AKAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CATHOLICISM IN DIALOGUE: ENVISAGING A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE IN POSTMODERN GHANA

Daniel Adjei

Follow this and additional works at: https://dsc.duq.edu/etd

Part of the Catholic Studies Commons, Christianity Commons, Other Religion Commons, and the Practical Theology Commons

Recommended Citation

This Immediate Access is brought to you for free and open access by Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.
AKAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CATHOLICISM IN DIALOGUE:
ENVISAGING A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE IN
POSTMODERN GHANA

A Dissertation
Submitted to the McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By
Daniel Aboagye Adjei

May 2023
AKAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CATHOLICISM IN DIALOGUE:
ENVISAGING A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE IN
POSTMODERN GHANA

By
Daniel Aboagye Adjei


Sebastian Madathummuriyil, S.T.D., Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology
(Committee Chair)

Radu Bordeianu, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology
(Committee Member)

Elochukwu Uzukwu, Ph.D.
Professor of Theology
(Committee Member)

James P. Bailey, Ph.D.
Associate Professor of Theology
Chair, Department of Theology

Kristine Blair, Ph.D.
Dean, McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts
Professor of English
ABSTRACT

AKAN TRADITIONAL RELIGION AND CATHOLICISM IN DIALOGUE:
ENVISAGING A PARADIGM SHIFT IN THE THEOLOGY OF MARRIAGE IN
POSTMODERN GHANA

By
Daniel Aboagye Adjei

May 2023

Dissertation supervised by Sebastian Madathummuriyil, S.T.D., Ph.D.

The changing phases of religions, cultures, and world history in the epoch of
postmodernity today call on the Catholic tradition to be religious both culturally as well as
interreligiously. The identity and mission of the church can no longer be defined in a eurocentric,
triumphalist, or exclusivist term as in colonial times. As the church expands to new religio-
cultural and socio-political territories, like Ghana, the theological principles of dialogue,
interculturality, listening, and inculturation must guide her mission. This dissertation, tracing the
historical, cultural, and theological development of interreligious and cultural dialogue in the
Roman Catholic Church, argues that the Catholic church of Ghana must engage the diverse
religions, cultures, and the government of Ghana with a new outlook of dialogue and
collaboration to maintain and promote the religious and national peace and harmony in the
country.
Again, from the perspective of interculturality, this dissertation contends that the Ghana Catholic church needs to adopt a paradigm shift in the theology of the rite of marriage. After the Council of Trent, church marriage has been assumed to be normative for the Catholic family even though it fails to resonate with the culture of the Ghana Akan marriage rite. The consequence of the ‘imposition’ of this tradition on the church of Ghana has resulted in the multiplicity of marriage ceremonies before an Akan married spouse can join the entire church around the eucharistic table. This has resulted in eucharistic famine and ecclesial apathy in most parishes. This dissertation will explore the context of the Catholic Church in Ghana that seeks to integrate the catholic experience of Holy Matrimony into the culture of the Akan people in a manner that the experience not only expresses itself in elements of this culture but becomes a force that animates orients, and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion within the culture and enrichment for the universal Church.\(^1\) This dissertation proposes two models of Akan-Catholic rites of marriage that take into consideration the theological, canonical, civil, and cultural requirements for the validity and celebration of marriage that is truly Akan and truly Catholic.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the Adjei and Agyarkoh families and to the repose souls of
Stephen B. Adjei, Joseph Agyarkoh, and Dr. Marinus C. Iwuchukwu, who could not physically
witness the joy of my graduation after all their assistance and encouragement.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Profound gratitude to all those who have accompanied me on this academic journey for your love, patience, direction, and constructive criticism. Special appreciation to Dr. Sebastian Madathummuriyil, my dissertation chair, Professor Elochukwu Uzukwu, and Dr. Radu Bordeianu for their insightful contributions and guidance in completing this project. I thank all the theology faculty members whose inputs have walked me through the academic doors of theological discourses.

I am incredibly grateful to Most Rev. John Bonaventure Kwofie, CSSp, for the opportunity to further my studies. To the Adjei and Agyarkoh families in Ghana, the Rolandis, Neidigs, Curleys, Kustras, Porcos, Kostandinus, Kasanovichs, Vargos, Schocklings, Antolovichs, Struthers, and all parishioners of St. Joseph the Worker–Pittsburgh, USA, for their constant support, love, and concern toward my welfare, education, and ministry. Thanks to Frs. Langbiir (Ph.D.), Nelson-Tawiah, Belieb, Asemiah, and Amihere-Ackerson. Sincere thanks to my friends; Obi-Hemaa (O.H), Gloria, Eileen, Erin, and all Creamboyz for their fraternal encouragement towards this accomplishment.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dedication</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>List of Abbreviations</td>
<td>xiv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Introduction</td>
<td>xv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scope of the Research</td>
<td>xx</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Chapter 1

1.0. Interreligious Dialogue in Postmodernity: Cultural and Theological Reflection on Akan Traditional Religion .......................................................... 1

1.1. Interreligious Dialogue in the Age of Postmodernity: Characteristics of the Historical Epoch ................................................................. 4

1.2. The Era of Postmodernity and Catholicism: Challenges to Dialogue with Non-Christians .......................................................... 10

1.3. The Necessity of Interreligious Dialogue in the Age of Postmodernity ............ 17

1.4. The Complexities and Relatedness of Culture, Religions, and Dialogue .......... 24

1.5. Characteristics of Culture .................................................................. 28

1.6. The Socio-Cultural Influence on Catholicism ....................................... 32

1.7. Brief Overview of Akan Traditional Culture and Religion ....................... 36

1.8. The Akan People of Ghana: Origin and Cultural Structures ....................... 36

1.9. The Akan Religion and Cultural Worldview in Ghana ............................. 39

1.10. Nature of Akan Religion: Identification of the Akan Religion Within the
Socio-Culture Structure……………………………………………………………45

1.11. Some Core Tenets of the Akan Religion………………………………………48
1.12. Identifying the Akan Religion within the Religio-Cultural Structure……….56
1.13. Conclusion………………………………………………………………………61

Chapter 2

2.0. Catholicism in Dialogue with Other Religions and Cultures: A Historical Survey of Pre-Conciliar, Vatican II, and Post-Conciliar Catholicism………………62
2.1. Pre-Conciliar Catholic Outlooks on Other Religions and Dialogue………………63
2.2. “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus.”: Magisterial Context Before the 19th Centuries…69
2.3. Theological and Magisterial Review of Other Non-Christian Religions Within the Nineteenth Century…………………………………………………………..75
2.4. Response of the Catholic Church Towards Religious Indifferentism and Other Religions……………………………………………………………………..75
2.5. Cultural and Interreligious Dialogue: Context and Perspective of Vatican II Council………………………………………………………………………….80
2.6. Nostra Aetate: A Historical Turning Point of Interreligious Dialogue in Catholicism…………………………………………………………………………….89
2.7. Some Fundamental Interreligious Tenets of Nostra Aetate…………………90
2.8. Intrinsic Hermeneutical and Epistemological Flaws of Vatican II Documents: Implication for Interreligious Dialogue in the Postmodern Era……………100
2.9. Post-Conciliar Magisterium and Interreligious Dialogue: Continuity and Innovations………………………………………………………………………113
2.10. A Summary of the Content and Analysis of DI in the Light of Interfaith
Chapter 3

3.0. Church in Dialogue with African Traditional Religion/Cultures During the Papacy of Pope Francis: Promoting Dialogue, Friendship, and Fraternity………..145

3.1. The Historicity of Catholicism in Ghana……………………………………146

3.2. The Encounter Between Akan Traditional Religion and Catholicism: Toward an Akan Narrative of Inculturation……………………………………155

3.3. Dialogical Encounter After Ghana’s Independence 1957………………….164

3.4. A Theological and Liturgical Inculturation of Ghana Catholicism: An Akan Context…………………………………………………………………………169

3.5. African Catholicism and the Imperativeness of Inculturation………………171


3.7. Definitions of Terms: “Evangelization,” “Proclamation,” and “Dialogue”……177

3.8. Semantic Evolution of Mission and Evangelization Within Vatican II ……..179

3.9. Interreligious Dialogue as a Constitutive Element of the Church’s Mission of Evangelization: A Review of Magisterial Documents……………………183

3.10. The Pontificate of Francis on Evangelization, Mission, and Interreligious Dialogue……………………………………………………………………189

3.11. The “new” Church: Re-envisioning Evangelization, Mission, and Dialogue in a
Religiously Pluralistic Ghana Today…………………………………………………191
3.12. Evaluation and Conclusion…………………………………………………………194
3.13. Promoting Interreligious Dialogue in Ghana: A Theological and Pastoral
Paradigm of Pope Francis…………………………………………………………195
3.15. The Paradigm of Interreligious Encounter of Pope Francis: Practical Personal
Experience…………………………………………………………………………200
3.16. Pope Francis and Interreligious Encounter: Survey of Encyclicals, Exhortation,
and Homilies……………………………………………………………………….205
3.17. Dialogical Friendship and Fraternity: Strength and Weaknesses of Francis’
Paradigm…………………………………………………………………………..217
3.18. Conclusion…………………………………………………………………………220

Chapter 4

4.0. A Theo-Dialogical and Cultural Reflection on Catholicism and Traditional Akan
Marriage………………………………………………………………………………222
4.1. Historicity, Cultural, and Theological Background of Marriage: Evolution of
Marriage in the Church……………………………………………………………225
4.2. Marriage as a Social and Cultural Institution with Religious Import……………..227
4.3. Early Ecclesiastical Rite of Marriage: Sacramentalization and Legalization
of Customary Marriage…………………………………………………………..230
4.4. The Theological Argument for/against the Sacramental Nature of Marriage….235
4.5. Refutation of the Sacramental Nature of Medieval Catholic Theology of
Marriage………………………………………………………………………………239
4.6. The Council of Trent and the Decree of Tametsi of 1563: A Catholic Response ................................................................. 243
4.7. Catholic Marriage as a Vocation ................................................................. 246
4.8. Consent and Consummation in Marriage .................................................. 247
4.9. Marriage and Holy Communion ................................................................. 250
4.10. Marriage Systems in Ghana: Customary, Ordinance, and Marriage Under Islamic Law ................................................................. 253
4.11. Customary Marriage in Ghana ................................................................. 255
4.13. Engagement Stage .................................................................................. 258
4.15. After the Customary Rite of Marriage .................................................... 264
4.16. Marriage Under the Ordinance ............................................................... 264
4.17. Pastoral Realities of Marriage Among Akan Catholics: An Interreligious and Cultural Survey of Marriage in the Catholic Church of Ghana .................. 267
4.18. A Brief Pastoral Experience .................................................................... 271
4.20. The African (Akan) Voice for Ecclesia-Pastoral Marriage Review: An Urgent Concern within a Synodal Church ........................................ 275
4.22. Essential Elements of the Sacrament of Marriage .................................... 282
4.23. Polygamous and Divorce in Marriage: Hindrance to African-Catholic Marriage..287
Famine” in the African Church.................................................................293
4.27. Proposed Marriage Outline for an African/Akan-Catholic Marriage Rite: Final
Ceremony.................................................................................................305
4.28. Exemplary Models in West Africa (Catholicism)...........................................306
4.29. Conclusion.........................................................................................307

Chapter 5
5.0. Catholicism, Non-Christian Religions and Government of Ghana in Dialogue:
Prospets and Challenges.................................................................312
5.1. The Daily Situation of Interreligious Encounter........................................313
5.2. Ghana After Independence: Church, Politics, and Interfaith Dialogue............314
5.3. Fostering Dialogue Among Catholicism, Islam, and African Traditional Religion:
Contribution of Ghana Bishops’ Conference.......................................332
5.4. Challenges and the Future of Interreligious Dialogue in Ghana....................337
5.5. Conclusion.......................................................................................342
5.6. General Conclusion...........................................................................344

Bibliography.....................................................................................352
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AG – Ad Gentes
AL–Amoris Lætitia
ATR – African Traditional Religion (also Akan Traditional Religion)
CCC – Catechism of the Catholic Church
CHAG – Christian Health Association of Ghana
DI –Dominus Iesus
DP–Dialogue and Proclamation
EN– Evangelii Nuntiandi
FT–Fratelli Tutti
GCBC – Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference
GES – Ghana Education Service
GS – Gaudium et Spes
LG – Lumen gentium
LS – Laudato si’
MOH – Ministry of Health
NCHS – National Catholic Health Service
QA–Querida Amazonia
RM –Redemptoris Missio
RME – Religious and Moral Education
UNO – United Nations Organisation
USCCB – United States Conference of Catholic Bishops
General Introduction

The necessity for a new hermeneutic grounded and validated by cultural diversity, religious pluralism, and dialogue in a postmodern world cannot be overemphasized. This is true especially as the Catholic Church\(^2\) generally engages other cultures and religions in dialogue, particularly with African Traditional Religion (ATR)\(^3\), which had not received substantive attention in magisterial documents. In the ecumenical Council of Vatican II, the fathers identified the symptomatic features of cultural diversity and religious pluralism of the postmodern world. This necessitated the Church to advance a different theological and pastoral position to be religious interculturally and religiously. This was ground-breaking for a church that has encountered religions and cultures with exclusivism (monologue), confrontation, eurocentrism, and ethnocentrism. The church before Vatican II encountered other religions and cultures with her traditions as normative for the entire Catholic world. Catholics from other cultural worlds were expected, indeed required, sometimes in the name of ‘divine law,’ to abandon their own cultural practices of celebrating life and being religious. They were then morally coerced into embracing the ‘superior’ ways of Europe, uncritically imagined to be somehow more compatible with Christianity.

The Fathers of the Vatican II Council in *Nostra Aetate* positively reshaped and changed the tone of dialogue between the church and other religions. The conciliar declaration sought to procure a new hermeneutic and epistemology as it highlights a shared understanding instead of condemning what is found in other religions and cultures that are incompatible with the catholic

---

\(^2\) To avoid monotony and repetition, the subsequent usage of “Church” unless otherwise specified in the text, is in reference to the Catholic Church.

\(^3\) African Traditional Religion and African cultures were not given important space in *Nostra Aetate*. Nothing was said about it as compared to Judaism, Islam, Hinduism. Was the omission of the mention of ATR purposefully done by the Church in her document that was meant to show the Church’s relationship with Non-Christian Religion? Does the Catholic Church value some non-Christian religions than others or only recognizes those religions with political influence in the world?
tradition. However, some identifiable hermeneutical flaws are inherent in Nostra Aetate and some post-conciliar documents that impede a sincere interreligious and cultural dialogue. For instance, Nostra Aetate projects a theology of religious universalism and revelation, as the paradigms of truth that cannot but ought to be assimilated or “inculturated” by all other religious faiths and cultures. Concretely, article 4 of the document states that the Church possesses the role of proclaiming the cross as the universal sign of God’s love and grace: “It is the duty of the church, therefore, in her preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as the sign of God’s universal love and the source of Grace.” Such theological discourse raises a question—must the Christic revelation of love and grace for our entire universe at all times, in all cultures and contexts, only be proclaimed under the event of the cross on Calvary, or this revelation of love and grace of God has also been communicated in a different dimension beyond the cross as in Christianity? What happens to the souls of different cultures and times who did not encounter the message of love and grace through the cross? Are they damned or saved?

In the same vein, Nostra Aetate positively recognizes the element of truth and holiness of non-Christian religions: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.” However, such language raises an unanswered question: What is the paradigm for measuring the truth, or by whose judgment are these non-Christian religions true and holy? Is the truth weighed by the hermeneutical judgment of the Catholic church, or do truthfulness and holiness emerge as the innate character of these

---

5 NA 4.
religions?\(^6\) The opposite question is equally relevant: Is Catholicism ready to admit that there is the presence of ‘rays of truth’ available in other religions that the church does not possess and can adopt for its own edification? These questions can lead to a conclusion that the Church’s way of thinking is only from the egocentric dimension,\(^7\) impeding a genuine interreligious and cultural dialogue which must be a mutual affair, a two-way street in which there is give-and-take.\(^8\)

From this background, this dissertation contends that theology and theologizing, entrenched in an egotistic and imperialistic pride tendency, lack the humility to breathe out sincere and genuine dialogical encounters with non-Christian religions and cultures with the intention to “give out” and “receive” for mutual enrichment. To revitalize postmodern interreligious and cultural dialogue, this dissertation argues that theology should be seen as expansive. Thus, the church needs to reexamine other principles and cultures to which mainline theologies and religions have relegated for years. Some of these principles discussed include contextualization, Particularity and Historicity, Literary and non-literary resources of inquiry, Space and time, etc.

Secondly, From the context of a religiously pluralistic postmodern Ghana, “Catholic Christianity can no longer afford to be Eurocentric anymore than early Christianity could afford to be purely Judaic if it would reach the Gentiles in ways that they could understand and appropriate the common faith in their own cultural forms.”\(^9\) As the focus of the second part, this

---


\(^8\) See Adjei, The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World, 55.

\(^9\) David Tracy, “world Church or World Catechism: The Problem of Eurocentrism,” Concilium 204, no. 4 (1989): 29. According to Tracy, Christianity cannot be associated with European any longer. Many factors have made Christianity a world reality thus any refusal to this reality must theologically be resisted. There is therefore the
dissertation contends that the religio-cultural rite and theology of marriage in the Catholic church of Ghana demands an urgent paradigm shift if the church’s message of marriage wants to stay relevant to the Akans of Ghana in the next few decades. The paradigm shift of the theology of marriage celebration must resonate with the Akan culture and customary practices. Since the Council of Trent with the decree of Tamatsi, all Akan traditionally married Catholics were disallowed to receive communion unless they were married according to the “canonical form.” Tamatsi ruled that a valid Catholic marriage had to be contracted in the presence of the parish priest and two or three witnesses. Once this is absent, traditional married couples are classified as living in ‘sin’ and are unqualified as Catholics worthy of the Holy Eucharist.

Today, an Akan customarily married convert cannot receive communion unless another marriage rite, Holy Matrimony, is performed in the church. The consequence of this in the Ghana Catholic church is the growing eucharistic famine and ‘ecclesial apathy’ among traditionally married spouses. To the Akan customary married person, the Holy Matrimony has become a prerequisite to receiving the Eucharist or assuming a higher ecclesiastical position in the parish. Others posit that church marriage is a rebranded form of colonization or European culture of marriage system imposed on them under the garment of Catholicism. Tracing the historicity of Church marriage, one would ask: Why must one ecclesiastical and civil marriage legislation used in Europe at a different cultural generation to resolve specific European marital (Clandestine) and social problems justifiably be extended to Akan Catholics in Ghana? Unfortunately, the church has failed to recognize that a model that fits well for one cultural and religious setting in Europe does not mean the same model is ideal for the Akan societies south of the Sahara.

________________________

urgent need to respect and acknowledge multicultural and religious realities especially in the formulation of theological and liturgical doctrine. The era of hailing a single theological system as a universal or mono-cultural imposition must be treated as a failure on the part of the Church. See also Hermann Håring. “Experiences with the Short-Formula’ of the Faith,” Concilium 204, no. 4 (1989): 72.
Again, if the church’s marriage today grew out of a culture, why can’t the Akan customary marriage practice be baptized to align with the theology of marriage in the post-Vatican II church, where inculturation and cultural dialogue is hailed?

Against this backdrop, this dissertation proposes two marriage models [a. Option I: Rite of Marriage for African/Akan Couples (RoMAC) and Option II: Rite of African-Catholic Marriage for Monogamous Union (RacMMu)] as a remedy for the multiplicity of marriages and the eucharistic famine in the Ghana Catholic church. These models are drafted with a theological, canonical, civil, pastoral, and Akan cultural sensitivity to ensure that all the marriage requirements in the eyes of the church and Akan society are not neglected. The proposed models are to allow Akan converts to go through one marriage ceremony that is truly Akan and truly Catholic. It will be concluded that as a synodal church, dialogue, listening, discernment, reexamination, and inculturation should be intensified to make the church’s practices resonate with the Akan Catholics of Ghana.
Scope of the Research

The dissertation is divided into five chapters: Chapter one is in two parts: It opens with a general introduction and then discusses Akan culture and religion. For the church to attain a more profound and precise awareness of itself and its mission, especially as it dialogues and collaborates with other religious traditions, it must understand the changing phases of religion, culture, and world history. The introductory part of the dissertation, therefore, seeks to present the epoch of postmodernity within which Catholicism engages non-Christian religions in dialogue, bringing out the characteristics and the challenges this era poses within which the church is called to dialogue.

The second part studies the complexities of culture and religion from a broader perspective and narrows it into the religio-cultural worldview of the Akans of Ghana. Since the Akan religion is not codified in a tangible book like the Abrahamic religions, this dissertation will delve into where one can discover the Akan’s cultural and religious roots. This will open the dissertation to discuss rituals, ceremonies, festivals, beliefs and customs, proverbs, myths, and legends of the Akan people. The discussion will assert further that the Akans make little or no distinction between religion and culture. Therefore, it is very difficult for the average Akan to sever all links with his culture, which has religion at its base.10

Chapter two will center on a comprehensive historical review of papal and conciliar documents to highlight interreligious dialogue, theological and hermeneutical shifts, and developments in Catholicism. This historical survey will concentrate on the 19th Century through Vatican II and post-Vatican II to underscore the Church’s theological teachings on non-Christian religions. Aside from a brief review of the 19th Century and some of the Vatican II documents

that touched on culture and dialogue, \textit{Nostra Aetate}, a historical ecumenical document of Vatican II, and encyclicals of Pope Francis will be used as a structuring mechanism to offer coherence to this vast field of interreligious dialogue in the Catholic context. The dissertation will seek to argue further that the Church needs to reflect beyond \textit{Nostra Aetate} due to some hermeneutical flaws embedded in it, thus, using Pope Francis’ pontificate and pastoral approaches as a paradigm for further exploration of Catholic dialogical encounter in the postmodern world.

Chapter three focuses on the dialogue between Catholicism and Akan culture and religion and how this encounter has influenced all facets of the Catholic Church in Ghana today. Here, a brief historical review of the missionaries’ approaches to evangelization and dialogue will be traced to lay a foundation and comparison for the positive developments in the last thirty years of Catholicism in Ghana. To what extent has the Ghana Catholic church rooted the faith in Akan culture and religious beliefs through inculturation, and what is the way forward? Finally, this chapter will again discuss Pope Francis’ approaches to interreligious dialogue and how it has influenced Ghana Catholicism to collaborate with Akan religious leaders to promote fraternity.

Chapter four will review the marriage traditions of both the Catholic church and Akan culture and religion. Marriage is important to Catholicism and the Akan cultural and religious tradition. The problem is that Akan Catholics face the challenges of performing both the traditional marriage rite and the church marriage before the couple can receive communion. Akan Catholics must satisfy the traditional, canonical, and civil requirements for marriage. Many Akan converts who are traditionally married but do not have the means for church weddings continue to worship without receiving the eucharist. This has increased eucharistic famine and ‘ecclesial’ apathy among traditionally married spouses in the Catholic church. This chapter seeks to explore a paradigm shift of the theology of marriage that seeks to resolve the issue of the
multiplicity of marriages that Akan Catholics had to undergo before receiving communion. This chapter will examine the political order or Ghana law and its role in validating the Akan-Catholic marriage, which is truly Akan and truly Catholic.

Chapter five presents the various efforts from the governing political authorities concerning policies and laws in Ghana to facilitate a cordial and mutual dialogue among the various religions in Ghana. Again, the chapter highlights the determinations among religious bodies in Ghana to engage one another devoid of all conflicts to promote national peace and growth. The contributions of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference towards interreligious dialogue and the collaborative works with the government, Akan traditional leaders, and other faith traditions will be reviewed to draw out the prospects of dialogue for promoting fraternity in Ghana. Lastly, it will discuss the challenges and the future of interreligious dialogue in Ghana.
Chapter 1

1.0.  Interreligious Dialogue in Postmodernity: Cultural and Theological Reflection on Akan Traditional Religion

Introduction

The world’s religious, cultural, and social contexts are dynamic, constantly, and rapidly changing. Some of these changes are dramatic and sudden. Other times, these changes are gradual, subtle, and more difficult to discern, as with the current process of globalization in postmodernity. The Catholic Church, or the Christian community, must be on the alert to adapt its cultural, social, and religious mission to the changing contexts. She must be guided by the principles developed over the past centuries to avoid staining her identity. The Fathers of the Vatican II Council, not oblivious to the “true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man’s religious life as well,”11 opens the introductory statements of *Gaudium et Spes* by emphasizing the heavy responsibility of the Church to read the signs of the times, a direct affirmation of what Pope John XXIII kept calling the Church’s attention to.12 The Council Fathers identified the external changes in the modern times and its influences on the interior life of all humanity including culture and religion. *Gaudium et Spes* writes the following:

---

11 *Gaudium et Spes* (GS.) 4.

12 “Signs of the times” from a theological context was first used by Pope John XXIII in the Bull *Humanae salutis* (Dec. 25, 1961), in which he convened the Vatican Council to meet in the next year. He writes: “We renew our confidence in our Savior who has not left the world he redeemed. Instead, we make our recommendation that one should know how to distinguish the signs of the times (Mt 16:4), and we seem to see now amid the darkness a few indications that argue well for the fate of the Church and humanity (sec. 3).” Again, the pope used the term “signs of the times” three times as the sub-titles to three distinct sections (par. 29, 126, 142) in his encyclical *Pacem in Terris* (April 13, 1963). Under these titles, the pope points forth three significant events concerning the knowledge of God: the progressive development of the working classes, the growing role of women in public life, and the gradual disappearance of colonialism. See “Signs of the Times,” Encyclopedia.com. https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/signs-times Accessed on January 26, 2022.
To carry out such a task, the Church has always had the duty of scrutinizing the signs of the times and interpreting them in the light of the Gospel. Thus, in language intelligible to each generation, she can respond to the perennial questions which men ask about this present life and the life to come, and about the relationship of the one to the other. Therefore, we must recognize and understand the world in which we live, its explanations, longings, and often dramatic characteristics.\textsuperscript{13}

According to \textit{Gaudium et Spes}, the Modern World was characterized by an abundance of wealth, resources, economic power, a growing exchange of ideas, and humanity’s desire in search of a better world. Far from this optimism, the Council Fathers identified the paradoxes and problems of inequality where many people are under the torment of hunger, poverty, and total illiteracy. In contrast, others live in opulence.\textsuperscript{14} The Modern World, the Council Fathers added, was beset with new forms of coercion, dissensions, and conflicting political, social, economic, and racial forces. Most significantly, there is no certainty of ideologies and cohesiveness, and humanity’s continuous search for a better world is, unfortunately without a corresponding spiritual advancement.\textsuperscript{15} The Fathers saw the “spiritual agitation and the changing conditions of life as part of a broader and deeper revolution”\textsuperscript{16} in the Modern World. The result of the revolution is humanity’s move from a relatively static concept of reality to a more dynamic, evolutionary one.\textsuperscript{17} These dynamic changes of ideas are experienced more in the formation of the local communities such as families, clans, tribes, villages, various groups, and associations stemming from social contacts.\textsuperscript{18} The Council Fathers at Vatican II took cognizance of all these promising opportunities, paradoxes, and struggles so that the Church at different

\textsuperscript{13} GS. 4. 
\textsuperscript{14} GS. 4. 
\textsuperscript{15} GS. 4. 
\textsuperscript{16} GS. 5. 
\textsuperscript{17} GS. 5. 
\textsuperscript{18} GS. 5.
epochs could strategize and appropriate the apt corresponding missionary pedagogues for encountering others in evangelization.

More than sixty years after the official closure of Vatican II, the world has and rapidly continues to undergo a transformation that cuts across all facets of human existence. Therefore, it was prophetic when the Vatican II Council affirmed that the Church needs to cautiously read the signs of the times to interpret them in the light of the Gospel. For the Catholic Church to attain a profound and more explicit awareness of itself and its mission, especially as she dialogues and collaborates with other cultures, religions, and their people in a religiously pluralistic postmodern world, there is the need to understand the changing phases of religions, cultures, and the world history.

In light of this, Chapter One of the dissertation seeks to probe the changing phases of religions, cultures, and the world history of this epoch within which the Catholic Church continues to engage non-Christian religions and cultures in dialogue. The first part of the chapter examines the signs of our times and the corresponding challenges to Catholicism that necessitate a new interreligious dialogical theology and pedagogues. After setting the current historical landscape within which Catholicism engages other religions in dialogue, the focus will be narrowed to discussing the Akan Traditional Culture and Religion. Here, the intrinsic connection of culture and religion, the nature and the worldview that shapes the Akan beliefs and rituals, the tenets of the Akan Religion, and how these tenets are woven within the religio-cultural, socio-political structures of the Akan societies will be explained. This aims to provide a brief scope of the Akan Traditional Religion and Culture to discuss the need for interreligious dialogue with Catholicism, using marriage as a cultural example.
1.1. Interreligious Dialogue in the Age of Postmodernity: Characteristics of the Historical Epoch

Naming this era of postmodernity has raised discrepancies and inconsistencies among scholars regarding where to draw the line to differentiate this era from other eras and what is peculiar to each of them. The apparent struggles among scholars to reach a consensus regarding how to call this present historical age cannot be overstressed. From different fields of study, scholars have suggested the expressions; modernity, late modernity, post-modernity, and post-postmodern to describe this present age.\(^{19}\) It is against this background that David Tracy said, “we live in an age that cannot name itself.”\(^{20}\) Notwithstanding the divergent interpretations, most scholars are generally accustomed to using the term postmodern or postmodernity.\(^{21}\) While cultural theorists, philosophers, and theologians still debate the exact definition and dates of the postmodern era, there seems to be the acceptance that the postmodern era began during the second half of the 20th Century and was “marked by skepticism, self-consciousness, a celebration of differences, and the reappraisal of modern conventions.”\(^{22}\) Jean-François Lyotard famously described this current historical period as “incredulity to metanarrative”\(^{23}\) and Graham Ward also suggested that “postmodernity promises neither clarification nor the disappearance of perplexity.”\(^{24}\) He added that this does not seem that we should not “take stock of where we


\(^{21}\) This dissertation will therefore use Postmodern or Postmodernity to describe this present historical epoch.


stand” and investigate the “profundity of the relationship between our thinking and our cultural/historical context.”

Identifying the characteristics of this present historical age would indubitably disclose the challenges today’s Catholicism faces, particularly in her mission of religio-cultural interfaith dialogue. “Taking stock of where we stand,” Gerrard Mannion identified in his book “Ecclesiology and Postmodernity: Questions for the Church in our Time,” that “the postmodern era is marked by an increasing disillusionment with all-encompassing explanatory hypotheses for the world in general and human beings and societies in particular.” For him, he continued, “Master narratives such as religion, political ideologies, and even science, are no longer seen to have ‘all the answers’ to humanity’s questions.” This dethronement of grand narrative has resulted in a process Mannion called “detraditionalization.” In the postmodern era, there is a shift from the concept and belief of certainties and truth claims to a concentration on localized and contextual elements. It is an era categorized by multivalent and ambiguous phenomena.

Peter Phan also describes the postmodern world as initiated in architecture and art but rejects the elements of modernity that preferred stylish integrity and purity. Postmodernity, he further opined espouses “heterogeneity and polyvalence, bricolage and pastiche, and an eclectic mixture of disjointed and contradictory elements.” In other words, objective truth claims and

\[25\] Ibid.
\[26\] Ibid., 4.
\[27\] Ibid.
\[29\] Ibid., 17.
\[31\] Ibid.
\[32\] Ibid.
absolute knowledge of reality are despised by critics of this historical age.\textsuperscript{33} Implicit in this position is eradicating universality, supra-cultural, and timeless truths about “reality” to give precedence to an ever-shifting knowledge and social construction made by a particular community, religion, culture, and tribe in view of its interest and context.\textsuperscript{34} The postmodern era encourages epistemology that celebrates principles of particularity. Thus, respect for local context and the ‘otherness’ of all facets of life, be it race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and culture, are upheld against any body of knowledge that assumes the principles of generalization or overarching systems (metanarrative) that can be reasonably legitimatized.\textsuperscript{35} In light of this, Chapter One of the dissertation seeks to probe the changing phases of religions, cultures, and the world history of this epoch within which the Catholic Church continues to engage non-Christian religions and cultures in dialogue.\textsuperscript{36} With this background, Peter Phan avows that “plurality and diversity are perceived to be the essential safeguards preventing life-affirming unity from degenerating into deadening uniformity or, worse, into an instrument for the powerful to homogenize those who are different and to deny them their basic right to be who and what they are.”\textsuperscript{37}

Phan identifies an irony associated with the postmodern era. While postmodernity moves toward a centrifugal celebration of plurality and otherness, thus prioritizing particularity, there is at the same time in postmodernity a centripetal movement that glorifies universal unity and the construction of the ‘global village’ under the world phenomenon of globalization in its full pressure.\textsuperscript{38}

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid. See also Adjei, “The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World,” 7.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., XVIII.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid. XIX.
Globalization, a significant factor that drives the postmodern era, is defined as the “historical process by which all the world’s people increasingly come to live in a single social unit.”\textsuperscript{39} Though globalization is primarily used in the economic world, denoting the recent developments in the operation of global markets, capital, multinational corporations, technological achievements, and communication, the cultural and theological or religious implications cannot be overemphasized. The phenomena of globalization in the postmodern era have contributed to the collapse of geographical boundaries, whether socio-economic, cultural, or religious. This collapse has created a hybridity of cultures and religions, thus designing a world where an individual’s identity is hardly confined to and defined by their place of birth.\textsuperscript{40} Technological advancement and the communication revolution have facilitated the development of the phenomenon of globalization. These factors have brought diverse cultural and religious traditions into contact, and the flow of these traditions is not unidirectional.\textsuperscript{41} For instance, the youth outside the West are absorbed into a homogenized “hyperculture” characterized by modern values, vices, and consumption of Western goods.

Again, postmodernity has created an environment in Ghana where the Akan Traditional culture and religion cannot claim it is in its pure state. Akan culture and religion continue to encounter and dialogue with other religious traditions (Catholicism/Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, etc.). This dialogical engagement stimulates an omnidirectional or multidirectional influence. Undoubtedly, the dialogical encounter of religions and people of different nationalities has caused a transformation in Ghana’s cultural and religious landscape. In the same manner,

\textsuperscript{40} Phan, \textit{Being Religious Interreligiously}, XIX. See Also Adjei, “The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World, 7.
\textsuperscript{41} Phan, \textit{Being Religious Interreligiously}, XIX.
through immigration, Ghanaians, and for that matter, Africans have also traveled to the West, bringing with them diverse cultures and religious traditions.

Another implication of globalization in the postmodern world is the encouragement of religious and cultural pluralism. Postmodern religions identify themselves in relation to one another and become less rooted in specific places because of diasporas and transnational ties.42 Beyer also opined that, in the postmodern world, the phenomenon of globalization stimulates imperialism and homogenization and provides fertile ground for the variety of noninstitutionalized religious manifestations and the development of religion as a political and cultural resource.43

It must also be said that the postmodern world has created two radically different worlds: “the real in appearance but turning out to be illusionary, and the other sinister in appearance but turning out to be more benign and real at the end.”44 The aid of sophisticated computerized programs, images, and special effects bring the unreality of the real and the reality of the unreal into an indistinguishable state. The internet world of “virtual reality” gives people access to sit behind their computer screens and connect with the world of others, but at the same time, these persons are shielded separately from interpersonal face-to-face relationships. Peter Phan summarizes this beautifully when he said, “in the virtual world there is neither objective reality “out there” nor subjective reality “in here”; rather, the events happen somewhere in between, blurring the distinction between subject and object, the very thing postmodernism says “reality” is.”45

43 Ibid.
44 Phan, Being Religious Interreligiously, XVIII.
45 Ibid.
The Catholic Church in the postmodern world cannot be blind to all these features and their complexities. Therefore, as desired by Vatican II Council, the Church should critically pay attention to the rapidly changing phases of religion, culture and the challenges this era poses shrouded in the phenomenon of globalization. This will aid the Church in strategizing appropriately with the corresponding tools for effective evangelization, which sees interreligious dialogue as an intrinsic element to facilitate a genuine encounter with non-Christian cultures and religions in general and, in particular, Akan Traditional Culture and Religion in Ghana.
1.2. The Era of Postmodernity and Catholicism: Challenges to Dialogue with Non-Christians

The symptomatic features of cultural diversity, socio-political and economic globalization, and religious pluralism associated with postmodernity pose new challenges to Catholicism in the broader framework of theology, particularly interreligious dialogue. This section delves into a brief examination of some of these challenges:

i. Cultural and Religious Pluralisms (a de facto and a de jure)

Postmodernity challenges the Church today to factor religious and cultural pluralism into her theology and life as *a de facto* (matter of fact) reality and *a de jure* (matter of principle, or divinely ordained principle). Today, most societies acknowledge cultural monotheism and religious exclusivism as obsolete ideologies. Writing along the lines of religious pluralism in postmodernity, Marinus Iwuchukwu said:

> It has become somewhat anachronistic to validate monoculturalism and religious exclusivism as acceptable in today’s pluralistic societies. It is also becoming increasingly unacceptable to ignore, deny, or demean the existence of the religious other in many pluralistic societies today.

Along the same lines, Jacque Dupuis emphasized the divine foundation of religious pluralism and how humanity has responded to the root of pluralism in their own cultures. He suggested that religious pluralism has its roots in the depth of the Divine Mystery itself and in the manifold way in which human cultures have responded to the mystery. He insists that differences must be tolerated, welcomed, and celebrated with thankfulness because they are

---

46 Jacque Dupuis is convinced and strongly advocated that in all dialogical encounters, especially among Christians, religious pluralism ought to be given attention not just as *a de facto* reality but also *a de jure* of God’s plan and relationship with humanity. See Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1997), 386.

47 Marinus C. Iwuchukwu, “Appropriating Christian and Islamic sacred texts to underscore the theology of inclusive pluralism toward effective global Christian-Muslim dialogue” (January 2015). 

‘a sign of the superabundant riches of the Divine Mystery which overflows to humankind and … an outstanding opportunity for mutual enrichment, ‘cross-fertilization,’ and ‘transformation’ between the traditions themselves.’

For Dupuis, religious pluralism has a place in God’s plan of salvation. He argues that commitment to one’s faith is compatible with openness to others, and to affirm one’s religion is devoid of being confrontational. Sharing the view of Edward Schillebeeckx, Dupuis points out that Christianity and, for that matter, Catholicism can maintain their uniqueness and still affirm the positive values and nature of non-Christian religions unequivocally. In his final analysis, Dupuis argues that the theology of religions must be a theology of religious pluralism. The principle of religious pluralism flows from the immeasurable richness of God’s gratuitous self-communication to diverse humanity. God’s revelation cannot be confined to one culture, religion, continent, or group of people.

In the postmodern world, globalization has advanced this reality of cultural and religious pluralism. Different cultures and religious traditions engage each other at a fast rate due to the quick flow of information and people due to technological advancements in transportation and communication. This irrefutable certainty challenges the Church today to separate itself from her two-millennia-long tradition of Eurocentric theological ideologies that subscribe to the culture of sameness and universality on one hand and monocultural and religious exclusivism on the other. Today, the Church is compelled to reexamine religio-cultural pluralisms (as both a reality

---

49 Ibid., 199.
50 Schillebeeckx opined that “In my view the question for us is whether the pluralism of religions is a matter of fact or a matter of principle” See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 194.
52 Ibid., 200.
53 Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously*, XIX.
and as a principle divinely ordained) that acknowledge particularities and contexts of others in a broader scope of culture and religion.

ii. Relativism, Emotivism, and Moral/Ethical Fragmentation

As an era characterized by the dethronement of master narrative and the overarching universal explanatory hypotheses,\textsuperscript{54} postmodernity challenges the Church with the reality of relativism and emotivism. Scholars have called this detraditionalization.\textsuperscript{55} The result of detraditionalization has given rise to individualistic ideas and positions in the world. However, it is essential to state that this does not mean absolutism is rejected but that observations and judgments are made in relative terms or based on individual preferences and emotional bias.\textsuperscript{56} This context of judgment has collapsed or changed the narrative of ethical frameworks.

Pope Francis speaks of moral relativism as “the spiritual poverty of our time.” He, therefore, cautioned that the spirit of the world tempts us with

\begin{quote}
The deceptive light of relativism, which obscures the splendor of truth and, shaking the earth beneath our feet, pushes us toward the shifting sands of confusion and despair. Moral relativism is also at the root of the social and moral divide over some of the most critical battles of our time – fraying the bonds that should hold us together.\textsuperscript{57}
\end{quote}

Associated with relativism and emotivism is what postmodern commentators call the “fragmentation” of ethical norms and patterns of moral guidance.\textsuperscript{58} Moral absolutes are disregarded by many, and the possibility of transferable moral standards is assumed as unachievable. Sometimes these ethical norms are now coded in the political, legal, or emotive outfit that people conceive of “rights” without acknowledging that these rights presuppose an

\textsuperscript{54} Mannion, \textit{Ecclesiology and Post-Modernity}, 17.
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{58} Mannion, \textit{Ecclesiology and Post-Modernity}, 17.
ethical framework and the foundation for moral thinking. The notion of morality is under attack in the consumer explosion of postmodernity because of individuals’ dominant “pick and mix” relativistic mentality. Mannion writes of the postmodernist: “What matters for many individuals now is not what is seen to be morally right or wrong, good or evil, etc., but what is right or “best” for that “me” that sits atop the consumerist age like a new god, imprisoned in its own heaven by its own volition.” Pope Benedict XVI described the fragmentation of moral relativism as a major evil facing the Church of this age. Ethical relativism seeks to defeat the Church’s notion of “being-in-community” or communitarian or the social priority of the Church. What becomes of the Church’s social mission in the postmodern era with the increasing influence of moral relativism?

Studies have shown that this trend of individualism, driven by materialism and moral relativism, has created a new context for religion in general and Catholicism in particular. The individualistic mentality on the increase in postmodern society affects all spheres of life, including spirituality and ecclesiastical ethics, or the moral teaching of Catholicism. This individualism or relativism in ethical decision-making has resulted in new forms of enslavement, leading many people to a life of despair. Confronted with the dictatorship of relativism in postmodernity, the Catholic Church and all religions face challenges where the Church’s position of universal and transcendent values, moral absolute is neglected.

59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
iii. Consumerism, the ‘New Religion’

Today, there is a ‘consumerist turn’ for which everything is weighed on the marketing principle of personal satisfaction. Religion is no exception. Observing the postmodern trend of consumerism, Mannion opined that religion is now “packaged,” “organized,” and even “marketed” as such because believers are treating religion as a commodity they may take or leave, picking and choosing which aspects they feel will “work” for them.62

Peter Brierley in Britain speaks of emergences of consumerism and the challenges to the Church in these words:

It has become acceptable to make choices about various aspects of life that were not options for previous generations. This is expressed in all sorts of ways, from the consumerism that has spawned the phrase “I shop therefore I am,” to changing sexual mores…. [T]he changing pattern of church attendance is probably at least partly to do with personal choice… [and p]eople within the church are also exercising choice—about what to believe, who to follow, which church to attend. We have all played musical chairs as children; people now play musical churches as adults… This consumerist approach means that the whole culture in which the church and Christian organizations exercise their ministry is changing radically…. [T]he church is facing competition of a kind it has not had to wrestle before. Choice in itself is, of course, neither right nor wrong, but this consumerist culture impacts leadership in a huge number of ways…63

Consumerism has become the “new religion” that many individuals perceive as a platform to assert their identity and freedom, but the contrary of enslavement is apparent.64 Throughout history, humanity has sought to define its identity and the purpose of existence. Many resort to their cultural configurations, communities/groups of common interest, religion, or supernatural being to ascertain their destined purpose and form their identity. Before the dawn of the Industrial Revolution and the postmodern world, the masses in the West pursued this through

62 Mannion, Ecclesiology and Post-Modernity, (with slight changes)
64 Mannion, Ecclesiology and Post-Modernity, 20.
Christianity (Catholicism) or Protestantism. In the postmodern world, there is a fast-emerging shift from religion to the world of materiality and consumerism. They rely on clothing, jewelry, houses, and other marketing products. Consumerism has become a worshipped phenomenon.

Religion today is losing its power to influence consumerism at a fast rate. The contrary is also true; “consumerism has become a culture and “new religion” of its own,”\(^6\) swaying and dictating the pace of religious activities and principles. While most world religions were built on the foundation of simplicity and modesty, the emerging “new religion” revolves around a constant cycle of buying and seeking new product. People consume to construct their identity. In his article, Nethra Rajendran concludes that “Consumerism has become a culture. A culture with ecological, social, and economic implications. Consumerism has become a culture that religion can no longer control… This culture has infiltrated our society and has overtaken its religious counterparts. Modern consumerism is now a religion of its own.”\(^6\) While the evolving shift is meant to help humanity discover its identity and enhance human life and environment, the direct opposite of enslavement, depression, segregation, etc., are experienced. The worship of “economic growth,” which beckons on the masses to consume and dispose of, is exposing our common home to depletion of resources, ecological crises, pollution, and human exploitation.\(^6\) It is within this era that the Church is called to mission and dialogue. Today, the Church is challenged to redirect the masses to their identity and freedom through community support, not individualism, simplicity and modesty, and a return to the Divine.

---


\(6\) Rajendran “Consumerism: A New Religion?”

\(6\) Laudato Si (LS) 20, 23, 48-52.
v. Crises of Legitimation

Mannion identifies crises of legitimation as another challenge posed by postmodernity. The authority of the Catholic Church, with the current trend of “new religion,” is losing relevance concerning the legitimation of all the ethical principles and guidance she provides the world today. The value of moral principles and religion, generally, have become relevant for few. At the same time, the majority only sometimes see the need for the Church on the ground of fulfilling family traditions. It is not surprising that Richard Dawkins argues today that religion has no positivity in our society. He categorizes religion as a pernicious structure and thus argues for various levels. The Anglican theologian has criticized the assessment of Dawkins Keith Ward in his word as providing a shallow, ill-informed, and idiosyncratic evaluation of theology, religion, and church. This does not refute the challenges postmodernity poses to the Church today.

From the above challenges, it is suitable to conclude by reiterating Howland Sanks’ words when he said, “for theologians, our growing awareness and analysis of this phenomenon [i.e., globalization] and for that matter, postmodernity is part of the ongoing reading of the signs of the times….We are faced with a new situation that calls for new analysis and conceptualization.” This new phenomenon pushes for a new innovative model for the Church as she fulfills her mission of reaching out to the ends of the earth with the gospel message of Jesus Christ. It must be affirmed that the new cultural paradigm invites the Catholic Church in dialogue to have a new theological pattern, revisioning of the entire theological agenda, and re-examine the questions of method, God,

69 For example, to procure baptism for the newly born baby since it has been a tradition or confirmation or wedding after which Church and doctrine or ethical principles are secondary.
history, human beings, ecclesiology, eschatology, and cultural-religious pluralism. The Church’s theological works and methodology must integrate the cognitive questions raised by postmodernist criticism, the practical questions put forth by theologians of liberation, and cultural and religious pluralism. The Church is challenged to make relevant the message of the gospel within the postmodern world characterized by the changing conditions because of individualization, ethical relativism, de-traditionalization and dedoctrinalization, consumerism, and religious pluralism. To this dissertation, these questions become crucial: How does the Church engage other religions and cultures in the postmodern era, considering all the changing trends associated with postmodernity? From where does the Church begin, and to what extent must the Church be opened to cultural and religious pluralism and dialogue? Answers to these questions based on an appeal to a metanarrative, either based on natural law or divine revelation, which lay claim to universal validity and absolute normativity without attention to particularity and context, would always encounter opposition in this cultural era of postmodernity and thus impede genuine interreligious dialogue.

1.3. The Necessity of Interreligious Dialogue in the Age of Postmodernity

The challenges posed by this era called on all religions and, for that matter, Catholicism to develop new pedagogical missionary strategies to match up the postmodern context. From the perspective of interreligious dialogue, the postmodern world, in all its complexities, challenges the Church to advance interfaith dialogue as an intrinsic part of the Church’s mission as a reality

---

72 Peter Hodgson suggests in the cultural era of postmodernity that the Church must devise new ways of doing theology; that which reexamines the question of God, history, humanity, ecclesiology, religious pluralism, etc. For further reading, see Peter Hodgson, Revisioning the church: Ecclesial Freedom in the new Paradigm (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press 1999). See also Mannion, Ecclesiology and Post-Modernity, 23.

73 Ibid.

74 Phan, Being Religious Interreligiously, XX.
and a divine principle. This is because interreligious dialogue has higher necessities that cannot be trivialized in a postmodern world. This section discusses some of these necessities.

i. Genuine Communication.

Authentic interreligious dialogue elicits genuine communication with others of different faith commitments. Honest dialogue necessitates a better understanding of others, not from one’s own beliefs and traditions but rather from others’ perspectives and beliefs. Since proper dialogue is “an activity with its own guiding principles, requirements, and dignity,” it stimulates communication of openess and mutual acceptance because it does not prioritize the strategy to elicit conversions but rather the opportunity to get into the skin of others to understand what they do. Teasdale’s definition of dialogue drives home the necessity of dialogue in a world characterized by differences and diversities. Dialogue, he writes, “suggests an attitude of openness to members of other traditions. It presupposes mutual acceptance. Dialogue is an attitude before it is an activity. That is, it requires a state of willingness and generosity of heart to enter into genuine communication with others different from us in the faith commitment.”

Genuine interreligious dialogue produces an active form of communication based on goodwill and mutual respect between and among the interlocutors. It calls for a substantive act of openness, honest conversation devoid of hidden agenda and with the primary objective of reaching a better understanding, not just a partial knowledge of the other. Jacques Dupuis captures this in the following words:

To know the religion of another is more than being cognizant of the facts of the other’s religious tradition. It involves getting inside the skin of the other; it

---

75 “Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences” in Rosales and Arévalo, eds, For All the Peoples of Asia, (New York Orbis 1992), 167.
76 Ibid.
involves walking in the other’s shoes, it consists in seeing the world in some sense as the other sees it, it consists in asking the other’s questions, it involves getting inside the other’s sense of being a Hindu, Muslim, Jew, Buddhist, or whatever.\(^7^9\)

The cultural world of postmodernity, associated with diversity and difference, demands dialogue where religions and believers engage in a genuine conversation to understand each other by getting inside the skin of each other.

\begin{itemize}
\item[ii.] \textit{Listening and Learning from the Other.}
\end{itemize}

Interreligious dialogue necessitates openness to mutual listening and learning. This dialogical encounter is not meant to judge and discard the other person or religion. It provides the avenue to move from the unknown to the known as interlocutors learn on the basis of trust that the “other” has words and substance of life to offer us.\(^8^0\) Paul Knitter points out that in Christian terms, to experience the Divine (God) is not only to experience truth and power that is categorized as “universally relevant,” to be made known to the end of the earth; it also presupposes a fall into the embrace of a mystery that is always mightier and greater than our own experience of the divine. Simply put, God is greater than our knowledge and experiences of him. To experience this Mystery of God authentically brings the interlocutors to the truth that each person or religion is experiencing it only partially.\(^8^1\) The religious experiences of all religions of the Mystery of God, Brahman, Allah, the Tao, Nyame, etc. “can never be known and experienced \textit{in toto} but only \textit{in parte}.”\(^8^2\) If this holds, then all religions and religious interlocutors in dialogue must rise to discovering “other parts” by taking the humble steps to look through

---

\(^7^9\) Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism}, 380. Also quoted in Adjei, “The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World, 9.


\(^8^1\) Knitter, “Interreligious Dialogue,” 30.

other windows into the universe of Truth and Mystery. Irrespective of the beauty and awesomeness we experience from our window, Knitter continues, we must imperatively look through the windows of others to broaden our experience of the Mystery of God. This analogy resonates with the dictum of Max Müller, who said, “those who know one, know none.”

Postmodernity challenges all religions to learn and listen from our ideological circles and others. Originators of the “hermeneutic of suspicion” unearthed the limitation of our reasoning and the corruption of the human heart. In the sincerest effort to attain the truth, fashion our world and understand and interpret the Mystery of God revealed, Knitter noted that “there is the worm of ideology—the ever lurking propensity to use our “truth” as a means of assuring our own advantage or control over that of others.” There is always the tendency in religions and all facets of human life to capitalize on our “truth” or ideology as the narrative to confirm our advantage or attain control over other people. Knitter argues that such ideological abuse of religion is an “error” and a “systemic distortion” that is hard for the insiders to identify by themselves to correct them. There is the need for the insight and perspective of others who perceive the world differently from us and can critically assess our standpoint outside our circle and tell how our “truth” for centuries has defamed, victimized, or excluded others to the periphery. The postmodern world with the reality of cultural and religious pluralism makes interreligious dialogue necessary where conversers enter into dialogue with the openness to listen and learn from others who are not within our ideological circles for the benefit of seeing our

---

83 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
distortion and self-centered abuse of the truth that has been transmitted from one generation to the other. It must be acknowledged here that the need to listen and learn from others does not come that easy. It is a complex process since every interreligious encounter does bring out some similarities and differences. Our limited understanding of the other and our “truth” or perspective have clouded our vision to look beyond our circles. Again, since each religion is unique and reflects some elements of religious significance, genuine dialogue is an opportunity for mutual edification.88

iii. Fostering Harmonious Co-Existence.

The ascendancy of prejudices, suspicions, and violence that threaten our world make interreligious dialogue necessary in postmodernity. The multi-cultural, multi-tribal, and multi-religious traditions and practices associated with postmodernity bring out the pressing need to foster a harmonious co-existence of all the differences within the circle of religions and all other areas of life. The absence of interreligious dialogue ignites prejudices, suspicions, and sometimes violence that militates against the security and harmony of our communities and the world at large. On the contrary, a realistic interreligious encounter produces richness and beauty in diversity. Aga Khan said diversity is richness, not a burden.89 Any substantial meeting of religions and cultures that has the potency to trigger division, misconception, and its associated violence must be replaced with genuine dialogue. Unfortunately, as Teasdale noted, cultural and religious isolation has existed for centuries, even millennia, among different faith traditions.90 In the same vein, we can speak of religions mutually ignorant of one another’s history, beliefs,

88 Ibid.
89 November 14, His Highness the Aga Khan addressed an overflow audience at Memorial Church on the challenges of pluralism today in the world. He affirmed that “Diversity is not a burden to be endured, but an opportunity.” http://www.islamicstudies.harvard.edu/agakhan/. Accessed August 16, 2021.
90 Teasdale, Catholicism in dialogue: Conversations Across Traditions, 5.
rituals, and their positive contributions to the world, society, and the human community. During those ages, communication was minimal, if at all.\textsuperscript{91} The consequence of this religio-cultural isolation and ignorance provoked the treatment of others’ cultural and religious traditions as an “outcast.”\textsuperscript{92}

In the postmodern world today, cultural, and religious isolation is unrealistic. Isolation is breaking down due to globalization which has advanced technology and communication, thus facilitating the meeting of people of different religions, traditions, ideologies, and the rapid flow of information. Individuals also encounter each other in global forums, shopping malls, airports, workplaces, sporting events, etc. According to Teasdale, there is no way to escape diversity any longer. Postmodern conditions of life force everyone to accept otherness in all its manifestations, especially in the sphere of religious diversity.\textsuperscript{93} The cultural and religious diversities have opened the capability of intercultural cooperation and interreligious understanding.\textsuperscript{94} It is from this inescapable socio-cultural pluralistic environment that the Church and other faith traditions must see the necessity to assemble all the indispensable tools and skills to ensure a sensitive and fruitful interreligious dialogue that promotes a harmonious coexistence.

\textit{iv. A Collaborative Effort to Advance Solutions for World’s Problem.}

The postmodern era is confronted with major problems that demand a collaborative effort of all religions and other agencies to develop a comprehensive remedy. For instance, the world faces ecological (the care for our common home) crises, poverty, and climate change, raising the urgent need for a collective solution. Almost all the world religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam, Taoism, Jainism, Sikhism, African Traditional Religion, Shamanistic cultures,

\textsuperscript{91} Teasdale, \textit{Catholicism in dialogue: Conversations Across Traditions}, 5.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{93} Teasdale, \textit{Catholicism in dialogue: Conversations Across Traditions}, 5.
\textsuperscript{94} Adjei, “The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World,” 10.
etc., express extreme concerns for the environment, terrorism, disease, hunger, poverty, education, human right, bioethical questions, justice, freedom, war, and peace that threaten humanity.\footnote{Ibid., 11.} A collaborative interreligious effort based on the teachings of these religions and cultures in these areas of life can complement governments’ and individuals’ interventions to fight the multifaceted problems that continue to plague humanity today.

From the perspective of Christian beliefs, it could be concluded that dialogue intrinsically falls within the core of Christian life. Knitter references two pivotal Christian beliefs that make this statement true. Firstly, the God of Abraham did not confine his love to a specific epoch or a group of people, but this God universally reveals his love to all. This means, Knitter concludes, there is “revelatory ‘gold in the hills’ of other religions.”\footnote{Paul F. Knitter, “Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? How?” in Christopher H. Grundmann ed., \textit{Interreligious Dialogue: An Anthology of Voices Bringing Cultural and Religious Divides} (Winona: Anselm Academic, Christian Brothers Publications, 2015), 32.} Secondly, if the entire laws and the teachings of the prophets are encapsulated in the law of love of neighbor, then love requires of Catholic Church to prioritize respect and to listen to non-Christians rather than subjecting them to “doctrinal claims about the finality of Christ and the inadequacy of extra-biblical religion.”\footnote{Knitter, “Interreligious Dialogue,” 32.} Beautifully put: “the ethics of love takes precedence over the doctrine of uniqueness.”\footnote{Ibid.} In fact, interreligious dialogue is the pivotal tool that neutralizes violent division and procures for our world new opportunities and cooperation to find remedies to the problems that confront us today.

1.4. The Complexities and Relatedness of Culture, Religions, and Dialogue

The Christian doctrine of the incarnation of the Word of God explains the relevance of culture. God entered human history, became part of human culture, and communicated his love and salvific event within a human context, culture, and history. This indicates that God permeates all cultures, and the divine is encountered through culture. Religion is not without culture. This section seeks to explain the complexities of culture and its relatedness to religion. It would be argued that today’s Catholicism and Akan Traditional Religion are not without culture. The culture integrated with religious beliefs has been passed down from generation to generation. Thus, an encounter of two religions (Catholicism and Akan Religion) is always an encounter of cultures. This makes intercultural and interreligious dialogue very important.

Defining culture does not seem to be an easy task. From the Latin words *colere* (to cultivate or instruct) and *cultus* (cultivation or training), the complexities of culture have necessitated diverse definitions from many anthropologists and theologians. John S. Mbiti has defined culture as “the human pattern of life in response to man’s environment, ... expressed in physical forms, such as agriculture, arts, technology; in inter-human relations, such as institutions, laws, customs, and in forms of reflection on the total reality of life, such as language, philosophy, religion, spiritual values and world view.” In their quest to arrive at a more comprehensive definition, two American anthropologists, namely Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn in 1952 made a review of the concept of the circulating definitions of about sixty social scientists. After their research, Kroeber and Kluckhohn write the following:

Culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values…

Critical recent definitions of culture portray it primarily as having to do with the mind and only secondarily with behaviors. This shift, even evident in the definition of Kroeber and Kluckhohn, is supported by the belief that culture is a “kind of ‘mental or cognitive map’ that directs people’s interactions with the environment.”

Some anthropologists also connect culture as ideas of observable phenomenon or behavior. Richard Shweder falls under this school of thought when he defines culture as “community-specific ideas about what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient. To be ‘cultural,’ those ideas… must be socially inherited and customary, and they must be constitutive of different ways of life.” Luzbetak is no different from Shweder when he argued that even though culture is hugely embodied in artifacts, concrete behaviors, material objects, rituals, and events, these in themselves are, strictly speaking, not culture. Even though most anthropologists see these as the essential part of the culture, they are only expressions of the “ideational code” or the intrinsic core of culture—including symbols, values, concepts, meanings, beliefs, attitudes, etc. For him, the “ideational code” is the substantive foundation that provides external expressions.

Culture for Luzbetak is “a plan or blueprint…according to which a society is to adapt itself to its physical, social, and ideational environment.” Luzbetak did not fail to add that the ideational codes cannot be disconnected

---


102 Muonwe, *Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration: Inculturation or Syncretism*, 47.

103 Quoted in Muonwe, *Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration: Inculturation or Syncretism*, 47.

104 Ibid., 47-48.

from the people’s reality or practical life.\textsuperscript{106} That is to say that culture expresses both the inner core and the external languages.

The postmodern conception and approach of culture have different tendencies as they lay less emphasis on the homogeneity of culture within communities. Muonwe highlights that postmodern culture seems to “present culture as a well-organized, seamless, and innocuous reality devoid of struggle and tensions.”\textsuperscript{107} He further remarked that such an approach “tends to visualize culture more as a product, thereby undermining the ongoing historical and social process behind cultural formation.”\textsuperscript{108} The cultural shift in the postmodern era rather emphasizes contention, strains, conflicts, power struggles, differences, and fragmentations upon which the culture of a particular community or group of people is shaped and sustained.\textsuperscript{109} In this sense, what becomes the culture of a group of people emerges from the beliefs, assumptions, and customs or traditions that are shaped by the few dominant groups; either members within or strong external forces from outside (foreigners) who have the means and power to dictate the course of history upon the marginalized majority. This is so obvious in the analysis of the culture in Ghana today. Advantageous foreign structural power groups partially or intensely manipulate the Ghanaian cultural views and ideologies in terms of commerce, governance, religion, marriage, etc.

From the above discussion, Muonwe could be right when he affirmed culture as a “way of life of a people, comprising basically learned ideas, symbols, and meanings. It also includes their mode of production and expressions in behavior, arts, languages, and other human capabilities, by which the people can confront the different challenges posed by their

\textsuperscript{106} Luzbetak, \textit{The Church, and Culture}, 48.
\textsuperscript{107} Luzbetak, \textit{The Church, and Culture}, 49.
\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.
environment.”110 Whether ideas are stressed or not, it must be emphasized based on the above discussion that no society can be understood without its culture. Culture becomes the mirror through which a particular society and its people’s way of life and systems are understood. Through culture, society conserves and develops the rich traditions transmitted from one generation to another. The culture of a society forcefully builds up cohesion, stability, meaning, and a sense of purpose as they struggle through the adoption of new ideas and challenging life conditions that confront them.111 Negatively, culture can become a tool of oppression, victimization, and marginalization of a minority group within the society.

A community’s religion or encounter and understanding of God cannot be disconnected from their culture. God reveals himself to a group of people, not outside their own culture. Since culture is the lens through which a group of people within the society visualize realities of life, Christianity (Catholicism), it will be argued in Chapter Three must be open to mutual dialogue and in-depth knowledge of the culture and traditions of Ghanaians for the enhancement of better communication of the gospel message best understood and relevant to the local context.

110 Ibid.
1.5. **Characteristics of Culture**

i. **Culture is a Social Reality**

From the above discussion, culture is seen as a social reality. Individuals or groups of people may use culture differently to suit them. They can make changes in terms of the elements in their culture, but the essential fact is that these changed items and their use are always within the social circle. In his book *Christ and Culture*, Niebuhr writes: “Culture is the social heritage they receive and transmit.”\(^{112}\) Anything that is purely private is not considered part of the culture of a given group of people.\(^ {113}\)

ii. **Culture is a Human Achievement**

Culture, again, is characterized as a *human achievement*.\(^ {114}\) It is differentiated from nature based on the evidence of human purposiveness and effort, Niebuhr noted.\(^ {115}\) It is from nature that human beings craft culture. For instance, sand is nature, but a house built out of sand is culture. The work of the human mind and hands produces culture for the community. Culture, then, is that “portion of man’s heritage in any place or time which has been given as designedly and laboriously by other men, not what has come to us via the meditation of nonhuman beings or through human beings insofar as they have acted without intention of results or without control of the process.”\(^ {116}\) In this sense, we speak of culture to embrace speech, education, tradition, myth, science, art, philosophy, government, law, rite, beliefs, inventions, and technologies.\(^ {117}\) While nature’s gifts are received as they are communicated without any intentionality or consciousness of human effort, the gift of culture cannot be procured without a conscious

---

\(^{113}\) Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture*, 33.
\(^{114}\) Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture*, 33.
\(^{115}\) Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture*, 33.
\(^{116}\) Ibid.
\(^{117}\) Ibid.
striving on the part of the recipient.\textsuperscript{118} Today, we all operate in a world of culture. For instance, the government upon which our nation is run or religious institutions that continuously regulate and direct the ways of worship must be maintained by human efforts.

iii. \textit{Culture is an Organized System of Value.}

Thirdly, Niebuhr identifies that “culture is a world of values.”\textsuperscript{119} That implies that all human inventions and achievements were geared toward some specific end/s.\textsuperscript{120} Culture is crafted for the intended purpose of serving humanity positively. This resonates well with Malinowski’s assertion that culture is “an organized system of purposive activities.”\textsuperscript{121} It must be stated unequivocally that culture cannot be described as devoid of the ends or purposes in the mind of the designers or community to which the culture belongs. For instance, any technological inventions are judged or studied with reference to the end that the inventor intended to serve.

iv. \textit{Culture Predominantly Serves Humanity.}

Related to the fact of culture as a human achievement and a world of good is the point that these values function for the good of humanity.\textsuperscript{122} All the achievements or values of culture serve dominantly the needs of human beings.\textsuperscript{123} All cultures have many purposes, but human beings are the primary or “chief value and the source of all other values.”\textsuperscript{124} What is valuable or good is that which is good for men and women. For instance, communities have worshipped God/gods in their desire to maintain and advance human life and human self-realization. Niebuhr

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
  \item \textsuperscript{118} Niebuhr, \textit{Christ & Culture}, 33.
  \item \textsuperscript{119} Niebuhr, \textit{Christ & Culture}, 34. Italics is from the author.
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} Bronislaw Malinowski, \textit{A Scientific Theory of Culture, and Other Essays} (Chapel Hill, The University of North Carolina Press, 1944) Chapters V and VI.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} Niebuhr, \textit{Christ & Culture}, 35 with minor changes. ‘Man’ is changed to humanity for the sake of gender neutrality or sensitivity.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Niebuhr, \textit{Christ & Culture}, 35.
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
stressed the anthropocentric dimension of culture, that is, culture serves the ‘good-of-man’ but is not an exclusive sort. Human beings labor or produce culture to also “serve causes transcending human existence.”\textsuperscript{125} From the primitive to totemic to modern and postmodern eras, humanity has acknowledged the existence of orders of beings apart from them. Human beings see themselves as the representatives of life, and they identify with the other order of beings.\textsuperscript{126} These orders of beings have been respected by social organization and laws, art, and religion. For instance, Christianity and Akan Traditional Religions have not just identified and acknowledged the order of beings but also served the God/gods all among others, for the good of men and women.

v. \textit{Concerns Temporal and Material Realization of Values}

Niebuhr again identifies culture within all its forms and diversities as concerned with the \textit{“temporal and material realization of values.”}\textsuperscript{127} It is totally out of place to emphasize culture as materialistic to suggest that human beings only labor to procure their needs for their satisfaction as physical and temporal beings. It must be noted that beyond the value of materiality—progeny, food, drink, clothing, etc., human beings, through culture, seek to obtain less tangible values. For instance, by culture, human beings pursue prestige, glory, beauty, truth, and goodness on the one hand and express feeling intellectual vision on the other. Still, all these imaginative values are presented in concrete, tangible, visual, and audible forms.\textsuperscript{128} The perspective of the immateriality of culture cannot but be realized in temporal and material forms.\textsuperscript{129} Again, “the harmony and proportion, the forms, order and rhythm, the meanings that men and women

\textsuperscript{125} Niebuhr, \textit{Christ & Culture}, 35.
\textsuperscript{126} Niebuhr, \textit{Christ & Culture}, 35-36.
\textsuperscript{127} Ibid., 36 italic is from the author.
\textsuperscript{128} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid.
discern from nature, social events and the world of dreams, the vision of order and justice are all brought into the world of materiality through paintings on walls, print on papers or carved on stones or metals, sang in ballad and written down in laws, rites, the structure of government, etc.\(^{130}\) In the world of religions, the perception of the unseen or impalpability is celebrated physically in the rituals and traditions of the believers. For example, the sacraments are the visible or material signs that mediate the immaterial presence of divine grace for humanity according to the faith of Catholicism.\(^{131}\)

vi. *Culture is Pluralistic Reality.*

To speak of culture is also to touch on *pluralism.* Culture has complex values, and no society can even realize all its manifold possibilities. Niebuhr recognizes each culture as made of many “institutions with many goals and interweaving interest.”\(^{132}\) The pluralism of culture emerges from the concerns of males and females, child and adult, rulers and ruled, and those in special vocations and groups. The values individuals seek in their societies, as represented in their institutions, are many. This generates in the community the efforts to hold together in tolerable conflict to conserve many diverse goods. There is always the tension with cultures to “combine peace with prosperity, justice with order, freedom with welfare, truth with beauty, scientific truth with moral good, technical proficiency with practical wisdom, holiness with life and all these with all the rest.”\(^{133}\) Culture is, therefore, not a singular reality but a complex reality colored with plurality.

---

\(^{130}\) Niebuhr, *Christ & Culture*, 36-37.

\(^{131}\) Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) #1131 “The sacraments are efficacious signs of grace, instituted by Christ and entrusted to the Church, by which divine life is dispensed to us. The visible rites by which the sacraments are celebrated signify and make present the graces proper to each sacrament. They bear fruit in those who receive them with the required dispositions.”


The section below connects the complexity of culture and its relatedness to Religion by focusing on Christian Religion (Catholicism) and Akan Traditional Religion by asking to what extent has culture influenced Christianity (Catholicism) and Akan Religion, and what is the major shift that has taken place?

1.6. The Socio-Cultural Influence on Catholicism

Catholicism today is not without culture. Catholicism’s religious practices and traditions have a long-standing historical influence based on the cultural, political, social, and religious worldview of the early centuries of the Greco-Roman and the Western world. The original shape of Christianity has grown out of interculturality. In his book *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Beliefs and World Religions*, Joseph Ratzinger traces the beginning of Christianity, not from Europe but in the Near East, the geographical point where the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe come into contact.134 Pointing out the interculturality of Christianity, Cardinal Ratzinger said … “‘interculturality’ is part of the original shape of Christianity.”135 Christian religion and all religions grew and continue to thrive within a culture.

Catholicism, and for that matter, every religion, does not exist outside a culture. Today, the Catholic traditions have undergone the process of ‘inculturation’ in the Greek and Roman world, followed by ‘inculturation’ in the various cultural expression in the Germanic, Slavic, and Romance peoples.136 As Ratzinger describes, from the classical times through the Middle Ages till postmodernity, Catholicism has gone and is undergoing a rebirth. It was never “simply there as a possession.”137 Ratzinger affirms that the Greek mind, for instance, bequeathed to

---

137 Ibid.
Christianity and, for that matter, Catholicism essential forms of thinking and speaking. Yet, all these happened with a great challenge and resistance: The Christian way of understanding things had to be won from Greek thought at the cost of countless struggles, in which the Greek heritage was appropriated and extensively reshaped.\textsuperscript{138}

The worldview of the First Century influenced the Catholic Church’s theological and practical life. Like most ancient civilizations,\textsuperscript{139} the Roman classicist mindset and perception of culture was “a universal system of values and laws that could be elicited through philosophical reflection and imposed through education.”\textsuperscript{140} The Romans determined their own values in society and exclusively appropriated to themselves true culture. What was meant to be of a true culture was to imbibe the ideas, education, and mannerism that is Roman.\textsuperscript{141} The absence of these was equated to a disadvantaged society of no culture. With this mindset, it was unsurprising that the Romans tactically imposed their cultural ideal on the entire world within their military conquest and corollary expansion of the empire.\textsuperscript{142} The Catholic Church was not exempted from this influence.

