen to good advice, this proverb is quoted. It is also cited in situations where a Christian does not pay careful attention to biblical teaching, or deliberately disobeys the Word of God and yields to temptation, thereby getting into trouble. It is used to make the point that one has to blame oneself for some unfortunate situation in which one finds oneself.

Biblical Theme/Story:

- _____ (1) Jerusalem, Jerusalem! ... How many times have I wanted to put my arms round all your people, just as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and but you would not let me! And so your Temple will be abandoned empty. (Matthew 23: 37-38).
- (2) Pray that you will not fall into temptation. (Luke 22: 40, 46).

36. Proverb: **Bô ni obaa mâ osaa lâ nakai obaak nô.**

_____ English: As you lay your bed so must you lie on it.

_____ Explanation: If you lay your mat or bed straight, you will like straight on it; if it is at a tangent, so you will lie on it.

Meaning: You reap what you sow.

Purpose/Occasion:

The proverb is about cause and effect. It is used when someone is suffering for his/her own bad conduct. Parents often use it to warn their disobedient children that they will find life difficult in future, if they do not cultivate good habits.

Teachers and preachers also use it to teach people that if they obey

the words of Christ, they will have life, but if they disobey them, they
will be disappointed in life.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) If what was built on the foundation survives the fire, the builder
will receive a reward. But if anyone's work is burnt up, then he will
lose it. (1 Corinthians 3: 14-15).

(2) Do not deceive yourselves; no one makes a fool of God. A person
will reap exactly what he sows. (Galatians 6: 7).

37. Proverb: ***D a le mô ni nu lâ.***

English: The (alcoholic) drink knows the one who drank it.

Explanation: A person who has taken in some alcoholic drink is the one who
gets drunk, no someone else.

Meaning: (1) One who does some wrong is the one who gets trouble for it.
(2) Nothing under the sun is hidden.

Purpose/Occasion:

When someone denies an offence he/she has committed, this
proverb is used to tell the person that one day the truth will come out.
It can be used to teach that everyone who sins receives some punishment.

Biblical Theme/Occasion:

(1) Everyone who sins will be punished for his/her sins (Numbers 32:
23; Ezekiel 18: 20).

(2) For on that Day fire will reveal everyone's work; the fire will test it
and show its real quality. (1 Corinthians 3: 13).

38. Proverb: ***Duade mli yâ kô .***

English: Some types of cassava are not good for cooking.

Explanation: It is not all the types of cassava that are good for cooking; some
are hard and suitable only for other uses.

Meaning: (1) In all classes of things, some are not good enough.
(2) It is not all persons that are good.

(3) One has to be selective in choosing things.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb is used to caution young people who are fond of associating with all and sundry. They are advised to watch people's character carefully before they associate with them.

Biblical Theme/Story:

_____ (1) Be on your guard against false prophets. (Matthew 7: 15-23).

Corinthians (2) Do not be fooled. "Bad companions ruin good character." (1 15: 33).

John (3) My dear friends, do not believe all who claim to have the Spirit. (1 4: 1).

39. Proverb: ***Ejurôfeelô lâ gbâhe ewôô.***

_____ English: The benevolent person often sleeps by the way side.

Explanation: It sometimes happens that a person who is hospitable and takes in strangers, gets stranded and finds no one to help out.

Meaning: (1) If you are generous, you may find no one to help you in your time of need; people may be ungrateful to you.

experience (2) If you decide to be good, you must be prepared to ingratitudes.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ Sometimes a person who has helped many others, does not find anyone to help him when in need; even those he has helped before refuse to help. It such circumstances, this proverb is quoted. It is also used to forewarn people not to expect any appreciation for the good services they may be rendering, so that they would not be surprised when it happens.

of Preachers can use the proverb when preaching about the sufferings trial, he Jesus Christ. Although he had gone about doing good, yet at his "Crucify him!" had no one to defend him. Instead, the people shouted, Even his disciples deserted him.

Biblical Theme/Story:

- _____ (1) But the wine steward never gave Joseph another thought - he forgot all about him. (Genesis 40: 23).
- people? (2) Is this the way you should treat the LORD, you foolish senseless people? He is your father, your Creator, he made you into a nation. (Deuteronomy 32: 6).
- victory (3) But the people said to Saul, "Will Jonathan, who won this great LORD that he for Israel, be put to death? No! We promise by the living was done with will not lose even a hair fro his head. What he did today being put to death. (1 God's help." So the people saved Jonathan from Samuel 14: 45).
- there is, (4) One day David asked, "Is there anyone left of Saul's family? If Samuel 9: 1). I would like to show him kindness for Jonathan's sake." (2

40. Proverb: ***E aji lâ nyiâ mo , shi ntribii yâ mli.***

English: The weaver-birds (or robins) all look alike, yet there are some with darker colours.

Explanation: Weaver-birds all loo alike, yet there are differences among them, for some have lighter and others have darker feathers.

Meaning: (1) Many people may have knowledge about something, but some have more expertise than others.

(2) There may be many people around, but some have higher status than others. In every home, there are elders.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb has to do with disretion and circumspection. There are many deceivers around, and one has to be careful. It can be used to warn against entrusting some important jobs to people on the basis of mere outward appearance.

it is not all who say, "Lord, Lord" that will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only those who do God's will (Matthew 7: 21); or (2) do not believe all who say they have the Spirit, but test every spirit (1 John 4:

1).

