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Beyond Vernacularization: Abisa, Akwankyer, and Prophetic Direction in Ghanaian Neo- Prophetic Christianity

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Abstract

This article analyzes Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic spiritual consultations through two Akan concepts with semantically related concepts that are usually (and incorrectly) assumed rather than analyzed: abisa and akwankyer. Based on Akan Lexicon and related works, this article explains that *abisa* and *akwankyer* combine the concepts of seeking, consulting, inquiring, knowledge, and teaching. *Abisa* and *akwankyer*, it explains, occur together to mean giving a teaching and showing a way that will orient action. This article explores these vernacular concepts in tandem with Walls' Translation Principle, and Sanneh's vernacularization theory, Bediako's mother-tongue theology, and recent Ghanaian studies on prophetic guidelines. It explains that foregrounding *abisa* does not stop with "translating" Christian concepts. Foregrounding *abisa* gives a culturally adequate frame for seeking and understanding religious knowledge and prophetic direction. It shows that some biblical narratives contain patterns of inquiry, knowledge, mediation, discernment, and direction, but are not to be equated with indigenous divination. Neo-Prophetic *akwankyer* is proposed to be a vernacularly mediated Christian practice of continual change, discontinuity and biblicalization, accompanied by pneumatic activity, materiality, and contested prophetic activity. By shifting the analytical focus from textual translation to how local language structures religious practice, the article aims to establish 'vernacular religious epistemology' as the main contribution to World Christianity within the field of study.

1. Introduction

Christianity in Ghana relies heavily on languages with robust religious histories. With respect to Akan, several words used in preaching retain the habit of asking, directing, and naming the cause. There are two particularly illuminating examples. Two words are particularly revealing: *abisa* and *akwankyer*. In ordinary speech, *bisa* means "to ask" or "seek advice" (Christaller 1933, 24). In religious usage, *abisa* refers to consulting a priest or prophet for supernatural explanation or guidance (Onyinah 2002, 24–25). *Akwankyer*, by contrast, draws on the imagery of the way (*kwan*) and showing (*kyer*), evoking the act of showing a path or directing action. This ordinary semantic structure explains why contemporary Neo-Prophetic consultation feels immediately understandable to Akan-speakers, even in the absence of Christian authority (Bediako 1995; Ahaligah 2020).

The semantic richness of these examples can be seen in the mother-tongue Christianity in Ghana. For example, Lamin Sanneh (2016) and Walls (1996) have both supported the idea that when a language receives the gospel, it offers its own ideas and concepts. Bediako (1995) held that the mother tongue is more than just a medium; it provides the environment for the gospel. If we consider these ideas together, Ahaligah (2020) shows how mother-tongue Christology can provide new theological ideas. *Abisa* and *akwankyer* should be investigated in this perspective, since the vernacular helps to shape a certain kind of inquiry and direction, rendering an interpretation prior to a prophet speaking.

The following examples describe a specific feature of Ghanaian Neo-Prophetic Christianity that has been studied by a number of scholars. According to Cephas Omenyo (Omenyo 2011), the Ghanaian concern

for destiny and misfortune is coupled with a type of prophetic ministry. Simon Kouessan Degbe (Degbe 2015) described *sunsum akwankyer*ɛ as a new form of spiritual mediation, while Victor Washington (Washington 2022) analyzed it as circumstantial description and advice. More recently, George Kyeremeh and others (Kyeremeh et al. 2025) have analyzed the reasons why Ghanaian Christians seek spiritual direction for their existential problems and Joana Salifu Yendork and others (Yendork et al. 2026) have documented the diverse forms of directives in Neo-Prophetic churches. Although these studies show that *akwankyer*ɛ is an important element of contemporary Ghanaian religion, they leave an important research gap. Considering the prophetic consultation from the perspective of the Akan distinguishes asking (abisa) from showing the way (akwankyerɛ).

These distinctions are important. While *abisa* is the asking, *akwankyer*ɛ is showing the way. Degbe (2015) and Washington (2022) state that *abisa* is the asking while *akwankyer*ɛ is the way. In practical terms they happen together. One person seeks to understand the cause of the illness while the prophet prays, discloses, and directs. On a theoretical level, assuming that *abisa* and *akwankyer*ɛ are two independent entities illustrates how within Christian prophecy, a reworking of an Akan epistemology of inquiry is possible without saying that Neo-Prophetic practice is simply indigenous divination or an unmediated biblical practice.

These meanings do not stay in verbal use only. The biblical material makes the problem even more complicated. In 1 Samuel 9, Saul and one of his servants go looking for “a man of God”. According to them, ordinary looking did not recover the lost donkeys (1 Sam. 9:6). The New Revised Asante Twi Bible translates the servant’s wish in terms of way-showing: the “man of God” may instruct them on the way they should go, and in verse 8 it is stated that he will “show us the way” (wakyɛrɛ yɛn yɛn kwan) (Bible Society of Ghana 2012, 1 Sam. 9:6–8). More remarkably, in verse 9 it is stated that in ancient Israel people used to go to seek the counsel of God, and said in Twi, *rekɔbisa Nyankopɔn hɔ adeɛ*, that is to go and ask or seek counsel of God (Bible Society of Ghana 2012, 1 Sam. 9:9). This illustration puts *bisa* and *kyan/kyer*ɛ in close relationship of prophetic consultation. English translations of 2 Kings 3:11 make the same point from a different perspective: the NRSV (NRSV 1989, 2 Kgs. 3:11) and NIV (NIV 2011 2 Kgs. 3:11) speak of “inquiring of the LORD” through Elisha, while the NET says that they seek “the LORD’S direction” (NET Bible 2019, 2 Kgs. 3:11) and the NLT renders this as asking the LORD “what to do” (NLT 2015, 2 Kgs. 3:11). These translations show that Akan-speaking Christians can hear biblical prophetic narratives that express the notions of inquiry, knowledge, guidance, and action, within a vocabulary they already possess.