Christianity had a major shift in the legal system at the conversion of Constantine (c. 280–337) and with the Edict of Milan in 313. Later under the reign of Theodosius (379-395), Christianity assumed the status of the official religion of the Empire in 380. Adrian Hastings

\textsuperscript{138} Ratzinger calls that process: death and rebirth. For him, “there is ‘Christian Plato,’ but there was always also an ‘anti-Christian Plato.’ Platonism was a solid opposition to Christianity from the time of Plotinus till its latest forms. Since Christianity was influenced by the culture and Greek philosophical deposits of knowledge of the early centuries, Christianity also won itself from some of its Platonic positions incongruous with Christian beliefs but through much resistance. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{139} Hellenization could be mentioned here as an example for which Alexander the Great pushed Greek culture by making it mandatory for all the conquered states to imbibe. Many scholars believe it was a strategy to attain a better government and make administration easier. For further reading, see Peter Green, \textit{Alexander the Great and the Hellenistic Age: A short history} (London: Orion, 2008), 21.


\textsuperscript{141} Muonwe, \textit{Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration: Inculturation or Syncretism}. 28.

contends that Theodosius banned any pagan religions in 391, creating a better atmosphere of a cordial connection between the State and the Church.\textsuperscript{143} The State at this stage was under a religio-political system of governance, and that also saw the Church adopting the culture of the Romans in its worship and traditions.\textsuperscript{144} The Church’s theological understandings and relationship with other nations and religions were shaped by the culture it borrowed from the Greco-Romans.

For instance, Justin Martyr employed Greco-Roman philosophy to explain Christian beliefs concerning the central role of the Holy Spirit in bringing a soul to union with God.\textsuperscript{145} Theologically, the early bishops, Councils, and theologians explicated dogmas and doctrines like the Trinity, the Paschal Mystery, the Real Presence of Christ (Transubstantiation), the Humanity and Divinity of Jesus Christ by resorting to the ancient philosophical and intellectual context of the Greco Roman world. For example, the First Nicene Council (325) adopted the complex and kind of hybrid Greek concept \textit{homoousios} to describe how Jesus is “one in being” or “of the same being” or “of the same substance” as God the Father.\textsuperscript{146} The Post-apostolic Alexandrian leaders and theologians, like Origen and Clement of Alexandria and Ambrose of Milan, and later St. Augustine from the Latin world were educated in Greek Philosophy. Their study of “Platonism and Stoicism” especially St. Augustine, influenced his doctrine of the Holy Trinity.\textsuperscript{147} In the 11th Synod of Toledo (675 A.D.), the dogma that God has three co-equal

\textsuperscript{143} Hasting records that Empire Theodosius did not only make Christianity the official religion of the empire but passed a rule to ban any pagan religions around 391. See Adrian Hastings, “150-550,” in A World History of the Church, ed., Adrian Hastings (Grand Rapids, MI: EERDMANS, 1999), 36.

\textsuperscript{144} Shorter, \textit{Towards a Theology of Inculturation}, 18. See also Muonwe, \textit{Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration: Inculturation or Syncretism} 28-29.


\textsuperscript{147} “Trinity doctrine, that is, the teaching that God has three co-equal persons was declared only at the 11th Synod of Toledo in 675 A.D., more than 500 years after the Bible had been written. Read more in \textit{Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma}, 4\textsuperscript{th} edition. (Rockford, IL: Tan Books, 2013), 53.
persons was declared more than 500 years after the Bible had been written through the definition and argument of St Augustine, who is known intellectually as representing the most influential adaptation of the ancient Platonic tradition with Christian or Catholic idea that took place in the Latin Christian world.

From the Sixth Century BCE on, the Greco-Roman tradition served as the dominant religious and philosophical system of the Western world until about the Fifth Century CE. The influence of the West on the culture and practices of Catholicism cannot be overstated. The Western culture and its interrelatedness to Catholicism bring forth the complexities of the reality at hand. It is hard to completely perceive the gospel message as devoid of culture and mostly seen from the western perspective. Kwame Bediako of Ghana may be right in saying:

Christianity itself has emerged historically as part of the cultural impact of the West on the rest of the world...we ought to dissociate the Christian Gospel from the trappings of western culture. But the interrelation of Gospel and human culture is a complex one; the Gospel can only be perceived by us in some cultural form or other—a pure Gospel devoid of cultural embodiment is simply imaginary. The trouble is that we all wear cultural blinkers, and whilst we may affirm an absolute Gospel and accept the relativity of our diverse cultures, each of us fails to perceive some important facets of the one Gospel.

Again, Robert J Schreiter also points out that “the imagery of Christian eschatology, angelology, and demonology” is not disconnected from “the Persian influences upon Judaism.” Just like any other religion, Christianity, and for that matter, Catholicism has a “long history of absorbing elements (syncretism) from the cultures in which it has lived.” The above, (to be

---

148 Ibid.
discussed extensively in chapter three) gives an indication that the Christian faith has always been in direct link with the cultures it encountered, and through that same culture, the faith was made intelligible. Religion and culture are therefore connected. There is, therefore, the need for a dialogue of cultures when two religions encounter each other. The Second section of this chapter focuses extensively on Akan Religion and its connectivity with Akan culture.

1.7. Brief Overview of Akan Traditional Culture and Religion

This section highlights Akan Religion and how it is interwoven into Akan socio-cultural structures. The broader scope would be looked at under the following subtopics: Who are the Akan people, what is the worldview that shapes the Akan culture and religion, what is the core of the Akan religion, and lastly, where are these beliefs and traditions identified in the Akan social-cultural structure?

1.8. The Akan People of Ghana: Origin and Cultural Structures

The Akan people of modern Ghana constitute the largest homogenous ethnic group who inhabit the tropical rainforest area that lies approximately within the Atlantic seaboard in the South. ¹⁵³ Most Akans live in Ghana, where they settled in successive waves of migration between the 11th and 18th Centuries. The other Akan groups inhabited the eastern part of Cote D’Ivoire bordering Ghana on the West and parts of Togo bordering the East of Ghana. There are divergent accounts of the origin of the Akan subgroups. The historical account and the oral tradition hold that modern Ghana has its ancestral root from Western Sudan (the region north of Ghana drained by the river Niger). ¹⁵⁴ According to Kuada and Chachah, the Akan people first migrated from the

Chad-Benue regions of Western Sudan. They settled in the forest regions at the confluence of Ghana's Prah and Offin rivers in the 11th Century. B. Crayner said the Akan migration from Western Sudan was necessitated by repeated wars and the pressure of conversion to Islam. After settling at Techiman, some moved to various settlements. Another divergent view from Fynn traces the ancestral root of the Akan from the grassland areas of north-western Ghana and the north-eastern Cote D’Ivoire. Gradually, they formed a strong kingdom of Bono-Manso-Banda when they had settled in Akan-Man-mu. As they numerically experienced an exponential increase, some of the Akan people migrated to the forest regions of Ghana while others headed southward to the coastal region.

The subgroups of the Akans in Ghana include the Nzima, Anyin, Sefwi, Asante, Fante, Akuapem, Akwamu, Akyem, Agona, Wassu, Bono, and Ahanta. These subgroups have spiritual, cultural, economic, and social attributes in common. They also share common features of the succession to high political office, tracing of descent, and property inheritance. Linguistically, the Akan subgroups can be categorized into three major dialect clusters: The Twi and Fante speaking subgroups located in the southern belt of Ghana; the Baule and Agni speaking groups in the Cote D’Ivoire and south-western Ghana; and lastly, those who speak Guan, located in Middle Ghana and scattered along the coast of Ghana in Fanteland. Despite the diversity of dialects


Ibid., 8.

among the subgroups, the Twi language is comprehensible or spoken by almost all of them. Similarly, the dialect of the other subgroups is generally intelligible to the other Twi speakers.\textsuperscript{160}

The Akan people of Ghana are characteristically featured to belong to two clans: the \textit{Abusua} and the \textit{Nton}.\textsuperscript{161} \textit{Abusua} is the basic social unit for the Akans, which is equivalent to the European understanding of family but with different constituent parts. For instance, when a married woman has offspring, the husband is not a member of the \textit{Abusua} because it is taboo in the Akan subgroups for members of the same \textit{Abusua} to enter traditional Akan marriage.\textsuperscript{162} The effect of the constitution of the \textit{Abusua} ensures that land, properties, and positions of political authority are passed on to the descendants of the matriarch. Among the Akan subgroups, there are eight central \textit{Abusua} units,\textsuperscript{163} exclusively composed of the descendants of the female members, thus making the Akan \textit{Abusua} a matrilineal ancestry system.\textsuperscript{164}

The \textit{Nton} is the other clan of the Akans, which has no equivalence in any other culture. There are nine major \textit{Nton} clans; every Akan belongs to one. Unlike the \textit{Abusua}, the Akan child takes the \textit{Nton} of their father, but only the male child can pass it on to his children. The \textit{Nton}, unlike \textit{Abusua}, is spiritually significant. It is the source of the \textit{Okra} (soul) in every person.\textsuperscript{165} Members of a specific \textit{Nton} are forbidden to eat certain food (\textit{akyiwade}). The refusal to abstain from these \textit{akyiwade} leads to sickness, demanding a ritual cleansing called \textit{akradware} or \textit{afodie} to pacify and cleanse the \textit{Okra} (soul).

\textsuperscript{160} Kofi Bempah, \textit{Akan Traditional Religion: The Myths and the Truth}, 7.
\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{162} For more information, read Bempah, \textit{Akan Traditional Religion: The Myth and the Truth}, 8-9.
\textsuperscript{163} The different \textit{Abusua} are the Agona (parrot), the Aduana (dog), the Asekie (bat), Oyoko (falcon/hawk), the Asakyiri (vulture), the Asona (crow), the Bretuo (Leopard), and the Ekuona (bull). https://dbpedia.org/page/Abusua Accessed on March 15, 2022.
\textsuperscript{164} Bempah, \textit{Akan Traditional Religion: The Myth and the Truth}, 11.
\textsuperscript{165} Ibid., 12-13.
In his book *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, Peter Sarpong elaborated on some fundamental cultural and religious beliefs of the Akan subgroups in Ghana woven in their worldview. To discuss the Akan religion, it is important to elaborate on their cultural worldview within which their religion is intrinsically connected. The section below discusses the religio-cultural worldview of the Akan people of Ghana.

1.9. The Akan Religion and Cultural Worldview in Ghana

The spiritual knowledge developed by each country is essential for it. This should not be underrated. According to its historical circumstances and the requirements of the place and the time, each country develops its store of spiritual knowledge. No one has the right to criticize it. Each country evolves its own code of righteousness and its corpus of knowledge and culture based on its conditions and needs and this is the proof of its validity. Each system of spiritual knowledge, however, is designed to promote human personality.

Sri.Sathya.Sai.Baba

Like all Africans throughout the ages, the Akans have been preoccupied with the long-lasting questions: who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going when this earthly life ends? As the Akan people confront the material universe around them, they begin to discover that it is the handiwork of a Being or Power. This curiosity grew in search of that greater Being and tries to relink, thus the beginning of Akan spirituality and religion. Sri Sathya Sai Baba describes religion as consisting of two parts: From the Latin root ‘‘re’’(‘again’) and ‘ligere’, (‘to come together’ or ‘unite’). Religion, therefore, means ‘to unite with God’ or ‘coming together again’ with God. It is not, as people assume, a bundle of doctrines, rituals, and rigorous dos and don’ts. The sacred aim of religion is to remind people of their divine origin and lead them back to God.”

Akan Traditional Religion is no exception. In their bid to relink to the supreme power, the Akan families developed their ways of life with a religious foundation. Akan spirituality and religion are defined as:

---

the totality of rituals, beliefs, practices, and behaviour patterns perfected by a community of people throughout the passage of time, to get in touch with, not only the Ultimate source of energy, but also, the various multiplicity of energy configurations which include themselves, water, plants, animals, the Sun, the Moon, air, etc. For the Akan, the goal, the prize at the end of these endeavors, is to reconnect himself with his power source, his own reality—

Nyame.167

Kofi Bempah adds that any definition lacking the essential elements above deviates from a comprehensive description of the Akan spirituality and religious ideas, values, and the meaning of their practices and rituals.168 For the Akans, their religion is not separated from their culture and daily life; thus, a wide-ranging grasp of the Akan worldview will give a broader and deeper understanding of the Akan Religion.

In his application of the word “Weltanschauung” (worldview) as the basic tenet of his philosophy, Wilhelm Dilthey, described it as a complex of ideas and sentiments. Using the idea of Dilthey as his foundation, Hodges intimates that these ideas and sentiments involve:

(a) beliefs and convictions about the nature of life and the world; (b) emotional habits and tendencies based on these, and (c) a system of purposes, preferences, and principles governing action and giving life unity and meaning. The Weltanschauung of a person or a society includes that person’s or society’s answer to the fundamental questions of destiny which Dilthey calls riddle of life.169

The Akan worldview expresses the fundamental principles that govern their actions and provide life and meaning to their sentiments and all that is around them. The basis of Akans’ worldview is determined by their concept of “onipa” (human being) and its relatedness with the Creator, creatures, health, sickness, and death. The Akan understands onipa or the human person as “both

168 Ibid. 14.
a biological and a spiritual being.”170 From this background, the Akans have defined the human person not in “purely secular or purely religious terms, since he is both at once.”171 The sacred is imbued in everyday life; fiscal concerns, emotional well-being, spiritual developments, and material realities are all interconnected and interdependent on one another. This definition, by extension, means that “there is only one world, which is not first profane and then religious, but both in one,” Bénézet Bujo affirms.172 When one of these two dimensions, sacred and secular, is lacking, the Akans cannot speak of the “human person qua human person.”173 From this sense, Bujo writes broadly of the African worldview; we cannot talk of “autonomy” and “theonomy” from the strict sense of the West within the African (Akan) worldview of the harmony between the sacred and the profane.174 The broader religio-cultural worldview of the Akans centers on the life and the community whose culture is guided by a religious norm.175 Since the human person is both a biological and spiritual being, the Akan worldview of life is not just a secular (material) one but also sacred (spiritual). This perspective of life makes the Akans endeavor toward ensuring a perfect balance or harmony between the sacred and the secular; forming a unified community 176 that embodies humans, Nyame (God), ancestors, spirits and the unborn. Douglas speaks of the African context or rather the Akan worldview as follows:

Reduced to essentials, their worldview, their vision of the world, is a unifying factor, because it does not imply any clear-cut difference between the profane and sacred, between matter and spirit. In its view the living and the dead, the visible

---

174 Ibid.
176 In the life and thought of the traditional Akan people and, for that matter, other African peoples, the division of the sacred and secular is for convenience because these two worlds are paradoxically one inseparable entity. The secular cannot exist independently of the sacred and vice versa. The ‘two worlds’ must unite permanently to become meaningful for the Akans.
cosmos and the invisible world merely constitute one and the same universe, and the antinomies of good and evil, life and death, which spring from antagonisms inherent in existing beings do not vitiate the unity of this world-vision.  

The Akan subgroups also recognize other impersonal or non-moral forces which manifest their presence and effects in the working of magic, witchcraft, and sorcery. The Akan people, from the religious perspective, also recognize the land, forest, water bodies, and certain animals as possessing spiritual energies. This explains their reverential attitude and relationship with these bodies. The Akans offer prayers and sacrifices and perform rituals before utilizing them. For instance, prayers and rituals are conducted before the cultivation of the land, and a thanksgiving ritual is offered at the first harvest. All these entities form one cultic configuration and can positively or negatively influence human life.

The Akan culture and religion arrange these spiritual entities in a hierarchical order within this larger configuration. Rattray affirms that the Supreme Being (Nyame) presides over this hierarchy. Akans’ worldview, therefore, creates a relational network and connectivity between the individual, nature, visible and invisible to form a broader community that is not only anthropological but also cosmic and theocentric. There is a reciprocal relationship that treats the dignity and rights of individuals, the cosmic, and the entire community as one basic component. This worldview is not just abstract but a lived communal experience emanating from a proper balance between humans, and spirit powers, including even the unborn. Osuji expresses this

---

179 I grew up to see my grandfather pouring libation before the land for cultivation in the year. I was thrilled. Likewise, for a bumper harvest, a sacrifice of a goat was offered in thanksgiving. The name given to the earth (Asaase Yaa) depicts that the earth is a goddess/mother that cares and feeds their children, who are the inhabitants.
180 Rattray R. S., Ashanti (London: Oxford University Press, 1923)
181 Kwasi Wiredu, a Ghanaian philosopher, said the African responsibility to the unborn is more superior than others. He writes: “Of all the duties owed to the ancestors, none is more imperious than that of husbanding the resources of the land to leave it in good shape for posterity. In this moral scheme, the right of the unborn play such a
worldview in these words: “An interdependent existence among the earth, its fauna, flora, human and nonhuman, animal, the gods, and the spirits, as well as the ancestors (i.e., the living dead) and the unborn.”182 The interdependent web of life among the spirit, nature, and humanity in the Akan tradition suggests a religio-cultural life in which any human action affects the chain of connectivity either positively or negatively. Stressing the interdependent web of life of the sacred and the profane for Africans and, for that matter Akans, Laurenti Magesa quotes Baudin, who observed that, “nothing moves in this universe of forces without influencing other forces by its movement. The world of forces is held like a spider’s web of which no single thread can be caused to vibrate without shaking the whole network.”183 Magesa further opined that “…the notion of being-together is intended to emphasize that life is the actuality of living in the present together with people, other creatures and the earth.”184 The well-being of humanity is dependent on the interrelatedness of nature and the world beyond physicality. All activities in the secular sphere of the Akan are meant to connect them to the world beyond the tangible.

Furthermore, the Akans understand their central worldview of life and community to mean a “social arrangement where the community is not conceived as a mere association or a sum total of isolated individuals, but as a unity in which the individual members of the sacred and the profane world are linked by interdependent relationships, sharing common values and working towards common goals.”185 The Akan society works to ensure solidarity or mutual dependence and cooperation among humans, God, gods, the ancestors, and nature. Thus, the physical world is not

---

184 Magesa, African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life, 64.
only profane but also sacred. From this sense, the Akan’s religio-cultural activities like sacrifices, libation pouring, festivals, closeness to nature, celebrations of the various rites of passage of life, etc., are all meant to affirm and strengthen the communion among the individuals and the unseen members of the community.

The above worldview, the Akan religio-cultural and socio-political, economic, and ethical structures are arranged to enable every member of the community to realize the onerous responsibility to connect their ordinary secular life with the spiritual for the realization of total well-being or salvific vision of the creator (Nyame) which is the ultimate goal of humans.186 Since religious understanding is not separated from all facets of Akan life, Opoku writes of the Akans: “religion is life and life, religion.”187 From the same dimension, Mbiti describes the Sub-Sharan Africans and, by extension, Akans as “notoriously” religious,188 and Parrinder also describes Africans as, “incurably religious.”189 The Akans’ indigenous deep knowledge and wisdom of their ways of life with solid religious underpinnings cannot be overlooked. Neglecting that fact leads to a misinterpretation and misunderstanding of the Akan culture and religion. From this worldview, the subsequent section will reflect on the nature of the Akan Traditional Religion and how to identify the core tenets within the socio-cultural structures.

189 Geoffrey Parrinder, Religion in Africa (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969), 235. In the sixties and early seventies, the notion widely supported by African theologians and anthropologists that Africans are incurably religious was challenged by Okot p’Bitek. He is the first African scholar of religion to have challenged this myth. In 1985, Jean-Marc Ela suggested that this 'pretension' ought, perhaps, to be 'demystified.' He was the first to have made such a suggestion. See Eloi Messi Metogo, Dieu peut-il mourir en Afrique? Essai sur l'indifférence religieuse et l'incroyance en Afrique noir (Paris: Karthala; Yaoundd: Presses de l’UCAC, 1997), 8-9.
1.10. Nature of Akan Religion: Identification of the Akan Religion Within the Socio-Culture Structure

The Akan Religion is part and parcel of the historical, cultural, and religious African heritage, which travels back hundreds and thousands of years. Akan Religion emanates from the thinking and experiences of the forefathers and mothers that have been handed down to the current generation. Through their relationship with God, spirits, humans, and the universe, the Akan subgroups formed religious ideas, formulated religious beliefs, performed religious ceremonies and rituals, told proverbs and myths with religious imports and devised laws and customs to safeguard the life of humanity and their harmony with the bodies of the unseen sphere of life. This makes the culture or heritage of the Akans intrinsically united with the religious perspectives of the people. Akan religion has been for the indigenes the normal way of looking at the universe and experiencing life itself.

Akan Religion is a way of life. It is integrated so much in the Akan ordinary life that all human activities have a religious undertone. The Akans’ religious ideas and beliefs permeate all aspects of life within the cycles of birth and death. The religion is taught informally to future generations through everyday conversations, proverbs, myths, rituals, and practices. The young generation learns through conscious participation in religious activities such as festivals, rituals, pouring of libation, etc. Akan Religion has a higher concentration on the community than the individual. Religious ceremonies are performed mainly by the community population or a group of family members, or a group of people with one common interest. Individuals in the community hardly reject participation in the community’s religious ceremonies because such an

---

191 This does not mean that individuals cannot perform certain rituals for their own needs.
attitude is tantamount to ostracization. Such an individual automatically alienates himself/herself from the total life of the people.\textsuperscript{192}

Concerning the founder and sacred scripture, Akan Traditional Religion has no specific founder compared to Christianity and Islam. The religion slowly evolved through many centuries as the Akan people reflected and responded to the diverse manifestations of the unseen sacred powers, the universe and life experiences. Mbiti, speaking from the broader perspective of African Religion and its evolution, said that many factors must have contributed to it. African religion, the geographical environment including mountains, rivers, deserts and forests, the change of seasons, powers of nature (such as earthquakes, thunderstorms and volcanoes), calamities, epidemics, diseases, birth and death, major historical events like war, locust invasions, famines, migrations have all contributed to the formulation of the African Religion and for that matter Akan religion.\textsuperscript{193} Again, the deep contemplation of the Akan people on the universe, the origins and the end of humanity, the problem of evil and suffering, healing and magical powers also greatly influenced the Akans’ religious beliefs and practices.

As the Akans probed to find answers to the immensity of the wonders around them and procure solutions to their predicaments, religious ideas and practices arose. Then rituals and ceremonies to celebrate and mediate these religious energies were formulated. In times, those irrelevant or inadequate practices to mediate the answers to their life’s issues were abandoned or replaced by potent ones. The Akan subgroup’s encounter with other tribes in Ghana and Africans within the sub-Saharan regions introduced them to some religious ideas and practices that were borrowed and adapted to suit their religio-cultural needs.\textsuperscript{194}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{192} Mbiti, \textit{Introduction to African Religion}, 15.
\textsuperscript{193} Mbiti, \textit{Introduction to African Religion}, 16.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}
Akan Religion or rather, African Traditional Religion unlike the Abrahamic religions, has failed to travel faster to other continents. Mbiti speaks in this respect in these words: “just as there were no founders of African religion, there have been no reformers, preachers or missionaries to change it, improve it, or take it overseas to other continents.” Over the years, religious changes in the Akan Religion have emerged through the intermingling of people and natural necessities since the religion is open to new ideas that are not detrimental to the Akan religio-cultural understanding of the harmony between the sacred and the secular.

Akan Religion does not have an official and authoritative written scripture like the Bible for Christians and Quran and Hadith for Islam. The beliefs, moral values, rituals, and practices are woven and entrenched in the history, hearts, and experiences of the daily lifestyle of the indigenous people. Oral tradition has been the mode of transmission of the beliefs and practices of the religion with the chiefs, queen mothers, and elders as the custodians. The absence of a written document makes it difficult to speak to the originality or pureness of the Akan Religion at any point in history. This is because there is no scripture or authoritative body like the Magisterium of the Catholic Church to define what is original or an aberration of the Akan religious practices. That notwithstanding, the Akan religion has stood the test of time.

In conclusion, the Akan Religion belongs to the indigenous Akan subgroups with much diversity. The religion provides a sense of security by providing believers with a religious and cultural identity. It offers them the guidelines to act in different circumstances and solve their life problems. Akan Religion has five essential parts of all religions: Beliefs and practices,

195 Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 16. This does not imply the African traditional religion has not influenced life outside the continent. For instance, the major influence of African Traditional religious philosophy and spirituality in the religious practices of the Creole people of Louisiana; voodoo practices in Haiti; African spirituality in Brazil; spirituality and religions in the entire Caribbean society, and wherever you find Black people in the World has been awesome.
196 Ibid., 17.
197 Ibid.
cere monies and festivals, religious objects and places, values and morals, and religious officials or leaders.  

With a brief explanation of the nature of the Akan Religion, the following section below expands on the core tenets that distinguish the religion from others.

1.11. Some Core Tenets of the Akan Religion

From the broader religio-cultural worldview described above, the Akans believe that behind the visible is the invisible, and all the happenings in the material world are not by chance. The spiritual beings have much influence on the occurrences in the physical realm. They are believed to be hierarchical. Although Parrinder and Asare Opoku disagree on the hierarchical arrangements of the spirit powers, most scholars, notably Rattray and Williamson, vehemently share the same view that the spirit powers are hierarchical. Parrinder has the following hierarchical order of the spirits: The Supreme God (Nyame), the deities (abosom), ancestral spirits (nananom nsamanfo), and the lower spirit powers (amulets and talisman), which are worn around the waist, asuman, a force believed to be obtained from small forest beings (mmoatia) with feet facing backward, witches and wizards and the use of magic. Below is a brief description of the beliefs of the Akan people from the hierarchical orientation which follows the arrangement of Parrinder.

---

198 Ibid., 11-13.
a. The Supreme Being

In his book “People Differ: An Approach to Inculturation in Evangelization,” Peter Sarpong presents the Akans religious world in an equilateral triangular shape. At the apex of the triangle is the Supreme Being, on one side are the divinities, and on the other, the ancestors and lastly, at the base of the triangle are the other aspects which include morality, witchcraft, sorcery, taboo, totemism, medicine, mystical beings and forces, etc. According to Peter Sarpong, Akan religious thought is essentially theocentric and theistic. God is at the center of the religio-cultural structures of the Akan people. The Akan subgroups believe in one eternal, invisible supreme deity regarded as far greater than any other being. Their approach to God is practical or concrete though God is a spiritual being. God’s existence is known by all, including, they believe, even a child. The Asanti proverb depicts this: Obi nkyere akwadaa Nyame (literally, nobody teaches or shows God to a child). Though the Akans have different names, Sarpong noted that the qualities attributed to that Supreme Being are identical. Names used in reference to the Supreme Being include Onyame, Nyame, Nyankopon Kwame, Odomankoma, Totrobonsu, Twediampon, etc. Akan people’s belief in the Supreme Being has permeated their daily lives. The Akan languages, symbols, rituals, and practices are full of expressions of the presence of God. Writing about the Ashantes, Rattray reports that he found Nyame Dua (God’s Tree) in almost every compound of an Ashanti village he visited. It is a three forked branch set upright in the ground with a bowl resting on it. This served as an altar for the presence of the Supreme Being (Onyame) in the family.

205 Sarpong, People Differ: An Approach to Inculturation in Evangelization, 94-95.
207 Sarpong, Ghana in Retrospect, 9.
208 Rattray, Ashanti, 139-42.
Nyame is known to be the creator of everything, visible and invisible, thus the attribute Oboadee (creator) and Asaase Wura (owner of the earth). The various attributes ascribed to this deity is inexhaustible and infinite hence the statement that “the Supreme Deity has no name but answers to all names.” The Supreme Deity is formless. This explains why there is no picture, image, or sculpture depicting God in the Akan worship. This formless Supreme Deity is everywhere. The Akans believe that their object of worship is both immanent and transcendent to his creation because omnipresence is possible only if what is present in the macro is also present in the micro at the same time, all the time. The Supreme Deity fills the universe, beyond it, and nothing is ever outside his reach. He is magnanimous, holy, and hates evil. All happenings and phenomena of significant national and tribal consequences are attributed to Nyame. He is behind the shining of the Sun, the rains, epidemics, plagues, famine, drought, and unusual waves of death. He is believed to be active in the lives of humanity. In short, the Supreme Deity, Nyame, is the creator, provider, and sustainer of his creation.

The Akans depict their belief in the Supreme Being as the creator in a myth. Opoku recounts the myth as, Nyame first created the sky, followed by the creation of the earth, rivers, and plants in that order. Finally, he created man and animals. The animals used the plants as food and subsequently served as food for human beings. Consequently, humanity also needed protection in their environment and to satisfy the quest for protection, the Supreme Deity created the spirits of the waters, forests, and rocks. The Akans believe everything was created in order and devoid of confusion. Furthermore, everything was created for a purpose. God is regarded as

---

210 Ibid.
211 Sarpong, Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture, 11.
the highest among the pantheon of spirits and as such, must be approached directly without any intermediary, Opoku affirms.\textsuperscript{213}

**b. Lesser/Minor Gods**

The next in the hierarchy is the lesser gods. The Akans term their minor deities as *abosom*. The *abosom* are believed to be the children of the Supreme God and assigned by the supreme being with respective jobs. According to Peter Sarpong, it is not easy to determine the precise nature of these gods, but a few certain facts include the point that they are spirits and never became humans.\textsuperscript{214} They are also God’s creations who have their earthly abode in anything from natural objects like water (*nsuobosom*), rocks and caves (*bosombo*), and houses (*fiebosom*). The lesser gods may also be domiciled in man-made shrines.\textsuperscript{215} They can be male or female, but their influence and potency are independent of their sexes. The various deities have their area of competence, such as agriculture, morality, fertility, and wealth.\textsuperscript{216} While some deities are potent in healing, barrenness, and impotency, others combat the negative influence of witches on individuals or the entire community.\textsuperscript{217} These deities demand worship and obedience from human beings and the default of which results in the punishment inflicted on the individual or community.\textsuperscript{218} To appease the gods, human beings offer wine, rams, goats, fowls, etc. as a sacrifice for the community’s general well-being.\textsuperscript{219} Again, these gods possess powers above

\textsuperscript{217} Eshun, “Religion and Nature in Akan Culture.”
human beings and desist any human activity that disrupts community harmony or family life. The gods visit those who perpetrate such characters with punishment.\footnote{Opoku, \textit{West African Traditional Religion}, 156.} Opoku also mentioned that the lesser deities are “means to an end and not an end in themselves” because God created them to accomplish specific tasks.\footnote{Ibid., 54.} They are supposed to be the intermediary between humanity and the ancestors to communicate the ancestors' wishes to the living and to make known how the living could pacify the ancestors.\footnote{Sarpong, \textit{Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture}, 17.}

c. The Ancestors

“Ancestor spirits” are the spirits of the dead who have departed from the land of the living and dwelling in \textit{asamando} (the land of the dead). The Akan subgroups have a special place for the “ancestors.” Ancestors occupy a unique position in the realm of the spirits. According to Sarpong, the ancestors' beliefs and acts of veneration are not peculiar to a particular age, religion, or society. It is as old as the world.\footnote{Sarpong compares the Akan understanding of ancestors with saints (those who have passed on marked with the sign of holiness and are enjoying eternal bliss with the creator) of Christianity and Muslim’s belief in Mohammed and a host of others whose name they impose on them. When Christians call their dead people saints and refer to pagans as ancestors, Sarpong argues they are not expressing any different ideas. Saints and ancestors have the same connotation: They belong to their religious family and are dead, and are supposed to have more significant influence over the living. See Sarpong, \textit{Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture}, 33.} Parrinder speaks of the ancestors as spirits connected to the living. They are not so far away and are believed to be watching over their families like a “cloud of witnesses.”\footnote{Geoffrey Parrinder, \textit{African Traditional Religion} (London: S.P.C.K, 1962), 58.} Ancestors have influence over the living. They serve as intermediaries. According to Danquah, the ancestors play intermediary role by acting as friends at the court to intervene between the living and the Supreme Being and get prayers and supplications answered more quickly and effectively.\footnote{J.B. Danquah (1963) “Religion in the Ghanaian Society.” Paper presented at the Student Christian Movement Conference, Aburi, Ghana.} As intermediaries between God and
human beings, the Akans channel their petitions to God through the ancestors in the prayerful rites of libation.

Peter Kwesi Sarpong rejects the misconception that the ancestors are objects of worship. The Akan people venerate them because they are not the ultimate spiritual power in the hierarchy.226 Again, the Akans perceive their ancestors to be watching the behavior of family members and the entire community to either punish and reward those who infringe or keep to the land's customs and laws.227 Busia has this to say:

The ancestors are believed to be the custodians of the laws and customs of the tribe. They punish with sickness or misfortune those who infringe them… Constantly before the Ashanti and serving to regulate his conduct is the thought that his ancestors are watching and that one day, when he rejoins them in the world of spirits, they will ask him to give an account of his conduct, especially of his conduct towards his kinsmen.228

As part of the philosophy and religious beliefs among the Akan subgroups, ancestorship is not automatically attained by every dead person. Some conditions qualify the deceased person to be venerated as an ancestor. Some of these include the following:

a. **Dying as an Adult and with Children**

To qualify as an ancestor among the Akans, the person must die as an adult and with children. Adulthood here is not determined by age but by marital status. For instance, among the Ashantes, Peter Sarpong noted that an adult is defined by a person’s marital status. A teenager who marries at the age of fifteen (15) is considered an adult as against a sixty (60) year-old man who remains a bachelor.”229 An unmarried man is disqualified because he refused to contribute to the

---

229 Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture*, 34. It is common among the Wassa people to speak of a responsible or older adult about a married person irrespective of age. Aside from marriage, if a young unmarried man is enstooled as the chief or leader of the community, he is considered an adult. This may explain
numerical strength of the community or propagate the family name. Childbirth is necessary to continue the family’s name and expansion of the community.

b. Exemplary Life for the Next Generation.

The dead person must have led a life worthy of emulation to become an ancestor. Within the Akan societies, no one wants to remember the deceased man or woman who left behind any reproachable life examples. For instance, to be associated with theft, murder, rape, strife, and discord or disrespect in the community disqualifies a dead person from being called an ancestor.

c. Natural Death and Old Age

Another criterion to qualify a dead person as an ancestor is naturally dying at a good “ripe age.” Anyone who dies through diseases such as leprosy, epilepsy, and smallpox is disqualified as an ancestor. Similarly, when your life is truncated because of drowning, being accused of witchcraft, and being accidentally shot disqualifies a departed adult from being called an ancestor.  

d. Burial and Funeral Rites

A proper funeral rite and well-organized burial for the dead person is a qualification to ancestorship. Death, the final life crisis, continues to be a mystery to the Akan subgroups. Still, Akan philosophies and religion seem to have been entirely accepted as the channel to transition a soul beyond the physical world. As a result of the mystery surrounding it, the Akan tribes have theories and beliefs about mortuary rites and their significance. The fact of ancestor cult begins with funerals which must be such as to make for timely dispatch of a deceased into

---

why the Akans (Wassa, Asantes, etc.) have stool wives to ensure their chiefs are always married. For example, a boy of fifteen years of age can become the chief and be married to a woman of thirty years or more as a stool wife.

230 Sarpong, People Differ: An Approach to Inculturation in Evangelization, 98.

the world of the ancestors. The committal ceremony is solemn or frantic, depending on the
caliber of the person within the society. The burial of a man who lived well or of a great
substance is grand. A week after the burial of a deceased adult, he is remembered, and
arrangements are made for a forty-day ceremony and funeral.232

d. Morality and Values

At the base in the hierarchy of Akan religious beliefs are morality, witchcraft, sorcery,
taboo, totemism, medicine, mystical beings, and forces, etc.233 This part of the Akan religion is
meant to safeguard the relationality and community life that holds all the members and the world
around them together. The scope of Akan values and morals is wide, covering topics like truth,
justice, love, right and wrong, good and evil, beauty, decency, respect for individuals,
hospitality, reward, and punishment, praise and shame, rights and responsibilities, integrity,
character and dignity, peace, and tranquility, generosity, compassion, and empathy, etc.234 All
these values and morals are infused in the ordinary daily life of the Akan. These values and
morals are not practiced in isolation but are intrinsically linked to the secular and sacred
relationship. Good morals connect one to the sacred bodies with positive energies, which
position a person to receive blessings. On the contrary, vices incur punishment from the sacred
deities, i.e., spirits and ancestors.

As part of the religio-cultural belief system of the Akans, it is essential to affirm that the
above tenets of the Akans do not stand in isolation. Instead, they are woven into the Akan
culture's ordinary and daily activities and life patterns. To identify and study the beliefs of the

Akans, the researcher must pay attention to the rituals, ceremonies, festivals, shrines, sacred places and objects, proverbs, riddles, myths, legends, and customs. The section below expands on the various areas of the Akan culture within which the Akan religion could be identified and studied.

1.12 Identifying the Akan Religion within the Religio-Cultural Structure

As already indicated above, the Akan Religion is not codified in a book as compared to the Bible or Quran, which are authoritative sacred texts for Christians and Muslims. This segment outlines the core of the Akan Religion inherently woven within the Akan heritage and socio-cultural fiber of the indigenous society. The Akan people express their sense of religion and cultural beliefs in the following:

a. Rituals, Ceremonies, and Festivals

Akan, or African Traditional Religion, expresses its rich religious beliefs mentioned above in rituals, ceremonies, and festival celebrations. For the Akans, all the various stages of life are culturally celebrated but with a deep religious undertone and significance. From childhood through puberty, adulthood to old age, and even at death, the Akans celebrate every event but are not disconnected from their beliefs in God, divinities, ancestors, and community life (both seen and unseen). For instance, birth, child naming, circumcision, and other ceremonies like marriage, harvest festivals, and funerals are celebrated with religious significance. These celebrations go beyond the individual. They either involve the family or the entire community. The Akans exhibit deep religious meanings and perpetuate their religious beliefs to the next generation in all ceremonies, festivals, and the performance of rituals on these occasions.

For example, at naming ceremonies and festivals, the rituals that are performed depict the religiosity of the Akans. A child is named on the eighth day after birth. This is because every
soul is considered a gift from the spiritual or the community of the ancestral world. When a child spends the first eight days on earth without returning, it is a symbolic gesture that it has come to stay with the physical community. During the naming ceremony, a libation prayer is offered to invoke the presence of the Supreme Being (Nyame), the gods, ancestors, and all the relatives in the spirit world. The living expresses appreciation in their prayers to the sacred powers for the gift of a new child and, in turn, ask for their protection and blessings upon the child. Among some tribes, the child is lowered for the first time to touch Mother Earth (Asase Yaa) with the feet three times. This symbolism is meant to connect the child to “Mother Earth,” upon which the baby will walk and derive its livelihood.

Festivals are great occasions to identify the religiosity of the Akan communities. Festivals have the symbolic power of always manifesting the relationship between the dramatic substance of rituals and ceremonies and the religious power of humanity (Akan) and the gods of the unseen world at those celebrations. The quote of Ogbaa from the narration of Chinua Achebe’s novel, ‘Arrow of God’ speaks perfectly of what transpires during African or Akan festivals:

The festivals thus brought gods and men together in one crowd. It was the only assembly in Umuaro in which a man might look to his right and find his neighbor and look to his left and see a god standing there.

During festival ceremonies and rituals, sacrifices of food and animals are offered to the gods and ancestors because they are present. All the rituals at this occasion depict the profound ancient religious belief or theology handed down from one generation to another. The chiefs, queens, and elders have been the custodians of these rich traditions.

---

235 Mother Earth is known as *Asase Yaa* among the Asantes and Wassa, while the Fantes called it *Assase Efua*. These Akan subgroups see the earth as a woman who feeds her children from birth till death. Therefore, the earth is seen as sacred, and during libation, the living offer drinks to her.

that enable the living to invoke the presence and spiritual support of God, spirit beings, and the ancestors. Festivals are solemn occasions for purification and blessings for the entire community.

**b. Shrines, Sacred Places, and Religious Objects**

The use of shrines, sacred places, and religious objects reflect the religious nature of the Akan people. Some Akan subgroups have a family shrine that connects the entire family to their ancestors. There are equally shrines respected as sacred grounds for the community as a whole. These shrines or sacred places could be in groves, rocks, caves, hills, mountains, or under a tree (*Nyame Dua*). The place is treated as sacred grounds where people seek refuge. No life is attacked in these places. Sacrifices and offerings of animals, fowls, food, utensils, tools, and coins are offered.\(^{237}\) As a ground of prayer, an Akan encounters the divine through the mediation of the priest or priestess. These places could be natural or artificial. The natural sacred places are usually secluded or situated a little away from home. Usually, such shrines or temples will have a permanent priest or priestess responsible for all communal worship or receive individuals who have come to pray or offer sacrifices. Priests or priestesses are also responsible for the maintenance of the shrines.

Again, the Akan people use religious articles and objects tied around either the necks, arms, legs, or waist. Some of these objects are buried in the house premises or field of work or kept in bags, pockets, or swallowed. They are of different kinds and sizes. They are spiritually potent and work differently. These material objects and shrines are not just the outward religious expressions of their beliefs in supernatural powers, but they also mediate the presence of spiritual beings.

c. Arts and Symbols, Music, and Dance

Arts and crafts are part of African heritage\textsuperscript{238} that communicate nonverbally the religious foundations and ideas of the Akan people. Usually, these arts and crafts are common on wood, stools, calabashes, stones, sticks, pots, domestic animals, and human bodies. Carvings on wood, ivory, and stone are no exceptions. Again, in Akan oral traditions, words are not left alone to speak, but usually, they are accompanied by nonverbal and paralinguistic elements that dramatically communicate in performance. Many of these subtle variations include mime and dance. They are performed by people who are familiar with and understand the symbolism. The Akans dramatize their cultural and religious beliefs in music and dance in a more serious and humorous manner. The cultural and religious language is as important as the spoken tongue.\textsuperscript{239} In the unspoken words of art, symbols, and dance, the Akan tribes express the complexities of African communion with the spirit world. Prayers and invocations also accompany these in the pouring of libation.

Religious dance, according to Robert Fisher, also has a social function: “their purpose is to generate systemic control over all forces of good or evil for the harmony between the spirit and material world, and as social control over the behavior of the people by means of oracles, shrines and customs.”\textsuperscript{240} Common among the Akans is the Akom dance. It is a dance performed commonly at shrines by priests or priestesses either to transition them into a trance or to release them from it.\textsuperscript{241} In the trance, the priest or priestess communicates with the deities on behalf of the community or individuals.

\textsuperscript{238} Mbiti, Introduction to African Religion, 24.
\textsuperscript{240} Fisher, West African Traditions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana.
\textsuperscript{241} Ibid.
d. Proverbs, Riddles, Myths, and Legends

Akan proverbs, riddles, myths, and legends are full of the religious richness of Akan/African wisdom. Most of them express the interconnectedness, and relatedness humanity shares with God, the gods, ancestors, the universe, and all creation. Proverbs, riddles, myths, and legends are crafted with elements of the Akan socio-cultural structures, making them easy to pass on from generation to generation. Almost every Akan has the skill to communicate with proverbs. For instance, to express the religious idea of the need to talk to God, an Akan will simply say in a conversation, “wope asem aka akyere Nyame a, ka kyere mframa” (if you want to speak to God speak to the wind). The Akans also view the world from a religious perspective with riddles that are more for entertainment that stimulate intellectual exercises. Akan traditional wisdom, divine self-communication, or revelation, understanding of the unseen spirits, their operation, and interaction with humanity are expressed, preserved, and passed on to the future generation in the form of myths, legends, and stories in the Akan communities.

e. Beliefs and Customs

Beliefs and customs are naturally part of the Akan Religion. Many of the Akan customs do not only express their culture. Some also have religious connotations and imports. Akan religious beliefs cover religious topics like God, ancestral spirits, gods, death, magic, and witchcraft. The intangible beliefs of the Akan Religion are expressed through the customs that mediate and enact into concrete reality what the indigenous people believe. Akan beliefs permeate all facets of life. Unsurprisingly, when an Akan converts to other religions, it is not uncommon to realize that some of their former beliefs are retained and practiced alongside their new religious beliefs and practices.

---

1.13. Conclusion

Chapter One elaborated on the context of postmodernity, its challenges to the Catholic Church, and the necessity of interreligious dialogue as an intrinsic part of the Church’s mission of evangelization. It further elucidated the Akan worldview, which shapes the Akan culture and religion. Some of its core beliefs were discussed, not as a separate structure, but intrinsically interwoven in ordinary daily Akan life. The purpose was to lay the foundation that Akan culture and religion are part of Akan life, even if the person converts to Catholicism. This is to set the stage to discuss later that for the Catholic faith to resonate with the Akan convert or continue to be relevant in their society, there is an uncompromising need for dialogue between the two religions so that the Christian message could be understood from the Akan religion-cultural worldview. With this foundation, Chapter two will delve into a critical survey of papal and conciliar documents from the 19th Century through Vatican II and post-Vatican II to review the historical, theological, and pastoral shift in the Church’s encounter with non-Christian religions. The review will indicate that Catholicism has made a dialogical shift from intolerance (exclusivism) or monologue to a dialogue of openness towards non-Christians from the 19th Century through Vatican II till post-Vatican II. Beyond the positivity, the chapter will unearth some hermeneutical flaws in conciliar and ecclesiastical writings to propose other sources of theology to enhance genuine interreligious dialogue in postmodernity.
Chapter 2

2.0. Catholicism in Dialogue with Other Religions and Cultures: A Historical Survey of Pre-Conciliar, Vatican II, and Post-Conciliar Catholicism

Introduction

A critical survey of papal and conciliar documents from the 19th Century through Vatican II to post-Vatican II reveals a historical, theological, pastoral, and hermeneutical shift in the Church’s encounter with other religions and cultures. Historically, the Catholic Church has moved “from confrontation to dialogue”\(^\text{243}\) in her relationship with other cultures and religions. Though the Church is struggling to open herself to the realities of religious and cultural pluralism as both \textit{a de facto} (matter of fact) social reality and \textit{a de jure} (matter of principle or divinely ordained principle) of God’s encounter with all humanity, Vatican II Council has unlocked a new breath of dialogue.\(^\text{244}\) The Catholic Church, for the first time in an ecumenical Council, made a significant step in offering a positive outlook in approaching other religions, their believers, and cultures as being an integral part of the divine plan for humanity. Through the declaration, \textit{Nostra Aetate}, the Catholic Church laid out a new path of openness, reconciliation, dialogue, and collaboration among Christians and other religions. The Church opened itself up to the truth and realities of other non-Christian faiths. Again, it highlights the unity among the various religious traditions in the world.\(^\text{245}\) This section highlights the historical, theological, pastoral, and hermeneutical shifts within the church from intolerance (exclusivism) or monologue to a dialogue of openness towards non-Christian religions and cultures. The scope of the review


\(^{244}\) Jacque Dupuis points out that religious pluralism is both \textit{a de facto} and \textit{a de jure} reality. For him, “God has made various covenants with humankind in history, before making a ‘new covenant’ with them in Jesus Christ.” See Jacques Dupuis, \textit{Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue}, 254.

\(^{245}\) \textit{Nostra Aetate} (NA) 1.
stretches from the 19th Century through Vatican II to post-Vatican II. Before that, a short historico-theological foundation from the first millennium will be traced to provide the groundwork for Catholic interreligious dialogue in the 19th Century.

2.1. Pre-Conciliar Catholic Outlooks on Other Religions and Dialogue

Prior to the positive ecumenical affirmations and theology of interreligious dialogue, the general outlook of the Catholic Church towards other religions and cultures had generally been negative and confrontational despite some papal documents that pushed for a dialogical encounter. Historically, before the 19th Century, the predominant maxim of Cyprian of Carthage, “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus,” had been an underlying Catholic doctrine that defined the scope of the Church’s dialogical encounter with those outside the Catholic traditions and non-Christians. Although the axiom is linked to Cyprian, its historical antecedents in different forms and understandings travel back to St. Ignatius of Antioch. St. Ignatius is the first Church Father who stressed the uncompromising need for unity within the Catholic Church and union with the bishop as a prerequisite for unification with God through Jesus Christ. He was totally against schismatics for their willful breaking of the unity the Church enjoyed. He writes, “Be not deceived, my brethren: if anyone follows a maker of schism, he does not inherit the Kingdom of God.” St. Ignatius sees a willful and guilty separation from the Church as a ground for total exclusion from God’s salvific grace. In a different context, St. Irenaeus also considered the

---

246 Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus (est) (Lat., ‘outside the church there is no salvation’). St Cyprian used the axiom of “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus” with specificity. His usage was in reference to Christians who have deliberately separated themselves from the Catholic Church because of heresy and schism. Cyprian never intended to use the axiom for religions. Unfortunately, later writers like St Ambrose of Milan, St Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom and later conciliar writings applied this principle with a wider scope to include everyone outside the Church including other religions. See Gerald O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26. See also “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus (est),” Encyclopedia.com. https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/extra-ecclesiam-nulla-salus-est Accessed on November 21, 2021.

Gnostics, who claim to possess superior knowledge not accessible to the ordinary Christian community, as separatists and in danger of being excluded from salvation. For him, the possibility of sharing in the life of grace exists only in the true Church of which the Gnostics willfully deprive themselves. He writes: “Where the Church is, there is the Spirit of God, and where the Spirit of God is, there is the Church” (Adv. Haer. III, 24). Irenaeus, just like St. Ignatius, perceived a willful and guilty separation from the Church as a reason for exclusion from the salvation of God.\(^{248}\)

Origen added some level of complexity to this situation. While he, on the one hand, continued Justin’s logos theology, he nevertheless explicitly spoke about salvation only in the Church. \emph{On First Principles}, Origen speaks of the \textit{Logos} as being at work in all “rational beings” (\textit{logikoi}), while the Spirit dwells in the saints (\textit{peumatikoi}). That is to say that the action of the \textit{Logos} is more expanded than that of the Spirit.\(^{249}\) From the contrary perspective, Origen commented on Jos 2:19 in his homilies on Joshua 3:5, where he understands the house containing the family as a representation of the Church. He wrote the following:

If anyone wishes to be saved, let that one come into the house of her who once was a prostitute. Even if someone belonging to that people [Hebrew] wishes to be saved, let such a one come into this house to find salvation. Let one come into this house, in which the blood of Christ is the sign of redemption…. So, let no one persuade oneself, let no one deceive oneself: outside this house, that is, outside the Church no one is saved (\textit{extra hanc domum, id est extra ecclesiam, nemo salvatur}); for, if one goes outside, one is responsible for one’s own death. (\textit{Homilies on Josuah} 3,5; PG 12:84-42).

For Origen, salvation is assured for those who remain in the Church, the ark of salvation of which the ark of Noah is seen as a type. He added, “by the sign [of the blood of Christ] let all those find salvation who are found in the house of her who was once a harlot, after their

\(^{248}\) Ibid.

cleansing in water and the Holy Spirit and in the blood of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (Homilies on Joshua 3,5; PG 12:841-42).\textsuperscript{250} Origen later refers to the Jews as those who have willfully not accepted the Christian message. The Jews, like the other Christians who have equally separated themselves, are lost souls.\textsuperscript{251} Later, in his commentary on 1 Cor 15:28, Origen writes of the Church with a broader scope: “The Body of Christ… is the whole humankind, nay rather perhaps the whole of creation, and each one of us is a member and part” (Homily 2 on Ps. 36; PG12:1330). This quote opens us to what Dupuis calls the “eschatological perspective of universal restoration in the apokatastasis,” which Origen proposed only as a “working hypothesis, a provisional opinion.”\textsuperscript{252}

From the above, it could be said that the thought of Origen was somehow ambiguous as compared to St. Cyprian, who was exact in his use of “Outside the Church no salvation.” This may explain why the axiom is principally tagged to his name. For Cyprian, the possibility of salvation is only by the “virtue of the gratia increate, the Christological and pneumatological grace, offered through sacramentally institutionalized mediation of the Christian Church.”\textsuperscript{253} With the mediation of the Church, Cyprian addressed all those in danger of separation or already outside the Church as expelled from salvation. For instance, he addressed those who rebelled against their bishops and were threatened with excommunication in these words:

\begin{quote}
Let them not think that the way of salvation exists for them, if they refused to obey the bishops or priests…. The proud and insolent are killed with the sword of the Spirit, when they are cast out from the Church. For they cannot live outside, since there is only one house of God, and there can be no salvation for anyone except in the Church. (Epist. 4, 4; CSEL 3,2:476-77)
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{250} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{251} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{252} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{253} The Catholic doctrine of non-Christian religion 11. St Augustine also shared the same view. This made Karl Rahner blame Augustine and his followers on the grounds that he created a theology of “Augustinischer Heils pessimismus” which prevailed in the Catholic church for over a thousand years. See Karl Rahner, Foundation of Christian Faith: An introduction to the Idea of Christianity (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1978), 344.
In addressing heretics and schismatics, Cyprian emphatically points out that not even martyrdom could open the gates of salvation nor purge their guilts. He said the following: “even though they have suffered death for the confession of the Name, the guilt of such people is not removed even by their blood; the grievous irremissible sin of schism is not purged even by martyrdom.” Later, Cyprian addressed both heretics and schismatics in these words:

The spouse of Christ cannot be adulterous; she is uncorrupted and pure. She knows one home; she guards with chaste modesty the sanctity of one couch. She keeps us for God. She appoints the sons whom she has born for the kingdom. Whoever is separated from the Church and is joined to an adulteress, is separated from the promises of the Church; nor can he who forsakes the Church of Christ attain to the rewards of Christ. He is a stranger; he is profane; he is an enemy. He can no longer have God for his Father, who has not the Church for his mother.

With regards to pagans, Cyprian did not pass any negative judgments. This would raise the question that pagans outside the Church were also excluded from the salvific grace of God. In his comment on this, Francis A. Sullivan intimated that Cyprian did not explicitly apply the saying “No salvation outside the Church” to the majority of people who were pagans but rather the damnation of heretics and schismatics. Sullivan writes: “we know that he judged Christian heretics and schismatics guilty of their separation from the church. Did he also judge all pagans guilty of their failure to accept the Christian Gospel and enter the Church? We do not know.”

The above expositions on Ignatius, Irenaeus, Origen, and Cyprian underscore that when these fathers applied the axiom “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus,” the scope consistently covers heretics and schismatics who are guilty of a willful separation from the Church. This dissertation avows that while the patristic tradition is strong on Christian separatists, it failed to broaden the


255 The Unity of the Catholic Church, 6.

scope of Cyprian’s maxim to include non-Christians. This conclusion is supported by the reference to the *logos spermatikos* by the patristic Fathers. Since the *logos* permeates all cultures, it exonerates them from being intensively exclusivists. Sullivan seems to share the same idea. He holds that if they were asked about Jews and pagans, these Fathers would have included them under the umbrella of the axiom.\(^{257}\) Sullivan quickly added, “But it is significant for the history of this axiom that we do not find them applying it to others than Christians at this time when Christians were still a persecuted minority…. The case was different when Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman empire and most people had accepted the Christian faith.”\(^{258}\)

The axiom was later applied to pagans and Jews when Christianity had become the Roman empire’s official religion. Just as the many who were guilty of the sins of heresy and schism were excluded from salvation, so it was presumed to be the fate of the Jews and the pagans. For instance, Saint Gregory of Nyssa insisted in his *Catechetical Oration* that everyone had heard of the faith and message of Christ; thus, to stay out of the Church is a willful rejection of salvation.\(^{259}\)

St. Augustine also confirmed that salvation could only be found in the Catholic Church in his controversy with the Donatists. Augustine disagreed with Cyprian that baptism conferred outside the Church was invalid\(^ {260}\), but he shared his view that such baptism was inoperative regarding salvation. Augustine argues that baptism conferred outside the Church was not performed and cannot confer the Holy Spirit; hence the gift of salvation is absent.\(^ {261}\) For


\(^{259}\) Gregorius Nyssenus – “Oratio Catechetica Magna 30; PG 45:76-77).”


\(^{260}\) This was in disagreement with Cyprian’s position that baptism conferred outside the Church was invalid.

\(^{261}\) Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 90.
Augustine, those baptized outside the Church and celebrating the sacraments could do so, but they must know that they are excluded from salvation. In his response to a Donatist bishop, St Augustine writes the following:

Outside the Church he can have everything except salvation. He can have honor, he can have sacraments, he can sing Alleluiah, he can resound with Amen, he can have the Gospel, he can hold and preach the faith in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit: but nowhere else than in the Catholic Church can he find salvation. (Sermo ad Caesarensis Ecclesiae Plebem 6; CSEL 53:174-75).

Augustine’s position in applying the axiom as a theologian shows his belief in the salvific will as not universal but only applied to those freely destined by God to be saved.262 J. P. Theisen succinctly writes of St Augustine:

In short, Augustine transmits to the Middle Ages a rather exclusivist understanding of the adage extra ecclesiam nulla salus. While he refuses Cyprian’s position about the validity of baptism outside the Church, he still insists on the necessity of the Church for salvation. Union with the Church is conceived rather rigidly; it is required for the reception of the Holy Spirit and eternal life.263

Later, Prosper of Aquitaine, one of the faithful followers of St. Augustine, expressed a contrary view to his master’s doctrine of the absolute primacy of grace and God’s freedom in bestowing it. Prosper posited that God wills the salvation of all to some degree. While he speaks of a “general” grace universally offered, God reserved a “special” grace for those he chose to grant those graces.264 In his work “The Call of all Nations,” Prosper stressed that the death of Christ was not meant only for believers but for everyone, including non-Christians or believers and sinners.265 According to him, those who, by no fault of theirs, have not had the opportunity to receive the “special” grace to hear the Good News have nevertheless been granted the

263 J.P Theisen, The Ultimate Church and the Promise of Salvation (Collegeville, Minn.: St John’s University Press, 1976), 16.
264 See Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 91.
265 (De Vocacione Omnium Gentium 2:16; PL 51:702-3; ACW 14:118-19) See also Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 91.
“general” grace before Christ; thus, they could be saved too. He recounted, “we have no doubt that in God’s hidden judgment, for them also a time of calling has been appointed, when they will hear and accept the Gospel which now remains unknown to them. Even now they receive the measure of general help which heaven has always bestowed on all people” (De Vocatione Omnium Gentium 2:17; PL 51:704; ACW 14:125). Unlike Augustine, Prosper lowered the intense exclusivist explanation his master gave to the axiom.

Fulentius of Ruspe (468-533), another student of Augustine in support of his master, wrote against the position of Prosper. Fulgentius applied the axiom’s rigid form to pagans, Jews, heretics, and schismatics. Nine centuries later, this rigid position of Fulgentius influenced the declaration of the Council of Florence (1442). Writing of heretics and schismatics, Fulgentius has this to say:

Hold most firmly and do not doubt that anyone baptized outside the Catholic Church cannot come to eternal life if before the end of his life one does not return and become incorporated into the Catholic Church. For the apostle says: if I have all faith and know all mysteries, but do not have charity, I am nothing [see 1 Cor 13:2]. And we read that also in the days of the flood no one could be saved outside the ark. (De Fide ad Petrum 37; PL 65:703).

Fulentius further writes of the Jews and pagans, heretics, and schematics that if they die outside the Church, their share is the eternal fire destined for the devil and his angels. [Mt 25:41] (De Fide ad Petrum 38 (79); PL 65:704).

2.2. “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus,: Magisterial Context Before the 19th Centuries

From the context of interreligious dialogue, papal and conciliar pronouncements before the 19th Century will examine Popes Innocent, Boniface VIII, the Councils of Florence, and Trent. In 1208, Pope Innocent III wrote a letter to the archbishop of Tarragona, which demanded

266 St. Fulgentius of Ruspe, a vigorous critic of Arians and Pelagians, whose De Fide ad Petrum put forth a pessimistic view of Augustine about the damnation not only of many ‘within’ the Church but also of everyone ‘outside’ the church. See also O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 32.
a profession of faith prescribed for Waldensians who wished to be reconciled to the Catholic Church. The declaration of faith demanded the necessity to belong to the Holy Roman, Catholic Church, outside of which there is no salvation: “We believe in our hearts and confess with our lips that there is one church, not that of the heretics, but the Holy Roman Catholic and Apostolic Church, outside of which we believe that no one is saved.”

At the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), headed by Innocent III, this same principle was affirmed against the Albigensian heretics. The definition of the Catholic faith reads: “There is one universal church of the faithful, outside of which no one at all is saved.”

In his bull “Unam Sanctam” (“One Holy”) promulgated in 1302, Pope Boniface VIII linked his two powers: spiritual and temporal, against Phillip the Fair, the king of France, and all other emperors to submit to his authority. Pope Boniface VIII makes this assertion with significant reliance on the medieval theory, which provides spiritual supremacy to the pope over any temporal powers. There are “two swords” (temporal and spiritual powers), but the spiritual has total dominance over the temporal. Such power gives the pope the full authority to institute and judge temporal rulers. From this background, Pope Boniface, in “Unam Sanctam,” connected the interrelationship between the power of the supreme pontiff of the Church and the

---

269 Philip IV started to collect new taxes from the clergy and pope Boniface VIII opposed the imposition of these taxes on the clergy because Philip failed to seek papal consent. In February 1296, Pope Boniface issued the *Clercis Laico*, which was a prohibition for any lay to tax clergy without first seeking an explicit approval from the pope. King Philip and Edward I considered this as a threat to their political authority and their treasuries. The kings responded with retaliatory measures and forced pope Boniface VIII to withdraw his bull to categorically affirm that the taxation of any clergy is legitimate without permission from the pope. The pope to reaffirm his stand released Unam Sanctam. Here, pope Boniface VIII emphatically established the relationship of his spiritual and temporary powers and the connection it has with the salvation which is only found in the Catholic church under the pope. See *Conflict with the papacy of Philip IV*. [https://www.britannica.com/biography/Philip-IV-king-of-France/Conflict-with-the-papacy](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Philip-IV-king-of-France/Conflict-with-the-papacy) Accessed on February 2, 2022.
salvation of souls. The pope writes: “Indeed we declare, announce and define, that it is altogether necessary to salvation for every human creature to be subject to the Roman Pontiff.”271 By this, the pope categorically affirms that any king, emperor, and person are excluded from salvation if they stay outside the Church of Christ, within which the Pope is vested with the spiritual and temporal authority of the world. In his observation, Jacque Dupuis avows that Pope Boniface proposes a hierocratic theory in an extreme form without compromise.272 From this context, he confirms the need to belong to the Church. He writes:

That there is only one, catholic and apostolic Church we are compelled by faith to believe and hold, and we firmly believe in her and sincerely confess her, outside of whom there is no salvation, nor remission of sins…. In her there is “one Lord, one faith, one baptism” [Eph 4:5]. To be sure, at the time of the flood there was one ark of Noah, a type of the one Church; and this ark finished to one cubit from the top and one pilot and captain, that is, Noah. We read that outside the ark all living creatures were destroyed…273

Today, the postmodern view of the relationship between the spiritual and temporary authority has been discarded. However, the fact still holds that the bull nevertheless reiterates the traditional misconstrued position of ‘Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus.’

Again, the Council of Florence (1438–1445) quotes the words of St. Fulgentius, a century after Boniface, to reaffirm the necessity of the Church for salvation. The Council’s Decree for the Copts of 1442 states:

It firmly believes, professes, and proclaims that those not living within the Catholic Church, not only pagans, but also Jews and heretics and schismatics cannot become participants in eternal life, but will depart “into everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels” [Matt. 25:41], unless before the end of life the same have been added to the flock; ... That no one, whatever almsgiving he has practiced, even if he has shed blood for the name of Christ, can

272 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 94.
273 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 94.
be saved, unless he has remained in the bosom and unity of the Catholic Church.274

In the Church’s history, it must be stated that the Council of Florence was the first general Council that decreed the damnation of all Jews, heretics, schismatics, and pagans who failed to join the Church before their demise. Until now, the first millennium of Christianity saw bishops and individuals whose pronouncements and writings pushed forth the confrontation encounter with non-Christians and those outside the territory of the Church’s jurisdiction. According to Sullivan, the Fathers of the Council were influenced by the views and arguments of the middle age; that to be outside the Church is to be outside the saving grace of Christ. Without trivializing these historical circumstances, Sullivan boldly avows that what happened was unjustifiable or unaccepted.275 He noted:

We have good reason to understand this decree in the light of what was then the common belief that all pagans, Jews, heretics and schismatics were guilty of the sin of infidelity, on the ground that they had culpably refused either to accept the true faith or to remain in it…. Their [the bishops of Florence] decree cannot be understood except in the light of their judgment concerning the culpability of all those who they declared would be condemned to hell.

…The bishops of the Council of Florence certainly believed that God is good, that being good he is just and that a just God does not condemn innocent people to the fires of hell. The conclusion is inescapable that they must have believed all pagans, Jews, heretics, and schismatics to be guilty, and deserving of eternal punishment.276

Though the decree of Copts of the Council won the admiration of the majority at the time, others vehemently opposed it. For instance, the work of Nicholas of Cusa, “De Pace Fidei” (On the Peace of Faith), reacted against the decree. His work contended for peace between the

Church and the different religions in his form analogy of a dream where representatives of all religions, in their irreconcilable diversities of teachings and faiths, stood before God in heaven and recounted their differences. God sent back on earth all the representatives to lead their worshipping communities in their faith, with the assurance of promoting peace.\textsuperscript{277} The vision of Nicholas underscores the reality that religious diversity is not a curse but riches. In other words, religious diversity is a divinely ordained principle (\textit{a de jure}). Diverse religious faith and cultures of people can implicitly converge.

The Council of Trent (1545-1563) also shared light on Catholicism and its relationship with other religions. Using Hebrew\textsuperscript{11:6},\textsuperscript{278} the Council stressed the necessity of faith in God’s existence for justification. Unlike the Council of Florence, the Fathers of Trent did not offer a blueprint statement of explicit faith in Christ, knowing well that maintaining a belief in God, as the book of Hebrews stipulates, is enough for a person’s salvation.\textsuperscript{279} This was a positive shift in a magisterial document. The Council of Trent opened a new dimension to argue that believers of other religions like Akan Traditional Religion who express a belief in the existence of God (\textit{Nyame}) are not condemned but saved just like Catholics. Also, the Council addressed two critical issues: 1) While it insisted on the necessity of baptism for salvation, the Fathers did not fail to recognize that a bath of regeneration or baptism by desire unlocks the grace of salvation for a person.\textsuperscript{280} 2) The Council opened a positive perspective where Malachi 1:11\textsuperscript{281} was cited for stressing the potency of cultic and sacrificial rites and practices of other religions and

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{277}For further reading on this, see Nicholas Cusanus, \textit{Opera Omnia}, vii, Raymond Klibansky and Hildebrand Bascour, eds. (Hamburg: Meiner Verlag, 1970), See also O’Collins, \textit{The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions}, 35.
\item \textsuperscript{278}“And without faith it is impossible to please God, for whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him” (NRSV).
\item \textsuperscript{279}O’Collins, \textit{The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions}, 38.
\item \textsuperscript{280}O’Collins, \textit{The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions}, 38.
\item \textsuperscript{281}“From the rising of the sun to its setting my name is great among the nations, and in every place incense is offered to my name, and a pure offering; for my name is great among the nations,” Malachi 1:11.
\end{itemize}
traditions. The Council Fathers interpreted this oracle in the light of the Eucharistic sacrifice as being “prefigured by various types of sacrifices under the regime of nature and the law. It includes all the good that was signified by those former sacrifices; it is their fulfillment and perfection.”282 This dissertation shares the view of O’Collins with his affirmation that the Council with this assertion positively evaluated the sacrifices of other religions, not only that of Jews under the law but also the sacrifices of other faiths and traditions under the regime of nature.283

The new light of dialogical positivity shared by the Council of Trent brought Juan de Lugo, Francisco Suarez, and other Jesuit theologians to the theological conviction that salvation is not restricted to the confines of the Catholic tradition. For them, salvation is available to those who have not encountered the gospel message by no fault of theirs but through divine assistance and grace have lived genuinely and uprightly by natural law and faith in God. De Lugo even proposed that non-Christians who faithfully persist in their religious faith, practice, and live by their informed conscience and divine law can attain salvation.284 De Lugo, from this background, proposes further that ‘outsiders’ must not be called ‘non-Christians.’ Although they are not Catholics in principle, their interior lives and faithful practices are not different from the lives of true Christians.285

From the above, it could be concluded that the pre-19th century theological concept of “outside the church no salvation” and the scope of its application explicitly or implicitly affected any significant dialogue Catholicism had with other religious traditions. From this historical and

282 Quoted in O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 39. See also Adjei, “The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World: Reflecting Beyond Nostra Aetate,” 22
283 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 39.
284 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 39.
theological background, the next section will concentrate on the shifts of interreligious dialogue in Catholicism within the 19th century and beyond.

2.3. Theological and Magisterial Review of Other Non-Christian Religions Within the Nineteenth Century

Introduction

St. Cyprian and Fulgentius of Ruspe’s positions on “Outside the Church, no Salvation” undoubtedly became the pivotal teaching that influenced the Church’s dialogical steps and writings before the 19th century. The tenet of this maxim gradually found its way into magisterial documents. This section of the dissertation reviews the Church’s historical and theological teachings in papal and ecumenical councils. The review unravels the shifts in Church’s teachings on interreligious dialogue from a monologue to a positive dialogical orientation and development that engendered an ecclesiastical transformation in theological epistemology and hermeneutics. It will be stressed that the positive shift of interfaith encounters that began slowly culminated at the dawn of Vatican II when the Catholic Church, for the first time in an ecumenical council, emphasized the salvation of non-Christian people and the value within their religions for their devotees.286

2.4. Response of the Catholic Church Towards Religious Indifferentism and Other Religions

Even though the vestiges of “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus” of the first millennium influenced the 19th century ecclesiastical, theological, and pastoral strategies, it was soon

---

286 The position of this dissertation upholds the Church’s teachings on the validity of salvation in Christ for all humanity and a place for religious and cultural pluralism. The universal salvation applies to “those outside the geographical and religious boundaries of the so-called “chosen people” or “people of the covenant.” The New Testament provides us instances to affirm the salvation of all. See texts like Acts 10:34, Matt 8:10-12; Lk 13:29-30; and Jn 1:9. This dissertation shares the theological view of J. Dupuis and Marinus Iwuchukwu on religious plurality as a de facto and a de jure reality.
confronted with more vigorous oppositions. The Catholic Church saw a significant shift in dialogue and other areas of human life in the 19th century. The essential effects of global politics, scientific discoveries, cultural, social, and economic conditions of Europe, and other rapid developments that were irresistible in the world were external forces that caused the Church to open itself to the realities of cultural and religious pluralism; this created the need for dialogue. Miikka Roukanen captures this beautifully when he says the Church was “compelled to venture out of her own intellectual ghetto and to gaze at the world with a more open mind.”

