

# **ODWIRA AND THE GOSPEL: An Exploratory Study of the Asante Odwira Festival and Its Significance to Christianity in Ghana**

Frank Adams

July 2002

## **ABSTRACT**

The study of the Odwira festival is the key to the understanding of Asante religious and political life. The festival was established in 1717 by the first Asantehene Osei Tutu and the inauguration was associated with the coming together of various states. The Odwira festival was an annual festival where chiefs came together to reaffirm their allegiance to the state under the leadership of the Asantehene. The festival was the way Asante society found its highest religious expression.

The study aims to explore the nature of the Odwira festival longitudinally; pre-colonial, colonial and post Ghana independence. It brings together different pieces of evidence from historical sources and explores the religious ideas and values that have survived over these periods of history. These are: the defilement of Asantehene's ntoro; the purification of the Golden Stool as a means of purifying the Asante state; the feeding of the ancestral stool with mashed yam to solicit blessings from ancestral spirits; and the community eating together which is considered as a sacrificial, memorial and fellowship meal. The study examines the Odwira ideology and its implications for understanding the Asante self-identity.

The study looks at the Colonial period when the Asante state was conquered by the British Colonial Government; the Asantehene Prempeh 1 was exiled to the Seychelles; and the Asante state became a Protectorate. The Odwira festival ceased but some elements survived and found expression in localised festivals like Wukudae, and Akwasidae. The Odwira festival was revived as a religious festival after Ghana gained independence. During modern times Odwira festivals have also been used to address modern issues like education, health and commerce.

The study also discusses how elements of faith portrayed in Odwira could provide a framework for understanding the cultural shape, which Christianity has taken among the Asante, and for enabling Christianity to engage at a greater depth with Asante culture. It examines how this study of Asante Odwira ideology will help enrich Christianity in Asante and also to communicate better to the people of Asante. Theological themes in Asante belief that have emerged from this study include: the theology of sacrament, ecclesiology, eschatology, Christology, and a complex concept of time. The study shows that Asante cultural identity lies at the heart of the process by which the Asante Christian faith is carried forward.