

**A CRITICAL STUDY OF CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS IN THE CENTRAL REGION OF GHANA
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TRADITIONAL AKAN VALUES**

BY

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ABSTRACT

This work studies Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana with special reference to the role of traditional Akan culture. It identifies and examines religious and cultural practices of the Akan people of Ghana that continue to exert strong influence on the people in the wake of the upsurge of Christianity and Islam. These practices have not only succeeded in moulding and shaping both Christianity and Islam into unique entities as found in Ghana but also toning down the ancient rivalries that have existed between them.

It is concluded that Christian-Muslim exchanges go beyond theological and historical discussions. They, more importantly, include religious and socio-political practicalities and issues which are found in this work to not only have far-reaching implications for the formulation of images and attitudes of the other religious tradition but also foster effectual and meaningful Christian-Muslim encounters.

It is in the context of cultural and, in fact, holistic understanding of Christian-Muslim engagements that the commonalities of the two great religious traditions could be celebrated and the differences inherent in them be deeply appreciated as an asset and not a liability.

DEDICATION

To the Glory of God

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

1.1 INTRODUCTION

1.1.1 The Rationale of the Study

Christian-Muslim relations, all over the world, are usually associated with instances of intolerance, tensions, and conflicts. Such associations are the result of wrong impression often created by the misinterpretation of history. They are also due to the media's characterization of Christians and Muslims as enemies who are almost always at each other's throats (Sanneh, 1983:210). Reports on conflicts, especially in Africa, often claim that Christian-Muslim intolerance is the main cause. However, there are many areas in our world today and Africa for that matter, where peaceful and harmonious exchanges do take place on daily basis between Christians and Muslims. Such positive exchanges have received little attention in the study of religions in Africa. Furthermore, some people often either deliberately or inadvertently fail to see the very complex underlying issues involved in Christian-Muslim conflicts across the globe.

One area where the usual monolithic view of Christian-Muslim relations fails to stand up to scrutiny is the Central Region of Ghana. In this part of Africa, Christian and Muslims get along quite easily. In other words, religion is not a barrier as Christians and Muslims interact. Certainly, we agree with Mbillah (1999:67) and Samwini (2006: 35-37) that there have been instances of intolerance, tension and conflicts in this area, but these have been short-lived. In fact, Christians and Muslims live in close proximity to each other in villages, communities, families, houses, and at times in rooms. They encounter each other at school, the market place, naming, marriage, and funeral ceremonies, as well as at religious and social functions.

Accordingly, the relation between Christians and Muslims in the Central Region has been commonly described as "mutual" and "peaceful". Nevertheless, the assertion that peaceful co-existence takes place in the Central Region raises many questions: Is the statement true? If so, then what are the models and issues contributing to these harmonious and fruitful encounters? What is actually keeping these people together to the extent that their religious differences do not matter so much to them? What could be done to make the

encounters even better? Are there values and principles here that could be useful in areas where there is constant Christian-Muslim strife? As Muslims and Christians interact what are the main issues that influence their judgements, decisions and actions? It is to find answers to such questions that we are undertaking this study.

The study sets out to explore the theologico-cultural values of the Akan people of the Central Region, which ensure harmonious and cohesive Christian-Muslim relations that safeguard religious liberties and respect difference and particularities. Pope John Paul II to the bishops of Ghana, Burkina Faso and students of Cote d'Ivoire in 1980 which described the values of their cultures as:

“... real treasures from which you can and must draw something new for building up your country, on an original and typically African model, made up of harmony between the values of its cultural past and the most acceptable elements of modern civilization.” (The *Magisterium* of John Paul II, 1997: 231-233)

With these words, the Pope urged Africans to safeguard and preserve the values of their cultures, using them to seek solutions to the enormous problems confronting the continent. It is assumed that the findings of this work could help improve interfaith relations in the Central Region, other communities in Ghana and in West Africa and perhaps beyond the sub-region. The Findings of this study would be much more appreciated in the light of the decision of Pope Benedict XVI to consider Christian-Muslim relations in the broader context of cultures by placing the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue under the Council for Culture.

1.1.2 Objectives of the Study

This study seeks to:

1. examine the history of Christian-Muslim relations in the Central Region and its impact on the society
2. study the models of social cohesion of traditional Akan Society before the advent of Christianity and Islam

3. explore the main levels, issues and models of Christian- Muslim encounters in the Central Region and
4. analyse the role traditional Akan values play in Christian-Muslim encounters in the Central Region.

1.1.3 The Research Instrument

A multi-method approach is used in this study.¹ Information about the history of Christian-Muslim relations and Akan traditional values were obtained by using available literature. The literature included books and articles in libraries, archives and local newspapers. Official documents such as constitutions, handbooks, working papers and profiles of religious groups, organizations and denominations were also used. The main instruments we employed at the fieldwork were questionnaire, interviews and observation. A well-prepared and structured questionnaire, arranged in sequence and designed to be self-administered were sent out. Questionnaire was designed to require information on beliefs and attitude, behaviour and attribute of religious people as they relate with members of the other religions.²

With regard to the structure of the questions we used mainly close-ended questions with choices, in which case answer choices were provided. These answer choices were not arranged in any particular order to enable the respondent choose from among different categories by evaluating them independently. The respondent then was expected to choose the ones that best reflect their situation. Some of the questions were also partially closed-ended and open-ended.³ The interview schedule involved one-on-one in person.⁴ Participants responded to questions about traditional values in relation to Christian-Muslim encounters in

¹ To make up for limitations of each instrument we have adopted a multi-method approach in which case the various instruments will complement each other and so will render us the comprehensive information that will lead us to an intuitive understanding and deeper insight of the people whose attitudes are under study.

² For instance, questions on attitudes concerned what people want and expect Christian-Muslim relations to be. They sought answers to how people feel about Christian-Muslim relations. Questions on beliefs asked about what people do and also their beliefs about their behaviour in relation to the other. They mainly concerned what people have done in the past, what they are now doing or what they intend to do at all levels of Christian-Muslim relations. Attribute questions also sought answers to how respondents perceive people of the other religion. Questions generally asked for answers to why people behave and act the way they do in relation to people of other faith (Librero, 1985: 43-44).

³ The partially closed-ended questions provided answer options, but gave the respondent the opportunity to create his own answers. The open-ended questions did not provide answer options, but required the respondent to supply their answers.

⁴ Even though telephone interviewing has many advantages we did not use it because we could not bear the cost it was to involve (Frey & Oishi, 1995:4).

the Central Region. They also demonstrated how, in their view, certain traditional elements help promote the religious encounters. The interview questions were mainly open-ended. To reduce bias, which could have crept into the interviews where assistants were employed as indicated by Judith Bell, the researcher conducted all the interviews himself (Bell, 1992: 72).

Participant observation used consisted of observation of interactions, actions and reactions, behaviours of Christians and Muslims.⁵ As a Fante and with sufficient knowledge of the social context under study the researcher is able to give meaningful and unbiased interpretation to the behaviours observed.

1.1.4 Scope and Limitations

A study of Christian-Muslim relations in the Central Region cannot intend to explore all the issues involved. In view of this, the study seeks mainly to explore the role of the traditional values in these encounters. It is a critical study of the time-honoured customs and traditions as we explore viable issues, foundations and models for mutual understanding and encounters between Christian and Muslims in the Central Region of Ghana. It also does not do a mere descriptive study of the two religions but to study these religions from the point of view of relationships. It focuses mainly on the practical ways Christians and Muslims engage one another in their daily lives and will try as much as possible to avoid theological controversies.⁶

Though several ethnic groups of the Akan inhabit the Central Region, the study is intended to focus on Christian-Muslim relations among the Fante people. The Fante ethnic group of the Akan people is selected because it is the largest ethnic group covering nine out of thirteen districts of the Central Region. Moreover, Christianity and Islam in the region began with the Fante people. The religious groups in the region selected for the study included: (A) Christian denominations made up of the Mission Churches such as the Catholic, Methodist, Presbyterian and Indigenous Christian Churches like the Musama Disco Christo Church, the Twelve Apostles' Church, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches; (B) Muslim denominations

⁵More importantly, this instrument will also target oral tradition such as narratives, sayings (proverbs) and songs, which are transmitted by means of the word of mouth, which have some influence on the judgements and decisions of people. It will mainly be used to obtain information that questionnaire and interview schemes will not be able to and to crosscheck information already obtained from the other instruments (Osman, 1982:3).

⁶ The theological controversy may sidetrack the focus of the study.

such as mainstream or ‘Orthodox’ Muslim group, the *Ahl al-Sunna wa 'l-Jamā'a* and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement. The study was conducted within the contemporary Ghanaian society.⁷

1.1.5 The Literature Review

Since academic discourses on Christian-Muslim relations in tropical Africa began, a number of contributions have been made by historians and commentators of religion using various approaches and models. Many of these scholars adopted the historical approach by exploring the origins and developments of Christianity and Islam in Africa, making available to their readers critical and objective accounts of these religions and their impact on the continent. On one hand, scholars and historians such as Trimmingham (1961), Clarke (1982:1-20, 28-66), Fisher (1973:27-40), Levtzion (1994: 207-216), Hiskett (1984: 34-67), Fitzgerald & Lanfry (1974), Abdullahi (1984), Sanneh (1997), Sulayman (1986) and Mazrui (1986) have written extensively on Islam and made useful contribution to this effect. On the other hand, historians such as Westermann (1937), Debrunner (1960), Parrinder (1961), Gifford (2004), Idowu (1965) and Odamtten (1978) have also documented comprehensive account of Christianity. Thanks to the works of both groups of scholars many in Africa and beyond have access to useful information particularly concerning the factors, which contributed to the spread of Islamic and Christian traditions in the sub-region.

In spite of the wealth of information these works have provided readers, they have received mixed reactions from later generation of historians and commentators. While some such as Nyang (1990: 46) consider them as “faithful” and “objective” accounts, others like Azumah (2001: 231) describe their accounts as “shameful” for trying to glorify, romanticize and idealize Arab-Islam by hiding the atrocities it inflicted on the African. John Azumah in his *The legacy of Arab-Islam in Africa: A quest for Inter-religious Dialogue*, in the name of exploring possible, appropriate models of dialogue ventures to reveal what he describes as “evils of the Arab-Islam past” or more appropriately to challenge the romantic perception of a “glorious Islamic past” in Africa. In view of this, Azumah engages in the discussion of what he considers as the jihadists’ attempt at destroying the African culture by “...overthrowing

⁷ Contemporary Ghanaian society refers to post- independent Ghana. Ghana attained its independence from Britain on the 6th of March 1957. This event was a milestone in shaping the course of the history and development of the country.

and overhauling the indigenous African and his/her heritage” through anathemization and demonization of its essential elements as *kufir*. Azumah also brings out the socio-religious malevolences of Arab-Muslim slavery in Africa (Azumah, 2001: 231). Azumah’s main objective is “...to level the historical playing field for a more honest and sustainable inter-faith dialogue and peaceful co-existence between Muslim and non-Muslim” in a pluralistic environment such as Africa (Azumah, 2001: xvi).

An approach of this sort, as championed by Azumah (2001), is at present unnecessary for the findings of such models bring humanity back to the era when Christians and Muslims engaged in prolonged polemics, which tended to keep them apart from each other and more importantly deepened the acrimony that characterized such encounters. This approach opens wounds and eventually dwells unduly on differences with crippling effects on inter-religious dialogue. In other words, this approach, which thrives on blame game by finding faults, is counter-productive to dialogue and becomes practically misplaced especially when it is allowed to take the centre stage in issues of Christian-Muslim discourses. Such an approach, in our view, obviously cannot achieve the well-intended goals of promoting Christian-Muslim relations. If anything, it will certainly hinder or be an obstacle to it. The outcome of this blame game approach cannot deal with the legacy of antipathy, fear and sometimes aversion that aspects of the history of Christian-Muslim encounters have created within African societies. That mistakes have been made in the past is undeniable, but should we continue to painstakingly look for such mistakes, however deliberately made, and highlight them, especially in academic circles, with a view of levelling the playing field?

Another aspect of the debate that has gained currency in academic circles, but which was more predominant in the 19th century, is the impact of Western-Christianity and Arab-Islam on the African continent. It seeks to find out which of the two great religions have dealt kindly with African cultures and so is more poised to lead Africa to the much needed civilization. Accordingly, advocates of this aspect of the debate, like their precursors (Blyden, 1887: 11-12; Lewis, 1980: 74; Trimingham, 1959: 40 and Nyang, 1990: 46), demonstrate how Islam has been more flexible and compromising with the African heritage than Christianity. Writing about the development of Islam in Africa, Blyden, whose work was first published in 1887, hammers home the positive effects of Islam on the African continent by claiming that “...as an eliminatory and subversive agency, it (Islam) has displaced or unsettled nothing as good as itself” (Blyden, 1887: 2; Debrunner 1967:240). In his bid to paint Islam white in

order to champion the 'Black African Cause', Blyden himself, though a sincere Christian, discusses positive Islamic influences such as prohibition of intoxicating drinks, promotion of superior intellectual, moral and unifying character, disdain for caste distinction and introduction of teaching and learning (Blyden, 1887: 3-5). Blyden even finds in the ranks of Islam established areas the most energetic and enterprising tribes in his travels (Blyden, 1887:15; Debrunner, 1967:240). Much as there is no justifiable reason to deny the truism of these positive elements, Blyden's silence on the many negative influences is a cause for concern. His attempt to glorify Islam and to present it as a wholly sacrosanct entity undermines the principle of objectivity, which is the bedrock of academic discourse. Blyden (1887: xiii) and Bosworth Smith, in particular, go further to, emphatically, propose that the future of the African continent lies in Islam.

In the same way, Atterbury (1899) adopts the approach of Blyden (1887) but ends up with a contrasting view which considers Islam as opposed to civilisation and is, therefore, a "...hindrance and not a help to the higher civilisation" (Atterbury, 1899: 184). In other words, Islam should not be considered a factor in progress towards the ideal that Africa hopes for since, according to Atterbury (1899), Islam in Africa "...is characterised by superficiality, a selfish and materialistic greed, a combination of all that has been proved bad" and "aggressive" (Atterbury, 1899: 161). It is no wonder that his chapter entitled "The Great Solution" asserts emphatically without any equivocation that "...the civilisation of Africa must be accomplished by Christianity and Commerce- hand in hand", thus leaving Islam out entirely (Atterbury, 1899:186). Like Blyden (1887), Atterbury's objectivity is undermined by his refusal to see anything good in Islam. What is most worrying is that both Blyden and Atterbury are widely known to have undertaken serious studies of both Christianity and Islam in sub-Saharan Africa. The future of Africa cannot be attributed to any one of these religions, especially when each of them, is widely known to have substantial influence and above all has made and is still making laudable contribution to the sub-region. It is also strange that both scholars should arrive at conclusions, which completely contradict each other.

In line with Atterbury (1899), Baudin (1985), a missionary on the 'Slave Coast of Africa' in the late nineteenth century, discredits the valuable contribution of Islam in Africa, characterising it as a dangerous obstacle to the future of the African. He observes:

"...there is a lower and still viler being than the black fetichist, and that is

the fetichist turned Mussulman. To his former brutishness and superstitions he adds two new vices: fanaticism and pride...the Mussulman Negro is unapproachable.” (Baudin, 1985:103)

Baudin’s criticism of the African Muslim should be understood in the context of his absolute and general disregard, disdain and contempt for Islam which he saw as an obstacle to rapid expansion of Christianity. Apparently influenced by medieval Christian perception of Islam as evil, Baudin (1985), whose book was first published in 1885, does not see how Islamic expansion can propel Africa unto the path of development and progress. Baudin (1985) contends:

“The rapid progress of Mahometanism in these [African] countries alarms all the friends of Africa, all those who take an interest in these unfortunate people, and follow the march of events. It is only in the circle where the influence of the Christian missions is felt that fetichism has lost credit, and this fact indicates to us the remedy of evils of which we have only been able to give a faint idea. In Catholic evangelization and the charity of Christian nations rests the only hope of the salvation of the black fetichist.” (Baudin, 1985: 103-104)

On the whole, this approach needs to be reassessed critically. In the first place, neither Christianity nor Islam has succeeded in eroding completely the African heritage. In fact, although both religions have considerably impacted the continent, traces of traditional African cultures still persist. Secondly, this model, as particularly championed by Blyden (1887), Atterbury (1899) and Baudin (1985) indirectly suggests suppression, if not complete elimination, of one religion or the other, which may sow seeds of suspicion among Christians and Muslims and ultimately destabilise the continent. Both Islam and Christianity, needless to say, have become integral part of the cultures of Africa, as each has made inroads into the socio-cultural interstices of Africa and commands significant following. The fact that the two religious traditions have survived on the continent for centuries is an indication of their having been indigenised. Thus, the future of Africa lies neither with Islam nor Christianity exclusively, but both. Both Christianity and Islam have to learn to accommodate each other and studies in this area should rather concentrate on developing and highlighting models of

harmonious co- existence.

Accordingly, soon after independence and even until now African leaders have consistently rejected the divisive, reckless, problematic and impractical positions of people like Blyden (1887), Atterbury (1899) and Baudin (1985) and have adopted a comprehensive approach in dealing with African socio-cultural challenges. In *Consciencism*, Nkrumah (1964), Ghana's first president spelt out a political ideology, based on all the various religious traditions, not only to de-colonise Africa but also pave the way for its strong and prosperous future. Nkrumah notes:

“With true independence regained, however, a new harmony needs to be forged, a harmony that will allow the combined presence of traditional Africa, Islamic Africa and Euro-Christian Africa, so that this presence is in tune with the original humanist principles underlying Africa society.”
(Nkrumah, 1964:70)

By this statement, Nkrumah threw over board the divisive, tactless and short-sighted views of people like Blyden (1967), Atterbury (1969) and Baudin (1985) in privileging one religion over the other and called for an ideology created within the framework of all three main traditions of Islam, Christianity and the traditional African way of life. In this way, Nkrumah hoped to transcend religious particularism and exclusivism in order to create a plurality that would support his integrative revolution (Addo, 1997:41; Nyang, 1984:76).

Hence, while acknowledging the laudable contributions of both Christianity and Islam, Nkrumah also called for a second look at the traditional philosophy of life which, he believed, would be a necessary foundation for a viable and strong society (Nyang, 1984:77). Such a positive view of the three main religions of the continent resulted from Nkrumah's recognition of the unique role religion can play in forging an ideology for a unified people under one government. He contended that:

“Our attitude to the Western and the Islamic experience must be purposeful. It must be guided by...a body of connected thought which will determine the general nature of our action in unifying the society which we have inherited, this unification to take account, at all times, of the

elevated ideals underlying the traditional African society.” (Nkrumah 1964:76)

Though Nkrumah believed religion should not intrude unduly in political decision making he does not hide his admiration for religion as a potent integrating force (Addo, 1997:33). In other words, Nkrumah recognised the symbolic and integrative capacities of Ghanaian religiosity and its potential role of dealing with tension between centralization and diffusion of political authority.

Furthermore, secularism and the impact of western education on the religiosity of the African people cannot be left out of discussion of Christian-Muslim exchanges on the African continent. With overwhelming embrace of western system of education and its attendant secular philosophy by both Christians and Muslims in West Africa, scholars such as Lewis assert that many West Africans would eventually become secular in their view of life (Lewis, 1966: 91). Though one can find some signs of this secular attitude notable among them being constitutional governance in West Africa it is proper to disagree with people like Lewis and most importantly Trimingham (1959) who argue that the obvious consequence of this secular attitude is the gradual adoption of religion as “personal religious allegiance” (Trimingham, 1959: 221) and so eventual elimination of religion entirely. In other words, Trimingham (1959) is of the view that many Muslims and Christians will adopt Islam or Christianity only as a personal religion which would have bearing on the private and not on daily and public life. While this position of Trimingham might be cogent, there is much evidence to prove that it is very much overstretched. For, many in sub-Saharan Africa, as Mbiti (1969), Sarpong (1974), Ukpong (1984) point out, still regard religion as the heart and soul of their culture and most importantly in the sense of spirituality (Montilus, 1989) and as such a prevailing system (Azumah 2001), which ought to have significant influence on every activity of daily life. Writing on secularism and its impact on the religiosity of the Africa people, Bediako argues that secularism does not necessarily mean irreligiosity in Africa stating that:

“...African Christians have, on the whole, avoided any significant secularisation of their outlook. New knowledge in science and technology has been embraced, but it has not displaced the basic view that the whole

universe in which human existence takes place is fundamentally spiritual.” (Bediako 1995:176)

Thus, Bediako adds his voice to those who still do not see a clear dichotomy between the secular and the spiritual in the African world view of life. Apparently, people like Brenner think scholars such as Lewis (1966) and Trimingham (1959) have acted like false prophets by predicting that secularism will finally undermine religiosity in sub-Saharan Africa. Brenner argues that the failure of secularism in Africa has rather strengthened religiosity, stating: “...African Muslims have increasingly been turning to Islam for the resolution of their own social and political problems” (Brenner, 1993: 1-2). In admitting the failure of secularism to address the considerable challenges of Africa, Brenner creates the impression that African Muslims are crying for a regime of Islamic dispensation, a sort of theocracy. But instances where Muslims are actually turning to Islam, as an alternative political tool to constitutional governance, seem to be isolated and few in sub-Saharan Africa. Brenner actually picks up on these isolated instances and generalizes them. For, countries such as Senegal, Burkina Faso and even Cote d’Ivoire, with Muslim majority population, still have time-tested constitutions in place in which is deeply entrenched religious freedom. Even where attempts have been made to adopt or impose Islamic dispensation, such as in Sudan and Northern Nigeria, the result has been catastrophic. The general indication is that Christians and Muslims of sub-Saharan African wish for and actually want a political dispensation that will play religion out of politics and which will allow both religious traditions adequate room to thrive.