Biblical Theme/Story:

- _____ (1) You will know them by their fruit; by what they do. (Matthew 7:
15-20).
- weeds (2) When the plants grew and the ears of corn began to form, then the
showed up. (Matthew 13: 24-30).
- 1). (3) Many false prophets will appear. (Matthew 24: 23-25; 1 John 4:

DANGME PROVERBS

41. Proverb: ***Abui kpâô bo ha je se e hwôô fi .***

_____ English: The needle sows clothes for many but it has no shelter from the
cold (or sleeps without clothing).

Explanation: The needle is used to sow clothes for people so that they may not
be cold, yet the needle itself does not wear any clothing.

Meaning: (1) A visitor may be served with sumptuous dishes while the host
goes without food.

(2) The kind-hearted person gets no one to help when in need.

(See also Ga proverb No. 39 above.)

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ The proverb is quoted when a kind-hearted person is in trouble and
finds no one to help.

It can be used to exhort Christians not to be kind to others only

because of
good to anyone;
proverb may also be used
Jesus when they shouted,
had been good and kind to

expected rewards, since if they do that, they may never do
for human beings can be most ungrateful. The
to illustrate the ingratitude of the Jews to
"Crucify him, crucify him!," even though he
so many people.

Biblical Theme/Story:

- asked
the one
- (1) He was holy and good, but you rejected him ... and instead you
Pilate to do you the favour of turning loose a murderer. You killed
who leads to life. (Acts 3: 14-15).
- made
his
- (2) You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; rich as he was, he
himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of
poverty. (2 Corinthians 8: 9).

42. Proverb: ***Abui nâ e he dô la a, de e saa kp .***

English: A hot needle burns the thread.

Explanation: Thread cannot stand fire. Thus if you thread a needle that has been
heated in fire, the thread will get burnt.

Meaning: An angry person acts in unjust ways; or does the wrong thing.
Anger is destructive.

Purpose/Occasion:

someone gets
proceedings. The
of patience, and to get

This is a proverb about patience. It is sometimes cited when
angry during a discussion in a meeting, or during court
purpose of citing it is to emphasize the importance
the angry person to calm down.

they
Christ.

It is used in sermons to exhort Christians to patiently bear with one
another, and to see that they do not remain angry for long. Rather,
must forgive one another, just as God has forgiven them through

Biblical Theme/Story:

- (1) Cain as so angry that he turned on his brother Abel and killed him.
(Genesis 4: 5-8).
- (2) Be always humble, gentle and patient. Show your love by being

tolerant
all day. ... be
another, as God
26-27, 31-32).

with one another ... If you become angry, do not stay angry
kind and tender-hearted to one another, and forgive one
has forgiven you through Christ. (Ephesians 4: 1-3,

43. Proverb: ***Adadee yâ wo se e wo we akuadu kê ye ku.***

English: The cat does not go fishing but it never eats kenkey with bananas.

Explanation: The cat never goes fishing and does not catch fishes, yet it eats fish
all the time.

Meaning: (1) Every person enjoys the fruits of someone else's labour.

(2) It is not necessary for people to do, all by themselves,
everything that they ever need.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb has to do with grace, mutual help and
interdependence. People refer to it to stress that it is good to help
those who cannot help themselves. It is also used to express hope
and to console oneself, that help will come from some unexpected place
in time of need. One may cite it to express gratitude to someone
who has helped one out of a situation in which one could not have
done anything for oneself.

Preachers can use it to teach that no human being can save
him/herself, and that it is only by grace that people are saved by God
through Christ.

Biblical Theme/Story:

_____ (1) "That is true, sir," she answered; "but even the dogs eat the
leftovers that fall from their masters' table." (Matthew 15: 27).

(2) For it is by God's grace that you have been saved through faith. It
is not the result of your own efforts but God's gift, so that no one can
boast about it. (Ephesians 2: 8-9).

44. Proverb: ***Adowa ke e yâ ta, se e hewomi yaa ta.***

English: The antelope says that it never goes to war, but its skin does.

Explanation: In Dangme traditional society, some warriors used antelope skins to make battle dresses and protective charms which they wore during wars.

Meaning: (1) God does not travel, but his Spirit is in every town (i.e., everywhere).

helping (2) If you cannot do something yourself, you can, at least, give a hand to one who is doing it.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ or that task. It progress encourage every example, through also use the proverb matter where it is said.

This proverb is referred to when teaching that God is everywhere, it is his Spirit that gives strength and grace for carrying out some can be used to teach the need for people to play their part for the of their family or community. Similarly, it can be used to Christian to support the Church in some way; for generous giving and intercessory prayers. One can to teach that God will hear and answer prayer, no

Biblical Theme/Story:

you would (1) Where could I go to escape from you? ... If I went up to heaven, be there. (Psalm 139: 7-8).

help do. proportion to (2) Now, concerning what you wrote about the money to be raised to God's people ... you must do what I told the Churches in Galatian to do. Every Sunday each of you must put aside some money in what he has earned. (1 Corinthians 16: 1-2).

me, that that I may speak (Ephesians 6: 18-20). (3) Pray on every occasion, as the Spirit leads. ... And pray also for God will give me a message when I am ready to speak, so boldly and make known the gospel's secrets.

45. Proverb: ***A kâ nô hí s nô nâ a tee si nâ a sã lâ.***

_____ English: Never sit on a bench with another and get up without warning him.

Explanation: If two people are sitting on a bench, and one get up without

warning the
is sitting at the

other person, the weight of that person, especially if he/she
edge, will make him/her fall of the bench.