The 19th-century Western world faced theological, social, political, economic, and philosophical ideologies and religious upheavals. The Catholic Church faced a great challenge which Pope Pius IX (1846-1878) described as “the deadly virus of indifferentism and unbelief.” Religious indifferentism shook the doctrinal foundation of “Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus” of the previous centuries because it endorsed the position that all religions are equally truthful and valuable. This dissertation will focus on Popes Pius VII, Leo XII, Pius VIII, Blessed Pius IX, and Pope Pius XII of this century to discuss how the Catholic Church dialogued with other religions with a different approach.

---

289 “Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, he shall consider true. Pope Pius IX to issue the Syllabus of Errors, in which he condemned the principal errors of the time, on the Feast of Mary’s Immaculate Conception, December 8, 1864 (the 10th anniversary of the solemn definition of this Dogma of Faith). Among the principal errors condemned by Pope Pius IX, were the following four expressions of the heresy of Religious Indifferentism: “Every man is free to embrace and profess that religion which, guided by the light of reason, he shall consider true. Man may, in the observance of any religion whatever, find the way of eternal salvation, and arrive at eternal salvation. Good hope at least is to be entertained of the eternal salvation of all those who are not at all in the true Church of Christ. Protestantism is nothing more than another form of the same true Christian religion, in which form it is given to please God equally as in the Catholic Church.” [Nos. 15-18]. Pope BI. Pius IX - 1864 “The Syllabus of Errors” https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius09/p9syll.htm Accessed on January 3, 2022.
The Papacy of Pius VII (1800-1823) encountered the formative stages of religious indifferentism. The pope condemned all writings that indirectly propagated the tenets and spread of religious indifferentism. In his encyclical *Diu Satis*, Pope Pius laid down his total rejection of what he classified as dangerous books or ideologies that seek to damage the life of the Catholic Church.

We cannot overlook, keep silent or act sluggishly. For unless this great license of thinking, speaking, writing, and reading is repressed, it will appear that the strategy and armies of wise kings and generals have relieved us for but a short time from this evil which has crushed us for so long.\textsuperscript{291}

Further, the papacy of Pope Leo XII (1823-1829), among other things, strived to restore Catholicism by unambiguously condemning any traits of religious indifferentism.\textsuperscript{292} In his *Ubi Primum* (May 5, 1824), the Pope summarized the mission of religious indifferentism and pointed out the dangers of the assumptions entrenched in the philosophy. He writes:

A certain sect, which you surely know, has unjustly arrogated to itself the name of philosophy, and has aroused from the ashes the disorderly ranks of practically every error. Under the gentle appearance of piety and liberality, this sect professes what they call tolerance or indifferentism. It preaches that not only in civil affairs, which is not our concern here, but also in religion, God has given every individual a wide freedom to embrace and adopt without danger to his salvation whatever sect or opinion appeals to him on the basis of his private judgment.\textsuperscript{293}

The pope’s condemnation of religious indifferentism was based on its assumption that every person or religious tradition is on the right road.\textsuperscript{294} He invoked the Cyprian maxim of the first millennium to contravene the rise of religious indifferentism against the salvation in the Church.

\textsuperscript{291} *Diu Satis*, (On a Return to Gospel Principles), Papal Encyclical Online. \url{https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius07/p7diusat.htm} Accessed on November 3, 2021.


\textsuperscript{293} Leo XII, “Ubi Primum” (On His Assuming the Pontificate, n. 12, May 5, 1824) in Carlen, *The Papal Encyclicals*, 201.

After the demise of Pope Leo XII, Pius VIII (1829-1830) was elected to fill the vacancy. Like his predecessor, Pope Pius VIII strongly opposed religious indifferentism in his encyclical, *Traditi Humilitati* (May 24, 1829). He categorized indifferentism in all its forms as heresy in these words: “Among these heresies belongs that foul contrivance of the sophists of this age who do not admit any difference among the different professions of faith and who think that the portal of eternal salvation opens for all from any religion.” Pope Pius VIII insists that Catholics and all people must be taught against this heresy to rather accept the truth that the “profession of the Catholic faith is uniquely true, as the apostle proclaims… He who believes shall be saved; he who does not believe shall be condemned” (Mk 16.16).

Subsequently, the Church began to witness a shift during the papacy of Blessed Pius IX (1846-1878). Influenced by the missionaries’ experiences with other religions in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Australia, and Oceania, Blessed Pius IX, unlike his predecessors, gave an inclusive interpretation to the maxim ‘outside the church no salvation.’ It was the first in the history of Catholicism where a pope mitigated the harshness of the axiom introduced by Innocent III, Boniface VIII, and the Council of Florence. In 1863, Pius IX, in his encyclical *Quanto Conficiamur Moerore*, while affirming the necessity of the Church for salvation, also positively writes that “those who labor in invincible ignorance concerning our most holy religion and who, assiduously observing the natural law and its precepts which God has inscribed in the hearts of all, and being ready to obey God, live an honest and upright life can, through the working of divine light and grace, attain eternal life.” This positive shift was reaffirmed by his

296 Ibid. See also Pope Pius VIII – 1829, *Traditi Humilitati*: On His Program for His Pontificate Pope Pius VIII. https://www.papalencyclicals.net/pius08/p8tradit.htm Accessed on November 12, 2021.
predecessor Pope Pius XII in his official encyclical Mystici Corporis promulgated in 1943. He laid a better development in the Church’s thinking about dialogue and collaboration with other religions and traditions when Mystici Corporis states that:

We must earnestly desire that this united prayer may embrace in the same ardent charity both those who, not yet enlightened by the truth of the Gospel, are still outside the fold of the Church, and those who, on account of regrettable schism, are separated from us, who though unworthy, represent the person of Jesus Christ on earth.298

On the eve of Vatican II, Karl Rahner (1904-84), a renowned theologian, was convinced that we can talk of “one history of the world, and in this one history both Christians and the non-Christians live in one and the same situation and face each other in dialogue.”299 According to Rahner, “God desires the salvation of everyone, and this salvation willed by God is the salvation won by Christ, the salvation of supernatural grace which divinizes the human person, the salvation of the beatific vision.”300

Another encyclical worth mentioning in the Church’s interreligious dialogue is Ecclesia Suam of Pope Paul VI, promulgated on August 6, 1964. Some theologians even acknowledged Ecclesia Suam as the manifesto of a Church in transition from a monologue to dialogue.301 The Pope speaks of dialogue in four levels: with the entire world, other religions, other Christian churches, and dialogue within the Church.302 Ecclesial Suam positively made these remarks:

---

300 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 53.
301 Adjei, The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World, 30.
We do acknowledge with respect the spiritual and moral values of various non-Christian religions, for we desire to join with them in promoting and defending common ideas... On these great ideals that we share with them we can have dialogue, and we shall not fail to offer opportunities for it whenever, in genuine mutual respect, our offer would be received with good will.\textsuperscript{303}

The gradual positive shift to dialogue between Catholicism and non-Christian traditions saw a profound consideration and advocacy in the Vatican II Council. This affirmation can be seen especially in documents like the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (\textit{Sacrosanctum Concilium} SC), Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (\textit{Lumen Gentium} LG), The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World (\textit{Gaudium et Spes} GS), the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions (\textit{Nostra Aetate} NA), and Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church (\textit{Ad Gentes} AG).

\textbf{2.5. Cultural and Interreligious Dialogue: Context and Perspective of Vatican II Council}

The Second Vatican Council was the first Ecumenical Council in the Church’s history to give a momentous recognition to interreligious dialogue, building upon the positivity and openness in dialogue with those outside the Church as exemplified in the writings of Popes Pius IX, Pius X, and Paul VI. The Council took this irenic approach to a new level by acknowledging and affirming spiritual and moral values (“seeds of the Word”) in other religions and cultures. Reflecting on the positive shift, Swidler declares that Catholicism took a “Copernican turn”\textsuperscript{304} with Vatican II regarding its approach to the modern world and culture. Instead of blanket condemnations reflecting a fortress mentality, the Church turned toward a significant optimism, emphasizing the necessity of interreligious and intercultural dialogue.\textsuperscript{305}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[\textsuperscript{303}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{304}] The term “Copernican turn” or “Copernican Revolution” can be traced back to Wilfred Cantwell Smith and John Hicks. See Philip Almond, \textit{John Hick’s Copernican Theology}. https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0040571X8308600108?journalCode=tjxa
\item[\textsuperscript{305}] For further reading see Leonard Swidler, \textit{Toward a Catholic Constitution} (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1996).
\end{footnotes}
While the various documents of Vatican II will be briefly examined, a broader survey of *Nostra Aetate* will be relevant here since that is the primary document that specifically spells out the Church’s official position on other religions and traditions. Again, the dissertation will unearth the embedded hermeneutical flaws within the Vatican II documents (particularly *Nostra Aetate*) to argue that the Catholic Church needs to reflect beyond *Nostra Aetate* to enhance a comprehensive and genuine interreligious dialogue with other religions, particularly Akan Traditional Religion, and culture.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (SC) was written more introverted because it was not meant for public readers outside the Catholic Church. Nonetheless, it still has elements that reflect the Church’s new dialogical outlook beyond its borders. *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (SC) was solemnly promulgated on December 4, 1963,\(^306\) aiming for liturgical promotion and renewal.\(^307\) Although SC was crafted for Church teachings on the liturgy, it transcended beyond the mind of Trent to embrace a context of the entire human race. In the second paragraph, the bishops speak of the liturgy, particularly the Eucharist, as a source through which the faithful’s spiritual lives are fed and brought to ‘the fullness of Christ.’\(^308\) It goes further to affirm that the Eucharist “strengthens their power to preach Christ, and thus shows forth the Church to those who are outside as a sign lifted up among the nations under which the scattered children of God may be gathered together, until there is one sheepfold and one shepherd.”\(^309\)

In a like manner, Chapter One, under the title “General Principles for the Restoration and Promotion of the Sacred Liturgy,” opens with the classical scriptural text that implies the

\(^{306}\) On 22 November 1963, the entire ‘schema’ was approved by 2,158 votes, with only 19 against it.


\(^{308}\) SC 1.

\(^{309}\) SC 2. Here, SC. evokes John 11: 52 (about Jesus ‘gathering into one the dispersed children of God’).
universal salvation of God: “all human beings to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2: 4). This chapter reiterates the Church’s responsibility to announce the gospel to all unbelievers so that “all human beings would come to a better knowledge of the one true God and Jesus Christ whom he has sent.”

The Church’s vision of salvation here is all-encompassing.

Again, the positive pastoral shift is reflected in Chapter Two, dedicated to the Eucharist. Here, the Council Fathers restored the “prayer of the faithful,” “an old tradition” which had completely vanished from the Roman liturgy. On Sundays and holy days of obligation, the Church offered this universal prayer for itself and the salvation of all. Sacrosanctum Concilium explains: “by this prayer in which the people are to take part, intercessions are to be made for the holy Church, for those who lead us politically, for those weighed down by various needs, for all human beings, and for the salvation of the entire world.”

In the same manner, as SC, three other conciliar texts discussed below in order of publications speak of non-Christians from three themes identified by Dupuis as (1) Salvation of people outside the church, (2) the authentic values found in non-Christians and their religious traditions; and (3) the Church’s appreciation of these values and the consequent attitude which it takes toward the religious traditions and their members.

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium LG) was promulgated on 21 November 1964. To appreciate the document’s contribution to the Church’s theology and dialogue with other religions, brief historicity for the development of the constitution is paramount. Among the nine drafts or schemata presented to the bishops (seven in August and

---

310 SC 9.
311 The only time the intercessory prayer was prayed was during on Good Friday Service.
312 SC 53.
313 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 162.
two in November 1962), one was a draft of the Church–De Ecclesia. The schema De Ecclesia underscored the church as a hierarchical society. It failed to recognize the mystical nature and the church as the people of God. The Council Fathers criticized and rejected the schema (1–6 December 1962). The ‘schema’ went through revision with a touch from Yves Congar, resulting in a new ‘schema’ that was mailed to the bishops in the middle of the year. With some amendments from the bishops, the final text was promulgated in 1964 under the title Lumen Gentium.314 Lumen Gentium Number 16 of Chapter 2 showed a tremendous positive dialogical relation towards Jews, Muslims, and other religions that became a bedrock for Vatican II’s Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate 28 October 1965) and later the Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity (Ad Gentes, 7 December 1965).

Lumen Gentium called on the Church and her faithful to be religiously interreligious in two articles (nos. 16 and 17) highlighting Catholicism and “the religious others.” Preceding these, article 13 had set the scope and background for the all-encompassing church mentality to be discussed when it said that through the gratuitous gifts of Christ’s salvation, “All men are called to belong to the new people of God.”315 According to O’Collins, the Council Fathers, reflected here that ‘in different ways’, all men ‘belong (pertinent)’ or ‘are ordered (ordinantur)’ to ‘catholic unity’316 “no matter whether ‘they are Catholic faithful, or others who believe in Christ, or lastly all human beings without exception (omnes universa- liter homines), called by God’s grace to salvation.”317

315 LG. 13.
316 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 73.
317 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 73.
Reflecting on those who have not yet received the gospel and been ordered to the people of God, *Lumen Gentium* mentioned (a) Jews, (b) Muslims, (c) other believers in God, and (d) those who, through no fault of their own, have not yet come to an explicit knowledge of God. For the first two groups (Jews and Muslims), the Church acknowledges the element for dialogue by what they share in common. Firstly, the Church recalls that the Jews were the first people God established and gave the testament and the promises. Through the Jewish lineage, “Christ was born according to the flesh.” Focusing on the Islamic religion, it must be affirmed that the Church’s statement on Islam in *Lumen Gentium* was the first time the Catholic Church, in an ecumenical council, officially inscribed her teachings on the religion and its people and, of course, from a positive dimension after it was founded by the prophet Mohammed (d.632). Here, the Church mentions God’s salvation as extended to them by professing the faith of Abraham, judgment of humanity, and along with us, adore the one, merciful God. Analyzing the Church’s positive statement on Muslims in *Lumen Gentium*, the obvious question of revelation and salvation through the Islamic religion is not explicitly affirmed. O’Collins identifies this and writes: “if Muslims ‘acknowledge the Creator’ and, together with Christians, ‘adore the one, merciful God, who will come in judgment at the last day, how can they do this without God having been revealed to them and their response in faith? How can this happen, moreover, unless

---

318 In the first place, we must recall the people to whom the testament and the promises were given and from whom Christ was born according to the flesh. On account of their fathers, these people remain most dear to God, for God does not repent of the gifts He makes nor of the calls He issues.

319 Professing to hold the faith of Abraham, along with us adore the one and merciful God, who on the last day will judge mankind. Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Savior wills that all men be saved.

320 LG. 16. “Those also can attain salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.”

321 LG. 16.

322 LG. 16.
in some sense God has made Islam a way of salvation for them?" He proposed that “It is hard to escape the conclusion that the constitution recognizes some revealing and saving efficacy in Islam. In some way, the Muslim religion enjoys a specific role in mediating the knowledge of God and grace of God.”

After Judaism and Islam, the Council addressed other believers in God. Here, LG writes, “…Nor is God far distant from those who in shadows and images seek the unknown God, for it is He who gives to all men life and breath and all things, and as Savior wills that all men be saved.” All those who fall into this category the Church recognizes as saved if through “no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience.” Even though they seek God in shadows and image, the Council Fathers were explicit about the fact that they do so by no fault of theirs. More so, since they seek God with a sincere heart and, under the influence of grace, channel their actions and apply their conscience to strive to live a better life–these too would be saved since God offers both life and desires the salvation of all humanity. The Council in this article prioritizes divine initiative–God the creator gives his grace and, ultimately salvation through the Son.

This positivity also raises the question of the Church’s silence on divine self-communication-revelation and its correlative in human faith. Commenting on this, O Collins has this to say: “we should ask: while the voice of conscience dictates what the ‘God-seekers’ should do, how has the will of God been ‘made known’ to them at the heart of their conscience?

---

323 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 74.
324 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 74.
326 Cf. 1 Tim. 2:4.
327 LG. 16.
328 LG. 75-76.
Does the ‘making known’ imply some measure of revelation? Although they can be described as seeking ‘the unknown God’ and doing so ‘in shadows and images,’ this language suggests that something has been disclosed to them. Shadows are not equivalent to total darkness, and images imply some resemblance to truth and reality.”

Lastly, LG turned attention to ‘those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life.’ For this category of people, the Church affirms that they too, will not be denied salvation through the providence of God. Here, the Council Fathers retrieve the terminology of ‘implicit/explicit’ used by Thomas Aquinas about faith (God and Christ) and desire for baptism. The Church’s language here is a vindication of Karl Rahner’s notion of the ‘anonymous Christian’ since these people endeavor to lead an upright life irrespective of having not yet attained an explicit knowledge of God by no fault of theirs. Article 16 continues to say: “Whatever good or truth is found amongst them is looked upon by the Church as a preparation for the Gospel,” a gratuitous gift given by “him who enlightens all men so that they may finally have life.”

---

329 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 75.
330 LG. 16.
331 The foundation of Rahner’s theology of the “Anonymous Christian” emerges from belief of “God’s self-communication.” For him, the self-communication of God is transcendent and go beyond every palpable way in human history through which we perceive and know God such as sacred people, places, and things. According to Rahner, everyone knows God when he communicates to us. God communicates by becoming “immediate” to us. We recognize God as a supporter, or someone who fills an emptiness when we need help because God hears our unconscious call and fills that emptiness. It is in such self and gratuitous communication of God which offers humanity his forgiveness and salvation. This thinking process is what leads Karl Rahner to the idea of the “anonymous Christian.” “Karl Rahner and the Anonymous Christian Theology Religion Essay,” UKEssays.com https://www.ukessays.com/essays/theology/karl-rahner-and-the-anonymous-christian-theology-religion-essay.php Accessed on May 3, 2022.
332 LG. 16.
333 LG. 16. The terminology is originally used by Eusebius of Caesarea and in a footnote, Lumen Gentium refers to his work which bears that name (LG 16, n. 20). Cf Eusebius of Caesarea, praeparatio evangelica I, 1.
334 LG. 16.
While attributing a positive value to the dispositions of individual people, not the religious or other groups to which they belong,\(^{335}\) the Church did not fail to insist that these positive endowments of people nonetheless “…have become vain in their reasonings and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator (cf. Rom 1:21).”\(^{336}\)

In article 17, the bishops endorsed the responsibility of the Church to proclaim the gospel and receive those who embrace faith into the Church. This is because those who accept the gospel message undergo a revelatory and redemptive process in receiving light and life.\(^{337}\) In his comment, O’Collins quickly points out the positivity that this article opens on how the bishops viewed the previous religious condition of ‘the others’\(^{338}\) as discussed in article 16. Through her proclamation of the gospel, the Church prepares them to profess the faith and receive baptism, which “snatches them from the slavery of error and idols and incorporates them in Christ so that through charity they may grow up into full maturity in Christ.”\(^{339}\) By this, the bishops mitigate this unwelcoming and unqualified picture of the religious situation of those who have not (or have not yet) accepted the gospel, O’Collins stressed. He goes on to say that the text suggests:

That their pre-Christian condition has left them somehow wounded, at a lower level, and imperfect. Through the Church’s missionary work, ‘whatever good is found sown in the heart and mind of human beings or in the particular rites and cultures of peoples, so far from being lost, is healed, elevated, and consummated (sanetur, elevetur et consummetur) for the glory of God.’\(^{340}\)

\(^{335}\) Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 162.

\(^{336}\) LG. 16.

\(^{337}\) Cf. O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 79.

\(^{338}\) Ibid., 79.

\(^{339}\) LG. 17.

\(^{340}\) O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 80. See also LG. 13: ‘[The Church] fosters and adopts, in so far as they are good, the abilities, resources, and customs of peoples. In adopting [them], she purifies, strengthens and elevates [them].’ This passage highlights the activity of the Church, while that of LG 17, by using a ‘divine passive’, suggests more the primary initiative and causality of God. The ‘good sown in the heart and mind of human beings or in the particular rites and cultures of peoples’ is ‘healed, elevated, and consummated’ by God.
Through her missionary work, the Church cleanses and perfects for salvation whatever good is in the minds and hearts of men, whatever good lies latent in the religious practices and cultures of diverse peoples for the glory of God and the happiness of humanity.\textsuperscript{341} Positively, the Church transcended the affirmation of appropriate disposition in individual people to those values enshrined in their religious tradition and culture. The bishops affirmed these values and positive endowments of the others, not oblivious to the Church’s mission to share the gospel’s light on them to bring them to fulfillment.

In conclusion, the four documents discussed above drive home Vatican II’s positivity towards other religions and cultures by stressing that first, the Kingdom of God extends beyond the Church (LG 5, 9) and all people are ‘ordered,’ albeit differently, to the Church (LG 11, 13, 16). Again, in the prayer of the faithful, the Church prays for the entire world, both inside and outside the Church (SC 53; LG 17). Unlike the first millennium, the Catholic Church made a substantial shift by recognizing the elements of ‘grace and truth’ (what is ‘good and true) in the ‘religious others’ (LG 16). These positive elements of grace and value are nonetheless to be ‘healed, elevated, and consummated’ when these ‘others’ come to faith and baptism. In AG, the bishops, seeing the values in the religion and culture of other religions, encouraged missionaries to identify with the people and culture of the nations where they work. In all these, the Holy Spirit prompts the mission of the Church in the world (LG 17).

\textsuperscript{341} LG. 17.
2.6. *Nostra Aetate*: A Historical Turning Point of Interreligious Dialogue in Catholicism

**Introduction**

The ‘Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religion-*Nostra Aetate* (NA)” was promulgated during the fourth and final sessions of the Vatican II Council on October 28th, 1965, after it had gone through different phases of changes. With a positive outlook, Vatican II affirmed other faiths and their faithful as an integral part of the divine plan for humanity. The Catholic Church laid out a new path of openness, reconciliation, dialogue, and collaboration between the Christian religion and other religions and cultures. In *Nostra Aetate* (NA), the Church offered an explicit opportunity for openness to the truth and realities of other non-Christian faiths. As a buildup on the positivity in *Sacrosanctum Concilium and Lumen Gentium* (in particular, art. 16), NA has proved a genuine milestone in the history of Catholic interreligious dialogue. The declaration not only extended the positive dialogical remarks enshrined in LG 16 about Judaism and Islam but also reflected on other religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism. *Nostra Aetate* also placed the dialogical encounter of the Church and other religions in the broader context of humanity’s common origin and destiny in God to offer answers to common struggles with the riddles of human life and their common end in God. Even though NA recognized the truth and universalistic scope of God’s salvation in other faith traditions, it is appropriate to point out that the declaration did not relent in declaring the Church’s duty to affirm the fulfillment of religious striving in Christ just like the previous documents.

---

342 Subsequently, *Nostra Aetate* and *NA* would be used interchangeably.
343 Adjei, *The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World*, 33.
345 NA 2.
For some reason, Nostra Aetate had troubles with its acceptance (most particularly what was to be written about the relationship between the Church and Judaism.) The first version came to the Council Fathers in November 1964 as Chapter 4 (‘On the Relationship of Catholics to Non-Christians and especially to Jews’) in a ‘schema’ for the Decree on Ecumenism. After being worked on, a new draft of this same chapter became an appendix in the same decree and under the title ‘A Further Declaration on Jews and Non-Christians.’ Later the proposal was that it should be an appendix to LG, with the title ‘On the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions. Finally, after a heated debate in November 1964, the declaration under the same title was voted on and approved to be a self-standing document at the last Council’s season.

2.7. Some Fundamental Interreligious Tenets of Nostra Aetate

a. Religious and Moral Truths of Unity of Humanity

In Nostra Aetate, the Church framed her position with non-Christian religions and cultures within a theological concept of the development of unity within humanity. The declaration opens with an idea of humanity called to a vocation of drawing more closely together, with a bond of friendship and promotion of unity and love among different nations and people. The need to foster the unity of humankind could be looked at from two perspectives: Practical and theological. Practically, the bishops of Vatican II gathered at one place from different parts of the world, coupled with the reality in postmodernity that isolation and barriers between religions, nations and people are gradually disappearing as a result of the complexities and sophistication of social communication, globalization, the explosion of international trade, world sports and global tourism. Nostra Aetate declared that:

346 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 85.
347 For More on the historicity behind Nostra Aetate before its approval, see Ruokanen, The Catholic Doctrine of Non-Christian Religions According to the Second Vatican Council, 35-44.
In our time, when day by day mankind is being drawn closer together, and the ties between different peoples are becoming stronger, the Church examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions.\textsuperscript{349}

From a theological background, the bishops saw the unity of humanity as nothing different but the very essence of the Christian faith. The second sentence states: “In her task of promoting unity and love among men, indeed among nations, she considers above all in this declaration what men have in common and what draws them to fellowship.”\textsuperscript{350} The bishops acknowledged here the Church’s mission of ensuring this unity which flows from the catholic theological concept of the Holy Trinity, a perfect paradigm of unity among the three divine persons.

Promoting the unity of all humanity is a dialogical enterprise that transcends all attitudes of monologue. This unity of humankind is a motivation to closely examine the Church’s relation to other religions and their people. O’Collins opined that no Council among the Twenty-One general councils ever made such a profound statement about the state of global humanity.\textsuperscript{351} The ‘Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World’ later did not only affirm what NA had written but also extensively developed the vision of the global human race.\textsuperscript{352} From the broader frame of fostering the unity of humanity, NA recognized the urgent need of the Church which “examines more closely her relationship to non-Christian religions”\textsuperscript{353} in order to foster unity and charity among individual nations and religions as inherently bound to her mission.\textsuperscript{354} To accomplish such a task, NA, without denying the theological and doctrinal differences among other religions, emphasized more the positive shared understanding, what humans have in

\begin{footnotes}
\item[349] NA. 1.
\item[350] NA. 1.
\item[351] O’Collins, \textit{The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions}, 86. See Adjei, \textit{The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World}, 36.
\item[353] NA. 1.
\item[354] Cf. NA. 1, See also O’Collins, \textit{The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions}, 87.
\end{footnotes}
common, and what fosters fellowship among them.\textsuperscript{355} Here, the Fathers of the Council \textit{identified} three fundamental grounds for unity and better dialogical collaboration. These include 1) From one stock or origin in God, 2) the divine providence and salvation that extends to all people, and 3) their common heavenly destiny.\textsuperscript{356} In the footnote, NA quotes Acts 17: 26\textsuperscript{357} to emphasize the scriptural basis of nations stemming from one stock since God created the entire race of human beings to inhabit the earth.\textsuperscript{358} The declaration expressed the providence and universal salvation of humankind beyond religious sect by referencing Wisdom 8:1 in the footnote,\textsuperscript{359} Act 14:17, Romans 2:6-7, and 1 Timothy 2:4. With particularity, Romans 2:6-7, (God “will repay each person according to what they have done.” To those who, by persistence in doing good, seek glory, honor, and immortality, he will give eternal life.) convey a theme which stresses a common standard for judgment of all humanity irrespective of religion or being a Jew or gentile.

\textbf{b. Sacred Dignity, Divine Fatherhood, and the Fraternity of All}

Another ground to engage in interreligious dialogue with other religions is rooted in the defense of the sacred dignity of the human person. In defense of human dignity and divine fatherhood, the Fathers of Vatican II made known the Church’s frame of mind about all humanity. Pope John, in his encyclicals \textit{Mater et Magistra} (May 15, 1961) and \textit{Pacem in Terris} (April 11, 1963), makes the defense of \textit{Dignitas Humanae Personae} a theme because the

\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{355} Edward Idris Cardinal Cassidy, \textit{Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate} (Rediscovering Vatican II), (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2005), 129.
\item\textsuperscript{356} NA. 1.
\item\textsuperscript{357} (New American Standard Bible) “And he made from one man every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times and the boundaries of their habitation,” The Council only cited Acts 17:26 without quoting the text. According to O’Collins, in order to “simply avoid The problem of deciding between the two possible Greek readings: ‘ex henos (from one human being, from One ancestor)’ or ‘ex henos haimatos (from one blood, from one stock, from one blood-stock).’ O’Collins, \textit{The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions}, 87.
\item\textsuperscript{358} NA. 1.
\item\textsuperscript{359} Wisdom personifies divine willingness to save all when it said “She [lady wisdom] reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well. (RSV)
growing sense of the dignity of the human person will have a positive contribution to fostering the common good of all nations, people, and culture and for a genuine interreligious dialogue that transcends racial, religious, and cultural boundaries. Article 5 of Nostra Aetate reiterated the Church’s firm foundation of human dignity and human rights in her theology to argue that humanity must brotherly exist devoid of discrimination and violence. The declaration states:

We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man’s relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: “He who does not love does not know God” (1 John 4:8). No foundation therefore remains for any theory or practice that leads to discrimination between man and man or people and people, so far as their human dignity and the rights flowing from it are concerned. The Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, color, condition of life, or religion. 360

The Council noted that humanity’s common brotherhood is established on 1) “God is omnium Pater, and all human beings are created as imago Dei. 361 All humanity has a common origin, God, the father to all who has created every person in his own image. Irrespective of our differences in race, religion, culture, etc., we are all from God, the father of all, and bears his imprint. In his comment on these points, Roukanen upheld the Christian obligation “to treat all men fraterne and to regard them as homines fratres.” 362 He continues, “… moreover, for a Christian, treating other men with respect and love is a condition for his own relationship with God: If there is no love toward others, it is a sign that no relation of love with God exists.” 363 This is connected to the development of an attitude of zero tolerance of discrimination of any kind that tramples on human dignity and rights. Later, ‘Human Dignity’ would become the title of the Declaration on Religious Liberty which was promulgated on 7 December 1965 few weeks

360 NA. 5.
361 NA. 5.
after *Nostra Aetate. Gaudium et Spes* (promulgated on the same day) also noted and reaffirmed ‘the extraordinary dignity of the human person’ and the basic rights that flow from that dignity.\(^{364}\) It continues to say that since all are created in the image of God, “every way of discriminating against the fundamental rights of a person on the grounds of sex, race, color, social condition, language, or religion should be overcome and removed.”\(^ {365}\) The recognition that all humans are created and bear the image of God creates a mindset that prioritizes a better interpretation and understanding of ‘the religious others,’ whomever they may be.\(^ {366}\)

### c. Positive Elements, Truth, and Holiness in Other Religions

From a broader perspective of interreligious dialogue, *Nostra Aetate* also highlighted some positive elements, truth, and holiness inherent in non-Christian cultures and religions. The Council did so in the framework of John 14:6 and 2 Corinthians 5:18-19 to affirm Jesus Christ as “‘the way, the truth, and the life,’ the one in whom God has reconciled all things to himself”\(^ {367}\) as the pinnacle of divine revelation and salvation of humanity. According to *Nostra Aetate*, humanity experiences the “fullness of religious life” in and through Christ.\(^ {368}\) Even though the Council Fathers uncompromisingly proclaimed that the fullness of divine revelation and salvation resides in the Church through Christ, they did not fail to underscore that non-Christian religions also possess some elements of truth and holiness.

The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although different in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.\(^ {369}\)

---

\(^{364}\) GS 26.

\(^{365}\) GS 29. See also O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 103.

\(^{366}\) Ibid.

\(^{367}\) NA. 2. Does the profession of Jesus as the “the way, the truth and the life” meant to imply a separation between Christianity and other religions or a direct profession or follow of Jesus? This text has also been interpreted as Jesus, an incarnation who came to teach and show the world the “true way, truth and life” of the Father. That is to say that when a person follows the way and truth taught by Jesus, such a person can encounter God.

\(^{368}\) O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions*, 99. See also NA.2.

\(^{369}\) NA. 2.
Compared to previous papal bulls and Councils in the first millennia discussed above, NA carefully and intentionally refrained from using words of condemnation and defamation to describe the diverse manner of the doctrines and rituals practiced by non-Christian religions and cultures, which differ in many respects from Catholic teachings. On the contrary, the bishops affirmatively articulated that those non-Christian religions possess in their rituals and practices enshrined truths that are channels of illumination for all humanity (John 1.9)\(^{370}\) and not only their own believers. From this positive outlook, NA elaborated briefly on the spiritual or religious values of Hinduism and Buddhism when it said: “In Hinduism, men explore the divine mystery and express it both in the limitless riches of myth and the accurately defined insights of philosophy. They seek release from the trials of the present life by ascetical practices, profound meditation, and recourse to God in confidence and love.”\(^{371}\) In the same positive manner, the Church affirmed that Buddhism provides a diverse “way of life by which man can, with confidence and trust, attain a state of perfect liberation and reach supreme illumination either through their own efforts or by the aid of divine help.”\(^{372}\) It is this positive outlook of the Church of non-Christian religions that encouraged the bishops to invite the Christian faithful to collaborate and dialogue with Hinduism, Buddhism, and all other religions. NA noted:

> The church therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.\(^{373}\)

\(^{370}\) Though the church did not explicitly site the quotation, its allusion is unmistakable.

\(^{371}\) NA. 2.

\(^{372}\) NA. 2.

\(^{373}\) NA. 3.
Nostra Aetate only forcefully expresses the authenticity of the values and religious truth in other religions, affirmed by Lumen Gentium when it said there are elements of sanctification outside the Church. It is significant to state also that just as LG upholds elements of sanctification and truth outside the confines of the Catholic Church, it did not keep silent that the Church constituted and organized in our present age of postmodernity subsists in the Catholic Church.

The above positive outlook of the Church towards non-Christian religions, rituals, and traditions is reaffirmed by the Decree on the Mission Activity of The Church (Ad Gentes), a document promulgated on 7 December 1965.

This universal design of God for the salvation of the human race is carried out not only, as it were, secretly in the soul of a man, or by the attempts (even religious ones by which in diverse ways it seeks after God) if perchance it may contact Him or find Him, though He be not far from anyone of us (cf. Acts 17:27).

Ad Gentes 3 employs the phrase “even religious ones” in the above article to objectively express elements belonging to the “others” religious traditions against the subjective dispositions that inform people’s personal religious life, as intimated in LG 17. The bishops add that these religious attempts or undertakings also need to undergo enlightenment and healing even though, through the providential workings of God, they may sometimes serve as leading the way towards God or as a preparation for the Gospel.

Again, while the Council Fathers acknowledged the authenticity of human and spiritual value in non-Christian religions and traditions of nations, it was not silent on the necessity to purify, raise and bring to perfection in Christ any element of goodness found in people and their tradition or culture. AG writes:

---

375 Ad Gentes (AG) 3.
But whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations, as a sort of secret presence of God, He frees from all taint of evil and restores to Christ its maker, …And so, whatever good is found to be sown in the hearts and minds of men, or in the rites and cultures peculiar to various peoples, not only is not lost, but is healed, uplifted, and perfected for the glory of God, the shame of the demon, and the bliss of men. 

The need to purify, heal and bring elements of goodness to Christ found among non-Christian cultures and religions necessitated the bishops to comment on the true spirit and role that missionaries must inculcate:

In order that they may be able to bear more fruitful witness to Christ, let them be joined to those men by esteem and love; let them acknowledge themselves to be members of the group of men among whom they live; let them share in cultural and social life by the various undertakings and enterprises of human living; let them be familiar with their national and religious traditions; let them gladly and reverently lay bare the seeds of the Word which lie hidden among their fellows. At the same time, however, let them look to the profound changes which are taking place among nations, and let them exert themselves to keep modern man, intent as he is on the science and technology of today’s world from becoming a stranger to things divine; rather, let them awaken in him a yearning for that truth and charity which God has revealed. Even as Christ Himself searched the hearts of men, and led them to divine light, so also His disciples, profoundly penetrated by the Spirit of Christ, should show the people among whom they live, and should converse with them, that they themselves may learn by sincere and patient dialogue what treasures a generous God has distributed among the nations of the earth. But at the same time, let them try to furbish these treasures, set them free, and bring them under the dominion of God their Savior.

Missionaries today who are under the authentic influence of the Holy Spirit cannot but see God in the national and religious traditions of others. This can only be possible when missionaries and, of course, the entire Church is ready to go beyond their own insecurity to familiarize themselves with the traditions, cultures, and religions of others, to learn devoid of judging others from their own religious ideas and doctrines.

---

378 AG 9, LG 17.
379 AG 11. In chapter three, a contrast missionary attitude will be discussed as the missionaries first landed on the soil of Gold Coast, the modern-day Ghana. If such attitude of Vatican had been the approach, Ghana church today would have had a better evangelization that was much entrenched in the traditions and culture of the people.
The revolutionary teaching of Vatican II in postmodernity about non-Christian religions and cultures, which will be noticed in Chapter Three, is a total sharp difference between how mission and evangelization began in Ghana and the encounter of Christianity with Akan Traditional Religion in the middle of the 19th Century. The early missionaries failed to identify or familiarize themselves with the cultural and religious heritage of the Akan people. Their insecurity and ignorance of the people, culture, and religion made them adopt the categorization tool, where everything “Akan” was branded as fetish or devilish. They failed to discover the secret presence of God in the Akan culture and thus brainwashed the converts to develop inner animosity for their own roots and indigenous religion. Traces of this continue to hamper the self-realization and religious and cultural development of the Akan people and Ghana in general.

d. Conclusion

Vatican II approached non-Christian Religions and traditions more positively than the papal and conciliar statements and mentality of the first millennia. From the writings of Sacrosanctum Concilium, Lumen Gentium, Nostra Aetate to Ad Gentes, the Church witnessed a new outlook that acknowledges the presence of the “seed of the Word” and “the ray of that truth which enlightens all humanity” in other religious faith and rituals. The Church acknowledges the divine origin of some elements of truth, which could also serve as “pedagogy toward the true God.” The Vatican II Fathers intend to recognize in non-Christian religions the presence of both human value and divine gifts, which are not only a manifestation of goodness or holiness in non-Christians as persons but as objective elements inherent in their religious traditions and rites. These positives are not the human initiative but rather the preliminary working of the Holy Spirit before the advent of the missionaries in different cultures. It could be said that these elements of truth and holiness are not there because the Catholic Church now acknowledges them as a
reality. On the contrary, the Church is now coming to a better appreciation of what is not within its circles. These non-Catholic traditions, rituals, and rites do not need the Church to affirm that they are rays of truth and holiness before they can effectively guide their members. Again, even though Vatican II Council encouraged dialogue among religions, the question remains: Can the Catholic Church accept the reality that its religious dialogical partners are legitimate media for God’s revelation and salvific truths in themselves? The complexities of these questions leave the next section of the dissertation to critically examine the conciliar documents that touched on the Church’s dialogical encounter with non-Christian religions and traditions to unravel the theological flaws inherent in some of the documents despite the positive outlook explained above.
2.8. Intrinsic Hermeneutical and Epistemological Flaws of Vatican II Documents: Implication for Interreligious Dialogue in the Postmodern Era

Vatican II doctrine, theological and pastoral appreciation of non-Christian religions and traditions have received diverse interpretations. Both reductionists and maximalists approach the conciliar texts from different perspectives.\(^{380}\) A critical examination of the spectrum of interpretations of these documents discussed above will help foster a balanced evaluation of the contributions of Vatican II towards the advancement of dialogue in this present age. This section will discuss that despite the theological and pastoral positive shifts the Church has made, especially at Vatican II, the changing features of postmodernity with all its complexities pose new challenges to the Church to reexamine her hermeneutics and epistemology that underline her theological discourses. Some of these hermeneutical and epistemological flaws will be discussed under the following subtitles: 1) Claim of universal truth, salvation, and ideologies, 2) ‘Revelation’ in Other Religions, 3) Intrinsic truth and holiness based on the Church’s Judgement? 4) Colonial narrative, perception, Imagery, and Language, 5) Silence of Vatican II on some Religions.

a. The claim of Universal Truth, Salvation, and Ideologies

A critical examination of the conciliar texts reveals that the bishops reiterated the classical theologies that postulate universalistic ideologies and their complexities that suppress all other religions’ sacred histories.\(^{381}\) The result of such a theological system is the imposition of uniform theological and pastoral ideas in different contexts. Traces of such hermeneutical flaws are identified in Vatican II documents. For example, in his general comment on Western theology, Deloria Vine, in his book “God is Red,” pointed out that a particular revelation is

\(^{380}\) Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 165.
\(^{381}\) See Adjei, The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World, 50.
mistakenly perceived to be of a universal relevance without respect to context, time, space, and locality. He writes:

In the western tradition, revelation has generally been interpreted as the communication to human beings of a divine plan, the release of new information and insight when the deity has perceived that mankind has reached the fullness of time and can now understand additional knowledge about the ultimate nature of our world. Thus, what has been manifested of the deity in a particular local situation is mistaken for a truth applicable to all times and places, a truth so powerful that it must be impressed upon people who have no connection to the event or to cultural complex in which it originally made sense.\textsuperscript{382}

Such a universalistic Western approach to revelation has the highest tendency to assume that the revelation that is known to a particular church (in this case, Catholicism) is the only and highest form to be propagated without considering the revelation that had taken place in another locality or particular context. Such assumption and hermeneutical approach are a catalyst that impedes a proper interreligious dialogue between or among religions and cultures where one assumes to possess the highest and true revelation to impose it on the other in their encounter. For instance, from a hermeneutical standpoint, \textit{Nostra Aetate} positively spoke of other religions with reverence and respect for those ways of conduct and rituals, their teachings and precepts, though different from what she holds as being a ‘ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.’\textsuperscript{383} Right after this positive assertion, the Church quickly adds that Christ, who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn. 14:6), is the one through whom “men find the fullness of their religious life.”\textsuperscript{384} Again, \textit{Nostra Aetate} further adds in article 4 that the Church possesses the role of proclaiming the cross: “it is the duty of the church, therefore, in her preaching to proclaim the cross of Christ as


\textsuperscript{383} NA 2.

\textsuperscript{384} NA 2. “Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.”
the sign of God’s universal love and the source of Grace.” The question unanswered is, must the Christic revelation of love and grace for our entire universe at all times, in every culture and context, only be proclaimed under the event of the cross on Calvary or beyond the cross, or are there other dimensions of experiencing the universal love and grace revealed in other religions but not under the cross? What happens to the souls of different cultures and times who did not encounter the message of love and grace through the cross? Are they damned or saved? The Conciliar writings have advocated such definitions of religious universalism and revelation, faith, and theology as paradigms of truth that cannot but ought to be assimilated or “inculturated” by all other religious faiths.

Again, some of the conciliar documents do not relent to affirm that the fullness of revelation and salvation resides in Jesus and the Catholic Church. For instance, in Dei Verbum, Pope Paul VI explicitly writes: “This plan of revelation is realized by deeds and words having an inner unity...By this revelation then, the deepest truth about God and the salvation of man shines out for our sake in Christ, who is both the mediator and the fullness of all revelation.” Dei Verbum further added: “Christ the Lord in whom the full revelation of the supreme God is brought to completion.” When NA and LG positively express that other religious traditions “may achieve salvation,” the bishops were consciously silent to confirm that, different religions and traditions could function as “ways of salvation in a manner analogous, let alone

---

385 NA 4.
388 DV. 7.
389 LG. 16.
parallel, to Christianity.”  

A paradoxical post-Vatican II document *Dominus Iesus* reiterates what NA had already opined along the same line in these words: “if it is true that the followers of the other religions can receive divine grace, it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.”  

From the theological perspective of *Dominus Iesus*, the ‘if’ clause used in the statement encodes the Church’s positive perception of non-Christian religions and divine grace on the conditional relation of the church’s Christological reading of divine grace of salvation. That means that divine grace and salvation found in the other religions are not independent but necessarily hinge on Jesus Christ. Coming from such a theology of universalism, the Church, according to Aihiokhai, “continues to position itself in a way that hinders its ability to see the riches of the flourishing of religions among peoples, even among the oppressed and the marginalized.  

b. ‘Revelation’ in Other Religions

Secondly, an in-depth analysis of the use of the word “revelation” from a hermeneutical standpoint betrays the intentions of Vatican II and the Church’s understanding and perception of other religions. When *Nostra Aetate* spoke of non-Christian religions and cultures, it never applied “revelation.” The only time ‘revelation’ was used in reference to a non-Christian religion was when the Church gratefully recounted ‘the revelation’ that she had inherited from the Jewish people in the Old Testament. NA writes, “…on this account the church cannot forget that she

---


received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established the ancient covenant.”

In his commentary on this subject, Miikka Ruokanen may be right in saying of the Church that “any idea of applying the concept of revelation to any instance outside Christianity is totally missing in the council documents.”

If the Church acknowledges revelation outside Christianity through the Hebrew Bible, why is it impossible to affirmatively inscribe in NA that it could also be present in all other religions beyond the Jewish Old Testament. Again, when NA acknowledges the positive elements in other religions and traditions, it only references “their natural aspects, i.e., natural knowledge of the one personal creator and natural law given by Him.”

Dupuis says: “much less, then, are non-Christian religions viewed by the Council as “ways of salvation.” He continues, “The Council fully acknowledges the moral good which can be found in the doctrinal concepts and moral practices of religions. But in regard to mysterium divinum, non-Christian religions are still seekers of the truth.” This implies that “non-Christian religions do not add any supernatural dimension of revelation or grace to the natural condition of man.”

Karl Rahner, like Ruokanen, also spoke of the Council Fathers as being extraordinarily reserved when the question of salvific faith in a real revelation of God in the strict sense is raised outside the realm of the Old and New Testaments. In his comment O’Collins expressed his issue with Rahner’s use and significance of the ‘real’ in ‘real revelation’ and ‘in the strict sense’

---

393 NA. 4.
395 Ibid., 68.
397 Ibid., 100. Also quoted in Adjei, The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World, 53.
to qualify how revelation occurs. O’Collins questions: “Is God’s revelation sometimes (often?) less than ‘real’? When and how would such a revelation occur in less than ‘the strict sense’?”399 In his bid to understand Rahner’s position, O’Collins perceived that “Perhaps Rahner has in mind a distinction between revelation as it occurs in the ‘special’ history of revelation and salvation (that the inspired Scriptures recorded and interpreted) and revelation as it occurs in the ‘general’ history of revelation and salvation that coincides with the history of humanity”400 O’Collins in disagreement with Rahner endeavored to point out the dangers in being obsessed to fish out or being bewitched by the excessive search for the word ‘revelation’ and ‘reveal.’ To illustrate his point, he referred to Rudolf Bultmann, who highlighted years ago the number of times the Fourth Gospel used the word revelation concerning Christ.401 O’Collins continued, “Even if that Gospel never formally gives Christ the title of ‘Revealer’ and never uses the terminology of ‘revelation (apokalupsis)’ and ‘reveal (apokalupso),’ it applies to him a rich and variegated revelatory language: ‘glory’ (and ‘glorify’), ‘light,’ ‘signs,’ ‘truth,’ ‘witness’ (as both noun and verb), the ‘I am’ sayings, ‘disclose (phaneroo),’ and so forth.” He then concludes that even though the Johannine vocabulary didn’t use the words ‘revealer,’ ‘reveal,’ and ‘revelation,’” it still communicated the identity and activities of Christ heavily with revelatory import.402 O’Collins continues in defense of the Council by analyzing what the Church implied when she spoke of the Hindus and Muslim religions. He raised a question concerning what NA said about the Hindus examining the divine mystery, others possessing some true and holy elements and their rituals and practices to ‘often reflect a ray of that Truth, which enlightens all human

400 O’Collins, The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions, 107.
401 Ibid. For details, see O’Collins, Rethinking Fundamental Theology: Towards a New Fundamental Theology (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 68.
beings.’ O’Collins believed that Christ (the Truth that enlightens all human beings) could not possibly enlighten humanity without conveying to them something of the divine self-revelation? In this sense, he believes the Council presumably meant what it said (or, at least, clearly implied) about the light of God’s revelation going beyond the territory of Christianity to reach everyone, including the followers of other religions. In the same spectrum of O’Collins, P. Rossano, reflecting on the Council’s assertion of elements of truth and grace as present in other religions, has no hesitation in affirming that “as for the salvific function of these religions, namely, whether they are or not path of salvation, there is no doubt that ‘grace and truth’ do reach or may reach the hearts of men and women through the visible, experiential signs of the various religions. Vatican II is explicit on this point.” This dissertation struggles with the veracity of O’Collins and Rossano’s positions because if Vatican II were implicit about God’s revelation in other religions, post-Vatican II documents would have at least categorically referenced other religions in the light of revelation (just like in Christianity and Judaism) independent of the Catholic Church and the grace of the cross. More so, the Church would have no reservation in seeing religious pluralism as a de jure within which people attain their salvation.

K. Kunnumpuram elaborated on the Council’s document firstly by pointing out that the Council never asks directly whether God utilizes the element of truth and holiness embedded in the rites and doctrines of the non-Christian religions to mediate the salvation of their members and whether they are “providential means of salvation” for them. Despite this, Kunnumpuram

---

403 Ibid.
404 Ibid.
wholistically viewed the different positivity of the conciliar document about non-Christian religions to argue that members of these religions and traditions “are, or can be, saved in and through their non-Christian religions. For them, these religions are ways of salvation.”

A summary of his position is as follows:

The Second Vatican Council recognizes that non-Christian religions possess many positive values such as truth and goodness, grace and holiness. It regards these values as a sort of secret presence of God, as the seeds of the Word and the fruits of the Spirit. The council realises that these religions cannot be considered merely as natural religions, since they contain supernatural elements, even saving faith. Despite error, sin and human depravity, non-Christian religions are a preparation for the Gospel, as they have an innate tendency, as inner dynamism towards Christ and his Church. For those who have not yet been existentially confronted with Christianity, non-Christian religions can serve as ways of salvation, in the sense that God saves these men in and through the doctrines and practices of these religions.

Examining all these divergent views, it is still not adequate to state that the Catholic Church, in the conciliar documents, intended revelation or salvation as a principle that emanates intrinsically from the rites and practices of non-Christian religions independent of Christianity and the Christic message of love and grace of the cross. Do these documents imply that God’s revelation and salvation are a *de jure* or divinely ordained principle in all religions independent of Christianity? To avoid room for doubt, the subsequent conciliar document, *Decree on the Church’s Missionary Activity* (December 1965), promulgated a few months after *Nostra Aetate* explicitly acknowledged ‘revelation’ in the divine activity beyond the territories of Christianity. Still, the same question stands: by this does the Catholic Church perceive salvation and revelation in non-Christian religions and, for that matter, religious pluralism as a

---

divine plan of God for the perfect redemption of members of each religion? If yes, is
evangelization aimed at conversion still relevant in Catholic pastoral ministry?

c. Intrinsic Truth and Holiness Based on the Church’s Judgement?

What locus does the Church reflect and judge the truth and holiness of non-Christian
religions, and what kind of truth does the Council see from the perspective of the non-Christians?
As said in the previous sections, Nostra Aetate positively recognizes the element of truth and
holiness of non-Christian religions from the interreligious point of view. A careful reading of
the Council statement on the truth and holiness in other religions, however, raises the question:
what is the paradigm for measuring the truth, or by whose judgment are these non-Christian
religions true and holy? Is the truth weighed by the hermeneutical judgment of the Catholic
Church, or do truthfulness and holiness emerge as the innate character of these religions?

Reflecting on this, Roukanen points out that the possibility of the presence of God’s saving grace
in other religions is not totally rejected by the Church but not without a link to Christianity. He
observes that “a continuity seems to exist between non-Christian religions and the Christian
truth. A possibility of the presence of God’s saving grace in other religions thus seems not to be
totally excluded.” However, he continued, non-Christian religions “have no independent status
as to revelation of the divine mystery; their religious truth must be related to the truth of
Christianity.” Such a theological understanding and writing, Roukanen said, aligns with the
“perfection or fulfillment theory so usual in post conciliar Catholic analysis of non-Christian
religions.”

Along the same lines, Ahiokhai believes that “if the church’s teaching authority

408 “Nostra Aetate 2” as in Flannery, ed., Vatican Council II.
409 Adjei, The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World, 54.
411 Ibid. See also Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 166.
412 Ibid.
has judged that other religions are holy and true not of themselves but only of what they convey, ‘ray of truth,’ then it is a logical conclusion to deny their intrinsic salvific significance."413 The opposite question seems relevant here too: what is the possibility of Vatican II or the Church accepting that there is equally the presence of ‘rays of truth’ not found in the Catholic Church but available to some of the non-Christian religions for which the Church can adopt for its own edification? These questions raise some consistent epistemological conclusions and resistance to the validity of the religious claims by non-Christians outside the watchful eyes of the magisterial teachings of the Church. From this background, Maurier concludes that the Church’s way of thinking is only from the egocentric dimension,414 impeding a genuine interreligious dialogue which must be a mutual affair, a two-way street in which there is give-and-take.415

c. Colonial Narrative, Perception, Imagery, and Language

In Nostra Aetate and other conciliar documents, there are traces of biases of colonial narrative, perception, imagery, and language for a Church that endeavors to open up for a genuine dialogue or encounter unfamiliar terrains of other religions, their peoples, and cultures. In Vatican II, religions and traditions that have been at the margins of human civilizations and with much less political influence in the world did not receive any proper recognition.416 Nostra Aetate, for instance, writes: “religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and more developed language.”417 Upon whose paradigm is cultures and religions judged as advanced and

415 See Adjei, The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World, 55.
416 It is obvious from the Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religions, an ecumenical document that was meant to express the Church’s openness and collaborations with other religions failed to mention African Traditional Religion or other indigenous religions.
417 NA. 2. Italic mine.
of developed language? Is it by a Western standard, or does the advancement of a culture originate from the sense of the native’s ability to communicate the complexities of their beliefs and rituals? Douglas E. Thomas remarked on the article by Samuel G. Kibicho. He noted that “in western scholarship, Judaism and Islam have been viewed as superior to other religions because of their monotheistic view of deity. This ignores the fact that African Traditional Religions is a religion whose strength is in the unity of diversity.”418 It should be said that if the criteria of assessment of sophistication and advancement of cultures and religions were founded on the doctrine of monotheism, the Church would always be clouded to see beyond itself to understand better and appreciate other religions. Every culture and religion possesses its own identity and unique beauty (also true of the Akan Tradition Religion), and it is a divine gift only to be perceived when people are open to it with the necessary respect and dignity.419

In his article “Reading Nostra Aetate in Reverse: A Different Way of Looking at the Relationships Among Religions,” Peter Phan points out the hermeneutical and theological problem with the use of ‘non-Christian’ to describe other religions in Vatican II document. He explains the offensive implication of the prefix ‘non,’ perhaps an anthropological and sociological shorthand used to distinguish ‘us’ from ‘them.’420 Phan argues that it is difficult for a person who was groomed exclusively in a Christian milieu to understand the depth of the negative naming (non-Christian) of the other religions. ‘Non-Christian’ as an identity marker used by the Church, a Christian religion that has claimed superiority over other religions for

419 Simon Mary Asese Ahiokhai, “Going Beyond Nostra Aetate...,” 388.
centuries, ignites a spark of past monologue and master-slave relationship in any dialogical encounter. Phan writes:

The “non” then, when applied to others, implies the absence, or at least imperfect presence, of all the things that make this group the norm and standard of perfection for all others. Thus, during the height of empire and colonialism, such sobriquets as “non-Greek,” “non-Roman,” “non-Persian,” “non-Turkish,” “non-British,” … were powerful weapons in the imperial and colonialist arsenals to categorize other peoples as uncivilized and barbarian who therefore needed to be brought into the fold by means of the *mission civilisatrice* and often by conquest and subjugation. Such negative designation is by no means a neutral nomenclature but is part and parcel of the imperial politics of difference and power. 421

It is essential to state here that the above quote is not meant from the standpoint of this dissertation to suggest that the bishops of Vatican II are concealing imperialistic ambitions (Phan also shares the same position). But it would not be astonishing for those referred to as ‘non-Christians’ to read the title or entire *Nostra Aetate* along the lines of imperialism or colonialism since Christianity has had a long history with empire — “after all it was an imperial religion for nearly two millennia.” 422 Because of this, it will be difficult to dismiss any concern or interpretation related to religious domination as “overheated conspiracy theorizing or trivial terminological nitpicking.” 423

Beyond the point of imperial domination, Phan identifies the crux of the matter here as not merely lexicology but more of a theology that falls under the umbrella of “fulfillment theology” of religion. 424 A careful reading of NA for believers of other religions will sense that Christianity is used as the measuring rod, as the *vera religio*, to classify and eventually to

---

421 Ibid.
422 For instance, an Akan (Ghanaian) who was colonized under the tool, among other Christian religion reading such language would not be mistaken to do so under the lens of a master-servant relationship of dialogue.
424 Phan, *Reading Nostra Aetate in Reverse*.
425 Ibid.
appraise other religions.\textsuperscript{426} Irrespective of the fact that NA focuses on dialogue with other religions and traditions, the language used here describes other religions from the vantage point of Christianity to portray how close or connected they are with it. Peter phan writes, “In fact, it seems that the various religions are listed in the ascending order of the degree of their agreements with Christianity—from the so-called primal religion through Hinduism and Buddhism to Muslims and lastly to Jews.”\textsuperscript{427} Phan envisages that this could be the reason NA failed to mention Indian religions like Jainism and Sikhism and the Chinese religious traditions such as Confucianism and Daoism because they are significantly dissimilar from Christianity. Based on the language, imagery, perception, and traces of colonial narrative, it could be concluded that dialogue, as perceived in NA, is not a mutual one but only unidirectional. Other religions can be “fulfilled” in Christianity, and not the other way round\textsuperscript{428}

d. Silence of Vatican II

Concerning the focus of this dissertation, it is paramount to mention that the declaration did not even mention indigenous religions at all, like Indian Tribal Religions and African Tradition Religion, which some of which have existed before Christianity. On the one hand, while NA categorically recognized some religions like Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism and Judaism by names, it completely kept silent on indigenous religions in general and African Traditional Religion in particular. This gesture communicates volumes of the closeness of dialogical encounters the Church has or envisages with these different religions. The language of \textit{Nostra Aetate}, especially about Judaism, depicts and affirms its unique and privileged position with the Church in the divine plan of salvation and the close relationship compared to African Traditional

\textsuperscript{426} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{427} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{428} Ibid.
Religion and others. The assertion of Peter Phan could be correct in saying that the Catholic Church perceives Judaism as beyond the category of the religions she calls non-Christian in the dialogical engagement. In unequivocal terms, Catholicism affirms the reality of divine revelation and grace and not merely the “element of truth and grace” or “secret presence of God” or “seed of the Word” as she speaks of the other religions. The question relevant today is this: is Catholicism ready today to talk of African Traditional Religion (Akan Religion) in the same language as Judaism or Israel with respect to divine revelation and God’s salvific grace? If not, where does a religiously mutual dialogical encounter begin so that African Traditional Religion and Catholicism can both experience the sentiment of being not ignored by the other but can build room for a mutual interpenetration?^430

2.9. Post-Conciliar Magisterium and Interreligious Dialogue: Continuity and Innovations

From the broader theological frame of the Church after Vatican II, documents published and interreligious relations with other religions continue to grow. This section reviews post-conciliar documents and papal statements to highlight the continuity and innovations of the narrowly ecclesiocentric approach of Vatican II towards other religions and interreligious dialogue. Documents and popes to be considered here include Pope Paul VI and, Pope John Paul II, Benedict XVI. Later in Chapter Three, Pope Francis’ pontificate also would be reviewed.

1. Pope Paul VI and Other Religions

The Pontificate of Paul VI saw the birth of Ecclesia Suam (6 August 1964), which was published between the second and third sessions of Vatican II deliberations. Some theological

---

429 Phan, Being Religious Interreligiously, 139. See also Adjei, The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World, 55.
scholars hastily affirmed this encyclical as the “manifesto of a Church in transition from a monologue to dialogue." The pope saw a church eager to evangelize and to live not in a world of singularity but amid pluralistic “otherness.” Pope Paul VI, in the encyclical, understood the encounter of God and humanity in the history of salvation from the perspective of dialogue. From such understanding, the pope perceived the Church in the world as positioned to enter into dialogue in four dimensions: With the entire world, other religions, other Christian churches, and dialogue within the church. The pope was cautious in noting first the foundations and conditions for interfaith dialogue. He observed that religions of this world have different doctrinal foundations. Thus, the Catholic Church cannot be unconcerned about seeing all religions as having the same value. For the pope, honesty compels the Church to “declare openly that we believe, namely that there is one true religion, the Christian religion, and that we hope that all who seek God and adore him, will come to acknowledge this.” He nonetheless affirms:

We do acknowledge with respect the spiritual and moral values of various non-Christian religions, for we desire to join with them in promoting and defending common ideas... On these great ideals that we share with them we can have dialogue, and we shall not fail to offer opportunities for it whenever, in genuine mutual respect, our offer would be received with good will.

Pope Paul VI, in the continuity of the theology and understanding of the ongoing synod of Vatican II, positively affirmed the respect the Church has for the spiritual and moral values of other religions but did not hesitate to indicate in an uncompromising term the exclusiveness of

---

432 Ibid.
435 Ibid.
436 Ibid.
Christianity as the “one true religion.” Just like Vatican II, Pope Paul VI also had an ecclesiocentric scope of writing even though he was open to dialogue with other religions.

In his apostolic exhortation Evangelii Nuntiandi (December 8, 1975), Pope Paul VI looks at the theology of other religions under the background of the evangelization world of the Church in the modern world. Even though the apostolic letter in the continuity of Vatican II stressed on the innate duty of the Church to evangelize the modern world, it also exhorted Christians to respect the religious traditions of the people of the nation where the Church finds itself spreading the good news. The Church greatly respects and values non-Christian religions and their traditions, lifestyle, and faith. Evangelii Nuntiadi maintains a proclamation of faith rooted in respect and tolerance.\textsuperscript{437} Concerning the salvific values found in the scriptures of other religions, the Pope held in the continuity of the theology of Vatican II that they are preparations for the Gospel and that the seeds of the word of God can be found in them.\textsuperscript{438} It must be repeated that the pope captured the negativity that did not correspond to the many opinions expressed by the synod of bishops on the evangelization of the modern world. One of such is as follows:

Even in the face of natural religious expressions most worthy of esteem, the Church finds support in the fact that the religion of Jesus, which she proclaims through evangelization, objectively places man in relation with the plan of God, with His living presence and with His action; she thus causes an encounter with the mystery of divine paternity that bends over towards humanity. In other words, our religion effectively establishes with God an authentic and living relationship which the other religions do not succeed in doing, even though they have, as it were, their arms stretched out towards heaven.\textsuperscript{439}


\textsuperscript{438} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{439} EN. 53. Italic for emphasis is mine.
Here, it becomes evident that the pope revisited the fulfillment theory, which has been classical in the theology of the Church. Jacque Dupuis argues in the same line when he said “the image of the arms stretched out towards heaven,” as against God reaching out to human’s aspiration in the person and ministry of Jesus, and the distinction between the “highest forms of natural religions” and the insistence on the religion of Jesus through which alone an “authentic and living relationship with God is truly established” are all indicator that the pope, Paul VI, travels back to uphold in a classical form the fulfillment theory.\(^{440}\) The pope who was seen as “the pope of dialogue” through Ecclesial Suam portrayed some modicum of silence on the subject of interreligious dialogue in Evangelii Nuntiadi.\(^{441}\)

2. The Pontificate of John Paul II and Other Religions

Pope John Paul II showed much conviction that interreligious dialogue could be a potent path to unite diverse efforts on behalf of furthering the causes of peace, understanding just and human dignity. John Paul II builds upon the positive outlook of the Vatican II Council. Even though Vatican II rediscovered and progressively emphasized the universal economy of the role of the Holy Spirit in the world (see LG, Gaudium et Spes), Pope John Paul II’s “theology of religions” in a more comprehensive manner, affirms the operative presence of God’s Spirit in the religious and traditional life of non-Christians. His first encyclical Redemptor Hominis (March 4, 1979), spoke of non-Christians with the “firm belief” of an “effect of the Spirit of truth”\(^{442}\) and this made him ask the question:

\[
\text{Does it not sometimes happen that the firm belief of the followers of the non-Christian religions—a belief that is also an effect of the Spirit of truth operating outside the visible confines of the Mystical Body—can make Christians ashamed at being often themselves so disposed to doubt concerning the truths revealed by}
\]

\(^{440}\) See Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 172.
\(^{441}\) Cf. Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 173.
\(^{442}\) Ibid. 174.
God and proclaimed by the Church and so prone to relax moral principles and open the way to ethical permissiveness?\footnote{443}

The pope reiterates here what the Fathers of the Council acknowledged; one truth or “seeds of the Word” (cf. AG 11, LG 17), but different religions take diverse channels to reach that single goal. It is this truth “to which is directed the deepest aspiration of the human spirit as expressed in its quest for God and also in its quest, through its tending towards God, for the full dimension of its humanity, or in other words for the full meaning of human life.”\footnote{444} The pope, therefore, calls on all missionaries to respect everything that has been brought through the action of the Spirit which “blows where he wills (Jn 3:8).”\footnote{445} These affirmations of the pope highlight the same truth gradually developing that “the holy spirit is present and active in the World, in the members of other religions, and in the religious traditions themselves.”\footnote{446}

Again, John Paul II transcended or expanded the position of Vatican II when he spoke more intensely on the Spirit of God's active presence in other religions' religious traditions. At the event of the World Day of prayer for peace in Assisi (October 27, 1986), the Pope recalled that the participants had prayed for peace that was in harmony with their respective religious identities and the quest for truth. Notwithstanding this, the pope pointed out that there had been a “wonderful manifestation of that unity which binds us together beyond the differences and divisions which are known to all.”\footnote{447} His conviction for such declaration was based on his belief that “every authentic prayer is under the influence of the Spirit ‘who intercedes insistently for us…, because we do not know how to pray as we ought,’ but he prays in us ‘with unutterable

\footnote{444}{RH. 11.}
\footnote{445}{RH. 11.}
\footnote{446}{Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism}, 175.}
\footnote{447}{Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism}, 175.}
groanings’ and ‘the One who searches the hearts knows what are the desires of the Spirit’” [Rom 8:26-27.] For the pope, every authentic prayer is called forth by the Holy Spirit, who is mysteriously present in the Catholic Church and outside and in every person’s heart.448

Again, the economy of the Spirit is further made clear in the encyclical Dominum et Vivificantem (May 18, 1986), where Pope John Paul II stressed the universal activity of the Spirit outside the Catholic Church and before the Christian dispensation.449 In Redemptoris Missio (December 7, 1990), the pope, with greater clarity, writes that the spirit’s role is not only experienced by individual persons but also by the religious traditions themselves.

The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time… The Spirit, therefore, is at the very source of man’s existential and religious questioning, a questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but by the very structure of his being. The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions.450

It must be said that, despite the repeated affirmation of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the other religions and their traditions, the pope, on the one hand, affirms salvation outside the Church when he said, “by virtue of a grace which, while having a mysterious relationship to the Church, does not make them formally part of the Church but enlightens them in a way which is accommodated to their spiritual and material situation.”451 He did not fail to add that “although

This is also stated in the popes “Message to the People of Asia” (21 February 1981).
449 This reiterates what AG had said that the Spirit’s activity in the world had been before the Christic event—(without doubt, the Holy Spirit was at work in the world before Christ was glorified” (AG 4). Leo the great also wrote “when the Holy Spirit filled the Lord’s disciples on the day of Pentecost, this was not the first exercise of his role but an extension of his bounty, because the patriarchs, prophets, priests, and all the holy people of the previous ages were nourished by the same sanctifying Spirit…., although the measure of the gifts was not the same” (sermo 76; PL 54:405-6).
451 RM. 10.
participated forms of mediation of different kinds and degrees are not excluded, they acquire meaning and value *only* from Christ’s own mediation, and they cannot be understood as parallel or complementary to his.”

From this, one can conclude that, in a way, John Paul II is reminiscent of his predecessor by resuming the “fulfillment theory” in *Evangelii Nunciandi*. For instance, in his apostolic letter *Tertio Millennio Adveniente (Nov 10, 1994)*, the pope asserts that “…the incarnate Word is thus the fulfillment of the yearning present in all the religions of humankind: This fulfillment is brought about by God himself and transcends all human expectations. It is the mystery of grace.” In Christ, religion is no longer a ‘blind search for God’ cf. Acts 17:27 but the response of faith to God who reveals himself…. Christ is thus the fulfillment of the yearning of all the world’s religions and, as such, he is their sole and definitive completion. The sense of other religions having their fulfillment in Christianity and Jesus Christ could be visualized in these texts concerning God’s gratuitous communication to humanity in the person and ministry of Jesus.

3. The Pontificate of Benedict XVI and Interreligious Dialogue

Pope Benedict XVI’s vision of interreligious dialogue post-Vatican II has been viewed by many as problematic. In his writings and speeches as Joseph Ratzinger and Pope Benedict XVI, two important thoughts have been considered difficult to reconcile: 1) Ratzinger saw interreligious dialogue as highlighting the truth and thus is intrinsically connected with

---

452 RM 5. Italic original
454 RM 6.
455 Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, 178.
evangelization. 2) Benedict treated interreligious dialogue, or at least theological dialogue, as an impossibility, calling instead for an intercultural dialogue about common values and human rights. While Emile Anton tries to reconcile both in his article “Mission Impossible? Pope Benedict XVI and Interreligious Dialogue,” many theologians like Thomas P. Rausch compare different sources to conclude that Ratzinger is “somewhat ambivalent regarding dialogue with non-Christian traditions.” Gregory Baum on the other hand points to a shift in Ratzinger/Benedict’s writings from a negative perspective to a positive one and Peter C. Phan identifies a “development in the opposite direction.” This section does not aim to do a comparative study but to briefly look at his vision for truth in interreligious dialogue as a continuity of Vatican II, a further development, or calving of a new paradigm. In examining some of his writings, Dominus Iesus will receive greater attention.

According to Ratzinger, interreligious dialogue is not aimed at unifying all the diverse religions and their various paths. It is meant to make the faithful of one another better Christians, Jews, Moslems, Hindus or Buddhists, Akan Religion, etc.? This, of course, is the standpoint of this dissertation. Ratzinger has this to say:

… My answer is No. For this would be nothing other than total lack of conviction ... we would be finally renouncing truth. Rather, the answer must be that mission and dialogue should no longer be opposites but should mutually interpenetrate.

---

458 Thomas P. Rausch, Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision (New York: Paulist, 2009), 63.
Dialogue is not aimless conversation; it aims at conviction, at finding the truth; otherwise it is worthless.462

For him, interreligious dialogue is only relevant as much as it is geared toward the truth and not opposed to the mission but intrinsically intertwined. In his openness to interreligious dialogue, he cautioned when he addressed the PCID by first praising their attempt at dialogue promoted by John Paul II but warned that “the great proliferation of interreligious meetings around the world today calls for discernment.”463 Ratzinger insisted that truth must be the light that drives all interventions for dialogue.