Another approach, very crucial to our study, is a contemporary and crisis-driven one, which focuses on the areas and moments of religious tensions and conflicts and tries to restore peace there. Such attempts explore possible factors of intra-religious and inter-religious controversies and propose models of calming and/or dealing with the tensions and conflicts. Mbillah in studying the Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana follows this approach and ends up identifying political, social and doctrinal causes and issues of Muslim unrest (Mbillah, 1999: 3-6). Samwini (2006) and Azumah (2001) also follow suit by delving deep into the various Islamic doctrinal differences and the role they have played in destabilizing the harmonious inter-religious environment that characterised the pre-independence era (Samwini, 2006: 191-208; Azumah, 1994:34-45). Thus, a lot have been explored and said about religious intolerance in Ghana, which in their view, have rendered efforts at intra and

inter-religious dialogue much more complicated. We, however, think they have overstated the situation and overlooked, if not glossed over, many areas and times of fruitful and honest exchanges going on daily among Muslims on one hand and among Muslims and non-Muslims on the other. These moments and areas of fruitful encounters, obviously, have not been given the attention they deserve. The positive encounter that takes place between Christians and Muslims of Africa is highlighted by scholars like Trimingham (1959), who notes that: "...many Yoruba families (of Nigeria) have Muslim, Christian and pagan members and all join happily in each other's religious festivals" (Trimingham, 1959: 221-222). This harmonious encounter is also true of the Fante families of Ghana, the Wolof of Senegal and the Creoles of Dahomey. Religion, for these people, should not, in any way, undermine family solidarity and cooperation but promote them.

Studies of the originality of the concept of Supreme Deity among Africans in general and the Akan people in particular have been numerous and have become crucial in Christian-Muslim deliberations. While almost all African scholars such as Danquah (1968), Mbiti (1969, 1970), Idowu (1965), Sarpong (1981) and Busia (1951) express unreservedly that the Africans had notions of the Supreme Deity before the arrival of Christianity and Islam their European counterparts express divergent views on the matter. Among the historians and commentators who strongly opposed or rejected the "originality theory" regarding the concept of the Supreme Deity is A. B. Ellis, a major of the 1st West Indian Regiment, who was among the first English to engage in trade with the people and later established colonies along the West African coast. Ellis observes that:

"By the words 'religion' and 'religious beliefs,' I do not mean the belief in a Supreme Being who controls the universe...but a belief in the existence of beings, ordinarily invisible, upon whose favour or indifference man and his fate depend. In this form of religion is commonly found amongst savage tribes, and the less developed is the intelligence of the people, the more crude and the more absurd appear their religious notions; for it is not the religion that is the cause of the civilisation, but rather the higher stage of civilisation that gives birth to higher religious ideas." (Ellis, 1887: 10)

Ellis (1887), here, tries to make a number of assumptions, which are untenable. He seems to suggest a certain co-relation between religious belief and intelligence to the effect that high religious beliefs are associated with high intelligence and civilization. He begins with the premise that the belief in the Supreme Deity is a high religious belief. Europeans have the concept of the Supreme Deity and therefore Europeans are highly intelligent and civilised people. It can be deduced from Ellis's argument that 'primitive' West Africans could not, by themselves, conceive of the idea of the Supreme Deity because of their low minds. In other words, the Twi-speaking people, in view of Ellis, are too simple and primitive, if not unintelligent to have any notion of the Supreme Deity.⁸ However, Rattray (1923), an anthropologist of high repute and later Debrunner (1967:2), a distinguished theologian and historian both refute Ellis' claim, arguing to the effect that the Jews and the Arabs who are widely acknowledged as architects of Monotheism were not as intelligent as the Greeks and the Romans, the civilised people of the time. Rattray contends further that notion of the Supreme Deity of the Asantes⁹ "...has nothing whatever to do with the missionary influence, nor is it to be ascribed to contact with Christians or even, I believe, with Mohammedans" (Rattray, 1923: 140).

Accordingly, the tribes of West Africa, particularly the Asantes, according to Rattray, are capable of conceiving the idea of the Supreme Deity. In convincing evidence Rattray demonstrates his counter claim and superior knowledge of the history of the religion and people of West Africa. In his contention, Rattray (1923) brings out the truism which is reiterated by Abul Kalam Azad that "The belief in the existence of God ...is ingrained in the human nature" (Azad, 2003: 1). An Akan maxim affirms that: *obi nnkyere abofra Nyame-*nobody shows the child God. In other words, every child knows the Supreme Deity by intuition. Sarpong affirms Rattray (1923) and so Abul Kalam Azad (2003) by indicating that the Christian "... preacher in Africa is ...not preaching a new God; he is preaching an old God who has been revealed to us positively by his son" (Sarpong (1981:242). That the Akan people knew God prior to the advent of Christianity is no longer disputed. No wonder

⁸Many shortcomings and challenges including, among others, the language barrier, might have contributed to Ellis' lack of complete understanding of the people, especially when historical and cultural references point to the fact that the concept of a Supreme Deity existed among the Akan people long before the arrival of Christian missionaries (Warren, 1973:22). One notices his avowed interest in writing off other cultures regarding the conception of the Supreme Deity (Pobee, 1979: 76). Obviously, Ellis' findings were not the result of authentic, empirical research but motivated by anthropological prejudice, which championed race superiority at the time (Fisher, 1998: 137; Sanneh, 1990: 34; p'Bitek, 1970: 1-7).

⁹The term 'Asante' is also spelt '*Ashanti*.' We will use 'Asante' throughout this work unless quoting.

Parrinder, speaking in relation to Ellis's comments on the originality of the Akan idea of the Supreme Deity, points out that: "Ellis's works were useful in their day, but they are now outmoded" (Parrinder, 1961: 4).

To give credence to his stance, Ellis ventures to explain how the concept of Supreme Deity came to be among the people. He states:

"After an intercourse of some years with Europeans, the Tshi-speaking inhabitants of the towns and villages in the vicinity of the various forts, added to their system of polytheism a new deity, whom they termed *Nana Nyankupon*. This is the god of the Christians, borrowed from them, and adopted under a new designation" (Ellis, 1887: 24) and "...Nevertheless, in the course of two or three centuries, the belief in *Nyankupon* (Supreme Being), thanks to the only too evident superiority in material welfare of the whites, gradually permeated the masses of the southern tribes." (Ellis, 1887: 26)

In his attempt to defend his early position and so further call the originality of the Akan concept of the Supreme Deity into question, Ellis does not only shows his ignorance of the real fact but also his desperate attempt to defend the indefensible and to reject the obvious. His claim that the Akan people "adopted" the concept of God and gave it a new name is unacceptable. How would the "primitive", 'Tshi-speaking people' be smart enough to give a rather new and "borrowed" concept an original native name such as "*Nana Nyankupon*."¹⁰ With their small minds, the utmost the Tshi people would be capable of, was to keep something of the European name for the Supreme Deity as well. That the native term "*Nana Nyankupon*" is used clearly indicates that the people (Christians and Muslims) did not adopt the concept but only likened it to what they already knew. Furthermore, a section of the people of Edina (Elmina) lends credence to our point of view. The People of Elmina (Edina) have a shrine in honour of a "*Nana Antona*" (which is basically a statue of St. Anthony believed to have been left there by the Portuguese who first arrived at the shores of the Gold Coast (1418) and built a castle as their residence and place of worship). The people, who later found the statue, adopted it as one of their '*abosom*' (gods) but refused to liken or

¹⁰ '*Nyankupon*' is usually spelt '*Nyankop*□n'.

equate it to the Supreme Deity, and have retained the name however incorrect the pronunciation (Debrunner, 1967:34). It is, however, stunning that the term “*Nana Nyankupon*”, the “borrowed” term, has no semblance whatsoever with any European term for the Supreme Deity. That the name “*Nana Nyankupon*” has no relation or semblance with any European name for the Supreme Deity is an indication of the uniqueness of the term to the Akan people.

Nevertheless, western Scholars who have eventually come to agree and accept that Africans knew the Supreme Deity before the arrival of Christianity and Islam obviously far out-number those who have not. In their writings, these researchers and historians such as William Bosman (1705), Rattray (1923), Westermann (1937), Parrinder (1961), Baudin (1985) and Fisher (1998) have been quick to defend the “originality theory” of the Supreme Deity belief of African people. However, one major problem with their works has been their failure to grasp the place or role of the lesser deities and the ancestors. In view of this failure the African idea of the Supreme, primordial Deity and His relation to his creation appeared to them vague, crude, confused and shrouded in obscurity.

One of such writers is Baudin (1985), a missionary on the Slave Coast of Africa in the late nineteenth century, full of zeal to Christianise the African, described the Negro concept of God as “a vast pantheism”. In *Fetichism and Fetich Worshippers*, Baudin states that:

“The religion of the blacks is an odd mixture of monotheism, polytheism, and idolatry. In these religious systems, the idea of a God is fundamental; they believe in the existence of a supreme, primordial being, the lord of the universe, which is his work...and notwithstanding the abundant testimony of the existence of God, it is practically only a vast pantheism—a participation of all elements of the divine nature which is as it were diffused throughout them all.” (Baudin, trans. M. McMahon, 1985: 9)

It is obvious that Baudin (1985) and others like him misunderstand the role of the lesser divinities and the ancestors in relation to the Supreme Deity (Fisher, 1998:133). *The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines ‘Pantheism’ as “belief in many or all gods, or belief that God exists in and is the same as all things, animals and people within the universe.” Pantheism, in the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, is defined as “a view of reality that

tends to identify the world with God or God with the world” (Naughton, “Pantheism”, in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 2003). And so ‘Pantheism’ has the tendency of reducing the Creator to His creation. By characterising African religion as “pantheism”, Baudin is actually indicating that Africans fail to distinguish between cause and effect, the Supreme Deity and His creation. That is to say, the Supreme Deity and creation are one entity for the African people. Africans and the Akan people for that matter, speak of the Supreme Deity as the efficient, extrinsic cause but not just intrinsic cause of the world. Baudin also reduces the African Supreme Deity to some kind of a material source of the universe, which is also contrary to the African view of Supreme Deity who is pure spirit. African people grant the Supreme Deity the infinite positive value and not just a mere quantitative inclusion of all things (Naughton, “Pantheism”, in *New Catholic Encyclopaedia*, 2003).

Baudin (1985) erroneously takes the lesser spirits for gods or understands the Supreme Deity to exist in the lakes, forests, stones, and trees that the people called ‘*abosom*’ and in his frustration considers the religion a form of pantheism. The lesser divinities are not of the same standing with the Supreme Deity. Again, the term *Nyame* (God) is always used in its singular to refer to the Supreme Deity alone as noticed by Christaller: “The heathen Negroes are ...at least to a great extent, rather monotheists, as they apply the term for God only to the Supreme Being” (Christaller, 1856:23). Baudin’s reference to the African Traditional religion as “pantheism” is grossly misplaced. Furthermore, writing about the relationship between the Supreme Deity and the people of West Africa, Bosman observes:

“First, that they never make any offerings to God, nor call upon him in time of need; but in their difficulties, they apply themselves to their Fetiche (of which more hereafter) and pray to him for Success in their Undertakings: The second is, the different opinions of some of them concerning the Creation.” (Bosman, 1705: 146)

Bosman (1705), by this statement, indicates the prominent role of divinities in traditional African religions. However, he downplays the role of the Supreme Deity by suggesting that He is of no use to the people. To the Akan, the Supreme Deity is a personal God who is constantly involved in the day-to-day activities of His people. He is the ultimate provider for His people and to only Him they owe their existence. Also, Westermann characterises the

African Supreme Deity as a distant deity in his observation that:

“...a supreme being or a personified power who, in a general sense, rules the world, maintains its order, and to whom man owes the essential institutions of life as well as his cultural achievements, but who is too vaguely conceived, or according to the native creed, too great, and too far removed, to be concerned about the personal fate of the individual.”
(Westermann, 1937: 65)

This statement of Westermann, though approved initially by Parrinder (1961: 24-25) is replete with contradictions. It is impossible for the African Supreme Deity to be disinterested in his creation as suggested by Westermann. Westermann continues further:

“...it is in the sayings of these people that sometimes the figure of God assumes features of a truly personal and purely divine Supreme Being.”
(Westermann, 1937: 65)

In his first statement quoted above, Westermann (1937) indicates that the Supreme Deity is distant and remote. Yet, in his second statement he admits of a personal Supreme Deity. These two statements by Westermann present a description of an African Supreme Deity who is remote and at the same time immediate. One, then, wonders why Westermann (1937), could not fathom that the ‘remote’ and ‘immediate’ notions of the African Supreme Deity are in reference to the omnipresent nature of the Supreme Deity. If this unique deity is remote and immediate simultaneously, then He is simply everywhere (Gyekye, 1996: 8). This Akan conception of the omnipresent, transcendent, and immanent Supreme Deity is further supported by the Akan maxim: “If you want to say something to God, say it to the wind.” The wind is everywhere and blows in all directions. The Supreme Deity also has no shrines dedicated to Him because He is too big and all over the place to be contained in shrines.

Perhaps, if the Akan acts of worship, centred primarily on lesser divinities, led historians such as Bosman, Baudin and Westermann to reject the “originality theory” regarding the Akan Supreme Deity, it is the Akan mythical stories of the abode of the Supreme Deity which made it worse. Gyekye encapsulates one of the stories thus:

“Long, long ago, God lived near to men. His abode was the sky, which was then very near. There was an old woman who used to pound ‘*fufu*’ [a meal of mashed yam or plantain] in a wooden mortar with a long wooden pestle. Whenever she did so, the pestle hit the abode of God, which was the sky. So one day God said, ‘Because of what you have been doing to me, I am taking myself far away where men cannot reach me.’ So he went up till men could no longer reach him.” (Gyekye, 1996: 8)

This story seems to lend support to the opinion that the Supreme Deity of Africa is a distant, withdrawn and sky God who has little, if any at all, to do with the people he created. According to Fisher the story is of importance only in as far as it explains why *Nyame* is no longer living near the people (Fisher, 1998: 138). To Fisher, the story is about physical proximity and nothing else. The abode of The Supreme Deity has nothing to do with his usefulness or role. The impression created that the Supreme Deity is of no use to the people is misplaced. Bosman (1705), Baudin (1885) and Westermann (1937) are actually indirectly purporting that a change of location caused a change of the Supreme Deity’s nature and functions which is untenable. For a change of location does not necessarily mean a change in essence of a being. Danquah (1968) adds his voice to the debate to the effect that it is absolutely wrong even to refer to *Nyame* as ‘sky’ god, which will imply that the sky is the Supreme Deity of the traditional Akan. But Danquah wonders why a god who, while on earth (as indicated by the above mythical story), was not associated with any of his creation will be later associated with a creature, the sky (Danquah, 1968: 30-31).

Incidentally, it is highly impossible for the Akan to conceive of a Supreme Deity who is not beneficial or useful. The Supreme Deity, the most powerful, all knowing and the source of everything must be able to do much more than the lesser divinities. To Anyanwu, the African Supreme Deity is “...the God of the universe, hence a universal Person, lived and felt” (Anyanwu, 1981: 161-169). Thus, to the Akan, the Supreme Deity ensures the sustenance of his people by providing security, health, prosperity, and good neighbourliness (Fisher, 1998: 139). Gyekye acknowledges that the African’s complete dependence on the Supreme Deity is captured in their belief in the goodness of the Supreme Deity (Gyekye, 1996: 9). Also, in Islamic tradition, Allāh (God) is referred to as “*ar-Rahmān*,” which according to Shaykh

Bayrak means God “...wills mercy and good for all creation, at all times, without distinction between the good and the bad, the faithful and the rebel, the beloved and the hated. He pours upon all creation infinite bounties” (Bayrak, 2000: 48). And Allāh is also ‘*al-Wahhab*’ “...the donor of all, without condition, without limits, without asking any benefit or return, giving to everyone, everywhere, always” (Bayrak, 2000:70).

1.2 THE AKAN ETHNIC GROUP

1.2.1 The People

The Akan are negroid peoples who form the largest ethnic group in Ghana. About half of the population of Ghana claim to have Akan ancestry (Aboagye-Mensah, 1994:18). The Akan people include the following linguistic groups: Ashanti, Akim, Akwapim, Brong, Kwahu, Assin, Wasa, Fante, Agona, Nzima and Ahanta, Afema, Sehwi and Chakosi (Manoukian, 1964:9-10). Geographically, the Akan can be found in the southern and middle portions of the country stretching from the coast in the south, to the Gonja state in the north, and from the Volta in the east to the Côte D’Ivoire border in the West. Culturally, the Akan are the dominant group in modern Ghana (Boahen, 1966: 3).

Akan people are believed to be descendents of ancient Western Sudanese Kingdom of Ghana. Attacked by the Berbers in c. 1077, the people of ancient Ghana moved south. They became the forbears of the present Akans (Danquah, 1952). Meyerowitz, however, believes the Akan formerly lived along the Niger Bend in the region lying roughly between Djenne and Timbuktu. From there, the Akan people were ousted (at the beginning of the eleventh century) by “Moslems-Islamized Saharan Berbers” (Meyerowitz, 1958:17).

Tradition, which can in many cases, be substantiated by what is known of the early history of West African Kingdoms, holds that the Akans were the first group to migrate into the Gold Coast (Ghana). Driven southward by the pressure of Hamitic tribes to the rear, they came from the north and northeast. During the period between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, three successive waves of Akans entered the forest area of Ashanti and the plains of the Volta with some tribal groups penetrating to parts of the coast itself. Originally, they had been a nomadic, pastoral people but the character of the land they settled in determined a shift to agricultural pursuits. The Akan people fall into two main groups, the Twi-Fanti group

which is found principally on the coast and in the forest area, and Twi-Guang group, which settled on the plains of the Volta and the Black Volta. Many Akan tribes developed centralized yet democratic forms of government in which a paramount chief with his council rules over large areas of land. The Akans often possess marked trading ability and many of the Fante on the coast served as middlemen between the European merchants and tribes of the hinterland (Manoukian, 1964:9-10).

1.2.2 Traditional Values

Since this study focuses on the role of the traditional Akan values in Christian-Muslim relations it is appropriate to clarify what actually is meant by ‘tradition’. The word ‘tradition’ is commonly described as a contrast to ‘modernity’. In this way, ‘tradition’ is interpreted with a sense of ‘primitive, ancient, primordial’ entities in mind. Traditional societies then are archaic, primitive societies, different from modern developed societies. Another meaning of the word ‘tradition’ has the sense of ‘infallability’. Assimeng draws attention to this view of tradition as:

“... not subject, or capable of being subjected, to serious questioning, doubt, and analysis with tools of modern modes of thought and social action.” (Assimeng 1989:48)

This view of tradition has to do with closed, static knowledge or even custom, one that views creativity and innovation with suspicion as against progressive and evolving one which indicates a certain degree of process and continuum in the quest for certitude. Since society is a non-static entity and over time develops complex structures, this notion of tradition as eternal and absolutely timeless appears impractical and unreasonable. Unlike the first understanding of tradition by which change becomes an invaluable asset with regards to the second meaning change is an absolute liability.

