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CHRISTIAN MIND AND WORLDLY MATTERS

Religion and Materiality in Nineteenth-century Gold Coast

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Abstract

In anthropological studies of the impact of missions in the non-Western world, Protestant missions’ alleged claim that material matters were just ‘outward things’ subordinate to ‘inward faith’ has eschewed closer examination. This paper investigates a 19th-century German Protestant mission’s actual and alleged attitudes towards materiality under the conditions of colonialism among the Ewe, as well as the tensions arising between missionaries and African converts about the role of materiality in life in general and consumption in particular. Examining the role missionary materializations played in conversion processes and investigating tensions between missionaries and converts about the proper relationship between ‘civilization’ and ‘salvation’, the paper shows that so-called worldly matters mattered much more than Protestant missionary rhetorics were prepared to acknowledge. Missions played a crucial role not only in the ‘development’ of the colony but also in the making of modern consumers. Tensions between missionaries and Ewe converts reveal that actually Christian identity itself was to a large extent produced through the consumption of Western commodities.

Key Words: colonial mission, consumption and religion, Ewe, Gold Coast

All over Africa, the so-called Prosperity Gospel as it is being propagated by pentecostal churches has attracted an increasing number of followers. When I conducted research on African appropriations of the missionary message in Ghana, I encountered a great number of
pentecostalists, who, though not uncritical about the dangers imbued in money and commodities, were looking for ways to enhance their consumptive possibilities. Pentecostalist churches offer prayer sessions devoted to the improvement of people's business and provide room for members to give testimony of how the Lord 'blessed' them with money. Riches being represented as blessings that God has showered upon his true servants, it is regarded as self-evident that church leaders drive Mercedes Benz cars, live in huge mansions and dress themselves in the most exquisite fashion. Several pentecostalist leaders assured me that they regarded poverty as a sign of sin and wondered whether poor people could be good Christians. In their view, good Christians would be blessed with money by God and, in turn, were to glorify Him through their lifestyle and outlook. A column written by the publisher of the monthly magazine The Living Testimony aptly summarizes the pentecostalist point of view: here the Western missionaries who brought the Gospel and who left Ghanaians with 'the legacy of the money-shy Christian' are accused of having been 'most hypocritical' and 'wicked'. For although they themselves received full payment for their occupation, they taught Ghanaian Christians to 'be poor to be holy'; and this attitude was reflected in the sober life style and poor outlook of African pastors and evangelists (The Living Testimony 1(11):2).

The Prosperity Gospel is met with great contempt by the leaders of mission churches, that is, churches resulting from the efforts of 19th-century Western missionaries. They warn that worldly matters such as the striving for riches would not befit a true Christian and explain the fact that many people leave the mission churches for pentecostalist churches by referring to their materialistic inclinations, which are taken as a sign of spiritual immaturity. Echoing the missionary point of view, they argue that Christians are to lead sober lives and not to lose themselves in this-worldly matters. Although wealth is not considered bad as such, one should not pray for it and should be wary not to find oneself on the broad path of worldly pleasures.

The criticism raised with regard to the Prosperity Gospel, and, indeed, the very term, makes it seem as if pentecostalism would offer a completely new attitude towards material things and their consumption. Even pentecostalists themselves present their point of view not only as being diametrically opposed to that of the missionaries, but also assume that in colonial times converts simply adopted the missionary stance. Yet, it remains to be seen whether these converts actually were exponents of the sober, ascetic life style so aptly described by Weber (1984[1920]) as the key feature of Protestantism and whether pentecostalism's stance is as new as it claims. For despite Protestantism's emphasis on the Word, it is clear that 19th-century Protestant mission activities also focused on more mundane, material matters, such as the
construction of Christian settlements with a church, school and new types of homes, or the clothing of Christians in new styles. While anthropologists studying the impact of missions in the non-Western world have laid much emphasis on the investigation of newly evolving Christian discourses, the material dimension of missions has received much less attention (but see Comaroff and Comaroff, in press; Keane, 1996; Pels, 1993). Still more neglected have been struggles between missions and converts about the proper relationship between mind and worldly matters, between the Word and things. It seems that thereby Protestant missions' complicated stance towards material matters has eschewed closer examination. There definitely is need for a detailed investigation of Protestant mission's actual and alleged attitudes towards materiality under the conditions of colonialism, and of tensions arising between missionaries and African converts about missionary materializations in general and consumption in particular.

In this paper, I approach this topic by investigating the 19th-century encounter between missionaries of the German Pietist Norddeutsche Missionsgesellschaft (NMG) and the Ewe in what is now southeastern Ghana and southern Togo. Through this historical investigation it will become clear that ever since the spread of Christianity in Ghana, the material aspects of the mission have been a very important and, at the same time, highly problematic field. Examining the role missionary materializations played in conversion processes and investigating tensions between missionaries and converts about the proper relationship between 'civilization' and 'salvation', I show that so-called worldly matters mattered much more than Protestant missionary rhetorics were prepared to acknowledge. 'Civilization' and 'salvation' actually went hand in hand and missions played a crucial role not only in the 'development' of the colony but also in the making of modern consumers, who were, however, expected to maintain an uneasy attitude towards things. This ambivalence is still part and parcel of contemporary Christian discourse.

THE EWE'S QUEST FOR 'CIVILIZATION'

The encounter between the missionaries of the NMG and the Ewe, who inhabited the area between the river Volta to the west and the Mono to the east, started in 1847 with the arrival of the missionary Lorenz Wolf. By contrast to the neighbouring Asante, the Ewe did not form one united kingdom, but rather separate, autonomous states allying themselves with others whenever the political need arose. Each state consisted of several clans, which, in turn, each consisted of patrilineal and patrilocal families. Polygamous marriage was possible provided a husband was able to take care of his wives and children. Land was the base of production and the Ewe made a living through the cultivation of staple
crops, palm trees, vegetables and local cotton. Access to land being allocated to all male family members by the family head, wives would receive a piece of land for cultivation from their husbands. There was a clear division of labour both on the farms and in the house between the sexes. For the Ewe the unit of production, distribution and consumption was the extended family.

When Wolf settled in Peki, the most powerful inland Ewe state which was the centre of the kingdom of Krepe, he immediately asked the Peki king for a piece of land and employed some people to build him a house. His new home was constructed with the usual materials, but it differed in size and form from the customary Peki houses. Wolf supposed that the (in his view) 'unhealthy' African climate had to be compensated for by houses of European style. Together with his 'houseboys' and some workers Wolf started to lay out his fields and gardens, where he grew yams as well as plants and flowers unknown to the Peki. He made a path through the garden to the house and planted trees on both sides. He also raised pigs, sheep, goats and chickens. In other words, he created a classical south-German peasant farm (the so-called 'economy') - a piece of home in the 'wilderness' of Africa, thereby realizing the Pietist ideal of life. Though Wolf was not yet able to preach his message in Ewe, the mission post must have spoken for itself. Even before Wolf could reach the Peki with his words, the architecture of his house and the objects it contained proclaimed their message about the white way of life.