What we need ... is respect for the beliefs of others and the readiness to look for the truth in what strikes us as strange or foreign; for such truth can correct us and lead us farther along the path. What we need is the willingness to look behind the alien appearances and look for the deeper truth hidden there. Furthermore, I need to be willing to allow my narrow understanding of truth to be broken down. I shall learn my own truth better if I understand the other person and allow myself to be moved along the road to the God who is ever greater, certain that I never hold the whole truth about God in my own hands but am always a learner, on pilgrimage toward it, on a path that has no end.464

Ratzinger believes that all religions, including Christianity, are never supposed to be only a giver but also a receiver.465 He reiterates this sense of giving and receiving in his new preface to his book Introduction to Christianity when he writes of the Asian religions in these words:

“The mystical dimension of the concept of God, which the Asian religions bring with them as a

462 Ibid., 111–12.
464 Joseph Ratzinger, Many Religions – One Covenant: Israel, the Church and the World, trans. Graham Harrison (San Francisco: Ignatius, 1999), 109–10. This is a rich quote from Ratzinger. He prioritizes with humility that the Church does not have all the answers to the questions about God and the entire creation, seen and unseen. Therefore, this insinuates that other religious traditions like Christianity also have an iota of the truth of God, which the Catholic Church can equally learn to augment her search to come to a better appreciation and comprehension of God. The question then is, if other religions also contain some truth of God, then God’s revelation has been made known to them; thus, through their tradition and ritual, God’s salvific grace is also available within that tradition. If this is true, what is the necessity of evangelization that aims at conversion? Evangelization, if necessary, must only focus on helping the other come to a better knowledge of God irrespective of where they worship.
465 Ratzinger, Many Religions – One Covenant: Israel, the Church and the World, 109, 112.
challenge to us, must clearly be decisive for our thinking, too, and for our faith.”

Francis X. Clooney analyzes the perspective of Ratzinger that his insistence for the truth does not mean that “We have the truth; they are searching for it.” Rather, it “obliges everyone involved, and what is learned will have consequences even for those of us who, by grace, know Jesus.” In his insistence on the truth, Ratzinger pointed out the cancer of relativism, which is opposed to conversion and mission. In other words, he cautioned against a “shallow eclecticism in regard to disparate religious teachings and what he called in another context, the “dictatorship of relativism.”

Ratzinger writes in *Truth and Tolerance*:

> Thus to a great extent the concept of dialogue, which certainly held an important place in the Platonic and in the Christian tradition, has acquired a different meaning. It has become the very epitome of the relativist credo, the concept opposed to that of “conversion” and mission: dialogue in the relativist sense means setting one’s own position or belief on the same level with what the other person believes, ascribing to it, on principle, no more of the truth than to the position of the other person. Only if my fundamental presupposition is that the other person may be just as much in the right as I am, or even more so, can any dialogue take place at all. Dialogue, it is said, has to be an exchange between positions that are fundamentally of equal status and thus mutually relative, with the aim of achieving a maximum of cooperation and integration between various religious bodies and entities.

---


Ratzinger continues his fight against what he calls relativism in *Dominus Iesus* (DI), a document that has been described as pushing forth the need for Catholicism to return to the theological position before the developments in the ecumenical movement during the last thirty years: “that Christianity is unique among religions as the repository of divinely revealed truth and that Catholicism and its ecclesiastical institutions are the authoritative interpreters of that truth.”⁴⁷¹ All these doctrinal positions inspired Catholics to refute any theory that has traces of any theological relativism and religious pluralism.⁴⁷² After the presentation of the document by Ratzinger, the Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the secretary of the Congregation, Monsignor Tarcisio Bertone, added that “the Document … reaffirms and summarizes the doctrine of Catholic faith defined and taught in earlier documents of the Church’s Magisterium; and it indicates the correct interpretation thereof in the face of doctrinal errors and ambiguities that have become widespread in modern theological and ecclesial circles.”⁴⁷³ Many theologians and religions think DI was embedded with theological statements meant to shatter Vatican II’s broadmindedness and subsequent interreligious development. Below is an overview and theological analysis of DI in line with interfaith dialogue.

---

⁴⁷² Savi, *The Declaration Dominus Iesus.*
⁴⁷³ Ibid.
2.10. A Summary of the Content and Analysis of DI in the Light of Interfaith Dialogue

In continuity with the Vatican II Council and John Paul II’s encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, the Declaration *Dominus Iesus* (DI) was issued in 2000 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) when Joseph Ratzinger was prefect. The document constituted an admirable answer of the Church’s Magisterium to Christian theology of religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. The Church has perceived religious pluralism as a threat that undermines truths of faith central to Catholicism and Christendom in postmodernity. To address this issue, DI upholds that the evangelizing mission of the Catholic Church at the close of the second millennium is “still far from complete (cf. John Paul II, Encyclical Letter Redemptoris Missio, 1: AAS 83 [1991], 249–340),” and in our postmodern world endangered, as a result of “relativistic theories” which “seek to justify religious pluralism, not only *de facto* [as an empirical reality] but also *de iure* (or “in principle”). According to DI 4, religious pluralism presumes a denial of certain truths of faith which include:

- The definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ,
- The nature of Christian faith as compared with that of belief in other religions,
- The inspired nature of the books of Sacred Scripture,
- The personal unity between the Eternal Word and Jesus of Nazareth,
- The unity of the economy of the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit,
- The unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ,
- The universal salvific mediation of the Church,
- The inseparability–while recognizing the distinction–of the kingdom of God, the kingdom of Christ, and the Church,
- And the subsistence of the one Church of Christ in the Catholic Church.

In his comment, Jacque Dupuis expressed the underlying presupposition that upholding these tenets of Catholicism must imply “affirming them as absolute exclusive possessions.”

---

474 Henceforth, DI would be used interchangeably with *Dominus Iesus* in this text.
476 DI 4.
He questions such presupposition in connection with the identity of other religions and their authenticity by saying if the affirming and reaffirming of the Catholic identity necessarily suggest a denial of the existence elsewhere of comparable authenticity, if not identical values? In other words, does the catholic doctrine of the complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ need to deny a priori the existence of some divine revelation elsewhere? Does the nature of the Christian faith need to exclude the existence of any divine faith elsewhere, whereby the other religions are reduced to holding ‘beliefs’ of merely human origin, unable to carry saving faith? Such presupposition Dupuis described as an exclusivist mindset pushed forth by the document. In this sense, DI becomes a discontinuity of Vatican II’s positivity towards other religions. For him, the “absolute” statement of the text regrettably failed to differentiate between possible means of understating the “definitiveness or non-definitiveness, the absoluteness or non-absoluteness of some historical events.” He goes further to remark that the “mystery of Jesus Christ and that of the Church seem regrettably placed on one and the same level of unicity and universality in the mystery of divine revelation, apparently forgetting that the Church is a derived, related mystery, which finds its significance exclusively in the mystery of Jesus Christ.” He asserts that we must maintain a distance between the mystery of Jesus and that of the Church to avoid being trapped in the pit of multiplying absolute claims and affirmations.

Again, not different from the language of Vatican II, DI taught firmly the necessity to “reassert the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ” as the solution to the relativistic mentality which is gaining ground. It further adds that “it must be firmly

478 Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition.
479 Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition.
480 Ibid., 32.
481 Ibid.
482 Ibid.
483 DI. 5. Declaration “Dominus Jesus” On The Unicity And Salvific Universality Of Jesus Christ and the Church.
believed that, in the mystery of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, who is ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (Jn 14:6), the full revelation of divine truth is given… For in Christ the whole fullness of divinity dwells in bodily form” (Col 2:9-10). It is crucial to be critical here because there is a higher possibility of misinterpretation if we do not take cognizance to highlight the gap between the historical divine revelation that took place in time in the person of Jesus Christ and God’s final revelation at the eschaton. It must be known that “however complete the historical revelation in Jesus Christ may be, it belongs to the “already,” not to the “not yet.”\(^{484}\) This is not meant to nullify God’s full historical manifestation in the person of Jesus, but, like Dupuis, it does not mean it is definitive – “Though it is complete, then, but not fully achieved.”\(^{485}\) In other words, even though divine revelation in the incarnation is historically unsurpassable, it contains its own limitations that will be overcome only in the eschaton.\(^{486}\) DI nevertheless intimates that any theology that holds a limitation, imperfection, and incompleteness of the historical revelation of Jesus, thus complementary to that found in other faith traditions, is incongruous with Catholic theology. DI writes: “the theory of the limited, incomplete, or imperfect character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, which would be complementary to that found in other religions, is contrary to the Church’s faith.”\(^{487}\) Dupuis noted that DI failed to distinguish between different possible ways of understanding or explaining certain “complementarity” between Christian and other revelations.\(^{488}\) Like Vatican II, DI does not recognize the possibility of Christian ‘revelation’ having any form in other religions. This suggests the superiority and fulfilment mentality of Christianity which possess divine revelation in the person of Jesus.

\(^{484}\) Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition, 32.
\(^{485}\) Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition, 32.
\(^{486}\) Ibid., 33. Italic is original.
\(^{487}\) DI, 6.
\(^{488}\) Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition, 33-34.
In connection with the above position, DI makes a distinction between theological or divine faith and religious belief. DI makes such a distinction by attributing divine faith, which is a divine supernatural gift to Christianity, while belief which is a natural achievement of humanity, is used in reference to other religions.  

The distinction between *theological faith* and *belief* in the other religions, must be *firmly held*. If faith is the acceptance in grace of revealed truth, which “makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently”, then belief, in the other religions, is that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute.

This statement was very offensive to members of other religions and traditions. Is there any biblical justification to deny members of other religions a divine faith? What do we make of the address of John Paul II in 1985 to thousands of Muslim faithful in Casablanca when he said, “we believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perfection? Does he seem to imply here that what is divine faith for Christians is different from that of Muslims? If it should be taken to its logical conclusion, this distinction will take the Church’s interreligious encounter to the rigidity or exclusivism of the first millennia encapsulated in the axiom “outside the church there is no salvation.”

Another point affirmed by DI, which puts Christianity above other religions, is the use of ‘inspiration’ as exclusive to the Holy Bible as a sacred text. DI referenced Vatican II to reiterate that “there are some elements in these texts which may be *de facto* instruments by which...

---


490 DI. 7.

countless people throughout the centuries have been and still are able today to nourish and maintain their life-relationship with God.” The texts of other religions, what they teach “reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men”\textsuperscript{492} even though they differ from what the Catholic Church teaches. This reduces the text of other religions to provide some natural light but not as “inspired text.” DI adds, “The Church’s tradition, however, reserves the designation of \textit{inspired texts} to the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments, since these are inspired by the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{493} By this assertion, the Church exclusively privileges the Bible as the highest-inspired text even though there are many sacred texts like the Quran, The Rigveda, Bhagavad Gita, Vedas, the Upanishads, etc. Some of these are older than the Bible. Does the Church’s position of restricting inspired text to the Bible mean to deny any form of revelation, though incomplete, in other religions? If this is true, then the words of Dupuis could be right when he said: “in this manner, the document refuses to pass from the univocal concept of the word of God, of sacred scripture and divine inspiration, which has developed within the Christian tradition, to an analogical understanding of those concepts which would allow for the possibility of recognizing some divine, even though incomplete, revelation outside the Bible. The word of God is understood to be the exclusive prerogative of the Jewish-Christian tradition.”\textsuperscript{494} DI shares the point of \textit{Redemptoris Mission 55} that God makes himself known to both individuals and the entire people through their spiritual riches expressed in their religions. Still, it fails to subscribe to the position that this divine presence implies a divine revelation.\textsuperscript{495} How God could make himself known in other religions and cultures without doing so in a revelatory sense is strange.

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{492} NA. 2.
\footnote{493} DI. 8.
\footnote{494} Burrows, \textit{Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition}, 38.
\footnote{495} Burrows, \textit{Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition}, 38.
\end{footnotes}
DI fails to explain how the element of divine ‘truth and grace,’” which are the “secret presence of God” in other religions even prior to the historical event of Jesus Christ, is derived or happens.496

Dealing directly with the Catholic Church’s relationship with other religions, based on what has been explained above, DI confirms a restrictive understanding of salvation that contradicts what had been suggested earlier. DI only attributed to other traditions the role of offering religious elements that “come from God,”497 consisting of their being “occasions or pedagogical helps in which the human heart is prompted to be open to the action of God.”498 It is important to question the contradiction here: What is the difference between affirming, on the one hand, that these elements in other religions are from God and, on the other hand, say that they may be “occasion” prompting the human heart to open itself to the action of God?499 DI continues to write: “One cannot attribute to these, [elements] however, a divine origin or an ex opere operato salvific efficacy, which is proper to the Christian sacraments. Furthermore, it cannot be overlooked that other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions or other errors (cf. 1 Cor 10:20-21), constitute an obstacle to salvation.”500 DI had affirmed these elements “come from God,” so why deny their divine origin or brand them as superstitions or errors which are obstacles to mediate salvation for its believers. It is undeniable that not every ritual or element in other religions is conducive for salvation. Dupuis writes, “Other traditions have no monopoly of superstitions, or even idolatry. Not everything in Christian devotions or rituals is exempt from error.”501 Unfortunately, Christianity had always branded other religious traditions as superstitious or fetish for centuries when it did not seem to understand their traditions,

496 Ibid., 39.
497 DI. 21.
498 DI. 21.
499 Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition, 63.
500 DI. 21. Italics mine.
501 Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition, 65.
elements, and rituals from the standard lens of the Church. It is high time the Church, especially in an official and authoritative document like DI, reassesses other religions and not forget to reexamine its own devotions and practices.

*Dominus Iesus*’ denial of these elements of the other religions as channels of grace and salvation for their members but only as a “pedagogical help” to dispose of the human heart to the reception of divine grace is a restrictive way of speaking about God’s salvific workings outside the Church which is contrary to what had been said earlier. For instance, the document of the International Theological Commission, titled “Christianity and the World Religions,” said the following:

> The presence of the Spirit in the religions being explicitly recognized, it is not possible to exclude that they may, as such, exercise a certain salvific function… It would be difficult to think that what the Holy Spirit does in the hearts of individual persons would have salvific Value, while that which the same Spirit brings about in the religions and cultures would not. The recent magisterium, however, does not seem to allow for such difference. The religions can, then, within the terms specified, be a means (*mezzo*) which helps for the salvation of their adherents…

Stressing on the mysterious relationship between the coming of the Savior Jesus Christ and the Church, DI affirm that “God has willed that the Church founded by him be the instrument for the salvation of all humanity (cf. *Acts* 17:30-31).” The document noted that this does not negate the sincere respect the Catholic Church has for the other religions but at the same time, “it rules out, in a radical way, that mentality of indifferentism ‘characterized by a religious relativism’ which leads to the belief that ‘one religion is as good as another’” DI concluded from the above that *objectively speaking* other religions can receive grace but they are in a “gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means

---

503 DI. 22.
504 DI. 22.
of salvation.” Such language and attitude calls for a caution on the part of Christians that in affirming their beliefs, they must desist from underestimating and devaluing the endowments for salvation adherents of other religions may derive from their own traditions. It becomes unfair for an outsider to evaluate the insiders’ religious benefits from their religions. The Church must recall the working of the Spirit not only in the Church but outside it too. Pope John Paul II has insisted on the Holy Spirit's universal operation in people, cultures, and religions. Catholics must not be surprised when they discover in the religious traditions of non-Christians traces of the Spirit’s action. Again, Christianity must be circumspect not to fall into the trap of comparison, which makes them offensively describe the beliefs and elements of other religions. For instance, comparing and speaking of other religious traditions as in “gravely deficient situation” to Christianity is not a language that facilitates the creation of bridges or dialogue but the opposite.

In the last paragraph, DI spoke of interreligious dialogue in the light of mission of the Church. In continuity from earlier magisterial documents, DI prioritizes the Church's evangelizing mission but did not fail to reiterate that dialogue is part of that mission. Here, DI situates the relationship between interreligious dialogue and mission on the premise of the “knowledge of the truth. The text writes, “Salvation is found in the truth.”

505 DI. 22.
506 The secretary of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in his reflection on Pentecost affirms in his reflection on Pentecost 2000 that, Pope John Paul II continues to insist on the universal role of the Spirit. The pope wrote in Redemptoris missio: “Thus the Spirit, who ‘blows where he wills’ (cf. Jn 3: 8), who ‘was already at work in the world before Christ was glorified’ (AG., 4), and ‘who has filled the world ... holds all things together [and] knows what is said’ (Wis 1: 7), leads us to broaden our vision to ponder his activity in every time and place (cf. DV., 53)” (RM., 29). See Michael L. Fitzgerald, M. Afr., Reflection of Bishop Fitzgerald on Pentecost 2000. https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_20000530_pentecoste-2000-3_en.html Accessed on May 7, 2022.
507 DI. 22. “Inter-religious dialogue, therefore, as part of her evangelizing mission, is just one of the actions of the Church in her mission Ad Gentes.”
508 DI. 22.
that “those who obey the promptings of the Spirit of truth are already on the way of salvation.” It did not hesitate to add, “But the Church, to whom this truth has been entrusted, must go out to meet their desire, so as to bring them the truth.” Here again, DI unreservedly sees the Church as possessing the fullness of truth. In order words, she has the sole monopoly over the deposit of truth and the responsibility of making it known to others for their salvation. The language assumes that the non-Christian traditions apparently do not possess any iota of truth to offer their members or Christians to bring them to salvation. This assertion seems to contradict what Vatican II had said of other religions that they possess “elements of truth and grace” and of the “seed of the Word” Dupuis concludes that “no wonder if, with its negative preposition, Dominus Iesus 22 sees interreligious dialogue as ‘just one of the action’ of the Church.” One can wonder what level of dialogue the church envisages to build if DI already pushes forth the monopoly of divine truth and salvation. Can we speak of a real exchange and mutual enrichment between the Church and non-Christian religions based on some of the hostile and offensive language used in DI compared to Vatican II?

It could be concluded that while many expected DI, written under the auspices of Ratzinger, to build on the positivity of Vatican II and, of course, reshape some of the hermeneutical flaws to push forth a sincere and mutual dialogue among all the world religions, DI seems to travel back to the past to highlight the superiority and ill or negative evaluation of other religions by the Church again. Pope Francis’ pontificate and interreligious dialogue will be discussed in Chapter four which looks at interreligious dialogue in postmodern times with Akan

---

509 DI. 22.
510 Cf. Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition, 68.
511 AG. 9.
512 AG. 11, 15.
513 Burrows, Jacques Dupuis Faces the Inquisition, 68.
Traditional Religion. To liberate Catholic interreligious theology from such hermeneutical flaws or from Western and Eurocentric underpinnings that have made it difficult for the Church to advance interreligious dialogue to the next level fifty-five years after Vatican II, the next section will concentrate on some theological principles that have not received attention as having the potential of revitalizing interreligious dialogue.
2.11. **Beyond Western and Eurocentrism: Dialogue Liberated from Dominant Principles of Theology**

**a. Introduction**

Theology and theologizing fortified by a narcissistic self-awareness and entrenched imperialistic pride tendencies have no potency to breathe out interreligious humility to encounter the other with the intention to “give out” and “receive” something for mutual enrichment among religions and cultures. In attempts to revitalize postmodern interreligious dialogue and theology in general, it has become necessary for theology to be liberated from the dominant principles that, for millennia, have created rigidity that has clouded our visions to reexamine other forms through which God communicates with humanity. Is any religion or theology equal to the absolute totality of God? Indeed, God transcends any religion and theological discourse. Since human languages have their limitations, they lack the potency to be the apparatus that can exhaust the complexities of God. Religion or theology that claims to possess the whole truth of God, without any limitation, has in itself become God, thus an idol. If this is true, then various theologies and traditions are all attempts to appreciate better and understand God. Theology should be seen as expansive. Thus, it is always essential to reexamine other principles which mainline theologies and religions have relegated to the background. This section seeks to consider some of these principles of theologizing, which have the potency to enhance a comprehensive understanding of the operations of the divine and, for that matter, interreligious dialogue.
b. Contextualization, Particularity, and Historicity

No relevant theology is done in a vacuum. Context, particularity, and historicity are critical to making the theology, faith, and beliefs of a group of people or community rich and comprehensible. Any religion or theological foundation that fails to acknowledge this closes itself to encountering the other from their root and identity only to impose their context, particularity, and historicity on them. Theologizing from the U.S. Latino/a background, Aquino intimates that explanation and articulation of the faith, beliefs, symbols, and formulation of the Christian communities must be characterized by the idea of contextualization. Her point is that contextual theology produces the specificity of the reality of a community, culture, and religion by delving into the epistemological foundation, fundamental principles and sources, and loci, which are characteristics of that faith community.514 She adds that Contextualization is advantageous because it refutes theologizing by employing another context, e.g., Western theological traditions, as the foundation for a group outside that culture. From this background, Maria Aquino affirms that Latino/a theology must not be enslaved to the mere repetition of dogma or old formulas. Instead, it must consciously theologize comprehensibly from the central tenets of the faith, which emerges from its own tradition and present-day experiences of the community.515 Every context has a particularity and historicity even though it may share some similarities or relevance with other contexts. Thus, theologizing from such a background inspires the claim of voices that have been marginalized instead of merging all particularities into one universal concept.516

515 Ibid.
516 Adjei, The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World, 58.
Fernando Segovia from liberation theology expressed the claim of voices when he said that every theological reflection “is a voice in search of freedom, independence, and autonomy... a voice that wishes to lay claim to its own reality and experience, give expression to its own view of God and the world, and charts its own future.”

For instance, the particularity, historicity, and symbols of the Akan Traditional Religion are peculiar to the Akans. It is therefore paramount that in the dialogical process with other religions (Catholicism), the principles that underpin the dialogical engagement must be emancipated from the Western monopoly of the definition of revelations, faith, and theology as the truth, which should be assimilated and “inculturated” in the other faith traditions.

Prioritizing a particular context, history, and culture in interreligious dialogue and theology gives a voice to every religion and experience instead of hailing one religion as the paradigm of all truth in theological expositions. God’s revelation is never absent from the Akan historical and contextual experiences. Prior to the God of the Bible, the Akan people knew God from their own context, culture, and history. This historical and particular context must be the basis of the Akan theology of God and the theology of interreligious dialogue. Therefore, in this dissertation, it is crucial to affirm that Catholicism in Ghana, particularly among the Akans, can resonate well with the people when the faith is calved and practiced from the basis of their context, culture, and history.

c. Literary and Non-Literary Resources of Enquiry

The recent trend of postmodern theological reflections has highlighted the primacy of cultural and contextual value of theologizing, which utilizes the literary and non-literary resources of theological enquiry which had been neglected in the classical theological studies.

---

517 Maria Pilar Aquino, Theological Methods in U.S. Latino/a Theology, 9.
518 Ibid., 8.
519 This will extensively be explained in Chapter Three.
concrete example worth mentioning is the emerging trend in Asian and African theology which uses “extratextual hermeneutics (an approach that tries to use indigenous literary and non-literary resources for theological inquiry).” With specificity to Akan Traditional Religion and culture, there is a strong consciousness in African theology today to rediscover the values of folktales in Akan Religion and culture to retell the stories of the indigenous people to express their theological understanding of the sacred and secular world and the connectivity between both. A critical theological study of the various Akan stories, poems, proverbs, dramas, drum language, symbols (Adinkra) and chants underline the authenticity and complexities of the Akan’s understanding of God, spirits, ancestors, and life in general. These sources of theology which are expressions of the rich history from the cultural and religious context of the Akan people, were “demonized” by the Christian missionaries as unsuitable sources for Christian theology. The Akans, it could be said, safeguarded and passed on their more profound spirituality and life in these stories, poems, proverbs, drum language, symbols, and chants. Kofi Bempah, in his description of the Akan Traditional Religion, affirms that the spirituality or religion of the indigenes is describable because it is a way of life that flows from the cultural heritage of the people and is elaborated and exemplified through songs, drama, sculpture, poetry, rituals, philosophy and folklore, by the people. These literary and non-literary sources move beyond the mere narrative to the dramatic mode to express the cultural identity, morality, and traditions unique to a particular religion, place, and time.

---

522 Adjei, The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World, 59-60.
It is important again to mention that theologizing from the indigenous literary and non-literary perspectives is of greater significance towards revitalizing interreligious dialogue since these sources offer a cosmology that is not only material but also spiritually based to serve as elements of edification and enrichment for the Christian understanding of the care for creation, our common home. For instance, the theologies surrounding the creation stories of the Akan Traditional Religion communicate something that goes beyond the physical and sensory. They affirm close connectivity with mind and body, the sensual and the highest aspiration of the soul, unlike the Christian creation theology, which is linear and chronological.\(^{523}\) Again, literary and non-literary sources emphasize the living spirit present in all human beings and the whole of creation.\(^{524}\) In his article “Who is God to Us Today?” Jyoti Sahi avows that there is the need for \textit{via positiva}, a spirituality that sees the beauty in the physical world as not just an illusion but the presence of the divine.\(^{525}\) This spirituality approach goes against the religions that only believe in the transcendental and trample down on the cosmic faith. Today, Western Christianity is rediscovering this spirituality that seeks to protect our common home, which saints like Francis and Anthony practiced as against the human exploitation of the soil, mineral, water bodies, trees, etc.

\(^{523}\) Ibid.

\(^{524}\) Cf. Nana Akua Kyerewaa Opokuwaa, \textit{The Quest for Spiritual Transformation: Introduction to Traditional Akan Religion, Rituals and Practices} (New York, Lincoln: iUniverse, Inc. 2005), 20. For the Akans, every creature-land, plants, rivers, forest, animals etc. have a life force dwelling within them. This is the basis that ensures the protection and care of creation in the indigenous culture and milieu.

d. Space and Time

Connected to the above points is the principal shift from the theological concept of temporality to spatiality. Postmodern theologies must take into consideration “space.” Like the Akan Traditional Religion, American Indian Tribal Religion, theology today emphasizes landscapes as having the highest possible meaning and relating all theological reflections and statements with a spatial undertone instead of time. For centuries, the dominant religions have theologized and upheld the theological and philosophical principles of time, which undoubtedly have failed to adequately answer the world’s difficult issues. Deloria identifies the difficulty of Western European thinking in line with time when he writes:

A singular difficulty faces people of western European heritage in making a transition from thinking in terms of time to thinking in terms of space. The very essence of the western European identity involves the assumption that time proceeds in a linear fashion; ... the same ideology that sparked the crusades, the Age of Exploration, the Age of imperialism, and the recent crusade against communism all involve the affirmation that time is peculiarly related to the destiny of the people of western Europe. And later, of course, the United States.\(^{526}\)

Dominant theology, which has always been the foundation for the principles of interreligious dialogue for the Church, has conceived time or history as the absolute value which is universal for all. Deloria argues for something different. For him, religion, and religious activity, and by extension, theology, must be approached not from time but the novel of space. Unlike the context of time, the novel of space consigns religious universalism, which has been the undertone of most conciliar documents to the background to highlight the beliefs as modified by humans and the natural environment. Theologizing from space prioritizes context for the practices and understanding of reality as compared to monotheistic religions.\(^{527}\)

---


\(^{527}\) Ibid., 65.
Opokuwaa, religions that uphold space value sacred places like rivers, mountains, plateaus, valleys, or other natural features.\textsuperscript{528} They are protected from human abuse since a particular community relates their revelation and historical events within, but not outside the confines of their land. It will be noted that “regardless of what subsequently happens to the people, the sacred lands remain as permanent fixtures in their cultural or religious understanding.”\textsuperscript{529}

Theological discourse built on sacred places/space affirms the particularity of divine revelation since space has a geographical limitation. Arguing from such background makes the question of Deloria relevant for reflection: “the question that the so-called world religions have not satisfactorily resolved is whether or not religious experience can be distilled from its original cultural context and become an abstract principle that is applicable to all peoples in different places and at different times.”\textsuperscript{530} How does this concept tally with \textit{Nostra Aetate} of Vatican II, \textit{Redemptoris Missio} of John Paul II, \textit{Dominus Iesus}’ insistence on the fullness of revelation in the person of Jesus? Did God’s full revelation only start at the dawn of Christianity in the person of Christ? What stops God from revealing himself in other religions like the Akan Traditional Religion, Islam, Hinduism, Confucianism, other tribal religions, etc.?

Again, from the world of religious imagery, how do we explain from the temporal perspective the concept of symbols,\textsuperscript{531} doctrines, and insights in which religious ideas are brought forth. The answer becomes clear when approached from the spatial dimension because

\textsuperscript{528} Nana Akua Kyerewaa Opokuwaa, \textit{The Quest for Spiritual Transformation}, 20.
\textsuperscript{529} Vine Deloria Jr., \textit{God is Red.}, 66.
\textsuperscript{530} Many Akan today ask the same question regarding Catholicism and some of the rituals and practices which seem abstract to them and not identified within their own space. Why are Akan traditions like marriage not baptized or raised to the status of a sacrament to avoid Akan convert to undergo church wedding after the traditional wedding? Why is church marriage a criterion for the reception of the Eucharist but not Akan traditional wedding? These questions would be explained in Chapter Four.
\textsuperscript{531} For instance, how relevant is the crucifix to be understood by a Ghanaian when there are Adinkra Symbols that communicates the supremacy and saving power of God.
the deity, symbols, and doctrines proceed from the experience of a particular community.\textsuperscript{532} Theology done from spatiality is valuable because it does not favor the universal imposition of one religion upon another cultural context. The limitation of space forces Western dominant religion and theology to reconsider its position on revelation and religious imposition because revelation or religion is interpreted, impressed, and transmitted upon another foreign culture or place is likely to severely damage the message of revelation and become immaterial to the community that receives it.\textsuperscript{533} This explains why some Ghanaian (Akan) Christians still consult priests and priestesses of the Akan Traditional Religion for a remedy to situations because the Christian faith, symbols and the philosophical undertone of its doctrines are sometimes foreign to them and the land.

\textbf{e. Uniqueness and Universality of Religion}

God theologically is an absolute mystery, and no religion is absolute to represent the totality of Him fully. This absolute mystery forbids any claim of uniqueness for any religion. Wilfred Cantwell Smith writes, “each religion is an ‘idol’ (that is, image) of God and that if an ‘idol’ is elevated to the status of uniqueness and exclusiveness, it is turned into an ‘idolatry.’”\textsuperscript{534} In summarizing the views of Gordon Kaufman, John Hick, and Langdon Gilkey on the uniqueness and universality of religion, Peter Phan intimates that, “the modern awareness of the historico-cultural limitations of our knowledge and religious beliefs and of the impossibility of judging the truth claim of another culture has rendered the claim of uniqueness and universality of a particular religious tradition no longer credible.”\textsuperscript{535} If this is true, then it could be concluded that the effect of the claim of uniqueness and universality for any religious founder and of

\textsuperscript{532} Adjei, \textit{The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World}, 62-3.
\textsuperscript{533} Deloria Jr., \textit{God is Red}, 65.
\textsuperscript{534} Phan, \textit{Being Religious Interreligiously}, 88.
\textsuperscript{535} Ibid., 87.
religion leads to oppression and injustice and undeniably retards genuineness to interreligious dialogue. Such a concept sadly empowers an imperialistic theological principle that only imposes one dimension as the normative reality for all others to assimilate, thus impeding a mutual dialogue.\textsuperscript{536}

Another theological principle connected to the above which impedes interreligious dialogue between Christianity and other religions (Akan religion and culture), is the claim of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus. Phan considers what can be claimed in interreligious dialogue in the light of uniqueness and universality by differentiating between claiming the uniqueness and universality of one’s religious founder and the uniqueness and universality of one’s religion. He observed such differences on epistemological, sociological, historical, and theological grounds. Phan opines that faith in the person (founder) must not be equated to the institution.\textsuperscript{537} From a theological perspective, he noted that though Jesus and the Church are intimately connected, there is a fundamental difference and that cannot be misconstrued.\textsuperscript{538} Failure to maintain this differentiation leads to idolatry.\textsuperscript{539} Phan argued strongly against the claim of uniqueness and universality of one’s religion because it makes a particular religion and institution the normative, which stimulates colonialism, religious imperialism and oppression. He vehemently accused the Christian religion of possessing some historical traces in the following word: “the triumphalistic claim for Christianity as a social organization, and not the claim of the uniqueness and universality of Jesus as the crucified Christ, produced in Christians self-righteousness, contempt for other religions and lust for domination.”\textsuperscript{540} The difficulty I must

\textsuperscript{536} Adjei, \textit{The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World}, 64.  
\textsuperscript{537} Adjei, \textit{The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World}, 93.  
\textsuperscript{538} Adjei, \textit{The Church in Dialogue with Other Religions in the Postmodern World}  
\textsuperscript{539} Ibid., 100.  
\textsuperscript{540} Ibid.
point out is the differentiation between the claims of uniqueness and universality of both a religious founder and the church/institution from the philosophical ground sounds convincing, but practically, faith and one religious institution are intrinsically inseparable. Therefore, it is difficult to claim universality and uniqueness in Jesus and not the Church/institution.\footnote{The dissertation is not oblivious to the reality that the pragmatics will contradict this position. There are people who have almost absolute faith in Jesus but have chosen to have nothing to do with any Christian Church.}

It could be concluded that Catholic theological and interreligious discourses would potentially break deadlocks to tread the unfamiliar grounds of other religions when dominant theological principles are liberated from western and Eurocentric ideological imposition to give room to the above principles that have been overlooked. Applying some of these methods of theologizing will highlight the values of other religions and cultures, enabling the Church to understand others for a better dialogical encounter and edifying the entire theology of Christianity.
2.12. Conclusion

The Catholic Church has undoubtedly made a tremendous historical, doctrinal, hermeneutical, theological, and pastoral shift in her encounter with other religions. The above critical review of papal and conciliar documents has unpacked the shifts from monologue to dialogue, from confrontation to dialogical encounter. The massive shifts were recorded in the ecumenical Council of Vatican II, but it must be stated that traces of a church wanting to dialogue had gained momentum in the early part of the nineteenth century. It was, therefore, not out of place for Vatican II to unlock a new breath of dialogue, a new outlook that changed the language and pastoral principles of the church with other religions. It is essential also to mention that despite the dialogical progress the Church has made, there are many internal struggles for the Church to open herself to the realities of religious pluralism not only as a *de facto* (matter of fact) but also as a *de jure* (Matter of principle or divinely ordained principle) of God’s encounter with humanity. The complexities of postmodernity have brought many cultures and religions together, allowing them to learn from one another and unlearn the confrontational and diabolical perspectives each religion had for the other. Post-Vatican II has more significant resources today at its disposal to build on the gains of the past to further enhance interreligious dialogue that aims to edify both interlocutors. Chapter Three seeks to build on the positive shift by transposing the Universal dialogical principles and progress the church has made to narrow it down into dialogue between Akan Traditional Religion and Catholicism in Ghana.
Chapter 3

3.0. Church in Dialogue with African Traditional Religion/Cultures During the Papacy of Pope Francis: Promoting Dialogue, Friendship, and Fraternity

“Nor can there be authentic dialogue unless we are capable of opening our minds and hearts, in empathy and sincere receptivity, to those with whom we speak.”

(Pope Francis)

Introduction

This chapter discusses the dialogue between Akan Traditional Religion/culture and Catholicism. It delves into how this encounter has influenced all facets of the Ghana Catholic Church today. Here, a brief historical review of the advent of Catholicism in Ghana and the missionaries’ approaches to evangelization and dialogue will be traced to lay a foundation and comparison for the positive developments in the last thirty years of Catholicism in Ghana. To what extent has the Ghana Catholic Church rooted the faith in Akan cultural values and religious beliefs through the theological principle of inculturation, and what is the way forward? This chapter will further explore evangelization, mission, and dialogue in the light of Pope Francis’ dialogical friendship and fraternity paradigm. To what extent has this paradigm shift of interreligious dialogue influenced Catholicism in Ghana and the collaborative efforts with Muslims and Akan religious leaders to promote fraternity? Lastly, this chapter will deliberate briefly on the strength and weaknesses of Pope Francis’ paradigm of interreligious encounters.
3.1. The Historicity of Catholicism in Ghana

Catholicism was first introduced on the soil of the Gold Coast\textsuperscript{542} in the 15\textsuperscript{th} century by the Portuguese around 1471.\textsuperscript{543} Firstly, the Portuguese landed in Shama, where a cross was planted at the shore to symbolize their presence and their mission of evangelization. Later they settled on the coast of La Mina.\textsuperscript{544} Among these European explorers were some Catholic priests commissioned by a Papal Bull to create “Holy faith in our Lord Jesus Christ and lead in this faith all souls desirous of being saved.”\textsuperscript{545} In his book \textit{Akan Religion and the Christian Faith}, Kwesi A. Dickson intimated that when they landed in \textit{La Mina}, they suspended the banner of Portugal from the bough of a lofty tree at the foot of which they erected an altar. The whole company assisted at the first Mass that was celebrated in Guinea. They prayed for the conversion of the natives from idolatry and the perpetual prosperity of the Church they intended to erect on the spot.\textsuperscript{546}

Unfortunately, the mission work was unsuccessful, as the missionaries envisaged. This could be due to the following reasons: Firstly, the Portuguese got enchanted by the immense deposits of gold wealth on the Gold Coast to the extent that the clerics also became entangled in the gold trade to the detriment of evangelization.\textsuperscript{547} To fortify their readiness to trade in the

\begin{footnotes}
\item[542] Gold Coast is the section of the coasts of the Gulf of Guinea in Africa. The name indicates that this region, from Axim or nearby Cape Three Points in the west to the Volta River in the east, had a huge source of gold. The deposit of gold attracted many Europeans. This area was later noted for its intense colonial rivalry from the 17th century. The site was later acquired by the British in the 19th century—on March 6, 1957; the Gold Coast colony attained independence from the British. The first president, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, changed its name to Ghana. It became the Republic of Ghana in 1960.
\item[544] \textit{La Mina} is the modern-day Elmina, located on the coast near Cape Coast in Ghana.
\item[546] Kwesi A. Dickson, ed. \textit{Akan Religion and the Christian Faith} (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1965), IX.
\item[547] Peter B. Clark, \textit{West Africa and Christianity} (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), 15.
\end{footnotes}
lucrative gold business, the Portuguese erected a castle in 1482 in Elmina. This castle was later expanded to accommodate slaves and other items. An eyewitness account of Barbot buttressed this point when he wrote in 1980 of the Dutch: “The great concern of the Dutch on this coast, as well as of all other Europeans, settled or trading there, is the gold, and not the welfare of those souls.” Secondly, Hans W. Debrunner reports that the clerics among the European traders extensively concentrated their chaplaincy work on the Europeans with little missionary outreach toward the indigenous communities. Preaching and teaching their Christian faith received little attention among the indigenous people. All their focus was on their fellow European traders. Thirdly, the indigenous gold coast people relentlessly remained indifferent to the Catholic or Christian faith. They were hostile to the establishment of the Christian church that rivaled their indigenous religion and practices.

The little missionary progress recorded was the intervention of de Azambuja, who is believed to have convinced the traditional authorities of the commercial benefits at stake if they allied with the European missionaries and the Catholic faith. He sometimes celebrated mass in the palace of the Chief. It was not until 1503 that Catholicism on the soil of the Gold Coast recorded its first converts when the king, his family, and the palace officials embraced the new Catholic faith. Lamin could be right when he said the palace elite got converted, unlike the ordinary masses. He concluded that the palace conversion was motivated by political and economic factors. Politically, the king sought to align with a foreign power for support and

---

security in case of any tribal attack.\textsuperscript{553} Despite the king’s conversion, Catholicism still struggled to take root. The Portuguese centered their missionary activities on their school, established to teach only the Mulattos (children of mixed European and Ghanaian ancestry).

Until about 1640, missionary activities on the Gold Coast were intermittent because of the devastating health hazard, lack of personnel, and resistance to the gospel message by the indigenous people. Again, around 1600, the lucrative transatlantic slave trade diverted the priorities of the missionaries.\textsuperscript{554} The trade escalated the rift among European traders. For instance, the Dutch attacked the Portuguese in Elmina and advanced to capture the entire Elmina people and sell them into slavery. In their first attempt in December 1625, the Elmina townsfolk defeated the 1,200 troops of the Dutch, and the survivors fled to their ships.\textsuperscript{555} This also necessitated an unsafe and unfavorable environment for missionary activities among the indigenes. The attempt frustrated the proclamation of the Christian faith.\textsuperscript{556}

Within the 1700s–1820s, protestant missionaries, mainly from Denmark and England, populated the evangelizing phase of the Gold Coast after the failure of the Catholic Portuguese and Dutch. In 1737, the United Brethren or Moravian Church in Denmark, founded by Nikolaus Zinzendorf, sent Christian Protten to Ghana as a missionary. Protten was born in Ghana (Accra) to a Danish father and a Ghanaian mother. Nikolaus envisaged that he would penetrate and convert many natives to the Christian faith with his Ghanaian background. Protten couldn’t achieve much because he confined his activities to the Danish settlers. Besides this, Protten translated the Lord’s Prayer, New Testament parables, Catechism, and Christian Hymns into the

\textsuperscript{553} Ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{556} See also Sanneh, \textit{West African Christianity}. 
Another protestant missionary that laid a foundation for Christianity in the Gold Coast was Jacobus Elisa Johannes Capitein. He was an ex-slave from the Ivory Coast and a Dutch Reformed minister of Ghanaian birth. After his studies at Leiden University, Holland, he was sent to Ghana as a missionary to evangelize in 1742. He arrived at Elmina and taught from 1742 until he died in 1747. History reports that he could not advance Christian conversions. Still, his literacy enabled him to translate the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments, and parts of the Catechism, which were published in the indigenous language. This publication was resourceful for future missionaries. F. L. Bartels says, “these rudiments of Christian faith, given in a written form as well as orally to the mulattos by Capitein, laid the foundation for future missions.”

Another protestant missionary worth mentioning is Thomas Thompson. The records he left behind testify that he preached to the chiefs and elders, first by beginning on the nature and attributes of God, God’s providence, and life after death, before touching on Christianity. His methodology gives the impression that he valued the culture of the people and used it as the basis to introduce Christianity. Thompson received a mixed response from the indigenous people. Those who received Thompson’s message suggested he capitalizes on Tuesday for his evangelizing outreach because that day for the Akans along the Coast is a traditional “holy day” or “sabbath day,” dedicated to the Sea god, Nana Bosompo. Thompson could have the

---

557 Debrunner, A History of Christianity in Ghana, 12. The Ga is a Kwa language spoken by the people in and around Accra, the capital city of Ghana. Some people in Togo, and Benin also speak Ga.
560 Sanneh, West African Christianity, 83. See also Peter B. Clarke, West Africa and Christianity (London: Edward Arnold, 1986), 19.
561 Other parts of Ghana, the ‘Holy Day’ or ‘Sabbath Day’ is on Thursdays. Like those along the coast, these holy days are meant to perform rituals for the Sea gods and also to allow the Sea (Nana Bosompo) and Land (Asaase Yaa) to fallow. It is also necessary for workers to gain some rest. There have been many instances where those who flouted this custom were struck by the gods when they either went to farm or Sea.
opportunity to encounter the fishermen or farmers who are not allowed to go to sea or farm to work on that day. Thompson, unfortunately, neglected the advice and failed to adapt to the Tuesdays of rest for his proclamation and evangelism. He trivialized the indigenous worship and belief as false, idolatrous, or superstitious and was bent on dissuading them. He refused because, in his mind, he was there “to strike at their false worship and endeavor to convince them of their false notions and to expose the folly of their idolatrous and superstitious rites; so that, if possible, he might disengage their minds from these, for reception and entertainment of Divine Truths.”

Though Thompson described the indigenous worship and rites as superstitious, he did not fail to acknowledge the people’s sense of religiosity and high morality. He states, “I consider them to be more civilized people in general ... far removed from barbarity and savagery, they are certainly capable, and fitter to deal with ... they have a high morality.”

Later around 1828, the Basel Mission (now the Presbyterian Church of Ghana) focused their missionary works at Akuapim. With tremendous success, they extended to other parts of the Eastern Region. The Wesleyan Methodists also settled in the coastal region in 1834, while the Bremen Mission (Evangelical Presbyterian Church) took to the Volta Region from Togoland in 1847. Interestingly, the Roman Catholic missionaries around 1880 had returned and successfully made progress on the coast and later entered the north of Ghana, which had been Islamized in 1906. Around this time, it must be stressed that after three centuries of intermittent Christian exposure, missionaries from different countries and religions established schools and hospitals, improved agriculture, and produced some indigenous Christian leaders, such as Philip Quacoe,

---

563 Ibid.
564 Peter Sarpong, *Ecumenical Relations in Ghana* (Kampala: Gaba Publication, 1974). See also Adu Boahen, *Ghana in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*.
Joseph Smith, and David Asante. Nonetheless, the efforts of these local leaders remained on the fringes of the broader cultural and religious life. Around this time, the European missionaries identified that their activities’ success rested on the chiefs. The chief was hospitable and generous in receiving the missionaries and offered them lands and security for their missionary works. Despite their receptivity, Daniel Justice Eshun recounts that the chiefs knew they stood to lose their authority, power, and influence bequeathed to them by their ancestors and traditional religion to the missionaries if they embraced or encouraged their subjects to convert to Christianity.

It must be emphasized that the Catholic Church had established the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples around this time. The Congregation had, by then, standardized the Catholic modalities for the implantation of churches in all mission countries. Among some modalities for spreading the gospel in mission lands was that missionaries were responsible for intensively studying the indigenous people’s religious and socio-cultural contexts. This ensured that the missionaries avoided any imposition of their home cultures and ideologies on the indigenous people. Propaganda Fide ensured that while missionaries worked to transmit the Catholic faith by respecting the people’s religious and socio-cultural sensitivities and realities, the doctrines and practices of the church were nonetheless adulterated. In other words, any religious, social, and cultural elements of the natives, devoid of superstitions and suitable for promoting the gospel message, must be accepted, whiles native rites or rituals that are

567 Eshun, “Speaking for Ourselves…”
irrevocably bound up with superstitious connotations must be abhorred. The question unanswered is, whose standard is used in judging what element has traces of superstition?

It must be highlighted that the return of the Catholic missionary activities in the Gold Coast when it was suspended met the challenges of the protestant churches, who had already gained ground in certain places. For instance, the Catholic missionaries had to teach and evangelize the Catholic faith by considering the backdrop of Catholic-Protestant strife and efforts to win souls. Propaganda Fide, on April 28, 1879, erected the prefecture of the Gold Coast. It extended from the river Volta to the river Cavally in the Ivory Coast. This was a new ecclesiastical jurisdiction that was entrusted to the Society of African Mission (S.M.A). This initiative is reportedly facilitated by the letter of Sir James Marshall, a former Anglican priest who later converted to Catholicism. Two years before the erection of the prefecture, Sir Marshall’s letter to the TABLET editor in 1877 made a tremendous impact. Marshall writes:

I write from a part of the world, the West coast of Africa, in which England now has almost exclusive interest and power, but for which the Catholics of England, Clerical and Lay, have as yet done nothing… On the whole of the Gold Coast, there is not a single Catholic Priest or mission of any nation.

The letter called public attention to the plight of the indigenous people of the Gold Coast concerning the fact that the Catholic Church had not been established in the country. Sir Marshall’s contribution necessitated the immortalization of his name later in Sekondi when the

---

569 Ecclesial in Ghana: On the Church in Ghana and its Evangelizing Mission in the Third Millennium.
570 Ibid.
572 Sir William Marshall was a Scottish Anglican minister, who after his conversion to Catholicism remained in the lay state on account of an amputated arm. He served the British colonial Government in the Gold Coast Colony as chief magistrate and a judicial assessor. Cf J. Van Brakel, The First 25 Years of SMA Missionary Presence in the Gold Coast (1880-1905) (Nymegen, 1992), 9-10.
573 Wiltgen, Gold Coast Mission History, 133-134.
Catholic Friendship Society, founded around Nov 1926, chose to replace its name with Knight of Marshall. In response to the letter, the Congregation for the propagation of the Faith called on the Holy Ghost Fathers to comment on the suitability and the chances of success of the mission in the Gold Coast. In response, Fr Gommenginger, a Holy Ghost Father, visited the Gold Coast and wrote this to the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith:

Think of it, we Catholics were the very first ones … to take roots in the Gold Coast, and yet now we have not even a single missionary in the land. The Protestants themselves cannot figure it out. When they saw me arrive, they felt surely the sole purpose of my coming was to open a Catholic Mission. Personally, I am convinced that the opportune moment has arrived. It is time for us to take up again the work began so propitiously by our missionaries of the 15th century, and then interrupted so inexorably by the ascendancy of the Dutch. Conditions have changed and obstacles have in part been removed. God and souls are calling us back to the Gold Coast.575

Pope Leo XIII approved the decree establishing the Prefecture Apostolic in the Gold Coast on 7th May 1879 and confirmed its publication. The S.M.A Missionaries were charged with the responsibility of the Gold Coast.576

Aside from all the historicity around it, the success of Catholicism in the Gold Coast (Ghana) is attributed to two S.M.A Fathers, Auguste Moreau, and Eugene Murat. These two Fathers were sent from the island of St. Helena by Fr. Planque. They arrived at Elmina for missionary work on 18th May 1880. They undoubtedly encountered hardships and setbacks, such as scarcity of a plot of land, Malaria, exhaustion, and no money or holidays.577 Like their predecessors, Moreau and Murat invested in schools and agriculture to train their students in land cultivation. Regardless of their frustrations from the several attempts to contact the chiefs and elders, the protestant missionaries who had gained ground like the Wesleyans had rifts and

576 Ibid.
conflict. Barely two months after their arrival, on August 6, 1880, Fr. Murat died. Fr Moreau celebrated the first public liturgy for his burial on the Gold Coast. Later, Fr. Michon joined Fr. Moreau. They rented a house meant for a mission house and school. He started his school with five pupils, and by May 1881, the number grew to thirty-eight and, later, in July, 100 pupils. They used the school to promote Catholic doctrinal education. Fr. Moreau prepared a Fante Catechism for religious instruction through the instrumentality of Fr. Burgeat after they had studied the local dialect. Later, in 1908, a group of missionaries wrote the Katolik Mfantsi Katekism, and Mr. H. Cobbina translated it into the Fante language. Meant to answer some doctrinal questions, the book was in a question-and-answer form and was to be studied by heart. This catechetical instruction did not take cognizance of the relevance of some of the good elements in the religious and socio-cultural traditions of the indigenous people. They were not ready to risk the doctrine by any form of inculturation. The universal rubric and missionaries regulated church liturgy and observed them meticulously as they practiced in their home countries. They sang Latin (Tu es Petrus). Some commentators said, “somehow the Catholic liturgy with its ‘mysterium tremendum et fascinosum,’ it’s tremendous and fascinating mystery and its often colorful expression seemed to appeal to the people.” Even though their methodology of transmitting the faith was not the best since it was more an imposition of what the missionaries knew, they could not be judged harshly without taking cognizance of the strict doctrinal training of these missionaries and the infantile situation of the church at the moment. Soon the number of Catholics began to increase with churches and schools. Trained under

---

579 Ecclesial in Ghana: On the Church in Ghana and its evangelizing Mission in the Third Millennium, 10.
580 Literary mean a Catholic catechism book in the Fanti language.
581 Brakel, The First 25 Years of SMA Missionary Presence in the Gold Coast, 45. Quoted also in Ecclesial in Ghana, 11.
various missionaries, Rev. Anastasius Dogli was ordained in July 1922 as the first priest. The Church, around this time, had begun acquiring formal structures. On March 5, 1923, the Lower Volta Apostolic Vicariate was established and under the care of the S.M.A, Province of Holland. Fr. August Herman was appointed as the Vicar Apostolic.

Today, the Catholic Church in Ghana has Twenty dioceses/archdioceses/vicariate. Four archdioceses, fifteen dioceses, and one vicariate are under the canonical jurisdiction of Ghanaian bishops and archbishops. The 2021 population and housing census in Ghana revealed that the total population of Ghana is 30.8 million. Catholics in Ghana are 10 percent of the total population. According to the statistical record, the population of Catholics dropped from 13.1 percent to 10 percent due to many factors, of which marriage is a crucial factor worth studying (to be discussed in Chapter 4). Therefore, it is essential to analyze the dialogical encounter between the Akan culture/religion with Catholicism during the missionaries’ time and now when the Church is pastorally and administratively in the hands of Ghanaian leadership. How have the missionaries dialogued with the Akan culture and religion? And how has the religio-cultural context influenced the Catholic way of worship and practices?

3.2. The Encounter Between Akan Traditional Religion and Catholicism: Toward an Akan Narrative of Inculturation

This section discusses the encounter of two cultures and religions: Catholicism and Akan Traditional Religion and Culture. For about two thousand years, most missionaries of the Church adopted Christianity’s triumphalist and exclusivist approach to evangelization. As the Church


continued to expand to new religio-cultural and socio-political territories through the zealousness of her missionaries, the Church’s cultures, and worldview encountered others. In their travels to evangelize, the missionaries met different religions and cultures. Instead of dialoguing to understand others and use their culture and values as a tool to proclaim the gospel message, the early missionaries exhibited a high level of superiority. They denigrated the native people, their culture, and their traditional religions.

The encounter of the early European missionaries on the Gold Coast was no exception. The missionaries (Portuguese, Dutch, Danse, England, etc.) spread the gospel message in the new indigenous terrain shrouded and enveloped in the Graeco-Roman and Western cultures and traditions. Muonwe, for instance, writes of most missionaries characterized by such evangelizing approach in these words: “time and energy were expended for centuries trying to convert people not merely to the Christian religion but also to the supposed superior culture to be universal and exemplary.”

The understanding of conversion to the Catholic faith was therefore intrinsically associated with neglecting the indigenous cultures and traditions and holding on to the ‘ideal’ or ‘civilized’ culture and traditions of the West. Muonwe further writes:

Neither was the contingency of human knowledge and experience as a result of which they are heavily influenced by the environment given adequate attention, nor the legitimacy of people’s autochthonous values given any serious thought. The only important element was for the natives to disconnect themselves from their roots and traditions and practice the Christian traditions and rituals of initiations and sacramental practices. To be Christian was to practice the supposedly superior culture and civilization of the west.

---

585 Muonwe, Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration, 30.
586 Ibid.
For the American theologian, “Christianity must be accepted in the form in which it is offered, whether that be Irish, French, or German Catholicism.”587 This was to maintain the fact that the presentation of the gospel message must not adapt to any element offensive to the ecclesial unity and apostolicity of the Church.588 Indigenous culture and tradition, part of communal identity, must be sacrificed for the sake of the idea of unity and apostolicity. Sadly enough, the cultural superiority or “cultural arrogance”589 was coded in an unchangeable language of divine ordinance. In their missionary works, Graco-Roman or European culture and religious tradition were assumed as normative for the entire human race. Hillman speaks to this when he writes:

Western culture, owing much to its Graco-Roman antecedent, was uncertainly assumed to be normative for the entire human family. Christians from other cultural worlds were expected, indeed required, sometimes in the name of ‘divine law,’ to abandon their own traditional ways of being human and religious. They were then morally coerced into embracing the ‘superior’ ways of Europe, uncritically imagined to be somehow more compatible with Christianity.590

The encounter between the Catholic missionaries and the Akan people, their cultures, and religion was no exception in Gold Coast (Ghana). The early missionaries scaled the Akan cultural and religious practices as unfit for the communication of the gospel message because they were non-European and therefore perceived as “pervaded by evil spirits and demonic forces”591, which Christianity has brought into that culture to exorcize.592 The Akan cultures and traditions were spoken of as pervaded by an evil spirit and demonic power. Christianity was the remedy to purge and exorcize the culture and Akan religion.

587 Ibid., 30-31.
588 Ibid., 31.
590 Hillman, Toward an African Christianity, 36. Quoted also in Muonwe, Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration, 31.
591 Muonwe, Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration, 31.
Even in the postmodern world, the vestiges of this mentality continue to linger in the Church’s encounter with the cultures and religions of others today. The gospel message is preached to non-Christians but coded in a Eurocentric perception of the culture of the missionaries. Lonergan beautifully expresses this:

In so far as one preaches the gospel as it has been developed within one’s own culture, one is preaching not only the gospel but also one’s own culture. In so far as one is preaching one’s own culture, one is asking others to accept the gospel but also renounce their own culture and accept one’s own.  

Ghana and most African countries in the Twentieth Century are primarily under the classicist mentality where the gospel message continues to be celebrated in the culture and tradition of Europe despite the efforts of some African theologians and anthropologists to inculturate it. The Akan religion and culture, ritual, and traditions are categorized as savage, fetish, and without the conception of God. In his work, Edwin Smith, a missionary and anthropologist in South Africa, recounted his conversation with Ludwig. Smith tells of his experience with how he taught the Africans about God. In amazement, Ludwig retorted, “how can the untutored African conceive God?... How can this be? Deity is a philosophical concept which savages are incapable of framing.” This is a clear indication that the African culture Smith experienced was first thought of as not knowledgeable about God to the extent that the people, savages as they are, cannot conceptualize and comprehend any philosophical concept like God. The Africans, in effect, have no philosophy and, thus, no philosophical concept of God and religion. Missionaries with religious backgrounds, such as Ludwig, will enter Africa and consider the people’s culture and religion uncivilized. Thus, they would not engage them in

594 One such theologian and anthropologist that has championed the inculturation of the gospel message in his native culture and values in Ghana is Archbishop Emeritus Most Rev. Peter Akwasi Sarpong of the Kumasi Archdiocese of Ghana.
an open interreligious and cultural dialogue. Samuel Baker also writes of the Africans in the same line: “Without any exception, they are without a belief in a Supreme-Being, neither have they any form of worship or idolatry nor is the darkness of their minds enlightened by even a ray of superstition.”

With such perception, it was not surprising that African (Akan) music, dance, and manner of worship were considered devilish and thus excluded from liturgical celebrations of the Church in the era of the early missionaries. For instance, the Akan converts were prohibited from practicing their culture, such as using their Music (folksongs), drumming, dancing, and wearing talismans in and outside the Church. The Akan style of worship was classified as contemptible for the Christian celebration. They were deemed satanic, savage, fetish, heathen, and ungodly. Worse of it all, Akans who failed to be converted were addressed as “ehu nyame fo,” literary those who do not know God. Church hymns were in Latin and English, with few translations. Akan Church premises were decorated fully with the cross and Jesus (white) images to facilitate the complete conversion of the Akans. Ghanaian traditional, cultural, and religious shrines were destroyed or vilified for the veneration of “their” gods.

Kofi Poku Quan-Baffour pointed out the positive changes in Catholicism over the past two decades, where Ghanaian drums, songs, and dance were once again accepted into the celebrations of the Mass. Interestingly, he added that this ethnographic study, undertaken to


597 Even today, some Christians describe non-Christians or ‘pagans’ as “ehu Nyame fo,” a derogatory expression. They forget that Christianity survived in Ghana and Africa as a whole because the people themselves were religious so why that expression?


599 Quan-Baffour, “Africanising the Catholic Mass Celebration in Ghana.
understand the sudden “U-turn” in Ghanaian culture, reveals that the change of attitude was to retain the faithful in the wake of strong competition from emerging charismatic churches. Of course, this position could be accurate, but the dissertation strongly believes that Ghanaians have become conscious of their own cultural/religious values and the richness of their style of worship.

Again, indigenous names were rejected as unwholesome for Christian converts. Converts were asked to choose saints’ names and family names of European origin. The Akan converts were made to understand that European and saints’ names come with superior status. The missionaries presumed that the traditional religions of the natives were of little or no value, devilish, and without any genuine theology. Again, African (Akan) customs and languages were discouraged and banned in mission schools. Akan heritage was ridiculed and suppressed. Aside from the fact that these were classified as uncivilized and devilish, the Akans were to be branded with a new identity by compelling them to use new Christian names, speak European languages, and practice the white man’s culture of worshiping God.

Dialogue with the indigenous culture and religion was thus considered pointless and unwarranted. Any dialogical encounter with the tradition and religion of the indigenous people was equated to supporting the heathen and evil worship. In his book, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, Kwesi A. Dickson records that the arrival of the Europeans on the shore of La

---

600 Even growing up, during my first communion catechetical instructions period, I recall one of the candidates was asked to relinquish his indigenous name and replace it with a saint’s name because his local name was despicable to the Catholic faith. The refusal to pick a saint's name was tantamount to a denial of the sacrament of baptism and Holy Communion. Recently, native names have been accepted as baptismal names even though candidates are encouraged to add or take a saint's name.


603 Muonwe, *Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration: Inculturation or Syncretism*, 34.
mina (Elmina),\textsuperscript{604} was for this purpose: “prayed for the conversion of the natives from idolatry, and the perpetual prosperity of the Church they intended to erect on the spot.”\textsuperscript{605} The Akans were considered idolaters or superstitious and in need of salvation. Christianity was a mission to battle “against the forces of Paganism, which endangers the soul”\textsuperscript{606} of the Akans. Not only on the Gold Coast but across the African continent, the missionaries saw it as their responsibility to wage a religious and cultural fight against the evil forces that pervaded the continent and liberate the soul of the Africans from the shackles of Satan. The African clergymen were also schooled to see their culture and tradition as paganism that needed liberation. For instance, Samuel Crowther, who became the first African Anglican Bishop in Nigeria, records in his letter to Henry Venn of the C.M.S. in Fernando Po, “Many a heart burns to see the day when the gospel of liberty to the captives of Satan shall be proclaimed on the banks of the Niger.”\textsuperscript{607} After the C.M.S permanently settled for missionary work, J.C. Taylor writes of the Igbo society and the necessity to increase missionaries on the land in these words: “May many come willingly to labor in pulling down the strongholds of Satan Kingdom, for the whole of the Ibo district is his citadel.”\textsuperscript{608}

The dialogue between the Akan Religion and the Christian missionaries turned unhealthy after the indigenous religion and people accepted them amicably. Christian missionaries in Gold Coast/Ghana deliberately and systematically distorted and discredited to their converts the reality

\textsuperscript{604} La Mina is the modern-day Elmina, located on the coast near Cape Coast. It is believed that the first Portuguese missionaries first landed on the soil of Ghana at the shores of Elmina.
\textsuperscript{605} Kwesi A. Dickson, 	extit{Akan Religion and the Christian Faith} (Accra: Ghana University Press1965), VIII.
\textsuperscript{608} Samuel Crowther and J.C. Taylor, 	extit{The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger} (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall, 1869), 325.
of the Akan Traditional Religion and culture to their advantage. The missionary system of education (school and church) became a powerful tool to “indoctrinate” the Akan converts to hate their own traditional religion and cultural practices.609 Thus, those who could even record and write about the Akan religion and tradition later did so by selectively shaping their writings by the ideologies and principles of Eurocentric Christianity. The Akan people were educated to look down on their culture and religion. They were to disconnect themselves totally from all cultural practices and religion because that which linked them to their cultural and religious roots was branded as an impediment to ‘advancement.’610 An example of the perception of cultural inferiority was seen in the insistence in the Americas and the West Indies, where the enslaved Africans, under the instruction and coercion of their colonial masters, were asked to relinquish their names, languages, and religions. Knowing the power of religion and culture, the missionaries consciously subjected to attacks any African/Akan cultural concepts, ideologies, practices, and rituals seen and regarded as religious.611

From the perspective of Catholic interreligious dialogue, E. C. Dewick maintained that a zero-tolerance of value to non-Christian religions and their rituals, traditions, and worship was obvious. The early Catholic missionaries, according to Dewick, “went out with love for non-Christians in their hearts, but not with any thought of appreciating the non-Christians religions. Their purpose was to rescue souls from the clutches of heathenism in this world and the fires of hell in the next. They went to give and not to receive; to save, not to cooperate.”612 Clearly, the Catholic missionaries on the Gold Coast imposed their religion and values. They failed to engage

609 In my primary school day (1991-1996), friends who were not Catholics but attended Catholic school were forced to participate in Sunday Masses to escape being beaten on Monday at school. Almost all mission schools adopted the same strategy, which was slowly infused into my generation’s Christianity as being superior to any other.
611 Crowther and Taylor, The Gospel on the Banks of the Niger.
in genuine interreligious dialogue with the Akans and their culture to learn anything from them. It could be correct to say that the missionaries’ encountered the Akans with the perspective to erase or deprive them of their cultural and religious roots to facilitate Christianizing and Europeanizing them and their culture.\textsuperscript{613} The missionaries, clouded by eurocentrism, rated their culture and religion as superior to the inferiority of the Akans’ culture and religion. For them, their culture, religion, and tradition are at the center of the universe,\textsuperscript{614} so to share the gospel message of salvation with the Akans was intrinsically connected to westernizing them and their cultural/religious values.

They projected their ethnocentric position in religious circles and the socio-economic and political arena.\textsuperscript{615} Socio-Politically, the early missionaries in the Gold Coast and other African countries embarked on their work of evangelization under the umbrella of colonialism. Though the missionaries were not directly at the forefront of colonial governance, their influential power in reshaping the new social order was apparent in politics, economics, and culture. Politically, the missions and European missionaries gave elites a point of entry into the new colonial order.\textsuperscript{616} Simon Gikandi and Evan Mwangi pointed out that these young African elites were not so much attracted to the promise of salvation of the white man’s religion, but the social order defined by the power of literacy and access to modern amenities of the Europeans. Around the 1920s, some of these same African elites began questioning the colonial and missionary strategies and the spiritual cost of religious conversion. This rise highlighted that the Europeans were not here to dialogue or learn. This aroused religious and cultural nationalism. These elites

---


\textsuperscript{614} Boaheng, “Early Christian Missions in West Africa.

\textsuperscript{615} Ibid, 229.

realized that the Christian missionaries had tactically embarked on a project to destroy African religious and cultural foundations. Kenyatta Jomo, one of such elites, said the Europeans perceived the African as “a clean slate on which anything could be written.” Kenyatta writes:

In the early days of European colonization many white men, especially missionaries, landed in Africa with preconceived ideas of what they would find there and how they would deal with the situation. As far as religion is concerned, the African was regarded as a clean slate on which anything could be written. He was supposed to take wholeheartedly all religious dogmas of the white man and keep them sacred and unchallenged, no matter how alien to the African mode of life. The Europeans based their assumption on the conviction that everything that the Africans did or thought was evil. The missionaries endeavored to rescue the depraved souls of the Africans from ‘eternal fire’; they set out to uproot the African body and soul, from his old customs and beliefs, put him in a class by himself, with all his tribal traditions shattered and his institutions trampled upon. The African, after having been detached from his family and tribe, was expected to follow the white Man’s religion without questioning whether it suited his condition.

3.3 Dialogical Encounter After Ghana’s Independence 1957

Vestiges of the unbalanced dialogue between the Christian missionaries and Akan culture and religion in the early missionaries’ years lingered until and after the independence of Ghana on March 6, 1957. Ghana first president, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah like other nationalists, acknowledged missionaries as part and parcel of racism, colonialism, and cultural and religious destruction on the one hand, while on the other, they saw themselves as indebted to missionaries for providing education and hospitals. At a Conference of the International Missionary Council held in Accra in January 1958, Dr. Nkrumah registered his appreciation for the Christian missionaries in these words:

They belong to the martyrs of Christianity ... The fortitude which they showed is the sure foundation upon which Christianity is based in Ghana. Ghana salutes

---

See also Eshun, “Speaking for Ourselves.”
these men and women who gave their lives for the enlightenment and welfare of this land.

However, Dr. Nkrumah detested the destruction of the Ghanaian culture and religion and the harmful effect of the rule of the colonial masters in an address to the Conference of Independent Africa States in Accra on the same year, April 15, 1958. He writes:

The stage opens with the appearance of missionaries and anthropologists, traders, concessionaires and administrators. While the missionaries with Christianity implore the colonial subjects to lay their ‘treasures in Heaven where neither moth or rust doth corrupt,’ the traders and concessionaires acquire his minerals and land resources, destroy his arts, crafts, culture, religion, and home industries” (Nkrumah, April 1958).

On his part, President Dr. Nkrumah demanded that prayer of libation be offered at all State functions. He again adopted Akan chiefly honorific titles such as Osagyefo and Kasapreko, even in modern politics, to communicate the possibility of dialogue between Akan Traditional Religion/Culture with Christianity. For him, the approaches which took the Ghanaian cultural and religious context seriously offered a new Ghanaian outlook on engaging with Christianity.

K. A. Busia, a political leader, expressed the concern that Christianity is still alien to the everyday activities and rites of Ghanaians because it has yet to integrate its teachings within the cultural fiber of the people. He said the following: “As one watches the daily lives and activities of Christians, and takes account of the rites connected with marriage, birth, death, widowhood, festivals, or installations to traditional offices, one learns that a great deal of normal community activities lies outside their Christianity and that for all their influence, the Christian Churches are still alien institutions, intruded upon, but not integrated with the indigenous social

---

620 See also Eshun, “Speaking for Ourselves.”
621 “Osagyefo” means Savior and “Kasapreko” also literary means one who speaks, and no one Challenges.


Christianity relevant to Ghanaians, thus moving the religion from the periphery to the center. This has resulted in massive growth today. From the perspective of Catholicism, this dissertation would argue that there is much for the church to adopt concerning Akan traditional culture and religion in general and the marriage rite of the Akans in particular. The ambivalent attitude of President Nkrumah, and the recent theological scholarship of Peter Akwasi Sarpong, Dickson, Bediako, Asamoah-Gyadu, take the Akan traditional religion and culture seriously even though the legacies of the Christian missionaries are not completely rejected. Coupled with urgent pastoral reassessment, many Ghanaians are convinced that if Christianity (Catholicism) continues to fail to reassess its local ecclesial leadership, theology, liturgy, and pastoral attitudes towards Akan Traditional Religion and cultural values, the next two decades will see a total decline of Catholicism.

The population census of Ghana in the last two decades has revealed a continuous decline in the country’s Catholic population. Among the factors is the church’s failure to resolve the problems of both the Akan traditional marriage ceremony and the Church’s theology and canon of Holy Matrimony (see Chapter 4). The Ghana Catholic Bishop Conference has raised concerns over the rapid decline of Catholics in the country. In describing the phenomenon as a challenge, the Bishop of Sunyani, Bishop Matthew Gyamfi, in his address to the participants of the 18th Biennial Plenary Assembly of the Tamale Ecclesiastical Province Pastoral Conference (TEPPCON), said that pastoral agents “are not reaching all corners of our country.”

He referenced the Ghana Housing and Population Census, 2010, and observed that out of the 71

---


167
percent Christians of the total Ghanaian population at 24,658,823, the Catholic population was 13.1 percent, a drop of 2 percent from the previous 15.1 percent in the 2000 census.\textsuperscript{628} The Catholic prelate further said, “The two percent might sound insignificant, but mathematically, it is a huge number and a big loss to the Church in Ghana.”\textsuperscript{629} He believed that the dwindling percentage indicates that pastoral agents or the Church have failed to reach the corners of the country or dioceses. In the same light, Ghana’s recent 2021 Population and Housing Census recorded a further decline from 2010. Out of the total population of 30.8 million, the Catholic Church recorded 10 percent, a 3.1 percent drop from 13.1 percent in 2010. Among the 3.1 percent decline are Catholics who struggled to attain full communion in the Church because of the dead theo-dialogical encounter between traditional marriage practices and Catholic Church marriage. Unlike the Catholic Church, the Pentecostal/Charismatics recorded a significant increase from 28.3 in 2010 to 31.6 percent in 2020-2021. This translated into over 9.7 million of the country’s population, an increase compared to the 2010 census.\textsuperscript{630} It will be argued later (Chapter 4) that while the Pentecostals/Charismatics have been able to bridge the gap between Akan traditional marriage with Church Marriage, the Catholic Church in Ghana still struggles to do so. This problem suggests that the Catholic Church has not comprehensively integrated the traditional Akan culture into practicing and celebrating the Church’s sacraments. The next section explores inculturating the Catholic faith in the Ghana Catholic church.