Eisenstadt’s description of tradition which attempts a synthesis of the two previous perceptions of tradition brings the study into right perspective:

“However different they may be, traditional societies all share in common the acceptance of tradition... of some actual or symbolic past event, order or figure as the major focus of their collective identity; as the delineator of the scope and nature of their social and cultural order, and as ultimate legitimator of change and of the limits of innovation. Tradition not only serves as a symbol of continuity, it delineates the legitimate limits of creativity and innovation and is the major symbol of legitimate past...The essence of traditionality is in the cultural acceptance of these cultural definitions of tradition as a basic criterion of social activity, as the basic referent of collective identity, and as defining the societal and cultural orders and the degrees of variability among them.” (Cited in Assimeng, 1989:48)¹¹

Here, Eisenstadt identifies the constituents of tradition. Tradition is that aspect of society, often the core feature which remains essentially unchanged in the face of rapid societal transformation. It is the mainstay social structure or perception which remains of the old order and subsequently becomes the yardstick for the acceptance of the new. It is a typically unique time-tested custom and evidently an indicator of societal, collective identity. A cursory look at the contemporary Akan society reveals certain core elements of traditional society which have remained and truly become indispensable features of both Christianity and Islam. These customary elements which have given Christianity and Islam in Ghana their unique identities could be invaluable in the discussions and study of Christian-Muslim encounters in the Central Region of Ghana.

1.3 CONCLUSION

The main aim of this work is to study Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana. This is a broad area of study and already important contributions have been made to this field by earlier students and renowned scholars using various approaches as indicated in the section on review of relevant literature. This study approaches the Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana from a new perspective, one that looks at the role traditional culture plays in such encounters.

¹¹ A secondary source is used here for the reason that Eisenstadt’s book was unavailable to the researcher.

Both Muslim Akan and Christian Akan have common traditional values. These values, aptly expressed in the customs and traditions, are important and influential to the Akan people because they are time-honoured and they express their understanding of themselves and the world around them, including the supernatural. Any attempt to understand the Akan and to help deal with the many challenges confronting them, including Christian-Muslim exchanges, cannot ignore traditional values. Ultimately, the rationale for our study is simply to give peaceful and harmonious exchanges a place in the study of Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana with regard to traditional Akan values.

CHAPTER TWO: ISLAM AND CHRISTIANITY IN GHANA

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter studies the history of Islam and Christianity in Ghana. It places traditional life at the centre of the discussion by way of its role in moulding and shaping Christianity and Islam in Ghana. The Chapter looks at the challenges that traditional society posed to Christian and Islamic missionary activities in Ghana. It identifies the methods and attitudes adopted by the missionaries at various stages in the planting and spreading the two traditions. It goes further to examine the indigenous responses to the various Christian and Muslim missionary strategies and attitudes. It features prominently the resultant independent religious phenomenon of the cultural exchanges, which reveals as much about traditional religious heritage as about the separate opportunities of the two missionary religions. It also examines the extent to which the traditional culture has transformed the ancient rivalry between Christianity and Islam by confronting them with the critical issue of indigenisation. In other words, the chapter studies the extent to which the traditional society has succeeded in involving Christianity and Islam in a continuous process of engagement the direction and momentum of which no longer reflected the prejudged priorities of the two religions.

2.2 THE PLANTING OF ISLAM IN GHANA

2.2.1 Dyula Muslims and Traditional Society

Dyula Muslims were the first to bring Islam to the northern territories of Ghana in the 14th to 15th century (Sanneh 1997: 12). Dyula Muslims were traders, professional travellers and *du'āt*. They were mainly Wangara, Yarse and Hausa people of Malian and/or Mande origins who moved downward onto the Northern part of Ghana largely to engage in the booming commerce there (Wilks 1968:162; Hiskett 1984:45; Nyang 1984:31). Later, some of these Muslim traders who had become economically and politically powerful in the northern states such as Gonja, Wa, Dagomba moved southwards upon invitation of some chiefs of the

southern states such as Bono and Asante and largely to engage in gold trade (Levtzion, 1968: 182, 184; Hiskett, 1984:134; Clarke, 1982: 106-7).¹²

Generally, the Dyula Muslims adhered to the *ūft* Islamic tradition. They were less strict, ordinary, practicing Muslims (Wilks, 1968:163) who did not tout accurate knowledge of philosophical, theological, and doctrinal aspects of Islam as the most essential in the practice of faith. They were also not generally experts of Islamic law though adored learning a great deal (Wilks, 1968:65-68). They were *negroes* or black people who easily identified with the people. They were characterised as humble and unassuming people who wherever they went did not despise the local traditions and cultures.

2.2.1.1 Accommodating Attitude to Traditional Life

From the outset Dyula Muslims adopted a gradual, quietist, pacific and a non-methodological attitude towards the culture of the indigenous which saw them intermingle with the people, integrate and contribute immensely to the society (Levtzion, 1968:108; Sanneh, 1997:12). They were particularly influential at the royal court. At Gonja royal court, the Muslims' support ranged from administration and military warfare to recording of history that eventually helped to consolidate the position of the chiefs (Clarke, 1982: 94; Levtzion, 1968:53-56; Wilks, 19-21). Muslims supported the chief of Dagomba, Na Zangina, to ward off Gonja attacks (Clarke, 1982: 95), kept formal lists of past chiefs and *imāms*. They also studied and recorded the history of the kingdom (Goody, 1968:214; Clarke, 1982:94; Samwini, 2003:24; Levtzion, 1968: 62; Wilks *et al*, 1986:28&29). As time went on, these Muslims came to be so attached to the royal families that they eventually became part of them. In Kumasi, the capital of the Asante kingdom, Muslims served as advisers to the rulers on important matters of state and they also came to control the distributive trade in gold, kola, salt and slaves, while at the same time securing a monopoly over the cattle industry. Thus, they wielded considerable economic and political power. Some of the Dyula Muslims also

¹² The Muslims, it appears, did not only carry the precious metals into the Muslim Sudan; they also carried Islamic ideas back from the Niger Delta to Bono and later to Asante. Whilst in the Northern Ghana these Muslims helped to found and/or to administer areas like Gonja, Dagomba, Wala, Banda and Mamprussi (Goody, 1968:199; Levtzion, 1968:54&86; Wilks *et al* 1986:28). The Wangara, Dyula, Yarse and to a lesser degree Hausa Muslims perpetuated a moderate, somehow progressive ideology which was less repugnant to, tolerant and accommodative of traditional customary practices.

functioned as civil servants, physicians, astrologers, manufacturers of charms and amulets and as commercial agents and political agents on behalf of the Northern states (Hiskett, 1984:134; Levtzion, 1968:184 and Clarke, 1982: 106-7).

This Dyula attitude of flexible engagement with the traditional religion and culture was generally effective, especially in the Northern Ghana, in spreading Islam. The Dyula Muslims did not demand a radical break with the past. Instead, they presented rather non-violently and largely without compulsion the positive religious assets of Islam which included the ritual prayer, the Ramadan fast, simple death and marriage ceremonies and the laicization of religious functions (Trimingham, 1958:31). They also offered the non-religious elements such as superior commerce and writing skills (Goody, 1968:205). Besides, many Islamic elements such as marriage fell within the framework of African customary law. Whenever an Islamic element went against a customary law it was not insisted upon since the Muslim *du'āt* were Africans (Trimingham, 1961:23; Nyang, 1984:41).

2.2.1.2 Favourable Indigenous Response in Northern Ghana

Once the seed of Islam had been sowed in northern Ghana, a gradual assimilation of its tenets followed inevitably over the years. Trimingham identifies three stages in the gradual assimilation of Islamic religion and culture among the people of West Africa, which was equally true of the northern states of Ghana. The first stage, according to Trimingham, is the preparatory stage. It involved the outward embrace of Islamic way of life expressed in the slow infiltration of elements of Islamic culture such as the wearing of the Islamic amulets, ornaments and dress into traditional life of the people (Trimingham, 1958:34-35; Goody, 1968:201-204; Nyang, 1984:43). This stage is characterized by the breakdown of hurdles and impediments posed by traditional life and the espousal of the aspects of the religious and material culture of Islam ranging from prayer rituals to literary prowess and spiritual succour. At this stage, native people's attitude to Islam is more of indifference or better still friendly (Trimingham, 1958:34-35). The second stage, according to Trimingham, is the conversion stage usually pioneered by the kings and the royal families characterized more by the gradual break with the old traditional religion than the complete adoption of Islam. It is marked by the gradual adoption and incorporation of major material elements of Islam. At this stage the two

religions exist simultaneously in the community with a significant weakening of indigenous religion and culture (Trimingham, 1958: 36-37; Nyang, 1984:43). The third stage is the gradual process of reinterpretation in terms of the old culture by which Islam changes the life of the community. It is characterized mainly by strong belief in the efficacy of Islamic religious sanctions leading to actual change in conduct and social custom. The individual gains a feeling of belonging to the ‘*ummah*’ (Islamic community). Children go to Qur’anic schools. There is the gradual disintegration of the old culture and the transformation of society. But this process is such that the disintegration and reintegration seem natural. The new culture gives new values without radical displacement of the old (Trimingham, 1958:38-39).

Thus, the gradual dissemination of the Islamic religion and culture among the people of northern Ghana was a major factor for the development of distinct social classes that came to exist in most of the towns and villages. Goody (1968:199), Levtzion (1968:55) and Hiskett (1984) identify three different groups of people in the states of Northern Ghana. First were the *gbanga*, the rulers and members of royal family, the descendents of the Jakpa conquerors who associated with the Dyula Muslims. Though they accepted Islamic religion, the *gbanga* practiced imperfect or adulterated Islam. Then were the *nyamase*, the subjects, who were the commoners, untouched by Islam and steeped in their traditional religion. The third class was the Muslims, known as the *karamos*,¹³ who were of various ethnic origins (Hiskett, 1984: 120-121). This social differentiation based on class existed in the Gonjaland for a long time until the whole area eventually adopted Islam through a combination of factors.

2.2.1.3 Unfavourable Indigenous Response in Southern Ghana

2.2.1.3.1 Asante and Bono States

In the south, however, the Dyula Muslim positive and accommodating attitude was less successful. For this reason, Trimingham’s three stage process of assimilation of Islamic traditions and culture is hardly applicable to the Southern states of Bono and Asante. The Muslim influence was felt in Asante as well. Muslims “...were allowed to preach and teach

¹³The term ‘*karamo*’ is still used for a Muslim in Ghana to this day

Islam” and had even tried to change some of the un-Islamic rituals which undeniably troubled the Asante people (Clarke, 1982:107). Muslim prayers were solicited to supplement traditional Asante and Bono rituals. There was extensive use of Muslim amulets by Asante and Bono of all walks of life. Most people including chiefs referred to the Muslims for healing, divination, and charms (Levtzion, 1968:186).

This notwithstanding, the Muslim situation, which started very well in Asante, for instance, deteriorated over time and was finally curtailed completely with the destoolment of Asantehene Osei Kwame.¹⁴ Even though economic, political (Hiskett, 1984)¹⁵ and geographical (Trimingham, 1959:24)¹⁶ reasons have been given to explain the worsening Muslim influence in the southern states, it is convenient to say that the people of Bono and Asante just did not seem to like Islam (Buaben, 1985:2 &3; Crayner, 1969; Ward, 1926). Though the Asante and the Bono people derived enormous benefits from the Dyula Muslims, they were, at the time, not just ready to trade their beliefs, customs and time tested tradition for Islam. Asante, it appears, received what pleased it of Islam but on its own terms and without surrendering its cultural identity. Islam, however, was not completely weeded out of Asante, as those Muslims who stayed were integrated into the society without being compelled to surrender their faith.

¹⁴Asantehene Osei Kwame (1777-1801), in whose reign the Muslim influence commenced, is reported to have been ‘a believer at heart’. The next Asantehene, Osei Bonsu (1801-1824), commenced his reign as an enemy of Islam, and even executed several Muslims most probably to win back the support of the people (Levtzion, 1968:187).

¹⁵Reasons given by Hiskett are the Ashanti fear of growing Muslim power in the north which threatened Ashanti dominance, tension created by successful *jihad* in Hausaland and its aftermath, may have been Asante decision to establish a much closer control over the kola trade. For Hutton the Muslim influence diminished because of desertion of one Baba during the war of 1818 against Gyaman and Kong (Hutton, 1821:323).

¹⁶ Geographical factor: the humid climate and forest vegetation of the south often prevented invading people from moving southward. Again, poor communication and the dispersion of population in the southern Sudan also made contact difficult. The incidence of yellow fever, malaria and sleeping sickness, famine and tsetse-fly zones rendered many of the regions impenetrable.

2.2.1.3.2 Other Southern Towns

Like in the Bono and Asante states the Dyula Muslims received unfavourable response in other southern towns. Muslims found in the *zongos* (Muslim quarters)¹⁷ of southern Ghana are mainly Dyula Muslims, largely the descendents of resettled groups following the abolition of slave trade. The first batch of freed Muslims slaves¹⁸ arrived in 1836 from Brazil and was settled in James Fort and Ussher Fort in Accra, Elmina, Cape Coast and Keta. The second batch arrived in July 1872 when another batch of 300 Hausa Muslim troops was brought to Ghana (Debrunner, 1967: 240-1). Also, in the *zongos* could be found Muslim immigrants of Wangara, Kotokoli, Hausa, Yoruba and Fulani descent who moved into the then Gold Coast during the colonial period to work in the plantations and in the mines and to do other trades (Buah, 1998:73,74). Upon arrival, these Muslims set up their quarters in the urban trading and mining towns and villages such as Tarkwa, Prestea and Takoradi, which later came to be called '*zongos*' also known as '*sarkyi zongos*'. Unlike Dyula Muslims in northern parts of the country, these Muslims did not get involved in the local politics and socio-religious affairs of the chiefs and their people (Schildkrout, 1978: 69-265). In fact, they actually made little impact in terms of islamising the local people. Debrunner suggests that this lack of involvement or engagement could, perhaps, be due to the fact that the Muslims, largely Hausa and Dyula, were despised by the people on the coast who were unimpressed by their little formal English education (Debrunner, 1967:241). The resultant mistrust and tension that characterised the interactions of the two groups have persisted to date, challenging intra and inter-religious relations.

¹⁷ The word *zongo* originates from the Sahel region of north Africa. It means 'caravan' and was once used to describe the areas where trans-Saharan traders would rest their ware-loaded camels as they stopped on the fringes of towns and settlements in the south to barter cattle and cloth for salt and Ashanti gold. Before long, the *zongo* areas became permanent settlements by northern Muslim migrants. But by the turn of the (twentieth) century, the British colonial masters had found a new purpose for the outlying *zongo* areas: convenient out-of-sight, out-of-mind locations to contain the northern migrants they were exploiting as a source of labour for colonial expansion. The early economic migrants from the Muslim north provided the cheap labour to build, and work in, the grandiose towns that were designed and implemented using the white man's 'town and country planning' codes. Even the local indigenes were included, and catered for, in the grand city master plans, only somebody forgot the northerners, as they were left to fend for themselves in invisible *zongo* spaces. In the modern era, overcrowding, woefully inadequate sanitation and dilapidated buildings are the hallmarks of the *zongo* (Dretke, 1968:45).

¹⁸ Also known as "Tabons" or "Brazilians" these people are generally believed to have introduced Islam to Accra because it is believed they carried a copy of the Qur'ān along with them into slavery and were careful to preserve it so that they returned with it when liberated (Ofosu-Asante, 1997:13).

2.2.1.4 Favourable Indigenous Response in Southern Ghana

Unlike the people of the Dagomba, the Gonja, and the Mamprussi as well as the other southern people such as the Asantes and Gas, a serious Islamic *da'wah* activity to the Fante people was initiated by local people. Two Fante men, Benjamin Sam and Mahdi Appah are associated with the establishment of Islam in the Fanteland also known as Fante *kramo* (Fante Islam) in 1885. Benjamin Sam, a Wesleyan (Methodist) catechist at Ekumfi Ekrawfo near Mankessim adopted Islam. After conversion, Sam used his previous experience as a catechist to build a sizeable Muslim community of about five hundred people who later scattered over the Fanteland (Fisher, 1966:288-98; Debrunner and Fisher (trans.), 1960:17, 28 –29; Debrunner, 1967:241; Fisher, 1969:128-40). As a moderate Muslim and the *imām*, Sam did not abhor traditional customary practices. He allowed the consumption of alcohol and even had high regard for western education, a tradition that has since become a notable feature of the Fante and other southern Ghana Muslims. His brand of Islam contained many elements of both Christianity (Debrunner, 1967:241) and traditional culture. Some of the group members invited the first Indian missionaries of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement of the Qadiani Branch then headed by Khalifat-ul-Masih E. R. Hakeem to come into the Fanteland (Assimeng, 1989:80).

2.2.1.5 Indigenisation by Reinterpretation

The encounter of the two cultures has resulted in a purposeful blending of Islamic and traditional elements leading to the evolution of an Islamic religion that is unique but relevant to the collective aspirations and imaginations of the people. This new Islamic religion, though the obvious expected outcome of the coming together of two powerful religions, is in the case of Ghana, and even West Africa, frowned upon and described by commentators and scholars in language with astringent and derogatory undertone. Hiskett (1984), for instance, alludes to syncretism when she writes of the religious life of the converted Chiefs who, according to him, "... referred to both shrine priests and Muslim *imāms*, requiring the traditional ritual from the former and Muslim prayers from the latter" (Hiskett, 1984: 121). Trimmingham (1959), however, prefers the term "spiritual dualism" and Usman dan Fodio referred to this

“new Islamic religion” as found in Dagomba as “infidelity” (Clarke, 1982:96) and Goody (1968) calls it a “mix” religion (Goody 1968:204). Similarly, Levtzion alludes to “half-Islamization” in reference to a Gonja chief who is neither a Muslim nor a complete pagan (Levtzion, 1968:54). Evidence of strong reciprocal relationship between Islam and Traditional cultural practices abounds in the Northern part of Ghana. Speaking about the sort of Islam he found in Wa, Clarke observes that:

“...the Muslims forged ties with the chiefs and took on the language and many of the customs of the local people. They also allowed Islam to be adapted to a very considerable degree to the local culture.” (Clarke, 1982:96)

By this statement, Clarke confirms Levtzion’s claim of Dagomba Muslim functioning as a shrine priest and an *imām* (Levtzion, 1968: 87). Nonetheless, although some chiefs and local traders got converted to the Islamic faith they continued to perform their traditional duties (Goody, 1968:199). Both Goody and Levtzion observed that in Kpembe, the capital of Eastern Gonja, the major festival of Damba was held on the anniversary of the *mawlid* (Prophet Muhammad’s birth) with hardly any Islamic features (Goody, 1968:213; Levtzion, 1968:55).

Despite its uniqueness, the type of Islam found in West Africa in general and Ghana in particular still has common features with that found elsewhere. These features include the recognition of common Islamic law, the Qur’ānic school as an essential feature of village life, the ‘pillars’ as evidence of following the Muslim way, the observance of the common taboo and common calendar rites; the inclusion of some Islamic elements into the transitional rites at naming, circumcision, marriage and death; the recognition of the effectiveness of Islamic supernatural powers, that is, the ability of the clerics to bring power into activity through ritual words and actions. But, the blending of Islamic and traditional cultures is commendable as it has led to the evolution of a new and unique Islam that is practicable, meaningful and relevant to the indigenous people of West Africa in general and Ghana in particular, something Christianity has been struggling with difficulty to achieve over the years.

2.2.2. Attempts at De-indigenisation of Islam

This notwithstanding, Islam in Ghana has had its share of revivalist or reformist movements.¹⁹ The main objective of the reformist movements has been to rid Islam of traditional cultural influences which, in their view, have corrupted and compromised the religion (Sanneh, 1997:23). The contemporary revivalism is a purely religious movement which found as un-Islamic and appalling the adoption of rituals and beliefs from other religions like praying to the saints and believing that saints could grant blessings or perform miracles, superstitious practices, like spiting in a particular way or wearing charms to ward off evil spirits. Reformers are puzzled and perturbed by these practices especially when they are accompanied by a failure to respect Muslim rituals and prayers (Clarke, 1982:111; Nyang, 1984:38). They wondered whether people who engaged in these un-Islamic practices and activities could still be considered Muslims as their actions portrayed that things and people other than God have the power to grant requests and give protection.

The new Islamic orthodoxy which reformers introduced hinges on the fundamental ideals of Islamic revivalism. These are: (1) a return to the *tawhīd* (the Islamic concept of the one God). In Islam, Allāh alone is considered worthy of worship and prayer. He (Allāh) alone should be recognised as the creator and sustainer of all life and as the ultimate sovereign and lawgiver and (2) a return to the fundamental sources of faith- the Qur'ān (the word of God as revealed to the Prophet Muhammad) and the *hadīth* (records of the sayings and deeds of Muhammad) - as the bases of guidance that would lead to the moral and religious transformation of society (Delong-Bas, 2004:9).