Meaning:
behind

When you agree with someone to do something together, do not go
him/her and do something else.

Purpose/Occasion:

to urge
everything together.

This is a proverb about faithfulness and honesty. It is usually cited
that members of a family, or an association should do
No one should say one thing and then do another.

behind their

It can be used to advise a married couple never to do anything
partners or without their knowledge.

Biblical Theme/Story:

(1) I urge you, then, to make me completely happy by having the same
thoughts, sharing the same love, and being one in soul and mind.
(Philippians 2: 2).

(2) Paul rebuked Peter and the Jews because of their hypocrisy and
inconsistency concerning the tradition not to eat with gentiles. (Galatians
2: 11-14).

46. Proverb: ***A le ô tso e yi ba lokoji a tswaa e sipoku.***

English:

You must identify a tree by its leaves before you dig up its root.

Explanation:
them
its roots
harm; hence the

We cannot see the roots of a tree but we can see its leaves, and by
we can recognize a tree. If you do not first identify a tree, and dig
(for medicine), you may use the wrong roots and cause
need to first identify the tree by its leaves.

Meaning:
family and

Before you marry a woman, it is advisable to find out about her
parental background.

Purpose/Occasion:

first tells
parents to
and ask for the
a marriage bond with
demonic dealings such

In Dangme tradition, if a young man desires to marry a woman, he
his parents, who then inquire about the woman's family and
know what sort of people they are, before they go ahead
girl's hand. This is to ensure that they do not go into
a family that has a bad history, say, of insanity, or
as witchcraft or murder. If such

investigation is not made, there is the hereditary disease or evil spirit into their marriage.

danger of their bringing some own family through the

into a family. before believing The proverb is usually cited to advise young men against going marriage relationship without knowing anything about the wife's family. It can be used to warn Christians also to test every spirit in them.

Biblical Theme/Story:

_____ (1) Like mother, like daughter. (Ezekiel 16: 44).

but test For many false (2) My dear friends, do not believe all who claim to have the Spirit, them to find out if the spirit they have comes from God. prophets have gone out everywhere. (1 John 4: 1).

47. Proverb: ***A li nô piani nâ a suu kane gbôkuâ kê hyâ e hâ mi.***

_____ English: You do not light a lamp at night to identify someone you know during day time.

Explanation: If you know somebody well, you can recognize him by his voice even in the darkness; therefore, you do not need a lamp in order to recognize him. If you light a lamp, it may make other people he would like to avoid, recognize him, and thus a secret may get known.

Meaning: Do not be ungrateful.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb is quoted in a situation where you have done someone a good turn but he behaves as if he does not know you, when you need his help.

they too, will It can be used to warn Christians that, if a situation demands that they should stand up for Christ but they deny him, as the Jews did, he, too, will deny them on the last day.

Biblical Theme/Story:

_____ (1) Do not forget your friends or your father's friends. If you are in trouble, don't ask your brother for help; a neighbour near by will help you more than a brother who is far away. (Proverbs 27: 10).

- in.
would
- (2) Is evil the payment for good? Yet they have dug a pit for me to fall
Remember how I came to you and spoke on their behalf, so that you
not deal with the in anger. (Jeremiah 18: 20).
- Father in
- (3) But if anyone rejects me publicly, I will reject him before my
heaven. (Matthew 10: 33).
- so evil
(Hebrews 3:
- (4) My fellow-believers, be careful that no one among you has a heart
and unbelieving that he will turn away from the living God.
12).

48. Proverb: ***Apletsi ke e ngâ nô ko tita nô puââ, se e li kaa lâ nitsâ e hlemi nya nâ e ngâ puââ.***

English: The goat thinks it is messing up someone else's compound, without realizing that it is messing up its own tail.

Explanation: Goats walk about while dropping excreta, thus messing up every place. But in the process a goat often soils its own tail.

Meaning: (1) If you pretend, you may harm yourself in the end.

(2) If a wife gossips about her own husband in public, she is only disgracing herself.

Purpose/Occasion:

_____ This proverb shows that if one does something in order to destroy someone else, in the end he will destroy himself. It is usually cited when someone has gossiped or told lies about a person as a result of which that person has lost his honour, or has been ill-treated. The liar would be shown up for what he is, and would lose his own credibility.

about
their

It can be used to call the attention of fellow Christians who go saying evil and unkind things about other churches, to the fact that conduct brings all Churches, including their own, into disgrace.

Biblical Theme/Story:

_____ (1) All of us fell to the ground, and I heard a voice say to me in Hebrew,
yourself by "Saul, Saul! Why are you persecuting me? You are hurting hitting back, like an ox kicking against its owner's stick."
(Acts 26: 14).

(2) It is not right for you to be proud! You know the saying, "A little

bit of yeast makes the whole batch of dough rise." (1 Corinthians 5: 6).

48. Proverb: ***Atâplâ Gazo ke e fi ngâ mi nâ a kê ya he na.***

English: The cocroach says its faeces are among (i.e., on the, or are part of) the moneys used to buy the cow.

Explanation: In the olden days, rich people kept their money in straw bags and bowls. Cocroaches entered these containers and would excrete on the money, sometimes staining the money. Thus, when the money was used to buy a cow, the cocroaches' droppings were taken along with the money. In the proverb, cocroach droppings stands for something that is despised or not highly regarded; the cow stands for something that is much valued.