This article focuses on how Neo-Prophetic Spiritual Consultation in Ghana can be understood as a vernacularly mediated Christian practice where Akan linguistic tools provide a framework through which existential concerns and prophetic direction can be related. This article is built on the works of Walls, Sanneh, Bediako, Omenyo, Degbe, and Washington. It argues that the Akan vernacularization process does not begin and end with the translation of Scripture into the Akan language, but also when culturally contextualized ways of posing and receiving religious concerns are assimilated into Christian hermeneutics. This article describes vernacularization more as a process of adaptation, selection,

contestation, and transformation, as opposed to simple borrowing. It has three main goals: to define the religious and semantic relationships of the Akan words *abisa* and *akwankyer*; to analyze how the vernacular field provides understanding and insight to some of the biblical narratives on the process of prophetic inquiry and direction; to analyze how Neo Prophetic ministries utilize practices and prophecies alongside prayer to transform spiritual inquiries into direction.

2. Method and Scope: A Conceptual-Comparative Reading

This article takes a conceptual-comparative approach instead of new ethnographic discoveries (Walls 1996; Sanneh 2016; Bediako 1995). This article brings three different fields of knowledge into constructive debate: 1) foundational and contemporary scholarship on translation in World Christianity; 2) published research on Ghanaian prophecy, Neo-Propheticism, *abisa*, and *akwankyer*; 3) several biblical accounts about the quest for knowledge and prophetic guidance, and the revelation and prophetic direction of the Holy Spirit. The analysis does not trace the direct historical lineage of Akan *abisa* to *akwankyer*. Rather, this article presents a comparative analysis of religious grammars: who seeks; what is the problem that initiates the encounter; who mediates; how the hidden causality is interpreted; what form the revelation is; what directive is given; what is the prescription that is to be done and what is the embodied action to be done; and what authority is the directive based on. The analysis allows for similarity and difference to be seen. It also avoids a recurring weakness in many discussions on African Christianity where indigenous resemblance is considered either in a positive light as meaningful contextualization or in a negative light as syncretism, before the actual processes of transformation have occurred (Omenyo 2011; Degbe 2015; Washington 2022; Kyeremeh et al. 2025; Yendork et al. 2026).

The biblical component is also treated in a similar fashion. Several biblical accounts show that the biblical tradition has examples of seeking divine guidance and knowledge, prophetic mediation, and diagnosis and instruction, disobedience, and the result of the prophetic mediation. Hunting down historical parallels won't change the distinctions of covenantal ordering, prophetic function, ecclesiology, ritual economy, and jurisdictional control. For this reason, narratives will be treated as a reservoir of resources from which the Ghanaian Christians can sanction and decipher their practices, and not as resources that substantiate each and every practice tagged as *akwankyer* as admitted in biblical framework.

3. Sanneh, Walls, and the Unfinished Question of Translation

Sanneh's (2016) vernacularization thesis provides some much-needed direction as it elegantly counters a previous hypothesis which held that missionary translation was an extension of Western Christian dominion. It presented vernacular languages with textual, intellectual and theological status and empowered local speakers. Local Christians were not condemned to reproduce the missionary's cultural world; they could engage the Christian message by using local resources and, in the same way, they were able to engage Christian missionary world by using the Bible in local languages. Sanneh's thesis

brings innovation to translation. Vernacular is not a ‘neutral space’ in which an unchanged gospel is poured; a vernacular is an active space in which Christian concepts and ideas are innovated. This thesis is exemplified by Aidan Ahaligah’s (2020) analysis of the Christological reinterpretations in the Akan language in Ghana. Translation enabled new theological concepts of understanding Christ in Akan (Sanneh 2016; Bediako 1995; Ahaligah 2020).

Walls (Walls 1996) looks at the process through the historical example of Christianity’s ability to cross borders, feel at home in a new place, and maintain connectivity to the original revelation. The Translation Principle is closely related to the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation: just as the Word becomes flesh, the Christian doctrine assumes many forms in many cultures. Walls’s thinking has this apparent contradiction: a tendency to ‘indigenize’ that makes faith at home, paired with a tendency to ‘pilgrim’ that converts every culture to the gospel. This contradiction ensures that vernacularization is not just romanticizing and considering culturally familiar things Christian by default. The Akan category *akwankyer*□ is a culturally intelligible way to speak of divine guidance, but Christian appropriation of the category can limit, transform, or contradict what it means. There is, therefore, a need for both hospitality and judgment in translation. Recent scholarly works that attempt to revisit the translation principle suggest that Walls and Sanneh placed the focus of the new Christians, whereas contemporary works place it in a comparative framework.