2.2.2.1 Agents of De-indigenisation

In the history of Islamic religion in Ghana, the perpetrators of this puritan Islamic attitude are largely Muslim scholars and intellectual elite mainly of Fulani, Hausa and Tuareg ethnic

¹⁹Islamic revivalists in Ghana draw inspiration from and have a lot in common with the militant Islamic movements¹⁹of the eleventh and twelfth centuries in terms of their intellectual but puritan ideologies and uncompromising attitude. They are, however, sharply contrasted with the militants in terms of approach and strategy. Whereas reformist movements seek to amend Islamic religion by gradual transformation of people's attitude through preaching, teaching, education and training and the correct application of the law, the revolutionary/ militant movements stand by the belief that society will change either in a flash by divine action or by the sword (Sanneh, 1996:17).

origins who, alongside the Dyula traders, moved into the northern territories of Ghana and further south into Bono and Asante. These Muslims have broadened their horizon and experience in Islamic Education with profound knowledge of the Arabic language, increasing supply of books and writings of Islam. Their study abroad also offered them more frequent contacts with the Muslim world of North Africa and the Middle East and Muslims in areas with long tradition of Islam in West Africa. In short, these Muslim scholars had access to the ideals of Islamic civilization as laid down in the Qur'ān (Clarke, 1982:111).

2.2.2.2 Puritan Attitude to Islam in Ghana

The reformist and the puritan activists largely championed by the stricter and learned Hausa, Fulani and Tuareg Muslims adopted an uncompromising attitude toward the traditional way of life, perhaps wrongly deemed as obstacle to their version of Islamic conservatism, in order to revive and advance orthodox Islam in Ghana. They set up to uproot and eradicate all traces of un-Islamic observances and beliefs encouraged or tolerated among Muslims of Northern Ghana (Clarke, 1982:114).²⁰ In the northern states of Ghana the reformist Muslims represented a trend of Islam, which was less tolerant and sympathetic to traditional culture. They commanded considerable influence in varying degree in Dagomba and Mamprussi at the early stages of Islamic Expansion in the eighteenth century. In these two places they adopted completely different approaches. While in Dagomba,²¹ the Hausa Muslims adopted the pluralistic moderate approach, hiding their true Islamic puritan stance behind some semblance of tolerance, probably because they were not the dominant group, they, however, were less tolerant in Mamprussi. In Dagomba, Wa and Mamprussi, they set up Hausa *zongos* and would neither tolerate nor intermingle with the non-Muslim chiefs (Hiskett, 1984: 125). To Hiskett, the various instances where Hausa and Fulani Muslims cooperated (and one of them even became the *imām* at the court of the ruler of Mamprussi) reveal very bad relationship with the chiefs and the society in general. They even went to the extent of putting pressure on the

²⁰ These included divination by sand, by the stars and by spirits; belief in spirits regarded as inhabiting wells, streams and rivers. These practices were considered un-Muslim because they were seen as reverencing supernatural and forces other than Allah and wanted to replace them with orthodox ones.

²¹ Islam probably entered Dagomba sometime in the 17th century, but it was not until around 1700 that it began to exercise any real influence there. The early Muslims in Dagomba were Mande-speaking Muslims traders from the upper Niger region who were later joined by Muslim traders from Hausaland. It was not, however, until the reign of Na Zangina (c.1700-1714) that a strong and influential Islamic community began to emerge in Dagomba.

chief, although he remained a non-Muslim, to take part in the Islamic festival of *laylat al-qadr* (the night of power).²² This pressure, which culminated in their acting independently of the chiefs, led Na Atabia to eventually move his court from Gambaga to Nalerigu (Hiskett, 1984:122).

2.2.2.3 Failure of De-indigenisation

The puritan attitude perpetuated by reformists largely Fulani and Hausa Muslims sadly did not go well with the people of the northern states let alone those of the south such as Bono, Asante and the coastal towns. In most cases, the reformists gave up their efforts at purification of Islam and kept to themselves mainly in the zongos. The indigenous Muslims demonstrated their desire for Islam that was not just moderate and meaningful to their spiritual aspiration, but also practical and relevant to them and eschewed or were just repugnant to a form that frowned upon, if not repudiated, their world view and culture. As a result, two different forms of Islamic practices could be identified right from the onset. One was moderate, tolerant and accommodative of traditional customary practices, the other, somehow conservative and uncompromising of them. Hiskett (1984) gives evidence of the two forms of Islam in Dagomba and Mamprussi noting that "...two levels of Islam emerged; the ancient one, of the Dyula Muslims (*yarnas*), which are barely distinguishable from the native Earth cult and a new, strictly Sunni and very literate Islam of the Hausa immigrants" (Hiskett, 1984: 122). The Hausa and the Tuareg Muslims lived the stricter form of Islam in accordance with the Qur'ān and the Sunna of the Prophet wherever they went and refused to integrate in the society. The reason may be their puritan ideology, which frowned on what they considered to be mediocrity in religion.

²²*Laylat al-qadr* is one of the odd nights in the last 10 days of Ramadan. It commemorates the Revelation of the Qur'ān (Sūrah, 97)

2.2.3 The Face of Islam in Contemporary Ghana

2.2.3.1 The Mainstream or ‘Orthodox’ Muslims

The mainstream Muslim group constitutes the majority of the Muslims in Ghana. While it is simple to categorise the other Muslim groups such as the Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement and the *Ahl al- Sunna* as Islamic *fiḵr* (sects) from structural and doctrinal viewpoints it is more difficult with regards to the mainstream Muslim Group because of its unique ethnic and doctrinal diversity.²³ The mainstream Muslims largely follow the Mālikī *madhhab* with a leaning towards the Qādiriyya²⁴ and Suwarian/Tijāniyya²⁵ *tarīqa* (Hiskett, 1984:46).

The mainstream Muslims belong to the Dyula tradition with moderate doctrinal viewpoint with regard to other religions and culture enabling them to function with relative ease within a non-Muslim and pluralistic society such as Ghana. In other words, they are Muslims who accommodate their interest to those of the wider society while at the same time maintaining some distinctive Muslim identity.²⁶ They could conveniently be said to be the followers of the *Suwari* School which subscribes to a sort of pluralistic ideology in which the Muslim is conscious of his faith while the worldview of “the other” is respected, accommodated and tolerated. The Muslim must place his service at the disposal of the local ruler, whether he is a Muslim or non- Muslim (Wilks, 1975: 256-7). Their ideology permits Muslims to live among non-Muslims and to set before them the example of the Prophet. Even

²³Fante, Asante, Northern, Ga and Ewe Muslims other than the Ahmadiyya Muslims

²⁴ Qādiriyya order was founded in Baghdad Shaykh ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Jaylānī during the twelfth century. The doctrines of the Qādiriyya varied over the years but of crucial importance is their interpretation of the Qur’an and the Hadith in mystical fashion (Hiskett 1984:244-246).

²⁵ *Suwari* is a scholarly discipline that had a great number of scholars as well as a long history among Muslims in Ghana. Alhaji Salim Suwari is believed to have founded this school of thought. It was a tradition adopted by most West African Muslims including those in Ghana. The Muslims observed this tradition either as a community or individual. It was an approach devised to enable their continued survival in a largely non-Muslim West African society. Lamin Sanneh calls them “the *suwarians*” and Wilks refers to them as belonging to the “*suwarian* tradition” (Sanneh, 1997:214; Wilks, 1989:25).

²⁶The Suwarians/ Tijāniyya *shuyukh* over the years have been sympathetic with Ghanaian traditions and customs adopting whatever is considered useful into the fold of Islam and followers adopted and introduced several African traditional customs into Islam. This attempt has achieved an enviable record of bringing Islam to the African. In this way, Islam has been made African and to suit the African’s worldview and philosophy, something Christianity has been struggling over the years to do (Stewart, 1965:48). The Tijāniyya *tarīqa* is the *ḥiḳm* brotherhood that eventually established itself in Ghana with its exclusive claims of spiritual, as well as socio-political acumen. This order has become a more or less ordinary, though a “spiritist” religious association in Ghana. The brotherhood brought about a new spirit of devotion to Islam in Ghana and in West African sub-region. It traces its origins to ‘Abdul Abbas Ahmad b. Muhammad b. al-Mukhtar b. Salim al-Tijāni (1735-1815) (Stewart, 1965:19-21; Hiskett, 1984:255-256).

though in the past they were not keen to convert non-Muslims, since true conversion comes in God's time, they have of late deepened the call to Islamic *da'wah* by the use of loud speakers (Samwini, 2003: 106).

These mainstream Muslims, with a particular leaning to Sūfī Mysticism and the largest following of Muslims in Ghana, have been generally considered the 'orthodox' Muslim group and the sole custodian of Sunni Islam in Ghana until the inauguration of the *Ahl al-Sunna wa 'l-Jamā'a* in August 1997 (Samwini, 2003: 106). The group succeeded in organizing itself into a formidable body in 1991 with a constitution and a supreme head, the National Chief Imām. The main object was to bring all Muslims under one umbrella and authority. How far the group has gone in terms of achieving its objective is beyond the scope of this work. Attempts at institutionalisation and organization of members of this moderate tradition are saddled with difficulties.

Commenting on the challenges of the mainstream Muslim in the face of proper structural reform and organization, Samwini attributes the difficulties to inadequacies of the their constitution which to him appears "...quite vague in its provision of substantive material to lay out definite theological and administrative structures of the group" and that "...the local and regional *a'imma* are independent of one another and are not the representatives of the National chief Imam" (Samwini, 2006: 187). Incidentally, the challenge seems to hinge more on theologico- ethnical differences than independence or autonomy of the local and regional *a'imma*. Since Islam does not subscribe to a hierarchical system of administration with a central authority ruling through local representatives. Moreover, the autonomy of local *a'imma* should not, in itself, be an obstacle to national religious cohesion. Perhaps it is highly probable and would serve Islam well in Ghana if Muslims were organised on ethnic grounds. That the Mainstream Muslim adherents are more or less at home with their non-Muslims and have developed a wonderful relation with them, as indicated by Samwini, is quite understandable taking their theological background and their readiness to adapt to prevailing circumstances into consideration. The unique feature of this school makes their adherents stand out and feel that they were, first and foremost, Ghanaians before they became Muslims.

2.2.3.2 The Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Movement, though a puritan and reformist movement in terms of

ideology, is generally quietist in its missionary approach. The Ahmadiyya²⁷ mission was established in Ghana in 1921 following an invitation by a group of Fante Muslims of Ekumfi Ekrawfo led by Ben Sam. The reason for the invitation, to Samwini, was that the Fante Muslims were just reluctant to continue under the spiritual supervision and direction of Hausa and Northern Ghana Muslims (Samwini, 2006:87). Debrunner, however, thinks the Fante Muslims intended the invitation of “white teachers” to give the new movement some degree of ‘social respectability’ (Debrunner, 1967: 302). By 1927, the movement had 3000 members and by 1965 the mission was considered the largest Ahmadiyya community in Africa.²⁸ The Sunni ‘orthodoxy’ considers Ahmadiyya as a separatist movement whose teachings go contrary to Islamic ideals. They particularly abhor the Ahmadi unremitting devotion to the head of the community, Ghulam Ahmad, which in their view casts shadow over the person of the Prophet Muhammad and creates the danger of according him a less apparent, less glorious, place of honour. While the Ahmadi see Ghulam Ahmad as a prophet, Sunni ‘orthodoxy’ considers this an anathema since the interpretation of the Qur’an verse (*Sūrah*, 33:40) says there shall be no prophet after Muhammad. In Ghana, however, the movement is perhaps the most organised Muslim fīkr (sect)²⁹ and has a considerable following with main Ahmadiyya centres in Saltpong, Kumasi, Accra, Tamale and Wa (Samwini 2003:147; Assimeng 1989:80). The Ahmadi profession of faith is exactly the same as that of any Muslim in all respect. At the slightest opportunity, the Ahmadi missionaries were quick to declare Sunni Muslims *mushrikūn* (unbelievers). It remains a sad truth that wherever the Ahmadiyya movement became established they brought confusion and division in the Muslim community (Samwini, 2003: 165-168).

²⁷The Ahmadiyya movement was founded by Mirza Ghulam Ahmad in 1900 in Punjab in Present day Pakistan based on the belief that its founder is the *masīkh mawūd* (Promised Messiah) and *Mahdi*. The name Ahmadiyya is the name of reinterpretation or a restatement of the Religion of the Holy Qur’an. The Ahmadi profess to be the most faithful Muslims and the most enlightened. They regard their founder as a ‘Reformer’ who completed the work of previous messengers. This means that they have a great devotion to Muhammad (Spencer, 1974: 27-37; Bashir al-din Mahmud, ed., 1961:23-24).

²⁸As in 1961, the mission had 161 mosques and 20 schools of which one is a secondary school and two for teaching Arabic. Through the effort of the Ahmadiyya mission Arabic and Islamic religious studies are part of the university courses in Ghana. The Qur’an has been translated into *Fanti* (one of the widely spoken dialects in Ghana). The mission, in addition to many schools, also has a missionary training college at Ekrawfo, and a printing press in Accra. Their missionaries also contribute regularly to Television and Radio programmes organized by the media on religions (Ahmad, 1965:15; Fitzgerald & Lanfry, in *Encounter* no. 2 (Feb.1974), PISAI, ROME; and Mahmud Ahmad Bashir-ud-din, 1965:10).

²⁹ The movement is organised from *Markaz*, an International Headquarters of the Ahmadiyya Community at Rabwa, Pakistan based on international document of rules and regulations (Samwini, 2003: 148) under the leadership of the *Khalīfatul Masih*. The Ghana Movement is headed by an Amīr (the president) appointed by the *Khalīfatul Masih* (Samwini, 2003:150).

With regard to traditional Ghanaian practices it is difficult to determine where Ahmadīs stand since most of their programmes and activities are geared towards condemning Christianity and mostly the existing Sunnī Islam (Samwini, 2003:162&163). Unlike the reformist/puritan Muslims in the case of Ghana, the *Ahl al- Sunna* group whose main aim it is to bring the standard of Islam in Ghana to the level of that of the Middle East the Ahmadīs deem themselves as the repository of Islamic orthodoxy and all other Muslims as innovators and so adulterators. Moreover, the movement appears to be more concerned with theological purity or exactness than cultural correctness (Samwini, 2003: 154-158). In other words, all their activities are aimed at instilling right Islamic doctrine. Ahmadīs have never stopped to exhibit their high regard for western culture as evident in their missionary approaches which provide social services such as the establishing schools such as in Ekroful, hospitals and the use of the media (Samwini, 2003:169-172; Assimeng, 1989:80).

2.2.3.3 *Ahl al-Sunna wa 'l- Jamā'a* (ASWAJ)

Another Islamic denomination in Ghana worthy of mention is the *Ahl al-Sunna wa 'l- Jamā'a* (ASWAJ). It was started by a group of Ghanaian Muslim scholars who came into contact with the Arab/Muslim world (Samwini, 2003: 173) thus towing the line of Hausa/Tuareg Muslims. This group, strictly legalistic, places great emphasis on the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet in accordance with the *wahhābīya* doctrine.³⁰ Being a reformist or puritan group, ASWAJ devoted considerable energy to weeding out what it considered *bid'a* (innovation) in Islam perpetuated by the mainstream Muslim group in Ghana.³¹ The group was registered in the statutory books of Ghana in August 1997 as an independent Islamic group/denomination with an administrative headquarters at Nima (Accra). Its National Representative Assembly (NRA) and a National Executive Council (NEC) is headed by a national *imām*, called the

³⁰ Wahhabism is the name generally used to denote both the doctrine and the followers of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb. Muḥammad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb was born in 1115/1703. The main teachings of Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab are (1) *tawhīd* and *shirk* (monotheism and associationism), (2) *tawassul* (intercession), (3) *bid'a* (innovation), and (4) *ijtihād* and *taqlīd* (independent juridical interpretation and imitation of tradition). See Werner Ende and Esther Peskes, "Wahhabiyya", in EI², vol. XI, 7. See also Caspar, 1998:63-266.

³¹ Among the practices that the ASWAJ considers 'innovation' and so condemns include the idea of sainthood, the celebration of the *mawlid al-nabī*, the practice of *tawassul* (intercessions) and offering prayers at the tomb for the living. Others are the elaborate funeral rites that lead to large amount of donations to the *mallamai* is fraudulent. It also condemns the performance of miracles, which it considers the preserve of the Prophet.

National Chief Imām, the title used for the Tijāniyya national Imām (Samwini, 2003:174). Known in Ghana simply as *Al-sunna*, the group is also uncompromising towards the *mahdī* and messianic doctrines of the Ahmadiyya Movement.

Surprisingly, the group still uses the same mosques as the mainstream Muslim group in many parts of the country for their daily and *jum'a* prayers. However, at *'īd*, (feast) prayers are said on separate grounds. And owing perhaps to its open uncompromising and radical character, ASWAJ has had very little to do, if any at all, with traditional Ghanaian culture. Its strict, rigid and conservative view of religion has made it unattractive to many non-Muslims and moderate *sunnis*.³² The group, however, appears to be at home with the Hausa Muslims, many of whom live in the *zongo* quarters scattered all over Ghana. It is a general belief that Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt have, over the years, been supporting the ASWAJ in Ghana mainly through scholarships and funds for the group's local programmes and activities.

2.3 THE PLANTING OF CHRISTIANITY IN GHANA

2.3.1. The Mission Churches

2.3.1.1 The Roman Catholic Church

Christianity in Ghana is believed to have begun with the Portuguese merchants and explorers at the coast in 1482 (Debrunner, 1967:17; Sanneh, 1983:22&23). Roman Catholic Augustinian missionaries who accompanied the Portuguese trade officials ministered at the first church built close to the Elmina castle and also commenced a school there in 1529 (Buah, 1998:132). A monastery was built shortly thereafter which led to the evangelisation of the people of Efutu and Komenda areas (Debrunner, 1967:19; Sanneh, 1983:24). In 1503 the chief of Efutu and about 1,300 of his subjects received baptism. In 1534 the country was made part of the diocese, with headquarters on the Island of San Tomé (Buah, 1998:132). The sudden departure of the Portuguese in 1637 meant the Roman Catholic missionary work thus

³²Moderate *sunni* include adherents of *suwari*/ Tijāniyya tradition to which we may include indigenous Muslims such as the Asante and Fante *kramos*.

began came to a halt only to resume in 1880.³³ The decision to re-establish the Catholic Church in the country had some support from Sir Garnet Wolseley, the governor and military leader of the Sagrenti War. It was also influenced by another colonial, a catholic, James Marshall, who worked in both Ghana and Nigeria, and who enthusiastically promoted the idea of inviting Catholic missionaries to Ghana (Buah, 1098:133). In 1880 missionaries, Fr. Eugene Murat and Fr. Auguste Moreau (SVD) arrived at Elmina probably sent by the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith on behalf of the Pope (Agbeti, 1986:103-105; Debrunner, 1967:219; Assimeng, 1989:82). From 1900 the Catholic Church spread rapidly not only in the south, but also in Asante/ Bono-Ahafo and Eweland, thanks to the dedicated work of the Fathers of the Society of African Missions. In 1939, another group of missionaries, the Society of the Divine Word (S.V.D.), arrived to work in present day Greater Accra and Eastern Regions (Buah, 1998:133).

In Northern Ghana, the Roman Catholic mission was begun by the missionaries commonly known as the White Fathers in 1906 at Navrongo among the Kassena- Nankana people (Debrunner, 1967: 222; Clarke, 1986: 98; Buah, 1998:132). Other mission stations were opened at a rather faster pace at Bolgatanga (1924), Wiaga (1927), Jirapa (1929). Meanwhile other catholic missionary groups such as the Society for African Missions and the Society of the Divine Word had began vigorous activities in the south western coasts of the country particularly Kpandu, Hohoe and Kete- Krachi. Through careful study of the local languages and customs among other things the Catholic Church made several converts in a shortest possible time (Peter Clarke, 1986: 98).

Created as an ecclesiastical province in 1950, by 1980 the Catholic Church had become so well established in the country that, in addition to two archdioceses at Cape Coast and Tamale, it had bishops in Accra, Secondi-Takoradi, Keta-Ho, Kumasi, Sunyani, Wa and Navrongo-Bolgatanga (Buah, 1998:133). The National Catholic Secretariat, established in 1960, coordinates the different Catholic dioceses in the country. The Secretariat implements the decision and policies of the Bishops Conference through its departments and Commissions for the spiritual and human development of the people of God.