Meaning: (1) God's Word (or power) is what makes it possible to obtain riches.

(2) Everyone has something that he/she can contribute for the progress of the whole community.

Purpose/Occasion:
Whenever someone is boasting and shows no respect at all for others, this proverb is quoted to tell the person that if it were not for the contribution of others, he could not be what he is. People also cite it to show that it is only with the help of God that something worthwhile can be done. It is also used to arouse self-confidence in people who have an inferiority complex, that they, too, have some important gift or talent that they can contribute for realizing something of benefit to all.

Preachers can use this proverb to encourage hristians that by sharing the gospel and by their Christian witness, they can help hasten the realization of the Kingdo of God, and the Second Coming of Christ.

Biblical Theme/Story:
(1) He called the disciples together and said to them, "I tell you that this poor widow put more in the offering box than all the others. For she is, put in all she had - she gave all she had to live on." (Mark 12: 43-44).
(2) The Spirit's presence is shown in some way in each person for the good of all. (1 Corinthians 12: 7).

50. Proverb: ***A woô m bi ta nâ ke a ya wo ô a gbeô yayi.***

English: One may mention herrings and yet go fishing and catch mackerels
or kingfishes.

Explanation: Herrings are small, do not have much flesh, and are full of tiny bones. So they are not much valued. The mackerel or kingfish is big and much valued. Sometimes, fishermen go fishing for just small fishes, but suddenly come upon big fishes and catch them.

Meaning: One may follow a small thing and stumble upon something big.
Mighty things often have trivial or humble beginnings.

Purpose/Occasion:

good
No. 29
in God,
This proverb is in a class of proverbs used to express the fact that fortune can come one's way unexpectedly. (See also Ga proverb above.) It is also used to teach Christians that if you put your trust he will raise you, and make you prosper.

Biblical Theme/Story:

- voice
and
group
- (1) He raises the poor from the dust ... and makes them companions of princes. (Psalm 113: 78).
 - (2) Then Peter stood up with the other eleven apostles and in a loud voice began to speak to the crowd ... Many of them believed his message were baptized, and about three thousand people were added to the group that day. (Acts 2: 14, 41).

100 ADDITIONAL PROVERBS NOT ANNOTATED

GA

1 ***Abôtri tâ nô shamôô.***

English: The stony wrestling ground can be slippery.

- 2 ***Akâ gidigidi yeee sane.***
English: You do not settle a case through violence (or in haste).
- 3 ***Akâ naji enyô susuuu faa.***
English: You do not (must not) measure (the depth of) a river with both legs.
- 4 ***Akpeee tso kâ nyôô fââ.***
English: You do not chew a (chewing) stick right into the night.
- 5 ***Akpokpolonto kââ 'Gbi ko lâ Sohaa ni.'***
English: The tortoise says, 'One day, it was a Friday!'
- 6 ***Akpokpolonto kââ, 'Mikpojee ji migbele.'***
English: The tortoise says, 'My coming out is my death.'
- 7 ***Alooo bo atooo gbâi.***
English: No one weaves a cloth in anticipation of hernia.
- 8 ***Awooo hiâ mama nô yâ ma .***
English: You do not raise the cloth covering your private parts (i.e., your under skirt) in public.
- 9 ***Awooo jwine kâyaaa Amaatsâ we.***
English: You do not adorn yourself with trinkets when going to the home of Amaatsâ (where trinkets abound)
- 10 ***Ayi bi Ayi.***
English: Ayi, son of Ayi (i.e., like father, like son)!
- 11 ***Batafo bi leee kpokpololo.***
English: The wild pig does not pay heed to any form of punishment.
- 12 ***Be ni ahuko Aja ôte lâ jâi kuaji yeô nii.***
English: Before Aja ôte lands were cultivated, the monkeys that lived there had food to eat.
- 13 ***Be ni sikli bako lâ t mi wôyeô (yâ).***
English: Before sugar came (was invented), we had the miracle sweet berry.
- 14 ***Etsuô efolo kôôja . Etsuô kwôô efolo.***
English: It is red-hot for nothing (i.e., we never say, Die).
- 15 ***Gbekâ lâ waa ejwaa; ejwaaa akpokpolonto.***
English: A child may break snails, not tortoises.

- 16 ***Gbekâ ni le edâ fômô lâ, ekâ onukpa yeô nii.***
English: A child who knows how to wash his hands may eat with an elder.
- 17 ***Gbi ko k afô Lakote.***
English: Needless to say, Lakote was born on a certain day.
- 18 ***Gbôtsui ashigbântâ, mima shi dani kanya ba.***
English: I am Anthill the immovable, the irreplaceable. Before the shrub 'kanya' came into being, I was.
- 19 ***He fââ he ni akpe wie yâ lâ ejoô.***
English: Wherever you chew the West African hot black pepper, it will be hot.
- 20 ***Hômô ni haa niyenii ôô.***
English: It is hunger that makes the meal enjoyable.
- 21 ***Kakalika nuô tswetsweetswe wiemô.***
English: The cocroach hears the painful groans of a rheumatic patient.
- 22 ***Kâ ehiii hefii lâ, akâblaa he.***
English: If it is not big enough to tie or wrap around properly, at least it can be used to cover partially.
- 23 ***Kâ obaaye hala wôlô lâ ja oyawô shônaa.***
English: If you desire to eat turtle eggs, you must needs sleep at the seashore.
- 24 ***Kâ okââ ole nii fe nine lâ, o too 'kudimi.'***
English: If you think you are too wise, you may greet a goat, 'Good evening.'
- 25 ***Kâ oleee adowa shwuô tsukômô lâ, ebaasha fe shwuô loo.***
English: If you do not know how to smoke antelope thigh, it will get more rotten than elephant meat.
- 26 ***Kâji tsâ dunaa t loo lâ, eyuâ bi dunaa.***
English: If a father's backside grows thin, its flesh can be found at his child's backside.
- 27 ***Kâji oyeko mutsru lâ, onaabu etsuuu.***
English: If you have not eaten red palm oil, your mouth would not be red.
- 28 ***Kâji hômô miiye gbô le, ekâjâ ema .***
English: If a stranger is hungry, he came with the hunger from his town.
- 29 ***Kâji loofôlô tsâ yâ tso nô le, belâ eebi tâ.***
English: If a bird perches on a branch for too long, it is asking for a stone.