Yet Wolf's mission did not prove successful, at least not according to his own standards. The Ewe hoped that through the presence of the white missionary they would be able to become involved in the trade with Europeans that had been going on in the coastal area for centuries. Since Wolf disappointed them in this respect, they showed little interest in converting to Christianity. Eventually the NMG abandoned the Peki mission post and gradually established new stations on the coast at Keta (1853) and Anyako (1857), and inland at Waya (1856) and Ho (1859), albeit with very limited success. The NMG started its work by taking care of so-called slave children, that is, children caught by slave traders, who were offering them for sale in the coastal markets where illegal slave trade went on well into the 1860s. The NMG bought these children 'free' with the money of German supporters (Ustorf, 1986a). Many Ewe regarded these children as slaves of the mission and refused to send their own children to the mission school or to convert themselves. The situation deteriorated further when, as a result of the war that the powerful Asante waged against the kingdom of Krepe, all mission posts were [partly] destroyed. Only after Krepe had defeated the enemy with the assistance of the British, and the European influence over the Ewe territory became stronger, did the inland Ewe show more interest in the mission, especially in its schools. Many refugees who had
fled the Asante returned home to reconstruct their destroyed towns and now, possibly because the war had disrupted previous routines, they were in for change. For that reason the missionaries praised the war as a blessing (MB, 1878: 10), which made the Ewe change their minds and develop an interest in the missionary message.

For instance, in 1878 the Peki teacher Joseph Bansa, a young man from Peki Blengo who had attended an NMG mission school on the coast, reported that he had opened a small school with four pupils. Next to books and other equipment he asked for free clothes for the pupils and one shilling per month to give to each child's parents. The editor of the mission magazine exclaimed jubilantly: '... a negro, who by himself develops the idea to run a school! That is a sign of the times!' (MB 1878: 11). Moreover, Bansa preached every Sunday and visited the nearby villages to proclaim the Gospel to the 'heathens'. In a letter written in English to the board he wrote:

... the King Kwadzo Dei [the Peki king], chiefs, and the natives wanting one minister here, many of them wish to be baptize[d], always they are troubling me about the minister's affairs. Now their eyes are opened, as they were driven by the Ashantees away from their places to Battlok and Akropong and stopped there some years, they saw how that places are going on [developing]; therefore some of them now are civilized more than Ho people I may say; like their sons will go [they like their sons to go] to school. (NMG-archives at Staatsarchiv Bremen, Stab 7, 1025-26/3, letter of Joseph Bansa, 18.1.1878)

Though this particular school did not last, there was an enduring desire for education. For three years afterwards the Peki king again asked a visiting missionary to establish a school. The missionary assumed that this wish was caused by the busy traffic with Accra and the influence of Ho and the British Gold Coast. Moreover, the wish for a school must be seen against the background of the mission's practice of providing its pupils with free clothes and even a small allowance. Western education, new clothes and money clearly implied each other and constituted a newly evolving nexus of 'civilization'. The desire for schools was embedded in a general openness for change. For the missionary noticed further 'signs of invading civilization' (Zeichen eindringender Kultur), such as the broadening of roads and the spread of chairs (MB, 1881: 26). It is telling that the missionary describes people's adoption of Western styles by using a military metaphor of conquest, thereby neglecting any constructive activity on the part of the Africans. This being typical for missionary reports of that period, historical documents about how Ewe thought about and dealt with Western styles and things prior to their conversion are virtually absent. For that reason it is difficult to find out what exactly 'civilization' meant to them and what attracted them to change.
In any case, Bansa’s letter suggests that people associated school and baptism with the ‘civilizatory’ achievements that went with colonization. It was commonly known that the skills taught in the mission schools and stations, as well as a Christian name to mark one’s ‘civilized’ state, were a prerequisite for getting jobs in European firms or the colonial administration. We may therefore conclude that many Ewe saw the mission as a vehicle through which to achieve the things that – once their ‘eyes were opened’ – they had seen in the coastal region where the presence of European traders, officers and missionaries had already led to incalculable materializations. Thus, the attraction of the mission for the Ewe initially lay in their wish for changing their way of life by adopting the material aspects of European ‘civilization’.

The term ‘civilization’, which was employed by all the parties engaged in the colonial endeavour, covers a complex semantic domain containing different meanings. In Ewe, ‘civilization’ is translated with the expression ‘open eyes’ (nku vu), which probably existed already prior to contacts with Europeans. The use of the term in Bansa’s letter suggests a connection between the state of ‘opened eyes’ and the experience of the hitherto unfamiliar. To the Ewe ‘civilization’ meant the adoption of new things seen elsewhere and found worthwhile to supplement, or even replace, the familiar. However, in talking about ‘civilization’ or nku vu the Ewe took up the central term of colonial discourse. In this discourse the term ‘civilization’ was used in a general way to submit the ‘primitive’ culture of the Africans to Western ‘civilization’ and to legitimize the domination of the former by the latter. In their quest for the possession of Western things, the Ewe not only appropriated Western products to suit their own needs with ‘open eyes’, but they also opened themselves up to the civilizing offensive of Western agents who sought the domination of the colonized. Thereby, the Ewe made their first step in the ‘long conversation’ (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1991) with Western agents. As we shall see, it was a conversation entailing a continuous dialectical process of appropriation and alienation in the course of which Ewe Christians were neither totally free in their appropriation of Western products, nor fully dominated by missionaries.

CHRISTIAN VILLAGES ON THE HILLTOP

As a consequence of the Ewe’s increased interest in schools, the NMG rebuilt and expanded its posts. Next to the four stations already mentioned, after 1890 more posts were opened in what became German Togo. Moreover, the main posts became the centres of districts with new sub-stations headed by native teachers in all villages asking for education. In this way, the mission developed a network of posts all over the Ewe area and contributed to the emergence of an infrastructure of roads.
Ewe country, initially a missionary construct based on the wish to unite the various scattered Ewe 'tribes' into one Christian people (Volkt) [see Meyer, 1995c], thus materialized as a geographical unit.