The issue occurs when the translation principle is primarily concerned with texts, words, and concepts. Religious life is never just semantic. Christianity is learned through bodies, sounds, spaces, objects, images, rituals, disciplines, and patterned expectations. Sepetla Molapo’s (Molapo 2019) study of southern African missionary translations of molimo provides a helpful example because it illustrates that linguistic translation is able to re-order material and temporal worlds. Birgit Meyer’s (Meyer 2009, 2011) work takes this even further by stating that religion is mediated: believers experience divine immediacy through authorized forms, thus, speech, gesture, sounds, images, bodily disciplines, and technologies as well as objects that make transcendence sensible. In Ghanaian Pentecostalism, the Holy Spirit’s presence is manifested to and evidenced by prayer, preaching, music, testifying, touch, and other sensational means (Meyer 2009, 2011). In this study, we must ask how not just theological concepts are rendered in Akan, but also how the culturally contextualized ways of knowing spiritually and putting it into practice are employable in the Christian context. The following two sections discuss *akwankyer*□ and *abisa* in the Akan context.

4. in Akan Thought: , and the Religious Work of ‘Showing the Way’

Akwankyer□ holds great meaning in its name. The Asante Twi words help define *akwankyer*□*’s* usage through semantics. The ‘a’- prefix in *akwankyer*□ converts the verb *kwankyer*□ (to show the way/to give direction) to a noun that refers to the act or practice of showing the way, direction, or guidance. In Akan, *kwan* means a road, path, or way, and in this context, *kyer*□ means to show or to indicate, and to make something known. When the two words are combined in everyday speech, *kyer*□ *me kwan* means ‘show me the way’. Based on the aforementioned information, *akwankyer*□ cannot be a formal ecclesiastical

term. In Ghanaian studies, *akwankyer*ɛ is placed in the semantics of 'direction', 'spiritual direction', 'divine instruction', and prophetic guidance (Degbe 2015, 270–289; Washington 2022, 548 – 55). This term is easily understood and integrated within the social sphere; a stranger can ask for direction, an older person can set guidance, and a teacher can show a pupil how to do something. The word helps orient one from a state of being lost, to being on a path that can be understood and directed. The understanding of this simple semantics helps Neo-Prophetic Christianity define a complex idea of spiritual direction for an Akan audience without the innovation of a new concept and term.

This is further substantiated by how the term is discussed in Ghana. Degbe (Degbe 2015, 270 – 89) defines *sunsum akwankyer*ɛ by including the meanings of "spiritual direction" and "divine instruction." Washington (Washington 2022, 548 – 55) also treats *akwankyer*ɛ as a kind of prophetic direction in which a situation is assessed and instructions or a response is given. These are helpful definitions, but in older Christian contexts, "spiritual direction" typically means a longer-term accompaniment, and Neo-Prophetic *akwankyer*ɛ is more diagnostic and prescriptive, and tends to occur in a crisis. This, therefore, is not a good way of understanding the term. It is simpler to think of the term in the Akan context. Someone is on the path, while another, believed to have the answer, shows the path. Though most modern formal Asante Twi uses 'akwankyerɛ' and 'sunsum' (with the letter 'n'), older texts, variants of the dialect (e.g. Fante or classical orthography), and older Bible translations use 'Akwankyerɛ' or 'Sumsum' (with the letter 'm'). In this study, modern standard formal Asante Twi is used, while ancient spellings are retained when quoting and referencing.

Each element of the word, as with the cardinal directions contains an implicit notion of authority. To indicate a path is already to suggest the path exists and that the pathfinder has the ability to discern it. In *akwankyer*ɛ, the prophet disavows autonomy to his or her knowledge and depicts the path as given by God or the Holy Spirit. Thus, the authority of the prophet is mediation. A dream, a vision, a biblical passage, an impression, an experience of prayer, a bodily sensation, a prophetic word, a sign perceived, or any such thing, is meaningful in the church as an interpretation of the thing as having significance from God. Where Birgit Meyer's work is concerned, mediation and authorized media are relevant: the believer experiences divine immediacy through authorized media (voice, gesture, Scripture, sound, bodily disciplines, etc.). *Akwankyer*ɛ is not simply informational. It is the process of interpreting a sign, validating an interpretation, and translating an authorized interpretation into action.

Ordinary Akan meaning helps to identify *akwankyer*ɛ from prophecy. Prophecy discloses, warns, exhorts, accuses, promises, interprets or announces, but does not give commands. *Akwankyer*ɛ is most explicit when revelation is given in order to be converted to guidance: after the case is presented and investigated, the person is told how to proceed. Joana Salifu Yendork and colleagues' (Yendork et al. 2026) recent work on directions relating to fasting, prayer, preaching, testimony, offering, sacrifices, and readily available objects reveals that *akwankyer*ɛ can occur as the embodiment of an act rather than speech (Washington 2022; Yendork et al. 2026). A direction can reorganize a person's time, finances, body, relationships, and devotional commitments. A seeker is not presented with a belief to hold; they are placed on a path to follow.

Akan vocabulary should not be considered a museum of an unchanged pre-Christian world. Contemporary Akan people are Christians and attend churches, schools, and work in biomedical facilities, social media, the Pentecostal networks, and multiple faith communities. The meanings of *kwan*, *kyer*, and *akwankyer* can be imaginatively used in these contexts to describe and give new interpretations. The work provides support for Kwame Bediako's (Bediako 1995) position that in the field of mother-tongue theology, refusing to treat African languages as empty vessels into which Christian teachings should be poured, is correct since they have a frame and order already. When a Neo-Prophetic minister gives a promise of *akwankyer*, an Akan-speaking audience does not require a theological discourse in order to appreciate the substance of the statement. A way can be shown (Bediako 1995; Ahaligah 2020).