\textsuperscript{628} “Ghana’s Catholic Population Decline Requires…” \textit{Africa}. Italics is mine.
\textsuperscript{629} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{630} Doris Dokua Sasu, “Religious Affiliation of the Population in Ghana in 2010 and 2021.”
3.4. A Theological and Liturgical Inculturation of Ghana Catholicism: An Akan Context

Inculturation is the incarnation of the message of Christianity in a particular cultural context. This experience firstly finds expression through elements proper to the native culture in question and secondly becomes a principle that promotes animation, direction, and unification of the Church. This process expedites new creation.631 Roest Crollius defines inculturation as:

The integration of the Christian experience of a local church into the culture of its people in such a way that the experience not only express itself in elements of this culture, but becomes a force that animates, orients and innovates this culture so as to create a new unity and communion not only within the culture in question, but also as an enrichment of the Church Universal.632

The means of inculturation is seen as a two-way process: ad extra and ad intra.633 The process where the Christian life and message influence the religio-cultural context of a particular church is referred to as inculturation ad extra. On the other hand, a given culture’s impact on how the Christian life and message is articulated, lived, and passed on is called inculturation ad intra.634

Vatican II Council, concerned with affirming and promoting cultural pluralism within the framework of the Church and realizing its universal mission, adopted the word inculturation to discuss better interreligious and intercultural relationships.635 The reality and challenges posed by postmodernity with its cultural and religious pluralism brought out the urgency to incarnate the Catholic faith in other cultures. David Tracy said it beautifully: “Catholic Christianity can no longer afford to be Eurocentric anymore than early Christianity could afford to be purely Judaic.

635 Muonwe, Dialectics of Faith-Culture integration, 89.
if it would reach the Gentiles in ways that they could understand and appropriate the common faith in their own cultural forms.\textsuperscript{636}

It must be noted that theology flows from a particular culture, and its dynamism shapes it.\textsuperscript{637} The encounter between the early missionaries and the Akan religion and culture shows that genuine communication between human cultures is only possible when the ground of dialogue and participation is fertile through proper listening and the readiness to learn. This does not exclude western theology, even though its practitioners fail to perceive it as inculturated. Its proponents contend that western culture is not only universally relevant and eternally valid but also not culturally limited.

The above assertion from the recent African scholarship has no place. The Catholic Church previously restricted theology or the Christic experience to Western culture and forms: Western beliefs, values, and systems.\textsuperscript{638} Today, African scholars want a church, values, beliefs, and systems rooted in their religio-cultural milieu because the Christic experience permeates all cultures. Theology must be drawn from the African’s pot to speak to its context as African Catholics without losing sight of the broader theology of the universal church. Reformulation of Catholicism rooted in the Akan cultural context, values, and symbols in Ghana stands a higher chance of enriching the Church today and in the future. In this journey, a genuine interreligious and cultural dialogue becomes a key to harnessing a better self-identification that lights up the

\textsuperscript{636} David Tracy, “World Church or World Catechism: The Problem of Eurocentrism,” \textit{Concilium} 204, no. 4 (1989): 29. According to Tracy, Christianity cannot be associated with European any longer. Many factors have made Christianity a world reality thus any refusal to this reality must theologically be resisted. There is therefore the urgent need to respect and acknowledge multicultural and religious realities especially in the formulation of theological and liturgical doctrine. The era of hailing a single theological system as a universal or mono-cultural imposition must be treated as a failure on the part of the Church. See also Hermann Häring, “Experiences with the Short-Formula of the Faith,” \textit{Concilium} 204, no. 4 (1989): 72.

\textsuperscript{637} Ibid., 6.

\textsuperscript{638} Ibid.
hope of growth toward a common horizon of truth.\textsuperscript{639} This makes inculturation in the Catholic Church in postmodern Ghana an imperative process. In this section, it will be argued that the Ghana Catholic Church must implement the principle of inculturation in both theological and liturgical celebrations of our faith. Of particular interest in this work is the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony (the focus of Chapter 4). The work will also argue that inculturation provides fertile ground for incorporating the culture of the Akan tribes into the Church. The principle of inculturation will disconnect the Ghana Catholic Church from the missionary concept of evangelization that treated the Akan culture and religion as fetish and satanic, as discussed above. Through inculturation, the Catholic Church of Ghana would reappraise her evangelizing mission to redefine her theological and pastoral orientations, particularly in celebrating marriage.

3.5. \textbf{African Catholicism and the Imperativeness of Inculturation}

For variant reasons, the imperativeness of Catholic theology of inculturation in the African context has become urgent. Firstly, it seeks to address the erroneous and dominant negative notion of Europe about their perception of Africa and, for that matter, the Akans of Ghana. For instance, Homer described Africa as a remote place located on the fringes of the universe where the inhabitants are noted for their worship and sacrifices of humans to their gods.\textsuperscript{640} Hegel also spread in his writings that “Africa is an ahistoric continent even though it has a geographic location. The people live in a condition of mindlessness barbering without laws and morality.”\textsuperscript{641} On his part, Comte wrote that “Africans are people who lack the sophisticated


\textsuperscript{641} Anthony, “Inculturation and the Christian faith in Africa.
linguistic skills, the scientific and political faculties of the European and are best suited to
dancing, dressing up and singing.” 642

Secondly, since these ideas informed the European missionaries who came to the Gold
Coast to evangelize, it was not surprising that the pedagogical skills of the missionaries and
formula of teaching the Catholic faith had no space to dialogue with the culture and religion of
the natives. African Catholic theology of inculturation arose as a counter to the Eurocentric
attempts by European missionaries to impose their beliefs and culture on the African converts. In
his book, African Inculturation Theology: Africanizing Christianity, Metuh argued that African
inculturation theology arose because of the different movements which interrogated the
assumptions of this early missionary missiology. The result was a new vision of African
missiology, which stressed that any theological application to Africa must take account of the
Africans’ culture, religion, and civilization. 643 This new missiology emphasized that Africans,
their religion, and their culture cannot be treated as footnotes. Rather, Africans have the right to
reflect on Christianity not in the culture and practices of the missionaries but on their own terms
and express their faith in theology and religious life relevant to their cultural situation. 644 From
Metuh’s point of view, the culture of a group of people cannot be trivialized. Vatican II Council
said that human beings come to authentic and full humanity only through culture. 645

From the perspective of African Catholicism and inculturation, it is recorded on the soil
of Ghana on May 1980, when Pope John Paul II, at his maiden pontifical visit, affirmed the
importance and the imperativeness of practical, theological, and liturgical inculturation in the
Church. The Pope said:

644 Metuh, I. E., African Inculturation Theology.
645 GS., 53.
In this process, cultures themselves must be uplifted, transformed and permeated by Christ’s original message of divine truth, without harming what is noble in them. Hence worthy African traditions are to be preserved. Moreover, in accordance with the full truth of the Gospels and in harmony with the magisterium of the Church, living and dynamic Christian traditions are to be consolidated.

Inculturation is rooted in the theology of incarnation. Christ enters human history and culture and shares human existence in all its fullness. His divine message of truth was not shrouded in a culture removed from his socio-cultural milieu. Instead, He lived and thought as a true Jew, communicated in the Jewish language, and proclaimed his message of salvation from and within the customs and socio-cultural elements of his *Sitz im Leben*. From the root of the incarnation, the Africa (Ghana) Church must make a conscious and conscientious effort to help the people or Catholics be converted down to the very roots of their indigenous culture. The Church is obliged today more than ever before to strive to attain a convergence between the conversion of mind and the conversion of the way of life so that African (Ghanaian) Catholics would be capable of living and expressing the essence of the Christian faith in depth and forms that sync with their cultural and religious identity. The African Church is still trying to inculturate various parts of the liturgical celebration that the church norms could change. But as Elochukwu E. Uzukwu rightly said, “there is no consensus among African local churches about how this ‘inculturation is to be realized in practice.’” This has been a challenge. Despite this, though slow, most African countries like Ghana are taking steps to inculturate the faith.

---

646 *Sitz im Leben* is a German phrase roughly translating to "setting in life" “in Biblical criticism. It explains the alleged context in which a text has been created, and its function and purpose at that time. When interpreting a text, it is paramount to consider the *Sitz im Leben* to facilitate a proper understanding of its meaning. [https://www.definitions.net/definition/Sitz%20im%20Leben#:~:text=In%20Biblical%20criticism%2C%20Sitz%20im%20Leben%20is%20a%20context%20in%20which%20a%20text%2C%20its%20function%20and%20purpose%20at%20that%20time%2C%20to%20allow%20a%20proper%20understanding%20of%20its%20meaning Accessed June 2, 2022.]

For example, seeing the imperative dimension to incarnate the faith in Ghanaian’s cultural and religious worldview, the Church has tremendously advanced in the inculturation process of some parts of the liturgy, the sacraments, and music. It is essential to mention that Archbishop Emeritus Peter Akwesi Sarpong of Kumasi has been at the forefront in this respect. To touch on a few examples, the Ghana Church has been able to move from simple adaptations to making creative initiatives. Some of such initiatives include a rediscovery of the importance of the Word of God; usage of the vernacular (Twi, Fante, Nzima, etc.), the use of Ghanaian arts and symbols like ‘Adinkra’ in liturgical vestment/clothing, decorating sacred spaces and on sacred vessels; and use of traditional Ghanaian forms to express certain elements of the faith: drums, clapping of hands, dancing and body language.\textsuperscript{648} These efforts are to enhance the meaning and understanding of the liturgy to facilitate the active, conscious, and full participation\textsuperscript{649} of the faithful. The Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference in the First National Catholic Congress held in Cape Coast in 1997 affirms that the Ghana church must mark its celebrations by ritual expression drawn from ancient African liturgical tradition and more recent experiences.\textsuperscript{650} With particularity to the inculturation of the Sacrament of Marriage, it is interesting to note that the Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference gives high recognition to the customary or traditional marriage of the Akans and thus spoke about the fusion of the Sacrament of Holy Matrimony and Akan traditional marriage. The Bishop’s Conference insists vehemently that the priest, before celebrating the traditional wedding, must instruct the couples on the forms of marriage and prepare them for penance and reception of the Eucharist. The priest must be at every important stage of the marriage process, and on the final day of marriage, he must be present to give the nuptial

\textsuperscript{648} Ecclesial in Ghana: On the Church in Ghana and its evangelizing Mission in the Third Millennium, 48.
\textsuperscript{649} SC. 14.
\textsuperscript{650} Ecclesial in Ghana: On the Church in Ghana and its evangelizing Mission in the Third Millennium, 50.
blessings during the traditional wedding. Then on Sunday or any holy day of obligation, the couples can receive communion. Chapter Four will extensively explore this dialogue between the cultural and traditional rites of marriage and Holy Matrimony.


Introduction

For many traditional Catholics and most Evangelicals, Christianity adheres to the position that the Catholic Church, which exclusively possesses divine revelation, has the primary mission entrusted to her by the Lord to evangelize, that is, to proclaim the Gospel and convert the heathens. The mission for them is inseparably linked to evangelization and conversion to Jesus Christ only through the Christian faith and baptism of the church. Such a theological position set the pace and directed the pastoral strategies and practices of the early Catholic missionaries in Ghana and, to some extent, in the universal church. Evangelization aimed to forcefully convert the heathens into the Kingdom of God through the church and Christianity, which the missionaries introduced inimical to the Akan Traditional Religion when they landed on the shores of Ghana. Catholic mission, for these missionaries, is disconnected from the interreligious dialogue, which presumes that the Church does not enjoy the fullness of divine truth since other religions also have traces of such revelation.

From the other side of the theological spectrum are those who vehemently subscribe to the position that a mission geared toward converting other religious believers into the Christian faith has no theological basis in the postmodern age of religious pluralism, which upholds all religions as valid channels of salvation for their believers.\footnote{Peter C. Phan, “Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue: Compatible Parts of Christian Mission?” 2-3, Santa Clara Lectures, (2010). https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=sc_lectures} This group endorses interreligious dialogue,
which positively lights shared religious doctrines and experiences among various believers within a dialogue of mutual respect and humility.

Another theological position, which lies in between the two extremes, maintains that while evangelization is the task of the church, the church must equally not only acknowledge dialogue among non-Christian religions but must necessarily promote it. The dialogue here must be more restricted to “cultures or the cultural consequences of religion (intercultural dialogue).”

Finally, there have been many theologians, according to Peter Phan, who maintain the theological standpoint that evangelization and interreligious dialogue are two intrinsically constitutive parts of the church’s mission. Though they are distinctive elements of the church’s mission, they must be held together, particularly in a world of religious and cultural pluralism. Peter Phan writes, “the intimate conjunction of these two activities is only possible if they are radically re-envisioned in both their nature and method.”

Significant questions arise, especially when we speak of mission, evangelization, and interreligious dialogue: Is interreligious dialogue an intrinsic part of the Catholic Church’s mission or extrinsic to it? Is evangelization an end in itself; a stratagem employed by the Church to win new members, or can evangelization totally eliminate the attitude of proselytism while the Church claims to be a missionary? What is the relationship between evangelization and interreligious dialogue with respect to the mission of the Catholic Church? It must be acknowledged that Vatican II Council and post-conciliar theology have not explicitly provided a uniform answer to these questions. However, there is no denying that Catholicism, as part of its comprehensive expression

---


652 Phan, *Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue*.

653 Phan, *Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue*.

654 Ibid.
of her mission of evangelization, positively integrates interreligious dialogue as an authentic and inseparable part of its mission to the world.

From the above theological perspectives and questions, this section of chapter three seeks to survey mission, evangelization, and interreligious dialogue from the religiously pluralistic context of Ghana. The section will be discussed under four major sections: A) Definitions of Terms: “Evangelization,” “Proclamation,” and “Dialogue,” B) Semantic Evolution of Mission and Evangelization During and After the Vatican II Council, 3) Interreligious Dialogue as a Constitutive Element of the Church’s Mission of Evangelization: A Review of Magisterial Documents, and 4) The “new” Church: Re-envisioning Evangelization, Mission and Dialogue in a Religiously Pluralistic Ghana Today. This is to envision a “new” church of Ghana that will serve its members and harmoniously relate with Akan Traditional Religion and Islam and their respective traditions. It will then be followed by an evaluation and conclusion.

3.7. Definitions of Terms: “Evangelization,” “Proclamation,” and “Dialogue”

It is important here to define the terms “evangelization,” “proclamation,” and “dialogue” before proceeding for better comprehension. The definitions of these terms as borrowed from the document “Dialogue and Proclamation (DP),” a joint document of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for Evangelization of Peoples, to enables us to have a broader view of the Church’s post-Vatican II concept of mission, evangelization, and interreligious dialogue. According to “Dialogue and Proclamation,” “evangelizing mission, or more simply evangelization, refers to the mission of the Church in its totality.”

655 “Church” used in this work refers particularly to the Catholic Church


the term evangelization is used in a broader sense, and the more specific understanding is expressed with the word proclamation.657

On the other hand, proclamation or announcing (kerygma) refers to the “communication of the Gospel message, the mystery of salvation realized by God for all in Jesus Christ by the power of the Spirit. It is an invitation to a commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and entry through baptism into the community of believers, which is the Church.”658 Proclamation could either be “solemn or public.” It is connected to catechesis (Didache), which aims to deepen the faith. DP adds that the “Proclamation is the foundation, center, and summit of evangelization.”659

The document “Dialogue and Proclamation” understands “dialogue” in different ways: From a purely human level, “dialogue” refers to a “reciprocal communication, leading to a common goal or, at a deeper level, to interpersonal communion.”660 Dialogue, again, could be seen as “an attitude of respect and friendship, which permeates or should permeate all those activities constituting the evangelizing mission of the Church.”661 Dialogue of such nature is also called “the spirit of dialogue.”662 Lastly, DP speaks of dialogue from the context of religious plurality to mean “all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom.”663 This definition of dialogue incorporates both the witness and the exploration of the other traditions, and it is this understanding sense that the present post-Vatican II speaks of

657 DP. 8.
658 DP. 10.
659 DP. 10. See also EN 27.
660 DP. 9.
661 DP. 9.
662 DP. 9.
663 DP. 6. See also Dupuis, Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue, 219.
dialogue as an integral and constitutive element of the mission and evangelization of the Catholic Church.

As will be argued extensively below, dialogue as a specific element of evangelization is distinct from the proclamation. While proclamation aims at conversion, dialogue does not prioritize the “conversion” of “others” into the Christian faith.\(^{664}\) It is important to point forth that the Church’s proclamation of the gospel, which calls others to embrace Jesus in the Church, must be carried out in a “spirit of dialogue.”

The above definitions make it clear that dialogue and mission must not be opposed to each other as though they were mutually opposite or even distinct. On the contrary, dialogue is an integral part of the Church’s evangelizing mission to which proclamation belongs.\(^{665}\) The preceding work will argue the place of interreligious dialogue in the Church’s evangelizing mission. It will stress dialogue as a distinct but constitutive element in its own right in the mission of the Church. This would be accomplished by reviewing three important post-Vatican documents: *Redemptoris Missio*, Dialogue and Mission, and Dialogue and Proclamation. Before this, the next section briefly surveys the evolution of the words and concepts of mission, evangelization, and dialogue.

### 3.8. Semantic Evolution of Mission and Evangelization Within Vatican II

This second section traces how the Church’s evangelizing mission has evolved over time, tracing from pre-Vatican II through Vatican II to post-Vatican II. Historically, words and concepts evolve, changing the realities and scope of communication. The evolution of theological concepts corresponds to the Church’s mission. One such area is the Church’s concept of evangelization.

---


\(^{665}\) DupUIS, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, 219.
Evangelization has evolved over the years to embrace a broader sense of the overall mission of the Catholic Church. D. Grasso observes the development and evolution of the concept of evangelization during and since the Vatican II Council when he said the following:

The postconciliar church continues to expand its use of the term “evangelization” to the point where the latter is gradually coming to express the totality of its mission. Thus, we may say that everything in the church is “evangelization” since the church performs its mission in all that it does. 666

The evolution of the word will theologically change the traditional missiology of Pre-Vatican II, which prioritized the Church’s mission as “planting the church” 667 Referencing pre-Vatican missiology, William Burrows contends that “Christian mission since 1492 has been defined as a function of the Church’s efforts to proclaim the gospel to persons of other traditions and to expand the membership of the church.” 668 The supreme aim of the Church was to ensure growth, first in terms of numbers and implanting churches in every part of the world. Vatican II later affirmed the traditional pre-Vatican II mission concept but added another perspective that broadened it slightly. In defining mission, the Council Fathers write in Ad Gentes: “the special undertakings in which preachers of the Gospel, sent by the Church, and going into the world, carry out the work of preaching the Gospel and implanting church among people who do not yet believe in Christ, are generally called ‘mission.’” 669 Adding another concept to the scope of mission, Ad Gentes continues, “the special end of this missionary activity is the evangelization and the implanting of the church among peoples or groups in which it has not yet taken roots.” 670 The Council includes that the concept of evangelization is part of the mission of the Church. Even with

---

666 Domenico Grasso, Evangelizzazione: senso… as quoted in Dupuis, Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions, 207.
667 Dupuis, Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions, 207.
668 Daniel Kendall and Gerald O’Collins (eds), In Many and Diverse Ways (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003), 219.
670 Flannery, Vatican Council II.
this, Dupuis observes that the term “evangelization” as employed in the Council’s documents expresses a narrow concept of just “proclamation” of the gospel geared toward inviting the “others” to embrace and be part of the Church’s community.\footnote{671}{Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism}, 359.}

Pope Paul VI’s encyclical \textit{Ecclesiam Suam} (1964), which influenced the Council positively in its interreligious affirmation of the other traditions, even failed to acknowledge interfaith dialogue as an intrinsic part of the Church’s mission and evangelization. Commenting on \textit{Ecclesiam Suam} about dialogue and evangelization, Dupuis said that “whatever importance or merit may be attributed to dialogue, in terms of its relation to evangelization, it represents but a first approach to the others, to which the preconciliar theological term of “preevangelization” could still be applied.”\footnote{672}{Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism}.} It was difficult to speak of mission broadly to incorporate evangelization and dialogue. The fact that even a later apostolic exhortation, \textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi} (1975) of Paul VI, the “pope of dialogue,” totally remained silent on the comprehensive notion of evangelization to include interreligious dialogue indicates that the broader concept in post-Vatican II faced much resistance and hesitation both from the hierarchy of the Church and the practical level of dialogue among the faithful and other believers.\footnote{673}{Dupuis, \textit{Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism}.} In this papal exhortation, the Church’s mission, mainly seen in the “proclamation,” considers the non-Christian believers as “beneficiaries” of the Church’s evangelizing mission in the world.\footnote{674}{Ibid.} Pope Paul VI could have had a broader concept of the Church’s mission to include dialogue. Unfortunately, his evaluation of the other religions remained negative, i.e., he considered the other traditions as a representation of the natural religiosity of human beings, whereas Christianity was the only “supernatural” religion.\footnote{675}{\textit{Evangelii Nuntiandi} (EN) 53. See also Jacques Dupuis, \textit{Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue} (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 218.}
From the above encyclicals and apostolic exhortation, it is interesting to see how the narrow concept of mission is implemented in the 1983 revision of the Code of the Canon (781-792). The Canons on mission, i.e., “the missionary Action of the church,” appeared in the third book of the code entitled “The Teaching Function of the Church.” These codes would be well understood when read in the spirit of Ad Gentes, Sacrosanctum Concilium, Lumen Gentium, and Gaudium et Spes.

Canon 781 alludes to Ad Gentes when it speaks of the nature of the Church as a missionary and that the work of evangelization is the responsibility of the entire people of God. The code makes a slight emphasis worth noting: Canon 786 echoes the definition of mission captured in Ad Gentes676 but makes a small amendment by emphasizing more of the preaching of the Gospel and a little of the implantation of the church.677 The next Canon 787 §1 highlights the necessity to incorporate a sincere dialogue with believers of other traditions in the evangelizing mission and to be sensitive to their cultural practices. It writes, “By the witness of their life and word, missionaries are to establish a sincere dialogue with those who do not believe in Christ so that, in a manner adapted to their own temperament and culture, avenues are opened enabling them to understand the message of the gospel.”678 Even though this canon calls on missionaries to engage in sincere dialogue, the ultimate aim is to convert the non-believers into the church through baptism, as affirmed in paragraph 2 of the same Canon: “Missionaries are to take care that they teach the truths

676 AG 6. “Missions” is the term usually given to those particular undertakings by which the heralds of the Gospel, sent out by the Church and going forth into the whole world, carry out the task of preaching the Gospel and planting the Church among peoples or groups who do not yet believe in Christ. Ad Gentes “On the Mission Activity of the Church”
678 Ad Gentes “On the Mission Activity of the Church.”
of faith to those whom they consider prepared to receive the gospel message so that they can be admitted to receive baptism when they freely request. 679

It could be said from the above that the Church, up to this point, has had a narrow concept of its mission of evangelization which hardly saw dialogue as a constitutive element with its own value and does not seek to convert the other into the Christian faith. A qualitative and comprehensive change in the definition of the scope of the Church’s mission of evangelization to embrace interreligious dialogue as an integral part was developed in the post-Vatican II years around the 1980s and the 1990s. This change has not been without setbacks.

3.9. Interreligious Dialogue as a Constitutive Element of the Church’s Mission of Evangelization: A Review of Magisterial Documents

The post-Vatican II teachings of Pope John Paul II laid a theological base for the relevance of interreligious dialogue as a distinct but integral element of the mission of the Church. His strong emphasis on the theme of the action of the spirit of God, as present not only in Christianity but among the members and traditions of other religions, becomes an important point of reference. Stating with clarity on the presence of the Spirit operative in other religions, Redemptoris Missio (RM) writes:

The Spirit manifests himself in a special way in the Church and in her members. Nevertheless, his presence and activity are universal, limited neither by space nor time... The Spirit, therefore, is at the very source of humanity’s existential and religious questioning, a questioning which is occasioned not only by contingent situations but by the very structure of his being. The Spirit’s presence and activity affect not only the individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. 680

Speaking particularly of interreligious dialogue as part of the evangelizing mission of the Church, Pope John Paul II opined in *Redemptoris Mission* (RM) that:

Inter-religious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Understood as a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment, dialogue is not in opposition to the mission *ad gentes*; indeed, it has special links with that mission and is one of its expressions. This mission, in fact, is addressed to those who do not know Christ and his Gospel, and who belong for the most part to other religions. In Christ, God calls all peoples to himself, and he wishes to share with them the fullness of his revelation and love… Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that *the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that *she alone* possesses the fullness of the means of salvation.\(^{681}\)

Writing about the relationship between dialogue and proclamation in the one evangelizing mission of the Church, the encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* also said that the “two elements must maintain both their intimate connection and their distinctiveness…they should not be confused, manipulated (*nec immodice intrumentorum instar adhibenda*) or regarded as identical, as though they were interchangeable.”\(^{682}\) In other words, to say that dialogue cannot be “manipulated” in the evangelizing activities of the Church implies that it cannot be employed or reduced to an *instrument* for proclamation. This destroys dialogue as having its value as an authentic expression of evangelization.\(^{683}\)

Again, John Paul II in 1981 addressed the people of Asia by stressing the universal presence and role of the spirit of God. He asserted that the Church today “feels a deep need to enter into contact and dialogue with all of these religions.”\(^{684}\) He continued to affirm that what unites

\(^{681}\) RM. 55.  
\(^{682}\) RM. 55.  
\(^{683}\) Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions*, 220.  
Christians and other believers is the need for prayer—the moment where the spirit of God is present in the sincere prayer of everyone.\textsuperscript{685} The concluding part of his address states:

All Christians must, therefore, be committed to dialogue with the believers of all religions, so that the mutual understanding and collaboration may grow; so that moral values be strengthened; so that God may be praised in all creation. Ways must be developed to make this dialogue become a reality everywhere, but especially in Asia, the continent that is the cradle of ancient cultures and religions.\textsuperscript{686}

The Pope underlined the universal oneness based on humanity’s common origin and destiny in the order of creation, on the oneness of Jesus’ redemptive mystery, and the active presence and the role of the spirit of God in the prayers of men and women of other religions. He calls on the Church to “work with all her energies (in evangelization, prayer, and dialogue) so that the wounds and division—which separates people from their Origin and Goal, and make them hostile to one another—may be healed.”\textsuperscript{687}

Even though Pope John Paul II wrote and promoted dialogue in his pontificate, later documents entitled “Dialogue and Mission (DM)” from the Secretariat for non-Christians in 1984 keenly and explicitly affirmed interreligious dialogue as an integral part of the single but complex and articulated reality of the mission of the Church. The document explains that the Church’s mission “is one, but comes to be exercised in different ways, according to the conditions in which mission unfolds.”\textsuperscript{688} The implication is that dialogue with followers of other religious traditions is an inseparable part of the Church’s mission. DM identifies five principal elements of the single mission of the Church, taking care that they are not exhaustive. These are a) simple presence and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{685} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{686} Dupuis,\textit{ Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism}, 361.
\item \textsuperscript{687} Ibid, 362.
\item \textsuperscript{688} DM. 11. “The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions.”
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
living witness of the Christian life; b) concrete commitment to the service of humankind and all forms of activity for social development and for the struggle against poverty and the structures which produce it; c) liturgical life and that of prayer and contemplation; d) *dialogue in which Christians meet the followers of other religion in order to walk together toward truth and to work together in projects of common concern*; and, e) announcement and catechesis in which the Good News of the Gospel is proclaimed, and its consequences for life and culture are analyzed. The totality of the Christian mission embraces all of these elements.689

“Dialogue and Mission” makes a major development in broadening the concept of the evangelizing mission by making interreligious dialogue one of the elements of evangelization which has its own validity. In this sense, one can speak specifically of dialogue as a form of evangelization but not as a substitute for the mission of the Church. The document again affirms that the life of Jesus contains all the elements of the mission, including dialogue, and all Christians are called to act the same way equally.690 Jacque Dupuis, commenting on this document, points out that DM showed explicitly the essential place occupied by interreligious dialogue in the evangelizing mission of the Church, which other documents so far have failed to point out.691 Cassidy, in the same vein, identifies the positive development of the concept of evangelization, mission and dialogue in the document, which, though rooted in *Nostra Aetate*, is strengthened here by clearly stating the essential relationship between dialogue and mission.692

689 DM. 13. See also Dupuis, *Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions* 220. Emphasis is mine.
690 DM. 15.
The document “Dialogue and Mission” further explains that interreligious dialogue, a specific and unique task of evangelization – which finds its place in the great “dynamism of the church’s mission”\(^{693}\) can assume different forms. Some of the forms of dialogue include dialogue of life, which is open and accessible to all,\(^{694}\) and the dialogue of a common commitment to works of justice and human liberation.\(^{695}\) There is an intellectual dialogue where religious legacies are exchanged among scholars of different traditions, which aims to promote communion and fellowship.\(^{696}\) Lastly, there is the sharing of religious experiences of prayer and contemplation, all in a common search for the Ultimate or Absolute.\(^{697}\) All these various forms of dialogue for the Christian are opportunities for sharing existentially with non-Christians the gospel values\(^{698}\) and working for the “evangelical transformation of cultures.”\(^{699}\)

Later, in 1991, a joint document was issued by the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples. It was entitled “Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientation on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (DP).” This document reiterates dialogue as a constitutive element of the Church’s evangelizing mission, as already affirmed in Dialogue and Mission. The document writes:

Interreligious dialogue and proclamation, though not on the same level, are both authentic elements of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Both are legitimate and necessary. They are intimately related, but not interchangeable...The two activities remain distinct but, as experience shows, one and the same local Church, one and the same person, can be diversely engaged in both.\(^{700}\)

\(^{693}\) DM. 30.  
\(^{694}\) DM. 29-30.  
\(^{695}\) DM. 31-32.  
\(^{696}\) DM. 33-34.  
\(^{697}\) DM. 35.  
\(^{698}\) DM. 35.  
\(^{699}\) DM. 34.  
\(^{700}\) DP. 2.
The document “Dialogue and Proclamation,” while it sees dialogue as representing an authentic expression of evangelization, also observes that it does not “exhaust it but remains oriented toward proclamation.”\textsuperscript{701} Both activities have a different scope: interreligious dialogue is a “deeper conversion of all toward God thus possess its own validity”\textsuperscript{702} and proclamation “aims at guiding people to explicit knowledge of what God has done for all men and women in Jesus Christ, and to invite them to be disciples of Jesus through becoming members of the church.”\textsuperscript{703} DP states:

Dialogue…does not constitute the whole of the church…it cannot simply replace proclamation, but remains oriented towards proclamation, in so far as the dynamic process of the Church’s evangelizing mission reaches in its climax and its fullness.\textsuperscript{704}

Jacques Dupuis, keeping to the tradition and authenticity of the Church’s teachings, comments on the orientation of dialogue to proclamation. For him, dialogue and proclamation are conceived as a “dialectical relationship within the same evangelizing mission.”\textsuperscript{705} Dupuis also echoes that the “orientation” of the dialogue toward proclamation, in fact, corresponds to the “orientation” (ordinantur) of the members of other religious traditions toward the Church.\textsuperscript{706} The orientation of the other traditions toward the church flows from the fact that the church possesses “the fullness of the benefits and the means of salvation.”\textsuperscript{707} Similarly, dialogue is oriented toward proclamation because it is “through which the ‘others’ are oriented to share that fullness in the Church”\textsuperscript{708} Dupuis affirms.

\textsuperscript{701} Dupuis, Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions, 221.
\textsuperscript{702} DP. 41.
\textsuperscript{703} DP. 81.
\textsuperscript{704} DP. 82.
\textsuperscript{705} Dupuis, Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue, 221.
\textsuperscript{706} Ibid., 221.
\textsuperscript{707} RM. 18. It is not surprising that Dupuis reiterates this quote from RM because his writings aim to be more orthodox while still holding the view that other traditions are means of salvation for their believers.
\textsuperscript{708} Dupuis, Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue, 221.
In the spirit of the evangelization mission and interreligious dialogue, though it had been affirmed that dialogue does not aim at conversion, participants, Christians, and others would not be discouraged if any decided to “convert” and accept the religion of the other, but this is not the priority. Again, conversion here is to Christ, which is a two-way activity—a Christian can convert to the religious tradition of a non-Christian and vice versa. Peter Phan sees this as a possibility and a risk to which each participant in the dialogue must be vulnerable. Conversion, even though not discouraged, is not the priority of interreligious dialogue because when that happens, the nature and method of interfaith dialogue are tarnished. When the nature and goal of interreligious dialogue, as explained above, are maintained, it can and must be an integral part of the Christian evangelizing mission. In this sense, the task of evangelization and interreligious dialogue of the Church could be linked without choosing one over the other.

3.10. **The Pontificate of Francis on Evangelization, Mission, and Interreligious Dialogue**

Even though some contemporary theologians have shown reservations on this subject matter, Pope Francis, on the contrary, has been at the forefront of promoting the mission of the Church, with interreligious dialogue serving as a constitutive part. Pope Francis’ recent historic trip to Morocco is a vivid example that substantiates a practically lived experience of the broader concept of the evangelizing mission of the Church. In his insightful address to the Moroccan Christians, the pope enacted the tenets of the three post-Vatican II documents discussed above when he rejected *conversion as the objective* of Catholics living among non-Christians. The

---


710 On March 31, 2019, Pope Francis visits Morocco, a Muslim country of a population of about 35 million with Christians being less than one percent.


pope tells the Catholics, “conversion is not your mission,” but they must witness by living in brotherhood with other faiths.\textsuperscript{712} Conversion is the mission of the Spirit of God. The pope again adds that “the church grows not through proselytism but by attraction.”\textsuperscript{713} The Catholic Church grows when non-Christians are attracted to its message, witness its charity, and engage in dialogue as part of a human family.\textsuperscript{714} The question is, what is the mission of the baptized Christians among the Muslims in Morocco and, for that matter, the whole world? Pope Francis answered this from the spirit of dialogue as being an integral part of the mission when he said:

…our mission as baptized persons, priests and consecrated men and women, is not really determined by the number or size of spaces that we occupy, but rather by our capacity to generate change and to awaken wonder and compassion… “The problem is not when we are few in number, but when we are insignificant,” …Catholics were called to be an integral part of inter-religious dialogue in a world “torn apart by the policies of extremism and division.”\textsuperscript{715}

For Pope Francis, the evangelizing mission of Catholicism calls for a dialogical encounter devoid of all presumption and imposition of the absolutism of what one sees as the truth. He expressed this belief at the 2013 World Youth Day in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in his address to the youth to “Be servants of communion and of the culture of encounter!” He continues, “I would like you to be obsessed about this. Be so without being presumptuous, imposing “our truths,” but rather be guided by the humility yet joyful certainty of those who have found, touched and been transformed by the truth who is Christ, ever to be proclaimed.”\textsuperscript{716} To what extent do Pope

\textsuperscript{712} Philip Pullella and Ahmed Eljechtiimi, “Conversion is not your mission, pope tells Catholics in Morocco.”
\textsuperscript{713} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{715} Philip Pullella and Ahmed Eljechtiimi, “Conversion is not your mission, pope tells Catholics in Morocco.”
Francis’ words become applicable and beneficial to the religiously pluralized context of Ghana?

In what follows, we will explore how evangelization in Ghana should be re-envisioned by applying what has been described above.

3.11. The “new” Church: Re-envisioning Evangelization, Mission, and Dialogue in a Religiously Pluralistic Ghana Today

With the post-Vatican II understanding that interreligious dialogue forms an inseparable but distinctive activity of the Church’s broader evangelizing mission, how can the Catholic Church in Ghana be a “new church?” How can it differ from the 15th-century church as she embarks on her evangelizing mission in a religiously pluralistic context? What will the Church’s challenge be as she dialogues without prioritizing proselytization and absolutizing? These are the focus here.

Today’s religiously pluralistic Ghana requires the Catholic Church’s evangelizing mission to be dialogical. Taking a clue from Peter Phan’s proposal of a modality of dialogue for the Asian church, the religious context of Ghana today demands an application of the same model. The dialogue here is not conceived as a separate activity (for example, ecumenical and interreligious dialogue). On the other hand, dialogue as a modality must be seen comprehensively as that “which everything is to be done by and in the church.”

The dialogue modality here must include liberation, interculturation, and interreligious dialogue. The Church would properly become the Church of Ghana when her evangelizing mission is driven powerfully by this triple dialogue (liberation, interculturation, and evangelization). The church does not treat these essential tasks as distinct and separate activities; they are intrinsically intertwined to define the Church’s

---

718 Peter Phan has the view that “the dialogue between faith and culture is not between a naked, culture-free faith and another culture. Rather it is always an encounter between an already inculturated faith and another culture. This is why he speak of “interculturation” rather than “inculturation.” See Phan, Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue, 3.
evangelizing mission. They are not topics to be discussed separately but are aspects of the integral mission of love and service; love that treats as supreme and values the preferential option for the poor and marginalized; and service that witnesses uniquely to liberate many through the Gospel message. Anything that falls short of the three issues cannot define a Church and mission in Ghana from a broader perspective.

Again, this dialogue modality must be extended to other churches and non-Christian believers. In her dialogical encounter, the Church must join hands and resources with other religious communities in collaboration with the government to address religious issues and the economic, social, political, cultural, educational, and health needs of the people of Ghana. In all these facets of the nation’s life, the Church must engage in a fruitful dialogue bearing in mind the challenge of not substituting dialogue with proclamation or evangelizing mission.\footnote{Phan, \textit{Evangelization and Interreligious Dialogue}. 18-19.}

Again, the Ghana Catholic Church will be “new” in the light of her evangelizing mission when she takes cognizance of the demands to hold a positive attitude towards other religious traditions and their believers. The significance of this cannot be overemphasized. The Church must rise above any prejudices to dialogue sincerely with the understanding and openness to the discovery and recognition of the Christic mystery present and active in the non-Christian religions. This sense of positivity and modesty is necessary for the Church to be able to “walk together toward the truth” with other believers.\footnote{Dupuis, \textit{Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions}, 231.} This attitude toward the other traditions will affirm the theological doctrine of the universal presence of the spirit of God, which John Paul II stressed in his pontificate. John Paul II writes, “the spirit’s presence and activity affect not only individuals but also society and history, peoples, cultures and religions. Indeed, the spirit is at the origin of the
noble ideals and undertakings which benefit humanity on its journey through history.” With the presence of the Spirit and the display of a positive attitude toward non-Christians, the Catholic Church can live that human respect through a dialogical friendship and fraternity with non-Christians which will promote religious liberty and peaceful co-existence affirmed by the 1992 Constitution of Ghana.

Lastly, in its evangelizing mission, the Catholic Church must not ignore the differences and possible contradictions within the religiously pluralist society of Ghana. She must desist from making universal religious claims and absolutizing what is relative. The difference and contradiction must not be dissimulated. The opposite of this will deprive dialogue of its objective. The Church must “seek understanding in difference, in a sincere esteem for conviction other than one’s own.” This will lead the Church and other believers to question themselves on the implications for their faith or the personal convictions of others. In as much as the Church should not dissimulate her faith in Jesus Christ as the universal savior, she must, in turn, acknowledge her interlocutors who do not share the same faith and the inalienable right and duty to enter into dialogue while holding firmly to their faith and traditions. It is in this fidelity to personal, non-negotiable convictions and honest acceptance on both sides that interreligious dialogue occurs “between equals” – in their differences. As the dialogue forbids any attempts at relativization, both partners must not demand what is “relative to be absolutized, whether by

---

721 RM 28.
723 Dupuis, Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions, 232.
724 Dupuis, Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions, 232.
725 Dupuis, Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions, 232.
726 Ibid.
727 Ibid, 233.
incomprehension or intransigence.” Catholicism, in its mission, must be cautious just like others, not to absolutize the relative. This tendency has necessitated many attacks, conflicts, and antagonisms among different religions, thus destroying the peace and harmony of our world.

3.12. Evaluation, and Conclusion

It is essential to point out that even though the Church subscribes to a positive attitude toward non-Christian religious traditions and upholds interreligious dialogue as a constitutive part of her evangelizing mission, she does not fail to affirm that the others in the dialogical encounter are oriented to the Church to access the fullness of the salvific mystery of Christ. The unanswered question is, could Christianity also be oriented towards other religions to experience the fullness of Christ’s mystery? Is it the Church that holds the authority to declare where the fullness of the Christic mystery dwells upon which all the others must orient towards it to access it? These questions thus become a steppingstone for a further area of research.

In conclusion, Vatican II Council was the first ecumenical Council to encourage dialogue with other religious traditions. Still, it failed to clearly declare interreligious dialogue as a constitutive element of the Church’s evangelizing mission. Subsequent documents (Redemptoris Missio, Dialogue and Mission, and Dialogue and Proclamation) took up the task of broadening the concept of evangelization. They hold that dialogue, which has its value, is part of the mission and cannot be reduced to an “instrument” of proclamation. The significance of this post-Vatican II understanding of the broader evangelizing mission of the Church cannot be overemphasized, particularly within the religiously pluralistic context of Ghana. It throws a more significant challenge for the Church of Ghana to desist from the 15th-century evangelizing strategies introduced by the early missionaries, which failed to see interreligious dialogue as a constitutive

---

728 Dupuis, Jesus Christ at the Encounter of World Religions, 233. Italic mine.
729 Redemptoris Missio (RM). 18.
part of mission, thus, evangelized with a negative attitude toward non-Christian religion and culture and absolutized what was relative. It is high time the Catholic Church in Ghana re-envision and continues to promote a mission that incorporates the modality of dialogue, knowing that dialogue is essential for one’s maturity and growth.

3.13. **Promoting Interreligious Dialogue in Ghana: A Theological and Pastoral Paradigm of Pope Francis**

**Introduction:**

At his election in 2013, the Catholic world was seized with hope but, at the same time, fear because of the future uncertainties. In anticipation, many Catholics and the world at large aspired with the hope that Jorge Mario Bergoglio, who chose the name Francis after St Francis, his role model, would inject the needed changes into the Church. On the other hand, many anxiously feared that Bergoglio, the first Jesuit Pope, might detract from what Peter Phan calls the “restorationist program” of John Paul II and Benedict XVI, his predecessors, to ignite the “Latin American liberationist agenda” instead. Many others followed his papacy with keen interest to see if the pope would address issues of clerical sex abuse, gay marriage, priestly celibacy, ordination of women, the Vatican’s financial scandals, the impact of globalization, climate change, and ecological destruction. On assuming office, Pope Francis’ foci are spelled out in his encyclicals: On Mission of the Church (*Evangelii Gaudium*), Ecology (*Laudato Si’*), Love in the Family (*Amoris Laetitia*), and Social Friendship (Fratelli Tutti). Interreligious encounter has been an area of theology that has been important to him even though he had not dedicated an

---

Like his predecessors, Pope Francis has written and practically lived out the essence of dialogical encounters even before his papacy. Peter Phan may be right in his comparison of Pope Francis and his immediate predecessor in their dialogical initiative in these words: “Francis approaches interreligious dialogue primarily as a pastor and a practical theologian and not as a systematic theologian like Benedict XVI, who was concerned mainly with expounding on the doctrinal and theological issues implicated in the dialogue between Christianity and non-Christian religions.” This section of the dissertation explores the theological and pastoral paradigms of interreligious dialogue of Pope Francis both from his lived experiences and his writings. His paradigm would be analyzed under his theological and pastoral models of Dialogue, Friendship, and Fraternity. Again, the dissertation will explore how Pope Francis’ paradigm is relevant to deepening the theological praxis of interreligious dialogue in Ghana (Africa). This section is divided into three major parts: Definitions of Dialogue, Friendship, 2) The Paradigm of Interreligious Encounter of Pope Francis: Practical Personal Experience and Writings (Encyclicals, Exhortations, and Homilies), and 3) the Strength and Weaknesses of Francis’ Paradigm. These various parts will be explored not in isolation but in relation to each other for a comprehensive view of Pope Francis’s model of interreligious dialogue in his pontificate. On a practical level, his paradigm would also be applied to the


732 Phan, “Pope Francis and Interreligious Encounter.”
context of Ghana to unravel the relevance and influence his pontificate has had on the nation concerning interreligious relations among Christians, Muslims, and Akan Traditional Religion.


Bergoglio, now Pope Francis, has always practiced and written about interreligious encounters under the words *Dialogue* which leads to *friendship* to form a *fraternity* that goes beyond any categorization. He connects his understanding of these words to catholic social ethics to drive home his point that we are all brothers and sisters in the Lord. Therefore, religion, politics, economics, etc., must not hinder us from staying together in our diversities. Instead, we should coexist in a manner where our unity is expressed in the beauty of diversity.

Before his pontificate, Bergoglio, an Archbishop of Buenos Aires, Argentina, in his dialogical friendship with Rabbi Abraham Skorka, explained what dialogue is and how it is done.

Dialogue is born of a respectful attitude toward another person, from a conviction that the other person has something good to say. It supposes that we can make room in our heart for their point of view, their opinion and their proposals. Dialogue entails a warm reception and not a preemptive condemnation. To dialogue, one must know how to lower the defenses, to open the doors of one’s home and to offer warmth.

For him, the dialogue flows from our respect for each human person based on the intrinsic goodness and the fact that we all have something to give or receive. As Pope Francis, he writes in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* that “approaching, speaking, listening, looking at, coming to know and understand one another, and to find common ground: all these things are summed up in the one word “dialogue.”” Through dialogue, our societies within diversities can arrive at a point

---

733 Emphasis is mine to highlight the importance of these words for Pope Francis and for this essay.
where some fundamental values become non-negotiable because of their inherent meaning. Pope Francis speaks of a dialogue that is not manipulative or withholds information but rather that which respects the other’s rational conviction in an effort to come to the whole truth. This includes interdisciplinary communication to have “... a more comprehensive and integral knowledge of reality.”

Pope Francis speaks of dialogue alongside friendship and fraternity. In *Fratelli Tutti*, the pope speaks more of dialogue than friendship. Some scholars have argued that friendship has different shades and dimensions, but Pope Francis needs to clarify his definition. Like Hans Harmakaputra, the dissertation shares the view that Pope Francis’ understanding of love as transcending oneself is the bedrock of friendship. Pope Francis writes:

In the depths of every heart, love creates bonds and expands existence, for it draws people out of themselves and towards others...My relationship with those whom I respect has to take account of the fact that they do not live only for me, nor do I live only for them. Our relationships, if healthy and authentic, open us to others who expand and enrich us. Nowadays, our noblest social instincts can easily be thwarted by self-centred chats that give the impression of being deep relationships. On the contrary, authentic and mature love and true friendship can only take root in hearts open to growth through relationships with others. As couples or friends, we find that our hearts expand as we step out of ourselves and embrace others.

Pope Francis, from this quote, thinks of friendship as not just a shallow human relation but as a deeper bond between individuals that cut across all facets of human existence. For him, “A friend isn’t just an acquaintance, someone you enjoy passing the time of day with. Friendship is much deeper” and requires patience to forge a strong bond of friendship between two people.

---

736 FT., 204.
737 For further reading see Goshen-Gottstein, A., ed. *Friendship Across Religions: Theological Perspectives on Interreligious Friendship* (Wipf and Stock, 2018), XI.
738 FT., 88 and 89.
Much time talking with one another, spending time together, and getting to know one another are essential ingredients to strengthen the friendship. Patience makes a friendship real and solid.740

The same idea has been expressed from the Christian perspective by Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz when they said, “The friendships we have in mind require the commitment of time and extended communication. They involve open communication and are not restricted to a certain facet of life (e.g., ‘office friends’). And, in concert with the roots of the English word ‘friend’ (from the Proto-Germanic frijójan, ‘to love’), they are marked by affection.”741

In communicating the intricacies of interreligious dialogue, Pope Francis employs the word “Fraternity” to pastorally appropriate the more technical principle of “solidarity” as found in the social teachings of John Paul II. In his advocacy for interreligious dialogue, Pope Francis explores the vocation of fraternity. The Pope’s message was evident in the virtual event to celebrate the International Day of Human Fraternity when he said, “Fraternity means firmness in one’s own convictions, because there is no true fraternity if one’s own convictions are negotiable. We are brothers and sisters, born from the same Father. We have different cultures and traditions, but we are all brothers and sisters.”742 Fraternity does not mean rejecting one’s ideas or roots, but rather listening to, accepting, and counting on one another. He adds calling on all religious leaders and nations that this is not the “time for indifference, and that the only valid

option is fraternity.” Building a culture of fraternity will enable human persons to overcome ideological barriers, prejudices, resentments, and preconceptions. Pope Francis encourages humanity to transcend the “stereotype of viewing one another as terrorists (a reality that is communicated daily in the news and that is often related to fundamentalist groups which can exist in all religions, including Christianity) … rather we are to view one another as our brothers and sisters who journey together with us in the hope of building up the Kingdom of God.”

In his lived experiences and writings, Pope Francis has used these three key pastoral and theological words to promote and communicate the values of interreligious dialogue in a pluralistic postmodern world with all its dynamism. Furthermore, he connects these words to call on leaders and believers of all religions to create a dialogical friendship that leads to a strong fraternity where we see ourselves as brothers and sisters. Below explores the influence of his dialogue, friendship, and fraternity paradigm in his personal experiences and writings.

3.15. The Paradigm of Interreligious Encounter of Pope Francis: Practical Personal Experience

Promoting a culture of dialogue, friendship, and fraternity have been a paramount concern of Pope Francis without an iota of doubt and ambiguity. As Berling puts it, the Pope is convinced that “learning other religions is a requirement for living as Christians in a religiously diverse world.” In continuity with the new positive outlook of interreligious dialogue and encounter with other religions by Vatican II Council Fathers, Pope Francis has given interreligious dialogue a pastoral face.

---

743 Pope Francis Calls for Fraternity: We Are Either Brothers or Enemies (2021).
On a practical pastoral level, Pope Francis has developed dialogical friendships with individuals and communities of different religions and cultures. For instance, Bergoglio, at his inauguration as Archbishop of Buenos Aires in 2009, as part of the program, ensured that the country’s president greeted all the representatives of diverse faiths and traditions, not only Christians who were present. Again, beyond the greeting, Bergoglio permitted all the representatives of other religions to offer prayers. According to Rabbi Abraham Skorka, his rabbi friend, Bergoglio’s gestures represent how important interreligious encounter is at the heart of the archbishop. Bergoglio also recounted that on two occasions, he accepted the invitations of Skorka to speak first at his synagogue, later, he invited the rabbi to speak to his seminarians.

Again, in an interview, his friend Abraham Skorka, a renowned conservative rabbi in Buenos Aires, when asked about his dialogical friendship with Bergoglio, has this to say:

We come together without burying our identities. I spoke to him about evangelization, and he stated emphatically that the Catholic Church cannot engage in proselytism, ... We are not looking for a photo opportunity, but we want what we are doing to trigger a re-thinking about things. Ours is not a relation of ‘tea and sympathy’; that is not my way, and it is not Bergoglio’s way. We want to move ahead by actions, we must advance by building bridges, through a living dialogue; not a dialogue of words, but a dialogue of actions that reflect our commitment.

The rabbi emphasizes a dialogical friendship with Bergoglio that transcends a mere diplomatic gesture for the public. On the contrary, both leaders share a common passion and commitment to building bridges through actions that open them to learn, give and receive from one another.

---

746 Peter C. Phan, “Pope Francis and Interreligious Encounter,” *Theological Studies* 2022, Vol. 83
Further, the gesture of Pope Francis during his maiden apostolic visit to Africa proved his pastoral zeal for an interreligious encounter. On November 25, 2015, the pope visited three countries in Africa. He first stopped in Kenya, followed by Uganda and the Central African Republic (CAR). The theme of his visit was “Stand Strong in Faith, Do Not Be Afraid.” Even though the theme does not directly reflect interreligious dialogue, Pope Francis’ pastoral presence radiated the light of dialogical friendship and fraternity with non-Christian religions. At CAR, the pope inaugurated a new paradigm shift in the pastoral praxis by visiting the Grand Mosque of Koudoukou in Bangui. This gesture was a huge step in the Catholic-Muslim relationship since Pope Francis became the first pontiff to visit an African Mosque. At the Mosque, the pope emphasized the necessity of building bridges that promote dialogical friendship and fraternity among Christians, Muslims, and believers of African Traditional Religion. The Pope declared:

> Christians and Muslims are brothers and sisters. We must therefore consider ourselves and conduct ourselves as such… Those who claim to believe in God must also be men and women of peace. Christians, Muslims and members of the traditional religions have lived together in peace for many years. They ought, therefore, to remain united in working for an end to every act which, from whatever side, disfigures the Face of God and whose ultimate aim is to defend particular interests by any and all means, to the detriment of the common good. Together, we must say no to hatred, no to revenge and no to violence, particularly that violence which is perpetrated in the name of a religion or of God himself. God is peace, God salam.\(^{749}\)

The pope’s proclamation and affirmation of friendship and fraternity was an encouragement for the ecclesial leadership in Africa and, for that matter, Ghana to advance a new praxis of dialogue that treats the other faiths and traditions with respect. It was a prophetic voice and a challenge for

---

Accessed on June 8, 2022.
Catholicism to move from their comfort zone to experience new terrains through dialogue, friendship, and fraternity. The pope reminded Catholics, Muslims, and African Traditional Religious believers to bury any religious self-centeredness and join forces in unity to pursue the common good in the continent. His exhortation was apt since it spoke to the reality of myriads of the continent’s socio-economic, political, cultural, religious, and ecological crises. Pope Francis prophetically pointed out that Africans are “living at a time when religious believers, and persons of goodwill everywhere, are called to foster mutual understanding and respect and to support each other as members of one human family.”

Again, Pope Francis recounted in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* how his dialogical friendship with Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb in Abu Dhabi, not just St. Francis of Assisi, inspired and influenced his reflections and thoughts. From their personal dialogue and friendship, Pope Francis and the Grand Imam Ahmad Al-Tayyeb declared that “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties, and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters.” Their friendship that grew stronger in dialogue, made them profess that we are all brothers and sisters created by God with equal rights, duties, and dignity. The pope added that their meeting was not a mere diplomatic gesture, but a reflection born of dialogical friendship and shared commitment. This reflection for Francis aims to open a new vision of fraternity and social friendship that will not remain at the level of words or within Catholic circles but as one that will inspire and sustain dialogue among all people of good will. Pope Francis’ humble acknowledgment of a non-Christian encounter as a stimulus for his encyclical is

---

751 At their meeting, they signed a document titled “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” on February 4, 2019 (Francis & Al-Tayyeb, 2019). Francis reiterated a quote from this text in FT: “God has created all human beings equal in rights, duties and dignity, and has called them to live together as brothers and sisters” (no. 5) FT. 5.
752 FT. 5.
753 FT. 5.
754 FT. 6.
monumental. Cardinal Michael L. Fitzgerald, in an interview, categorically said no other pope in history had done it before.\textsuperscript{755}

The pope’s exemplary gestures of dialogical friendship and fraternity have influenced and strengthened Catholicism in Ghana in building a peaceful relationship with Muslims and believers of the Akan Traditional Religion, the three major religions in the country. Despite our doctrinal differences, the Church, on several occasions, has joined the Muslim and Akan Traditional believers to forge ahead for a common agenda in the country.\textsuperscript{756} On special occasions like church anniversaries, priestly ordination (Catholic), Idr Fetir (Muslims), festivals, installation of a chief or priest or priestess (ATR), etc., representatives of the other religions are invited not just to grace the occasion but also strengthen the bond of dialogical friendship and fraternity that these major religions share. As part of his 100\textsuperscript{th} birthday celebration, the National Chief Imam Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharabutu visited the Christ the King Catholic Church, Accra on Easter Sunday. The office of the National Chief Imam says the “visit was only a symbolic gesture of friendship to solidify the existing inter-religious peace that Ghana enjoys.”\textsuperscript{757} Sheikh Aremeyaw Shuaib, the spokesperson for the Chief Imam, added: “As an icon of interfaith dialogue, interfaith harmony, interfaith friendship, he decided to stretch a hand of friendship to a church. That is a symbolic gesture to send a certain strong message for the possibility of Muslims and Christians to live in peace on the foundation of mutual respect, mutual cooperation


\textsuperscript{756} Some of these will be discussed intensively in Chapter five under Governance, Religions and Interreligious Dialogue in Ghana.

and mutual solidarity.” In an interview, the pastor of Christ the King, Rev. Andrew Campbell described the visit to the church, as “indicative of the peaceful co-existence between Christians and Muslims.” The Imam’s visit he added is a “reciprocal gesture to deepen religious tolerance following similar gestures to the Chief Imam by Archbishop Charles Palmer-Buckle, former Metropolitan Archbishop of Accra.” Beyond Islam, the Church also enjoys a dialogical friendship and fraternity with the Traditional believers. They invite the Catholic Church to their key programs and vice versa. From the context of Ghana, there is still the need, despite the mutual and cordial relation among these major religions, to encourage interreligious dialogue, especially among all believers. The religiosity and tolerance of Ghanaians are worth mentioning. Still, there are sometimes traces of religious exclusivism on the part of the believers, which has become an impediment to dialogical encounters. Religious exclusivism clouds the vision of dialogue on the part of the adherents, either Christians, Muslims, or traditionalists. For instance, some Muslims did not appreciate the visit of the Chief Imam to worship with Christ the King Catholic Church on Easter Sunday. It is high time Ghanaians realized that we are humans, brothers and sisters, and share a common ancestral heritage irrespective of our religious differentiation.

3.16. Pope Francis and Interreligious Encounter: Survey of Encyclicals, Exhortation, and Homilies

Pope Francis has addressed interreligious encounters in his encyclicals, apostolic exhortations, and homilies, calling on the world’s religious leaders and believers to promote the vocation of dialogical friendship and fraternity. In his address to the participants of the Plenary

---

758 Mingle, “Chief Imam’s Church Visit Creates Controversy.”
759 Mingle, “Chief Imam’s Church Visit Creates Controversy.”
760 Ibid.
Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue on the theme, “Members of Different Religious Traditions in Civil Society,” Pope Francis affirmed his pastoral orientation for dialogue and friendship among members of all religions and traditions. According to him, dialogue and friendship are essentially critical because of the increasing movement of people due to migration, communication, and globalization in our postmodern world. As a result of these phenomena, humanity is challenged to be more open to different cultures, religions, and traditions. He substantiated his point with a quote from his Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium,* saying that “an attitude of openness in truth and in love must characterize the dialogue with the followers of non-Christian religions, despite various obstacles and difficulties, especially forms of fundamentalism on both sides. Interreligious dialogue is a necessary condition for peace in the world. It is a duty for Christians as well as other religious communities.”

Not oblivious to the realities of political and economic motives superimposing themselves on cultural and religious differences and generating misunderstandings, diffidence and fear, Pope Francis vehemently subscribes to the position that the tools of dialogue and encounters must be marked by friendship and respect that resolve problems. He added that,

We must never forget that we are pilgrims journeying alongside one another. This means that we must have sincere trust in our fellow pilgrims, putting aside all suspicion or mistrust, and turn our gaze to what we are all seeking: the radiant peace of God’s face.

Emphasizing pilgrims journeying together brings to force the bonds of friendship, companionship, dialogue, collaboration, participation, communion, and fraternity.

---

761 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* (EG.), 250.
763 EG. 244.
In his address to religious representatives on the fifteenth anniversary of the closing of Vatican II, Pope Francis adopted the approach of Jesus, who addressed his disciples as friends and not servants. In the fourth gospel, John recounts how Jesus addressed his disciples and even those who will come to believe in him through the ministry of the apostles as friends. Thus, for John’s gospel, the word friendship assumes a Christological value when he writes, “You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you” (John 15:13-14). Pope Francis applies friendship/friend from the Christological worth to address representatives, which include non-Christians, in these words: “Dear friends, this year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the closing of the Second Vatican Council, at which the Catholic Church committed herself to ecumenism and interfaith dialogue in the service of understanding and friendship.”

The vision of Pope Francis on interreligious dialogue ultimately upholds that every religion is bonded in a common friendship with God. It was, therefore, not astonishing that in his homily at Bangui, the capital of the CAR, the pope stressed that through the power and guidance of Christ, the African Church must endeavor to “forge bonds of friendship, to dialogue with those who are different than ourselves, to forgive those who have wronged us, and to work to build a more just and fraternal society in which no one is abandoned.” Pope Francis employs the language of friendship in a pastoral sense to call leaders and believers to a practical theology of action. He challenged the African church and Ghana Catholicism, for that matter, to engage

---

764 EG. 244. Italic mine.
others who are different from us in matters of faith, ideologies, traditions, cultures, and religions to build a dialogical friendship and fraternity.

John Ddosky, a Canadian theologian like Pope Francis, reflects that to address a dialectical difference is by way of friendship. He argues that friends have the propensity to help each other grow in ways enemies cannot. He proposes a theology of friendship for interreligious dialogue as *Ecclesia ad extra*. With a theology of friendship, different religions will not pursue a strict self-meditation that distorts an attitude of mutual learning and growth. Otu Idara concludes from an African perspective: “Integrating a theology of friendship into an African theology of religion can transition the Church in Africa into a dialogue of mutual self-mediation, one that recognizes religious diversity and differences as moments for enrichment.”

It must be said that a dialogical friendship, a paradigm of Pope Francis for interreligious encounters, is an essential hermeneutical key to promoting peace and the common good in Africa, particularly Ghana Catholicism.

Again, in advocating for dialogue, Pope Francis stressed that each dialogical interlocutor should stay genuine in their identity. For him, dialogue should give no room to compromise one’s moral truths and faith. In this light, the pope warns against the attitude of interlocutors assuming the position of being the master of all truth in the dialogical process. In *Evangelii Gaudium*, he writes,

A facile syncretism would ultimately be a totalitarian gesture on the part of those who would ignore greater values of which they are not the masters. True openness involves remaining steadfast in one’s deepest convictions, clear and joyful in

---


767 Idara, “Magisterial Teaching on Interreligious Dialogue.”
The relevance of Pope Francis’ position cannot be overemphasized in the pluralistic religious context of Ghana. Many Christians believe that without professing Christ through baptism in the church, the fellow interlocutor from the Akan Tradition Religion cannot attain salvation. In most encounters, Christians often intend to impose their beliefs and identity through evangelization because they perceive practitioners of the Akan Religion to be in error. In the same way, the believers of the Akan Traditional Religion encounter their Christian interlocutors with the perception that they (Christians) have abandoned their cultural and religious roots/traditions to embrace the religion of the ‘white man.’ Such an attitude has never yielded a genuine dialogue that opens both parties to understand or learn something from the other. In their religious diversities, Ghanaians must be open to the convictions and values of the other believer. A religious tradition must not superimpose its beliefs but rather be consistent in its thinking and defend its identity. Pope Francis captures it beautifully in Fratelli Tutti: “When individuals or groups are consistent in their thinking, defend their values and convictions, and develop their arguments, this surely benefits society. Yet, this can only occur to the extent that there is genuine dialogue and openness to others.”

Ghanaians must recognize that the country’s future rests on the pillars of coexistence of respectful diversity and the fundamental right to religious freedom in all its dimensions. Pope Francis’ motive for dialogue and friendship must be a gentle reminder

---

769 FT. 203.
to Ghanaians that a constructive public debate is a key to trivializing and eschewing any sensational comments on the beliefs of other religions.

Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, president of the PCID in June 2015, at a gathering of Christians and Buddhists at Castel Gandolfo on the fiftieth anniversary of Nostra Aetate, expressed the keen interest of Pope Francis in the vocation of fraternity that goes beyond religious boundaries. In his address, the Cardinal intimated that in a world where diversity is perceived as a threat, the gathering between the two religions must be seen as a “commitment to the human fraternity.” According to him, the impetus for such an initiative is a fundamental vision of Pope Francis, an idea to construct a new form of dialogue that will help foster interreligious relations to address social problems.771

In his message on World Day of Peace 2014, Pope Francis avowed that the foundation of building fraternity as an essential human quality is critical because we are relational beings, and the reality of our relatedness behooves us to treat one another as “a true sister or brother,” knowing that without fraternity we cannot build a just society and a solid and lasting peace.772 The pope speaks of the family, and the domestic church as the grounds for learning the virtue of fraternity. According to him, family members have a complementary role in establishing and inculcating the spirit of fraternity. The pope writes, “The family is the wellspring of all fraternity, and as such, it is the foundation and the first pathway to peace, since, by its vocation, it is meant to spread its love to the world around it.”773 He reiterated the value of family and fraternity in Fratelli Tutti, saying, “families are the first place where the values of love and fraternity,

togetherness and sharing, concern and care for others are lived out and handed on.”\textsuperscript{774} The emphasis on the family as the ground for nurturing dialogical fraternity is relevant for Ghana Catholicism and the context of Africa. Family life is a treasure in Akan (Ghana) religio-cultural settings. Here, the idea of family transcends the nuclear to include the extended family, ancestors, and the unborn. In postmodern Ghana, the community’s life and fraternal bond among families have been under attack due to foreign influences of individualism. Pope Francis’ call to strengthen fraternity at the base of family life has become more relevant for Akans to return to their roof of family life or community where every member is connected, supported, and valued as brother or sister. This call is to ignite the indigenous philosophy of the Southern African word ‘ubuntu,’ which means “I am because you are,” is paramount. It is a philosophy that finds expression in the Nguni/Ndebele phrase: umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (a person is a person through other persons).\textsuperscript{775} The breaking down of communal and African family spirit threatens the African communal fraternity that underlines the interdependence and interconnectedness of the living, dead, ancestors, and even the unborn. Solid fraternity in the family and community is a gain for the church as the family of God.

In his homilies, addresses, and encyclicals, Pope Francis connects his paradigm of interreligious dialogue to the Church’s social teachings. He speaks in defense and protection of the dignity of the human person\textsuperscript{776} from the theological prisms of dialogue, friendship, and

\textsuperscript{774} FT. 114.
\textsuperscript{776} As an important Catholic social teaching, the principle of the dignity of the human person from the understanding that each of us is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Scripture emphasizes that human person is a creature of God (Cf Ps 139:14-18) and sees in his being in the image of God the element that characterizes and distinguishes him. Being in the image of God human person possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. This person is capable of self-knowledge, self-possession, freely giving himself, and entering communion with other persons. Man and woman have the same dignity and are of equal value, not only because they are both, in their difference, created in the image of God, but even more profoundly because the dynamic of reciprocity that
fraternity. During his visit to Africa, Pope Francis identifies “friendship” as a theological model for the African Catholic Church. He maintains that:

We see ever more clearly the need for interreligious understanding, friendship and collaboration in defending the God-given dignity of individuals and peoples, and their right to live in freedom and happiness.\textsuperscript{777}

Here, the pope re-explained the interreligious vision and understanding of Vatican II through the theological and pastoral lens of friendship\textsuperscript{778} to call the attention of religious leaders and believers to collaborate in dialogical friendship to ensure that the ‘God-given dignity,’ right to freedom, and happiness is not only protected but also enhanced. In the same vein, the pope sees the building of a dialogue of fraternity as the currency for the universal promotion of the worth and dignity of every person, either poor or rich, Christian, Muslim, or Akan Traditionalist, etc. In \textit{Fratelli Tutti}, Pope Francis recounts that social friendship and universal fraternity demand of us all the “acknowledgment of \textit{the worth of every human person}, always and everywhere.”\textsuperscript{779}

This non-negotiable demand surpasses any justification to treat any human person with less dignity because they are born in a place with fewer resources or less development or deformities.\textsuperscript{780} For Pope Francis, a dialogue underlined by friendship and fraternity upholds this basic principle of social life that many nations, cultures, and religions tend to ignore because they sense that it does not fit into their worldview or serve their purposes.\textsuperscript{781} It is a fundamental right for everyone to live with dignity and develop integrally. A person’s productivity or lack of

\textsuperscript{777} EG., 244. “Address to Representatives of Various Religions,” p. 8.
\textsuperscript{779} FT. 106. Italic original.
\textsuperscript{780} FT. 106.
\textsuperscript{781} FT. 106.
productivity does not justify his denial of this right. A vocation of dialogical friendship and fraternity espouses the dignity of every human person. For Pope Francis, fraternity defends human dignity based not on circumstances but on the intrinsic worth of everyone. Unless this basic principle is upheld, there will be no future, either for fraternity or humanity’s survival.\(^{782}\)

An interreligious encounter that protects the dignity of all resonates with the socio-cultural and pluralistic religious context of Ghana. Despite the Ghanaian dynamics of history and the diversity of ethnic groups, societies, cultures, and religions, it is essential to realize and work towards a vocation to form a community composed of brothers and sisters who accept and care for one another based on the intrinsic worth of every human person. Working together through a dialogue of fraternity can promote fundamental human rights, dignity, and especially the right to life, peace, and religious freedom.\(^{783}\) Religious and cultural pluralism, traditions and ideologies must not divide Ghanaians but rather enhance the beauty of unity in diversity as a country.

Again, Pope Francis emphasizes the intrinsic relationship between fraternity and solidarity. In his relentless efforts and speeches to bridge the gap of inequality, global poverty, and injustice, which, according to him, are not only signs of a profound lack of fraternity but also the absence of a culture of solidarity, Pope Francis calls on all nations, cultures, and religions to pay attention to the poor and weakest (found in all religious traditions). He noted that:

> New ideologies, characterized by rampant individualism, egocentrism and materialistic consumerism, weaken social bonds, fueling that “throw away” mentality which leads to contempt for, and the abandonment of, the weakest and those considered “useless.” In this way, human coexistence increasingly tends to resemble a mere do ut des which is both pragmatic and selfish.\(^{784}\)

\(^{782}\) FT. 107.
\(^{783}\) “Message of his Holiness Francis for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace.”
\(^{784}\) “Message of his Holiness Francis for the Celebration of the World Day of Peace.”
The pope in Fratelli Tutti again speaks of caring for the weakest among us. He writes, “building social friendship does not only call for rapprochement between groups who took different sides at some troubled period of history, but also for a renewed encounter with the most impoverished and vulnerable sectors of society.” Pope Francis affirms that the vocation of fraternity challenges every privileged soul in every nation, culture, and religion with the moral responsibility of solidarity that looks beyond religious differentiations to propagate peace and friendship. Such solidarity in fraternity finds concrete expression in different forms of services that care for others. Such service must take care of the vulnerable members of our families, society, and people. In offering such services, individuals learn to “set aside their own wishes and desires, their pursuit of power, before the concrete gaze of those who are most vulnerable… Service always looks to their faces, touches their flesh, senses their closeness and even, in some cases, ‘suffers’ that closeness and tries to help them. Service is never ideological, for we do not serve ideas, we serve people.”

The pope’s persistence in dialogue and care for the poor was further reiterated in Querida Amazonia. In this document, the Pope encourages an “ecumenical and interreligious co-existence” which prioritizes the primacy of cultural and social dialogue that care for the poor. He writes: “In an Amazonian region characterized by many religions, we believers need to find occasions to speak to one another and to act together for the common good and the promotion of the poor.” According to the pope, the primacy of cultural and dialogical engagement does not seek to water down or obscure the Christian conviction and identity. On the contrary, Pope

785 FT. 233.
786 FT. 115.
787 FT. 115.
Francis believes that when we are convinced and have a rich identity, we can enrich others in our different encounters. He writes: “If we believe that the Holy Spirit can work amid differences, then we will try to let ourselves be enriched by that insight, while embracing it from the core of our own convictions and our own identity. For the deeper, stronger, and richer that identity is, the more we will be capable of enriching others with our own proper contribution.”