- 30** *Kâji mâi enyô lâ too lâ, elajeô.*
English: When two persons rear a goat, it gets lost.
- 31** *Kâji okâ adu shwâ lâ, ewamôô oyite .*
English: If you play with a monkey, it scratches your head.
- 32** *Kâji onaaa omlinii ahe lâ, oshweee.*
English: If you do not see your intestines, you do not vomit.
- 33** *Kâji onufu ek bo d lâ, kâji ona titiômôtôi lâ osheô lâ gbeyei.*
English: If you have been beaten before by a snake, when you see an earthworm you fear it.
- 34** *Kâji wuô tô d pâ, ehiâ ekpa akroma nô.*
English: When a fowl gets drunk, it forgets about the hawk.
- 35** *Koo ni here bo lâ, atsââ lâ koo sha.*
English: You do not despise the forest that saved you.
- 36** *Lââhe fe fômôhe.*
English: Bringing up (a child) is more (difficult) than bringing forth (a child).
- 37** *Mô ko kê shwuô yeee naamô.*
English: No one competes with the elephant in stamping.
- 38** *Mô kome fôô, shi jeee mô kome lâô.*
English: Only one person brings forth a child, but it is not only one person that brings it up.
- 39** *Musu tsiimô akâkp bâlâ.*
English: It is with a full belly that you can blow a horn (bugle).
- 40** *Niyeniashi anaa abâkulô yâ.*
English: It is at meal time that you can tell who is left-handed.
- 41** *Nô ni bako d lâ, shôsââ eyôô.*
English: That which has never occurred is beyond the seas.
- 42** *mâ kome fiteô mâi fââ.*
English: One (bad) nut spoils all the rest.
- 43** *Obalanyo hiâ tamôô edeka mli.*
English: A young man's face (or looks) does not reflect the contents of his

box.

44 Ohiafo bâlâ egbââ.

English: A poor person's horn (bugle) does not sound.

45 Otsene lâ dalâ lâ, nakai akâbaaka obele lâ.

English: As is the size of your calabash, so will be the measure of the corn you will get.

46 Suômô leee agboku.

English: Love does not know (does not take notice of) decayed teeth.

47 Tso ni wa akâ tsina môô.

English: It is to a strong tree that a cow is tethered.

48 Tsuishitoo ji kunimyeli.

English: Patience is victory; or, patience brings victory.

49 Waa ni le ehe teemô lâ, lâ etsôô otope.

English: The snail that knows how to hide grows up to be old (mature).

50 Wotô mli kpaaa ôômô.

English: A bottle in which honey is kept never stops tasting sweet.

DANGME

1 Ajedu ngâ So yo se, nâ yo se wa.

_____ English: Ajedu strongly supported So yo (a woman) and women became strong.

2 Agbo ke, 'Seyami ji k peemi.'

_____ English: The ram says that to retreat is to show courage (or gather your strength).

3 Asafo pui buâ (pô buâ) ô asafo nâ lôô mi.

_____ English: The community vegetable pot is (to be) licked by the community.

4 Atâplâ Gazo ke muô ni peô lâ, se e be ngmôngmômi nâ e maa gba he ma.

_____ English: The cocroach says that it feels like laughing, but it has no hip to pat. (Note: When the Dangme, especially women, are overcome with laughter, they pat their hip.)

5 A wui jemâ to kpa ngâ ma nô.

_____ English: You do not (should not) tether a goat/sheep belonging to an esoteric or cultic society in the market place.