5. in Akan Thought: Asking, Seeking, Inquiring, and Consulting

If *akwankyer* starts with showing, *abisa* starts with asking. The vocabulary root is the Akan verb *bisa*. Johann Gottlieb Christaller (Christaller 1933, 24) mentions "to ask," "question," "inquire," and "ask one's advice" as his semantic range. In a religious context, Opoku Onyinah (Onyinah 2002, 24–25) uses *abisa* for consulting a traditional priest, a sorcerer, a prophet, or a prophetess or any other person who is approached for assistance in acquiring supernatural knowledge, solutions, or guidance. It is worth noting that this is a shift from a regular asking to a religious type of consultation. The meaning *abisa* gives to this religious context is an advanced form of an ordinary activity of a person who does not know, and, therefore, asks somebody who is believed to know. It is, in the end, a matter of the nature of the question, the source of the knowledge asked for, and the status of the mediator.

This semantic range applies in the Akan religious system. When ordinary causal explanations are insufficient, *abisa* is a way of calling upon the hidden dimension of an incident of adversity, sickness, or spiritual attack. George Kyeremeh and his colleagues (Kyeremeh et al. 2025) set modern Christian spiritual direction in this context of divination. Cephas Omenyo's (Omenyo 2011) account of African prophetism concentrates on the issues of destiny and hidden causality. Opoku Onyinah's (Onyinah 2002) work on Akan witchcraft is particularly helpful. He observes that in the Twi Bible translation, *abisa*-related lexemes are used for several terms pertaining to divination and soothsaying. Thus the vernacular has semantic equivalence and theological challenge.

Abisa and *akwankyer* should be related without being collapsed. *Abisa* focuses on the movement of the seeker: to ask, inquire, seek, consult, or request knowledge (Degbe 2015; Washington 2022). *Akwankyer* focuses on the movement of the guide: to show a path, direct, instruct, or teach what should be done (Degbe 2015; Washington 2022). In lived religious practices, they may occur in this sequence. A person asks, a spiritually authorized individual mediates an answer, reveals the meaning of the question, and a course of action is shown. The analytical distinction may be summarized as inquiry—disclosure—direction—response. The seeker's *abisa* is not the same as the prophet's *akwankyer*, even though the former can be the cause of the latter.

This distinction also explains the relationship between indigenous consultation and Neo-Prophetic ministry. A Ghanaian Christian may reject the shrine, the *abosom*, sacrificial requirements, and the divinatory methods associated with traditional consultation. However, they may still view the question as a legitimate one: can there be a spiritual dimension to what appears as an ordinary and trivial problem, and can divine knowledge provide the answer? (Onyinah 2002; Omenyo 2011; Kyeremeh et al. 2025). Neo-Prophetic ministries give an affirmative answer to this question, but they also move the mediation of the answer. Instead of consulting divination, they suggest prayer. They suggest that the Spirit is the source of the revelation, and the Bible is a source of legitimacy for the prophecy. They also suggest that the Christian charismatic prophet is a mediator, and the responses may be suggested as prayer, fasting, a reconciliation, a deliverance, etc., which are all other Christian narratives. The connection is that the question is asked in a religious framework; the disconnection is in the theological system that is employed for the answer.

Walls (1996) and Bediako (1995) are critical in this respect. Walls analyzes how Christian translation shows that a faith that crosses cultures is shaped by and responds to the contexts where it encounters diverse cultures and is able to put all cultures under Christian criticism. Bediako presents the same issue in African Theology and considers the vernacular as that area where Christianity is appropriated in an indigenous form. If, for instance, Akan Christians experience the biblical texts through a language that uses *bisa* meaning to ask, inquire, consult, and seek advice, then the Akan audience can understand and recognize the various scenes in the Bible where people approach prophets for divine illumination. This understanding can be facilitated by means of that language. Likewise, the prophetic ministry of showing divine guidance to an Akan audience can be expressed in a way that is immediately understood. In this case, the vernacular makes the practice meaningful, not legitimate.

This distinction is of grave importance. It would be too hasty to conclude that since the Neo-Prophetic consultation resembles *abisa*, it is merely Christian divination. It would be equally fallacious to conclude that since the Bible has prophetic inquiry, the contemporary *akwankyer*□ is biblical. Vernacular adaptation is selective: in some cases, older mediators may be retained while newer ones may be introduced and certain existential questions and ritual forms may be present while other material forms may be reintroduced with new biblical interpretations (Walls 1996; Omenyo 2011; Degbe 2015). The central concern is how Neo-Prophetic Christianity redefines and transforms Akan patterns of asking and showing ways.

The best case example for this is communication that isn't entirely foreign to the hearer's conceptual world. According to Lamin Sanneh (Sanneh, 2016), the vernacularization thesis, Kwame Bediako's (Bediako, 1995) mother-tongue theology, and Aidan Ahaligah's (Ahaligah, 2020) analysis of Akan Christian reinterpretation, make the same point: translation provides the ability for local interpretation. Neo-Prophetic ministers who use *abisa*-consultation, *akwankyer*□-(direction), *honhom*-(spirit), *tumi*-(power), *nkwagye*-(salvation), or other Akan categories build a connection to a level of interpretation where hearers organize their experience of religion. When they use a vernacular, other way-showing offerings may be perceived as the minister speaking from the seeker's world rather than the outside of it.