Pope Francis’s dialogical fraternity with non-Christian religions could also be realized through his pastoral zeal and orientation toward social problems. He added his voice in condemning religion-inspired violence among nations, religions, and societies. He called for a commitment to fraternity, explicitly inviting Muslim leaders to unite against terrorist acts and any violence that contravenes the dignity of the human person. Inspired by St. Francis, the pope calls for dialogue and friendship of love, not violence or war, when there is a misunderstanding or imposition of a religious doctrine. He writes of St Francis in Fratelli Tutti: “Francis did not wage a war of words aimed at imposing doctrines; he simply spread the love of God.”

On April 28, 2017, at an International Peace Conference held at Al-Azhar, the pontiff’s speech opened a two-day trip that came less than three weeks after Palm Sunday attacks on two Coptic Christian churches in Egypt, killing 45 and injuring others. The pope affirmatively condemns any act of religious violence, calling for “a firm and clear ‘No!’ to every form of violence, vengeance and hatred carried out in the name of God.” He further condemned strongly “demagogic forms of populism” coupled with arms trade which fuels terrorism and conflict, thus creating rifts among nations, cultures, and religions. In fact, “religious beliefs must never be

789 QA. 106.
790 FT. 4.
allowed to be abused in the cause of violence and war,” the Pope noted and we must be “unequivocal” in denouncing acts of violence. After refuting and condemning the act of violence and killing, it was not uncommon for Pope Francis to still exhort the “Egyptian Christians to be a positive force within society; to be people of dialogue who are “sowers of hope” and able to forgive those who wrong them.” Pope Francis encouraged all religious traditions to be dedicated to the education of young ones to “turn the polluted air of hatred into the oxygen of fraternity.” From his personal pastoral touch, Francis has taken interreligious dialogue in his pontificate beyond mere talk into practicing and living fraternity, upholding the dignity of the human person, friendship, and respect for others.

Pope Francis calls on all world religions to contribute significantly to building fraternity and defending justice in society based on their respect for each human person as God’s child. The pope pointed out that a dialogue of fraternity among religions and their followers must go beyond mere diplomacy, consideration, or tolerance. Using the words of the Bishops of India, the Pope writes that “the goal of dialogue is to establish friendship, peace, and harmony, and to share spiritual and moral values and experiences in a spirit of truth and love.”

Current postmodern Ghana enjoys good friendship, peace, and harmony among different religions, which has tremendously influenced Ghana’s stability as a country. Still, there is more to be done to strengthen the religious bond among believers of the different religions in the country.


794 Ibid.

795 Ibid.

796 FT. 271.

797 FT. 271. See also Catholic Bishops’ Conference of India, Response of the Church in India to the Present-Day Challenges (2016).
3.17. Dialogical Friendship and Fraternity: Strength and Weaknesses of Francis’ Paradigm

In his article, ‘Pope Francis and Interreligious Dialogue,’ Peter Phan emphasized that Francis’ sociocultural approach to interreligious dialogue has two sides: strength and weakness. Firstly, as a strength, Phan is right to intimate that the interreligious paradigm of Pope Francis expediates “all religions to achieve concrete and tangible goals, not least the elimination of religious violence, which is an urgent need in our time of religious indifference and fundamentalism.”798 His approach has the power to unite diverse religious traditions and, with all their differences, arrive at a consensus to work toward the common good for humanity. This paradigm of Francis is made possible because these different religious bodies are propelled to chart the common cause of humanity not on the grounds of strict religious doctrines and cultural and ecclesial traditions but on the promotion of the common good of humanity and the earth, our common home.799 Strict religious affiliation, scholarly achievement, and ecclesial tradition haven’t been the focal point for such dialogue and friendship but the fact of seeing ourselves as brothers and sisters. Phan recounts that this paradigm of Pope Francis has proved effective in dialogical resolution to various conflicts among communities and in improving the living standard of people, especially the poor.

Despite the positive contributions of Pope Francis’ paradigm of dialogical friendship and fraternity of encounter, there are equally some shortcomings. Pope Francis’ way of interfaith encounters has not critically explicated the doctrinal differences and sensitive theological claims that have fired violence, suspicions, and rivalry among different religions. For example, his paradigm has not resolved the theological problems of “(1) the uniqueness and universality of

798 Phan, “Pope Francis and Interreligious Encounter.”
799 Phan, “Pope Francis and Interreligious Encounter.”
Jesus as savior; (2) the truth and superiority of Christianity over non-Christian religion; (3) the divine origin of Christian revelation, sacred books, and rituals in contrast to the allegedly purely human character of those of other religions; (4) the missionary obligation to “proclaim” the Gospel to all; and (5) the necessity of converting other believers and unbelievers to Christianity and, more specifically, to the Catholic Church, which possesses the fullness of truth and means of salvation.”

There is the possibility for all religions to make these theological and doctrinal claims without necessarily resulting in violence and religious rifts. Unfortunately, as Phan noted, when these theological and doctrinal claims get intrinsically mixed up with the economic, political, and military superiority of some nations or religions, as we have seen in history, the minority or colonized countries get oppressed and sometimes there is a war that coerces the unbelievers to directly or indirectly to convert. For some theologians of religious pluralism, Pope Francis has repeated the teachings of the Vatican II Council for the salvation of all but on conditions: to acknowledge the Creator (LG 16), 2) “through no fault of their own do not know the Gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience” (LG 16). Again, that which is true and holy in these religions. The church reveres those ways of conduct, percept, and teaching as they reflect a ray of that Truth that enlightens all men (NA 2). Moreover, Francis reiterates that Christians “believe firmly in Jesus as the sole Redeemer of the world” (QA. §107), and that in interreligious dialogue, Christians must be convinced and firmly hold on to their “Christian identity” (FT. §277).

Lastly, in Pope Francis’ dialogical encounter, he gives a special place to Judaism as compared to other non-Christian religions such as primal religions. When he speaks of primal

---

800 See Phan, “Pope Francis and Interreligious Encounter” with slight changes.
801 Phan, “Pope Francis and Interreligious Encounter.”
religions, he does so in the light of LG 16, to reecho that non-Christians, when they live faithfully in line with their consciences and also be “associated to the paschal mystery of Jesus Christ” (EG. §254) can be saved. Even though what Francis said is not different from Vatican II, there seem to be traces within his writings that look at non-Christian religions as ways of salvation not only as a de facto but also as de iure. In *Evangeli Gaudium*, the pope writes that the non-Christians tend to “produce signs and rites, sacred expressions which in turn brings others to a communitarian experience of journeying towards God” (EG. §254). This statement establishes that the spirit of God opens non-Christian religions to operate within the economy of salvation through their founders or sacred texts (in the case of Hinduism) despite their doctrinal deficiencies. Francis further affirms that non-Christian religions are “channels which the Holy Spirit raises up to liberate non-Christians from atheistic immanentism or from purely individual religious experiences,” even though they “lack the meaning and efficacy of the sacraments instituted by Christ” (EG. §254). In his commentary on this, Peter Phan said “Channels” used by the Holy Spirit have the value of a “theological equivalents of “sacraments” even though Francis was quick to say that non-Christian religions “lack the meaning and efficacy of the sacraments instituted by Christ.” Here, Phan writes that “This judgment on non-Christian religions, however, applies only to their objective status, that is, their validity (ex opere operato), and not to their subjective effects on the non-Christian faithful, that is, their efficaciousness (ex opero operantis).” Again, for Francis to speak of non-Christian religions in connection with the historical origin of the sacrament “instituted by Christ,” is to be understood analogically. He argues that the church cannot trace all the seven sacraments to Christ directly apart from Baptism and Eucharist. He concludes that “the fact that non-Christian religions cannot be said to be

802 Ibid.
803 Phan, “Pope Francis and Interreligious Encounter.”
instituted directly by Christ does not lessen their sanctifying power.”

Francis’ evaluative judgment of non-Christian religions and the claim of the superiority of Christianity in the light of its sacraments emanates from the perspective of Christian’s criteria of what a “true religion” (vera religio) is. This does not necessitate a true dialogue. In as much as Akan Traditional Religion cannot make judgments of other religions from its own criteria of ‘true religion,’ Catholicism’s claim of the superiority of their sacrament isn’t good ground to build dialogical friendship and fraternity.

3.18. Conclusion

Pope Francis’ writings and practical personal life keep pushing for dialogue, friendship, and fraternity in our world. He proposes a dialogical encounter that emphasizes love beyond all barriers of geography, distance, religion, and ideologies. He ensures this through dialogue, friendship development, and promotion of fraternity in and across borders. The pope speaks of dialogue between generations, among all people, and the readiness to give and receive without compromising one’s identity and the truth. According to Francis, dialogue must not be confused with the heated exchange of opinion on social networks, frequently based on media information that is not always reliable. These exchanges, he calls “monologues,” lead to a subjectivist attitude where people cling to their own ideas, interests, and choices without opening up to the other. This is an obstacle to genuine dialogue. The opposite is this: Pope Francis highlights a new culture: a culture of encounter through a respectful dialogue that seeks the truth. Those who genuinely dialogue create friendship and fraternity that promotes peace, harmony, and the dignity of the human person. As social beings, our encounters must transcend all differences and divisions emanating from religion, race, politics, economics, etc. In other words, our dialogue

804 Phan, “Pope Francis and Interreligious Encounter.”
805 Ibid.
must create a multi-faceted polyhedron that creates a society where differences coexist, bridges are built, complementarity, enrichment, reciprocal illumination, and solidarity involve all (especially those which protect the weakest), and respect for all people are protected. Simply put, dialogue, friendship, and fraternity in society emerge the concept of life as the “art of encounter” with all people, including those at the peripheries, knowing that everyone is not expendable but has something to give or receive.

The next chapter transitions into arguing for intercultural and interreligious dialogue in the Church by specifically looking at the theology of marriage in the Akan socio-cultural setting and Catholicism in Ghana. To what extent has marriage been promoted in the Church through a mutual interreligious and cultural dialogue to make church marriage truly Akan and truly Catholic for the Akan converts in Ghana?
Chapter 4

4.0. A Theo-Dialogical and Cultural Reflection on Catholicism and Traditional Akan Marriage

Introduction

Marriage is the fundamental social unit in the world. It is intrinsically linked to the family, the core component of all societies, both past and present. Marriage is one of the most complex human institutions, probably because of its link with the family. As a private and public or individual and communal celebration, marriage as an institution connects two people whose families are linked. It involves the exchange or sharing of property. Marriage is both sacred and secular from the Akan traditional and Christian perspectives. It is simultaneously a “social, economic, religious, and legal institution.” The relevance of marriage to society has necessitated its regularization one way or the other by all civilizations. The Church is no exception in this sense. The interest of the Church and the state in marriage has brought to light the enactment of laws and regulations governing marriage as an institution. For instance, the marriage rites of today for Christians have undergone evolutions under the light of the Church’s law and theology. It must be stated clearly that even though the Christian concept of marriage is rooted in scripture, particularly the book of Genesis, it has also been shaped and influenced by the social and historical context of the Roman Empire (the period when the canon of the New Testament was completed).

---

808 Susan Mobley, “The Reformation and the Reform of Marriage: Historical Views and Background for Today’s Disputes.”
Testament was under construction). Under the Middle Ages, marriage as an institution was clarified significantly when it fell under the Church’s jurisdiction. Even though past centuries shaped the concept of marriage, the 16th-century reformation witnessed a divergent view between Catholicism and Protestantism. Today, even though it could be said within Christendom that there is a standard view of marriage, we cannot neglect the fact that there are still shades of variant views of marriage and divorce.

Just like Catholicism, marriage is an essential aspect of the cultural and religious tradition of the Akan people. The Akan societies consider marriage as the fundamental traditional root of Ghana as a nation. Before the advent of Christianity (Catholicism), the Akans had their customs, regulations, and laws governing marriage celebrations. Today, within the Catholic Church in Ghana, Akan converts face the challenges of performing the traditional Akan marriage rite and the sacramental marriage of the Church separately before the spouses can become communicants or take up some high positions/roles in the Church. As a result, many Akan converts who are traditionally married but, for one reason or another, have not performed the church wedding continue to worship with the family of God without receiving the Eucharist. This has created apathy for the reception of the Holy Eucharist, the source and summit of the Catholic faith. This current pastoral situation in the Catholic Church of Ghana defeats the symbolism of the church as the family of God, most notably when viewed against the communal outlook of the essence of family in the Akan context. Today, many traditionally

---

811 SC. 10.
812 For the Akans and most African societies, when families gather, the bond of unity and solidarity is solidified at the sharing of a meal where nobody is excluded.
married Catholics stay on the fence in the Church since they cannot participate in the church’s leadership role because they are not communicants.

Within the broader scope of interreligious and cultural dialogue between Catholicism and the Traditional Akan Religion and culture, chapter four seeks to review the marriage traditions of Akan culture and the church in the context of Catholicism in Ghana and, for that matter, Africa. The chapter explores the dialogical, theological, cultural, and legal grounds to propose valid pastoral reasons and arguments for merging traditional Akan and catholic marriage celebrations into a single ceremony. In the spirit of inculturation, this attempt seeks to ensure that Catholic marriage in Ghana resonates with the Akan culture and customs to avoid any theology of marriage that subsumes the Akan tradition into that of the Church. As a theological and pastoral response to the dilemmas and duplication of marriage in Ghana, this work proposes a paradigm shift that establishes a valid and legitimate African/Akan-Catholic marriage without overlooking all the essential requirements for customary, civil, or church marriages. Again, since marriage is a legal institution in every society, this chapter will integrate the proposed amalgamated sacramental and customary marriage into Ghana’s legal policies to satisfy the politico-ecclesial dialogue and validation of the marriage.
4.1. **Historicity, Cultural, and Theological Background of Marriage: Evolution of Marriage in the Church**

**Introduction**

The concepts of the meaning and other aspects of marriage have varied dramatically in the different epochs of human history and are still different in diverse cultures and religions. Likewise, the theology and the rite of Catholic marriage indubitably have gone through shades of historical, cultural, legal, and theological developments. A comprehensive examination of marriage would provide a better perspective to appreciating the historical, cultural, legal, and theological roots of Catholic marriage as it stands now. It will also enhance our understanding of marriages in different cultures outside the church.

In the history of Christianity, marriage in the broad sense of a sacrament is relatively new. While the New Testament provides a basic orientation for the church’s tradition of marriage, the works of Tertullian, Thomas Aquinas and the scholastics, the Council Fathers of Trent, and Vatican II help to give a wide-ranging theory of the sacrament of marriage in the church today. Around the 12th century, marriage transitioned from a social phenomenon to an ecclesiastical and sacramental institution. Before this time, there was nothing like a Christian wedding ceremony. Throughout the Middle Ages, there were no records of a single church ritual or rules that governed marriage as an institution or solemnizing marriage of Catholics and, for that matter, Christians. The church’s authority and standardized regularization of marriage was first witnessed after the Council of Trent to eliminate clandestine or secret marriage with its associated abuses.

---


814 Martos, *Door to the Sacred*, 440.
Historically, early Christians who lived under the control of the Roman empire and its civilization operated within “three concentric circles” which regulated their way of life and shaped their perspectives: a) Roman political authority, attitudes, and practices; b) Greek thought, and c) the Jewish customs and writings.\textsuperscript{815} Even though Christian thoughts, values, and practices were much influenced by Judaism and expressed Greek philosophical understandings and terms, it must be stated that Roman ideas had a disproportionate bearing upon Christian institutions.

Before any ecclesiastical standardization of marriage, the church officials relied primarily on the civil government to either regulate or allow divorce between Christian couples or non-Christians. Joseph Martos recounts that it was only when the imperial government failed to enforce its statutes on marriage that the church’s authorities (Bishops) capitalized on the opportunity to take legal control over marriage, thus assuming ecclesiastical function.\textsuperscript{816} The church then developed an elaborate system of rules, ecclesiastical courts, and theology to safeguard the permanence and sacredness of marriage. The church’s attempt received massive criticism from the Protestants, who argued that it was unscriptural. As before, today, some Catholic canon lawyers and theologians are asking about the possibility of allowing the regularization and divorce to revert to civil control. That is not to say that church marriage is non-sacramental or underrates its communal importance.\textsuperscript{817}

\textsuperscript{816} Martos, \textit{Door to the Sacred}, 406.  
\textsuperscript{817} For more details see Martos, \textit{Door to the Sacred} 405-406.
4.2. **Marriage as a Social and Cultural Institution with Religious Import**

This section provides a historical evolution of marriage as a social institution into the European legal tradition and then the ecclesiastical circle. The obscurity of the origin of marriage, whether it began as monogamous or polygamous, matriarchal, or patriarchal, or as a result of promiscuity, is a historical question without concrete evidence to resolve. What is apparent is that marriage has been an institution that has provided ancient and modern cultures with some form of a network of relationships that united people in kinship and friendship by occupation and social position.\(^{818}\) The diversity of the forms of marriage is true of the variety of culture itself. As an accepted custom that ensured the continuity of society, marriage has always been a socially institutionalized way of defining the relationship between sexes, of establishing rights and responsibilities.\(^{819}\) From antiquity, since marriage provided a social relationship that was very important, either in the nomadic or sedentary, tribal, or urbanized way of life, customs surrounding marriage have also been treated with reverence and sacredness. In that sense, the marriage institution also has religious import or values. The institution’s religious nature was still confined to the family’s social setup. Using Rome and traditional Akan cultures as examples, marriages were performed among families without any central religious officiating minister. The father and Abusuapanyin (family head) were the officiating “priests” and preservers of the social and religion of the household or family.\(^{820}\) In these two cultures, the fathers were not only in charge of marriages but also led the household to pay reverent homage and solicit help from their ancestors, gods, and spirits. In the traditional Akan extended family system, the Abusupanyin takes up such a religious task. In these ancient cultural settings, the father figure was responsible

\(^{818}\) Martos, *Door to the Sacred* 405-406.  
\(^{819}\) Ibid.  
\(^{820}\) Cf. Martos, *Door to the Sacred*, 407.
for obtaining wives for their sons and paying a “bride price” as compensation for the prospective wife’s family for the “loss of a skilled and fertile member.”\(^{821}\) The wedding ceremony was a family affair, a sharp difference in the recent concept of marriage where the mutual consent of the two prospective couples takes precedence over the parents’ consent. In the ancient Greek tradition, even if a Roman priest was invited to the wedding, “it was only to offer a sacrifice to the gods or to divine their prospects for a happy future.” Legal and ecclesiastical laws did not govern marriage or divorce among the early Greeks\(^ {822}\) and Akans. They were private affairs without the interventions of civil authorities and ecclesiastical tribunals.

Again, in ancient Israel, marriage was equally a social institution handled and arranged by the family through the father for their children when they were of age. Because Jewish marriage was private, the Jewish scripture makes few references to marriage customs. Surprisingly, there is no reference to wedding ceremonies since marriages were private agreements and weddings were not public religious functions.\(^ {823}\) It is not uncommon to see in Jewish scripture that most Jewish men had one wife, but those who had the means to pay the bride price and bear the responsibilities of maintaining a larger family had more than one wife.\(^ {824}\) From a historico-social viewpoint, the Israelites saw a collection and codifications of the ancient Hebrew folklore into a book in the Tenth Century BC. Among these was the book of Genesis, which narrates the story of the first man and woman. Around this time, Hebrews did not perceive the story as a “divine endorsement of monogamy since Solomon and other kings had many wives and concubines.”\(^ {825}\) It was a later rereading of the story in the light of the Israelites’ conquest by

\(^{821}\) Martos, *Door to the Sacred* 405-406, 407.
\(^{822}\) Ibid., 408.
\(^{823}\) Ibid.
\(^{824}\) Examples Abraham, our father in faith Gen 3.
\(^{825}\) Martos, *Door to the Sacred*, 408.
Assyria and Babylonia that the prophets deduced a lesson from such tragedy. Martos has this to say:

They began to propose that Yahweh had punished his people for not living up to their calling as a chosen people, they were supposed to be holy people with high moral standards, being just and merciful to all, and not chasing after the false gods of wealth and power. And as part of the new morality that they preached, some of the prophets began to propose that the moral ideal in marriage was faithful love between Yahweh and Israel as the marriage of a man who had given his wife everything, only to be deserted by her, and Hosea 1–3 portrayed Israel as a faithful prostitute married to Yahweh, who was still faithful to her and longed to take her back.826

Even though marriage in the early cultures did not involve the function of a religious minister, priest, or rabbi, the Old Testament never neglected the presence of God in such a celebration. For the Jews, even though Jewish or non-Jewish marriage did not belong to the temple worship, such marriages were contracted before God.827 The Jews have their religion at the center of their social life; thus, God’s presence is never disconnected from what they do in the social circle.828

For instance, in Genesis 2, the Hebrew narrator said God provided a wife to Abram and in Genesis 24, God is presented as the one who led Abraham’s delegation in the diligent search for the wife of Isaac, Rebecca, the daughter of Laban. Jesus, a true Jew, socialized with his people by participating in the home-based marriage ceremony at Cana.829

826 Martos, Door to the Sacred, 408–409. Again, other texts like Tobith 6–8 give a perfect marriage as a man that is bound to one wife, and Proverbs praise the virtuous woman and call on the husband to be faithful to her and turn his back on adultery (Prov 5–7).
828 This is not different from the Akan worldview of life, where the spiritual and the physical world are never disconnected. In that sense, just like the Jews, the Akan marriage celebration, though social and cultural, has always had a religious connotation. That is why the prayer of libation is offered to invoke God and the spirit of the ancestors to bless the spouses and the families.
Many Christian theologians have argued that the presence of Jesus at the wedding of Cana took the social institution of marriage to a divine level. Edward Schillebeeckx, a prominent Roman Catholic theologian, argued otherwise. Schillebeeckx points out that Jesus’ presence at the home-based marriage reception at Cana must nowhere be seen as a symbol of the Christianization of the marriage ceremony. Irrespective of the arguments to support the Christian rituals and symbolisms for weddings, Schillebeeckx holds that Christianity cannot legitimately claim the Bible as their heritage because marriage has always been a social or family affair right from the beginning.

From the above, marriage has been a social institution from the beginning. It was a family affair that had a sense of religious connotation. Marriage was more private and had no external legal or ecclesiastical influence until later centuries.

4.3. Early Ecclesiastical Rite of Marriage: Sacramentalization and Legalization of Customary Marriage

The early Church, growing under the Roman Empire’s jurisdiction, considered marriage as a social institution, as explained above. For the Church, it was a private and family festival. Tertullian, a great Christian theologian trained in jurisprudence at Rome and his contemporary Bishop John Chrysostom never condemned the customary marriage. On the contrary, they approved it as a valid private and family festival. Tertullian only objected to the participation of a Christian bishop in pagan sacrifices at any customary marriages. Chrysostom, in the same

---

Accessed on November 22, 2022.
line, encouraged baptized Christian couples to honorably celebrate their traditional marriages in a reverential godly manner by eschewing all forms of drinking, dancing, and overeating.\textsuperscript{834} Tertullian, in this light, suggested that praises, psalms, and hymns could be sung to God for Christian marriage.\textsuperscript{835} At this point, the Church has no intention of solemnizing or sacramentalizing marriage.

Later around the 4th century, when Christians had gained the right to practice their religion openly, the practice of priests and bishops blessing newly wedded couples became predominant. This custom was probably done when the bishop visited the house to congratulate the couple. Gradually, the practice came to be observed either during the celebration or a day before the wedding day.\textsuperscript{836} The blessing was not meant to solemnize the union, but it was considered more of an honor, showing the clergy’s approval of the marriage in the Eastern church. The domestic blessing for the couples was also to solicit the intervention of God for offspring and fruitfulness. Hence, the customary practice was performed in the couple’s bedroom. Such a blessing was done only for couple who have not been in a previous marriage.\textsuperscript{837} Ngundu asserts that the blessing might have been inspired by the Genesis story of God’s blessing the union between Adam and Eve.\textsuperscript{838} It must be stressed that although the presence of the bishop or priest at the marriage ceremony or a domestic blessing for the couple was much appreciated, these priestly actions were never meant to validate the marriage. The validity of the union was vested in the customary marriage itself, not the priestly act.


\textsuperscript{836} Martos, \textit{Door to the Sacred}, 418.

\textsuperscript{837} Martos, \textit{Door to the Sacred}, 418.

\textsuperscript{838} Ngundu, “Mission Churches and African Customary Marriage.”

231
Shortly after the end of the fourth century, priests and deacons were ordered to have their marriages solemnized according to the papacy of Pope Siricius. Then by the fifth century, the giving of benediction that took place in the domestic space of the couple gradually got conducted in front of the church. By this time, especially in Greece and Asia Minor, the clergy had become actively involved in the main ceremony. It became a norm for the clergy to either join the couple’s hands or put the garland over them.\(^{839}\) Gradually, the customary marriage ceremony developed into a liturgical action with an officiating priest who joined and blessed the married couple. At this time, the said liturgical act was not mandatory. It was not until the seventh century that Christians could marry either under the liturgical form or purely customarily in the house.\(^ {840}\) It should be noted that the priest’s blessing at this time was not an authentication of the validity of the marriage, but the custom itself determined such validity.\(^ {841}\)

By the eighth century, liturgical weddings had become the norm in the East. This necessitated new civil legislation recognizing liturgical marriages as valid as customary weddings. Later centuries gradually saw new laws requiring all weddings to have an officiating priest. Weddings in Greek churches became ecclesiastical ceremonies, and the theology developed later was that the nuptial blessing of the priest was necessary for all Christian matrimonial liturgy.\(^ {842}\) Just as baptism, marriage ceremonies assumed the status of a sacrament that transitions a person from one state of life to another, symbolizing spiritual growth. Marriage became a sacrament that united and consecrated a man and a woman in fidelity to each other. This sacrament offered Christian couple the grace to enter and participate in the mystery of union.
with Christ.\textsuperscript{843} Gradually, this theology and practice became common in the Orthodox churches.\textsuperscript{844}

After the fall of the Roman Empire, civil laws, including marriage issues, were referred to church leaders.\textsuperscript{845} Later, bishops started issuing canonical regulations concerning persons who could marry due to consanguineal relations. For instance, the church amalgamated the customs of the invading Germanic people with the church’s laws. This was not new because the church had already accepted Roman wedding customs. Though varied depending on the tribes, the general rule was that persons could marry only when they share a consanguineal relation of the seventh degree or above; that is, second cousins, for instance, can marry.\textsuperscript{846} Ecclesiastical theology and politics became fused around the Middle Ages.\textsuperscript{847} This saw the Roman Catholic Church claiming jurisdiction over doctrine, liturgy, education, charity, inheritance oaths, moral crimes, and marriages.\textsuperscript{848} This alliance of law and theology brought prominent authority to the Church in the West around the medieval centuries. The Church developed the Code of Canon Law,\textsuperscript{849} which regulated and authenticated marriage procedures in the church in Western Europe.\textsuperscript{850} In the Roman church, the marriage ceremony celebrated as a social institution gradually took on a new dimension. It became an ecclesiastical affair. In the light of faith, morals

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{843} Martos, \textit{Door to the Sacred}, 419.
\item \textsuperscript{844} Ibid., 418.
\item \textsuperscript{845} During the time of Constantine, the church had been given authority to act as judges in some civil matters and with the collapse of judicial system of the state, bishops were called upon to resolve most issues including marriage.\textsuperscript{846} Martos, \textit{Door to the Sacred}, 424.
\item \textsuperscript{847} From about 500 to 1400–1500 CE is traditionally known as the Middle Ages. 15th-century scholars first used the term to designate the period between their own time and the fall of the Western Roman Empire. The period is often considered to have its internal divisions: early and late or early, central or high, and late. “The Middle Ages,” Britannica \url{https://www.britannica.com/topic/history-of-Europe/The-Middle-Ages} Accessed on December 27, 2022.
\item \textsuperscript{848} Ngundu, “Mission Churches and African Customary Marriage,” 39.
\item \textsuperscript{849} Catholic tradition refers to the assemblage of all the rules or laws relating to faith, morals and discipline as Canon Law. Canon Laws are developed base on the theological disposition of the church on matters of faith morals and discipline in the church. Ngundu, “Mission Churches and African Customary Marriage,” 40.
\item \textsuperscript{850} Ngundu, “Mission Churches and African Customary Marriage,” 39.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
and discipline, Popes provided papal *decretales*[^851] that sought to answer questions bishops around Western Europe have asked, for which some bordered on marriage. Some of the papal decretals for the centuries were codified into canon law, which became the authoritative church’s teaching and theology, regulating marriage.

For instance, to ensure that marriages were performed by ecclesiastical regulations and in front of witnesses, most bishops invoked the texts of popes Evaristus and Calistus in the false decretals to demand priests to possess the faculty to bless all marriages solemnly.[^852] In the West, the result of these decretals initiated the custom that wedding ceremonies were held near the church to make it easy for new couples to go into the church for the priest’s blessing. Gradually, it followed that weddings were celebrated at the church door, accompanied by the nuptial mass in the church.[^853] The papal decretals became a starting point for theology and the regulation of marriage in the Western medieval Catholic Church.[^854]

By the twelve century, in parts of Europe, it had become the norm (just like in the East in the eighth century), that the clergy conducted all weddings in the church. There were variant forms of the ceremony, but they all had a common pattern.

At the entrance of the church the priest asked the bride and groom if they consented to the marriage. The father of the bride then handed his daughter to the groom and gave him her dowry, although in many places the priest performed this function instead. The priest then blessed the ring that was given to the bride, after which he gave his blessing to the marriage. During the nuptial mass in the church itself, the bride was veiled and blessed, after which the priest gave the husband the ritual kiss of peace, who passed it to his wife. In some places, the priest also

[^851]: The term *decretalis* (i.e., *epistola decretalis*), in a broader sense, signifies a pontifical letter that contains *decretum*, or pontifical decision. In the strictest sense, it means a rescript (*rescriptum*), which is an answer offered by the pope when his advice is sought on matters of ecclesiastical discipline. Though the answer provided may be specific to a case, the pope encourages his answer to be shared among the ecclesiastical authorities of the district so that his papal answer could address matters of the same kind. Papal decretals, therefore, are not necessarily general laws of the Church. See Douglas J. Potter, “Papal Decretals: definition and early history,” *New Advent*. https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04670b.htm Accessed on December 27, 2022.

[^852]: Martos, *Door to the Sacred*, 428-429.

[^853]: Ibid., 429.

pronounced an additional blessing over the wedding chamber after the day’s festivities had concluded.855

The above indicates how a social or family institution gradually became regulated by civil laws and later ecclesiastical office. Today what we celebrate in the church as marriage has undergone different evolutions through the adoption of different cultures and practices. The next section delves into the sacramentality of marriage.

4.4. The Theological Argument for/against the Sacramental Nature of Marriage

Around the twelve to thirteen centuries, the writings of Peter Abelard, Hugo of St Victor, Peter Lombard, St Bonaventure, and Thomas Aquinas witnessed a further step in Catholic theology of the sacraments. In their definition of sacraments as a cause of grace, the writings of some theologians objected to marriage as a sacrament on the same pedigree as the other sacraments. For example, even though Abelard incorporated marriage as one of his five sacraments (baptism, confirmation, Eucharist, Extreme Unction, and Marriage), he objected to the view that marriage has the sacramental effect of spiritual salvation of its recipients.856 Along the same lines, Peter Lombard, a renowned and influential theologian before Thomas Aquinas, in his Book of Sentences of the Mid-Twelfth Century, defined a sacrament as “a sign of God’s grace and the form of invisible grace, in such a way as to carry its image and be its cause.”857 He listed seven sacraments: Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Extreme Unction, Orders, and Matrimony (the church has recognized these to date). Despite naming matrimony as one of the sacraments because it is sacred, Lombard refuted that matrimony has a sacramental grace. In that sense, he differentiated the sacrament of matrimony from the other six sacraments of the

855 Martos, Door to the Sacred, 429.
857 Martos, Door to the Sacred, 429.
church. Lombard distinguished the sacrament that supplied grace, such as Baptism and Eucharist, and others that were only remedial, such as Matrimony.\footnote{Jacques-Paul Migne (ed.), Sententiarum, IV (2), 1, Patrologia Latina, CXCII, column 842, Paris, 1844-1864. See also Ngundu, “Mission Churches and African Customary Marriage, 40.} According to Lombard, one reason for such a differentiation is that marriage involves financial obligations and arrangements. Since the grace of God cannot be bought, matrimony cannot qualify strictly as a sacrament like the others.\footnote{Martos, Door to the Sacred, 431.}

Another reason that made some theologians around this time hesitate to call marriage a sacrament in the strict sense was that marriage existed before the coming of Jesus Christ. As discussed above, marriage has been a social institution from the beginning; thus, it could hardly be classified purely as a Christian institution like the other six sacraments.\footnote{Martos, Door to the Sacred, 431-432.} Thirdly, the scholastic theologians hesitated to call marriage a sacrament because it involved sexual intercourse.\footnote{Ibid., 432.}

Later, churchmen were forced to reconsider their view on marriage for the following reasons:

1. The rise of religious sects: Southern France saw the rise of a different religious sect which, like the Manichaeans taught that matter was evil, and since marriage brought material beings into existence through sexual intercourse/procreation, marriage was sinful.\footnote{Ibid., 432. Around the early Middle Ages, marriage was viewed negatively as a remedy for the desire for the flesh. Churchmen accorded virginity in high esteem than marriage. The church struggled at this time to dismiss the goodness of a marriage life since it was the sole means of procreation (as God told Adam and Eve to increase and multiply). At the same, the churchmen understood Paul’s theology of marriage as a distraction from the things of God. Paul seems to suggest that those who cannot quench the desire of the flesh resorted to marriage. It was not surprising when the bishop suggested to married couples to refrain from sex for three days as a respect for the blessings they had received or refrain from receiving communion when their bodies and souls are uncleaned after sexual intercourse. For further reading, see Door to the Sacred, 432.}

\footnote{Ibid.}
2. The Albigensian around this time also neglected the Christian concept of God and denied the value of the church’s rituals. They attacked the clergy of the church as corrupt. To combat the Albigensian theology of marriage, churchmen and Christian writers in the 12th century powerfully wrote in defense that sexual intercourse for procreation was good and divinely willed. Around this time, the church developed a Christian wedding ritual celebrated in the presence of the priest as an official authorization and acknowledgment that sexual intercourse in marriage is never wrong.

3. Lastly, the church rediscovered the theological writing of Augustine, for which he developed marriage as a sacramentum. Augustine argued for the sacramentality of marriage in two ways: “it was a sign of the union between Christ and his church, and it was also a sacred pledge between husband and wife, a bond of fidelity between them that could not be dissolved except by death.”

In this sense, Augustine saw marriage as a sacramental sign (signum) and a sacramental bond or covenant (vinculum; foedus). He argued in The Good of Marriage (401 A.D.) that “male and female were from the creation made both to desire one another and to live in friendship and physical intimacy.” This makes a marriage good in itself and produces three goods: progeny, fidelity, and a sacred bond dissolved only by death.

---

864 Martos, Door to the Sacred, 432.
865 Martos, Door to the Sacred, 432.
866 Ibid., 433.
https://www.ezrainstitute.com/resource-library/articles/augustine-on-the-good-of-marriage-part-1/ Accessed on January 2, 2023. Augustine lists three goods of marriage in his De bono coniugali. He clarified this in his summary, haec omnia bona sunt, propter quae nuptiae bonum sunt: proles, fides, sacramentum (Aug. De bon. coni. 28.32). “These things, namely, offspring, fidelity, and the sacrament, are all good, and because of them marriage is good.”
868 Ibid.
Later in the thirteenth century, Bonaventure and his contemporary Thomas Aquinas and later theologians agreed and argued for the sacramental nature of marriage. According to Aquinas, the sacrament of marriage gave a “positive assistance towards holiness in the married state of life.”\textsuperscript{870} His grace, according to Thomas Aquinas, is the grace of fidelity (the ability to remain faithful to one’s own vow and resist all forms of temptation to adultery), the grace of spiritual unity between the husband and wife (this grace enables the husband to love and care for the wife just as Christ loves his bride, the Church. It also empowers the wife to honor the husband just as the church does for her Lord).\textsuperscript{871} Thomas Aquinas, like the other scholastics, acknowledged that marriage preexists the advent of Jesus Christ just as the washing of water or anointing were before Christian baptism and anointing of the sick. Like the other sacraments, marriage, though natural, has been raised to a higher level as a sacramental sign that gives God’s grace. As a natural institution, it was “ordered to the good of nature, the perpetuation of the human race, and was regulated by natural laws that resulted in the birth of children.”\textsuperscript{872} As a social institution, marriage was “ordered to the good of the society, the perpetuation of the family and the state, and was regulated by civil laws that governed the political, social and economic responsibilities of married persons.”\textsuperscript{873} Then, as a sacrament, marriage is meant to be permanent or indissoluble, “ordered to the good of the church, the perpetuation of the community of those who loved, worshipped, and obeyed the one true God, and was regulated by the divine laws that governed the reception of grace and growth in spiritual perfection.”\textsuperscript{874}

\textsuperscript{870} Martos, Door to the Sacred, 435.
\textsuperscript{871} Martos, Door to the Sacred, 435.
\textsuperscript{872} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{873} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{874} Martos, Door to the Sacred, 435-436.
Council of Trent later affirms as a natural institution sacramental, indissoluble when it writes: “Although it belongs to marriage as a natural contract to be indissoluble, yet its indissolubility arises principally from its nature as a Sacrament, as it is the sacramental character that, in all its natural relations, elevates marriage to the highest perfection. In any event, dissolubility is at once opposed to the proper education of children, and to the other
In line with Thomas Aquinas and the scholastics’ theological argument for the sacramentality of marriage, Catholic medieval canonists and theologians further defended marriage as a spiritual matter. As a holy institution, it was appropriate that only the church, the custodian of spiritual values or faith, should handle and order its celebration.\(^{875}\) The teaching of Thomas Aquinas and the scholastics became official teachings of the church. After four centuries, the Council of Trent (1563-4) endorsed it as the absolute truth of faith for the sanctification of humanity.

4.5. **Refutation of the Sacramental Nature of Medieval Catholic Theology of Marriage**

The Protestant Reformers (Martin Luther, John Calvin) of the Sixteenth Century rejected the medieval theological teaching on the sacramental nature of marriage. Apart from the theological issues, many critics excoriated the accumulated canon law on marriage as confusing, inequitable, impractical, arbitrary, and easily abused. Enforcement of this flawed body of law was even worse—“sporadic, ineffective, and often corrupt.”\(^{876}\) The Protestant reformers rejected the Church’s teachings on matrimony, which on the one hand, encouraged Christians to join the sacramental marital state and, on the other hand, hailed celibate clergy because celibacy was seen as superior. “These two tendencies, the fostering of marriage and the praise of celibacy existed side-by-side within the clerical culture.”\(^{877}\)

Martin Luther criticized the Catholic sacramental theology and canon laws of marriage despite its strong dominance in the West for more than half a millennium. Luther and his

---


colleagues argued that marriage was a social estate of the earthly kingdom of creation. It has never been a sacred estate of the heavenly kingdom of redemption. Given that marriage existed before the Church, Luther writes in *Babylonian Captivity of the Church* 5:

Since marriage has existed from the beginning of the world and is still found among unbelievers, there is no reason why it should be called a sacrament of the New Law and of the church alone. The marriages of the ancients were no less sacred than are ours, nor are those of unbelievers less true marriages than those of believers, and yet they are not regarded as sacraments. Luther appealed to scripture to argue that no record from the New Testament defined marriage as a sacramental institution. He argued that the apostle’s saying in Ephesians 5:32-33 (“The two shall become one. This is a great sacrament”) is a literal translation. To him, this “betrays great shallowness and a careless and thoughtless reading of Scripture.” Luther contends that *sacramentum* used here in the text is a translation of the Greek word *mysterion*, which Paul employs to metaphorically denote the “mysterious union of Christ and the Church, not literally about the marriage bond between man and woman.” Wherever the word occurs in scripture, it designates not “the sign of a sacred thing, but the sacred, secret, hidden thing itself.” For instance, Paul writes in I Cor. 4:1: “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the ‘mysteries’ of God,” that is, the sacraments. In that sense, the sacramental nature of marriage established was based on a faulty translation of the Greek word *mysterion* as the word sacrament, while the vulgate used *Sacramentum* to translate the original Greek word *mysterion*. In that sense, the Greek verse renders Ephesians 5:32-33 as “They two shall become

---

880 Steinhäuser, Trans, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church.”
881 Martos, *Door to the Sacred*, 438.
882 Steinhäuser, Trans, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church.”
one. This is a great mystery.” This explains how they came to understand a sacrament of the New Law here, something they would never have done if they had read *mysterium*, as it is in Greek, Luther adds. Paul wrote these words as applying to Christ and the Church, he argues. Paul explains himself further in Vr 32 “I take it to mean Christ and the Church” [Eph. 5:32]. Why does the church proclaim *sacramentum* for man and woman while Paul himself ascribed it to Christ and the Church? Martin Luther concludes that “Christ and the church are, therefore, a mystery, that is, a great and secret thing which can and ought to be represented in terms of marriage as a kind of outward allegory. But marriage ought not for that reason to be called a sacrament.”

Luther’s argument does not repudiate the truth that God instituted marriage. He rejects instead seeing marriage as a sacrament in the strict catholic sense. Marriage, he maintains, is a natural and social institution that falls under natural and civil law, not church law. He writes that “no one can deny that marriage is an external and secular matter, like food and clothing, house and land, subject to civil supervision” (*On Matrimonial Matters*). In this sense, he called on the ecclesiastical authorities to “leave each city and state to its own customs and practices in this regard.” (*Short Catechism, Preface*). Even though marriage should remain in the circle of civil and social jurisdiction, Luther encouraged couples to seek blessings and guidance from the church. To the reformers, marriage is “an institution of the earthly kingdom, not a sacrament of the heavenly kingdom.” However, that does not mean marriage should be totally

---

883 Steinhäuser, Trans, “The Babylonian Captivity of the Church.”
885 Quoted also in Martos, *Door to the Sacred*, 438.
886 Reggio, “Martin Luther on Marriage and Family,” 204.
887 Witte, Jr. “The Reformation of Marriage Law in Martin Luther’s Germany,” 312-313. Quoted also in Mobley, *The Reformation and the Reform of Marriage*. 
separated from the church’s responsibility and concern. Apart from seeking counsel and
guidance from the church, according to Luther, the clergy should not interfere in marital issues
by passing laws but leave it to the government, which was morally obliged to do so within the
confines of laws of nature for the benefit of society.

John Calvin shared Luther’s position in affirming that marriage is not a sacrament. He
writes: “it is not enough that marriage should be from God for it to be considered a sacrament,
but it is required that there should also be an external ceremony appointed by God for the
purpose of confirming a promise” such as the promise of salvation that was confirmed by
Baptism (Institutes of the Christian Religion IV, 19, 34). 888 According to him, the case of
marriage is different from baptism and the other sacraments. Calvin believes no ceremony or
promise was mentioned in the New Testament concerning marriage. Again, he contends that the
law regarding marriage is within the authority of civil, not ecclesiastical power, as catholic
theologians and canonists postulate. Drawing on generational protestant reforms, Calvin
constructed a comprehensive new theology and law that made marital formation and dissolution.
Calvin held that civil authorities were morally obliged to enact laws for marriage and divorce but
in strict conformity to the principles of Christianity. For divorce, he preached that there are two
grounds from scripture for absolute divorce: adultery and malicious desertion of one’s family.
Calvin encourages innocent husbands and wives to sue for divorce, custody, and alimony.
889 He quickly added that the innocent must be permitted to remarry in divorce matters.

In conclusion, the reformers rejected the church’s teaching of the sacramental nature of
marriage and reaffirmed that marriage had been a social and cultural institution. Luther and

888 Martos, Door to the Sacred, 439.
889 John Witte, Jr., “John Calvin on Marriage and Family Life.”
890 Martos, Door to the Sacred, 439.
Calvin emphasize that the Bible never spoke of marriage as a sacrament. The church’s attempt to explain Paul’s text as a justification for sacramentalizing marriage is totally wrong since the translation of *mysterion* into sacrament was totally inaccurate. The Catholic church equally responded to the reformers’ position at the Council of Trent.

### 4.6. The Council of Trent and the Decree of Tametsi of 1563: A Catholic Response

Though very slow, the positions of the reformers necessitated a response from the Catholic church at the Council of Trent at the last session in 1563. The Council Fathers endorsed the doctrinal teaching of marriage by Thomas Aquinas as the absolute truth of faith. At the fourth session of the Council, the fathers affirmed that marriage is one of the seven sacraments. Again, the bishops held that God made the bond of marriage between a man and a woman to be unbreakable, and Christ in the New Testament raised marriage to a level of a sacrament whose “grace raised natural love to perfect love.”

891 To defend the sacramentality of marriage and the Church’s right and responsibility to regulate marriage, the bishops added some canons under the subtitle “Canons on the Sacrament of Matrimony.” The Council declared:

> If anyone says that matrimony is not truly and properly one of the seven sacraments of the evangelical law, instituted by Christ the Lord, but has been devised by men in the Church and does not confer grace, let him be anathema. (Canon I).

892 By this theological and canonical position, the Church avowed that the Christian marriage is superior to any other form of marriage and that “our holy Fathers, the councils, and the tradition of the universal Church, have with good reason always taught that it is to be numbered among

---

891 Martos, *Door to the Sacred*, 440.
892 See Trent, “Twenty-Fourth Session of the Council of Trent,” *Catholicism.*
the sacraments of the New Law." Generating more canons in defense of the sacramentality and the church’s right to regulate marriage, the Council wrote to condemn any contrary position that teaches:

That marriage was not a sacrament instituted by Christ which gives grace; that the church does not have the power to regulate who can and cannot legally marry, and to grant dispensations from these regulations; that ecclesiastical courts cannot annul un consummated marriages or render judgements about other marriage cases; that the church was wrong in teaching that the marriage bond cannot be dissolved for any reason including adultery, or in forbidding remarriage, or permitting spouses to legally separate without remarrying.

The Council of Trent further acknowledged the threat of clandestine marriage to the sacredness of marriage. The fathers designed a response in what is called Tametsi. Tametsi was intended to regulate the contracting of clandestine or secret marriages, which allowed people to enter unions and later renounce or seek annulment of public marriage. Couples in clandestine marriages secretly exchanged vows with one another. In the eyes of the church, clandestine marriage is sinful, though valid. It posed much threat of abuse according to the Council Fathers when they intimated that a man could leave his first wife by a valid but secret marriage and then contract a second, public marriage in the eyes of the church, a marriage the church sees as adulterous. To restore the sacredness and free marriage from such abuses, Tametsi ensured that subsequent marriages were subject to “canonical form,” that is, a valid marriage had to be contracted in the presence of the parish priest or his deputy and two or three witnesses. To take a drastic measure against that, the Council of Trent validated all previous clandestine unions.

893 Twenty-Fourth Session of the Council of Trent, Catholicism.
894 Martos, Door to the Sacred, 440.
Then it declared the invalidity of any other marriage henceforth unless it is celebrated under the canonical form. Anyone who contracts marriage outside the church’s domain, its canonical form and doctrinal teaching was considered to be in grave sin and treated as an adulterer.898

There was the difficulty and challenge of promulgating Tametsi in protestant nations since it could conflict with civil powers and law. Foreseeing the difficulty, the Decree of Tametsi was designed to be enacted parish by parish.899 In Spain and Portugal, the decree was speedily implemented, but the exact implementation in protestant countries was either neglected entirely or only in particular catholic enclaves.

The canonical and doctrinal teaching of the church on marriage became prevalent in Europe, but that does not negate the fact that there were other wedding ceremonies. For instance, in the late eighteenth century, the church confronted opposition through the France Revolution of 1789, which sought to end ecclesiastical authority over marriage. In France, the civil wedding became mandatory for all citizens at the introduction of the Napoleonic Code of 1792.900 This spread through all of Europe in the following centuries. Now, in Europe, citizens were allowed to marry in the presence of a magistrate, not the priest. This also meant that the government took

898 Martos, Door to the Sacred, 440. In the middles Age, there was a question about who the ministers of the sacrament of marriage were. It was concluded that the ministers of the sacramental bond were the couples of the marriage. Thus, marriage in the Middle Ages could be celebrated without witnesses. The giving of consent in the presence of a priest and two other witnesses as demanded by the canonical form, therefore, raises a canonical and theological question of whether marriages could be celebrated without the priest or the two witnesses since the main celebrants of the wedding were not the priest or the witnesses but the spouses.


900 In France, divorce became legally accepted for the first on September 20, 1792. This divorce law of 1972 was a revolutionary departure from what had come before. Marriage has been indissoluble under the ancient regime but post 1792 gave license to couples who desire divorce to obtain it quickly and easily. Under the law, there is the acknowledgement that both the principles of marital breakdown, in which neither spouse would be named the guilty party to the divorce. Grounds for divorce could be immorality, cruelty, insanity, condemnation for certain crimes, desertion for at least two years, or emigration. It was an extremely liberal divorce law and very affordable, even to the very poor. It was not based on any double standard of sexual morality that usually disadvantaged women. The law reflected the “Revolution's commitment to the rights of the individual and its antipathy to Roman Catholicism.” For further reading, See James Chastain, “Divorce and Women in France” (2004). https://www.ohio.edu/chastain/dh/divorce.htm Accessed on January 5, 2023.
over the regulations of all secular marriages and divorces. Rome was reluctant to change its position on the sacramentality of marriage. Catholic bishops in protestant countries were challenged by the Church’s canon law which considers all baptized persons who married outside the decrees of Trent as living in sin and their children as illegitimate. These bishops complained to Rome. The pope acknowledged the challenge that the protestant reformation and the regulation of marriage by the government had come to stay. Rome responded that the “Tridentine decree should be taken as applying only to those who were baptized Catholics and thus still under the legal jurisdiction of the hierarch.”

The later centuries that followed Aquinas and the scholastics’ teaching on marriage incorporated the legal terminology of canon law into the sacramental theology of marriage. Since the teachings of the Council of Trent, customary and civil marriages have not been recognized by the Roman Catholic Church as adequate without Holy Matrimony. In this sense, the customary marriage of the Akans is not acknowledged as suitable to qualify couples to be communicants in the church. To further explain why the customary marriage of the Akans or other cultures has not been considered worthy of church recognition, the next section seeks to underline the essential elements needed for any marriage to be considered valid from a Catholic perspective.

4.7. Catholic Marriage as a Vocation

The Catholic Church teaches that marriage is not just a social institution or an outward sign of a commitment between two people or families. It is a vocation that transcends social and
legal institutions. In the Church, marriage is a supernatural calling to an indissoluble commitment and sacramental partnership of love and life. Emmanuel Okonkwo expresses the very nature of marriage as a divine vocation: “Marriage from its very nature of the union of persons which God intended it to be, is a divine vocation. Their love for one another is the essential element of the divine call.”

Canon Law defines marriage by affirming it as a call by God even though couples marry of their own volition. According to Can 226 §1, “marriage is a call by God to a particular Christian way of life in which there is a build-up of the family and the people of God.” Pope Francis also affirms marriage as a vocation because it is always a response to a “specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church.” This implies that the decision to enter the vocation of marriage and to raise a family ought to proceed from the “fruit of a process of vocational discernment.” As a vocation, the sacrament of marriage is given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses since “their mutual belonging is a real representation, through the sacramental sign, of the same relationship between Christ and the Church…” as a vocation, catholic marriage is a call to a life of holiness and service within the couple’s relationship and in their family. The vocation comes with the challenge of expressing God’s love and truth to humanity.

4.8. Consent and Consummation in Marriage

The Catholic theology of marriage teaches that marriage is only between one man and one woman who personally, deliberately, absolutely, and freely agree to each other to live

---

905 Okonkwo Emmanuel, *Marriage in the Christian and Igbo Traditional Context: Towards an Inculturation* (Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2003), 126.
906 Can 226 §1.
908 AL. 72.
909 AL. 72.
910 AL. 72.
together as husband and wife without any external coercion.\(^{911}\) As early as the sixth century, Emperor Justinian decreed that the “only thing that was required for a valid marriage was the mutual consent of both parties.”\(^{912}\) Catholicism considers the man and a woman as the “first, fundamental, natural and essential authors and actors of the efficient cause of marriage, called matrimonial consent.”\(^{913}\) Both are the “subject and object of the mutual self-gift and acceptance”\(^ {914}\) in the marriage. By their personal and irrevocable act of the will, the man, and the woman pledge to exclusively and permanently enter a conjugal partnership of their whole life ordered of its very nature to their own personal good and that of their offspring.\(^ {915}\)

According to theology and the canon law of the church, free and mutual consent of the spouses determines the validity of a Catholic marriage. Jude Chukwuma Onyeakazi writes:

> The truth and dignity of marriage connected intrinsically in its inter-personal conjugal dimension to the matrimonial consent, demands that the act of will of each of the spouses be sufficient enough to establish a valid marriage. Hence, to speak about matrimonial consent essentially signifies to speak about the subject who gives the consent and the object contained in the subject’s consent. One cannot speak about the one without reference to the other altera alteram includi.\(^ {916}\)

Therefore, the importance of consent demands that the spouses have the capacity to make such a conscious decision: “A marriage is brought into being by the legitimately manifested consent of persons who are legally capable.”\(^ {917}\)


\(^{915}\) Ibid., 3.

\(^{916}\) Ibid.

\(^{917}\) Onyeakazi “Coercion and Fear in Marriage Today,” 3.
Vatican II Council recognizes the marriage covenant as proceeding from an irrevocable consent of a man and a woman for the mutual benefit of the spouses, their offspring, and society. The Council fathers write:

The intimate partnership of married life and love has been established by the Creator and qualified by His laws, and is rooted in the conjugal covenant of irrevocable personal consent. Hence by that human act whereby spouses mutually bestow and accept each other a relationship arises which by divine will and in the eyes of society too is a lasting one. For the good of the spouses and their offspring as well as of society, the existence of the sacred bond no longer depends on human decisions alone.\footnote{GS. 48.}

The church teaches that no human authority has the power to supply matrimonial consent except the spouses. Thus, the church is keen on the necessity of sufficient and proportionate internal and external freedom of the spouses so that they can make personal decisions. Canon Law writes: “The consent of the parties, legitimately manifested between persons qualified by law, makes marriage; no human power is able to supply this consent.”\footnote{Can. 1057 §1.} Marriage is a lifelong journey of the spouses; without their consent, it will be difficult for them to forge through till death separates them. Because of this, the church is very particular about giving consent that is not influenced by any external authority. In the marriage rite, the priest requests and receives the matrimonial consent of the bride and the groom for the validity of the marriage.

In the Catholic Church, the consummation of marriage takes place “if the spouses have performed between themselves in a human fashion a conjugal act which is suitable in itself for the procreation of offspring, to which marriage is ordered by its nature and by which the spouses become one flesh.”\footnote{Can. 1061 §1.} By this canon, the couple must engage in a normal act of heterosexual intercourse, which can potentially result in offspring. This implies a nullification of any act of

\footnote{GS. 48.}
\footnote{Can. 1057 §1.}
\footnote{Can. 1061 §1.}
interrupted sex act, anal or oral sex, and any unnatural means.⁹²¹ Along the same line, the canon mentions that consummation must be done “in a human manner.” That means the act of consummating must be voluntary on the part of the spouses, and any forcible rape does not constitute consummation. Canon 1141 explains the theological import of consummation: “A marriage that is ratum et consummatum can be dissolved by no human power and by no cause, except death.” Consummation of marriage has existed in many civilizations and Michael G. Lawler was right when he wrote the following:

In Roman law, a marriage was created by mutual consent, however, in many of the ancient northern European tribes, a marriage was created by sexual intercourse between the spouses after the giving of consent. In twelfth-century Europe, there were brilliant proponents of both points of view. Then in the mid-century, Gratian, the Master of the University of Bologna, proposed a compromise solution which combines both views. Consent initiates a marriage; subsequent sexual intercourse completes or consummates it. This compromised opinion settled the debate and is today still enshrined in the Code of Canon Law (Can 1061).⁹²²

4.9. Marriage and Holy Communion

Historically, Eastern and Western Catholic churches have traditions that celebrate marriage in connection with the eucharistic liturgy. From the Byzantine tradition, the eucharist has been the constant element that has kept its place in the manuscript of Byzantine marriage.⁹²³ There has always been the distribution of “divine-human mysteries,” i.e., the eucharist at the betrothal rite of the pre-euchological sixth-century Byzantine world.⁹²⁴ There is also historical evidence of the liturgy of the “pre-sanctified gifts” in the early church, where a consecrated

communion was prepared on the altar to be given to the newly married couple after the joining of hands. The eucharist was already consecrated to reduce the amount of time spent in the celebration of the liturgy of marriage and the eucharist.925

The eighth century, however, developed a different tradition that saw the end of celebrating marriage alongside the reception of holy communion. In the eastern church around this time, the tradition of the Barberini Euchologion introduced the “Prayer for the Common Cup,” which took place after the crowning.926 The blessing of the Common Cup replaced the eucharist given at the marriage ceremony. The Common Cup was a simple cup of wine blessed and shared by the married couple.927 For instance, “In the Armenian rite, the blessing of the cup took place at home after the wedding ceremony.”928 The theological significance of the Common Cup is explained as follows:

The common cup, given to the couple after the crowning, is explained today as the symbol of common life, and nothing shows better the desacramentalization of marriage, its reduction to a natural happiness. In the past, this Communion was the ultimate seal of the fulfillment of marriage in Christ. Christ is to be the very essence of life together.929

Reflecting on the practice of the Common Cup, Kenneth Stevenson posits that the blessing of the Common Cup contributed immensely towards the decline of regular communion in marriages in the eastern rites930 Stevenson said that for centuries in the Eastern Church, “Communion has no longer been given, instead, the blessing of the Common Cup, from which the spouses drink three times, has acquired great importance.”931 Today, the liturgical books of

925 Sarkodie, “The Celebration of Marriage and Its Effects on the Catholic Church in Ghana, 47.
928 Ibid, 259.
the Eastern churches propose that the “betrothal and (thus marriage) should be celebrated at the end of the eucharistic liturgy. Thus, at least in theory, the traditional link between marriage and the eucharist is safeguarded.”

In the Roman Rite of Marriage, a long-preserved tradition sorts the celebration of marriage in connection with the eucharist. Catholicism provides options for communion in the celebration of the marriage liturgy. While the church encourages the celebration of the liturgy of marriage with the eucharist, there are also options for marriage celebration without the celebration of Holy Mass. The alternative, “Rite of Celebrating Marriage Outside Mass,” is used for marriages between a Catholic and a baptized non-Catholic or when a significant number of the congregation for the marriage celebration are non-Catholics or when no priest is available.

In other celebration options, the church shows her unwavering commitment and the link between marriage and communion by distributing Holy Communion even when a priest is unavailable. For example, in a marriage between two Catholics who regularly participate in the church's life and there is no priest, Holy Communion, according to the rubrics, may be distributed after the nuptial blessing. The church “Order of Celebration Without Mass” said that after the nuptial blessing, the deacon or assisting layperson approaches the place where the Eucharist is reserved, reverently genuflect, and brings the Eucharist and places it on the altar. This is followed by the Lord’s Prayer and the kiss of peace. After this ritual action, the deacon or layperson genuflects, takes a host, and, holding it slightly raised above the vessel, facing the people, says: Behold the Lamb of God…” All respond: “Lord, I am not worthy…” Finally, the

---

936 The Order of Celebrating Matrimony.
deacon or layperson may receive communion and then distribute it to the congregation under the form of bread only.\textsuperscript{937} Where this option is available, marriage with Holy Mass has been the preferred choice to affirm the traditional link between marriage and the eucharist more vividly and beautifully.

In the spirit of interreligious and cultural dialogue, the following section concentrates on marriage from Ghana's Akan/African traditional context. This is to provide a comparative idea of marriage within the Catholic and Akan traditions. This knowledge will be a springboard for the argument and proposal of a harmonized marriage rite for the Ghana catholic church later in this chapter.

4.10. Marriage Systems in Ghana: Customary, Ordinance, and Marriage Under Islamic Law

Traditional Akan marriage in the Ghanaian religio-cultural and sociological context has remained one of the most celebrated and cherished institutions. It is the cog around which life in an Akan society and, for that matter, the church revolves. Consequently, the absence of marriage and family life is tantamount to the extinction of Akan society and the church in Ghana.

Marriage has been defined differently in diverse societies and circles. From the geographical and Akan socio-religious context, Marriage could be defined as the legal, spiritual, cultural, and physical union between a man and a woman who have agreed to come together as husband and wife with a commitment to rights and obligations after observing all the customary processes and procedures accepted in the society.\textsuperscript{938} This definition rules out any idea of same-

\textsuperscript{937} Ibid., 82 and 103.
sex marriage in the Akan societies, which in other jurisdictions is legal. Same-sex marriage is taboo among the Akan communities and in Ghana’s legal establishment. It is a criminal offense under the Ghana Criminal Act of 1960.939 Again, the definition gives no provision for child marriage or forced marriage.

Among the Akans, marriage goes beyond spouses. It involves the two families and the community.940 Peter Sarpong writes that “…marriage is not simply an affair between individuals who have fallen in love. It is a matter in which the lineages of the contracting parties are greatly interested.”941 In that sense, the Akans usually say, “one marries a family.”

According to the notable sources of Ghanaian law,942 there are three major forms of marriage in Ghana:

1) Marriage recognized under the Customary Laws (Traditional Marriage),
2) Marriage celebrated in accordance with Islamic Laws and registered under the provisions of the Marriage of Mohamedans Ordinance of 1951, as amended,943
3) A statutory marriage contracted pursuant to the provisions of the Marriage Ordinance of 1951, as amended (Christian Marriage).944

---

939 A bill entitled “Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill, 2021” was put before parliament recently to close all lacuna in the existing law that seems to soften the position on homosexuality activities in the country. The first paragraph of the memorandum sets the purpose: “the object of the Bill is to provide for proper human sexual rights and Ghanaian family values, proscribe LGBTQ+ and related activities; proscribe propaganda of, advocacy for or promotion of LGBTIQIAAP+ and related activates, provide for the protection of and support for children, persons who are victims or accused of LGBTIQIAAP+ and related activities and other persons; and related matters. For further reading, see “Promotion of Proper Human Sexual Rights and Ghanaian Family Values Bill, 2021.” https://cdn.modernghana.com/files/722202192224-0h830n4ayt-lgbt-bill.pdf Accessed on January 30, 2023.


941 Sarpong, Ghana in Retrospect, 77.


These three forms are necessary due to the multiple religious and ethnic groups in Ghana with their forms of marriage. Abraham T. Afrim-Narh affirms that “it is necessary to maintain three different systems of marriage to satisfy different marital interests in the Ghanaian society.”

Each of the three different forms of marriage stipulates the number of partners one can have. While the Ordinance marriage permits one-man-one-wife, Customary and Islamic marriages give room for polygamy. For the subsequent arguments, this dissertation will elaborate on the intricacies of customary and ordinance marriages.

4.11. Customary Marriage in Ghana

Many scholars, like Rattray, Field, Danquah, Busia, and Peter Sarpong, have written about the customary marriage of Ghana, especially among the Akans. In Ghana, among the Akans, the customary marriage is the primary marriage to be celebrated before any other forms follow, depending on a person’s religious affiliation. This shows that traditional marriage is observed in Ghana despite one’s religion as against the other forms. However, there has been disparity and lack of scholarly consensus as regards the Akan name for customary marriage. In the same article, Beatrice Okyere-Manu calls it the “Tirinsa ceremony” and “bride


947 In Ghana today, many people erroneously refer to Customary Marriage as “engagement.” When such term is used, it does not connote the same meaning as used in the Western world. Unlike engagement, the customary marriage is marriage in itself recognized in the Akan society and Ghana Law. It does not need any other rites to be performed to be accepted when it is completed among the Akans. Christian marriage is an addition that came with Christianity. Therefore, for Ghanaians to describe their marriage as an engagement is a misplacement of terms. Due to foreign influence, some Ghanaians have introduced the exchange of rings in the customary marriage, and since this same ritual gesture marks the engagement stage in the western understanding, the name engagement has erroneously been used. As part of Customary Marriages, there is the first stage called the “knocking ceremony.” In this ceremony, the boy’s family officially go the girl's family to declare their intention and request to take the girl to their home one day as a wife. This stage can be equated to the western understanding of engagement.

price ceremony.” Even though the dowry is a significant part of the ceremony, it does not express the entirety of the marriage celebration Okyere-Manu noted. Others call it “Efie Awadee,” which literally means home/family marriage. This seems a good description for two reasons. Firstly, customary marriage rites take place in the family house of the woman, and secondly, the name encompasses every cultural ritual that forms part of the celebration.

For the Akans, marriage is seen as a sacred bond, which demands a strict observation of the laws governing it. Today in Ghana, this marriage is under the regulations of the “Customary Marriage and Divorce Registration Law, 1985 (PNDCL 112)” as amended in 1991 by PNDCL 263. Legally, all customary marriages must be registered through the District/Metropolitan Registrar. The registration can take place when the following conditions are satisfied:

Consent by the man and the woman to be married, consent by the family of the man and the family of the woman that the two should be married, the man, or a member of his family, presents the woman’s family with gifts and asks for her hand in marriage, the woman’s family accepts the prospective bridegroom’s gifts and a marriage celebration is held.

As a polygamous institution, the PNDCL 112 permits a man to register as many wives as possible.

---

950 See Beatrice Okyere-Manu, “Cohabitation in Akan Culture of Ghana,” 50 and 60. “Tirinsa” is the Asante word for dowry.
951 In this dissertation “tirinsa” and “efie awade” will be used interchangeable to mean customary or traditional Akan marriage.
956 KMA. Also quoted in Sarkodie, “The Celebration of Marriage and Its Effects on the Catholic Church in Ghana, 47.
957 Subsequent discussion will deliberate briefly about polygamous marriage among the Akans.
958 This is totally the opposite of Catholic or Christian marriage and will be seen that it will be the ground for which the customary marriage faces a rejection to be fused with Church marriage.
The traditional Akan society has its norms and impediments to marriage. For instance, some degree of consanguineal relationship between a man and woman is enough grounds to forbid marriage celebration.\textsuperscript{959} The multiplicity of ethnic groups in Ghana engenders diversities in celebrating customary marriage. However, despite the diversities, some details are essential for all ethnic groups. The following procedure touches on the commonalities and requirements among many ethnic tribes in Ghana, but the emphasis is placed on the Akan customary marriage system.


From the broader African perspective, marriage is a ‘dynamic process,’ not just a day’s event. Speaking for the Zairean Episcopal Conference at the 1980 Synod about the process of African marriage, Archbishop A. Kaseba rightly said: “This process is a dynamic whole which creates the alliance. . . And it is the \textit{whole process that makes marriage a reality}.”\textsuperscript{960} Compared to the Western world, the African/Akan marriage is an event that goes through different stages and procedures. Bafour K. Takyi affirmed this when he said, “Often a multitude of processes and ceremonies accompany these marital transitions before the husband-to-be can officially claim the bride as his wife.”\textsuperscript{961} Below, the dissertation will briefly discuss the various stages of customary marriage among the Akans.

\textsuperscript{959} Ankrah, \textit{How Africans Marry in the Church} 25. Some family will even hinder their child to marry from a family for the reason of immorality, illness, and instances of unnatural death etc.


\textsuperscript{961} Bafour K. Takyi, “Tradition and Change in Family and Marital Processes,” 82.
4.13. Engagement Stage

In the Akan society, searching for a partner is the boy’s responsibility. When boys reach the age of marriage, their parents assist them in choosing partners. Due to many factors of which former education is fundamental, the selection of a future wife rests more on the boy’s choice now than in the olden days when parents selected a future wife for their wards.

Traditionally, any explicit initiative for a girl could be expressed personally by the boy or sometimes through the family, mother, uncle, or respected older person. The current practice is that the two partners make arrangements to introduce themselves to each of their families. Next, the man’s family approaches the girl’s family and makes their intentions of marrying their daughter known through what is called the “knocking ceremony.” Here, a token of drinks and money (knocking fee) are the essential items presented to the girl’s family. When the items are accepted, the girl’s family, in turn, presents the list of items demanded as “tirinsa” to the boy.

*Tirinsa* has been translated by scholars differently. Peter Sarpong and Bafour K. Takyi refer to “tirinsa” as the “bride wealth.” Kyerematen describes it as an “engagement fee.” The “tirinsa” is the dowry or the bridewealth that “ratifies the marriage.” It serves as a token...
that symbolizes the legitimacy of the marriage. Sarpong considers it a “kind of ‘documentary evidence’ attesting to the fact that matrimonial union has duly been entered into.” Tirinsa legitimizes the children in the family. A man can only call a woman his wife and the children his own when the tirinsa has been paid. In contemporary Ghana, the commercialization of the items and the cash for the tirinsa are becoming alarming. Some families are charging exorbitantly. Beatrice Okyere-Manu noted this when she said, “a visit to a bride price ceremony recently revealed that indeed this transaction has been commercialized, the groom-to-be had to present a physical cash of about 4,000 Ghana Cedis (approximately 958 US dollars), three suitcases full of clothes, sewing machine, ornaments, expensive wines and cool drinks as well as the cost of the party.” There was a time among the matrilineal Akans when two bottles of palm wine were enough for a man to get a wife to his home. Among the patrilineal people, the boy may be asked to provide a dozen fowls or cattle. The monetary value of these items is huge. Peter Sarpong noted, “the Nuer husband is reported to pay 40 heads of cattle before earning the title of husband.” Undeniably, that these instances of tirinsa have led to many African societies having rules to govern a manageable amount (cash or items) to be asked for a bridewealth.

Administrators and missionaries have misconstrued tirinsa as “simply a purchase price with which the husband bought the wife.” This could be due to the recent exorbitant and lavish items that the girl’s family demands. Far from this erroneous impression, tirinsa, according to A.

---

972 Sarpong, Ghana in Retrospect, 83.
973 Sarpong, Ghana in Retrospect, 83.
975 Sarpong, Ghana in Retrospect, 82.
976 Ibid., 82.
977 Ibid., 83.
A. Y. Kyerematen, literally means “rum for the head.” But it actually means “rum with which to wish prosperity for the wedlock.” It is a token that symbolizes the customary marriage’s seal and gives the ceremony public recognition. Again, the bridewealth or *tirinsa*, according to Sarpong, “entitles the husband to adultery fees, in the event of unfaithfulness on the part of the wife. It thus gives the husband exclusive rights of sexual access to the wife.” It must be noted that despite the exclusive rights of sexual access, the payment does not imply a total transfer of ownership of the bride to the husband and his relatives. This is because the bridewealth also “serves as a security for the husband’s good behaviour, as well as for the wife’s.”

Customarily, after the knocking has been accepted, a mutual investigation begins where each family tries to ascertain if the other family is worth being married into. The interest of the inquiry centers around some of these: Any record of “bad” disease in that family, such as leprosy, tuberculosis, barrenness, blindness, and insanity? Is the boy or girl hardworking or lazy? Any history of bad records like witchcraft, incurable or contagious diseases, criminal backgrounds, or violent behavior? Employment status, standard of living, and religious affiliation are all investigation factors. Peter Sarpong recounts that during the period of inquiry, the man expects to present gifts to the girl and his family. Accepting gifts or donations indicates that the girl’s family could respond positively to his request when he finally asks for their daughter’s hand in marriage. If the contrary happens, the girl’s family is supposed to refund all the gifts. Once the boy’s family receives a positive response from the girl’s family, the next procedure of the marriage ceremony can begin immediately. The two families typically agree on

---

979 Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 83.
980 Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 83.
982 Bafour K. Takyi, “Tradition and Change in Family and Marital Processes,” 84.
a date for the ceremony when the boy is adequately prepared by procuring all the marriage items and the *tirinsa*.