³³In 1880 missionaries, Fr. Eugene Murat and Fr. Auguste Moreau (SVD) arrived at Elmina probably sent by the Sacred Congregation of the Propagation of the Faith on behalf of the Pope (Agbeti, 1986:103-105; Debrunner, 1967:219; Assimeng, 1989:82).

2.3.1.2 The Presbyterian Church

Early efforts to establish the Protestant churches in the country from continental Europe, including the United Brethren of the Moravian Church, did not yield permanent fruits. It was not until the second decade of the nineteenth century that a fresh start was made by Swiss missionaries (Buah, 1998:135). In response to an invitation from the Danish Governor of the Christianborg Castle called Major de Richelieu, the Swiss Basel Missionary Society sent out a number of missionaries to Ghana in the first half of the 19th century (Clarke, 1986: 3). As was to happen to nearly all the first missionaries of the other churches, the tropical climate had a heavy toll on their lives; within the first seven months of their arrival, three of them had died, and the fourth died not long after (Buah, 1998:135). The missionaries, especially Andreas Riis, Windmann, Steinhauser and Zimmermann, opened several churches in the south-east Ghana among the Ga, Dangbe, and the southern Akan peoples (Debrunner, 1967:99). The period 1870 to 1900 witnessed a further expansion of the church into Akyem, Kwahu, Asante and later into northern Ghana (Isichei, 1977:167).

In 1847, the Evangelical Presbyterian (Bremen) Mission of the North German Missionary Society began evangelising among the Ewe peoples of the former German Togoland. Mission bases established by the Rev. Lorenz Wolf at Peki (1847) and Keta (1853), and from there spread out to Anyako (1959), Waya and other areas in the succeeding decades (Sanneh, 1983:113; Buah, 1998:136). With funds raised from a trading enterprise in palm oil and cotton, the missionaries built a catechist school in 1864. To assist the Bremen missionaries, some churchmen of the Basel Mission were sent to work in parts of the Volta Region. These included the West Indian, Rev. Peter Hall and the Ghanaian mulato, the Rev. Christian Quist. Two others who had a great impact on the area were the Rev. Nicholas Clerk and Daniel Awere (Buah, 1998:136). During the First World War, the Bremen missionaries, like their Basel colleagues, had to leave the country. The Scottish missionaries replaced the Basel and Bremen missionaries during the First World War. Today there are two groups of the Presbyterian Churches in the country: the Presbyterian Church of Ghana with headquarters in Accra, and the Evangelical Presbyterian Church with its own headquarters at Ho in the Volta Region.

2.3.1.3 The Methodist (Wesleyan) Church

After the Catholic Church, the Methodist Church, at first known as the Wesley Mission, is the strongest of the Christian Churches in the country both in terms of membership and geographical spread. Anglicanism played some role in the rise of Methodism.³⁴ One William de Graft, a product of the Anglican Church and school at Cape Coast Castle and founder of the Anglican Bible Study Group talked about the Cape Coast Castle mission with an English sea captain, Potter. Following the discussion, Potter requested that missionaries be sent to the Gold Coast in 1835. As a consequence, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society sent Thomas Birch Freeman to Cape Coast. Freeman worked for 52 years, in the course of which he established many churches and laid the foundations of the Ghana Methodist Church (Isichei, 168-169; Baëta 1968:37). Thomas Birch Freeman was born in an England, the son of English lady and a black father, a gardener. In 1873 Freeman is on record as having converted and baptized over one thousand people at Anomabu. In 1960, the Methodist Church attained the status of an independent conference after 125 years of uninterrupted development as a district of the British Methodist Church (Isichei, 168-169; Baëta, 1968:37). By the turn of the century, a number of newer missions had joined the older band of churches in the evangelization of the country. Among these more recent missions are the Salvation Army, as well as six missions which have either American origin or American links-the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (1898), the African Methodist Episcopalals (1933), the Baptists (1935), the Mennonites (1956), the Christian Methodist Episcopal (1957), and the Evangelical Lutherans (1960). Most of these missions were set up as a result of invitations sent to foreign missions by Ghanaian converts.

The Mission Churches established the Christian council of Ghana, the unifying organization, in 1929. It represents the Methodist, Anglican, Mennonite, Presbyterian, Evangelical Presbyterian, African Methodist Episcopal Zionist, Christian Methodist,

³⁴The English introduced Anglicanism in Ghana just after they took over the Cape Coast Castle from the Dutch. Thomas Thompson, Anglican priest, who was appointed to serve the traders in the castle also set out to evangelise the people of Cape Coast. Later one of his converts, Philip Quaake, trained in England, succeeded Thompson in 1766 and took up his post as catechist and schoolmaster at Cape Coast. That Philip laid the foundations of Anglicanism in Ghana cannot be disputed. His modest contribution paved the way for the work of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, which gave birth to the present Accra and Kumasi sectors of the Church of the Province of West Africa (Parsons, 1963:3).

Evangelical Lutheran, F' Eden, and Baptist churches and the Society of Friends. The council serves as the link with the World Council of Churches and other ecumenical bodies. The major concerns of the Council are Justice, Peace, Unity, and Reconciliation. The Christian Council of Ghana and The Catholic Bishops' Conference usually work as partners in championing the common course for the well being of their members and the people of the country in general.

2.3.2 The Mission Churches and Traditional Life

2.3.2.1 Puritan and Uncompromising Attitude

The strategy of the Christian missionaries was informed by the missionaries' negative perception of Africa at the time. That image has been aptly described by Hastings in his book *Church and Mission in Modern Africa* as one so deplorable as to require immediate attention:

“In fact, neither in the nineteenth nor in the early twentieth centuries did missionaries give much thought in advance to what they would find in Africa. What struck them, undoubtedly, was the darkness of the continent; *its lack of religion and sound morals*, its ignorance, its general pitiful condition made worse by the barbarity of the slave trade. Evangelisation was seen as liberation from a state of absolute awfulness and the picture of unredeemed Africa was often painted in colours as gruesome as possible, the better to encourage missionary zeal at home.” (Hastings, 1967:60)

The negative image the Europeans had of the African is again re-echoed by Bediako thus:

“...missionary Christianity seemed, to all intents and purposes, bound to uproot the African from his heathen past with its barbarities, savagery and ignorance, in order to give him a new identity, constructed on the basis of the new, total package of Christianity and European civilisation.” (Bediako, 1992:251)

Thus, bent on giving the African a new and far-superior religion and civilization, the European missionaries employed attitudes and methods that demanded a sudden break with the past (Schuyler, 1968:209). The traditional Ghanaian society was a major challenge to the Mission Churches as they engaged in the evangelisation of the people of Ghana. The missionaries arrived to find Ghanaians well-grounded in their own “primitive and heathen” culture. The religion was at the heart and soul of their culture. Full acceptance of the new religion meant that the new one had to perform the very function of the old. The mission churches set out to bring about wholesome cultural changes (Schuyler, 1968:209; Bediako, 1992:226-228) by taking a variety of positions in relation to the African life which more or less demanded a drastic break with the ‘valueless’ past, particularly practices and rites considered as ‘pagan’ and so to be shunned by their converts (Buah, 1998:138). These ‘pagan’ practices such as religious cults and rituals involving the use of charms, amulets, and talismans. Some, like the Basel and Methodist missionaries, took a strong opposition to tribal and customary practices (Grau, 1968:67; Gray, 1968:20). Rituals such as pouring of libation and animal sacrifices associated with local and regional festivals were prohibited. Converts were disallowed from even observing the ceremonies associated with the festivals because they were thought to be wrong (Debrunner, 1967:140, 141; Baëta, 1968:6). Others required a practice of non-participation but allowed their members to be on-lookers to rituals such as the veneration of ancestors and other traditional tribal ceremonies. Still others permitted participation if the practices were modified (Parsons, 1963:71-77). In pursuance of this rather puritan attitude to the traditional culture, the Basel missionaries, for instance, established “Christian quarters or communities” also known as “Salems” for the Christian converts which ultimately aimed at isolating them from the general society (Grau, 1968:67). These quarters, besides having their own elders and a chapel also had a code of acceptable social behaviour (Debrunner 1967:198; Grau, 1968:67; Assimeng, 1989:85). Graham also observes that even those Basel Christian converts living with non-Christians were encouraged not to eat with the latter (Graham, 1971:118; Mobley, 1970:215-216). Clarke, however, suggests these settlements were in response to the maltreatment converts received at the hands of their families, friends and community (Clarke, 1986:59).

Besides direct church pronouncements, the mission churches introduced formal education, which though aimed at reinforcing and giving impetus to catechetical work and

evangelisation, as well as provide the people with literary and vocational skills in carpentry, masonry and architecture (Debrunner, 1967:21; Samwini, 2003:62; Buah, 1998:139) was ultimately to dissuade converts from “pagan” practices. The missionaries established first and second cycle institutions over the country. The Wesley High School which later became Mfantsipim School (1876) and the Wesley Girls’ High School (1884) were founded by the Methodist Church. The Anglican Church founded the Adisadel College in 1910. The Catholics founded St. Augustine’s College at Cape Coast in 1936, the Presbyterian opened their first secondary school at Krobo Odumase in 1938. The missionary founded schools accounted for more than two-thirds of schools in Ghana by 1950 (Samwini 2003: 62; Buah, 1998:142).

In short, the prevailing attitude meant utter dismissal of African culture, and the effort to incorporate and integrate Africans to the worldview, values and practices of the Christian West (Baëta, 1968:16; Buah, 1998:138,139). This rather negative attitude of the mission churches was borne by spirit-filled, genuine willingness to help and a lack understanding of the culture of the Ghanaian. Clearly, the churches’ attitude toward traditional religion and culture was comparable to the puritan and uncompromising ideology of the reformist Muslims.

2.3.2.2 Opposition and Initial Challenges

The missionaries’ effort in trying to smother traditional Akan culture in favour of Christianity, however, was not allowed to grow unchecked. The traditional establishment opposed in many ways the puritan attitude of the missionaries by direct confrontation and criticisms. Many, however, refused to join the churches which considered their cherished values and way of life as evil and unwholesome. Parsons articulates the resentment of traditional society thus:

“...the churches and missionaries were considered as having dwelt too much on the negative elements of the African culture to the extent that everything African was considered bad, superstitious and primitive and should be abhorred. The church brought in new views abruptly with no

relation to African ideas of worship and the African could not understand the new ways.” (Parsons, 1963: 33)

Clearly, traditional society opposed the missionaries not so much for their message as for their unaccommodating and uncompromising approach to the general society. The fact that the opposition was championed by the chiefs brings home a very important point. Unlike Muslim *du'at*, who for many years saw it expedient to work through and with the chiefs and local leaders in pursuance of their accommodative and flexible approach to traditional culture, Christian missionaries could not relate well with these power structures (Samwini, 2003:63). What is intriguing is that the condemnatory and inflexible approach pursued by the mission churches as they evangelised Ghana is utterly at variance with their own missionary tradition. During its spread in the Greco-Roman world, Christianity never failed to take in/on board what was relevant in the old order (Bediako, 1992: 256-258; Assimeng, 1989:200; Buah, 1998:139).

It is hard to envision how any culture that is so interwoven with religion, that lives in it and interlaces with it, could be transplanted into a different religion, so to speak, without being destroyed in the process (Ratzinger, 2004:59). Evangelisation and the uncompromising attitude that accompanied it meant taking from the Akan culture its own religion, which has begotten it. It meant robbing the culture of its very heart and planting in its stead a new heart-Christian one. It is inevitable that this organism, the Akan culture, which is not adapted to the new heart, will reject it. It is in the light of this, scholars have suggested that African Christianity must put off its European garb, and instead put on an African robe if it is to make any meaningful impact. Idowu writes that:

“...to be effective in her life and mission, she must respect, preserve, and dedicate to the glory of God anything that is of value in the culture and institutions of the country. The purpose of Christianity, she must constantly remember, is to fulfil, and not to destroy; to make free, and not to enslave.” (Idowu, 1965:7)

By this statement, Idowu calls for indigenisation of Christianity in Africa. But, the mission churches had a daunting task encapsulating the African worldview as well as the religious and spiritual aspirations let alone incorporating them in their own traditions. The problem is that these churches had become international bodies whose administrative structures, theology and rites of worship reached universal dimensions and backed by long history of tradition. The early missionaries, then, themselves foreigners arrived in Africa with supposedly stereotyped (Debrunner, 1967: 141) and time tested liturgical forms, which were deemed so sacred that they were almost divine and unchangeable. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, celebrated the Mass in Latin and used English hymns as though “divine” languages until Vatican II. The mission churches were eventually branded foreign and particularly European. This is not to suggest that nothing was done to bring Christianity to the appreciation and to meet the aspiration of the Ghanaian. The Roman Catholic Church, for instance, expanded rapidly in Ghana because of its policy of adaptation and the careful study of the local languages and customs (Clarke, 1986:98). However, this was not enough to stop the mission churches from being characterised as conservative in their form of worship for their congregation. Dancing and clapping of hands were forbidden (Parsons, 1963:112-113). Thus, there was some willingness to separate the elements of worth in the traditional Ghanaian culture from elements that should be discarded. There was some effort, though limited, to adopt adequate and appropriate cultural ways that could be incorporated in Christian life. In other words, some attempts were made but they were so rigid, cautiously slow that they had limited influence, if any at all.

2.3.2.3 Redoubt of the Old Religion

Furthermore, the strategy and attitude of the mission churches were opposed indirectly by reversion to former “heathen” practices by the second and third generation of Christians (Debrunner, 1967:257). Still worse and worrisome were those situations in which some persons, mostly nominal Christians, endeavoured to live in two worlds-the Christian community and fetishism. In other words, the old religion maintained its hold over the people. Many scholars have suggested reasons for the persistence of fetishism among

Christians and the relapse of the Christian into their former religious state. People, like Debrunner and Baëta, cite as the main reason the lack of depth of the Christian faith and the shallowness of the Christian life for many people, which were usually attributed to insufficient well-trained leaders and mass conversions (Debrunner, 1967:317; Baëta, 1968:124). To some such as Idowu, this reversion was the result of “spiritual dissatisfaction” which African Christians began to experience (Idowu, 1965: 41). Berinyuu, however, disagrees with Debrunner and Idowu and remarks that “...it is not a question of lack of faith or unconversion, it is a question of who can do what and when (Berinyuu, 1988:147). These reversions and relapses attributed to “spiritual dissatisfaction” could perhaps in part be due to the direct consequences of the missionary strategy adopted by the churches, which by mere church pronouncements and strict disciplines in a rather unaccommodating and uncompromising manner sought to change human perception and religious behaviour in favour of Christianity. As Taylor argues:

“...when people do not develop step by step from their point of departure by a series of choices, but jump over into an apparently Christian new pattern without growth by decision then, sooner or later, old pagan patterns reassert themselves.” (Taylor et al, 1961: 303)

Besides, one cannot also downplay the resilience of African traditional religion which continued to “exercise a grip” on the Akan people (Sanneh, 1996:12). Ghanaian Christian converts missed some positive aspects of the old religion, which the new religion as practiced at the time was not an adequate substitution (Idowu, 1965:46). One of these positive elements in Parsons’s view was “the loss of fear of [the] former religion” (Parsons, 1963: 34). Obviously, in the process of evangelisation, some Africans became keenly aware at times of this “loss of the fear” of the former religion which placed strong controls upon their conducts. In the light of the “loss of the fear” of the former religion, one wonders how far religion can continue to appeal to fear in order to hold on to its membership. But this kind of spiritual vacuum felt by some converts is wholly justified since little attempt was made by putting in the former religion’s place a sufficient, strong new motive to righteous conduct.

2.3.3 Attempts at Indigenisation

2.3.3.1 The Mission Churches and Early Efforts at Indigenisation

Nevertheless, over the years these mission churches, on the whole, developed some positive attitude towards the Ghanaian culture. This change of attitude reflected, mostly, in their effort to establish an indigenous church (Grau, 1968:61). It led to the establishment of schools and seminaries for the training of local catechists and native ministers. The Presbyterian Church and the Roman Catholic Church established a Training College each at Akropong (in 1864) and Amisano (near Elmina in 1924) respectively (Debrunner, 1967:300&303; Grau, 1968:61; Assimeng, 1989:83). Later, The Roman Catholic Church established two full-fledged seminaries (St Victor's Seminary at Tamale and St. Peter's Seminary at Cape Coast) in 1957 for the training of priests. Around the same period, the Christian Council of Ghana founded Trinity College in Accra for the same purpose (Buah, 1998:141). However, people, like Assimeng, observe that the idea of indigenous ministry was a logical response to the "casualty rate" of the foreign missionaries (Assimeng, 1989:83) and not necessarily an effort at indigenisation. Clearly, the products of these institutions have been in a better position in bringing Christianity a lot closer to meeting the aspirations and needs of the Ghanaian (Baëta, 1968:63).

Furthermore, the mission churches also began a rather difficult task of translating the Bible and the hymns in local dialects to enable the converts read the Bible, prayers, hymns and other religious books in their own vernacular. The Presbyterian Church, by virtue of its missionary Bernhard Schlegel, supervised the translation of the four Gospels (1861), the whole New Testament (1877) and the whole Bible (1913) into Ewe language (Grau, 1968:61). A hymn book (1887), a catechism (1877), the Liturgy (1877) and the Church Order (1887) were also translated into the Ewe dialect. The Rev. Joahannes Zimmermann translated the entire Bible and the Bible history into Ga in the 1850s. The Rev. Johann G. Christaller has been described as the 'Father of Twi literature'. His works included his authoritative Twi grammar and dictionary, Bible history, a collection of Twi proverbs, a Twi translation of the Bible, as well as prayers and hymns (Buah, 1998:142). The Methodist Church used Fante Christian songs to Ghanaian tunes (Debrunner, 1967: 142; Baëta, 1968:128).

To some, like Bediako, the translation of the Bible and the use of local hymns were the most important first attempt at indigenising the Christian tradition (Bediako, 1995:62). Indeed, the establishment of schools and seminaries as well as the translation of the Bible into local languages were all aimed at achieving what Bediako has aptly articulated as opening doors to indigenous people who then were able to respond to the word of God on their own terms (Bediako, 1995:62). However, Bediako, seems to suggest that these earlier attempts at indigenisation of Christianity was not meant to be an end in themselves but to set the ball rolling for proper encounter which would eventually lead to an evolution of African Christianity relevant as well as adequate to the African's religious aspirations (Bediako, 1995:62). In other words, these important adaptations were to be seen as mere pathways and would be incomplete, if not meaningless, unless they were followed by systematic and insightful deliberations by African Christians themselves to make the new religion their own. Nonetheless, this necessary, positive relation which later came to exist between the mission churches and the Ghanaian culture, resulted among others in the use of local music and dancing in the liturgy as well as the acceptance of certain aspects of traditional cultural practices such as marriage rite by some of the mission Churches as necessary first step for the reception of the sacraments has received mixed reaction. While some have considered the positive exchanges as a step in the right direction (Idowu, 1965:7), others have consistently criticised the mission churches for being too cautious, if not silent, in criticising the evil and weaknesses in the traditional culture (Baëta, 1968:128; Gifford, 2004: 125).

2.3.3.2 Indigenisation by Reinterpretation

2.3.3.2.1 The Rise of the African Indigenous Churches

The early attempt by the mission churches to indigenise Christianity in Africa only proved eventually to be a necessary first stage. The rise and rapid expansion of the African Indigenous Churches (AIC) also played a significant role in the speeding up of reforms in the mission churches. The African Indigenous Churches have been established by Ghanaians. Ghana, like any sub-Saharan African country, abounds with the African Indigenous Churches

(AIC).³⁵ In fact they are scattered all over Ghana. Baëta calls them “spiritual churches” in view of the role of the Holy Spirit in their activities (Baëta, 1962:1). Parrinder, however, prefers to call them “separatist churches” to emphasise the apparent discontent which got them out of the main traditional mission churches (Parrinder, 1951: 107). Bediako calls them African Independent Churches to reflect their “...more self-consciously seeking to be African than the churches of missionary origin” (Bediako, 1995:63). Assimeng would rather call them “sect” in line with their usual unpreparedness to engage in any meaningful relations with the wider community (Assimeng 1989:135).