6. Biblical Prophetic Inquiry: , Direction, and the Prophetic Mediation of the Way

The translation of the Akan Bible becomes especially instructive in understanding the relationship of *abisa* to *akwankyer*ɛ (Bible Society of Ghana 2012; Onyinah 2002). Many biblical scholars acknowledge that ancient Israel contained both legitimate and illegitimate means of seeking knowledge of the supernatural, and the Hebrew language cannot be equated with the categories of modern-day Ghana. However, in many biblical narratives, it is very clear that if people wanted to know something and could not find a way to know it themselves, they would go to a prophet. It is necessary to notice how these narratives in the Akan Bible are framed with the words for asking, seeking, showing, and giving directions. Thus, translation supports reception: it shows how prophetic action in the biblical sense is linguistically accessible to the Akan readers.

Saul and his servant have been unsuccessful in locating their missing donkeys with regular means, so his servant directs them to a "man of God" (1 Sam. 9:6). In the version of the New Revised Asante Twi Bible, the man of God is expected to speak about the ɛ*kwan* (way), which is expressed in verse 8 as *akyer*ɛ *y*ɛ*n y*ɛ*n kwan*, "show us our way" (Bible Society of Ghana 2012, 1 Sam. 9:6–8). Verse 9 of the Bible bridges the gap with the verb *rek*ɛ*bisa Nyankop*ɛ*n h*ɔ *ade*ɛ (Bible Society of Ghana 2012, 1 Sam. 9:9). The verb *bisa* in this context refers to inquiring. The Asante Twi translation of the Bible uses the vernacular of *bisa* and *kwan/kyer*ɛ, merging inquiry and the showing of way, for the benefit of the Twi reader. This closeness in meaning is the result of a choice by the Bible Society of Ghana in translating the Hebrew narrative, as it is not natural to assume the semantic proximity. Thus, the mother-tongue translation of the Bible is a space of generative and creative theological work.

For 2 Kings 3:11, English versions describe "inquiring of the LORD" (NRSV 1989, 2 Kgs. 3:11; NIV 2011, 2 Kgs. 3:11), "seeking [for] direction" (NET Bible 2019, 2 Kgs. 3:11), or asking "what to do" (NLT 2015, 2 Kgs. 3:11) in that order. In Asante Twi, this is expressed as 'bisa AWURADE hɔ' through Elisha (Bible Society of Ghana 2012). The use of the mother-tongue allows the grammar of inquiry to be unified as 'bisa' is connected to 'akwankyerɛ' in one unit. Avoiding Western theological debates, mother-tongue reception offers a unified model of consultation.

The presence of Micaiah in 1 Kings 22 makes things more complicated because inquiry is found in a disputed prophetic area. This is more apparent for the Ghanaian *akwankyer*ɛ and Jehoshaphat's question, 'are there not prophets?' asks not just for their existence, but for the presence of another prophet of the LORD who may be consulted. The case illustrated is important because it shows that the presence of a culturally related practice does not automatically make answer clear. The Ghanaian *akwankyer*ɛ must determine whose prophetic word counts, how a prophet is recognized, and what happens when multiple prophetic interpretations are given. The Bible is an analogy and a critique. It is a confirmation that prophetic inquiry is a part of the literary world, but not a confirmation that every prophetic answer is to be trusted.

Of the four dimensions, 2. Kings 5 is the clearest example of the directive command. Naaman goes to Elisha to receive healing and is instructed to wash seven times in the Jordan. Healing comes by way of the spoken word, and this example joins speech, water, and some bodily movement. In Asante Twi, washing seven times is described as '*K□ na k□guare nkron nson w□ Yordan mu*' (Bible Society of Ghana 2012). Elisha's command instructs a path of action and is a local example of *akwankyer□*. From an Akan point of view, this can be interpreted as way-showing where the person with a problem is instructed on the specific task that needs to be accomplished. However, a disciplined comparison must remain: a biblical prophet's shown command does not justify every directive in the contemporary world that involves material objects. This instructs that some biblical prophecy moves to the revealed and then to the materially performed (Yendork et al. 2026).

Some texts extend the pattern. A case in point is 1 Samuel 28, where Saul consults the medium at Endor when other legitimate avenues of divine response have been exhausted. The narrative shows that the reading of this biblical text is contextual and relative to the mediator and means (Deut. 18:9–22; 1 Sam. 28; Acts 13:1–3; Acts 16:6–10). Some of these texts point to a biblical-canonical differentiation of supernatural inquiry (Deut. 18:9–22). The Twi translation of these biblical texts describes the prohibited acts of divination in the language of traditional spiritual search, including 'abisa' or 'asu□bisa' (consulting spirits) while God promises in the true prophet through whom inquiry can be made (Bible Society of Ghana 2012). In one case, Acts 16:6–10, Paul is shown to be redirected in mission through the Spirit and a vision while in Acts 13:1–3, communal worship, fasting and prophetic discernment bring forth missionary activity. Though differing in some respects, they demonstrate that Biblical religion is confronted with the question of how people come to know God's will and how divine communication is transformed into practical deed.

The Akan Bible presents a new dimension to the work of biblical translation. Reporting on an ancient event is one thing. Understanding the event is something else. Translation involves choosing a vernacular. Opoku Onyinah's (Onyinah 2002) observation that *abisa* terminology appears in Twi renderings of several passages concerning divination and soothsaying is significant. The same language can be used to refer to the asking of God in 1 Samuel 9 as *abisa* and can also refer to prohibited activities in biblical translations (Bible Society of Ghana 2012). Akan itself does not settle theology. All the contexts: the case in point, the mediator, the source, and the intention matter. For this reason, the vernacular is deeper than saying *abisa* equates to "divination." *Bisa* can mean many things. Christian translation requires engaging this multiplicity.