The traditional Akan marriage ceremony\(^{984}\) is simple, primarily if the girl’s nubility rite has been performed. Essentially, the ceremony centers around paying the bridewealth and accepting the marriage items by the girl’s family.\(^{985}\) Normally, the contracting families gather at the father/family’s house of the bride-to-be early in the morning on the agreed date and time. It is never done at the family house of the groom-to-be.\(^{986}\) On this day, the groom-to-be and the bride-to-be may be present at the gathering to affirm their consent publicly, but this is not essential because the bride-to-be’s consent before this day is already known by both families. The critical aspect, culturally and legally, is the consent of the four parties: the man and his family and the woman and her family.

On the day of the marriage ceremony, the bride-to-be receives the groom-to-be with his kinsmen in a grand manner. Pleasantries are exchanged according to the host family’s culture, and the groom-to-be’s relatives will present the items/*tirinsa* for the marriage on a table customarily placed at the center of the gathering. Among these items/*tirinsa* are bottles of schnapps, a ring, a Bible (Quran), clothes for the bride-to-be and her parents in bags, and money in envelopes. The ceremony begins with a prayer of libation or Christian prayer, depending on

---

\(^{984}\) The YouTube link is a sample of Traditional Akan marriage in Ghana. “Ghanaian Traditional Wedding 2022|Full Video #Ghana” [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6wz_QnBwVU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z6wz_QnBwVU) Accessed on January 3, 2023.


\(^{985}\) Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 82.

\(^{986}\) There has been a change of language from boy or girl to groom-to-be and bride-to-be. This is because at this stage of the marriage, the “boy or girl” has assumed the status of eligible married partners. See Sarkodie, “The Celebration of Marriage and Its Effects on the Catholic Church in Ghana,” 13.
the religious affiliation of the host’s family. The kinsmen of the bride-to-be, as Akan culture demands, will ask the reason why the groom-to-be’s family has visited their home. At this point, the groom-to-be’s family will publicly make their intention known and ask to marry their girl into their home. The dialogue between the two families is anchored on the spokespersons of both families who have the skills for public speaking, like the linguist. All these whiles, the groom-to-be and the bride-to-be are not present at the gathering (usually in separate rooms).

At this point, the boy’s family presents all the items to the host family. Usually accompanied by music, appellation, or joyful chants, the groom joins the gathering flanked by his friends and some relatives. Next, the groom-to-be’s family will name the bride-to-be among the girls in the house and demand that she is brought to the public. The appearance of the bride-to-be is done in a joyful and ceremonial style. First, the girl’s family will demand money from the groom-to-be’s family to transport the bride-to-be from wherever she is hiding. Then, to make it more interesting, different girls dressed up as the bride are intentionally presented, one after the other, to the groom-to-be’s family, who will reject them all before the bride-to-be finally appears. Finally, the bride-to-be appears publicly, preceded by some beautifully dressed ladies who culturally dance to a piece of joyful music or chants. It is common to see the groom-to-be and bride-to-be also wearing the same designed, colorful traditional dresses (normally Kente among the Akans) but with a different style to differentiate them from the other ladies and gentlemen accompanying them.

Next is the apex of the Akan marriage ceremony. That is the exchange of consent. At this point, the bride-to-be’s father, the principal celebrant of customary marriage, takes the stage.

---

987 In other cases, the groom accompanied by his friend’s and relative are already seated right at the beginning of the gathering before the ceremony commences.
988 In the absence of the father of the bride-to-be, the uncle or Abusuapanyin (family head) or any male adult with reputation in the family takes up this responsibility.
The father calls his daughter’s name and asks her three times for her consent to marry the groom-to-be and the family. For instance, the father may say, “Afia Aboagyewaa, do you know Kofi Adjei, and do you consent to his marriage proposal? Do you want us (family) to accept the *tirinsa* (all the presents they have brought?)” The three times affirmative responses of the bride-to-be to the father’s questions are a seal for the marriage. This public acceptance, or yes, of the girl, legitimizes the union. At this time, the two parties assume the status of husband and wife or bride and groom. After this positive response, the Abusuapayin or priest prays over the ring and the Bible. Then the groom presents them to the wife. The groom’s family traditionally exchanges a handshake with the bride’s family to show appreciation. The Abusuapanyin or pastor leads the gathering to pray. Culturally, a libation prayer is offered to thank God and the ancestors and entrust the husband and wife to the favors of God and ancestors and the fruitfulness of the marriage bond.

Those gathered are given a chance to advise the couples and their families. The pieces of advice centers on what could help the new couple experience a fruitful and successful marriage. Traditionally, there is a symbolic gesture of offering salt or sometimes soft drinks to all present as a kind of public seal or witness to the marriage contract. Customary marriage must be registered after the celebration with the District or Metropolitan Marriage Registrar as demanded

---

989 Personally, I have never witnessed an occasion where the bride-to-be responded negatively or failed to consent to marry the family that has publicly gathered for such ceremony. This is because prior to this day, the two families and the parties have already met and consented to the marriage. That notwithstanding, it is not beyond possibility that the bride-to-be for reasons known to her may reject the man and his family that have come to ask for her hand in marriage.

990 The ring, Bible and the presence of the priest or pastor in the customary marriage have been an addition to the cultural marriage ceremony of the Akans because of a dialogical influence of Christianity in Ghana. Christian religion and Akan culture interact harmoniously in Ghana, and it is beautifully seen in a customary marriage. Unfortunately, the converse does not take place in the church fully.

991 Depending on the religious affiliation of the bride/groom, the priest may be invited to witness and bless the ring, Bible, the spouses, and the gathered community. I have had numerous opportunities to see this.

992 Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect*, 82.
by the Customary Marriage and Divorce Registration Law, 1985 (PNDCL 112). Admittedly, it is unfortunate that most Akan couples fail to respect this legal marriage requirement.

4.15. After the Customary Rite of Marriage

The final marriage ceremony is followed up with a reception characterized by feasting and merry-making. Food and drinks are served, and loud music is played. Even though formal invitations are sent out, sometimes uninvited community members come to partake in the joy of the celebration. In contemporary Akan communities, this part of the ceremony is moved to hotels, beaches, conference halls, parks, or any ample space that can accommodate families, friends, and spectators. Once everyone is seated, the bride and the groom, accompanied by friends, are ushered into the assembly with music and dance. Usually, the dance is well rehearsed and in an orderly and stylish form. Dancing, eating, and appealing for funds take center stage at the wedding reception. Sarkodie is right when he intimated that the reception party had been commercialized in contemporary Akan society. It is not surprising to see handkerchiefs, toffees, champagne, balloons, pens, T-shirts, etc., sold in different fundraising styles to raise money for the couple. There is a presentation of gifts from friends and well-wishers to the couple. With influence from the Western world, some Akan weddings after parties conclude with the cutting of wedding cakes and the popping of champagne. The wedding reception is directed by a master of ceremony (MC).

4.16. Marriage Under the Ordinance

After the traditional wedding, the couple must undergo Holy Matrimony if they are Catholics. Among some Catholics, the traditional wedding occurs on Friday, and the Holy

---

993 KMA. See also Sarkodie, “The Celebration of Marriage and Its Effects on the Catholic Church in Ghana, 16.
Matrimony on Saturday. Despite this arrangement, many Catholics, for various reasons, do a church wedding after some years of the customary marriage. Some others (probably the majority) totally forgo the Holy Matrimony altogether. Ordinance marriage is categorized under the “Marriage Ordinance of 1951,” also called CAP 127. There are three (3) kinds of marriages under this ordinance:

(a) Marriage by a Registrar of Marriages
(b) Marriage by a Marriage Officer/Minister
(c) Marriage by Special License.

A Marriage Registrar is an officer at the Registrar Generals Office, Metropolitan, Municipal, or District Assembly (MMDA), with the responsibility to perform marriages. A Marriage Officer is a minister of a religious body (Christian or Muslim) who has been duly licensed and gazetted to perform marriages. This means the person has been recognized and given a certificate by the Government to perform Ordinance Marriages. Marriage by Special License is where at the Registrar General’s Office, MMDA waives certain conditions for an Ordinance such as the length of time for notices or permits a venue (other than the Registrar General’s Office, MMDA or church) to be used for the performance of the marriage.996

As the law demands, all marriages, including Catholic weddings, must produce a public notice first. The registrar would publish a notice of marriage and issue a certificate after twenty-one (21) days if no objection is raised. The marriage certificate must then be presented to a licensed marriage officer (in the case of the Catholic Church, it is the priest), after which the couple must get married within three months, or that certificate becomes null and void.997 In case of any objection, there is a caveat for the complaint to be addressed in court. The marriage must be celebrated within three months, and a certificate is issued as a record of the legalization of the marriage.998 Even though it is not a demand to marry customarily before a person undergoes the

marriage by ordinance, it has become impossible to neglect it. This is because, in the Akan cultural system, a man cannot take a bride to his home without paying a bridewealth or *tirinsa* to the bride’s family. For instance, in the case of the Church, the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Ghana demands that matrimony be celebrated only after the customary marriage. 999 This ensures that the two families have already assented to the union. The Catholic priest is authorized to legalize the marriage, but all marriages must be registered. Ordinance marriage, for that matter, Christian marriage is celebrated in a licensed and gazetted church. 1000

Unlike customary marriage, ordinance marriage is strictly monogamous. Section 44 of the Ordinance Marriage of 1951, limits a man or woman in Ghana to marry another person while the prior marriage exists. 1001 This law also prohibits all mannerisms of concubinage. The couples, by law, have the exclusive right to each other. As stated above, the laws governing the Customary Marriage and Divorce Registration Law, 1985 (PNDCL 112), and the Marriage of the Mohammedans Ordinance, 1951 (CAP 129) permit couples to engage in polygamy.

Catholic marriage is registered under the Ordinance Marriage. However, the disparity between Christian and customary marriages has created a substantial pastoral problem in Ghana. How can this be addressed so that an Akan Catholic can undergo only one marriage ceremony, which satisfies the Church’s law and the traditional Akan marriage custom? This will receive much attention in this chapter with a proposal for the Catholic Church in Ghana to adopt to

1000 The Guideline for the Celebration of Holy Matrimony gives an opening for marriages to be celebrated in the home as demanded by the culture of the people. In Ghana, all customary marriages are celebrated in the home as the culture requires, but it is rare to witness a Catholic wedding celebrated in the home.
resolve the performance of multiple weddings before an Akan traditionally married Catholics are permitted to receive communion or take up a church position.

4.17. **Pastoral Realities of Marriage Among Akan Catholics: An Interreligious and Cultural Survey of Marriage in the Catholic Church of Ghana**

In Ghana, every Akan Catholic adult of the age of marriage is confronted with three ‘worlds’:

1. The world of the traditional Akan culture and practices,
2) The world of the civil or legal system of Ghana and
3) The world of the predominantly westernized culture and ideas imported under the clothes of religion and faith.1002

Living in these three worlds poses many pastoral problems for the Akan Catholic in Ghana regarding the institution of marriage. As explained above, an Akan young adult will primarily marry customarily since that is the known and accepted tradition and practice by the Akan communities, and the laws of Ghana recognize it. Akan customary marriage has been in existence before the advent of Christianity. After satisfying the traditional and legal marriage system in the country, church marriage is acknowledged by most Catholic adults as an ecclesiastical foreign imposition or condition for the reception of the Eucharist. Since nothing impedes their marriage and the Akan society and the nation recognizes spouses who marry by the customary rite as authentically married, there is no urgency for most of these Catholic spouses to perform the church marriage. Archbishop P. Dery of Tamale (Ghana) expressed this situation at the Synod of Bishops in 1980: “Most Catholics, … feel no need and are often in no hurry for a Church marriage. Customary marriage, in the minds of most Ghanaians, including

---

1002 Ngundu expresses these three worlds also when he spoke about marriage in Africa and the difficulty couples undergo in the name of church and religion in mission churches. Ngundu, “Mission Churches and African Customary Marriage,” 35.
Catholics, is the real marriage. The ceremony in church is seen not as a celebration of marriage but rather a condition for the reception of the sacraments: a rule of the clergy, a simple blessing, a foreign import.”

Traditionally married Akans encounter pastoral frustration immediately when they decide to become Catholics (if they are converts) or think of being fully Catholics in the church. The Akan traditionally married couples are confronted with canon laws and western practices masked in the name of Christianity or Catholicism. As recounted earlier through the historicity of catholic marriage, it is indisputable that the Catholic wedding rite today has grown out of a culture and the legal world of the Graeco-Roman world and European legal context. Cheshire speaks along this line when he writes that the form of marriage recognized by English law is generally described as a “Christian Marriage.” The English matrimonial law was adapted to Christian marriage, which has come to stay as church marriage strictly for Akan converts to undergo before assuming the full status as Catholics.

The Akan and, for that matter, African Catholic couples attain the status of a full-Catholic only when they are married according to the “canonical form” as ruled by the Council of Trent in the Tamatsi: A valid catholic marriage had to be contracted in the presence of the parish priest and two or three witnesses. Once this is absent, traditional married couples are classified as living in sin and are unqualified as Catholics worthy of the Holy Eucharist. Had it been just a colonial ill-thought, it could have been tolerable, but the frustrating aspect is that missionaries

---

1980 Synod of Bishops.
Married couple in this section is always about a traditionally married man or woman unless otherwise stated contrary.
Cheshire and North’s, Private International Law, 3 (Oxford Univ. Press, 1999), First Indian Reprint (2006).
and some Akan-trained priests treat with contempt couples traditionally married but not yet married in church.

The discomforting reality on the ground cannot be unnoticed from the anthropology, canonical, theological, and pastoral perspectives. The Ghana Catholic Church today, unfortunately, has no clear and formidable pastoral guidelines that seek to make church marriage resonate with the Akan cultural settings except the western model, which appears to be an ‘imposition’ of a foreign model despite the theological and canonical justifications. Michael C. Kirven, in his book *African Widows*, could be right when he lamented about the frustrating pastoral situation in Africa, for that matter Ghana, when he said, “the loss of faith and patience of many baptized people, especially the youth” who are “with no clear guidelines, except those of a Western courtship model, a model meaningless in the context of the African societies.”

The frustration impelled Kirven to describe the Christian marriage as a manualist model which resonated only for a particular marriage system, that is, the European or Western world and North America. Unfortunately, the church has failed to recognize that a model that fits well for one cultural and religious setting in Europe does not mean the same model is ideal for the African/Akan societies south of the Sahara. Kirven criticized Catholic missionaries who were trained in the western model of marriage without necessarily marrying that with the diversified cultural marriage settings and rites in Africa and, for that matter, Ghana. Kirven’s observations and writing of the pastoral dilemma since 1979 engendered scientific research;

---

unfortunately, the frustrating subject had received no positive pastoral attention, especially in Ghana.  

Aside from the ecclesiastical laws, economic reasons limit many Akan married couples from embarking on Church weddings. The low economic standard of many catholic families compels them to concentrate on satisfying the high bridewealth and the traditional wedding demands instead of spending the extra money to purchase the colorful wedding attire and sponsoring a banquet: practices that are usually associated with the Western idea of getting married in church. Even though these are externalisms or embellishments that have nothing to do with ecclesiastical requirements for marriage, it is increasingly becoming difficult within the context of postmodern Ghana to forgo them. The priests of the Eastern Archdiocese of Nairobi may be correct when they confessed that “the Church has joined with society in projecting an “ideal” of marriage that only the rich can afford.” They continued: “The gospel of simplicity is hard to hear in a Nairobi where competition seems to be the order of the day and money the dominant value.” The situation described by the priests of Nairobi is not different from the Akan societies of Ghana today. The societal pressure of an ideal marriage has landed some families in perpetual debt because they borrowed money for their traditional and church weddings.

1009 Despite the efforts of some theologians and anthropologists, especially Peter Sarpong, there has not been a greater force from the Catholic Bishop Conference to revive the pursuit of a marriage rite that is truly Akan and Catholic.  


1011 Ibid.
4.18.  A Brief Pastoral Experience

In my first year as a parochial vicar responsible for twenty-two mission churches under St. Mary’s Parish, Kengen-Ghana, I encountered a devout woman who was traditionally married for about forty years. This woman’s pains and frustrations were for a priest to visit their church usually once a month, and she could not receive the Eucharist because she had not performed the church marriage. Many priests before my arrival had intervened to speak to the husband, a member of the Church of Christ, to agree to the church marriage but to no avail. During my visit, the husband was reluctant to proceed with any conversation about church marriage. He argues: “we are married already as our custom and tradition demand, and my church (Church of Christ) recognizes the marriage. Why must I undergo the white man’s custom in the name of church marriage?” For forty years, this woman had experienced eucharistic hunger. Her practice had been to walk out of Mass after the Liturgy of the Word or would not show up for Mass anytime the priest visited. At one point, she felt the need to seek divorce in order to participate in Holy Communion. The church leaders informed me of this matter because they didn’t want to lose a devout and active woman. I referred the case to my pastor, who sought a canonical dispensation for this devout catholic from the Local Ordinary. This is one of the many challenges most traditionally married men and women go through.

How long must a committed catholic husband and wife, who for years have shown the commitment of faithfulness to building up the Body of Christ, be denied participation in a eucharistic meal that should support them in their marriage struggle? Why should the Eucharist, a source of unity, becomes a source of division for others because they have not performed a marriage rite that does not resonate with their culture and custom? Must the Eucharist be
considered a reward for those married in the Catholic Church and not as medicine for all struggling on the journey of life? 1012

The consequence of the pastoral reality described above has undoubtedly contributed to the growth of lukewarmness among many customary married couples and families. Some have left the Catholic Church to join other Christian denominations that have been able to merge Christian marriage with traditional Akan weddings.1013 Again, some families and homes are broken due to a couple’s desire to receive communion when the other is not ready for a church wedding. Lastly, this problem has been one of the major causes of the Eucharistic famine in the African church today. The following section will discuss the plague of eucharistic famine in Africa or Ghana Catholicism due to Akan and Catholic marriage disparities.


“The Church lives by the Eucharist” John Paul II.

As the Catholic Church universally goes through years of synodality, the ideas of dialogue, listening, discernment, reexamination and pastoral proposals, collegiality, and subsidiarity are rekindled in the language of the Church to facilitate a deeper reflection of the life of the Church for the future. One area of the church’s life for the African continent which may take center stage in the synodal reports will be marriage and its consequence of ‘Eucharistic famine.’ As explained above, many African Catholics who have traditionally married but are yet to perform the church marriage can only participate fully in the liturgy of the Word and not the Eucharist at Mass. This

1012 Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium*, 47. Vatican.va 

1013 This is not to say that their understanding of the Eucharist is the same as the Catholic Church. The effort to connect the church marriage with the Akan culture and customs that are not inimical with the Christian faith is that which is commendable.
is because such couples are categorized as having irregular marriages. It is, therefore, not an exaggeration to have about a hundred adult Catholics at mass in some parts of Ghana, but only five percent may participate in the Eucharist.

This is not due to the issue of mortal sin but more of a marriage problem in the church. A specific pastoral challenge in Africa today is what Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana’a Nzeki Ndingi of Nairobi calls Eucharistic famine (also called the “Eucharistic Hunger” or the “Eucharistic Drought”). Eucharistic famine has been applied to different situations in the church:

1. It is applied to a situation where there is a lack of priests to celebrate Mass for the people of God, especially on Sunday. Most out-stations or mission churches in Africa celebrate with a priest at most once every month. This is a pastoral problem not limited to the African church. The West continues to experience shortages of priests, leading to a denial of Mass and ready access to the Eucharist. The situation imposes a “fast” or abstinence” from the source and summit of our liturgy, the Eucharist, which is the most fundamental spiritual nourishment. Now with the merging of parishes and the shortage of priests in the West, the laity must travel further, sometimes much further, to find Eucharistic celebrations, sometimes at a time that conflicts with their schedule. James Keane’s article in an America Magazine (“The Uncertain Future of Catholic Ireland”) referenced the

---

1014 When I was ordained, my early Masses in my village church, (Sacred Heart of Jesus, Princiso-Atase) brought to my attention the problem of marriage and Eucharistic famine. I realized that after Mass only the Church President and few widows and widowers and children stepped forward for communion. 90 percent of the church population of married men and women were cut off because they had not performed their church wedding. Based on my inquiry, they never saw the need of performing another wedding after their official and traditional marriage. “I am only married to one wife and faithful to her so why is it a problem for the Church to accept the marriage? Must I perform the ‘obroni’ marriage before I am worthy to receive communion?” a church member retorted when I asked why he doesn’t receive communion.

1015 As a common expression in the Church, Archbishop Raphael Ndingi Mwana’a Nzeki Ndingi, applied the term in his intervention at the First African Synod in Rome in April 1994.
“sacramental famine brought on by clergy shortages that may prove even more painful for Ireland than the United States.”

2. Secondly, ‘Eucharistic famine’ is experienced by many African Catholics who cannot receive the Eucharist because they are not officially married in the Catholic Church. From my ten-year pastoral experiences, it would be far from an exaggeration to support the surveys that said about 60% of adult Catholics in Ghana who go to mass on Sunday had not had their marriages sacramentalized. This does not include other practicing Catholics who divorced and remarried or married civilly outside the Catholic Church.

The concern here is not so much on the shortage of priests but more on the marriage conditions of the African church, which has been a canonical hindrance for many traditionally married Catholics to participate in the Eucharist. M. Cleary could be right in saying: “In many places of Africa and Madagascar, large numbers of baptized are not able to receive communion because of their marital situation.” Again, Bishop Boniface Tshosa from Botswana sees the situation as painful, especially when he compares the theology of the Church as the family of God and the philosophical foundation of the African family paradigm. He writes:

Many [people], because of what we call irregular marriage situations cannot receive the Eucharist -- the Food of Life. In Botswana, food is a symbol of welcome, of togetherness, of sharing, of celebration, of solidarity. To exclude someone from the Eucharist in Botswana, is interpreted as being excluded from God’s company and God’s love. Words expressing otherwise do not convince.

From the African context, food brings a sense of inclusion and communion to families and those at meals. The meal symbolizes not only the family we share but more. It strengthens the bond of

---

1017 Healey Pastoral, “Responses to the Worldwide Eucharistic Famine,” 3.
1018 M. Cleary, Church as Family: Dialogue between African Culture and the Church, 948.
togetherness. This idea must be enforced in the ongoing African process of inculturation in Africa. Excluding some members from the eucharistic meal is a scandal in the strict sense of the philosophy and socio-cultural foundation of the African family gathering or feasting. The post-missionary era of the African church cannot continue to look on to a wounded church without healing the many that are spiritually hungry for the Lord under the species of bread and wine.

The situation of “Eucharistic Famine” in the church is a total defeat of the intention of the Fathers of Vatican II, who described the liturgy as the “summit toward which the activity of the Church is directed; at the same time it is the font from which all her power flows.” The Catechism of the Catholic Church reiterates the same point: “The Eucharist is “the source and summit of the Christian life.” “The other sacraments, and indeed all ecclesiastical ministries and works of the apostolate, are bound up with the Eucharist and are oriented toward it. For in the blessed Eucharist is contained the whole spiritual good of the Church, namely Christ himself, our Pasch.”

4.20. The African (Akan) Voice for Ecclesio-Pastoral Marriage Review: An Urgent Concern within a Synodal Church

Since the Tridentine doctrine on marriage, the African and, for that matter, Akan traditional marriage ceremony has never been considered a sacrament. After the Council of Trent, the Church defended marriage as a sacrament that could only be celebrated in canonical form. On the other hand, protestants argued that contracting and conducting marriage under the

---

1020 Chinua Achebe expresses in “Things Fall Apart”, the significance for a brother to call his kinsmen to a feast when he writes, “A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so.” Chinua Achebe, Things Fall Apart, (New York: Penguin Books, 2017). The book was first published in 1994.
1021 SC. 10.
1022 SC. 10.
church’s jurisdiction was purely an effort to stop clandestine unions for a public ones.\textsuperscript{1023} The Western Christianity (Catholic) view and theology of marriage became the standard that was literally imposed on all catholic mission churches for which Ghana is no exception. The western model of marriage practices, ceremonies, and procedures today are the recognized church practice in the Catholic church of Ghana. However, the church’s liturgical tradition, theology, and Canon Law had failed to incorporate and reflect the cultures and practices of the traditional Akan marriage system. Ngundu, reflecting on the church’s marriage and African customary marriage, succinctly questioned the current rite in the church: “What we question here is whether ecclesiastical and civil marriage legislation passed in Europe to meet specific European marital and social problems in different cultural generations can justifiably be extended to African Christians in Africa (and the rest of the non-Western world).”\textsuperscript{1024} Again, it is essential to ask this: Since the church’s teachings on marriage today cannot be separated from Greaco Roman and Western cultures, what would have happened to African culture and rite of marriage if Catholicism was started in Africa and spread to the other continents? Since it is obvious the Church’s marriage practices grew out of culture (western),\textsuperscript{1025} it cannot be imposed wholly on a different culture without first drawing the Church’s theology and understanding of faith out of the indigenous culture of encounter.

Today, more than ever, there is an urgent call for an ecclesiastical reevaluation of marriage in Africa. This evaluation seeks to harmonize the African (Akan) customary marriage system with the church’s theological and canonical marriage. As an old problem, the Ghana

\textsuperscript{1023} Clandestine marriage was practiced in Holland, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, and England. See Harold C.N. Williams, \textit{20th Century Cathedral}, Hodder and Stoughton, 1964:13f.

\textsuperscript{1024} Ngundu, “Mission Churches and African Customary Marriage,”

Catholic Bishop’s Conference must intensify its effort to study the pastoral problem to the core and find a solution for the Ghana church. According to P. Gundani, the need for such evaluation is not an intellectual quest but a matter of pastoral praxis.\textsuperscript{1026} An ecclesiastical review of marriage that considers the Akans’ customs and cultures and intends to make marriage relevant to the Akan converts will undoubtedly necessitate a new outcome that will be different from the Catholic world of the West. The review will bring to light the way marriage is contracted and celebrated as different from Western Catholicism.

Africa needs Catholicism that reflects its cultures and values instead of living the values of the West in the name of religion and faith. From the perspective of the universal church, the African church needs to be Christian from its own cultures and values. The universal Catholic Church acknowledges this truth, but it seems only in words. There have been many papal exhortations for the African church to strive for African identity. To build an African church, many African ecclesial leaders at various synods have pushed for the inculturation of the African marriage. Still, there has been no practical improvement, leaving indigenous married Catholic couples in perpetual spiritual impoverishment. They are spiritually and ecclesiologically cut off from the body of Christ gathered around the table of the Lord.

From the perspective of the universal church, Pope Paul VI, in his homily at the Eucharistic celebration at the conclusion of the symposium organized by the Bishops of Africa in Kampala (Uganda 1969), called on the African church to work toward a Christianity that proceeds from the African identity. He writes:

The expression, that is, the language and mode of manifesting this one Faith may be manifold, hence it may be original, suited to the tongue, the style, the character, the genius and the culture of the one who professes this one Faith. From

this point of view, certain pluralism is not only legitimate, but desirable. An adaptation of the Christian life in the fields of pastoral, ritual, didactic and spiritual activities is not only possible, it is even favoured by the Church...And in this sense you may, and you must, have an African Christianity. Indeed you possess human values and characteristic forms of culture which can rise up to perfection so as to find in Christianity, and for Christianity, a true superior fullness and prove to be capable of a richness of expression all its own and genuinely African.1027

Working towards African identity, the pastoral problem created by traditional African marriage and church marriage was raised at the African Synod in 1994. The Synod Father, Cardinal Thiandoum, the Archbishop of Dakar, Senegal, had the following to say:

Marriage and family need to be looked at more closely, in order to recover and promote the precious values of the traditional African family. This could be a great contribution to finding an effective response to the crisis of the family in many modern societies. We need greater appreciation for our various customary laws of marriage and serious effort to harmonize them with Church laws on marriage.1028

At the same Synod, Bishop Raphael Nzeki from Kenya contributed forcefully by pointing to African customary marriage. He touched on the pastoral reality on the ground:

Many of our Christian faithful have finalized their marriage according to the African customs of their own tribe but for different reasons… they have not yet come to the Church for sacramental marriage… In the meantime they are considered by the Church to be living in concubinage because their traditional marriage has no canonical value. The consequence is that they are deprived of the reception of the sacraments, which, in the expression of some of our priests leads to a ‘Eucharistic famine’ of many Catholics in our parishes.1029

---


These synod fathers called for the church’s attention to harmonize Canon Law with African traditional customary marriage laws. The comment of Philip Knight on the proceedings of the synod is not far from the truth that the suggestions of the synod fathers were not welcomed with enthusiasm.\textsuperscript{1030} As a prominent topic in the synodal discussion, it was unanticipated that the post-synodal document, \textit{Ecclesia in Africa} hardly featured the issue.\textsuperscript{1031} \textit{Ecclesia in Africa} confirmed “the classic vision of Christian Sacramental marriage independent of reference to the cultural context of Africa.”\textsuperscript{1032}

Interestingly, in his discourse with the Bishops of Zaire in 1980 and the Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, \textit{Ecclesia in Africa}, Pope John Paul II rightly identified the need for inculturation and Africanization of the Church.\textsuperscript{1033} The Pope describes this effort as indispensable for the church towards making Christ known. He said:

One of the aspects of this evangelisation is the inculturation of the Gospel, the africanisation of the Church... That is part of the indispensable efforts to incarnate the message of Christ.\textsuperscript{1034}

Along the same lines, the pope was keen on finding a synthesis between cultures and faith in his apostolic exhortation \textit{Ecclesia in Africa}. In addressing the synodal fathers, the pope echoed the fathers’ priority for a synthetization or dialogue of the faith with the African culture. He wrote the following:

\textsuperscript{1030} Archbishop Vincenzo Fagiolo, President of the Pontifical Council of Legislative Texts, encouraged the Synod Bishops to use the present Code of Canon Law and supported the setting up of faculties of Canon Law in Africa. \textit{L’Osservatore Romano (English Weekly edition)} N.18 4 May 1994 p 14.
\textsuperscript{1031} Passing comments on the discussion may be alluded to in \textit{Ecclesia in Africa} 50 and 64. Italic is original.
\textsuperscript{1034} John Paul II, to the Bishops of Zaire; \textit{AAS}, 72, 1980, 342.
By reason of its deep conviction that “the synthesis between culture and faith is not only a demand of culture but also of faith”, because “a faith that does not become culture is not fully accepted, not entirely thought out, not faithfully lived,” the Special Assembly for Africa of the Synod of Bishops considered inculturation a priority and an urgent task in the life of Africa’s particular Churches. Only in this way can the Gospel be firmly implanted in the Continent’s Christian communities.\(^{1035}\)

Despite identifying the urgent demand of the synod fathers to inculturate marriage for Catholicism in Africa, the topic never had a chapter to explore the possibility, let alone charging the African leadership to propose an outline or draft for the apostolic exhortation. It is not an exaggeration to say, therefore, that on the one hand, Catholicism encourages inculturation in the church to ensure that the followers of Christ will ever more fully assimilate the Gospel message while remaining faithful to all authentic African values,\(^{1036}\) but on the other hand, the thought of inculturating church marriage to resonate with African Catholics and their cultures has remained a detested theological and canonical topic for the church. Pope John Paul II attested to the concerns of the synod fathers about Christian marriage and family life when he wrote: “A major challenge emphasized almost unanimously by the Episcopal Conferences of Africa in their replies to the Lineamenta concerned Christian marriage and family life.”\(^{1037}\) The question unanswered is why the synod fathers’ discussions were not addressed in the post-synodal apostolic exhortation. Is it because it is an African problem and not a European one? In other words, if it were a western issue, would the Church not find a quick remedy to address it just as it does for most theological and canonical problems that confront Europe and the Americas? For how long must the African Church continue to suffer before African marriage would be

---

\(^{1035}\) John Paul II, “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa.”

\(^{1036}\) John Paul II, “Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation Ecclesia in Africa.”

\(^{1037}\) Ibid.
considered a sacrament in the eyes of the Church? Must African values always be overshadowed or subsumed into European practices and values?

Today, the Church’s doctrinal position and Canon Law continue to present difficulties for African Catholics who wish to marry in the church. It has been argued that the African continent has diversified cultural marriage traditions and practices, so which of them should be used as a point of reference to harmonize with the church’s law? Thomas Ankrah of Ghana asserts this when he says, “the influence of social and religious traditions together with the diversity of cultural units makes it impossible to write about a singular African marriage tradition within the Christian church.”1038 While this is true, this dissertation holds that there is no need to write a single African marriage tradition. Instead, the various African Catholic Bishops’ Conferences can carefully study the marriage cultures and customs within their canonical jurisdiction and task experts like anthropologists, theologians, canon and civil lawyers, and liturgical commission to draft a marriage guideline that brings into sharp focus the values of the indigenous people’s custom without trivializing the essential elements of catholic marriage. The various cultural diversities of marriages in the African continent are a gift to be celebrated and not collapsed into one. Many traditionally married Catholics feel partially cut off from the church’s community due to marriage. There seems to be no urgency in finding the right medicine to heal them other than affirming one canonical position that has subsumed the African culture, practices, and marriage identity into one which is more a European culture and legal system baptized into the church. If these members are part of the body of Christ, then they deserve to eat from the banquet and drink from the font of healing of the body and blood of Christ.

In conclusion, the African church cries for a paradigm shift in the Church’s theology of marriage and rite that has total recognition and respect for the African culture and custom of marriage, not only in words but practice. This cry is not oblivious to the points of divergence between the Church’s marriage and traditional African or Akan marriages. Despite this divergence, there are various points of convergence, a better ground to theologize for a harmonized African-Catholic marriage rite in Catholicism. This dissertation seeks to propose a new paradigm that considers and differentiates the essential elements from the external forms, the canonical laws of the church, and the marriage guideline to ensure that both the church traditions and the African/Akan custom are not trivialized.


This section considers the essential elements of Catholic marriage and the hindrances that Catholicism identifies with African/Akan marriage to be accepted as a sacrament. What aspect of one’s culture serves as a hindrance and ought to be reviewed, and what part is worth adopting? From that background, the dissertation will consider to what degree church and Akan marriage traditions can culturally dialogue for a merged marriage rite that is truly African/Akan and truly Catholic.

4.22. Essential Elements of the Sacrament of Marriage

The Catholic sacrament of marriage has been distinguished from other cultural marriages based on the following essential elements. By this distinction, it becomes difficult for the Church to accept any cultural way of marriage that is contrary to these essentials. Therefore, in his address after the opening of the AMECEA Plenary Study Session on the theme, “Families Truly
Christian and Truly African,” on April 28, 1986, Joseph Cardinal Tomko indicated the following as the essential elements of catholic marriage.

a. Marriage as a Pact/Covenant

Firstly, catholic marriage is considered a pact or covenant between a man and a woman for the communion of life, a personal communion of the spouses.\(^ {1039}\) The covenantal union between the spouses is an earthly representation of the “covenant between God and his people, the new and eternal Covenant sealed with the blood of Christ; a physico-psychical communion which aims at generation, even if this does not exhaust its meaning.”\(^ {1040}\) As a communion, it concerns both the spouses and the community.\(^ {1041}\)

Akan marriage has always been understood as a pact between spouses and their families. Onyankopon (God) is the divine being who brings the union He ordained before the world’s beginning into a reality. In that sense, Akan marriage is both a secular and sacred pact. During the marriage ceremony, libation is poured, invoking the blessing of Onyankopon, the source of the covenant, the gods, and ancestors who are all part of the Akan community. On this ground, the Church and the Akan concept of marriage may be differently explained, but the core of being a pact cannot be overemphasized.

b. Unity of Marriage

Catholicism teaches that conjugal love involves two components, but it essentially “aims at a deeply personal unity,” intimate and indestructible.\(^ {1042}\) This unity is expressed in scripture. When Adam was contemplating his wife, he said, “This one at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my


\(^{1040}\) Tomko, “Inculturation and African Marriage.”

\(^{1041}\) Ibid., 160.

\(^{1042}\) Ibid., 160.
flesh. This one shall be called Woman, for from man was she taken.”

In the like manner, the book of Matthew also writes: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

According to Cardinal Tomko, the words of the book of Genesis indicate that the union between Adam and Eve in the plan of God was monogamous, a system of marriage that was not the socio-cultural norm in the context within which the book was written. From this context, Pope John Paul argues that polygamy is not a product of the Mediterranean Western culture but rather from a Semitic origin.

This monogamy, which is not of Western but Semitic origin, appears as the expression of the interpersonal relationship, the one in which each of the partners is recognised by the other in an equal value and in the totality of his person. This monogamous and personalistic conception of the human couple is an absolutely original revelation, which bears the mark of God, and which deserves to be studied more and more deeply.

From the Akan perspective, customary marriage allows polygamy, but as it will be argued later, the wisdom of the Akans depicted in their proverbs always points to monogamy as the ideal.

c. Indissolubility

Thirdly, catholic marriage is indissoluble. The code of Canon Law measures as an essential of catholic marriage unity alongside indissolubility: “The essential properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, which in Christian marriage obtain a special firmness by reason of the sacrament.” As an essential element, the Church has always considered conjugal love as that

---

1043 Genesis 2: 23.
1044 Matthew 19:5-6.
1047 John Paul II, Homily to the Families, Kinshasa, May 3, 1980. AAS, 72, 15, 80, 425.
1048 This will be extensively argued under polygamy in Akan society.
1049 Can. 1056.
which “demands indissolubility and faithfulness in definitive mutual giving.” The theology of indissolubility of marriage is often inspired by Matthew 19:6. In his dialogue with his interlocutors who asked him the question about the indissolubility of marriage (Is it lawful to divorce one’s wife for any cause? Mt 19:6), Jesus avoided getting trapped in juridico-casuistical controversies. Instead, he answered by referring to the beginning of Genesis, which the Pharisees knew very well:

Have you not read that he who made them from the beginning made them male and female, and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh? So they are no longer two but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder.’

Inspired by these words of Jesus, the Church has always proclaimed that a successful celebration of a valid marriage bond cannot be broken. The spouses enter a valid marriage knowing that their consent to give and accept the other freely is irrevocable.

The Council Fathers of Vatican II, in the light of Christian indissolubility, described marriage as an intimate union in which two persons mutually gift themselves to each other for their good and the procreation of children. By the nature of this very intimate union, spouses impose on themselves a “total fidelity” of an “unbreakable oneness between them.” The Council implies that the conjugal love between the spouses is unique, exclusive, and irrevocable, just as Christ’s love for his church is unique, exclusive, and definitive.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) also affirms the essentiality of indissolubility in these words.

---

1051 Matthew 19:3-9.
1052 GS. 48.
1053 GS. 48.
Thus the marriage bond has been established by God himself in such a way that a marriage concluded and consummated between baptized persons can never be dissolved. This bond, which results from the free human act of the spouses and their consummation of the marriage, is a reality, henceforth irrevocable, and gives rise to a covenant guaranteed by God’s fidelity. The Church does not have the power to contravene this disposition of divine wisdom.\footnote{Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 1640.}

By these three essentials, Cardinal Tomko decisively affirms that the Church has no power to compromise or change the fixed nucleus of Christ. By unity and indissolubility, spouses must consciously and decisively remain strangers to all manner of life that will destroy the beauty of their union, such as adultery and divorce, because the God who called them to marriage, continues to call to marriage.\footnote{The Order of Celebrating Matrimony, (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2016), 9 and 11.} As her mission, the Church continues to profess and teach that the Sacrament of Marriage is a life-long commitment that can only be broken by death, not even by the Catholic Church. Sacramental marriage becomes efficacious when the Church concretizes and celebrates marriage by meticulously ensuring that these essentials are in place. Cardinal Tomko has said the following:

There is need for distinguishing between the central nucleus — the substantia — of the rite, established by Christ himself, and the further determination of the same/\footnote{Tomko, “Inculturation and African Marriage,” 161.} Now the Church has no power over the above-mentioned nucleus fixed by Christ (salva eorum substantia], which must always be conserved in the celebration of the sacraments. But it has the power to enlarge and concretise the nucleus with the effect that only the rite, elaborated by the Church, can be considered as an efficacious sign which, when once it has taken place, gives existence to the sacrament.

The implications of these essential elements of catholic marriage have undoubtedly emphasized monogamy and no open for divorce. Unfortunately, these seem to have closed any discussion on the marriage system of polygamy despite the pastoral problems it continues to create for many Catholics, especially in Ghana.
4.23. Polygamous and Divorce in Marriage: Hindrance to African-Catholic Marriage

In the eyes of the Church, polygamy is never accepted. Kampungu points out that polygamous marriage is inconsistent with the theology of the Church in canon § 1125 in the Code of Canon Law. By analogy, Kampungu argued that “it would lead to the same conclusion as a marriage contracted in terms of a system of civil law that incorporated and allowed divorce as an acceptable practice.” Writing from the African context, Vieyra asserted that African customary unions are not marriages due to polygamy: “No polygamous union can be a matrimonium and no State can make it so, for it is a union entered into on the basis that if a man should desire to take further wives he is free to do so.” Of course, Vieyra assertion has been challenged. For instance, for his part, Professor Vijverberg emphasized that customary unions

[...] because it is a lasting union between a man and a woman, tolerated by law as a real source of rights and obligations which, according to the natural order of things, can only come forth from lawful wedlock.

As a marriage system, customary union is tolerated by law, but the polygamous aspect of it has always conflicted with the Church’s doctrine of unity and indissolubility of marriage. Inherent in a polygamous marriage is the male option to contract another marriage with another woman. In this sense, in the spirit of intercultural dialogue, catholic marriage should be able to merge with customary marriage when the practice of polygamy is excluded.

---

1059 Armand Reuter, Native Marriages in South Africa According to Law and Custom, (Aschendorfsche Verlagsbuchhandlung: Minister, 1963), 5. In the Akan society, even though the man can take another wife, he is charged with a compensation for the first wife. This was to deter men from marrying more than a wife.
1061 Reuter, Native Marriages in South Africa According to Law and Custom, 6.
1062 See pages 63-65 already discussed about the church teaching on unity and indissolubility.
In his address after the opening of the AMECEA Plenary Study Session on the theme, “Families Truly Christian and Truly African,” on April 28, 1986, Joseph Cardinal Tomko was emphatic on the issue of polygamy. He acknowledged that even though polygamy is quite diffuse in some countries, it *radically contradicts* the unity of Christian marriage because it “directly negates the plan of God, which was revealed from the beginning because it is contrary to the equal personal dignity of men and women who in matrimony give themselves with a love that is total and therefore unique and exclusive.”\(^\text{1063}\)

Pope John Paul II addressed the bishops of Kenya on August 18, 1985, and acknowledged that polygamy cannot be deleted from the Old Testament, but the New Testament restored marriage to its originality. The Pope wrote: “In the Old Testament polygamy was sometimes tolerated. But in the New Covenant, our Saviour restored marriage to its original state as a communion between one man and one wife.”\(^\text{1064}\) By contrasting the Old Testament and the restoration of marriage in the New Covenant, the pope implicitly underlined that a polygamous marriage has no place in the Church’s practices.

As the Catholic Church seeks to evangelize all nations, there have been instances where polygamous men and their wives converted to the faith. How has the Church addressed issues in such a manner concerning the reception of the sacraments, especially the Holy Eucharist? According to church teachings, within a polygamous situation, only one of the marriages, the first one, is considered a legitimate marriage and thus possesses the dignity of a valid marriage.\(^\text{1065}\) This is because, in the context of the exchange of consent of polygamous marriage, it is never done on equal terms of conjugal fidelity. How does consent allow the man to take

\(^\text{1063}\) Tomko, Inculturation and African Marriage, 161. See also *Familiaris Consortio*, 19, Gaudium et Spes, 49.
\(^\text{1065}\) Henriques, “The Roman Catholic response to customary unions in South Africa 1948-2012.”
another wife or wives in the future, but the woman is restricted to one partner? This is a perpetuation of a double standard De Muelenaere emphasized.\textsuperscript{1066}

The Catholic historian Adrian Hastings summarized polygamy in his report on Christian marriage in Africa when he was commissioned by the Anglican Archbishops of Cape Town, Central Africa, Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in 1973. Hasting made four major points:

a. Polygamy is simply a sin, comparable with adultery.
b. Polygamy is an inferior form of marriage, not sinful where it is the custom but always unacceptable for Christians.
c. Polygamy is a form of marriage less satisfactory than monogamy and one which cannot do justice to the full spirit of Christian marriage, but in certain circumstances individual Christians can still put up with it, as they put up with slavery, dictatorial governments, and much else.
d. Polygamy is a form of marriage, monogamy another. Each has its advantages and disadvantages; they are appropriate to different types of society. It is not the task of the Church to make an absolute judgment between them.\textsuperscript{1067}

Hastings concludes that A and D should be excluded altogether, but B and C need closer consideration by the Christian observer. From the ground of intercultural dialogue, the Anglican Church reported a resolution different from traditional Catholic teaching. According to the report, it was impractical to withdraw from the situation completely. In some circumstances, an opening was made to accept those who want to be baptized with their wives and children while they remain in a polygamous marriage.\textsuperscript{1068} The Anglican Church pastorally refused to go the road of the Catholic Church. The reason for not asking for the separation is that in such situations, the woman and children suffer much from the consequences of the breakup. However, such a decision is made in agreement with the local Christian community in a manner that will not cause any scandal in the church. Hasting further suggested that each case must be treated

\textsuperscript{1066} Henriques, “The Roman Catholic response to customary unions in South Africa 1948-2012.”
\textsuperscript{1068} Ibid., 77.
differently. For instance, a case of a man with ten wives cannot be treated the same as a man with two wives.

For the Catholic Church, a polygamous husband has one option if he wants to receive the sacraments: to keep the first wife and divorce the rest. Though it might work for the Anglican Church and other denominations, the Catholic Church has been firm on scripture, doctrine, and canon law as a guide to regulate the pastoral solution in such matters.


Archbishop Peter Sarpong has been at the forefront of interreligious and cultural dialogue in the history of Catholicism in Ghana. As a strong figure in inculturation, the problem of African-Catholic marriage has been of more significant concern. In his book, *Odd Customs: Stereotypes and Prejudices*, Peter Sarpong addressed the issue of polygamy. He sadly pointed out that “Africans in general are unfairly treated as polygamists.”\(^{1069}\) He argued that polygamy is not a prerogative of Africans but is practiced globally in different forms.\(^ {1070}\) However, Sarpong acknowledges that in the Akan culture, especially the Asantes, there are cogent reasons for polygamous marriages. It is important to ask if the practice has been part of the culture or is just an aberration. Sarpong seems to suggest that polygamy has not been an intrinsic part of the Akan culture but an addition at a point in time. According to him, a critical examination of the Asante proverbs indicates that polygamy is not an approved practice though part of the culture. The Asante proverb which says, *Akokonini adankwamo, ne yeremon aduoson nson nso odware mfuturo* (the cock has seventy-seven wives, but it bathes in dust).\(^ {1071}\) The culture intends to say what is the essence of keeping all these wives when none can provide you with clean water to


wash. Another Asante proverb said, “Wo yerenom du a, wo tekrema du” (if you have ten wives, you have ten tongues). To have ten tongues makes you a chief liar. The husband says different things and praises each woman as the most beautiful, surpassing cook and more industrious than all at different times when he is alone with each different wife. Another Akan wisdom says Mmaa aware ny3 hwee, s3 ohia (Multiplicity of wives is nothing but poverty).

Again, a cultural norm among the Akans compels a man who intends to be polygamous to ask for permission from his first wife. This indicates that the man can have other wives, but the consent and needs of the first wife are paramount. When this consent is freely or compulsorily given by the wife, the husband must compensate the first wife. Further, among the Asantes, it is believed that in the other world (asamando), the polygamist is only married to the first wife. From the wisdom and beliefs of the Akans as explained above, it becomes obvious that monogamy is the preferred system of marriage and not polygamy. So why is polygamy prevalent among Akans?

Peter Sarpong answered that it had been practiced everywhere and the Old Testament gives instances of polygamists—Abraham, Moses, David, Solomon, etc. Sarpong attributes the reason for polygamy to human concupiscence. Human weakness and inclinations toward carnal pleasure make some men uncomfortable to stay with one wife, he said. This is a universal

---

1072 Ibid., 59.
1073 Ibid., 59.
1074 This is not to say that when the wife objects to the man’s request to marry another wife he cannot go ahead with his plans. He is culturally supported to go ahead but the same culture demands of him as a sign of respect to ask for a permission.
1075 This compensation is called “mpatade3”-to pacify the first wife. Usually, the wife is free to ask for whatever will appease her heart, and the man is obliged to fulfill that.
1076 Sarpong, Old Custom: Stereotypes and Prejudices, 60.
1077 In contemporary Ghana, especially within the cities, majority of Akans marry in the monogamous fashion probably due to the influence of globalization and Christianity. That notwithstanding, polygamy is still common in the rural settings of Ghana.
1078 Sarpong, Old Custom: Stereotypes and Prejudices, 60.
inclination. It appears common in Africa because in the Asante culture, for instance, when a woman is menstruating, she is forbidden to prepare food for the household.\textsuperscript{1079} There is usually a separate house for them to move in. In order not to lose the services of the wife for the four-seven days in the month during menstruation, or for biological reasons of childbirth, or when the wife travels to her hometown for cultural and social events like funerals, weddings, etc., the Asante man will have another wife to take up the household responsibilities.

There is also a cultural and social honor attached to procuring multiple children, and that has encouraged many Akan men to marry more than one to give birth to many children. The multiplicity of children is also connected with the division of labor in the household and the farm. The children help the father on the farm, tend the livestock, or hunt with him. Polygamy in the Akan culture has served a purpose, Sarpong added.\textsuperscript{1080}

Sarpong contends that we must not rush in condemning polygamy when he said we must not “rush to condemn something which was prevalent among God’s own people, the Jews…we should judge polygamy with the sympathy which the social milieux in which it sprang up deserve.”\textsuperscript{1081} Archbishop Emeritus Sarpong did not hesitate to admit that the reasons enumerated in support of polygamy are no longer valid. From the Christian context, he quoted scripture in support of the catholic stance: And have joy of the wife of your youth (Prov. 5:18); but because of cases of immorality, every man should have his own wife, and every woman her own husband.

\textsuperscript{1079} Menstruation from the positive perspective in the Akan society highlights gender purity and the powerful and purifying aspects of it. It is believed that through the power of the menstruating blood, women are able to use it as a love charm and potion. Again, it can also enable a woman to receive greater care and attention from the husband. To avoid this a menstruating woman is not allowed to cook for the husband. Cf. Abraham Rosman and Paul G. Rubel, \textit{The Tapestry of Culture: An Introduction to Cultural Anthropology} (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 1995), 117.

\textsuperscript{1080} Sarpong, \textit{Old Custom: Stereotypes and Prejudices}, 62.

\textsuperscript{1081} Sarpong, \textit{Old Custom: Stereotypes and Prejudices}, 62. Interestingly Sarpong sees monogamy to have been the norm but he was of the view that if Christians are serious in eradicating polygyny from the church in favor of monogamy, they must produce very good reasons to the rationales favoring it. Ibid., 60.
(1 Cor. 7:2); But from the beginning of creation, God made them male and female (Mk. 10:6); For I hate divorce (Mal. 2:16).

In conclusion, it is worth stating that culture evolves, and just as the people of Israel’s marriage of polygamy in the Old Testament gradually evolved into monogamy in the New Testament through the words of Jesus and Paul, the Church must journey with the African culture and pastorally investigate each case individually to discover the best way to provide pastoral care for family in polygamous situations. Since polygamy is in total contradiction with the Church’s essential teachings on unity and indissolubility, this dissertation focuses on providing pastoral solutions to families that are in customary marriage and have resolved to keep it monogamous and unbreakable till death. In that sense, the hindrance of polygamy and divorce would not be an issue.\textsuperscript{1082}


In light of the inculturation and contextualization of the African Catholic marriage, this dissertation wants to reecho some pastoral solutions suggested by some African theologians and further build upon those for the consideration of the church, particularly the church in Ghana among the Akans. This will contribute to making the faith truly African/Akan and truly Catholic. This proposal aims to Africanize Catholic marriage, to reduce the eucharistic hunger in the Ghana Catholic Church. The initiative brings back into focus the words of the German theologian Karl Rahner, who said in 1979,

The [Catholic] Church must be inculturated throughout the world if it is to be a world Church….This, then, is the issue: either the church sees and recognizes these essential differences of other cultures for which she should become a World Church and with a Pauline boldness draws the necessary consequences from this

\textsuperscript{1082} Future research work can focus on polygamy among the Akans and marriage in the Church.
In the spirit of inculturation that seeks to liberate African marriage from being subsumed or overshadowed by church marriage and to remedy the increased eucharistic hunger in the African/Akan church, this dissertation proposes two paradigms for consideration by the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference. It can also serve as a paradigm to guide other African countries. The proposals consider the canonical, theological, and civil laws that govern marriage in the church and the country. The two proposals are:

a. Option I: Rite of Marriage for African/Akan Couples (RoMAC).

b. Option II: Rite of African-Catholic Marriage for Monogamous Union (RacMMu).

**a. Option I: Akan Married Couples, the Eucharist, and RoMAC Program**

Those who fall under this category are Akan Catholics who have already married customarily and have satisfied all the traditional demands and procedures recognized by the Akan traditional marriage system. These couples are in a monogamous marriage and are ready to register their marriage under the Ordinance Marriage of 1951, also called CAP 127.

Currently, all those who are officially married under the Akan customary marriage system before joining the church and those who were Catholics before they performed their traditional wedding and have not married in the church are all restricted by church laws from participating in Holy Communion. In most dioceses in Ghana, such Catholics cannot take up a higher church position.\(^{1083}\) Taking a clue from the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA), an intriguing proposal below aims to promote and elevate the many traditionally married couples to approach the eucharistic sacrament. From the background of inculturation, since the Ghana

---

\(^{1083}\) For instance, in the Sekondi-Takoradi Diocese, only communicates are allowed to hold church positions like the president and the vice president of the church. Sometimes in the villages, such rules may be relaxed but it has always been a norm for the president to be a communicant.
Catholic Bishops’ Conference already recognizes in part the customary marriage in the church,\(^{1084}\) this dissertation proposes a “Rite of Marriage for African/Akan Couples (RoMAC).” With a five-Week intensive, structured program within the liturgical year, beginning from the first week of the Advent Season, the Church journeys and catechizes these Akan married couples for the reception of the Eucharist. The following liturgical, doctrinal, and social topics may be relevant as part of their catechesis: Sacraments (concentration on Baptism, Confessions, Eucharist, Holy Matrimony), Christian family life (the socio-economic, psychological, and spiritual challenges, children formation, the health of the family, home management, conflict resolution, etc.), Parish life (rights and responsibility of a Catholic in the Church),\(^{1085}\) etc.

During their catechetical sessions, the couples must register their customary marriage under the Customary Marriage and Divorce Registration Law, 1985 (PNDCL 112) and Marriage by Ordinance if not already done.\(^{1086}\) This indicates that the couples have agreed to perpetually live together as husband and wife under the Church’s ideal of unity and indissolubility of marriage.\(^{1087}\) This registration indirectly also supports the above-explained point of Asante wisdom in their proverbs that monogamy is the ideal. Again, the pastor ensures that the couples fill out all the pre-nuptial forms and append their signature to all the details prescribed by the Ghana Catholic Church. Just as the state gives notice of publication and certificate of the

\(^{1084}\) Ghana Catholic church demands that the will-be groom and bride perform the Akan customary marriage as a prerequisite to the celebration of the church marriage.

\(^{1085}\) Diocese and parishes can add topics relevant to the local church and plan them to fit into the five-week catechetical program for all customary married Akan Catholics.

\(^{1086}\) Most celebrated customary marriages are usually not registered even though the law of Ghana requires the spouses to register the marriage with the State. The pastor must ensure that the spouses produce a certificate of the State indicating their marriage registration.

\(^{1087}\) Though spouses can make the option to register their marriage under Customary Marriage and Divorce Registration Law, 1985 (PNDCL 112), this program demands them to further register with the Marriage by Ordinance. This marriage prohibits all forms of polygamous marriage.
registered marriage,\textsuperscript{1088} the Church will also publish bans on three consecutive Sundays (during the first three Sundays of Advent). These couples are introduced to the congregants on the Fourth Sunday of Advent. The Church prays for them and congratulates them for journeying thus far. It is also a way to ask the Church to report to the priest, catechist, or the team in charge of their RoMAC sessions any act that contradicts the Christian marriage life they intend to undertake. An Advent retreat is specially organized for them, connecting their preparatory journey as being in the desert to prepare their hearts and minds to receive the Lord under the species of bread and wine. The spouses must be offered the opportunity to celebrate the rite of penance and reconciliation on this day.

On the Solemnity of the Holy Family of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, the final rite of RoMAC is performed. On this day, all the couples, dressed in their beautiful traditional Kente cloth (or any descent clothes), in procession follow the priest and other ministers to the altar. They reverently bow and take their reserved seats at the first front pews/chairs. After the homily (which should touch on marriage and family life in connection to the day’s readings and occasion), all the couples stand before the altar facing the priest. The priest liturgically greets and congratulates them for their training. He then briefly introduces the commitments they are about to make and asks if they are ready. Holding their hands, the priest leads them to reaffirm their consent which took place at their customary marriages.\textsuperscript{1089} The priest then prays the Church’s nuptial blessings on the spouses while they kneel in prayer. Then at communion, these couples

\textsuperscript{1088} The pastor in charge must ask for copies of these certificates and file them in the parish marriage achieve as a proof that the couple have agreed to live together as husband and wife in a monogamous manner till death separates them.

\textsuperscript{1089} This proposal requires them to reaffirm their consent because it happened at the traditional marriage ceremony without the presence of the priest. This will satisfy the canonical requirement of “canonical form.” That is not to say that the consent was not valid. It is rather an opportunity for the Church to also bear testimony to their marriage. The liturgical Commission can draft a format for the exchange of consent to be used as approved by the Bishop Conference.
step out first to receive their first communion (preferably under both species) as married couples in the Catholic Church. A reception could follow this if the Church or the couples have the financial means. However, the Church must intervene to ensure that the RoMAC program is not commercialized and is done in a manner of simplicity and brevity to encourage many traditionally married Catholic couples to participate and not be deterred by the financial burden, as we often see with Holy Matrimony.

Proposed Program for the Five-Week RoMAC Sessions

**First Week of Advent**
- Sunday: First Introduction of couples to God’s People and Prayer of Ecclesial Accompaniment.
- Monday Catechesis: Sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.
- Thursday Catechesis: Sacrament of the Holy Eucharist.

**Second Week of Advent**
- Sunday: First Publication of Marriage Banns
- Monday Catechesis: Teaching on Sacraments of Marriage, Christian family life (the Domestic Church, the Socio-economic and Spiritual Challenges)
- Thursday Catechesis: Children Formation, Health, Home Management.

**Third Week of Advent**
- Sunday: Second Publication of Marriage Banns.
- Monday Catechesis: Domestic Conflict Resolution.
- Thursday Catechesis: Parish life – Rights and Responsibility of a Catholic in the Church

**Fourth Week of Advent**
- Sunday: Third Publication of Marriage Banns
- Monday Catechesis: Day of Retreat and Reconciliation

**Fifth Week: Feast of Holy Family**
- Reception After Mass (optional).

---

1090 The Diocesan Liturgical Commission can calve a prayer of Ecclesial Accompaniment for RoMAC program.
1091 In most dioceses in Ghana, the baptismal certificate has a place for marriage. This section must be documented as a testimony of their marriage in the church.
b. Option II: Rite of African-Catholic Marriage for Monogamous Union (RacMMu)

As already intimated above, in Ghana, Catholic couples must undergo more than one marriage ceremony to commune at the eucharistic table with the Church. Bishop Alberto Setele of Inhambane in Mozambique puts it beautifully: “people must enter into three forms of marriage before they are recognized as fully married. Young people who would like to ratify their marriage must at the same time submit to a traditional procedure which is very expensive, a civil procedure and a canonical procedure.” This second option, in the spirit of inculturation, works out a possibility of avoiding the duplication of marriages for prospective young couples who want to satisfy the Akan customary marriage and the church’s rite of matrimony all in a single monogamous marriage ceremony. The intention of this proposal here aligns with the words of Hilary Okeke when he said, “What is needed is therefore not so much adaptation of the Roman Rite of marriage by selecting elements of African cultures, and fitting them into this rite but a complete creation of an African Christian Rite of Marriage, which is fully African in its genus and cultural expression and fully Christian in its fidelity to the message of Christ.”

The prospect of calving an African Catholic marriage that is truly African/Akan and truly Catholic is possible because the instruction provided in the Introduction to the Rite of Marriage Section 17, a reiteration of Canon 1120, permits the local Episcopal Conferences to draw up a marriage rite suitable for the indigenous people but in keeping with the Christian spirit. The text states:

Each conference of bishops may draw up its own marriage rite suited to the usages of the place and people and approved by the Apostolic See. The rite must always conform to the law that the priest assisting at such marriages must ask for

---

1092 Emmanuel Okonkwo, “Marriage in the Christian and Igbo Traditional Context, 119.
and receive the consent of the contracting parties, and the nuptial blessing should always be given. 1094

In adapting the Rite of Marriage to the local culture and marriage system, the Bishops’ Conference is responsible for ensuring that the priest in charge receives the consent of the groom and bride. The priest also ensures that the nuptial blessing is also not omitted. In the light of this instruction and in the spirit of cultural dialogue and inculturation, this dissertation makes the following proposal specifically applicable in the case of prospective couples who are ready to enter a monogamous marriage that respects the unity and indissolubility of catholic marriage or the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 19:1-6).

1. Journey with the Couple

Unlike the Western marriage system, in most African/Akan or Ghanaian societies, the marriage system is not seen as a single contractual exchange of consent. It is “an evolutionary process involving many stages or steps.” 1095 The prospective couple must make their intentions to marry known to the Parish Priest after all the marriage preliminaries, such as the family inquiries, marriage negotiation, preliminary consent, etc., have been completed. Informing the church through the priest-in-charge is an open indication for the church to journey with the couple and their families throughout the various African/Akan marriage stages. This initiative is in line with the recommendation of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Ghana at their First National Catholic Congress held in Cape Coast in 1997. The Conference resolved that the priest or his deputy must accompany the couple by taking a keen interest in the various stages of Akan marriage to show the Church’s commitment to pastoral care for marriage vocation. 1096

---

sense, it is the responsibility of the prospective couple to inform the parish of all the various cultural stages of marriage—from knocking to the final rite of exchange of consent and payment of bridewealth.

2. A Six-Month Marriage Counseling

After being informed, the priest ensures that the will-be couple is enrolled in the parish’s six-month marriage program or structure already in place in most parishes in Ghana. The program must offer an intensive Catholic catechesis on the sacramentality of marriage and its nature of unity and indissolubility. Here, all canonical and theological requirements and details of marriage should be taught, preferably by the priest. Topics like Confession, the Holy Eucharist, Sacrament of Marriage, Family Life and Children Formation, Home Management, Domestic Violence, and Conflict Resolution, etc., should be part of the training. Priests, catechists, and marriage counselors (Parish Marriage Counseling Team) must ensure that the six-month marriage program is educative, insightful, and spiritually motivated. During this period, the pastor ensures that all the necessary pre-nuptial forms are prepared, and the customary marriage is registered under both the Customary Marriage and Divorce Registration Law, 1985 (PNDCL 112) and Marriage by Ordinance.¹⁰⁹⁷ Banns are published in the Church three times to make room for resolving any objections to the marriage by the priest and the two families.¹⁰⁹⁸ More importantly, the Parish Priest or his deputy must ensure that catechistical sessions are completed before the final day of the marriage celebration. The priest should organize a day’s retreat for the couple with the opportunity to celebrate the Sacrament of Penance for the groom-to-be and bride-to-be before the final ceremony of marriage takes place.

¹⁰⁹⁷ The Marriage by Ordinance law does not allow polygamous marriage. The couple must produce copies of the certificate of registration of the Customary and Ordinance Marriage to the priest-in-charge to be filed in the parish records.
3. Final Ceremony

On the final day of the traditional Akan marriage rites ceremony, which usually takes place in the family house of the bride-to-be, the priest or his deputy must be present (His presence is the official manifestation of the entire church). Canonically, marriages are to be celebrated in a church that has been gazetted. That notwithstanding, the *Introduction to the Rite of Marriage*, Section 18 permits marriage celebration in the home among people whose custom demands that and for the pastoral need of the people of God. The *Introduction to the Rite of Marriage* states:

> Among peoples where the marriage ceremonies customarily take place in the home, sometimes over a period of several days, these customs should be adapted to the Christian spirit and to the liturgy. In such cases the conference of bishops, according to the pastoral needs of the people, *may allow the sacramental rite to be celebrated in the home*.\(^{1099}\)

This directive is in accord with Canon 1118 §1 and §2, which give the option for a marriage between Catholics, or between a Catholic party and a baptized non-Catholic, to be celebrated in an oratory or “*in another suitable place*” by permission of the local Ordinary or of the parish priest.\(^{1100}\)

At the celebration in the home (or any suitable place), the priest, his deputy, or delegate must be present. This satisfies the canonical requirements stipulated by Can. 1108 §1 and §2 which state:

> §1 Only those marriages are valid which are contracted in the presence of the local ordinary or parish priest or deacon delegated by either of them, who, in the presence of the two witnesses, assists, in accordance however with the rules set out in the following canons, and without prejudice to the exceptions mentioned in

---


1100 “A marriage between Catholics, or between a Catholic party and a baptised non-Catholic, is to be celebrated in the parish church. By permission of the local Ordinary or of the parish priest, it may be celebrated in another church or oratory” Canon 1118 §1.

“The Local Ordinary can allow a marriage to be celebrated in *another suitable place*” Canon 1118 §2. The emphasis is mine.
can. 144, 1112 §1, 1116 and 1127 §§1-2.
§2 Only that person who, being present, asks the contracting parties to manifest their consent and in the name of the Church receives it, is understood to assist at a marriage.

The prescription of Canon 1112 is a follow-up of the demand of the Tridentine decree of Tametsi of 1563. In the Church’s bid to check and eradicate the problem of clandestine marriages and the associated abuses, the decree of Tametsi was promulgated at Trent, making it mandatory under pain of nullity for marriages to be celebrated before the proper pastor of at least one of the parties or another priest delegated by him. Later, on August 7, 1909, the Holy See modified the Tridentine decree with Ne temere. Substantially, the norm required for the validity of a catholic marriage is an active presence of a qualified person and two non-qualified witnesses in an ordinary situation where the marriage has one of the parties being Catholic. The qualified person can be the Local Ordinary, the parish priest, or a deacon delegated by either of them. It can also be a layperson, but in this sense, the conditions of Can 1112 must be considered.¹¹⁰¹ Technically, ensuring the canonical and juridical form of marriage in the African/Akan context compared to the clandestine marriage may not be applicable here. This is because African/Akan marriage can never be contracted in a secret manner since it always involves two families.¹¹⁰² All the same, for the dialogue of African/Akan culture and Catholicism, the presence of the priest or his delegate for the exchange of consent fulfills the canonical form prescribed by the Church.¹¹⁰³

¹¹⁰¹ The diocesan bishop can appoint a layperson as a delegate to act as a qualified assistant at the wedding ceremony. This is possible when the conditions of Canon 1112 are acknowledged: “Where there are no priests and deacons, the diocesan Bishop can delegate lay persons to assist at marriages, if the Episcopal Conference has given its prior approval and the permission of the Holy See has been obtained.”
¹¹⁰² Okeke, a canonist argues that the original intention of the legislator was meant to check clandestine marriages and their abuses, and since African marriage always goes beyond couples to include two families, the canonical form is non-applicable. Hilary O. Okeke, “Christian Marriage in Africa Revisited,” 639. See also Titus Ikechukwu Nnabugwu, “The Integration of the Traditional and Christian Marriage Rites in Nigeria: Untying the Legal Knots” Ministerium: A Journal of Contextual Theology, Vol 2, No 2 (2016), 78.
At the house for the marriage ceremony, the priest asks for and receives the verbal consent of the groom-to-be and bride-to-be. This can take place after the Bride-to-be’s father or Abusuapanyin (family head) has culturally performed his part. After all the traditional customary rituals are completed, the priest may lead the couple to exchange the rings after he has blessed them. However, this is optional for the Church and the traditional Akan customary marriage. The groom and the bride must consult with their priest if they intend to use wedding rings and the Bible before the final day of the marriage ceremony.

The nuptial prayer is the essential element that follows the exchange of rings and the Bible. Next, the priest pronounces the nuptial blessing upon the groom and the bride. The marriage after this gesture is liturgically, canonically, and validly sealed in the eyes of the church’s rite of Marriage. Customarily, both sides of the families and a section of the witnesses offer advice to the new spouses. At this point, the priest can offer a short exhortation from holy scripture to the couple, and those present, followed by or after the elders have offered theirs.

The final ceremony will be concluded with a traditional prayer of libation by the Abusuapanyin or prayer and final blessing from the priest, depending on the arrangements made by the couple who are the principal celebrants.

---

1104 “After the exchange of rings, the crowning or veiling of the bride may take place according to local custom. In any region where the joining of hands or the blessing or exchange of rings does not fit in with the practice of the people, the conference of bishops may allow these rites to be omitted or other rites substituted.” See Rite of Marriage, Introduction, (1969).

Then the unofficial festivities continue after the blessing and dismissal. There is usually music and dance, food, and the presentation of gifts to the new couples. All these are coordinated by a master of ceremony (MC).

On Sunday or a major feast day following the final wedding ceremony (usually on Friday or Saturday morning), the groom and the bride, accompanied by families and friends dressed in traditional cloth, come to a “Thanksgiving Mass.” On this day, the spouses receive the Holy Eucharist (preferably on both species) for the first time as husband and wife. It suffices to add that the groom and the bride, for both the marriage ceremony and “Thanksgiving Mass,” must keep to the colorful traditional dresses associated with the customary marriage. There is no need for a Western white gown or garment (which symbolizes purity and virginity).

In conclusion, in the spirit of interreligious and cultural dialogue, this proposal considers the essential canonical elements for unity and indissolubility of marriage, the canonical form, and the place for the marriage celebration. Along the same lines, the traditional Akan marriage rite stays unadulterated. The relevance of the proposed harmonized marriage rite seeks to save Akan Catholic couples from the stress of arranging multiple marriages before they can become communicants in the church. Again, the married couple can save much money for their marriage journey since they don’t have to go through many marriage ceremonies. Most importantly, Akan Catholics can celebrate a marriage rite that is truly African and truly Catholic in a single ceremony. Advantageously, the two proposed rites ensure a drastic reduction of the high level of “Eucharistic Famine” in Catholicism in Ghana and, for that matter Africa. They will also increase the catholic population since the many incidences of traditionally married

1106 It must be emphasized that prospective couples should be given the option to choose to be wedded by the merged Akan-Catholic marriage or go through the customary marriage followed by the Church wedding.
couples leaving the Church due to the lack of recognition of their marriages by the church will be reduced.