A mission post can be regarded as a 'contact zone' where ongoing relationships between Africans and Europeans are established that involve 'conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict' (Pratt, 1992: 6). In what follows I shall situate the encounter between the missionaries and the Ewe in the power constellation of the contact zone and examine conflicts arising from the intricate dialectics of the mission's striving to uplift the Ewe to a higher level of 'civilization' through evangelization, and the Ewe's longing for 'civilization' as a way to profit from the presence of Western agents.

A mission post, which consisted of the missionaries' home, a school and a chapel if it concerned a main station headed by a European and of a school and teacher's house if it concerned a sub-station, was located preferably uphill and in the bush (gbeme) at some distance from the 'heathens'. In many cases, the place allocated to the mission by local chiefs had previously been sacred and had, for instance, served as a special burial place for people who had lost their lives in a bloody accident (Greene, n.d.). According to general understanding, such a place was unsuited for cultivation or settlement. By building on sacred land in the bush, the mission could demonstrate its contempt for these local conceptions and at the same time claim the superiority of its power. Yet, this superiority was not only constructed through this politics of space, but also through a politics of time that represented the mission post as a harbinger of 'civilization' in the midst of 'wilderness'. The missionaries requested converts to settle at the station and in this way separate Christian villages evolved. They were called Kpodzi, 'on the hilltop', that is, spatially and symbolically ahead of the rest. In this way, Christians could claim to lead their lives under the banner of 'progress' and characterize non-Christians as staying behind, thereby denying them, to use an expression employed by Fabian (1983), coevalness.

The price to be paid for 'civilization' was the submission under the NMG's congregational order. On the one hand, this order was instrumental in the mission's attempts to discipline its converts; on the other, it reflects the standards of 'civilization' (and thus separation and alienation from the hitherto familiar) that Christians themselves aimed to achieve. All inhabitants of Kpodzi had to be baptized and had to submit themselves to the congregational order, which requested that Christians would draw a strict boundary between themselves and the 'heathen' village (for a full description of this order see Meyer, 1995a: 84 ff.). They were to abstain from any religious ceremony performed by their non-Christian relatives - and since religion was entangled with all domains of life this request amounted to a far-reaching separation from their family in the 'heathen'
village – and were to live up to what the mission defined as a Christian way of life. They lived in new types of houses, wore different clothes, used Western medicines, sang to European tunes, held different feasts, and instead of the traditional taboo days, the ‘rest’ days of the tröwo, they observed only the Christian Sunday. For the Christians, polygamous marriages were forbidden and preferably they were to intermarry. In order to create Christian families, the mission stimulated their students’ marriage and taught them about Christian marriage and family way of life. The mission stimulated men much more than women to take up paid labour. Young women could only work as ‘housegirls’ at the mission posts or as childcare attendants in the kindergarten, and after marriage they were expected to devote themselves fully to their families.

The materiality of Kpodzi was impressive and entirely different from the usual standards. The Christian villages were permanent construction sites that attracted large numbers of people. For local men, women and children these projects provided the opportunity to earn cash by collecting construction materials such as earth, stones, planks and water or by grinding stones and moulding earth. Next to these unskilled workers, who were either employed on a weekly basis or traded their products for a negotiated price, the mission also employed and trained craftsmen such as brick-makers, stonemasons, masons and woodworkers (including sawyers, cutters and carpenters). Many young men from all over the area were attracted by the possibility of learning a profession and among this category the mission could eventually recruit its first adult converts. These crafts were so closely associated with Christianity that even those who performed them and did not get baptized no longer considered themselves ‘heathens’:

However, those who come now are Christians, or do at least regard themselves as such, for everybody who frequently visits the missionaries no longer wants to be a heathen. Thus, in their view a student or craftsman, although not baptized, is not a heathen, but exactly a student, a craftsman. (MB, 1894: 19)

This adoption of the category ‘heathen’ as an opposition to Christian industriousness shows the extent to which many Ewe strove to change. Although they differed from the mission in that they regarded work, rather than baptism, as an appropriate means to achieve Christian identity, they certainly adopted the mission’s representation of Ewe society as ‘backward’ and in need of being ‘uplifted’. Building appearing as an inalienable part of Christianity, it is not surprising that craftsmen became key symbols of Christian identity. These craftsmen were the ones who transformed through their skilled work the wilderness of the bush into the ‘civilized’ orderliness of Christianity. They were the embodiment of progress.
This major material operation was accompanied by a rhetoric of anti-materialism that opposed the ‘worship of idols’ and entailed a utilitarian stance towards nature. The mission’s stance towards local deities, who were located in the bush, comes to the fore clearly in an account in the MB (1892: 3), which reports that during the construction of the Amedzofe station foreign workers once brought to the construction site a big stone that they had found in the bush. However, since this stone, which was to be split up ‘to be desecrated to a wall stone’ was the dwelling place of a local deity, the local people intervened and obliged the mission to return the stone and pay some money in order to pacify the god. Representing Christianity as an anti-materialistic religion, the missionaries regarded such sacred objects as idols or fetishes, through whose worship the Ewe were actually serving the Devil.\(^{13}\) Basing themselves on the Second Commandment the missionaries preached against such practices and propagated the destruction of sacred objects, preferably in fire. Having deprived natural objects of all traces of sacrality, they were making use of them in a hitherto unknown and unrestrained way. Through the work of craftsmen, ideally, idols in the form of stones were to be turned into useful objects. These men were to desacralize the bush and thereby realize Christian ‘civilization’.\(^{14}\)

When the mission founded posts, it did not spend much energy on the construction of churches and there was no particular church architecture. This changed only in the beginning of the 20th century, when the mission was firmly established and some large congregations were able to build and finance chapels. In principle, the mission considered schools far more important than churches and in most of the sub-stations church services were held in the school building. They were conducted by native teachers, another typically Christian professional category, who also played a major role in communicating the Gospel to non-Christians and who were expected to provide true models of a Christian way of life. The emphasis on schools echoes the NMG’s evangelizing strategy, which was based on the idea that (religious) education in the Ewe’s mother tongue was the key to conversion. Indeed, Christians came to be called *sukuviwo*, school children, irrespective of their actual capability to read and write.