The biblical accounts do not support a clear-cut case of either continuity or a Neo-Prophetic practice. What the biblical accounts provide is an understanding of why under certain perspectives, prophetic consultation can be Christianly imaginal in the Akan context. The biblical accounts provide narratives of seekers, prophets, hidden knowledge, discernment, direction, and material action as well as disputed authority. Akan provides a means of asking and way-showing. The Neo-Prophetic branch of Christianity integrates these different worlds of praying, pneumatology, Scripture, prophecy, deliverance, and contemporary religious mediation (Walls 1996; Bediako 1995; Washington 2022). This does not restore

the biblical model or preserve *abisa* vernacular. Christian practice requires a defense that is imaginative and continues to be tested and evaluated.

7. Neo-Prophetic as Mediation, Materiality, and Semiotic Practice

Understanding *akwankyer*□ religious experience as a mediation is insightful. The prophet does more than translate a single sentence from the Bible; the prophetic experience articulates an inarticulate experience and translates it into a religious problem. A failed business, a recurrent dream, a sickness, the delay of a marriage, a family feud, or a fear about the future are interpretable concerns in the Christian domain. Prayer, prophecy, dreams, the Bible, visions, feelings, and at times objects are the media through which the unseen is made known (Meyer 2011; Degbe 2015; Washington 2022). This directive then translates that experience into an action: pray, fast, avoid a journey, undertake a symbolic act, change a relationship, give, wait, or seek further help. The entire experience is translational because it moves between different domains of the visible, the invisible, the diagnosis, the response, the sign, and the meaning.

In assessing this practice in terms of Meyer (2011) studies of mediation. The *akwankyer*□ term is used to posit “real spiritual experiences” as opposed to “mere media.” Religious experiences can happen through mediation. Ghanaian Pentecostalism has mastered techniques whereby believers feel the Holy Spirit’s presence and activity. Sound, voice, gestures, touch, music, testifying, and visual media and material objects do not compete with spiritual experience; they make spiritual presence experientially persuasive. Her concept of sensational forms describes authorized modes for organizing access to the transcendental. Applied to *akwankyer*□, sensational forms invite the researcher to consider forms authorizes prophet’s directives. What is the form of their utterance? What is the form of the text opened in prayer? What is the form of the vision narrated? What is the form of the dream? What is the form of the object prayed over? What is the form of the bodily sensation? The Christian nature of the directives is accomplished through the integration of various forms.

Materiality builds the argument. In their article, Joana Salifu Yendork and colleagues’ (Yendork et al. 2026) analyze the material and embodied aspects of *akwankyer*□ in six Neo-Prophetic churches in Ghana. Their themes include making use of already present objects as a means of providing solutions, offerings and sacrifices, libation, fasting and prayer, preaching and testimony, and the idea of prophetic infallibility. The results add to the discussions surrounding the definition of *akwankyer*□ as “advice.” Direction can be achieved through things, bodies, money, time, speech and disciplined practice. This reflects the material turn in the study of religion. More recent studies of Ghanaian Catholicism suggest that Africanization and pentecostalization occur through embodied and material means as much as through articulated theological means (Niedźwiedź 2023). Contemporary Ghanaian Christianity cannot be understood if material religion is treated as secondary decoration around an essentially verbal faith.

Materiality also focuses the concerns around *akwankyer*□. A call for prayer carries less suspicion than a call for an object that has been deliberately made, a repeated symbolic act, or a financial gift. Part of this

is of theological concern, but it is also of a semiotic concern. The Christian traditions consist of different views on what material things can do in the context of spiritual power. Birgit Meyer's (2009, 2011) analysis of Jesus pictures in Ghana shows how Protestant-Pentecostal semiotic ideology can distinguish between a benign symbol and an animate spirit object. Similar work is done with prophetic material. There is defense of the use of oil and condemnation of another object as fetishistic. Water can represent cleansing and power of God in one context, while in another, it can represent ritual manipulation. The classification is never strictly about the physical object; it is on the authorized histories, biblical narratives, ministerial power, and how signs correlate to the spiritual realm (2009, 2011; Niedźwiedź 2023).

This is where practice-centered translation theory provides better language than syncretism. Syncretism can identify mixing, but it tends to believe traditions that mix are internally pure and easily separable. Translation originates from movement and transformation. It poses the question of what happens to a form when it crosses a boundary and is reauthorized (Meyer 2011; Degbe 2015). For instance, if a Neo-Prophetic minister uses water in a directive, the concern would not be how other ministers use water, but how that minister names the water, prays over it, and scripturally narrates it. The water's form and its anticipated effect on participants is of concern. The same material form can be part of different semiotic regimes. Therefore, the issue to consider is how participants would provide meaning and not a decision of how it is meaningless.

8. From Linguistic Vernacularization to Vernacular Religious Epistemology

This analysis allows a more informed theoretical suggestion. World Christianity must distinguish linguistic vernacularization from vernacular religious epistemology (Sanneh 2016; Walls 1996; Bediako 1995). In this case, linguistic vernacularization comprises the availability and the degrees to which the Christian language can grow in the mother tongue. By contrast, vernacular religious epistemology deals with culturally replete and contextually legitimate forms and ways of religious knowing. In this vein, *akwankyer*□ falls within this second order, but cannot exist without the first. In this case, the Akan language provides the category, but the category sets a way of knowing and being. Christianity comes to be truly indigenous when it enters this epistemic domain.