4.27. Proposed Marriage Outline for an African/Akan-Catholic Marriage Rite: Final Ceremony

Rite of Reception at the Home
a. The gathering of the two families, guests, and witnesses at the Family House
b. Opening Prayer (by Abusuapanyin/Priest, depending on the arrangement between the family and the Church)
c. Welcoming address by the host family and stating the intention for the gathering
d. Exchange of greetings (Handshakes between the two families)
e. “Amanee” or Statement of the mission by the man’s family
f. A brief explanation of the gathering

Rites of Presentation
  g. Presentation of the groom to the host family and the witnesses
  h. Presentation of the dowry or bridewealth and the other customary items for the marriage by the man’s family
  i. Presentation of the bride-to-be at the demand of the family of the groom-to-be

Actual Marriage Rite (Apex)
  j. Brief introduction
  k. The exchange of consent
  l. Rite of acceptance of the dowry or bridewealth (tirinsa) and other marriage items
  m. Blessing and exchange of rings and the Bible (Led by the Priest)
  n. Nuptial Blessing by the priest or his deputy
  o. Exhortation or advice, or admonition by those present
  p. Closing Prayers/Libation and Final Blessing by the priest

Reception/Feasting
  q. Gathering at Parish Hall or a suitable venue
  r. Entrance of the Bride and the Groom
  s. Prayer over the meal
  t. Serving of food
  u. Gift presentation and appeal for funds (optional)
  v. Bridal dance
  w. Closing prayer

Sunday or Feast Day after the Final Marriage Ceremony
  x. Attendance of Thanksgiving Mass
  y. Reception of Holy Communion (Preferably under both species)
  z. Blessing of the couple and families after post-communion
4.28. Exemplary Models in West Africa (Catholicism)

The multiplicity of marriages in the Catholic Church in most African countries, with its consequences of eucharistic famine and ecclesial apathy, has necessitated creativity and boldness in some dioceses. Following the principle of incarnation, there has been deliberate imaginative creativity in marriage rituals in Ekiti and Lokoja dioceses (Yoruba and Ebira rites, in the 1990s) and in the Enugu diocese (Igbo rite, 2001).1107 These marriage rituals resonate with the Yoruba, Ebira, and Igbo socio-religious marriage ritual with the Roman “Reformed Order of Celebrating Marriage.”1108 The initiative takes inculturation beyond mere translation and traditional music. It recognizes the importance that liturgical celebration of the sacraments, particularly marriage for the purpose of this dissertation, be aligned with the cultures and practices of the indigenous people.

In his article “The Sacred Liturgy and Inculturation Today” Bishop M.O. Fagun, reiterated the same point and made mention of the dioceses in Nigeria that have taken a creative liturgical initiative to inculturate the sacrament of marriage that aligns with the indigenous people. Under the subtitle “Inculturation of the Liturgy,” the bishop writes:

What I am trying to say is that our so-called inculturated liturgy of the sacraments today does not go beyond translations. The only exception so far is the celebration of the sacrament of marriage as suggested in an article presented by my humble self to The Liturgical Inculturation Commission of the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Nigeria, held in Jos on October 12, 1993. We have such inculturated liturgy of the sacrament of marriage today among the Ebira of Lokoja Diocese and the Yoruba of Ekiti Diocese.

---

1108 Ibid.
1109 Bishop M.O. Fagun, “The Sacred Liturgy and Inculturation Today” [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5606aeabe4b0a63e2237dd26/t/563f6927e4b0ff714508ba83/1446996263992/THE+SACRED+LITURGY+AND+INCULTURATION+TODAY.docx](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5606aeabe4b0a63e2237dd26/t/563f6927e4b0ff714508ba83/1446996263992/THE+SACRED+LITURGY+AND+INCULTURATION+TODAY.docx) Accessed on May 28, 2023.
The bishop added that “liturgical procedures and gestures should be innate to the people celebrating, it should be an expression of the inner self, not other-self in the presence of God.” The Akan people of Ghana deserve a marriage rite that is brewed from the Akan pot. Since other bishops or dioceses have taken the lead, there is a paradigm for creating Akan-Catholic marriage for the Catholic Church of Ghana. The above two models, RoMAC and RacMMu seek to offer alternatives for a synodal church that pursues dialogue with the Akan culture and people.

4.29. Conclusion

Marriage and family life are the fundamental social institutions upon which every society is built. Despite its importance, marriage has created problems in the Akan society due to the clash between the Akan marriage culture and the Church’s liturgical and canonical requirements for a valid marriage. The words of Archbishop Denis Hurley are still true today:

Among the thorniest of problems in any mission territory is that of marriage. For marriage is at the heart of every social system. It has as its basic concern the propagation of life, so quite naturally it is looked upon as the element of highest importance in any culture and is surrounded by solemnities of custom and rituals reflecting the deepest convictions of that culture.

In Ghana, many traditionally Akan married spouses and young boys and girls at the age of marriage are discouraged from celebrating marriage in the Church for different reasons: The excessive financial burden and the stress involved in the duplications of marriages (Traditional, church, and civil) at various occasions and times. Again, the thought of celebrating church marriage after their traditional marriage revives the excruciating pains of colonization of our

1110 Ibid.
1111 Archbishop Denis Hurley, cited in Amand Reuter, Native Marriages in South Africa According to Law and Custom (Aschendorfsche Verlagsbuchhandlung: Minster, 1963), V.
ancestors being rebranded and brought back under the garment of faith and church tradition of marriage.

Akan Catholics have persistently cried out to eradicate the dichotomy and multiplicity of marriages. Instead, they want to celebrate a marriage rite that reflects their roots, culture, and ecclesiastical and Akan identity. This cry calls for an urgent need to restore marriage through an open dialogue of inculturation that prioritizes a dialectical integration of the essential Christian values (not the additional Western customs) with the valuable marriage culture of Africans/Akans.

Among customary African married couples in the Catholic Church, many devout men and women are not in a polygamous marriage or any state of mortal sin but are restricted to ‘spiritual communion’ and excluded from “sacramental communion” because of the doctrinal and canonical teachings of the Church. The unanswered question is, “would the church rather tolerate ‘ritualization’ of the sacraments rather than a spiritual promotion of the well-being of people trying to raise their families and live a life of faith?”

Again, should ecclesiastical law and doctrine hinder experiencing the fullness of life in Christ? As a listening Church, it is long overdue to embark on a dialogical vision for reviewing and changing with boldness and creativity church laws that favor some people but hinder the spiritual growth of others, knowing well that it will be marked by uncertainty. The American missiologist John C. Sivalon, speaks of such uncertainty as not a liability but an act of hope when he said, “the gift of uncertainty

---


1113 Orabator, Editor, The Church We Want: African Catholics Look to Vatican III, 83.
generates the gift of change and growth. And, most important, the gift of uncertainty grounds our mission within the Mission of God."\textsuperscript{1114}

Holding on to the marriage rite in the church, which gives no value and priority to the traditional African/Akan marriage system, has become an impediment to spiritual growth for most African married Catholics. It is time to break off from the shackles of a marriage rite that does not resonate with the African people and their culture.\textsuperscript{1115} This dissertation is convinced that any canonical, doctrinal, and theological structures in the Church that impede the spiritual growth of the people of God is in itself a system of de-evangelization and a blockage to interreligious and intercultural dialogue. Despite the long-standing scholarly ecclesial defense of such structures, the Church must rigorously scrutinize them in the light of the gospel in connection with indigenous cultures and customs. Do such structures serve as a spiritual benefit for the entire people of God, or do they subtly enslave and disorient the cultures and civilizations of others by imposing a particular ideal that seems to benefit only a section of the people of God? God is not outside any culture to be discarded entirely. He permeates all cultures, including the African/Akan cultural marriage system, despite the defects we may identify (common in all cultures).

In the spirit of interreligious/cultural dialogue and evangelization, it is the responsibility of the Church of Ghana, in collaboration with the Universal Church, to boldly and creatively examine the traditional Akan marriage system to identify the positive and rich values in African marriage system and harmonize those with the entire church’s rite to produce new pastoral Akan Catholic marriage rite. The identified positivity and riches enshrined in the Akan culture and


\textsuperscript{1115} This ritual in as much as it respects the church’s theology of marriage, it also recognizes the local culture and marriage system.
marriage custom can be a light of nourishment for the entire church and her marriage system today.

In light of this, the dissertation calls on the Catholic Church to reevaluate the two proposals (a. Option I: Rite of Marriage for African/Akan Couples (RoMAC) and b. Option II: Rite of African-Catholic Marriage for Monogamous Union (RacMMu)) to be adopted in the church. The Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference, in collaboration with the Universal Church, must urgently listen to the cry of Akan-Catholics and give attention to these proposals that seek to harmonize marriage rite that resonates with Church and Akan cultures and identities. This harmonized marriage rite proposal in the Ghana Church has everything to do with the church’s growth and the spiritual development of many traditionally married couples who have been starved for years because they have not performed the church’s marriage. It is time to let the resounding voice of Pope Francis in “The Joy of the Gospel” (Evangelii Gaudium No. 33) be heard and followed when he said,

Pastoral ministry in a missionary key seeks to abandon the complacent attitude that says: “We have always done it this way.” I invite everyone to be bold and creative in this task of rethinking the goals, structures, styles and methods of evangelization in their respective communities. A proposal of goals without an adequate communal search for the means of achieving them will inevitably prove illusory. I encourage everyone to apply the guidelines found in this document generously and courageously, without inhibitions or fear. The important thing is to not walk alone, but to rely on each other as brothers and sisters, and especially under the leadership of the bishops, in a wise and realistic pastoral discernment.

The pope’s words from the African context revived the sad exclusion of many Akan Catholics from communion because marriage in the Church has always been done in the Roman Catholic way, not the African/Akan Catholic way. Is the eucharist a reward for those married in the Catholic Church? If not, why is a monogamous African married couple denied the sacrament? Is it because they have not done the church’s marriage, or does the irregularity of the African
marriage, as the Church calls it, make the couples sinful? Pope Francis is right to have said in *Evangelii Gaudium* no.47 that “the eucharist, although it is the fulness of sacramental life, is not a prize for the perfect but a powerful medicine and nourishment for the weak.” Marriage in Africa or Ghana needs a reviewal, and the two proposals above can be a stepping stone for consideration by the Ghana Catholic Bishop’s Conference in her bid to procure a marriage rite that resonates with Ghanaian Catholics and their cultures.
Chapter 5

5.0. Catholicism, Non-Christian Religions and Government of Ghana in Dialogue:
Prospets and Challenges

Contemporary Ghana society is pluralistically religious. Today, Ghana has three major
religions: African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam. In addition, it must be mentioned
that Buddhism, Hinduism, and Hare Krishna are gaining ground. This religious pluralism cuts
across every fiber of Ghanaian society, engendering fundamental differences in theologies,
creeds, scriptures, spirituality, and manners of worship. From the sectors of politics, economics,
sports and entertainment, education, culture, etc., there is a high propensity to encounter
individuals Ghanaians or diverse religious groups harmonizing their respective religious
ideologies to work toward a common goal. Despite their religious differences, such religious
harmony and dialogue among Ghanaians is a beauty that should be celebrated. That
notwithstanding, Ghana has witnessed instances of hostility, tension, and unhealthy competition
fueled by religious interest where individuals or religious groups endeavored to advance their
religious agenda at the detriment of the interest of others or the good of Mother Ghana. Such
instances have unfortunately resulted in conflicts and rifts in different parts of the country among
ethnicities and religious communities. Among other consequences, there has been a retardation
of political and social advancement of the nation.

This chapter is a theological effort to highlight the various dialogical or collaborative
initiatives of the Ghana government and all the religious institutions (especially among the three
prominent religious leaders) toward fostering a fraternal and harmonious relationship in the
country amid the pluralism of religions. What are some of the religious and political policies or
laws implemented in Ghana to facilitate interreligious dialogue and mutual respect among the various religions and individuals in Ghana?

Moreover, the chapter will highlight the contributions of the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference (GCBC)\textsuperscript{1116} towards interreligious dialogue and the collaborative works with the government, traditional Akan leaders, Islam, and other faith traditions will be reviewed to draw out the prospects of dialogue for the promotion of fraternity and peace in Ghana. Finally, the challenges and the future of interreligious dialogue in Ghana will be discussed, offering some recommendations for the fortification of interfaith harmony and peaceful co-existence among the diverse religions in Ghana. It will be concluded that the unity, peace, and collaborations Ghana enjoys today have not occurred by accident but by the determined efforts of the government, various religious leaders, and individuals in the country despite their religious challenges.

5.1. The Daily Situation of Interreligious Encounter

The ordinary Ghanaian today is interreligiously situated and relationally connected daily due to the socio-religious environment of Ghana. The family trees of many Ghanaians have member/s who are either Christian or Muslim or practitioners of African Traditional Religion. Therefore, it is not surprising that at occasions like a funeral, weddings, or naming ceremonies, members of these major religions gather for a beautiful celebration without religion being a factor of impediment. Usually, when a community member is sick, all others moved by empathy and loving care pay a visit and sometimes contribute or offer the necessary help the person needs. When a Christian, traditional believer or Muslim has a house, it is rented out without any restrictions on the grounds of religion. At religious festivals, be it Christian (Christmas and Easter)
or Islamic (Id al-Fitr and Id al-Adha), or African Traditional Religion (Odwira, Kundum, etc.), it is common to see members extending felicitations and participating in the sharing of food and gifts.

In Islamic and Catholic/Christian or public schools, students have joined for “worship” or Mass (some non-Catholics end up receiving communion) or read the Quran or the Bible. In the Market, believers of different religions share the same space or sometimes are business partners. Today there are intermarriages across not just tribes but religions, uniting two families of different religious affiliations. Some Christians have Muslims or traditional believers as friends and mentors. This ordinary day life of Ghanaians makes it impossible to live solely as a Catholic, Muslim, or traditionalist without connecting with people of a different religion. It is easier to be interreligiously religious in Ghana because daily Ghanaian life is in an inescapable interreligious environment.

5.2. Ghana After Independence: Church, Politics, and Interfaith Dialogue

Introduction

Religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue have intrinsically been part of the historicity of Ghana, serving as the fundamental factors that define and sustain the peace and harmony the nation enjoys today. Promoting interfaith relationships in Ghana has influenced the government’s decisions, policies, national events, and academic, political, cultural, and corporate settings and services. Today, Ghana prides itself as the epitome of a growing pattern of evolution in interreligious encounters in sub-Saharan Africa. The nation knows well that religious pluralism has the potency to situate the country in a volatile position if the religious harmony today is not jealously guarded by a collaborative and dialogical effort by the Government and the religions in Ghana. Therefore, there have been efforts to intensify interreligious dialogue at various levels to
educate and sensitize religious leaders, government representatives, and other stakeholders about the prominence of dialogue. The Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference (GCBC) acknowledged in their communique issued in 1999 that the answers to building a great nation do not rest on one person or institution. There is, therefore, the need to engage one another in dialogue and fraternal collaboration to find solutions to the nation’s problems. GCBC wrote:

Dialogue, another synodal sub-theme, called on the Church to have dialogue within itself and the Church to have fraternal dialogue with the State, other Christians, brothers, and sisters of the Islamic faith and, especially, followers of Traditional African Religion. We dare suggest that no one person or group of persons has an answer to all the problems. We live in a society in which collaborative efforts from all citizens is absolutely indispensable. The principle of subsidiarity must be allowed to work in our dear country. Religious bodies are there to help in the process of national development. The government should not only allow this to happen but should promote and encourage it to happen. At all levels—district, regional and national— we should tolerate one another and support one another. We pray that the type of religious intolerance and bigotry found in some part of the world may not find its way into our society.1117

The collaborative efforts of the various governing authorities after independence in Ghana have fortified the dialogical encounter among multi-religious bodies in instilling and promoting interfaith relationships and peace within the country. Below are the various areas of politico-religious dialogue in Ghana and the consequence of harmony and peace.


As already mentioned, the interfaith dialogical encounter among individuals and groups of different religions in Ghana has been cordial partly due to the liberty of religion provided in Ghana’s 1992 Constitution and the government’s intervention. The 1992 Constitution of Ghana has a bill of rights entrenched in it. The bill of rights establishes that every individual and group

---

in Ghana, irrespective of race, place of origin, political opinion, color, religion, creed, or gender, shall be entitled to fundamental human rights and freedoms. These rights are not absolute but dependent on respect for the rights and freedoms of others and the country’s public interest. In other words, the right and freedom of religion of individuals and groups is applicable only when the equal rights and freedom of the other as a boundary are respected. These provisions are entrenched, thus making them hard for easy amendment. These rights can only be amended through a special procedure, including a national referendum. Freedom of religion, among these rights, is thus a fundamental human right in the Ghanaian legal regime, which prohibits religious discrimination and any associated forms. The right stipulates that individuals and religious groups can profess and practice their religions and faith practices. This entrenched provision in the 1992 Constitution has been part of the various previous Constitutions of Ghana since 1969. It is thus a settled fundamental human right that has, in the main, been respected by successive governments. The religious right from the past to the present has fortified individual and religious groups’ collaborative efforts to ensure and enhance religious tolerance, harmony, dialogue, and equanimity in Ghana. Article 21 of the 1992 Constitution of Ghana states the religious right as:

(1) All persons shall have the right to –
(c) Freedom to practice any religion and to manifest such practice.

Unquestionably, this constitutional provision has created and sustained a harmonious and peaceful environment within which religious pluralism can thrive. Despite the minor religious

hitches, Ghana experiences rich and beautiful interreligious relationships worth celebrating. Each religion operates without any unjustifiable interference by any group. It is common to see a religious message affixed anywhere: Cars, Storefront Signs, Billboards, T-Shirts, Houses, etc. Among Christians and Muslim properties, religious readings like “Jesus is Lord Enterprise,” “In Him is Life Motors,” “God’s Time,” “Allah is One,” and “Ya-Allah One,” etc., are common. While these suggest a heated competition of evangelization among Christians and Muslims, the relationship, on the contrary, reflects interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance. This interfaith tolerance and cooperation model is possibly attributed partly to the 1992 constitutional provision of Ghana law.

Secondly, to promote interreligious co-existence, religious tolerance, and encounter among all the religions in Ghana, the constitution stipulates that Ghana is a secular state. There is no constitutional designation of any one religion as a state religion to claim superiority over the other. This does not negate the reality that Ghana is theistic. A deep sense of spirituality and religiosity highly drives Ghana. The constitution designated no particular religion as the official State’s religion. This deliberate designation of the nation as secular is to avoid the intention of making one religion superior to the others. In that sense, all religions are put on the same pedestal to co-exist, and their members have the liberty to practice their beliefs. In light of this, the nation, at all national public functions, e.g., independence ceremonies or inauguration of a new president, allows all the three major religions in Ghana to offer separate prayers, one after the other, before the commencement of the day’s event. This gesture avoids the confusion of prioritizing one religion over the other.

b. Interfaith Dialogue for Peace and Reconciliation: Religions and Government

In their First National Catholic Pastoral Congress in Cape Coast, the bishops of Ghana acknowledged the efforts of the sitting government to end the conflict that ensued between the Konkomba-Dagomba people of the Northern part of Ghana. Ethnicity and religion were at the base of this conflict. In resolving this conflict and ensuring reconciliation, the government massively collaborated with the religious bodies in the country. Christians, Muslims, and traditional leaders were called to pray for peace and reconciliation. The bishops commended the government for its intervention and strategies for involving the religious bodies.¹¹²²

Muslims and the governments of Ghana have dialogued at various points in the nation’s history toward promoting peace and reconciliation. In Atebubu, a clash between the “Ahl AL-Sunna” and the Tiyanniyya forced the Muslim community to seek the assistance of the government as an arbitrator for resolution.¹¹²³ The government of Ghana was the first resort because the Islam community had no centralized hierarchy to appeal for reconciliation among all the Islamic sects. This crisis brought a dialogue between the two Muslims (the Ahl al-Sunna sect and the Tiyanniyya movement) and, secondly, between the government and the Muslim communities.¹¹²⁴

c. Government Efforts at Promoting Interfaith Dialogue and Religious Tolerance

In many countries of sub-Saharan Africa, the relationship among religions, especially (Christian and Muslim) has resulted in a rampant conflict fueled by politicians and their political party agenda. For politicians to score political points, many have capitalized on the electorate’s vulnerability on their political grounds to incite one religious’ group against the other. Though

¹¹²³ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Ghana, Ecclesial in Ghana, 154.
¹¹²⁴ Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Ghana, Ecclesial in Ghana, 154.
minor instances have happened in Ghana’s history, the positivity of interfaith dialogue and religious tolerance in the sector of politics in Ghana has been laudable.

Politics in Ghana for a long time has promoted interfaith harmony between believers of African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam. In early 1954, the Muslim community in Ghana formed a political party called the Muslim Association Party (MAP). Even though its battle cry was “Islam!” “Islam!” the party opened its doors for two seasoned Christian politicians who held important leadership positions in the party. They were Bankole Awoonor Renner and Cobbina Kessie.\footnote{Jean Marie Allman, \textit{The Quills of the Porcupine: Asante Nationalism in an Emergent Ghana} (Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), 21.} This initiative has elongated the unwritten custom among major political parties in Ghana to have a sizeable percentage of party leadership that cuts across all three major religions. For instance, the New Patriotic Party (NPP), since 1979, has kept to the tradition of appointing Christians and Muslims as frag bearers and vice-presidential candidates. In the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2000, the NPP party won the election. The party ruled for eight years with John Kufuor (a Catholic) as President and Aliu Mahama (a Muslim) as Vice-President.\footnote{Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, “Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana: A Model for World Dialogue and Peace” \textit{ResearchGate}, (2011). \url{https://www.researchgate.net/publication/279684862_CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM_RELATIONS_IN_GHANA_A_MODEL_FOR_WORLD_DIALOGUE_AND_PEACE} Accessed on January 22, 2023.} When confronted with a controversial question over whether a Muslim could ever be elected president in the country, Former President John Agyekum responded, “I don’t know how it could get into anybody’s mind to say that a Muslim could not be the president of Ghana.”\footnote{“Ghana: A Model of Interfaith Tolerance,” \textit{The World} (2013). \url{https://theworld.org/stories/2013-03-15/ghana-model-interfaith-tolerance} Accessed January 11, 2023.}

The tradition was continued in 2008 when the presidential candidate of the NPP party,
Nana Akufo-Addo (a Methodist), chose Mahamadu Bawumia (a Muslim) as his vice-presidential candidate. When asked why the New Patriotic Party has kept to this tradition on religious grounds, the presidential candidate, Akufo-Addo, says: “if there is to be a major eruption in our country, it will certainly come from the Muslim north where poverty is rife. Thus, it is important that the people (the Muslim north) are factored seriously into every political equation in order to maintain the unity and cohesion of our nation.”

This tradition, according to Mustapha Abdul-Hamid, was adopted by Nigeria but it failed to yield a favorable result. He made the following observation:

Even though Nigeria recently adopted this model as a way of maintaining the balance of power between its mainly Muslim north and Christian south, it failed to produce the desired harmony. President Olusegun Obasanjo and his Vice-President, Abubakar Atiku were not even on talking terms in the latter part of their second four year rule. Thus this power sharing formula will not necessarily guarantee peace, dialogue and stability except the parties involved are genuine and sincere. It will seem that sincerity is quite a scarce vocabulary in Nigerian political discourse.

In Ghana, the dialogue among the religions has promoted the tradition of attending the mosque or the church for a thanksgiving service by the emerging winner of a political party in presidential and parliamentary elections. The richness and beauty of seeing the cross-section of the political party membership dressed in all white with the political flag at these sacred places of worship express how politics, religious tolerance, and dialogue have harmoniously been weaved into the fiber of Ghanaian lives. This dialogical richness and harmony are laudable. At their victory in the 2010 presidential and parliamentary election, His excellency Nana Akufo-Addo and the national leadership of the NPP joined the Muslims to worship at Abossey Okai Mosque

---

on Friday, August 13, 2010. The party followed this up with a thanksgiving service in the Ridge Church in Accra.\textsuperscript{1129}


Religious tolerance and dialogue have existed for years in the education sector of the country’s governance. The collective commitment of the three major religions in Ghana with the government in providing quality education for citizens despite the difference in faith and beliefs is worth commending. However, there have been many debates among religious groups or interfaith leaders and lawmakers concerning the best way to ensure interfaith dialogue and deconflict educational policies in the country’s elementary, secondary, and tertiary institutions. One such collaborative initiative between interfaith leaders and the government resulted in a major educational reform in 1987 which introduced the teaching of the three major religions in all government, private and mission schools in the country. The education reformation introduced what is currently called “Religious and Moral Education (RME)” into the educational curriculum. As a core examinable subject, RME continues to help pupils/students to appreciate different beliefs and practices, morality and accepted norm, sacred objects, days, places, and festivals of African Traditional Religion, Christianity, and Islam. This deliberate attempt has fostered interreligious dialogue and religious tolerance among pupils/students and Ghanaians in general. Students appreciate that the diversity of religious affiliations is not a factor of division because, despite the various beliefs and practices, all three religions profess God as the Ultimate Being of worship.

Through the Ministry of Education, the Government of Ghana recently intervened to ensure that there is even enforcement and implementation of religious tolerance and policies in

all schools nationwide. The government of Ghana for example, ordered the authorities of Wesley Girls’ School, a missionary institution, to permit Muslim students to fast during Ramadan. The school authorities banned Muslims and students of any religion from fasting because, over the years, there had been various health implications. The school decided that fasting in Wesley Girls’ School was not permitted.\textsuperscript{1130} The government’s order abated the heated and widely publicized case in the educational sector.

At the university level, students of the Department of Religious Studies weave into the curriculum the various religions in the country, ensuring that one knows all the religious beliefs and practices of the major religions. The student graduates with a certificate or diploma in Religious Studies rather than in Islamic Studies or Christian Studies. The University of Cape Coast has even renamed its Department of Religious Studies as the Department of Religion and Human Values.\textsuperscript{1131} In his interview report of graduates of 2010 from the Department of Religious Studies of Cape Coast, Mustapha concludes that all the graduands were impressed with the curriculum because the studies had given them a better perspective and understanding of Islam as compared to their perception before they entered the program.\textsuperscript{1132} This has enhanced their relationship with their brothers and sister of other faith communities.

The partnership between religions and the Ghana government to provide quality education has existed for years. In Ghana, most of the prestigious schools are mostly missionaries.\textsuperscript{1133} The religious bodies have educational institutions from Day Care Centers and


\textsuperscript{1132} Ibid., 14.

\textsuperscript{1133} Presbyterian Boys Secondary School, St. Augustine’s College, The Archbishop Porter Girls’ Senior High School, Holy Child School, Wesley Girls’ Senior High School, Adisadel College, etc. These among other second circle schools have built up and maintained a high reputation in terms of academic performance, discipline, and appreciable moral standard all these years.
Nurseries, Primary and Secondary to Teacher Training Colleges, Vocational, and Universities that continue to serve many Ghanaians without religious discrimination. It augments the government’s effort to provide education facilities and quality training for Ghanaians, aside from being noted for their academic excellence. Mission schools are keen on providing a moral and disciplinary foundation, respect for religious differences, and a sense of patriotism for these future leaders.

The government of Ghana, through the education service years ago, took over most of these missionary schools as a way to streamline things in the public sector, hence, it introduced the concept of trained teachers in most schools, especially in Mission Schools, and subsequently absorbed the payment of teachers. Recently, some concerned Catholic educationists began lamenting taking back their mission schools completely from a shared responsibility with the government for many reasons. Among these include the decline in discipline, morals, and the level of intelligence graduates display.

Speaking on this, Mr. Dogodzi lamented the alarming rate at which the quality of education, discipline, and morality, which are the core of the missionary school, has been trivialized. This is due to many “political interruptions with school management for political control and policies that are detached from our cultural values among others.” Speaking at a graduation ceremony at the Trinity College in Accra, the President of Ghana, Nana Akufo-Addo, also promised a historic handing over of mission schools with the hope it would help arrest


declining moral standards in schools. He said, “The tradition of discipline, hard work, and integrity that characterize the churches...are needed in our country.”

According to Mr. Dogodzi, mission education provides unalloyed teaching that puts the dignity of the human person at the center stage. It touches on the three components of human development: the human intellect, the human heart (compassion for fellow man), and the human hand (zeal to work passionately). It is important to note that the effort to make the missionary identity be felt in the schools in which the government now has a partnership with Christianity and Islam is not meant for indoctrination but rather to train future leaders despite one’s religious affiliation with a sense of integrity, religious tolerance, discipline and love for one another.

To fortify a sense of interreligious dialogue and tolerance, this dissertation suggests that Religious and Moral Education (RME) must be taught with an open mind. In other words, the students should be taught to insist on and respect the “truth” each religion holds. This further means that all manners of superiority, stereotyping, prejudice, and mocking of the beliefs of any of the religions must not be tolerated. Students should be taught to have the capacity to “exchange cognitive, affective, volitional and practical information about the various religions with the purpose of making the discussants aware of similarities and differences between their respective religious traditions.” Students must be helped to weave these religious teachings, despite the similarities and differences, into a new moral and ethical fabric of the nation which will intensify a sense of patriotism as people of the same country and not as religious fanatics.

---

1136 “Catholic Educationists in Ghana Call for Control of Mission Schools Amid Student Unrests,” ACI Africa Correspondent, Ghana (2020).
1137 “Catholic Educationists in Ghana Call for Control of Mission Schools Amid Student Unrests.”
Secondly, students must be helped to transition from merely accumulating information and knowledge of other religious traditions to the spiritual level. In other words, students should be taught in a manner where they can discover the spiritual richness of the respective religions and the need to be conversing partners.

e. Health, Dialogue, and Government

Another sensitive sector that has brought diverse religions and the government to work together in harmony is health care. Firstly, the Christian Health Association of Ghana (CHAG), an umbrella organization that coordinates the activities of Christian Health Institutions and Christian Churches’ health programs in Ghana, endeavors to bring health care to all. Founded in 1967, the federation (CHAG) has been the body through which most Christian health facilities liaise with the Ministry of Health (MOH) to ensure proper collaboration and complementation of government efforts at serving the country’s health needs. CHAG predominantly provides health care in poor and marginalized communities for all citizens despite their religious affiliation. With a total of about 183 health facilities and health training institutions owned by 21 different Christian Church Denominations, Christian institution is able to supplement the government’s effort by 30-40 percent in providing health for all Ghanaians.

The National Catholic Health Service (NCHS) began in the 1950s and has provided urgent care to everyone despite religious affiliation in Ghana’s most rural and deprived areas.

---


Officially, the Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference established a Catholic Health Service in 1964, now called the “Directorate of Health” of the National Catholic Secretariat. In providing health care to all Ghanaians without any religious discrimination, the church is able to strengthen interfaith dialogue among members of other religions. As the church strives toward providing quality health care, it does not adulterate the Catholic ethics and moral principles in health care delivery.\footnote{Richard Novati Catholic Hospital, “Goals of National Catholic Health Service,” \textit{National Catholic Health Service}. \url{https://rnch.org/national-catholic-health-service/} Accessed on January 9, 2023.}

The Muslim community in Ghana, specifically the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, has collaborated with the government in the health field. Since 1970 the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission has established five hospitals in the country. Like the CHAG, these hospitals are strategically situated in rural areas to give Ghanaians access to primary health care.\footnote{Mohammad Bin Ibrahim, “Contribution by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission Towards Health Care in Ghana,” 36. \url{https://www.reviewofreligions.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/RR198811.pdf#page=38} Accessed on January 11, 2023.} These mission hospitals, in collaboration with the Ministry of Health, have doubled up the healthcare facilities open to all Ghanaians despite their religious affiliation or beliefs.

Some traditional healing centers bring out the ancient way of healing people through natural herbs. When people are sick, they go all out to get remedies to their maladies when it comes to seeking health, without considering the religious affiliation or background of the healer or the provider.

\textbf{f. Government, Religious Collaboration and Ecological Issues in Ghana}

Another area that demands a dialogical collaboration between the government and the three major religions is ecology and degradation. Like the rest of the world, Ghana today faces a great environmental challenge: Air pollution, destruction of water bodies and lands,
deforestation, desertification, bush burning, indiscriminate waste disposal, mining, etc.

Reflecting on the practical ecological problems of Ghana, Elizabeth Amoah, in her article *Religion and the Environment in Ghana* said the following: “Some markets and centers of economic activities especially in the cities and towns are full of rubbish heaps. A lot of waste is generated daily without proper means of disposal. There is plastic waste everywhere, the drainage systems are not working, emitting offensive odour … all sorts of used vehicles are imported to the country which release poisonous gases into the atmosphere.”1146 She added, “… farming and other commercial activities are diminishing rich forest resources. Both legal and illegal mining (*galamsey*) activities are degrading the land and polluting rivers which are slowly becoming harmful for human habitation.”1147 The results of this irresponsible ecological attitude have brought a lot of flooding in the rainy season and an outbreak of cholera and guinea worm infections.1148

All Religious leaders in Ghana representing the Christian Council of Ghana; Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference; Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council; Office of the National Chief Imam; Almadiyya Muslim Mission; Ghana, National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches; Council for Independent Churches; and Para-Church Organisations for once on the issue of illegal mining shelved their respective religious perspective and joined forces together to call for a ban on small-scale mining which had destroyed the water bodies in the country.1149 With pressure from these religious bodies, President Akufo-Addo held a meeting with all traditional and local government leaders to deliberate on procuring a permanent solution

1147 Ibid., 35.
1148 Ibid., 36.
to the illegal mining problem – known locally as *galamsey*. The president, on October 5, 2022, had this to say: “Since I took office on 7 January 2017, nearly six years ago, I have made it a central feature of my presidency to lead in the effort to rid our country of this menace… It has not been easy and we have not got the immediate result that I was looking for.”1150 The collaboration with governments, religions, and traditional leaders is still ongoing to find a remedy to illegal mining and conservation of the forest and the water bodies in Ghana.

**g. Dialogue, Government, and National Policies/Festivals**

The Ghana government has instituted national holidays for Christianity and Islam to intensify interreligious dialogue and tolerance. For instance, Christmas, New Year, and Easter are national holidays for Christians, Muslims, and African traditional believers. Since 1996, through a dialogical petition of the Islamic community with the government, the nation amended the statutory holiday laws to include *Id al-fitr* and *Id al-adha* as national statutory holidays for all citizens. During the climax of these festive religious days, the government of Ghana or its representative in most of the regions of Ghana usually shows their support and presence and encourages the community of faith to foster interreligious relations with other faith traditions in the country. This shows the collaborative effort between the government and the religious bodies. For example, in June 2018, President Akufo-Addo spoke at an *Eid al-Fitr* celebrated and declared, “Our country stands unique in West Africa, both in terms of inter-and intra-religious cooperation… We ought to guard this tradition of cooperation and tolerance jealously.”1151 He

---


also cautioned his fellow citizens to be wary of “troublemakers and hate preachers” who might sow disunity.\footnote{Ibid.}

It is worth noting that there has been a push by the believers of the African Traditional Religion to amend the statutory holiday laws to include equally traditional festivities for “holistic and equitable recognition of the major religions in Ghana”\footnote{Adam et. al., “Fostering Religious Tolerance and Harmonization in Ghana.”} have not been granted yet. The beauty is that during these holiday celebrations, there is an exchange of food and gift across religions because of the cordial and dialogical relationship among the believers of these major religious bodies. In celebrating traditional or Christian, or Islamic festivals or national programs, representatives of the other religion and the government are always invited.

The National Chief Imam, Sheikh Aremeyaw Shaibu, expressed the cordial relationship Muslims have with Christianity and the collaboration with the government by contributing towards the building of the National Cathedral in Ghana which design was unveiled in March 2018 by the president of Ghana, Nana Akuffo Addo in Accra. In his speech the president said:

\begin{quote}
The National Cathedral gives practical expression to this vision of a society mediated by the Almighty, and represents a sacred space for the nation. The Cathedral, thus, addresses a missing link in our national architecture, i.e. church for national purposes. It will be an interdenominational house of worship and prayer, and will serve as the venue for formal state occasions of a religious nature, such as the inauguration of Presidents, state funerals, national thanksgiving services, amongst others… Cathedral will be a unifying monument around which to elevate shared conversations on faith and on national transformation. It will also serve as a rallying platform to promote deep national conversations on how, collectively, we can build the progressive and prosperous Ghana we desire.\footnote{The Vision: Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, President of the Republic & Commander in Chief of the Ghana Armed Forces. \url{https://www.nationalcathedralghana.org/vision} Italics mine to stress the emphasis of the symbolism of unity and dialogue. Accessed on January 18, 2023.}
\end{quote}

This project has received many criticisms from Ghanaians, including those within the Christian circle. Ghanaians criticize that the President is funding the project with the nation’s resources.
even though it was a personal campaign promise to build it in honor of God if he wins. Despite the criticism, the National Chief Imam recently donated an amount of 50,000 Ghana Cedis toward the building of a National Cathedral. This initiative of the Imam equally had some criticism. In his response, the spokesperson for the National Chief Imam, Sheikh Aremeyaw Shaibu, justified the decision for the donation when he said, “it is a symbolic gesture aimed at establishing a sustainable peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christians in the country.”

From the background of interreligious relations, the spoke person of the Imam explained that the spirit of the gesture defines the revolutionary initiative of the Imam to fortify the dialogical relationship with Ghanaians of other religions. He added that “in a revolutionary manner, the Chief Imam is trying to move our mind from the tendency to see each other (Muslims and Christians) as enemies and to remove all traces of hatred.”

h. Dialogue for Peace Among Religions and Ghana of Government

The major religions in Ghana have relentlessly collaborated among themselves and with the government of Ghana to find amicable remedies to the unrest and violence in the country. For instance, in their communique issued in 1996, July 7-12, the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference expressed their sorrow for the ethnic hostilities and religious conflicts in Anloga, in the Volta Region of Ghana, and called on the Local Council of Christian churches and traditional leaders in Anloga to seek resolution through dialogue. The bishops write:

With regard to the violent disruption of religious worship, destruction and robbery of church property, arson, and other injuries inflicted by armed and militant hooligans in the name of protecting traditional religious customs, we expect the organs of law enforcement to intervene to bring about peace and discourage the


1156 Ibid.
repetition of such breaches of the country’s laws. We appeal to traditional rulers to respect the religious persuasions of their subjects and not impose on them practices that amount to a denial of the freedom of religion. We also appeal to Christians and Muslim fundamentalists to desist from actions and utterances that provoke religious animosity and conflict.\footnote{Ghana Bishop Speak: A Collection of Communiques, Memoranda and Pastoral Letters of the Ghana Bishops’ Conference, Vol II, (Takoradi: St. Francis Press, 2006), 22.}

The bishop unequivocally condemned many litigation cases involving chiefs who are supposed to be custodians of our traditions of morality for all generations. The bishops said they consider “chieftaincy as one of the noble legacies of our traditions and cultures.”\footnote{Ghana Bishop Speak, 23.} They challenged the traditional leaders or chiefs to be fathers to all, irrespective of anyone’s political affiliation, religious beliefs, and economic standings.\footnote{Ghana Bishop Speak, 23.} The bishops, in their Communique, called on the chiefs to revise critically some of the customs and traditional practices and eliminate any clause that seeks to violate any of the fundamental human rights.\footnote{Ibid.}

The Ghana Catholic Bishop Conference in February 2023 issued a communique that expresses the sorrow of the protracted conflict between the Kusasis and Mampruis, which has resulted in the death of 15 people and the wanton destruction of property. The bishop hinted that this lingering “conflict is gradually turning Bawku into a ghost town.”\footnote{Matthew Kwasi Gyamfi, Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference Appeals to Government and the People of Bawku to Help Bring the Protracted Conflict in Bawku to an End and Give Peace a Chance. National Catholic Secretariat, the Office of the President (2023). https://www.cbcgha.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/Statement-on-Bawku-Conflict-GCBC.pdf Accessed on January 14, 2023.} As a collaborative effort to protect Ghana’s peace and harmony, the bishops called on the government to intervene to end this conflict once and for all.

In some of our Communiques issued in the past, including the latest issued at the end of our Plenary Assembly held in Donkorkrom in November 2022, we made a passionate appeal to Government and the people of Bawku in the words: “It appears the conflict and insecurity in Bawku are gradually getting off the radar of Government. The town has become a pale shadow of itself as Education, Health...
and Social services delivery is adversely affected by the exodus of teachers, nurses and business people from the town. Government needs to pay attention to the plight of the remnant residents of the town by ensuring that lasting solution is found to the conflict in the area and should act swiftly to prevent Bawku and its environs from becoming a possible launching pad for terrorist groups operating in neighbouring countries.\textsuperscript{1162}

The bishop reiterated their appeal to the Government, as a matter of urgency, to implore all the resources at its disposal to ensure a lasting solution to the protracted conflict in Bawku.\textsuperscript{1163}

In conclusion, it is obvious that the harmony Ghana enjoys today has been a collaborative and determined effort among the various religions and the government of Ghana. These religions continue to dialogue not only at the leadership level but also at the grassroots. Ghana has made progress in coexisting with one another; however, there is more to be done among the religions and government to foster peace and harmony in the country.

5.3. Fostering Dialogue Among Catholicism, Islam, and African Traditional Religion:

Contribution of Ghana Bishops’ Conference

The Catholic church, since Vatican II, has approached other religions and cultures with open-mindedness compared to the eras that preceded the Council. With respect to Muslims, the Church has regarded them with esteem. The writings of Vatican II (\textit{Nostra Aetate}), John Paul II on Christian-Muslim dialogue, the initiative of the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue, and the exhortation of the African synod to dialogue have all been diverse voices geared towards one goal: Building a dialogical encounter with all religions and most particularly the Abrahamic religions. The Church’s call to deepen dialogue with other religions has been one of the efforts of

\begin{flushleft}

\textsuperscript{1163} Kwasi Gyamfi, “Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference,” 1.
\end{flushleft}
the Ghana Church. Spearheaded by the Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference, established in 1960, the Conference has adopted strategies of writing communique and exchanging invitations with Muslims, African Traditional Religion, etc., for seminars and conferences of interreligious dialogue and speak about sensitive issue that seeks to divide the nation. In their First National Catholic Pastoral Congress, the GCBC wrote, “the attitude of Muslims in West Africa toward people of Traditional African Religion and Christians had been pacifistic and quietist in nature. We thank God that today this pacifistic and quietist attitude still animates and inspires Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana.”

a. Organization of Interreligious Conferences and Seminars

Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference (GCBC) has contributed immensely to building the fraternal co-existence with other faith traditions in Ghana through conferences and seminars. For instance, Ghana Catholic Bishops Conference (GCBC), in collaboration with the Office of the National Chief Imam, organized a National Dialogue of Muslim and Catholic Leaders in Accra with a call on leaders to promote religious tolerance, peace, and stability in the country. In attendance were Most Reverend Philip Naameh, the President of the GCBC, Sheikh Dr. Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, National Chief Imam, Maulvi Mohammed Bin Salih, leader of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission Ghana, and prominent Christian and Muslim clergy and other religious organization.

In his speech, Most Rev. Naameh recounted that the maiden gathering between the two religious groups was historic because such a gesture of interreligious dialogue was crucial to

---

1164 Catholic Bishops’ Conference of Ghana, Ecclesial in Ghana, 151.
promoting peace and stability.\textsuperscript{1166} The president of the Conference clearly stated and commended the efforts of the National Chief Imam in advancing interreligious dialogue and unity in the nation.

The National Chief Imam, Sheikh Sharubutu, added that creating a platform to promote peace and stability between Christians and Muslims was important. He called on the two faith traditions to join forces to fortify the cordial relationship in the country. The Imam expressed sadness in instances where many have killed and caused violence in the name of religion. He ended his speech by acknowledging the difference between the two religions and said both religious believers should “accommodate and tolerate each other”\textsuperscript{1167} The National Chief Imam expressed sadness when in the name of religion, people kill and cause violence in the country.

The Executive Director of Sanneh Institute, Professor John Azumah, at the conference presented from the Christian perspective on the topic “The need for dialogue in light of interfaith diversity,” intimated that fostering dialogue between Christians and Muslims is paramount since both religions are majority in the country. Professor Azumah added, “We are all one people, we worship one God, we are all children of Abraham, all teachings of each side tell us to promote peace… protect the religion through dialogue.”\textsuperscript{1168}

\textbf{b. Engaging Stakeholders in Conflict Resolution}

The Ghana Catholic Bishop Conference has always been at the forefront of engaging in dialogue with government representatives, traditional leaders, and Christian and Muslim leaders in areas that have conflicts. One such initiative of dialogical engagement was the meeting in the capital of the Dagbon Kingdom with the Municipal Chief Executive, the Regent, Imams, Women in Peace Building, Muslim Women Association of Ghana, Christian Mothers Association, The

\textsuperscript{1166} Nyarko-Yirenkyi, “Ghana: Muslims, Christians Dialogue to Promote Peace, Stability”

\textsuperscript{1167} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{1168} Ibid. With little changes
Yendi Peace Council, Local Council of Churches, and some other opinion leaders in the area to deliberate about the conflict in Dagbon and Bawku.\textsuperscript{1169}

The Catholic bishops, in their communique, expressed their joy at the assurances from the traditional, religious, and political leaders that violence and conflict belong to the past in Yendi.\textsuperscript{1170} Despite the assurance, the bishops in dialogue made it clear that there are still a “few hurdles to clear in the peace process to achieve a lasting peace.”\textsuperscript{1171} Knowing that the unemployment problem in the area is a major factor that fuels the religious and ethnic conflict (the idle youth are easily manipulated by the unscrupulous to fan the flame of violence),\textsuperscript{1172} the Catholic bishops appealed to the government to speed up the implementation of the programmes of the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority to create jobs for the idle youth.\textsuperscript{1173} For the bishops, the mere dialogue with the religious and traditional leaders, society, and other stakeholders was not enough. All the factors contributing to the Dagbon and Bawku conflict needed attention. In this light, the bishops encouraged the government to speed up the Savannah Accelerated Development Authority project to help reduce the issue of unemployment for the youth in the area.

c. Resources and monetary Donations

Other practical ways the Ghana Catholic Bishop Conference has intervened in matters of national concern is the provision of resources and monetary support not to benefit only Catholics but all Ghanaians without religious differentiation. Recently, in the fight against the threat of Corona Virus Pandemic (COVID-19), the GCBC, on March 27, launched a special appeal to all Catholic organizations, businesses, and the faithful to assist in the efforts to raise funds for the

\textsuperscript{1170} Ghana Bishop Speak: A Collection of Communiques, 25.
\textsuperscript{1171} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{1172} Ibid., 26.
\textsuperscript{1173} Ibid.
pandemic. The appeal was to help the Conference to support the purchasing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) and other medical supplies to support the forty-six Hospitals and the eighty-three Clinics run by the Church under the National Catholic Health Service in the fight against the pandemic. These Catholic hospitals augment the government’s effort to provide better health care to all without discrimination on religious grounds. The Catholic societies of the Noble Order of the Knights and Ladies of Marshall and the Ancient Order of Knights of St. John International (KSJI) and their Ladies Auxiliary, at separate ceremonies at National Catholic Secretariat, presented cheques amounting to GHc130,000 ($26,000) to support the Bishops’ COVID-19 Fund.1174

The Archbishop of Accra, Most Rev. John Bonaventure Kwofie, invited everyone to sacrifice their widow’s mite to assist in caring for ourselves as a country. He said, “COVID-19 has affected the whole world and every country is fighting to survive it, so it will be difficult for Ghana to turn to other countries for help,” The prelate added, “we must look inward to see how to contain it with local resources and collaboration.”1176 The Archbishop knows it is in a collaboration that transcends all religious segregation and every faction that can help the nation and the world to fight the pandemic. He said the Accra Archdiocese had already spent almost GHc111,000 ($22,200) procuring PPEs and supporting vulnerable groups.1177

Apart from attending to the needs of the Catholic hospitals, the Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference (GCBC) donated 70,000 Cedis (approximately $12,000) to the nation’s Covid-19

---

1175 ACI Africa Correspondent, “Catholic Groups in Ghana Respond to Bishops’ Appeal to Support Health Facilities”
1176 Ibid.
1177 Ibid.
Trust Fund to aid the government’s effort towards procuring the necessary resources for the government hospitals. This initiative, according to Archbishop Palmer-Buckle, who made the donation on behalf of the Church to the government, said, “We are following the footsteps of Pope Francis, who has himself instituted a Covid support fund and donated $750,000 into it.”

It must be noted that these donations given to Catholic and government hospitals were converted into caring for Christians, Muslims and African Traditional believers, Jews, Hinduists and Buddhists, and anyone affected by Covid-19 and needed medical attention.

The Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference knew the fight against covid needed a collaborative effort with the government and all religions. Thus, Most Rev. Philip Naameh, the president of the Bishop’s Conference in compliance with the Government directive on the pandemic issued a statement directing all Arch/dioceses to suspend public spiritual programmes such as Masses, retreats, devotions, meetings, confessions, pilgrimages, among others. All Catholic schools were closed until further notice except final-year students who were called back to prepare for their final examination.

5.4. Challenges and the Future of Interreligious Dialogue in Ghana

As already mentioned, Ghana is constitutionally noted to be secular, but the citizens are religious. The interreligious atmosphere in Ghana today flows from the cordial receptivity of

---


African Traditional Religion (ATR), which opened its doors, though with some level of uneasiness, to embrace the new religions of Christianity and Islam in the 15th and 18th centuries respectively. In Ghana, these three major religions have been able to integrate their differences and live harmoniously in all sectors of the nation. Despite the efforts of the government, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion to join forces to foster interreligious and cultural dialogue, there are still challenges that make others feel the harmony in the country is fragile. David Little and Scott Appleby could be right when they described religion as a double-edged institution that “promotes both intolerance and hatred… as well as tolerance of the strongest type— the willingness to live with, explore, and honor difference.”

The focus of this section is to elaborate briefly on the challenges of interreligious and cultural dialogue in Ghana.

a. Ethnic and Religious Conflict

Religion defines and informs the lives of many people or countries. Ghana is no exception. Nonetheless, in Ghana, just like many other countries, the “misuse” and “misunderstanding” of religion have become a plague that has caused many conflicts. Such conflicts make interreligious harmony and peace fragile. Despite the incidence of conflicts recorded in many areas of Ghana, the Northern Region of Ghana deserve to be noted. The Northern Region has experienced many violence and deadly attacks, usually ethnic and religiously related. In Ghana, there are intraethnic and Interethnic conflicts that threaten the peace and dialogical harmony of Ghana. Nora Kofognotera Nonterah identifies that intraethnic conflicts are between two factions of the same ethnic group. These factions could be families, clans, or communities. These factions

share a common language, history, culture, and political demarcations here. Members of these ethnic groups share the same border, but all these commonalities, instead of being a good ground for unity, are sometimes marred by misunderstandings of religious beliefs and teachings, thus resulting in conflict. On the other hand, interethnic conflicts involve two distinct ethnic groups that share different boundaries and languages and engage each other based on ethnic and religious reasons.

**b. Unhealthy Religious Competition**

Where there is a scarcity of resources, there is always a high tendency for human competition. This is a competition where everyone tries to satisfy their ultimate goal or desire for today and, eventually, the future. The religions in Ghana turn to compete among themselves. The question worth answering is why the competitions if the ultimate goal of religion is to assist adherents or the community of believers “to attain perfection, to improve and become better people.” If religion has the perfection of individuals as the ultimate purpose, religious competition should not be an issue at all. On the contrary, religions must collaborate to light up the path of their adherents to the ultimate purpose of perfection. Cosmos Ebo Sarbah writes but sadly, that when communities or religions begin to show forth “which of the religious traditions are best placed to assist individuals and communities to achieve the ultimate objective of human perfection and continual survival? Or which community has the best beliefs and doctrines, history and scriptures, practices, and rites? Or which religion is the best and the most excellent, and which community is the most dignified?” then, the antagonistic competition begins to

---

1182 Ibid., 198.
1183 Ibid., 198.
infiltrate to taint the light of religious interreligiosity. This is when one particular religion begins
to see itself as a superior means to attain that perfection and begins to walk on the path of
religious exclusivism. Any religious community on this road generates competitive energy
around its “beliefs, doctrines, scriptures, and its interpretation.” R
gidity of doctrinal and
dogmatism perpetrates inflexibility and intolerance when other beliefs are expressed. Belief in
God or the ultimate is mistakenly manipulated to be a factor of division well package around
dogma and creed to justify one’s competitive obsession.

In a religiously pluralistic Ghana, there are tendencies of competition among Christianity,
Islam, and African Traditional Religion where the ultimate goal of attainment of human
betterment and communal perfection is trivialized to rather channel all our “efforts, resources
and time on the peripheral goals of competing on the authenticity of deposits of faith.” Some
Christian and Muslim communities in Ghana displace the ultimate task of helping members
advance their human potential of becoming perfect like their Father to center all their energies
“ultimately on numbers, physical expansion, and competition.” Such groups marshalled all
efforts, resources, and activities to advance the peripheral goal, thus creating more tension with
other religious communities. This religious rigidity and misplacement of goals have created an
unhealthy competition that has sparked fights and disrupted relationships among religious groups
within the same community. Even from an ecumenical perspective, one will notice among some
Christian denominations who perceive themselves as possessing the truth of Christ’s teaching
and doctrine. Today, they use television, radio, audio cassettes, books, pamphlets and social
media to preach a divisive message by directly or indirectly attacking other religions,
 demonizing their practices and ritual and elevating theirs as the best. Though most religions in

\[1186\] Ibid.
Ghana are culprits, it is worse among some sects of Christianity (Pentecostal and Charismatic preachers) who perceive themselves as the epitome of the truth of Christ's message. Sometimes their messages depict that Catholics and non-Christian religions are already condemned to hellfire unless they repent and get baptized in their church.

There have been records of unhealthy competition between Christians and Muslims in Ghana, particularly among adherents with fundamentalist orientations. These groups engage each other in a confrontational and polemical manner to the extent of setting ablaze churches, Bibles, Quran, etc.\textsuperscript{1187} The consequence of this is the violent eruptions between Christians and Muslims in Takoradi, Agona Nyakrom, Kumasi, Oda, Walewale, and Wenchi.\textsuperscript{1188} Among Christians and Traditionalists, there has been confrontational competition at Half Assini, Labadi and Korle Gonno.\textsuperscript{1189} Ebo Sarbah reports intra-Muslim clashes among Muslims in 1995-1998 at Akim.\textsuperscript{1190}

To conclude this chapter, it is worth noting that the peace Ghana enjoys today has been the result of deliberate and dedicated efforts of the Catholic Church, its dialogical collaboration with other Christian communities, Islam and African Traditional religious believers. The Ghana Government has done much to ensure and promote religious tolerance, respect, and recognition for the religious other. In their communique issued in 1981, the Ghana Bishops Conference expressed the good relationship they enjoy not just with other religions but also with the government of Ghana. This cordial and dialogical relationship has resulted in a collaborative effort among the religions in Ghana and the government to procure solutions to conflicts and

\textsuperscript{1187} Ibid., 54.
\textsuperscript{1189} Sarbah, “Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Ghana: Competition or Co-Operation?” 54.
\textsuperscript{1190} Ibid.
riots as well as political, education, health, and environmental issues in the country. The bishop writes:

We wish to make it clear that we cherish the good relations between us and the Government very much and hope that our prophetic mission to proclaim the Word of the Lord, welcome and unwelcome, may never be misinterpreted to mean antagonism towards either the Government or any other groups of persons. We also pray and hope that no incident, recent or past, may mar this cordial relationship as a result of misunderstanding.¹¹⁹¹

It must be stated that there are still threats of conflicts and unrest in certain areas, especially Bawku,¹¹⁹² fueled by religious differences and sentiments. It is important that the collaborative efforts among the three major religions and the government continue to devise means to handle any conflict and the unhealthy competition among these religious bodies at the grassroots so that Ghana as a country will perpetually enjoy the beauty of interreligious dialogue and cooperation.

5.5. Conclusion

Today, the Catholic Church in Ghana enjoys a good interreligious dialogue and relationship with the three major religions in Ghana. This interreligious dialogue is further translated into a religio-political relationship where the government of Ghana consults and collaborates with these religious leaders on important matters and the country's development. The dialogical and collaborative efforts between the religions and the Ghana government continue to protect and promote the peace and harmony the nation needs for development. The religious bodies augment the government's efforts to provide facilities for quality education, health care, and a security (prison) system in Ghana. As the moral conscience of the country,

¹¹⁹² Bawku unrest is currently ongoing, and the Bishops’ Conference has pleaded with the government to marshal and intensify resources to beef up the security system in place now to permanently remedy the conflict which has plagued the nation for years.
these religious leaders constructively criticize the government’s actions and policies that have a chance of jeopardizing harmony or retard the development of the nation.

Despite the beauty of collaboration and peaceful coexistence among religious bodies and governments, there have been instances of conflict and unhealthy rift among these religions. It is important that government and all the religious bodies intensify their collaborative efforts to marshal resources and solutions to permanently resolve any conflict issues in Ghana. For instance, the conflict in Bawku, fueled by ethnic and religious sentiments, is a sign that Ghana has much to do to maintain and promote the beauty of religious diversity, peace, and harmony in the country.
5.6. **General Conclusion.**

After about 60 years of the Vatican II Council, the Catholic Church today cannot stay oblivious to the changing phases of cultures, religions, and world history within which it seeks to evangelize and engage in dialogue within itself and with non-Christian religions and cultures. The Church, during the Council, acknowledged the “true cultural and social transformation, one which has repercussions on man’s religious life as well.” This made the Vatican II Fathers emphasize in *Gaudium et Spes* the weighty responsibility of the Church to read the signs of the times. In reading the signs of the times, the Church can identify the external changes in the postmodern world and their influences on the interior life of all humanity, including cultures and religions. This will enable the Catholic Church to map up new theological and appropriate the apt corresponding pastoral pedagogies for self-introspection and engagement with non-Christian religions, culture, and their people.

Identifying the symptomatic features of cultural diversity, socio-political and economic globalization, and religious pluralism of the postmodern world, the Catholic Church at the Vatican II Council, advanced a different theological and pastoral position to be interreligiously religious. This was revolutionary for a church that has evangelized for centuries with the mind of exclusivism (monologue), confrontation, and ethnocentrism. In other words, the scope of the Church’s theology of mission and evangelization was predominantly dictated by the maxim of

---

Cyprian of Carthage, “*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus.*”¹¹⁴⁴ Some magisterial, papal documents¹¹⁴⁵ and decrees of Councils¹¹⁴⁶ before Vatican II harshly affirmed the maxim of Cyprian, thus encountering those outside the church with exclusive doctrine and ideologies.

The exclusive and monologue perspective of the Church’s mission was experienced in the 19th Century when Christian missionaries came to Ghana and engaged the Akan Traditional Religion, culture, and people. These missionaries adopted Christianity’s triumphalist and exclusivist approach to evangelization. In their travels in Ghana to evangelize, Catholic missionaries failed to dialogue to understand the Akan culture and the Akan way of worship as a steppingstone to proclaiming the gospel message. The early missionaries exhibited high superiority and denigrated the native people, their culture, and their traditional religion. The missionaries (Portuguese, Dutch, Danse, England, etc.) spread the gospel message on the Gold Coast, shrouded and enveloped in the Graeco-Roman and Western cultures and traditions. Muonwe could be right when he spoke of the missionaries and their methodology of evangelization: “Time and energy were expended for centuries trying to convert people not merely to the Christian religion but also to the supposed superior culture to be universal and exemplary.”¹¹⁴⁷ Converts were taught to abandon their indigenous cultures and traditions and indirectly hold on to the ‘ideal’ or ‘civilized’ cultures and traditions of the West as the only way

¹¹⁴⁴ *Extra ecclesiam Nulla Salus (est)* (Lat., ‘outside the church there is no salvation’). St Cyprian used the axiom of “*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*” with specificity. His usage was in reference to Christians who have deliberately separated themselves from the Catholic Church because of heresy and schism. Cyprian never intended to use the axiom for religions. Unfortunately, later writers like St Ambrose of Milan, St Gregory of Nyssa and John Chrysostom and later conciliar writings applied this principle with a wider scope to include everyone outside the Church including other religions. See Gerald O’Collins, *The Second Vatican Council on Other Religions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 26. See also *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus (est)*, https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/extra-ecclesiam-nulla-salus-est Accessed on November 21, 2021.

¹¹⁴⁵ Example of encyclicals that affirmed the maxim of Cyprian include, *Unam Sanctam* “Ubi Primum, Quanto Conficiamur Moerore, Mystici Corporis.

¹¹⁴⁶ Council of Florence, Council of Trent etc. also reaffirmed that outside the church there is no salvation.

to salvation in Jesus Christ. The Akan cultural and religious practices were made to appear unfit for the communication of the gospel message because they were non-European and therefore perceived as “pervaded by evil spirits and demonic forces.”\textsuperscript{1198} Akan music, dance, and manner of worship were considered devilish and thus disqualified from liturgical celebrations of the Church in the era of the early missionaries. For instance, the Akan converts were prohibited from practicing their culture, such as using their Music (folksongs), drumming, dancing, and wearing talismans in and outside the Church. The Akan style of worship was classified as contemptible for the Christian celebration. They were deemed satanic, savage, fetish, heathen, and ungodly. Christianity was preached as the antidote for purifying and exorcising the Akan cultural practices and Akan religion.

At the Vatican II Council, the synod fathers took a detour to become the first Ecumenical Council in the Church’s history to give a momentous recognition to interreligious dialogue and to establish a positive outlook of openness with non-Christian religions and cultures. Instead of blanket condemnations reflecting a fortress mentality, the Church turned toward a significant optimism, emphasizing the necessity of interreligious and intercultural dialogue.\textsuperscript{1199} Vatican II documents like \textit{Sacrosanctum Concilium} (SC), \textit{Lumen Gentium}, \textit{Ad Gentes}, etc., unlike the first millennium, made a substantial shift by recognizing the elements of ‘grace and truth’ (what is ‘good and true) in the ‘religious others’ (LG. 16).

After it had undergone different changes, the Vatican II ‘Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian Religion-\textit{Nostra Aetate} (NA)’ was promulgated during the fourth and final sessions of the Vatican II Council on October 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1965. As a build-up of the preceding

\textsuperscript{1198} Muonwe, \textit{Dialectics of Faith-Culture Integration}, 31.
documents, with a positive outlook, *Nostra Aetate* (NA) affirmed other faith traditions and their faithful as an integral part of the divine plan for humanity. In the declaration, the Church laid out a new path of openness, reconciliation, dialogue, and collaboration between the Christian religion and other religions and cultures. The Church offered an explicit opportunity for openness to the truth and realities of other non-Christian faiths. Profoundly, *Nostra Aetate* framed the Church’s position with non-Christian religions and cultures within a theological concept of developing unity within humanity. The declaration opens with an idea of humanity called to a vocation of drawing more closely together, with a bond of friendship and promotion of unity and love among different nations, cultures, and people. Theologically, the Fathers identified the unity of humanity as the very essence of the Christian faith.

Again, *Nostra Aetate* stressed the sacred dignity of the human person as a ground for interreligious dialogue when the declaration defended that the dignity of every human person is connected to divine fatherhood. The declaration states:

> We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God. Man’s relation to God the Father and his relation to men his brothers are so linked together that Scripture says: "He who does not love does not know God" (1 John 4:8).

Moreover, NA highlighted the existence of some positive elements, truth, and holiness inherent in non-Christian cultures and religions when it said the following: “The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrine which, although different in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.” It is

---

1202 NA. 5.
1203 NA. 2.
from this positive outlook of the Church that the bishops of Vatican II encouraged all Catholics to dialogically engage non-Christians, something that was never said before the Vatican II Council. The declaration states:

The church therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture. 1204

While it is worth celebrating the courageous step of the Church to walk unfamiliar terrains of dialogue with non-Christian cultures and religions, especially at Vatican II, it is important to intimate also that the changing features of postmodernity with all its complexities pose new challenges to the Church to reexamine some hermeneutics and epistemology that underline her theological discourses. *Nostra Aetate* and some conciliar documents have intrinsic hermeneutical and epistemological flaws that impede openness and genuine interreligious dialogue. Some of these principles include: 1) The church’s claim of universal truth, salvation, and ideologies, 2) ‘Revelation’ not fully present in Other Religions, 3) Intrinsic truth and holiness based on the church’s judgment, 4) Colonial narrative, perception, Imagery, and Language, 5) Silence of Vatican II on Akan Traditional Religion.

Theology and theologizing fortified by narcissistic self-awareness and entrenched imperialistic pride tendencies become a blockage to the breathing out interreligious humility to encounter other religions and cultures to “give out” and “receive” something for mutual enrichment among religions and cultures. It is, therefore, necessary for the Church’s theology and dialogical intervention to go beyond the above-mentioned hermeneutical flaws to theologize among others with the following theological principles: 1) Contextualization, Particularity, and

1204 NA. 3.
Historicity, 2) Literary and Non-Literary Resources of Enquiry, 3) Space and Time. Catholic theological and interreligious discourses would potentially break deadlocks to tread the unfamiliar grounds of other religions when dominant theological principles are set free from western and Eurocentric supremacy that fail to give recognition to the principles mentioned above.

It must be mentioned that despite the advancement in interreligious dialogue in Catholicism, there are still vestiges of the religious and cultural supremacy mentality that continues to linger on in the Catholic Church of Ghana as it dialogues with the Traditional Akan Religion, its people, and culture. One typical cultural practice which continues to create problems for Akan converts is marriage. Ghana and most African countries in the twentieth century are primarily under the classicist mentality where the Church’s marriage does not resonate with the Akan culture.

The Akans of Ghana had their customs, regulations, and laws governing marriage celebrations before the advent of Christianity (Catholicism). Unfortunately, in Ghana, Akan converts who are already married in the culturally accepted customary marriage cannot receive communion unless another wedding is performed in the Church. To the Akan traditionally married person, the Church wedding is more a prerequisite to receiving the Eucharist or assuming a higher ecclesiastical position in the parish.\footnote{For instance, in the Sekondi-Takoradi Diocese of Ghana, it is only a man or woman who had undergo both the customary marriage and church marriage who can become the president of his/her parish.}

Since the Tridentine doctrine on marriage, the African and, for that matter, Akan traditional marriage ceremony has been classified below the level of a sacrament. The Church’s liturgical tradition, theology, and canon law had failed to incorporate and reflect the cultures and practices of the traditional Akan marriage system. This makes the question of Ngundu relevant
when he asked: “What we question here is whether ecclesiastical and civil marriage legislation passed in Europe to meet specific European marital and social problems in different cultural generations can justifiably be extended to African Christians in Africa (and the rest of the non-Western world).” As already argued, if the church marriage today had developed out of a culture, why can’t the Akan marriage practice be baptized to align with the theology of the Church? This has resulted in a high level of eucharistic famine in the church of Ghana because most traditionally married couples do not see the need to undergo another marriage rite which does not even resonate with the Akan cultural and religious setting. While the Church permits such couples to participate in the liturgy of the word and make donations to support the Church’s activities, they are cut off from the liturgy of the Eucharist, the food for their spiritual growth. Is the customary married person perceived by the Catholic Church as living in sin or not in a state of grace simply because the church’s wedding had not been performed? Should the Akan marriage system be exactly like the church’s wedding? My argument is that God is never outside any culture. “God is the absolute energy and driving force of all cultures and religions” Maribeth Rushe). In that sense, the Akan cultural marriage practices can be baptized to theologically align with the church’s teaching while its celebration stays truly Akan and truly Catholic. The current pastoral situation of marriage and the eucharist in the Catholic Church of Ghana defeats the symbolism or model of the Church as a family of God and the Eucharist as the source and summit of the Church’s life since some members are disallowed to sit and eat with others at the same table.

---

1207 SC. 10.
To satisfy the canonical and theological grounds for which the church does not give Akan marriage full recognition, this dissertation proposes two marriage models for consideration as a remedy for the multiplicity of marriages and the eucharistic feminine in the Ghana church:

a. Option I: Rite of Marriage for African/Akan Couples (RoMAC).

b. Option II: Rite of African-Catholic Marriage for Monogamous Union (RacMMu).

As a synodal church, the ideas of dialogue, listening, discernment, reexamination and pastoral proposals, collegiality, and subsidiarity need to be rekindled in the language of the church to facilitate a deeper reflection of the life of the church for the future. Today, Akan (Ghanaian) Catholics cry for a dialogue of liberation that will resolve the dichotomy between the traditional Akan marriage and the church’s marriages. Ghana church wants to celebrate a marriage rite that reflects their roots, culture, and ecclesiastical and Akan identity. Instead of celebrating Akan marriage and church marriage separately, there is an urgent cry for a dialogue between the two cultural and religious traditions to consider the proposals above so that Akan Catholics can celebrate one marriage rite, which is truly Akan and truly Catholic marriage.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


———. In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation.


Rahner, Karl. ‘Christianity and the Non-Christian Religions,’ trans. Karl –Heinz Kruger,


Rausch, Thomas P. Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision. New York:
Paulist, 2009.


**Book Chapter and Article**


Osuji, Peter “Laudato Si’ and Traditional African Environmental Ethics,” in *Integral Ecology*: 365


Online Resources

Intestate Succession Law for Non-Discrimination,” (University Of Oslo, 2008), 19.


Awuah-Nyamekye, Samuel Salvaging Nature: The Akan Religio-Cultural Perspective, (October


Cusanus, Nicholas. *Opera Omnia, vii, Raymond Klibansky and Hildebrand Bascour*, eds.


“Declaration “Dominus Iesus,” On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the
Church,” Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith.


Dialogue and Proclamation (DP), Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1) (1991),


Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus (est),


John Paul II, Supreme Pontiff Encyclical Letter, Redemptor Hominis(RH) 6


Gaudium et Spes.


Gyamfi, Matthew Kwasi. “Ghana Catholic Bishops’ Conference Appeals to Government and the People of Bawku to Help Bring the Protracted Conflict in Bawku to an End and
Give Peace a Chance.” National Catholic Secretariat, the Office of the President (2023).


Mystici Corpus Christi Encyclical of pope Pius XII on the Mystical Body of Christ Vatica.va

New Advent, “The Unity of the Catholic Church 14”

https://repository.globethics.net/bitstream/handle/20.500.12424/235739/n30_1_035.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y Accessed on December 11, 2022.


https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1006&context=sc_lectures


———. *Reading Nostra Aetate in Reverse: A Different Way of Looking at the Relationships Among Religions* (March 2016).

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/305079583_Reading_Nostra_Aetate_in_Reverse_A_Different_Way_of_Looking_at_the_Relationships_Among_Religions

Accessed on February 20, 2022.


Platvoet, Jan G. *The Akan Believer, and his Religions*. (December 1979).

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336029697_17_The_Akan_Believer_and_his_Religions


Pullella, Philip and Ahmed Eljechtimi. March 31, 2019 “Conversion is not your mission, Pope tells Catholics in Morroco.”


Accessed on 5/02/2019


[https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=church-history-pubs](https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1019&context=church-history-pubs)


Sarkodie, Raphael “The Celebration of Marriage and Its Effects on the Catholic Church in


Savi, Julio. *The Declaration Dominus Iesus: A Brake on Ecumenism and Interfaith Dialogue?*


Trent, “Twenty-Fourth Session of the Council of Trent,” *Catholicism*.


Ulzen, A. Edward “First Fathers of Society of African Missions (SMA) Arrive in Elmina,”


375


**Video Links**

“Ghanaian Traditional Wedding 2022|Full Video #Ghana”


“(The Asante's (Our Ghanaian Traditional Wedding)”