Although the African Indigenous Churches differ among themselves in many ways, certain features distinguish them from the mission churches. Unlike the mission churches, they are usually formed and led by Ghanaians who often refer to themselves as prophets. Of the various features of the African Indigenous Churches the most crucial to this study are the stress of African world-view and the affection for freer form of worship. These churches are considered more African than the mission churches because they aim at Africanising Christianity in a manner that Ayegboyin and Ishola find more “pragmatic in contextualising Christianity” in Africa. Other characteristics include emphasis on prayer, the spiritual and interest in divine healing (Ayegboyin & Ishola, 1985:31). Thus, they appear in their varied beliefs, doctrines and response to the needs of their members, to be more practical than the mission churches. In other words, they preach and practice a kind of Christianity, which is considered more in line with the Traditional Ghanaian culture by incorporating the worldview of their members in their beliefs.³⁶ For instance, in traditional African religion, various divinities, semi-deified ancestors, sprits, demons, witches, fetishes are resorted to in order to meet challenges posed by social and economic problems. Baëta acknowledges that the African Indigenous Churches were quickly able to shift the people’s reliance on these spirits to the Christian God:

³⁵ African Indigenous Churches in Ghana include: The Church of the Twelve Apostles, the Musama Disco Christo Church, Memenda Gyidifo (The Saviour Church), The African Faith Tabernacle Congregation Church (AFTCC), The Church of the Lord (Aladura), the Eternal Sacred Order of Cherubim and Seraphim Society. These churches have significant following in Ghana covering a large part of the rural folks. Even though Baëta describes the educational standards of members of the Twelve Apostle Church as for example “the lowest of any non-pagan religious body” in Ghana (Baëta, 1962:11) the situation has changed since they now have a significant number of their membership with high education. These churches seem to have excellent relations with the Ghanaian culture.

³⁶ For instance, many of AICs do not see polygyny as a violation of religious principle. They allow polygynists to the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper.

“The ‘spiritual churches’ represent a turning away from these traditional resources of supernatural succour in order that help may be sought for the same purposes, from the God proclaimed in the Christian evangel. As needs, cravings and hopes remain unchanged, so also the basic ideas regarding the character of the universe, of its forces, their possibilities and the modes of their operation, have been preserved intact.” (Baëta, 1962:135)

Also, the African Indigenous Churches aim at engaging their congregation in active and conscious participation in their worship. In his book *Religion in an African City*, Parrinder quotes E. W. Smith’s favourable view of African Indigenous Churches’ liturgy thus:

“...their success is due in no small measure to their adoption of less formal, more lively, forms of worship with the use of native music and instruments—they approach nearer the African ethos whereas the churches of European origin are often so distressingly European and dull.” (Parrinder, 1961: 43)

These churches engage in free and livelier mode of worship in the form of singing, clapping, dancing, quite unlike the Mission Churches whose liturgies are considered dull and not exciting enough despite their earlier effort to incorporate Akan values.

In Ghana, the mission churches’ view of the African Indigenous Churches is summed up by Baëta in his remark that the mission churches’ view of the Indigenous Churches is on “...the whole negative, being that they constitute a grave menace to the normal development of a healthy type of Christianity in the country” (Baëta, 1962: ix). Even though the African Indigenous Churches are not considered “proper” Christian Churches as depicted by Baëta or even religious aberration, (Assimeng, 1989:132) and the motivation of their founders appears questionable, they seem to be well-grounded and popular with members comprising largely the rural folks. Sundkler, however, seems to have a positive view of them as he states that: “...in these churches, one could see what the African Christian regarded as important and relevant in the Christian faith and in the Christian church” (Sundkler, 1961:17f). There are

reservations regarding some of the beliefs, rituals and practices of AIC (Assimeng, 1989:151-155) and even the source of the power of their prophets, yet one cannot assign to them outright condemnation in this work. The sources demonstrate the resilience of African spirituality and religious perceptions in the face of an emerging new Christian religion.

2.3.3.2 Pentecostalism and the New Evangelicalism

Pentecostal movements are another group of Christian churches which have emerged on the Ghanaian religious scene. Ottosson suggests that Pentecostalism in Christianity started in the United States of America (Ottosson, 1977: 11-15). The movements are identified generally by their strict adherence to the Scripture, baptism in the Holy Spirit and the initial evidence of speaking in tongues and their emphasis on the second advent of Jesus Christ (Ottosson, 1977:13). In Ghana Pentecostalism broadly falls into two groups: the established Pentecostals and the Neo-Pentecostals. The established Pentecostals are the Apostolic Church, Church of Pentecost, Christ Apostolic Church and Assemblies of God. The Neo-Pentecostals are usually referred to as the ‘Charismatic.’ One of the remarkable trends of the last decade among the Christian population of Ghana has been the dramatic rise of the “Charismatic” or “Pentecostal” movements. Hundreds of new churches and evangelical groups were established in cities and towns. They are also identified by their crusades, conventions and Bible schools. This contemporary Christian movement, appealing especially to younger, better-educated urban people, is arguably the fastest-growing section of Christianity in Ghana (Anderson, 2000: 24; Gifford, 2004:23, 38). All Charismatic churches conduct services in three parts: first is the ‘praise and worship’ which is a song ministration backed by electric guitars and electronic keyboards. It is totally participatory. Second is the offering, and then lastly, sermon which is the principal focus (Gifford, 2004:27). The vivacity and dynamism of the worship, the high quality of music and the sense of brotherliness are important indications of the appeal of these churches.

Many discourses have arisen especially in academic circles to explain why Pentecostalism has been a remarkable success in Sub-Saharan Africa and in Ghana. Anderson observes that Pentecostalism has been successful in Tropical Africa not only because of its emphasis on spiritual experience and its amazing strength to acclimatise to existing culture

but also, most importantly, because of its roots (Anderson, 2000: 26). According to Anderson, Pentecostalism has its roots in African-based slave religion of the United States and its genesis in the black-led Azusa Street revival in Los Angeles slums (Anderson, 2000: 26). Many of the early manifestations of Pentecostalism were found in the religious expressions of the slaves in North America, who retained much of the African religious culture from which they had been abducted. Similarly, MacRobert argues that black Pentecostalism "...cannot be fully understood without some consideration of their African origins and the conditions of slavery under which a black understanding of Christianity was formed" (MacRobert, 1988: 9). Its African origins implies that Pentecostalism, from the outset, has been "...an adaptive remoulding of African religious practices in a decidedly Christian context" (Anderson, 2000:28). However, Gifford has attributed the success of Pentecostalism to the proliferation of Christian programmes on FM radio and Television stations and most importantly to the failed socio-economic policies of the ruling elite of Ghana. This view is true to a large extent as indicated by their overemphasis on success, wealth, finances and status (Gifford, 2004:44-71). This prosperity message appears to be very well received because it embodies the traditional African orientation of religion which basically and essentially upholds prayer for solutions.

2.3.3.2.3 The Mission Churches

The mission churches have over the years incorporated African belief systems into their activities. In other words, the indigenisation by reinterpretation in terms of the old religion, which has its beginnings with the African Indigenous Churches, has over the years become important and noticeable features of the mission churches as well. Thus, the marked differences between the mission churches and the African Indigenous Churches which Baëta observed in his research (Baëta, 1967:64) are hardly noticeable in the contemporary Ghanaian religious context. The flourishing of Charismatic Christianity has also had significant influence on the mission churches. The mission churches have succeeded in stemming the flow of their members to the Charismatic churches by the incorporation of certain elements such as clapping and dancing into the various liturgies, as well as healing and deliverance services (Gifford, 2004:38, 39). The Catholic Church has Charismatic renewal movements. The Presbyterians and Methodists both now have their charismatic wings.

In line with these similarities, Bediako remarks years after Baëta's work, about the identical features of churches in Ghana:

“The distinctions between the historical churches, of missionary origin, and the independent or African instituted churches, have since become less meaningful, as feature which were once thought to be characteristic of the latter have been found to be shared also by the former. The significance of the independents, therefore, has been that they pointed to the direction in which broad sections of African Christianity were moving, and so they testified to the existence of some generalised trends in the African response to the Christian faith in African terms.” (Bediako 1995:66)

The mission churches have come to acknowledge that meaningful change does not take place by mere direct prohibitions from church conferences; rather, it will have to grow from within the Christian community and from the hearts of individual Christians, and utter indigenisation by reinterpretation in view of the worldview and spiritual aspirations of the indigenous people.

2.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter of the history of Islam and Christianity in Ghana has placed special focus on the mindsets and attitudes of the various agents at play in the planting processes, the diverse native responses and the eventual assimilation of the two great religions by way of reinterpretation in terms of the old cultural practices. Reinterpretation is found to be a necessary consequence of the fusion of the cultures. For, real planting of religion takes place when the relationship between the new religion and old religion together with its living culture is not one of absolute, strange bedfellows. This calls for a certain inner openness of the two religions as well as the cultures that brought them forth, each to the other, within them. This is particularly possible when the tendency to move toward each other and to unite is a part of their individual nature.

Consequently, the traditional Akan culture has an inner nature of openness which facilitated the warm embrace of Christianity and Islam unto its socio-religious life and which

could contribute to critical issues and credible models of Christian-Muslim encounters. Many questions come to mind: what are the traditional Akan religious beliefs which are tolerant and open to other religions and cultures? Are there traditional social values which are unyielding to religious exclusivity and so continue to keep the family and close relatives together irrespective of religious differences? What are the fundamental communal imperatives which still make tolerant religious beliefs and issues relevant to both Christian and Muslim Akan?

CHAPTER THREE: A BRIEF ACCOUNT OF TRADITIONAL AKAN VALUES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Both Christian and Muslim Ghanaians continue to hold on to certain traditional values which evidently are of crucial importance to Christian Muslim relations. In this chapter an attempt will be made to delve into aspects of the traditional Akan life which provide notable issues and models of interreligious encounter in Ghana. The chapter has three parts: the first part considers the traditional Akan religious consciousness and touches on the belief of the Supreme Deity, the universality of divine truth and the notion of religion as prevailing system. The second part looks at the traditional social institutions with special regard to the kinship systems, often pointing out their integrating qualities which ensure unity among relatives and family members. The third part deals with the traditional Akan understanding of society with particular reference to the concepts of communism, universal human family and human relationship. It also considers the foundations of the moral norms and their role in forging strong and cohesive society.

3.2 THE DYNAMICS OF AKAN RELIGIOUS IMAGINATION

3.2.1 Belief in the Supreme Deity

3.2.1.1 *Nyame*, the Father of All People

The common Akan term for the Supreme Deity is *Nyame*. The Akans, like all African people, believe that *Nyame* is the father of all human beings. Writing about the relationship between the Supreme Deity and human beings, Mbiti states that the African and also the Akan look on the Supreme Deity "...as a father and human beings as his children" (Mbiti, 1975:47). The Akan proverb emphasizes the Supreme Deity as father: *nyimpa nyinara ye Nyame mba, obiara nnye asaase dze*-All people are *Nyame*'s children; no one is the child of the Earth (Fisher, 1998:139).

As Father the Supreme Deity is also the head of the Family. Even though most African

writers like Mbiti (1975) and Fisher (1998) seem to highlight the vertical relationship of the Supreme Deity and human beings, the horizontal relationship (the relationship among people), which is the inevitable and obvious outcome of the vertical relationship, is also justifiably implied. People are closely related to each other if they really belong to the same father. As the father, the Akan people believe, the Supreme Deity creates human beings and also keeps them in existence, just as the earthly father is the head and breadwinner of the Akan family. In their prayers, the Akan present their petitions to the Supreme Deity in a manner similar to that of children speaking to their parents about themselves and their needs.

3.2.1.2 Danquah on the Supreme Deity

Danquah³⁷ observes that the Supreme Deity, *Nyame*, father of all people is the “Great ancestor”. Danquah describes the Supreme Deity as the “...Great Ancestor, with all other ancestors in between as the mediators” (Danquah, 1968:19). For this reason, the Supreme Deity is given the title ‘*Nana*’. The Fante refers to the Supreme Deity as *obaatanpa* i.e. good mother or father (Forson, 1993: 69). Gyekye (1995) and Fisher (1998) also admit that the Supreme Deity is “...Grand Ancestor” (Gyekye, 1995:69; Fisher, 1998:139).

However, Danquah’s claim of the Supreme Deity has been criticised by scholars and religious commentators. Parrinder, for instance, states that the Supreme Deity of the Akan people “...is not human and was not an ancestor” (Parrinder, 1961:25). In this way, Parrinder mistakenly takes Danquah’s expression “Great Ancestor” for “a deified ancestor” and in this way gives it a misleading interpretation (Parrinder, 1962:31). Parrinder argues that if, in Danquah view, the Supreme Deity who is “primordial ancestor of the tribe” and “the first father of the tribe” is also the “Great Ancestor” then the Supreme Deity is “deified ancestor.”

In this way, Parrinder creates the impression that Danquah’s Supreme Deity is a human being and so the first ancestor, the first Akan. To the Akan people and also to Danquah, the Supreme Deity has never been a human being. As the “Great Ancestor”, Danquah explains,

³⁷Joseph Buakye Danquah. J.B. Danquah was born at Bepong in Kwahu (Ghana). He worked as a law clerk and later as a secretary to the Omanhene of Akim Abuakwa during which time he acquired significant knowledge of the Akan traditional Cultural values. He later undertook extensive research in Akan religion and culture. In fact Danquah’s knowledge of the Akan culture cannot be overestimated. He, together with others, founded the United Gold Coast Convention in 1947. He loved politics and died in detention on the 14th of February, 1965. In his book ‘*The Akan Doctrine of God*’, J.B. Danquah argues to prove the originality of the indigenous ideas about the Supreme Deity to the Akan religious thought. Despite the criticisms levelled against Danquah, which seem to be largely legitimate, his work is a useful piece.

the Supreme Deity is:

“...the ancestor of the first Akan, the primordial ancestor, or of all ancestors in one supreme idea, head and cause of the family, who are his grand children. In its highest form, he is the Final Ancestor, the creator of the First Progenitor, who made all diverse Akans of one blood, the True High-God.” (Danquah, 1968:21-22)

If the Supreme Deity is “the ancestor of the first Akan”, then He is not the first Akan. And if the Supreme Deity is not the first Akan then He, without doubt, is “the primordial ancestor” or pre-historic being, who as expressed by Danquah is not the first Akan. If the Supreme Deity is distinct from the first Akan then He is not a human being and so cannot be a ‘deified ancestor’ as purported by Parrinder. The Supreme Deity, to Danquah, is rather “the Final Ancestor who created “the First Akan, the first Progenitor.” Hence the title ‘*Nana*’ is given to the Supreme Deity. Danquah, without doubt, hits the nail right on the head by tracing the genealogy of the Akan tribe to one great ancestor who is *Nyame* Himself. If *Nyame* is the “Great Ancestor” and so the father and invisible, spiritual head of the Akan tribe then, all Akan people are offspring of or are children of *Nyame*. Danquah (1968) explains further by indicating even a blood connection existing between all people and the Supreme Deity and by implication among people when he states that:

“The Great Ancestor is the great father, and all men of the blood of that ancestor are of Him, and are of one blood with all other men created of His blood and breath. Life, human life, is one continuous blood, from the originating blood of the Great Source of that blood. The continuance of that blood in the continuance of the community is the greatest single factor of existence.” (Danquah, 1968:28)

Here, Danquah mentions “blood” six times to indicate strongly that it is blood which links the Supreme Deity to the Akan people and between themselves. Gyekye, however, thinks otherwise and maintains instead that the soul is the divine nature, which “...constitutes all human beings into one universal family of humankind” (Gyekye, 1996: 24). Central to the

position of both Danquah and Gyekye is the belief that something binds God to humanity and humanity to one another. As children of Supreme Deity, the great father, human beings belong to one universal human family and hence the idea of common human confraternity.

The Akan conception of the Supreme Deity as the “Great Father” and the “Great Ancestor” of all people has a number of implications for Christian-Muslim relations. In the first place, by linking the Akan, and for that matter, all people to the creator, Supreme Deity, the Akan people are linking all people irrespective of their religious persuasions and race to one another. In other words, by referring to the Supreme Deity as “the Great Ancestor” and “the Father” Danquah is reiterating the Akan concept of common source of all people and therefore their common humanity and brotherhood. Danquah goes further to situate *Nyame* in a social context and personifies Him as the head of the family and the community.³⁸

3.2.1.3 *Nyame*, the Utilitarian Deity

The names and attributes of *Nyame*, the Supreme Deity, ultimately attest to the sense of human dependence on a power that requires veneration and submission (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979:36-37). The Akan names of the Supreme Deity depict or allude to a utilitarian Supreme Deity who provides for his people and keeps them in existence.

The Supreme Deity, *Nyame*, is the Absolute Reality³⁹. *Nyame* is *Odomankoma*. According to Awolalu and Dopamu (1979) the root of the word *Odomankoma* is from *adom* (‘grace’ or ‘mercy’ and *ankoma* (‘plentiful’ or ‘complete’). They interpret the name as “The One full of mercy” or “the only giver of mercy” or “He who is uninterruptedly, infinitely and exclusively full of grace” (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979:42). *Nyame* is also referred to as *Nyankopɔn*

³⁸According to Danquah, the head of the family, *opanyin*, the visible father is the representative of God, the real but invisible father. *Opanyin* is the ‘vicar of God’ among his people and his duty is to ensure that the family stays united. He is the very symbol of unity. He settles disputes among his people. As one family with one father, the *opanyin*, the representative of the Supreme Deity, the great ancestor, members demonstrate their common fraternity and togetherness when they support one another especially in time of need. In the light of this, it is not a surprise that family members give very little attention to their religious differences.

³⁹According to Parrinder the term ‘*nyan*’ may originally have been connected with the root ‘*nyama*’ for power or supernatural force. It then has to do with the essence or potency that fills all living creatures. Rattray, Awolalu and Dopamu rejects Parrinder’s claim to explain that the term comes from two words ‘*nya*’ (to get, to receive, to possess) and ‘*me*’ (to be full or to be satisfied) and arrives at the utilitarian conclusion that *Nyame* is God of Fullness or God of Satisfaction, the utilitarian Deity. Danquah explains *Nyame* from a completely different root altogether. To Danquah, the most appropriate root is ‘*nyam*’ (glory or bright, flickering, shining). *Nyame*, according to Danquah means ‘the shining One’. *Nyame* is of the same root with the word ‘*enyimyam*’ which literally means ‘splendour of the face’ (Danquah, 1968:39-40).

depicting Him as a dependable deity in the sense of utilitarian Supreme Deity.⁴⁰ In the same sense he is also referred to as *Twerammpɔn* (Danquah, 1968:48). The term ‘*Twerammpɔn*’ is derived from *twer* (to lean on) and *ammpɔn* (that which never gives way, never breaks). So *Nyame* is again the most dependable. He is *Totorobonsu*, the “unfailing copiousness of the source of the water”, i.e., a flowing or outpouring of all those things which water or ease the lot of man or of being (Danquah, 1968:55). He is *Nyaamandzekosoi*, the one upon whom one calls in time of need or distress (Fisher, 1998:139). *Nyame* is Almighty (*Okokroko*). He is *Osagyefo* (The War General, the saviour, leader at war). The Supreme Being has a personal name and so is a personal and caring deity (Parrinder, 1961:25).

As utilitarian Deity, *Nyame* cannot be a remote and deist God (Parrinder, 1961:25). He cares and has concern for his people (Anyanwu, 1981:161-169). He ensures the sustenance of his people by providing security, health, prosperity and good friendliness (Mbiti, 1969: 66; Gyekye, 1996:9; Fisher, 1998:139). Writing on the goodness of the Supreme Deity Danquah states:

“*Onyame* is, in this sense, pre-eminently the useful God, a God suited to the pragmatists because He works, He gives to life a hum and a song. In the most material and matter of fact sense He opens up for man an appetite for life, makes life worth living for him.” (Danquah, 1968:40)

Nyame (the Supreme Deity) functions or responds to the needs of his people through lesser divinities that are considered his sons and intermediaries (Rattray, 1923:141; Parrinder, 1961:24; Idowu, 1973:169; Awolula & Dopamu, 1979:73; Gyekye, 1996: 18). To the Akan, the *abosom* are the sons or children of *Nyame*. They are in to serve the will of God (Awolula

⁴⁰Even though Ellis finds the term ‘*Nyankopɔn*’ obscure, he finally associates it with the verb *nyan* ‘to waken’ and *onyan*, ‘the awakener’ which to him was an old name for the sky.⁴⁰ Dickson and Opoku have refused to accept Ellis’s explanation and have associated the term ‘*Nyankopɔn*’ with the suffix *pɔn*, which means ‘great’. So *Nyankopɔn* means “*Nyame* who alone is the Great One” The term ‘*Nyankopɔn*’ is usually translated as ‘God the Almighty’. Awolalu and Dopamu follow the line of Dickson and Opoku to indicate that the name ‘*Nyankopɔn*’ is made up of three elements: *Nyame* (the shining or the glorious or the God of Fullness), *ko* (the One, ‘the single’ or ‘the alone’) and *pɔn* (‘great’). Awolalu and Dopamu translate the name as “He who alone is great God of Fullness or satisfaction.” *Nyankopɔn* also comes from ‘*nyanko*’ (a friend) and ‘*pɔn*’ (Great, Mighty) and so the term means “The Great/Mighty friend.”