The mission house, of course, was the paradigm of Christian architecture. It was a two-storey building with a veranda all round and at least four big rooms on each floor and a separate kitchen in the compound. At first, the walls were made from earth, as was usually the case; what was new was that they were plastered and had wooden doors and windows. As construction skills developed because the mission was able to send out missionaries with a special training, stones and bricks were used for the construction of walls, and roofs were no more covered with grass, but with tiles and, later on, iron sheets. The furniture in these
The Christian village was usually built around the mission post, which served as a model for the construction of the new Christian home, virtually the first duty of any Christian man. While some prosperous Christians also built a second floor, others at least plastered their walls and got doors, windows and locally produced chairs and tables. These homes differed from traditional architecture not only in terms of the material used, but also in that they were focused on the nuclear family (see Figure 1). This implied that husband and wife would share table and bed permanently, rather than living in separate houses on one large compound and observing menstruation taboos as had previously been the case. The emphasis on the nuclear family at the expense of extended family ties was also reflected in new inheritance regulations. Rather than sharing a deceased person's belongings among his or her extended family, among the Christians the spouse and children were the rightful heirs. Though it is difficult to determine Ewe converts' position in society before their move to Kpodzi, we do know that this move implied a radical change in their status. These Christians became members of a new (contra-)elite whose education and life style predestined them to become the avant-garde in the changing traditional society. Moreover, by earning money through new professions they were more independent of the patrilineal family and its land, which had hitherto been the means of

FIGURE 1 Reverend R. Mallett in Blengo
Source: Bremen Mission Archives at Staatsarchiv Bremen, STAB 7, 1025 (107/10)
production. Nevertheless, farming remained important for subsistence and for the production of cash crops and so it was difficult for Christians to dissociate themselves completely from their lineages.

Trade stores run by Western Christian firms, which bought raw materials such as cotton, rubber and, from the 20th century onwards, cocoa and coffee from local producers and offered Western objects (such as iron-made tools, textiles, chinaware, biscuits, but, in contrast to non-Pietist traders, no alcohol) were also part of at least the larger Christian villages. Unlike other Protestant mission societies such as the Basler Mission, which was active among the neighbouring Asante, the NMG did not run stores on its own. However, both at home and in the mission field it co-operated closely with the trading company of the Bremen Pietist merchant Vietor. The following quotations show that for both parties the spread of the Gospel and world trade clearly belonged together:

The merchant, by wishing to earn for himself, sees to the exchange of the goods of the earth. This is his profession in the world economy, and he is to accomplish it. God wishes that humanity exchanges its goods. (Missionsinspektor Franz Michael Zahn quoted by Tell and Heinrich, 1986: 272; original in German, my translation)

Thus, to be working for both the spread of the Lord’s realm and a fair trade is the old custom of Bremen merchants. (Trader and NMG Committee Member C.R. Vietor, MB, 1857: 339)

The NMG and Vietor’s company often settled at the same places and at least for the local population their association was evident, despite the usual disclaimers of NMG missionaries, who desperately tried to keep Christianity at a distance from worldly matters such as stores, albeit in speech. While the mission stimulated the production of cash crops among its converts, the Vietor company bought their harvest from them. The NMG and the company were both convinced that the creation of a working class of plantation workers had to be avoided because of the social upheaval this would entail – also at home they felt threatened by workers’ political claims – and stimulated the ‘free labour of free peasants’ (Weiβflog, 1986). These peasants, of course, became highly dependent on the world market both as sellers of raw materials and buyers of foodstuffs. For through the cultivation of cash crops, subsistence production, and thereby the co-operation of husbands and wives in food production, became less important; to the dismay of the mission, many wealthy Ewe would spend their money on buying (imported) food on the market.

It is telling that, although the NMG promoted paid labour through its educational system, it did not favour converts’ adoption of trade as a profession (though against the wish of the mission, many married
women engaged in trade). Ewe mission workers were not allowed to supplement their little income through trading activities at all. The only thing they were expected to do next to their job was to grow their own food. Trade was to remain a European monopoly and Africans were merely to sell raw materials to, and buy commodities from, Western trading companies. This promotion of work for money and people's subsequent incorporation into world trade, be it as producers of raw materials or as consumers of Western commodities, was part and parcel of the propagation of a new Christian life style.

Christianity not only had an impact on the landscape and the outlook of villages, but also on the appearance of the human body, the Christian microcosm as it were. Clothes were an inalienable marker of the new religion. As mentioned earlier, in the first years the mission provided children with free clothes (short trousers and a shirt) in order to attract pupils, thereby representing European dress as an educated person's new skin. Also the congregational order required that converts dressed 'decently'. While women, who had hitherto dressed in a loincloth wrapped around their hips and a cover-cloth for the shoulders that was only worn if it was cold, were to cover their breasts with a blouse and their children were not to go 'sparsely dressed', men were expected to
either cover themselves by the traditional cover-cloth, or, preferably, to wear a Western-style suit. At least teachers were expected to dress in this manner and indeed, black coat and tie became the trade-mark of this professional group. Teachers regarded themselves as the avant-garde within the Christian group and in many places they organized themselves in societies devoted to the 'development' and 'improvement' of social life (see Figures 2 and 3).

The missionaries' wives trained young women to sew clothes for themselves and their children from imported Western materials. I did not find indications as to how the male attire was produced, but I suspect that it was made in Europe and then sold in stores. In this way the mission contributed to undermining the traditional co-operation of husbands and wives in the production of clothes. It had been the exclusive task of the women to spin thread and a man had to pay his wife for spinning the cotton he had grown for his own clothes. In turn, it had been the exclusive task of the men to weave strings of cloth (about 10 cm broad) and sew them together to form a large piece of cloth; the repair of torn clothes also depended on them. Yet in order to put on adequate clothes, people now depended on European imports, wax prints especially designed for Africa in the case of women, and suits, shirts and ties in the case of men. While formerly a person's clothes were a gift...
representing his or her involvement in a social relationship with spouse or parent, now clothes were commodities bought with individually earned money. European clothes became the symbol of the new time, which stood for the alliance of Christianity and 'civilization'.

Christian identity was not only defined by the adoption of a new material culture, but also by a new concept of selfhood. The Ewe defined themselves in terms of lineage membership and attributed personal character to a spiritual being (aklama) that was held to be embodied in a person and to determine the course of his or her life. Aklama was symbolized by a statue that was to receive sacrifices as a sign of gratefulness, or, if need arose, as a sign of pacification from the person who embodied it [Spieth, 1906: 510–12]. This spiritual permeability of the person also came to the fore in the notion that one might be caught by a local god and be possessed by it. The mission condemned the fact that the Ewe allowed themselves to be dominated by spiritual entities, or even to be possessed by local gods, and propagated the notion of the modern subject, which was defined by proprietorship of the self and a bounded identity. In line with its anti-materialistic rhetoric, the mission taught people not to confound the boundary between people and things and not to allow the latter to possess the former. Christians were supposed to have full control over themselves and the material world.18

Thus, through the influence of the mission, which both materially and ideologically promoted the Christian family as the appropriate place for individual growth, the nuclear family became for Christians the main unit of production, distribution and consumption. Especially in the first decades of mission work, when colonial rule was not yet firmly established, the NMG was the sole company that would employ Ewe as unskilled labourers or trained craftsmen. Though the mission stimulated agriculture and never aspired to create a working class, it offered young men especially a certain amount of economic and spiritual independence from their extended families. Since masons, woodworkers and teachers were required at many places, men with these professions also became increasingly mobile; they could migrate to wherever it was commercially attractive. In order to avoid the danger of adultery, they were to be accompanied by their spouses, who were expected to behave as devoted housewives. In this way the mission stimulated the emergence of a new social class that was economically and socially much less dependent on kinship ties with the extended family than had hitherto been the case and which was able to spend a considerable amount of money for the purchase of Western goods.