6 A yâ nyu wui kpââ gbagbâ mi.

_____ English: No one puts water into a leaking straw bag.

7 Ayifale sika kpâ mudô.

_____ English: You do not (cannot) make a mosquito net with the fine paid for seducing your wife.

8 Ba mi ngâ puô.

_____ English: There are holes in a leaf.

9 Bâ momo bâô pe bâ he.

_____ English: An old broom sweeps cleaner than a new broom.

10 Bi nâ e ke e nyâ nâ ko hwô mahe ô, lâ hu e hwôâ mahe.

_____ English: A child who does not allow its mother to sleep, will not sleep either.

11 Blônyââlô nâ le blô he sane.

_____ English: It is the traveller who knows what happened on the way.

12 Bua si tami nâ a woô kê saa tatu nâ a naa e tsui.

_____ English: With patience, you can dissect an ant and find its heart.

13 Detsâ biâ t de lo he.

_____ English: A hunter's name does not cease to be attached to the game (that he killed).

14 Detsâ bi fo we lo ko he ya.

_____ English: A hunter's child does not cry after meat (that he/she sees with other people).

15 Do je ngâ lalô se.

_____ English: Drumming (or dancing) time came during the absence of the singer.

16 Dudô ngua puâ we nyu, se dudô wayo nâ puâ nyu.

_____ English: The large water-storage pot does not waste water, but the small pot does.

17 Dudô yâ pa.

_____ English: The water-storage pot does not go (is not taken out) to fetch water.

18 E hí ha s lô nâ e maa hi ha hulô?

_____ English: It is not easy-going for the blacksmith, and can it be easy-going for the farmer?

19 He nâ je naa ngâô, lejâ ô nâ diblii woô ngâ.

_____ English: Where daylight breaks is also where night falls.

20 Hwô yee nyamitami gbeye.

_____ English: Hunger fears simulated munching.

21 Je mi munyu ngâ blâwii se sane ngâ se.

_____ English: This world's affairs seem to move slowly, but there is more beyond.

22 Jua kpa we ngâ yofôyo nô.

_____ English: The market does not (must not) close at sunset with a nursing mother still around.

23 Jua nô huhui hule we jua nô mâmlâ tso.

_____ English: The loud shouts in the market does not cause the big shade tree in the market to fall.

24 Kakate ji duôtsâ, Nyingmo pâ nâ gbeô nya la.

_____ English: The scorpion is poisonous, but the Creator God renders it harmless.

25 Ke abô tu zô ô, sikô yi mi nâ e yaa.

_____ English: When a lobster is fatty, it gets into the head of a threadfin.

26 Ke kôli ngâ we mi ô, yo kpeemi wâ.

_____ English: If you have trinkets in your house, it is not difficult to marry a wife.

- 27 Ke ngmô nô kê we ô, a yâ nyu kê yâ.**
English: If your farm is not far away, you do not carry water with you when going to the farm.
- 28 Ke nya ngâ lo he ô, ja a wo lâ mla.**
English: If the mouth is near a fish, it (the mouith) must be given regulations.
- 29 Ke o ngâ aboda kpee ô, de o yââ nyu toô he.**
English: When eating boiled corn, you must have water by you.
- 30 Ke o nyâ gbo ô, tsapi mo nâ o puô lâ.**
English: When your mother dies, you are not the one to bury her.
- 31 Ke to gbo ngâ tsu mi ô, tsu mi kê nâ a puô lâ ngâ.**
English: If a goat dies in a room, it is buried but in a room.
- 32 Klakumi ngmâ hlui nâ kpakpahe ya buô nô.**
English: The turkey does not lay eggs for the duck to sit on.
- 33 Kpakpahe ke, e nyuwumi ngâ e nane mi nâ ke e su pa mi loko e maa fo, se kpo nô lohwehi tsuo ke e z we.**
English: The duck says that its ability to swim is in its legs and that it is when it gets into the water that it runs swiftly, yet all the dry land animals say that it is dull.
- 34 Kungwô ajakpale ke wâ nô blâfo ngôâ.**
English: The featherless breed of fowl says that maize that is on a millstone is not palatable.
- 35 Kuôwi ke nyââmi jloô lâ se e be nane kê ha nyââmi.**
English: The frog says that it desires to walk but it has no legs for walking.
- 36 Ma lâ naa yohôyo.**
English: It is the public that can identify a pregnant woman.
- 37 Misitimi ji bâkpami.**
English: Having a thick (i.e., full) belly gives the ability to blow a horn (bugle).
- 38 Ngo nitsâ kê we e he ke e ngôô.**
English: Salt does not praise itself that it is tasty.
- 39 Nô kake lâ fôô lâ a kê toô matsâ.**

_____ English: Only one person gives birth (to a child) to be enstooled the chief
(for all).

40 Nubuô dlâ kaawi.

_____ English: A stranger does not distribute crabs.

41 Nyaka nui gbe yaka.

_____ English: A crocodile does not catch a dog for no cause.

42 Okpolu mi hí si ná a ya plâô e se mi ke a maa yâ nyu wo mi.

_____ English: No one pours water on the side of a bowl for storage, while the
inside is available.

43 O we nya kuadaa fu se e hí lami.

_____ English: The pepper in front of your house is ripe but it is not possible to
pick it.

44 Pa mi tsoku ke e yi fi gbeye.

_____ English: The log in the river says its does not fear the cold.

45 Payalô ná ywíaa buâ.

_____ English: It is the one who goes to fetch water that breaks the water pot.

46 Pu ná o yi mi gbeye ô, lejâ ô ná lohwe nuô mo ngâ.

_____ English: The forest that you least fear, is the very one in which a wild
animal kills you.

47 To ngâ nyââ se gbenô ngâ e kuâ.

_____ English: The goat is walking about but there is death around its neck.

48 Tsapi mimâ mâ a jua ji jale.

_____ English: The frankincense is not the co-equal of the soap.

49 Tsapi nô fââ nô ná hii kpo nô loko nyô mi hiômi nôô.

_____ English: It is not everyone that is outdoors (or awake) when the midnight
rain falls.

50 'Tsopatsâ mo tsa mo nitsâ o he ô' abâ gbi ' i.

_____ English: 'Physician, heal yourself' is a proverbial saying.

Index by theological topic and Proverb No.