& Dopamu, 1979:72). The place of the lesser divinities underscores the great importance the Akan attach to the role of intermediaries.⁴¹

3.2.2 *Nyame*, the Creator and Ruler of the Universe

3.2.2.1 *Nyame*, the Creator of the Universe

The Akan like most African communities have a religious conception of the universe. They believe that *Nyame*, the Supreme Deity created the universe. *Nyame* is the *Oboadze*, the creator of everything that is (Asseming, 1989:54). Mbiti says of all Africans and so the Akan that “...God is the explanation of the origin of the universe, which consists of both visible and invisible realities” (Mbiti, 1975:32). The Supreme Deity is “...the creator and origin of all things” says Gyekye (1987:34). Since the Supreme Deity created the universe it is subsequently dependent on Him for its continuity and harmony. The Supreme Deity is the sustainer, the keeper and upholder of the universe (Mbiti, 1975:35).

3.2.2.2 *Nyame*, the Ultimate Ruler of the Universe

The Akans believe that the Supreme Deity who created the universe also rules and keeps it in order at various levels. *Nyame* is *Otumfo*, i.e, he sustains his creation with his infinite power. The Akan people say, “*Onyame ne Hene* or God is (the real) king” (Akoi, 1969:68). Asante explains the kingship of God in line with Akoi (1968) admitting to a king-subject relationship between the Supreme Deity and the Akan (Asante, 1995:95). This means that as subjects the Akan are completely dependent on the Supreme Deity who is the ruler of the universe. The Akan understanding of themselves as a people having a divine source, namely, *Nyame* who is also believed to be king, points to their conception of the human community as a sacred community within which sacred norms are the dictates of human life (Asante, 1995:100).

⁴¹In common parlance, intermediaries are messengers. These intermediaries are not always divinities; they could also be human beings who are believed to possess extraordinary, mystical powers.⁴¹ Omari likens the intermediary role of the divinities to that of Prophet Muhammad of Islam (Omari, 1971:6). In fact, all prophets could be referred to as mediators in this sense. Even when divinities are considered the main intermediaries their human agents are of paramount importance. A close study of this phenomenon mediation reveals that it is not the lake, stone, forest, idol that matters but it is rather the human agents, the priests and priestesses of these ‘*abosom*.’ A Fante maxim goes that: “*Nananom mpɔw nyimpa na woyɛ*” (The sacred forest is a human construct).

The Akan believe that laws govern the entire universe and the Supreme Deity is the ultimate source of these laws. In line with this, Mbiti writes about the Supreme Deity of all Africans that: “God maintains order in the laws of nature and so gives a sense of security and certainty to the universe” (Mbiti, 1975:36). This Akan view of the world governed by the Supreme Deity is the result of a long and meticulous observation of the universe and the activities taking place in it. For the Akan people, the Supreme Deity directs the affairs of the world and so nothing happens by chance or at random in which case there will be total confusion in the world. This gives support to the cause-effect hypothesis in which case the Supreme Deity certainly is the first cause, the un-pushed pusher, and the source of all that is and will be. The onus is on human beings to discern the will of the Supreme Deity and allow the laws of nature to run their course. Because of His kinship, the Akan believe that *Onyame* is involved in their day to day activities and so the expression, *Onyame pɛ a*, (If *Onyame* wishes), is constantly on the lips of the Akan (Asante, 1995:102). The Akan Muslim or Christian is then expected to understand religious plurality as the work of the Supreme Deity and not to wonder why Islam or Christianity should exist.

As creator and king of the universe *Nyame* is ultimately responsible for moral order among all people (Parrinder, 1961:25). To the Akan, the Supreme Deity’s moral order is meant to ensure people live in harmony with one another. The moral order becomes the source of customs and institutions that have evolved in all societies and whose ultimate aim is to preserve the life of the individual and the community of which they are part. The Akan believes that morals and institutions of every society are given by the Supreme Deity and to be sanctioned ultimately by him. Moral norms of societies should not in substance, necessarily contradict each other. In other words, the very core of all these moral norms ought to synchronise since they all evolve from the same source, the Supreme Deity. The core moral values of society, the foundations of all religious traditions, have one originator, the Supreme Deity. The various religious persuasions of the world could dwell on the core values of society as one of the pivotal issue of interreligious relations.

3.2.3 The Universality of Divine Truth

3.2.3.1 Multiplicity of the Transcendent

A careful look at the Akan religious and spiritual universe reveals the existence of divinities, spirit entities and ancestors who have ambivalent, if not contradictory, relationship with the Supreme Deity. This ambivalent association of the divinities with the Supreme Deity poses a big challenge to African theologians, both Christians and Muslims alike. When confronted with the issue of the divinities historians, like Danquah, find it expedient to be silent. In his book *The Akan Doctrine of God* Danquah extensively treats the Supreme Deity of the Akan as being like the 'Christian God' (Danquah 1944:30-58) by expounding His essential qualities without mentioning the divinities and their all important role. The silence of Danquah, and many like him, actually indicates clearly his refusal to acknowledge their existence let alone their role.

Even some African scholars, like Idowu (1962:141), Mbiti (1969:77) and later Assimeng (1989:52), who ventured to mention them, placed the divinities and the other spirit entities in a hierarchy of beings with the Supreme Deity at the very top. Both Idowu and Mbiti and in particular Assimeng have presented the divinities as mere agents through whom the Supreme Deity exhibits His powers and reaches out to His people. In other words, these divinities have no power in themselves. They are portrayed either as mere agents or functionaries at the disposal of the Supreme Deity. In this way, the divinities are cautiously and deliberately placed at the periphery of the African religious imagination. Idowu, in his bid to belittle and so demean the role of the divinities among Yoruba people, sees the Yoruba religion as a defused monotheism with the divinities functioning as sheer ministers of Supreme Deity whose eventual disappearance is imminent:

“...to those whose worship the divinities and derive succour from belief in their existence, to such they are real; but to those who have outgrown them, all reality is concentrated in the Deity.” (Idowu, 1962:141)

Mbiti even doubts the realism of the divinities in the light of the omnipotence and omnipresence of the Supreme Deity, brands them as figment of imagination and finally predicts their extinction in the not too distant future in his remark that:

“Most, if not all, of these attributive divinities are the creation of man’s imagination. This does not, however, cancel their reality: the divinities are real beings for the people concerned. With increasing scientific knowledge, no doubt, most of the divinities will be explained away and the major divinity of science will take over.” (Mbiti 1969:77)

The efforts of Idowu, Mbiti and others like them only scratch the surface of what could be known about the divinities and their activities. In other words, the divinities are virtually unknown, given the very little time and efforts allotted to them in academic endeavours. Thus, the African concept of the unity of the Transcendent, manifest in its notion of the Supreme Deity, is deservedly expounded but that of His multiplicity, quite evident in the conducts of the divinities, is yet to be explored or is downplayed, if not consciously relegated to the background. The only reason frequently given for the lack of adequate research into the concept of the multiplicity of the Transcendent in the Akan religious understanding is its controversial nature. ‘Controversial’ because it is deemed to have the tendency of derailing every effort made so far to portray the traditional religion in the good light of the monotheistic persuasions.

In spite of this, some African theologians, such as Bediako, are optimistic about the outcome of studies of divinities and believe they could even enrich and deepen our understanding of the Ultimate Reality. Bediako remarks that:

“...while the affirmation of continuity has been made on the properly religious grounds of the ‘unity’ of God and is supported by the evidence of African religious thought, African theology has failed to wrestle adequately with the ‘multiplicity’ of the Transcendent and has undercut the contribution which it can make towards a fresh Christian account of

the Transcendent, drawing on its background in the primal imagination of African primal religions.” (Bediako 1995:99)

In this remark, Bediako regrets this “virtually untouched” field or the inadequate study into the existence and activities of the divinities in the light of the positive contribution it could make to the Christian tradition in Africa and subsequently to the rest of the world. The prospect of the African concept of the Unity and Multiplicity of the Transcendent in terms of enriching either Christian or even Islamic theology, though huge is beyond the scope of this study. The concern, actually, is that the concept of the existence, nature and role of the divinities in relation to the Supreme Deity could help explain, to a large extent, the trans-religious and the inherently religiously tolerant attitude of the Akan. Writing about the spiritual realm of the African religious life in relation to the One and the Many of the Ultimate Reality Bediako states that it:

“...is not a neat hierarchy of divine beings and spirit-forces held in unitary harmony. The African primal world can be conceived of as a universe of distributed power, perhaps even of fragmented power; it is as much a universe of conflict as the rest of the fallen world in that it is a world not of one Centre, God, but many centres; the unity and multiplicity of the Transcendent in the African world also reveals a deep ambivalence.” (Bediako 1995:100)

Thus, while acknowledging the ambivalence of the African notion of the world of the divinities Bediako refuses to accept the position of Idowu, Mbiti and Asseming that it is one of constant melodious, harmonious co-existence in a hierarchical order of beings. He, even, denies the central role of God in their activities. Regarding the source of powers of these divinities Bediako has no comment. He is, however, surprisingly loud on the fragmentation in the distribution of the divinities to the extent of making it the cause of the endless tension and conflict that exist between them. But, this fragmentary distribution of powers among the divinities in the realms of the spirits, as Bediako points out, is the reason for their differences and similarities, limitations and strengths. This understanding of the divinities and their

powers, when put at the disposal of human beings, irrespective of their source, are meant to complement each other in the spirit of harmony and synchronisation and not to oppose each other by sowing seeds of tension and eventual disharmony. In other words, these divinities have both profoundly irreconcilable and reconcilable aspects which are manifested in the contradictions of their existence and activities. The dissimilarities and similarities and so limitations and strengths, reconcilable and irreconcilable aspects of these divinities are comparable to or likened to the differences and similarities, particularly doctrinal and even structural, that largely exist between the various religious traditions that are found in Africa and in the world. If, in the Akan conception of the realm of the spirits, divinities exhibit differences and similarities of aspects and powers in seemingly constant strife and dissension yet demonstrate eagerness and sheer willingness to co-exist why can't religious institutions as well as communities do likewise.

3.2.3.2 Divine Truth transcends Religious Traditions

The traditional Akan believes that Divine Truth is singular and is not the preserve of one particular religion. In other words, no one particular religion can capture in full the totality of divine truth. Thus, all religions have some level of divine truth. In other words, truth could be found anywhere and the plurality of religions in the world is the direct proof of this universal nature of the divine revelation and truth. In view of this, the traditional Akan religion neither considers itself nor any other religion as the only approach to the Supreme Deity. In other words, the traditional Akan religion does not arrogate to or present itself or any other religious tradition as the unique and sole repository of divine knowledge and truth. In line with this, Opoku (1993) explains that truth which is one and has its source in God, "may be found everywhere God chooses to put it; for truth is not restricted to one religious tradition, whether that particular religious tradition lays claim to special revelation or not" (Opoku, 1993:67). Herein lies the truth of the Akan proverb that traditional religion is like a single person's hand that cannot embrace the totality of the divine wisdom and essence. This notion of divine truth explains the people's openness to religious truth which comes from other traditions (Opoku, 1993, 67). Divine Truth then if it could be found anywhere is actually what religious institutions have in common and it is this that unites them in the supreme Deity.

3.2.3.3 Divine Truth is not Time Bound

Divine Truth is also not the preserve of one particular personality or generation. Divine truth is vigorous and living, evolving and progressive (Sanneh, 1997:14). Truth according to Akan religious consciousness is enriched over time thanks to the generous addition and subtraction undertaken by successive generations with the relevance to society in mind. In other words, each generation adds to the deposit of faith and so the divine truth. This stems from the belief that religiosity is inborn in each person from the start of his existence and hence the adage: *obi nkyerε abofra Nyame*, meaning ‘The child does not need to be taught about the existence of God’ (Buah, 1998:50). Each generation contributes to and actually helps shape and define the deposit of faith when need be. Truth, then, is not tied down to history but shaped and defined by history.

This ongoing and progressive, unfolding and evolving quality of the divine truth, the obvious and inevitable result of its transcendence over time, as perceived by the Akan religious imagination sets it apart from that of other religious traditions, particularly Christianity and Islam. In fact, it is this same quality that engenders and also facilitates what Sanneh refers to as “...a fluid, dynamic intercultural process” towards vibrant/fruitful interreligious encounters. By contrast, Christianity views the fullness of revelation as having reached its completion in Christ Jesus and, for Catholics, subsisting in the Catholic Church (Dulles, 1992:4; 2 Cor. 1:20; 3:16; 4:6; DV, 7). The divine truth and for that matter revelation is then depicted as almost static, unalterable and thus defined by history. Islamic teaching on revelation in relation to time or history is similar to the Christian understanding even though the personality and the history are different. Revelation is complete and in its final form with the arrival of the Qur’an through the instrumentality of the Prophet Muḥammad (Watt, 1991; Daniel, 1960; Lombardi, 1956). In other words, in Christianity and Islam the founder and the scriptures become the main points of reference. The work of the subsequent generation is interpretation of the existing deposit of faith. In view of these two major religions, adding to and subtracting from the deposit of faith even to the extent of rejecting wholly the old to arrive at a more perfect and pragmatic dogma, meaningful and relevant to current generation typical of Akan traditional religious understanding is essentially out of the question. In fact,

the old pragmatic flexibility and tolerance of the Akan religious consciousness, both crucial issues in Christian-Muslims dynamic, could be attributed to its cherished progressive quality.

3.2.4 Religion, the Heart of Culture and Source of Unity

3.2.4.1 A Case in Favour of Religion as a Prevailing System

To say that the Akan people are religious is obviously an understatement. This is because life to them is religion and religion is life. If culture is defined simply as a way of life of a people then for the Akan people of Ghana religion is culture itself. Sarpong underscores the central role of religion that permeates life "... from cradle to grave, and there are important religious rituals, which mark the three most important stages of his life: birth, adulthood, and death" (Sarpong, 1974: Epilogue). Speaking about Africans in general, Ukpong agrees with Sarpong that religion is life in his statement that:

"Traditionally, for the African, religion is not merely a matter of going to church or observing a set of principles; it is a way of life that permeates all spheres and levels of living. One seeks material well-being, like healing, as well as spiritual well being, like forgiveness of sin, within the religious context." (Ukpong, 1984:11)

Religion, then, is the centre of life, the soul of the culture, the pivot around which all aspects of the culture revolve. All aspects of life-belief systems, activities, habits and behaviours- are viewed and interpreted through the eye of religion. Indeed, it is hardly possible to talk about African culture without talking about religion and vice versa. It is in view of this Opoku observes:

"The phenomenon of religion is so pervasive in the life of the Akan, and so inextricably bound up with their culture, that it is not easy to isolate what is purely religious from other aspects of life. It may be said without fear of exaggeration that life in the Akan world is religion and religion is life." (Opoku, 1974:286)

Speaking about the inseparable ties between religion and culture of the Zulu tribe of South African, Tanner also strikingly makes an observation which reinforces Opoku's statement that:

“...the practitioners of African traditional religions do not look upon their religious beliefs and practices as a distinct set of activities separated from economic or other ones, nor are they defined as the religions of Yoruba, Zulu or Kamba peoples as if they were national churches. An old traditionalist on being asked his religion would reply ‘I am a Zulu’ or whatever.” (Tanner, 1993:378)

The observations of Opoku (1993) and Tanner (1993) are not unnoticed by Baudin (1885) who never hides his fascination of the indissolubility of culture-religion linkage when he observes that:

“the religious and political systems, the ceremonies of worship, and the domestic customs of the African people are so intimately connected one with the other that a knowledge of their religion is indispensable to the understanding of their history and their national organization, and above all to the effectual work of their evangelisation.” (Baudin, 1885:6)

Baudin's comment is to be understood in the light of his vocation as a devout Christian missionary to African people. His comment, though genuine and appropriate, comes in the wake of his frustration in the face of the inadequacies of missionary enterprise and is much more an indictment of the puritan attitude adopted by the missionary churches than a candid observation. The remarks of Opoku (1974), Tanner (1993) and even Baudin (1885) on the inseparable union between religion and culture reinforce Kato's description of religion as “...the heart of culture.” Just as the heart is indispensable to the human body so religion is to the culture. In this way, Kato, actually, accords religion its rightful place as the lifewire, the backbone of culture to the extent of saying that “...any change in religion will inevitably necessitate a re-adjustment in culture” (Kato, 1976:11). It is in this sense of indissoluble union of religion and culture that Azumah makes a distinction of the two terms-‘religion’ and

‘religiosity’. By explaining ‘religiosity’ as prevailing system and ‘religion’ as institution with codified sets of doctrines, Azumah finds the former more able to describe accurately the African perception of religion (Azumah, 2001:48).

This African and also the Akan understanding and even interpretation of religion is of huge concern as it points to a higher or superior conception of religion which embraces and actually makes room for the other religious communities. Religion among the Akan is to be understood in the broader sense of a prevailing system or lifeblood of the very survival of the society. In other words, religion is much more than an institution or even an organisation as it is commonly perceived now. As the prevailing system, the heart and centre of the life and the soul of culture of the Akan people, religion then becomes the spirit of all organized activities and as such an important unifying force. Religion does not just give meaning to culture it ensures the spiritual unity of the people. The chief, the ultimate custodian of the culture, then becomes the supreme spiritual head of the entire community who actually performs the various communal rituals and rites on behalf of his people as stipulated by customs and traditions.

3.2.4.2 A Case against Religion as a Prevailing System

One of the historians and religious commentators who has written extensively on religious diversity in West Africa communities is a reputable Ghanaian sociologist Max Assimeng. In his book *Religion and Social Change in West Africa* Assimeng argues that the notion of religion as a “solidarist” or prevailing system only works in simple societies where religion is public and serves the collective needs of the people. Assimeng argues further that in complex communities, religion takes the form of institution and functions to meet individual or private ends (Assimeng, 1989:123,124). Assimeng notes of religion in complex West African societies:

“There is now no single religion in which all men are embraced. There are different religions, and people now have the right to choose their beliefs and styles of worship. There is religious pluralism in which organised religious groups with incompatible beliefs and practices are

obliged to co-exist within the framework of the same community or the same society. People now have the opportunity to choose their religion, and although this has not been a completely unfettered choice, yet there is the possibility of deciding which religion to choose, and whether to choose any at all.” (Assimeng, 1989:124)

Assimeng further remarks:

“Religion has now assumed one compartment of social life, instead of supervising or having suzerainty over all aspects of human behaviour as this used to be the case in traditional societies. There is, in modern times, what might be described as the specialization of the institutional competence of religion, and of its leading functionaries. This is because religion has now lost its overall supervision of other social institutions.” (Assimeng, 1989:125)

In the first place, Assimeng’s claim that religion has ceased to be a prevailing and collective system, public and social phenomenon which embraces all members of the society in contemporary, complex West African communities is farfetched. Religion is still the heart and soul of the society even in all societies of Ghana. Despite its diversity in the form of organised institutions, religion still performs its role as the pivot around which all aspects of the culture revolve. Any attempt to organise or run religion as a wholly isolated entity or institution in the likes of business enterprises fiercely competing with one another with little or no deliberate attempt to engage in purposeful, meaningful and fruitful encounter will be an absolute disaster to religion itself if not to the community. The capitalization of religion which actually demeans religion as a public property in favour of private enterprise is a gross misunderstanding of what religion is meant to be.