This proposal elaborates on Sanneh. Verbally translating the Bible gives people the ability to have control over their situation (Sanneh 2016). It cannot be limited to the control over language. Akan Christians choose the words for the importation of doctrines, they choose the biblical accounts that respond to their questions, the forms of prayer that make the divine presence real, who can speak with authority and ministry, and what they can ethically create as Christian practices (Sanneh 2016; Ahaligah 2020). Translation of Christianity is a social choice process. The theological creativity of Ahaligah (Ahaligah 2020) with respect to Akan reinterpretation of Christology demonstrates the appropriation of the mother-tongue. The present argument is that this same creativity is in the realm of practice. The category

akwankyer□ is not a merely descriptive phrase for a Christian activity that occurs before it; from the perspective of Akan semantics, it can determine what "divine guidance" is about.

The proposal extends Walls. The Translation Principle is useful in understanding how Christianity can cross cultures without the presence of one sacred language or one broad civilizational type (Walls 1996; Bediako 1995). However, Ghana exemplifies that in translating culture, Christianity does not mean solely an adaptation to it. Local Christians, in fact, translate cultural issues into Christian issues. Issues of concealed causes, destiny, spiritual peril, and suitably apt responses can be articulated in a biblical-Pentecostal environment where they are redefined in terms of the Holy Spirit, spiritual warfare, prayer, and prophecy. While in this environment, spiritual knowledge can be expressed as healing and visions and as prophetic revelation and divine instruction, and so the Bible's admonition to the Christian and the Akan becomes one.

Vernacular religious epistemology provides further insights on how Neo-Prophetic Christianity can integrate critically with indigenous religions. An example may be a Christian prophet who denies the shrine, offering to the god, the practice of animal sacrifice and divination of *abisa*, but endorses the belief that there are invisible causes to visible things, and that some persons can see these (Onyinah 2002; Omenyo 2011; Degbe 2015). Such prophet engages in selective translation. Some elements are translated, but others discarded; or new elements are added and pushed by Pentecostal theology and global charismatic movements. However, there is an epistemic problem. If the 'vernacular grammar' of *akwankyer*□ is what gives prophetic statements their power, how would the seekers know how to distinguish between true and false prophecies when different competing prophets speak in the same culturally intelligible way? As in the Micaiah narrative (1 Kings 22), the presence of conflicting voices does create a problem of discernment. A vernacular religious epistemology is an active, contested space, not a static, harmonious space of shared beliefs. Seekers have to negotiate credibility through local epistemic means: the prophet's moral character and spiritual track record, the prophet's interpretation, and the spiritual experiences and pragmatic outcomes of the actions. Thus, credibility and spiritual discernment of the community become a dynamic process.

World Christianity scholarship focuses on the movement of Christianity across borders. However, contemporary Pentecostalism shows that "local" Christianity is often forged through global movements. Ghanaian prophets model and preach through global digital platforms and adopt global charismatic discourse. They minister to diaspora audiences. In this case, *akwankyer*□ may be Akan, have biblical bases, possess Pentecostal pneumatology, and represent global charismatic Christianity, all at the same time, and be digital in nature (Meyer 2011; Niedźwiedź 2023). Translation is deep and recursive. Every new medium and movement may impact the practice. A private consultation may now become a prophetic declaration that is live-streamed. A locally relevant directive may now be an instruction that is posted on social media and consumed by an audience who have no contextual understanding of the directive. A material article that was used in a worship service may retain its meaning and be used within one worship community, but may now be used in other worship services and used in other ways and mean other things due to its digital circulation.

Therefore, it should be recognized that vernacularization is a continuous process of authorization. *Akwankyer*□ is an example of this process. Mainline Christians, classical Pentecostals, Neo-Prophetic practitioners, theologians, journalists, state regulators, and true believers have differing opinions on *akwankyer*□ (Degbe 2015; Washington 2022; Yendork et al. 2026). Such disparities are not signs of poor translation. Rather, these disparities are signs that translation has intensified border disputes. Communities argue about what may be translated, what should not be translated, and who has authority to translate. Therefore, World Christianity is not only the adaptation of cultures. It is also the naming of the Christian faith in the midst of many religions and various cultures.

9. Reframing the Translation Principle for World Christianity

Walls (1996) and Sanneh (2016) suggest the Ghanaian case offers four ways to expand upon translation (T) paradigms. First, the notion of (T) needs to be broadened. It is not just the movement of doctrines, Scriptures, or words. Questions, answers, and expectations travel. Ritual and social paradigms travel. The material dimension travels. The forms and ways of interpretation and the reading of signs travel. *Akwankyer*□ provides an example of how Christianity translated a culturally contextualized problem of how to orient oneself about knowing what is happening and what should be done into a Pentecostal-prophetic framework. Thus, World Christianity must include the translation of religious ways and epistemologies in the translation of texts.

Second, translations are poly-modal. The concept of transmediality proves useful here. A command can be expressed through speech, Scripture, dreams, actions, and the use of money, digital video, and ritual performance. The move from private to public prophecy, from private to televised or live streaming prophecy, broadens and alters the performance and the visibility of the seeker and the response. The time and place of the response and the possible circulation beyond the original context are altered. Birgit Meyer's (2009, 2011) research on Ghanaian Pentecostal media shows that the mediating technology and the spiritual medium can be reconciling and complementary instead of oppositional. This translation theory should follow the example of these media practices and move beyond the translated Bible.