Abel 42
animal sacrifices 10, 12
apostles 50
backsliding 27
baptism 50
blood of Christ 10, 12
Cain 42
Christ, blood of 10, 12
Christ, source of success 28
Christ, belief in 9, 12
Christ 47
Christ, power of 30
Christ, personal experience of 23
Christ, second coming of 32
Christian maturity 6
Christian love 21
Christian experience 23
Christian maturity 34
Christ-like life 9
churches 48
cleansing 10
communing with God 8
crucifixion 41
cursing 11
death, preparing for 32
demonic 46
denying Christ 27, 47
evil 11
faith, firm 22
faith 29, 34
false prophets 13, 38, 40, 46
forbearance 11
forgiveness 1
funerals 32
gentiles 45
God, dependence on 15, 28
God, looking up to 17
God, power of 28
God, trusting 15, 31
God's care 31
God's forgiveness 1
God's blessings 29
good and evil 20
gospel 49
grace 9, 24, 29, 43
growth in faith 5
hypocrisy 13

intercessory prayer 44
Jesus, desertion of 39
Jesus Christ 41
Jews 41, 47
Kingdom of God, entering 40
Kingdom of God 49
marriage institution 16
meditation 8
new converts 3
obeying word of God 35
obeying words of Christ 36
omnipresence, God's 44
Paul 45
peace 11
Peter 45, 50
Pilate 41
prayer 2, 35, 44
repentance 1
retaliation 1
righteous and sinners 33
sacrifice 24
salvation 9, 43
Satan, liar 18
Satan, source of evil 18
saving grace 9
sin of betrayal 5
sin 24, 37
sin, washing away 12
sin, cleansing 10
sinners and righteous 33
spirit being willing 20
Spirit of God 44
Spirit of the Lord 15
spiritual maturity 3
spiritual renewal 8
spiritual babes 3
temptation 24
testimony 23
testing the spirits 38, 40, 46
traditional rites 31
trust in God 7, 31, 50
using one's talents 4
vengeance 11
weakness of flesh 20
wheat and weeds 33
will of God 26
witchcraft 46
witnessing 49

yielding to temptation 35

Topical index by purpose/occasion indicating Proverb No.

advice, heeding 35
advice, rejecting 35
anger 41
appearances 40
associating with others 38
battle, winning 15
betrayal 5
blame 1
boasting 7
boasting 26
boasting 49
boasting 23

borrowing 21
carefulness 13
cause and effect 36
character 18
character training 14
cheating 27
children, bringing up 14
choosing 38
Christ, obeying words of 15
Christians and unbelievers 19
circumspection 40
circumspection 19
company, bad 19
company, shunning bad 19
competence 15
danger, avoiding 19
desire to do good 20
discretion 24
discretion 40
disobedience, results of 36
disobedient children 36
effort 9
endurance 34
endurance 31
eventualities 32
evil 11
expertise 40
expertise, regard for 28
failure 28
fairness 30
faithfulness 45
fellow-feeling 21
foresight 32
forgiveness 42
fortune 50
future 7
future, preparing for 26
generosity 39
goodness 11
gossip 48
gratitude 43
hard work 25
hard work 4
haste, avoiding 34
haste 6
help, asking for 21
help 43
helping others 31

helping hand 44
helping hand 39
honesty 45
hope 29
hope 31
idleness 4
illness 8
inability to do good 20
ingratitude 47
ingratitude 41
ingratitude 39
inheritance 18
innocence 19
innocent, punishment of 33
interdependence 21
justice 30
kind-hearted 41
knowledge, regard for 28
laziness 25
laziness 4 treachery 5
life 3
marriage, successful 17
marriage 46
marriage 16
marriage, not interfering in 16
marriage, difficulties in 22
marriage, joy of 22
marriage partner 17
marriage 6
married couples 45
married life 22
married couples, newly 16
morals 14
murderer 5
mutual help 43
needy, helping the 21
opportunity, denial of 30
opportunity, missing 27
overworking oneself 8
parents, talking to 14
patience 48
patience, blessings of 34
patience 1
patience 3
patience 27
patience 42
perseverance 22
perseverance 31

persistence 34
persistence 2
poor judgement 27
poverty 25
preparedness 32
pretence 47
pride 26
problems, handling 10
problems, solving 11
procedures, new 12
procedures, outmoded 12
progress 29
progress 49
propriety 17
propriety 19
prosperity 50
prostitutes, avoidance of 19
punishment 33
punishment for sin 37
punishment 30
putting oneself into trouble 5
quarrel 11
reaping what you sow 36
redress 30
reliance on others 23
responsibility, discharging 15
rest 8
rewards 36
rewards 41
rules, outmoded 12
rushing 6
selective, being 38
self-confidence 49
self-confidence 31
self-destruction 48
self-help 9
self-reliance 9
self-reliance 23
self-reliance 31
sin, cannot be hidden 37
small beginnings 29
small beginnings 50
solution, right 10
 solution, inappropriate 10
solution, correct 17
status 40
steadfastness 2
success 28

success 15
suffering 25
suffering, self-inflicted 36
suitability 17
taking time 6
tender-hearted 42
thumb 28
timing 3
tit-for-tat 11
togetherness 45
training, good, bad 18
training, good 14
treachery 13
tricking 27
trouble, self-inflicted 35
trust, not anybody 13
unequally yoked 17
unforeseen, preparing for 7
weddings 16
wineskins 12
work 25
worry 26
worrying about future 7