Christianity certainly cannot be held responsible for the fact that people wanted to be wealthy. The Ewe's openness to being linked to the world market both as producers and consumers suggests that they were not locked up in a 'moral economy' incompatible with the capitalist
market economy. Rather, they strove to profit from the latter as much as possible and there were no moral qualms concerning this involvement as such, but only with regard to the distribution of wealth (cf. Parry and Bloch, 1989). Prayers for health and wealth formed an important part of Ewe religion and the wish to prosper and to possess Western trade goods instigated Ewe in the 19th century to participate in new religious cults. The decisive difference between these cults (and, for that matter, cargo cults in Melanesia) and Christianity lay in their different attitude towards the distribution of riches. The mission set new directives for the distribution of income. The husband was expected to maintain his children and his wife, who should confine herself to housework and childcare rather than engaging in trade as her non-Christian fellows would do, and to contribute some money to the congregation. They were not required to share their income with members of their non-Christian extended family. In this way, Christians were free from the duty to share their wealth with less fortunate family members; witness the following complaint of a native teacher about his congregation: ‘Some people seem to hide among the Christians in order to find the opportunity to spend their money undisturbed’ (Stab, 7,1025-2/27), Halbjahresbericht von Peter Alomenu, Dzake 21.7.1915). Given rich people's fear of being bewitched by envious relatives with whom they failed to share in non-Christian society (see e.g. Spieth, 1906: 300), it seems as if in Kpodzi the wealthy - and this is what most Christians in the early days actually were, at least if compared to non-Christians - felt protected against witchcraft attacks inflicted upon them by less fortunate, envious relatives. Here they could spend their money on all those things that they considered indispensable for a ‘civilized’, and for that matter Christian, way of life. Christianity’s new individualist ethics liberated Christians from existing obligations to share their riches and from the fear of being bewitched if they failed to do so. Life in Kpodzi therefore was attractive to all those who wanted to accumulate and spend more money for themselves than was possible in the context of the non-Christian village.

Yet, although the NMG endorsed the Ewe’s involvement with the international market economy and their striving for ‘civilization’, it had an uneasy attitude towards these material matters. This attitude appears most pointedly in its complicated stance towards consumption, that is, towards the question as to how Ewe converts should spend the money gained through their engagement in paid labour. The tensions arising from this stance will occupy the remainder of this article.

TENSIONS ABOUT ‘WORLDLY MATTERS’ IN AFRICA

After Africa had been distributed among the European imperialist powers at the Berlin conference of 1884–5, the mission employed the
term *Kultur* (civilization') more than had hitherto been the case because it became involved in dialogue with the British and German colonial authorities, between whom the Ewe area was divided. Though the mission's relationship with both colonial administrations was not free from tensions, the missionaries themselves proudly advertised their important contribution to the colonial project of bringing 'civilization' to the Ewe. In an article entitled 'Einige Kulturfortschritte' the editor of the MB, the mission inspector F.M. Zahn, explained that, although it was not the proper task of the mission to bring 'civilization', its presence among less developed peoples would certainly entail cultural progress.

By leading the people to the one who made heaven and earth, Jesus' messengers give them a new impulse to value what God created, to care for it to free the field from the thorns and thistles and from many other things that patient and faithful work so that it can yield its fruits. Even if the missionary does not say anything about civilization, he is a carrier of civilization [*Kulturträger*]. It would be very interesting if somebody could narrate how everything changes where a missionary arrives. Who moves on now does not realize the change so much. But if Wolf could visit Peki now and tell us what changed since 1847, we would be surprised. Yet any change, any progress in civilization is a sign that there is a transformation going on which turns a heathen people into a Christian. (MB, 1886: 9; original in German, my translation)

In this vein, the missionary Jacob Spieth emphasized the achievement of the mission: 'The civilization which was brought by the mission and which also enters the country from other sides is best maintained in the Christian congregations' (1903: 15). He praised the missionaries for teaching the Ewe crafts and the cultivation of cotton, cocoa, coffee and rubber. This contributed not only to the development of the colony, but also to the evolution of new individual needs. Through their work, the Christians had sufficient means to satisfy their want for European goods, thereby supporting colonial trade (ibid.: 16). Similarly, the Pietist trader Vietor (1912) praised the achievement of the mission; he emphasized that the mission had enhanced the economic capacity of African farmers by stimulating individual entrepreneurs. And he boasted:

Furthermore the mission provides the most important services to the colonies. It turns lazy polygamists living from the work of their wives into industrious farmers and workers. It increases people's needs and educates them according to the word of the Scriptures 'Submit yourselves to the government' to loyal citizens. (Vietor quoted in Weißflog, 1986: 276; original in German, my translation)

Though they were proud of their contribution to 'civilization', the missionaries considered material achievements to be 'outward', 'worldly things whose possession had to be paralleled by a proper inne
individual development. This was a stance that they propagated both at the home base in Württemberg and in Africa. Facing the tremendous changes in the fields of production and consumption that occurred in the NMG's home base, the missionaries clearly propagated the Weberian 'Protestant ethic' against the emerging new consumptive possibilities that Campbell (1987) has described as the rise of the 'spirit of modern consumerism', that is, the modern person's entanglement in a continuously frustrated hedonistic striving to realize himself or herself through consumption. Pietists regarded the striving for pleasures through consumption as a dangerous temptation that might lure Christians onto the 'broad path' of worldly pleasures, which would eventually end up in hell fire; good Christians were to follow the 'narrow path' of the cross and lead sober lives in order to reach the heavenly Jerusalem. This ascetic attitude is expressed by the following quote from an opening article published in the NMG journal:

In the fourth demand [Give us our daily bread] one should be careful not to go beyond the daily, that is, beyond what is absolutely necessary. Hence the Lord's addition 'daily'. In the striving for heavenly goods it is 'The more the better! Never enough!' But in the striving for the worldly the motto is: 'If we have food and clothes let us be content.' Oh, how bitterly will it avenge itself especially in the case of Christians, if they want to, and do gain more worldly happiness and temporary property than they would strictly need to perform the tasks which they received as children of God in their lives. How much does the collection of treasures in the widest sense burden, hinder and grieve the Christian on earth! No, we should only be after the daily bread, only after what is strictly necessary for our life task. And the one who receives, should be thankful and content and praise his God with word and deed. But the one who is granted more, should remain humble and discover in the greater gifts also greater tasks, and should be economical and beneficent. Again, the one who receives less happiness in his earthly life than he thinks he would need, should first look at himself penitently and examine himself; then he should watch out for envy and resentment and be content with God's grace in Christ! [MB, 1900: 52; original in German, my translation]

The mission clearly propagated a sober utilitarian stance of inner-worldly ascesis: irrespective of one's wealth one should just seek to fulfil one's daily needs - a practice that was represented as natural and therefore taken for granted - and devote oneself to one's God-given task. Though the maintenance of the thin line dividing natural needs and worldly desires may have been a feasible option for the south-German Pietists that may have resulted in a feeling of victory because they resisted buying the latest fashion, things were more complicated in the African context, where the 'natural' need for certain European commodities did not yet exist.
The missionaries' accounts abound with complaints about the inner state of the Ewe Christians, who had eagerly taken up the material aspects of the mission but failed to supplement this with the Pietist world-view that required that the material advantages offered by the mission should be subordinated to a person's inner development. Clothes, being a matter of a person's 'outward appearance', became a frequent matter of tension between the mission and Ewe converts. For instance, the missionary D. Bavendamm, a man who supervised various NMG construction sites, reported with much satisfaction that the mission had stimulated the Ewe to work, thereby subordinating themselves to the harsh regime of Europeans (MB, 1894: 19). However, he was much less pleased about how people spent the fruits of their work:

Their ideal is and this is what they work for: Beautiful clothes and good food, or to speak with Augustine: 'Pleasure, worldly pleasure is their shibboleth, but instead of bread they receive stone,' because they do not look for the bread. Often, when I leave church service on Sunday I go to them and try to talk to them. Then often in the midst of a spiritual talk somebody may ask: Master, how much is your hat, your dress-coat, your shoes? Or in a free hour they ask me to look at my photograph album. I allow it. They have submitted all pages to a precise examination and correctly found out the gentleman who wears the best collar and the best tie and now they come with this picture: Master, order us such a collar, such a tie for Christmas.

And he continued:

Beautiful clothes the aim of their wishes? And should we condemn it, should we not understand it?

Where Christianity arrives the peoples become more demure and dress themselves more demurely. In the old Roman Empire this meant that they would dress more simply than before; here, in a country that is bereft of all civilization, it means to wear less simple, that is, better clothes than before. And I think we should only be happy, when our Christians no more want to be seen with the fig-leaf of paradise. (MB, 1894: 19; original in German, my translation)

Nevertheless, for the missionary it was clear that most Ewe Christians still had a 'highly materialistic orientation' (hochgradiger irdischer Sinn), and this, as the Bible taught, was a typical trait of the 'heathens' in general. The missionary himself, however, hoped, that Ewe converts would soon develop metaphorical hunger for the word of God, and ended his account with the rhetorical question: 'Yet the One who gave the people a heart to work, should he not also be able to plant in them a divine sense?' (MB, 1894).

It is by no means exceptional that in this account clothes formed the matter of tension. The individual body was regarded as the location par excellence that could reveal to what extent converts had reached the
mission's ideal of conversion, or to put it more neutrally, how they had appropriated Christianity. This account brings to the fore the dilemma in which the mission was caught: it tried to transform the Ewe into 'civilized' Christians by involving them in paid labour relations and by requiring them to live up to the standards of Kpodzi [and this certainly entailed a new type of clothing], but, though it was successful in this respect, it lacked the means to control their inner being and their desires. The mission was desperate that for Ewe Christians work merely seemed to be a road towards pleasure, rather than a virtue in itself and that for them consumption satisfied and re-created desires, rather than fulfilling naturalized basic needs. That the Ewe did not adopt the mission’s sober stance towards consumption is, of course, not surprising. What were ordinary objects of use meant to fulfil basic needs to the missionaries, to the Ewe were new [and often luxury] goods whose possession was closely related to new, modern notions of personhood and which became the targets of new desires. This is expressed clearly in the request to look at the missionary’s personal collection of photographs. Through this gaze the photograph album is virtually transformed into a mail-order catalogue that entices its onlookers to dream about themselves as dressed in these fine clothes. The images of the missionaries and their friends with their beautiful hats, ties, shoes and collars functioned as advertisements of Western clothes and modern identity. Concomitantly, the church service itself probably also offered a sort of fashion parade. I would like to suggest that here, in the gaze at these images, one may detect a trace of the ‘spirit of modern consumerism’ that Campbell (1987) described as a characteristic feature of modern society and against which the NMG defined itself at home. For Bavendamm describes the converts about whom he complains as qualified consumers – they correctly pointed out the best dressed man – who are in search of pleasure. This pleasure in looking at and dreaming about clothes was the problem, and not the fact that people were actually wearing them. Though he welcomed the fact that the Ewe started to cover their bodies in a – in his view – decent and morally correct way, Bavendamm detested the fact that they failed to adopt a more utilitarian stance towards clothes and that they merely seemed to work for ‘worldly’ pleasures. Clothes were to form a Christian’s second skin, no more or less than that. Many other examples testify to the fact that this was a stance shared by Bavendamm’s colleagues. It seems that, against their declared aims, among the Ewe the missionaries failed to implement their sober ascetic ethic and, rather, contributed unintentionally to the rise of hedonistic inclinations that they themselves defied so much.

Yet, although the mission kept on about the virtue of hard work and the temptations imbued in commodities, about the superiority of the ‘inner being’ to the ‘outward appearance’, it is important to keep in mind
that the mission actually required converts to consume Western goods. Ewe Christians were expected to settle in Kpodzi, to furnish their homes in the European style and to dress in the new way, for only then were they recognizable as Christians. There was a crucial difference between the mission's and the Ewe's attitudes towards consumption: while the former strove to reduce it to a natural affair meant to satisfy basic needs, for the latter it was a vehicle for the construction of a new, modern and 'civilized' identity. Being involved in a process of becoming new persons with 'opened eyes', Ewe converts transgressed the line that the missionaries carefully drew between consumption for the satisfaction of naturalized needs and the striving for worldly pleasure. Living in circumstances in which Western clothes had not yet become a second skin and in which the material culture found in Kpodzi was not yet taken for granted, but rather appeared as a symbol of a modern, Western way of life for which one longed without having attained it fully, they could not follow the mission's naturalizing conceptualization of consumption. Clearly, for Ewe converts Western commodities and things made in a European style were building blocks for a new life style, by which they could distinguish themselves from other people in society, for instance the traditional elites, and turn upside down existing societal and familial constraints.