Third, translation is semiotic. Religious actors not only translate messages; they translate signs. A dream is a warning. An illness is a spiritual attack or a call to prayer. A verse is a directive. Water is a means of obeying or being healed. An offering is a sacrifice or a means of gratitude, or a seed. According to critics, it is a means of commercial extraction. There are ideologies based on the relationship of signs to visible and invisible realities (Meyer 2011). World Christianity has focused on how Christian ideas take on local names. It should also focus on how local and global Christian communities discern what is a sign of God, a sign of the devil, a sign of a calling, or a sign of a charge.

Fourth, translation is disputed and morally crucial. The account of translation is sometimes presented in a triumphant fashion to show that Christianity is flexible and can fit in any culture. The Ghanaian case, for example, necessitates a more critical assessment. Flexibility can result in an understanding of the challenges faced by the local community, and can foster participation and creativity in the local context.

It can, however, also lead to the unchecked concentration of power. That which makes *akwankyer*□ system attractive to individuals can assist in the ease of resistance to prophetic statements. A developed Theory of World Christianity must ask not only if Christianity translates, but who is translating, in whose interests translation is done, what sorts of agencies it enables, and what sorts of subjugation are involved (Yendork et al. 2026; Kyeremeh et al. 2025). Translation is a field of power.

These refinements do not displace Sanneh and Walls. Sanneh (Sanneh 2016) helps provide a rationale for why Akan is not simply the vehicle for Christianity, but a form of African theology. Walls (Walls 1996) helps explain why Christianity is normally culturally contextualized without losing its translocal essence. The Ghanaian data advances their thinking in a different direction: the vernacularization of the practice of religion. In this context, the Christian message is not simply expressed in the vernacular of Akan; the Christian way of life is expressed in Akan and other ways of being that are meaningful. *Akwankyer*□ is an excellent example, as the idiomatic meaning describes 'showing the way'; which also describes the process of study (Sanneh 2016; Walls 1996; Bediako1995). Translation is an example of 'showing the way.' It is a way of creating a path between previously disconnected "worlds."

The model that results is a translational process. Existential uncertainty prompts a question. A culturally specific religious grammar makes this question intelligible. Christian media and authorities understand it. Its meaning is signified by the biblical and Pentecostal signs. Directional authority is exercised by the interpretation of signs; its meaning is stabilized by the material and embodied practices; and its meaning is further interpreted by testimony and media circulation. Whether the practice is authentically Christian is the subject of communal discernment (Meyer 2011; Washington 2022; Yendork et al. 2026). At every stage, translation occurs. Similar questions can be asked when Christianity meets and engages the richness of existing practices of healing, divination, Ancestors, dreams, pilgrimage, sacred objects, and ritual counsel. The purpose is to expand the theory through a Ghanaian category.

10. Conclusion

We believe that *akwankyer*□ can help expand the translation framework within World Christianity beyond linguistic transfer (Sanneh 2016; Walls 1996; Bediako 1995). While Sanneh's vernacularization and Walls's Translation Principle remain relevant, in the current case study of contemporary Ghana, vernacularization does not solely refer to the translation of Christian terms and concepts from English to Akan. Vernacularization encompasses the adoption of culturally relevant ways of asking questions, interpreting and explaining hidden causes, interpreting and understanding spiritual signs, mediating and acquiring knowledge in a divided world, and communicating divine knowledge to effect pertinent action.

The comparison of *akwankyer*□ and *abisa* have shown that religious inquiry and spiritual direction should be distinguished, but not separated. *Abisa* places emphasis on the act of inquiry or consultation, while *akwankyer*□ places emphasis on giving spiritual direction. Neo-Prophetic practice can link the two, but its adaptability into a Christian framework is achieved through the repositioning of Scripture, the Spirit, the ministry of prayer, the gift of prophecy, material practice, and testimony. The scriptural reflections further

demonstrated that Ghanaian Christians have available to them ancient prophetic narratives, which provide them a way of religious inquiry and spiritual direction. However, the use of the Bible to provide legitimacy to ministry and practice should be cautioned. Translation in this framework is selective, interpretive, and normatively controversial.

The central theoretical framework of the article proposes the movement from linguistic vernacularization to vernacular religious epistemology. In Christian translation, the formation of locally intelligible ways of knowing religiously occurs. For akwankyer, mediation makes doubt meaningful and brings about the necessary interpretive and performative actions; in the spiritual realm, material forms express claims; semiotics amplifies the ability to interpret what is happening; and prophetic authority establishes a relation between sign and response (Meyer 2011; Yendork et al. 2026). These phenomena extend the area of Christian translation through mediation, materiality, mobility, and semiotics.

From the Ghanaian case, we see a warning against three problems. Akwankyer should not be equated to abisa survival, because resemblance does not equal lineage and Christian mediation is capable of reshaping the practice substantially (Omenyo 2011; Degbe 2015; Washington 2022). It should not be equated to biblical prophecy, since contemporary Neo-Prophetic direction favors some biblical functions in the modern religious economy of seeking. And it should not be equated to a word, since akwankyer is the spiritual articulation and practice of the relations of objects and subjects to authority and response, and to Christian faith. Christianity is achieved in a vernacular form through a series of contestations in which Christian claims and inherited questions are made to speak to one another. In this ongoing negotiation, akwankyer describes spiritual direction, but more than that, it articulates a Christian world.

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