Index of biblical texts cited

| | Biblical text | Proverb No. |
|--------------|----------------------|--------------------|
| Genesis | 2: 24 | 16 |
| | 4: 5-8 | 42 |
| | 18: 25-25 | 33 |
| | 32: 27 | 2 |
| | 40: 23 | 39 |
| Exodus | 5: 11, 14 | 30 |
| Numbers | 32: 23 | 37 |
| Deuteronomy | 8: 3 | 14 |
| | 8: 3-5 31, | |
| | 29: 6 | 31 |
| | 32: 6 | 39 |
| 1 Samuel | 14: 45 | 39 |
| 2 Samuel | 9: 1 | 39 |
| | 20: 9-10 | 13 |
| Nehemiah | 8: 10 | 21 |
| Psalm | 23: 1 | 31 |
| | 37: 23-26 | 31 |
| | 41: 10 | 5 |
| | 113: 7-9 | 29 |
| | 127: 1 | 15 |
| | 139: 7-8 | 44 |
| Proverbs | 7: 24-27 | 13 |
| | 15: 1 | 11 |
| | 20: 4 | 25 |
| | 27: 6 | 13 |
| | 27: 10 | 47 |
| Ecclesiastes | 3:11 | 3 |
| | 9: 11 | 15 |
| Jeremiah | 18: 20 | 47 |
| Ezekiel | 3: 19 | 1 |
| | 16: 44 | 18, 46 |
| | 18: 20 | 37 |

| | | |
|-----------|----------|----|
| Habakkuk | 3: 17-19 | 31 |
| Zechariah | 4: 6 | 15 |

| | | |
|---------|------------|-------|
| Matthew | 4: 4 | 14 |
| | 5: 21-48 | 12 |
| | 6: 14 | 1 |
| | 6: 25-34 | 31 |
| | 6: 34 | 7, 26 |
| | 7: 15 | 13 |
| | 7: 15-20 | 40 |
| | 7: 15-23 | 38 |
| | 7: 21 | 40 |
| | 7: 24-27 | 15 |
| | 9: 17 | 10 |
| | 10: 33 | 47 |
| | 10: 36 | 5 |
| | 13: 24-30 | 40 |
| | 13: 29 | 33 |
| | 15: 27 | 43 |
| | 16: 24 | 22 |
| | 19: 4-6 16 | |
| | 23: 13 | 30 |
| | 23: 37-38 | 35 |
| | 24: 14 | 49 |
| | 24: 23-25 | 40 |
| | 24: 42 | 32 |
| | 25: 14-31 | 4 |

| | | |
|------|----------|----|
| Mark | 6: 31 | 8 |
| | 10: 27 | 28 |
| | 12: 43 | 49 |
| | 13: 9-13 | 22 |
| | 13: 11 | 17 |
| | 14: 21 | 5 |
| | 14: 38 | 20 |

| | | |
|------|-----------|----|
| Luke | 2: 51-52 | 14 |
| | 5: 36-39 | 12 |
| | 6: 27-31 | 11 |
| | 8: 15 | 34 |
| | 11:9 | 2 |
| | 17: 3-4 1 | |
| | 22: 40,46 | 35 |
| | 22: 48 | 5 |

| | | |
|-----------------|----------------------------|-------|
| John | 3: 16 | 9, 23 |
| | 4: 42 | 23 |
| | 6: 5-13 | 29 |
| | 8: 44 | 18 |
| | 15: 5-7 | 28 |
| Acts | 2: 14, 41 | 50 |
| | 3: 14-15 | 41 |
| | 4: 34-35 | 21 |
| | 26: 14 | 48 |
| Romans | 6: 1-2 | 24 |
| | 7: 15, 18-19 | 20 |
| | 12: 14, 17-21 | 11 |
| 1 Corinthians | 3: 1 | 3 |
| | 3: 13 | 37 |
| | 3: 14-15 | 36 |
| | 5: 6 | 48 |
| | 6: 18 | 24 |
| | 12: 7 | 49 |
| | 13: 11 | 3 |
| | 15: 33 | 38 |
| 16: 1 | 44 | |
| 2 Corinthians | 6: 14-7:1 | 19 |
| | 6: 14 | 17 |
| Galatians | 1: 6 | 27 |
| | 2: 11-14 | 45 |
| | 4: 8-11 | 27 |
| Ephesians | 6: 7 | 36 |
| | 2: 8-9 | 43 |
| Ephesians | 4: 1-3, 26-27, 31-32 | 42 |
| | 4: 11-13 | 6 |
| | 4: 28 | 23 |
| Ephesians | 6: 4 | 14 |
| | 6: 18-20 | 44 |
| | 6: 4 | 14 |
| Philippians | 2: 2 | 45 |
| | 2: 12-13 | 9 |
| 1 Thessalonians | 5: 21 | 27 |

| | | |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| 2 Thessalonians | 3: 10 | 25 |
| | 3: 12 | 4 |
| 2 Timothy | 2: 22-26 | 24 |
| Hebrews | 3: 12 | 47 |
| | 6: 1 | 3 |
| | 10: 4 | 10 |
| | 10: 4-18 | 12 |
| | 10: 26-31 | 24 |
| James | 1: 2-3 | 22 |
| | 1: 3-4 | 34 |
| | 4: 13-15 | 26 |
| | 4: 15 | 7 |
| 2 Peter | 3: 9 | 6 |
| | 3: 10-11 | 32 |
| 1 John | 4: 1 | 38, 40, 46 |

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