Thus, Western goods offered new 'means of objectification' (Miller, 1987) by which Ewe converts could construct a new, modern and 'civilized' identity – modern and 'civilized' not only in the sense that they possessed formerly unknown things [rather than being possessed by all sorts of 'fetishes'], but, above all, in the sense of a change of notions of selfhood. Often this was a desired ideal rather than a reality attained; given that family ties were still socially and economically relevant, many converts could not dissociate themselves as much from their extended families as they had in mind [cf. Meyer, 1996: 221–2]. Nevertheless, Christian converts clearly longed to leave behind local patterns of production and consumption, and to reproduce themselves through the objects and images that they encountered in their contacts with European missionaries, bureaucrats and traders.

In this sense, they certainly were on their way to become what the mission expected them to be: modern, individual subjects who were independent of their extended families and the concomitant ethics of sharing, as well as free from local spirits imbued with 'fetishes', and 'free' to submit themselves to the Almighty God and his representatives on earth. On the other hand, in the eyes of the mission most of these modern individual subjects realized 'civilization' at the expense of 'salvation' and took things much more seriously than the Word. For they failed to adopt the mission's paradoxical stance, which required that Christians made use of European goods but kept a critical distance
towards them at the same time. While in actual practice missionary materializations were vital for the construction of Christian identity, their importance was to be denied at the level of ideology. At this level they were either taken for granted as a means to satisfy basic needs, or represented as 'outward' objects of desire that could easily be employed by the Devil to tempt believers onto the path of destruction by promising them utmost pleasure.

Thus, there was a gap between actual missionary practices and their anti-materialist ideology. While, ideally, a person's 'outward appearance' was regarded as a mere reflection of an inner development, actually the material and the spiritual, the outward and the inner person, were related to each other dialectically: worldly matter constituted the Christian mind as much as personality was reflected through appearance. By representing missionary Pietism as an anti-materialistic form of worship focused on the inner person and, at the same time, requesting converts to adopt a distinct material culture, the mission mystified its own actions. Ewe converts' attitudes towards consumption were so disturbing to the mission because they laid bare a characteristic feature of the Pietist religion: the fact that conversions to Christianity actually required a large amount of Western commodities. Christianity certainly provided access to Western material culture and people were attracted to the new religion because of the appeal of the impressive missionary materializations emerging in the midst of 'wilderness'. Yet providing access to Western goods was not just a by-product of the missionary endeavours, but was at the core of conversion. Rather than merely enabling people to buy European commodities and adopt Western styles, Christian identity itself was produced through their consumption.28

**EPILOGUE**

These findings do not merely suggest that 19th-century Protestant missions' self-representation - a representation that is echoed in the still-current idea that Protestantism is a religion of the *Word* - does not match reality. More importantly, by drawing our attention to the much neglected and intricate relationship between religion and materiality, our investigation of the tensions about so-called worldly matters in the encounter between Ewe Christians and missionaries shows that any crude opposition of material versus spiritual, outward versus inward, is a mystifying, ideological construction that has served to denounce the other as less sophisticated and more worldly-minded and to conceal how much objects actually matter in the West. The anthropological fascination with the Other's concern with Western commodities in a situation of 'contact' (for a critique of this view see Thomas, 1991: 103 ff.) - a fascination that comes to the fore most openly in the examination of Melanesian cargo cults -
really is the flip side of the Western inclination to reduce consumption to the satisfaction of basic needs. Therefore it is appropriate that, rather than reiterating the boundary between the West and the Rest, anthropologists have come to 'acknowledge' consumption as a global cultural practice (Miller, 1995). This new awareness certainly has to be applied to the study of religious movements in past and present, all over the globe. Then matters such as the current attraction of the Prosperity Gospel appear in a new light. Clearly, with their materialistic orientation these churches do not corrupt the nature of Protestant religion as Christian critics suggest, but rather uncover one of its main characteristics, which the missionaries themselves failed to acknowledge, but which was evident to the Ewe converts of the first hour who were not to be fooled by the rhetorics of anti-materialism and of a sober ascetic ethic. Protestant missionary materializations were not subordinate to the proper message, but were part and parcel of its realization and were, despite possible objections to certain aspects of the colonial endeavour, firmly embedded in the modern market economy and vital for the making of modern consumers.

Notes

1. For their useful and stimulating comments I would like to thank Gerd Baumann, Peter Pels, Patricia Spyer, Peter van Rooden, Milena Veenis, Jojada Verrips, and two anonymous reviewers of this journal.

2. The historical documents considered are the Monatsblatt der Norddeutschen Missionsgesellschaft (MB), a German-written monthly periodical for the supporters of the mission; missionary ethnography produced for an academic audience, especially students of comparative religion: unpublished documents written for the mission board by missionaries and Ewe mission workers in either German, English or Ewe, which are kept in the NMG archives in Bremen; moreover, during my research among the Peki Ewe I received much information through oral history. In making use of these sources one has to take into account that they were produced for different audiences and were to serve different aims. Although the archival documents reflect the asymmetrical power relations in which the missionaries and the Ewe were involved, they need not be dismissed as mere distortions of pre-missionary culture and Ewe ideas and practices with regard to conversion. By reading them 'from below' and against the background of oral history, it is possible to get a glimpse of the Ewe point of view (cf. Meyer, 1995a: 102 ff.).

3. For the pre-colonial history of the Ewe see Amenumey (1986); Mamattah (1976).

4. This was an expectation widespread among Gold Coast chiefs (see Odamten, 1978: 21–2). Being subject to the neighbouring Akwamus, the Peki had been involved in the slave trade. After its abolition they were looking for new, 'legitimate' forms of trade.

5. In these places people already understood the profitability of education. In 1877 a missionary reported: 'On the coast the European influences, the factories of the traders have taught the people that education brings money' (MB, 1877: 188).
6. I am aware that by translating Kultur as 'civilization' part of the specific meaning of the German term is lost. Elias has pointed out that 19th-century German intellectuals associated Kultur with the development of inward qualities such as intellectual sophistication achieved through education [Bildung], and Zivilisation with the refinement of outward behaviour (1976: 1–42). However, it seems that the Pietists did not differentiate between Kultur and Zivilisation and regarded both as outward, behavioural matters. For them, only true Christian faith could bring about inward changes.

7. In the Ewe–German dictionary, Westermann, who based his linguistic observations on many years of work with old Ewe speakers, translated the expression as: 'his eye is open, he is open-minded, intelligent, cute, cultivated, civilized' (1905: 400). The first two meanings given after the literal translation designate an open, inquisitive attitude. I think that this attitude was associated with the term 'civilization', because Ewe people considered it a sign of 'open eyes' to open oneself up to the new things known as 'civilization' by European agents. It would be worthwhile to devote more attention to African people's understanding of and ideas about 'civilization' (until now such studies are scarce, but see Brown (1982)).

8. Though Togo became a German colony in 1884, the border between Togo and British Gold Coast was only defined in 1890.

9. In Peki Wudome, too, the mission school was built on such a place.

10. This was a common missionary practice all over Ghana (see also Mobley, 1970: 73 ff.).

11. Until the end of the 19th century, when Western tropical medicine took a big step forward through the discovery of quinine as prophylaxis, the missionaries had unscientific medical ideas. They stuck to 'humoralpathology', which explained sickness as the result of an unbalanced relationship between bodily fluids and demanded therapies such as blood-letting and purging (Fischer, 1991). Their medical ideas were thus not superior to those of the Ewe, and less well adapted to tropical circumstances.

12. For an extensive account of the history of building and the construction of the Amedzofe-station see MB 1892: 2 ff.


14. This attitude towards the forces of nature was a general feature of missionary Christianity, which also came to the fore in the neglect of taboos, such as not to work in the ground on particular days, not to cut certain trees, not to enter running water during menstruation (see Meyer, 1995a: 144–5).


16. The history of this cooperation has been analyzed in detail in a volume edited by Ustorf (1986b), and in a paper by Buhler (1979).

17. This process had been underway for some time. Already, earlier on, men had had the opportunity to become independent of their women's spinning work because European thread was offered in the trade stores.

18. Supposed to – for involvement in the market economy, of course, brought new fetishes in the form of commodities (cf. Taussig, 1980). The Mami Wata cults and imagery, which became increasingly popular all along the West African Coast in the course of this century, addresses this new fetishism. According to this popular imagination, beautiful European and Indian women dwelling at the bottom of the ocean lure African men into their arms and make them rich in exchange for their sexual fertility (Drewal, 1988; Wendl, 1991). Currently this imagery is referred to frequently in pentecostalist churches whose leaders offer ritual means to de-fetishize Western
commodities, thereby making sure that members possess the things they buy, rather than being possessed by them [cf. Meyer, in press].

19. On the other hand, many converts found it difficult to become fully separated from their extended families, with which they remained linked at least by the collective ownership of land. Many cases of so-called ‘backsliding’ occurred in which Christians sought help from their ancestors or family gods and returned to live in the midst of their families [Meyer, 1996].

20. This certainly applies to the Dente cult, a cult which originated in the north and spread among the Ewe in the 1880s. Maier (1983) has described how the Dente priest at Kete-Krachi, where Dente originated, was able to gain political control over Kete-Krachi at the expense of the Asante, the local chiefs, and even the British and Germans. The translation of religious power into political authority enabled the priest to profit from the market, which was an important center of commerce on the trade route connecting the coast with Salaga. His power was only broken by the German and British colonial powers in the 1890s. It would be worthwhile to study the spread of the Dente cult beyond its original area. I think this spread has to be understood against the background of the Dente priest’s position. It was an attempt to gain political power and prosperity through traditional, not Christian, religion.

21. I have the impression that the missionaries started to talk more about Kultur than Zivilisation in the context of the so-called Kulturkampf against German Catholicism, in which they felt they had to play a major role as devout Protestants [see MB, 1886: 8].

22. When Togo became a German colony in 1884, the NMG, which originally did not present itself as a national mission society, accommodated itself to the new political and economic circumstances and co-operated with the government officials as best it could. In 1912, the mission inspector Schlunk summarized the benefits of the mission to the colonial administration and vice versa. Whereas the NMG had provided pioneer services by studying the Ewe language, bringing about the Ewe’s confidence in white people, training them in modern professions and teaching them to respect the government, the colonial administration had ‘opened up’ the interior and developed remedies against tropical diseases [Tell and Heinrich, 1986: 280 ff.].

23. For a critical evaluation of Vietor’s ideas, see Weißflog, 1986.

24. In Germany in the second half of the 19th century industrialization and urbanization, which brought about new patterns of (mass) production and (mass) consumption, gradually got under way. This entailed not only an increasing number of commodities becoming available to an increasing number of people, but also consumption itself becoming important as a meaningful activity. Whereas social scientists have shown considerable interest in changes in the sphere of production, the study of consumption has only recently been placed on the agenda by sociologists and anthropologists (e.g. Appadurai, 1986; Campbell, 1987; Carrier, 1995; Miller, 1987, 1994, 1995).

25. Campbell argues that modern consumption is part of a ‘complex pattern of hedonistic behaviour, the majority of which occurs in the imagination of the consumer’ (1987: 89). Modern consumers expect to realize dream images of themselves, which are generated by gazing at commodities, through consumption; they continuously long for pleasure. Never achieving permanent satisfaction, they experience an ‘inexhaustability of wants’ and are in a ‘permanent desiring mode’ [p. 95] in which they open themselves up to
always consume new things. Campbell traces the emergence of this ‘spirit of modern consumerism’ back to the romanticist focus on self-development and selfhood (though, ironically, romanticism denied the importance of consumption), which was, in turn, fed by an optimist version of Calvinism with its emotionalism and cult of benevolence and melancholy. In his view, this ‘romantic ethic’, which gave rise to the ‘spirit of modern consumerism’, is the flip side of the well-known ‘Protestant ethic’ with its focus on rationality and instrumentality, and its suspension of pleasure, which brought forth the ‘spirit of capitalism’ so well described by Weber (1984[1920]). Campbell argues that the former has contributed as much to the industrial revolution and the emergence of middle-class culture as the latter, and that both traditions of thought exist side by side.

26. Elsewhere I have examined the image of ‘The broad and the narrow path’ and the missionaries’ world-view in detail (Meyer, 1995a: ch. 2).

27. The church order required Christians to lead sober lives and not to squander things nor to keep them avariciously. Yet the complaints show that this requirement was difficult to meet for Ewe Christians.

28. This conclusion, of course, owes much to Miller’s stimulating work on material culture (1987, 1994).

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