It is quite clear that Assimeng, a sociologist of high repute, looks at religion and social change in West Africa and so Ghana from purely sociological point of view. It appears his ultimate goal is to make a case for the theories of social development in a West African context. To this effect, Assimeng has done a brilliant job in making sociological theories applicable in the contemporary industrial and complex societies of West Africa. But the social

theories of growth can only be applied to the communities in Ghana with some degree of caution. For, though West African societies, like all societies, have undergone some degree of social changes which is even affecting their religious understanding and practices, it is inappropriate for anyone to assume these societies are already complex, industrial and so private oriented. More than 50% of Ghanaian population is still basically rural, simple, largely illiterate and marginally affected if not untouched by industrialization. Furthermore, a large proportion of urban settlers are still significantly religious who do not in fact see a dichotomy between religious and public life. Religion is public and private, collective and individual, secular and spiritual all at the same time. The Ghanaian society can best be described as 'transitional' as Assimeng himself admits in his conclusion at the end of the chapter (Assimeng, 1989:163-164). It is neither wholly complex nor wholly simple. It continues to have notable features of both societies. It is a society where basic features of simple and complex societies hold sway and in equilibrium.

What people like Assimeng fail to acknowledge is that though there is a considerable degree of consistency in the general patterns of social development as societies gradually move from one stage to another, there is always a certain level of distinctiveness evident in the changes that different societies go through. In other words, every society has certain core structures which though subject to change always essentially remain the same. These structures may not necessarily be physical or material entity it may be concepts or notions or even peculiar understanding or general worldview of a people. The Akan people's understanding of religion as public entity or prevailing phenomenon is one of the core elements of the old system which remains or has survived. The gradual and eventual embrace of the new religions of Islam and Christianity with scriptures and varying but defined theological stands by Ghanaians has had no obliterating effect on their primal views of religion (Bediako, 1995:176; Gyekye, 1996:17).

Also, it is actually strange that religious diversity be considered a feature of complex societies. Though religious diversity and so plurality in the sense of the existence of well defined and pronounced, organised institutions is a current and foreign phenomenon in Ghana it is however mistaken on Assimeng's part to suggest that the traditional societies had no religious diversity at all especially when he himself characterises the traditional family system particularly the lineage as "a religious community; cult" and its head (*ebusua panyin*) "a religious priest" (Assimeng, 1981: 63). By alluding to the lineage, in particular, as a religious

institution with distinctive features, Assimeng is actually admitting in the seven or eight lineages in a typical Akan community, multiplicity of religious communities. Religious differences also existed in their quite elementary forms in the shrines and various sacred places scattered all over the place. Religious plurality, then, has very little to do with complexities of society. Complex societies such as America and European remained so for years with only denominational diversity and not religious diversity. Even when religious diversity became quite evident and inevitable, politics and social circumstances in these countries prevented proper and genuine exchanges from taking place between the various religious traditions. That religion continues to play its central and communal role of unifying the people of Ghana, based on the Akan belief that religious traditions are not enemies of each other, is demonstrated by the high level of restraint and tolerance found in most of the communities. On the whole Ghanaian communities have dealt better with religious diversity and its attendant controversies than other communities of the world.

3.3 DYNAMICS OF TRADITIONAL SOCIAL TIES

3.3.1 Kinship System

3.3.1.1 The Extended Family by Blood Relation

The extended family by blood relations is a kinship group⁴² of close relatives which expands to the third or fourth generations of descendents. The nuclear family which results from the traditional marriage⁴³ always lays the foundation of and operates within the context of an

⁴² Kinship refers to social relationships derived from consanguinity, marriage and adoption. Among the Akan people, kinship finds its expression in marriage, lineages and clans (Nukunya, 1992:11). The kinship linkage has for long been the foundation for the establishment and organization of many social groups and relationship among. In other words, it is actually the root of the society, the superstructure on which the very fabric of social life is built (Nukunya 1992:11). The kinship system prescribes statuses and roles to members in particular relationships such as marriage, lineage or clan. The Akan people, like any African people, are noted for their strong kinship ties.

⁴³Traditional marriage is a social institution that brings a man and woman together as husband and wife. Marriage becomes a family when children are born to the couple. The marriage makes the man a socially accepted husband and the woman a socially accepted wife. This marriage also provides the offspring with a socially recognized father and a socially recognized mother. The marriage establishes special relationship between the spouses special lays the foundations for and begins the nuclear family. This notwithstanding, the Akan nuclear family can exist without marriage or living together.

extended family, either horizontally in terms of families of many brothers or sisters, or generationally, in terms of grandfather/grandmothers', fathers' and mothers', a man and his family, and his children's families (Arthur, 2001:82). The basic family is the extended family may comprise grandparents, blood relatives, in-laws, constituting a dynamic unity, or togetherness, with parents and children, according to prevalent mores (Pobee, 1979:49).

The extended family system is very common in Ghana and is usually made up of individuals of varying religious traditions which may or may not be a residential group (Nukunya, 1992:47). The religious backgrounds of the membership of the extended family play a very limited role, if any at all, with regards to familial relationships even in a residential setting. In other words, the social and spiritual communion established by virtue of blood linkage transcends and in fact overshadows their religious fraternity thus rendering the latter weak and almost ineffectual. In fact, among the Akan people the unyielding strength of familial bond and relationships have been a constant challenge to the formation of strong Christian and Muslim communities.

3.3.1.2 The Extended Family by Affine Relation

An Akan marriage is a social system meant also to bring families together. It is more or less an alliance between two families of which the spouses are only representatives. In view of this Rattray points out that:

“It is perhaps almost a platitude to state that marriage in Ashanti is not so much a contract between the two groups of individuals whom they represent.” (Rattray 1929:126)

It is most importantly a social contract between families. This is true of all Akan ethnic groups including the Fante. In *Yaotey v. Quaye*, the High Court judge also noted the difference between the English and customary marriage in Ghana by saying:

“Now, one peculiar characteristic of our system of marriage in Europe and other places is that it is not just a union of ‘this man’ and ‘this woman’; it is a union of ‘the family of this man’ and ‘the family of this woman’.” (Ghana Law Reports 573, 1961: 597)

Ekow Daniels’s definition of customary law marriage also mentions this affiliation created between the two families. He says that it is:

“...the union of, or a contract between, a man and a woman to live as husband and wife, during which period there arises an alliance between the two family groups based on a common interest in the marriage and its continuance.” (Daniels 1964:355)

Among the Akan people an individual marries not just their spouses but also their family.⁴⁴ The family members of your spouse automatically become your kin relatives in a highly recognised and reputable social linkage referred to as affine relation. By this relationship of

⁴⁴This explains the reason why parents have a major role to play in the choice of partners of their sons. They would either choose a partner for their son with his consent or they would sanction his choice. Presently, the latter instance is largely predominant among the Akan people. This means the Akan is, generally, allowed to marry a man or woman of their choice. It must be noted here that religious backgrounds of the partners is not a major issue. However, instances when a man ought to marry a person in a particular category cannot be ruled out entirely thanks to some puritan families and religious denominations (Nukunya 1992). This notwithstanding, the Akan is not permitted to marry from their kingroup, be it lineage or clan, an obvious attempt to prevent the marriage of people believed to be blood relations and so are too close (Meyerowitz, 1958:29). Ultimately, this prohibition is meant to encourage marriage with people other than kingroup with the view of establishing ties of friendship and even strong relations with others outside the immediate environment to ensure peaceful co-existence (Nukunya, 1992:41). The exogamous nature of the Akan marriage also goes a long way to demonstrate the inherent desire of the Akan to reach out to the other even strangers and enemies. However, it must be stressed that distance is a crucial factor in marriage. By ‘distance’ is meant a completely different culture. Since marriage has social implication ceremonies associated with it take place in a social setting. In line with this Nukunya refers to marriage ceremony as “a group affair” (Nukunya, 1992:39).

affinity the families of the spouses and the children from the marriage become “real kin of the two families” (Nukunya 1992: 39). ‘Real’ in the sense that the members of the families are not just imagined or considered to be kin relations but they truly and actually are. It is appropriate or convenient to say that the Akan marriage brings four family groups into affinal communion. These four groups are the mother’s and father’s families of both the man and the woman. In fact, among the Akan a person’s in-laws are not just the parents of his or her spouse but include the entire membership of their families.

Marriage is intended primarily to bring people together and ultimately to ensure that various communities live together in peace. This explains the reason why marriage goes further than merely uniting the couples to unite families (Hagan, 1967:61). In view of this, marriage often takes place between people or families who may have been strangers or even enemies before and makes them affines. Marriage institution then becomes a means of sealing a peace between hostile groups and to enable them to co-exist in harmony.

3.3.1.3 The Extended Family by Putative Ancestor

One of the formidable social institutions and the foundation of kinship ties in Akan traditional society is the lineage (Arthur, 2001:82). The lineage (*ebusua*) is a group of people, male or female, who are believed to have descended through one line only from a common, though often putative ancestor or ancestress (Arthur, 2001:82). The lineage is a segment of a clan and it is usually found in one community. The Akan use the term ‘*ebusua*’ for both the lineage and the clan. In fact, the clan is different from the lineage in that it is a large and inclusive group usually dispersed in various settlements (Nukunya, 1992:14). Among the Akan, a lineage is almost a local branch of a widespread matrilineal clan (Okali, 1983:13). The Akan are divided into seven clans. Each lineage belongs to one of these seven clans: *Nsona*, *Anona*, *Twidan*, *Aburadze*, *Ntwaa*, *Kwona* and *Adwenadze* (Hagan, 1967:59; Okali, 1983:13). In almost every Akan community could be found lineages of the various Akan clans. The lineage, thus formed, becomes an organized, formal, corporate group which owns property expected to be managed to the optimum benefit of all (Jennings, 2009:64; Arthur, 2001:82).

3.3.1.3.1 Blood Relation

The Akan people claim that all lineages of a clan, resident however widely apart, are “...the matrilineal descendants of a single remote ancestress” (Manoukian, 1962:17; Arthur, 2001:82). Lineage fellows consider themselves *mogyakoro* or to be blood related even though the *ebusua* continues to recruit, incorporate and absorb new people through other means besides descent (Meyerowitz, 1958:29). Within the *ebusua* the mother-child (*mogya*-blood) relationship is of paramount importance, hence the expression: *Wona wu a, na w’ebusua asa-* when your mother dies that is the end of your lineage (Arthur, 2001:82). The kinship system is usually associated with genealogical connection. A British social anthropologist Mair underscores that the biological linkage of lineage is the product of the society and it is aimed at group cohesion (Mair, 1972:24).

3.3.1.3.2 Common Totem

Every Akan clan is identified with an emblem usually a plant or animal, which is believed to have some ritual or spiritual association with it. Members of the clan are expected to treat the animal or plant with some respect (Nukunya, 1992:14). The lineages and their totem: (1) *Nsona-- Oso na Akunkuran* (the fox and the Whiteringed Raven) (2) *Anona-- Ekoo* (Parrot) (3) *Twidan---* *Itwi* (The Leopard) (4) *Aburadzi—Gyata* (lion) (5) *Ntwaa-- Bodom* (The Dog) (6) *Kwonna---* *Eku* (The bush cow) (7) *Adwenadze---* A cluster of *odwon* trees, i.e. *wowo adwin-* thinking people (Hagan, 1967:60).

3.3.1.3.3 Common Ebusua Panyin

Every lineage has a head called *ebusua panyin* who works to instil discipline and keep the membership united under his leadership (Ackah, 1988:128,129; Arthur, 2001:83). He also oversees the stool of the *ebusua* in which the spirits of the ancestors are believed to dwell. He automatically becomes a member of the chief’s council thus representing the interest of his lineage at the court (Arthur, 2001:82).

3.3.1.3.4 Ancestral Stool

Every lineage has an ancestral stool which symbolises the putative ancestor. The entire membership of the lineage pays allegiance to the ancestral stool. The stool functions as to bind the lineage members together and as the focal point of religious worship. Libation is poured on the stool at various occasions on behalf of the members of the lineage. At present, even though the stool continues to be a religious symbol its religious significance has declined (especially in the cities and urban areas) if not completely lost. This could be attributed to the fact that most, if not all, members are now Muslims and Christians with allegiance to Muhammad and Christ Jesus respectively.

3.3.2 Descent Systems

3.3.2.1 Matrilineal Descent System

The matrilineal descent system is a group of individuals, male or female who are descended, through the female line only, from a common ancestress (Ackah, 1959:216-218). ‘Mogya’ (blood) which he inherits from the mother forms the basis for this matrilineal descent (Busia, 1951:1; Meyerowitz, 1958:14; Pobee, 1979:49). By this descent system direct genealogical connection is traced between an individual and their forbears or offspring for the purpose of recruitment into the various kin groups particularly the lineage (Jennings, 2007:64). Genealogical linkage traced directly by matrilineal descent, establishes highly regarded ties of filiation referred to as cognation. The Akan people provide the only major matrilineal descent system in Ghana where members of lineage and clan are recruited mainly through the mother (Nukunya, 1992:13; Busia, 1962:21).

3.3.2.2 Patrilineal Descent System

The Akan also ascribe to the patrilineal descent system, which generally plays second fiddle to the matrilineal system. The patrilineal descent system is made up of all persons, male or female who are descended, through the male line. The kin relation that ensues out of this descent system is referred to as complementary filiation (Mair, 1972:2). The basis of a patrilineal filiation is the “*ntoro*” (animating spirit) which a person derives from their father

(Busia, 1951:1; Meyerowitz, 1958:14; Pobee, 1979:49; Ackah, 1988:126), hence the Akan saying: *Egya ye sumsum* (the father is a spiritual force). Among the Akan the *ntoro* is what determines a person's characteristics such as personality and disposition, and the spiritual bond between father and child. The *ntoro* cult, later instituted among the Akan gave authority to the father as the priest of the family and in charge of all the rites de passage. This started a new theory of descent among the Akan people. A child is bound by religious and educational ties to his father (Busia, 1951:1; Arthur, 2001:84) and he joins his father's *asafo* (military organization).

3.3.3 Kinship and Contemporary Society

3.3.3.1 Rights and Obligations of Kinship Membership

Kinship is also associated with noble features of reciprocal or mutual obligations in helpfulness and cooperation. The individual gives generously to and receives support and cooperation from his kinfolds (Arthur, 2001:94). Arthur identifies three forms of reciprocity among the Akan people: compensatory, obligatory, and initiatory reciprocity. The compensatory type of reciprocity is indicated by the *adinkra* symbol: "*pagya wo ti na gye aseda*-raise your head and accept thanks." The symbol "*woye papa a, woye ma wo ho*-when you do good, you do it unto yourself" expresses the view that a good deed returns to those who do it. The obligatory reciprocity is based on the demands of justice. It is conveyed by the symbols *nea wope se*-do unto others and *onipa ye yie a, oye gye ayeyie*-a good deed deserves praise. Also, when an Akan makes a present he accepts thanks (*okanni kyε adeε a ogye aseda*). These expressions convey the view that one must offer thanks in anticipation of a favour or service that will be rendered. The ungrateful person is likened to a stranger who returns a good favour with ingratitude (*woye ohoho papa a ode wo ti bo dua mu*). Of the ungrateful person it may be said: '*kae da bi'yede se boniaye* (remember the past) is said to the ungrateful person. Also, to the ungrateful person may be said *annyi me aye a, ennsei me din* (if you will not praise me, do not tarnish my good name). This 'give and take' obligation

leads to deep personal interaction and relationship on daily bases (Arthur, 2001:94). Busia writes of the significance of kinship to members thus:

“There is always the overriding importance of one’s membership in the kingroup. There can be no satisfactory or meaningful life for man except as a member of this group, of his family. Cooperation and mutual helpfulness are virtues enjoined as essential; without them, the kingroup cannot endure. Its survival depends on its solidarity. Such a concept of group life makes for warm personal relationships in which every individual has a maximum involvement in the life of the group.” (Busia, 1962:34)

Here, Busia points out the strong feeling of corporate responsibilities among kinfolds in the spirit of “cooperation” and “helpfulness” which infuses a powerful sentiment of brotherhood irrespective of religious affiliation. Every debt, for instance, which comes in the name of the lineage (*ebusua*) as it lends support to individuals in the event of personal predicaments is shared by its members and though people may escape payment of council rates, *ebusuatow* (the *ebusua* levy) is always paid and even those who have travelled outside have theirs paid on their behalf by their close relatives (Buaben, 1985:67; Buah, 1998:8; Pobee, 1979:49, 50; Assimeng, 1981:62). This ever strong and unyielding mutual obligation toward one another binds the kinfolds further together in group solidarity. This solidarity, in turn, promotes warm inter-personal relationships in which every individual has a maximum involvement in the life of the group.⁴⁵ The moral deviation of a member of the lineage could adversely affect the welfare of the whole lineage. A morally good act is conformity to tribal, clan and lineage customs (Assimeng, 1981:63).

⁴⁵The individual is socialised and internalised from childhood to recognise kinship association, its solidarity and continuous survival as the most important social structure, the ultimate good on which their very life depends, serving, in all its forms, largely as an economic, emotional and social insurance for members and maintaining its existence on the pragmatic grounds that people could opt out of it at their own risk (Hagan, 1967:51). This socialisation is so well planned, worked out and executed that it is hardly possible to come across an Akan who frowns upon his kinship ties and who does not think of himself in relation to this group and behave always in such a way as to bring honour and not disgrace to its members. The ideal set before him is that of mutual helpfulness and cooperation within the group of kinsfolk (Busia, 1962:33). In fact, Kinship linkage is, to Akan, next to nothing and would not trade it for anything.

3.3.3.2 Kinship in Religious Denominations

Kinship often plays a crucial role in the formation and organization of religious denominations among the Akan people in particular and Ghana as a whole. In particular denominations, churches and mosques are actually founded by or organised on kinship relations. This is particularly the case when the majority of entire membership of the religious community belongs to the kin group of either the founder or the dominant kin group of the local community. Kin fellows play leading roles in local churches and mosques ranging from donating land for the building of churches and mosques to serving as elders and priests and *imāms*. In fact, they become the bedrock and also the life line of that Christian or Muslim community. While acknowledging and recognizing the important role of some of these families and kin groups in their various religious communities one cannot gloss over the possible or likely situations where these kin fellows make untoward demands and treat the religious denominations as their bone fide property only to scare others from joining.

3.3.3.3 Kinship and Change in Contemporary Ghanaian Society

The kinship system and its relevance to modern life have received quite a lot of attention in recent socio-cultural studies by prominent Ghanaian scholars and social commentators. While some, like Busia, have considered the kinship ideals “...hardly congruous with life in a large, heterogeneous, competitive society” (Busia, 1962:34) such as modern Ghanaian society, others, such as Nukunya (1992) have admitted to the diminishing significance of kinship but nevertheless, have disagreed with Busia (1962) that kinship structure is incompatible with modern urban life (Nukunya). To Nukunya (1992), the kinship institutions have “...not completely disappeared” even in a changing Ghanaian life (Nukunya, 1992:12) giving the fact that urban settlers continue to support the institutions in many ways such as offering contribution to their coffers in the villages. Nukunya argues, further, that the kinship institutions are still formidable and relevant in the new forms they have taken. Trimmingham (1968) agrees with Nukunya (1992) in his observation that the change brought about by Islam

[and Christianity for that matter and even modernity in Tropical Africa] should “...not be exaggerated, the old bases of community remain paramount and the ideal of the unity of believers a superimposed linkage” (Trimingham, 1968:85; Azumah, 2001:47). To Assimeng, though urbanisation and modernisation bring people without blood or affine relationships together in voluntary associations the eventual interaction is “...ephemeral, temporary, and without much emotional investment” (Assimeng, 1981:65). In this way, Assimeng admits to the permanence and relevance of traditional social structures like kinship. As Christians and Muslims, the Akan still hold dear kinship relation and its ideals. Despite his education and even religious background the Akan still believes he is indebted or obligated to his fellow kin mates. After many years, Danquah’s assertion about the unbreakable tie that exists among family members still holds true: “If you would know what an Akan regards as most sacred and inviolable, attempt to make distinctions between him and members of his clan, or worse still, of his family. The family being more or less the unit personality in society, an individual tends to regard himself as out of touch with all existence when divorced from his family” (Danquah, 1928: 194).

3.4 TRADITIONAL AKAN COMMUNAL VALUES

3.4.1 Basic Concepts of Society

3.4.1.1 Communalism

The traditional Akan society is communalistic in nature (Pobee, 1979:49; Arthur, 2001:82). Each member of the community feels a “loyalty and commitment” to the society to the extent that members demonstrate their willingness to advance communal interests (Gyekye, 1996:35). The well-being of the community becomes the focus of the activities of the individual members of the society (Gyekye, 1987:155). This explains the Akan proverb: the sticks of the bloom cannot be broken when together, *dua kor gye mframa a obu* (Arthur, 2001:82). In Akan society, an individual’s social standing and reverence are based on personal sense of responsibility to the needs, demands, and welfare of the group or community (Gyekye, 1996:46). A person is a complete human being when he or she functions

to enhance societal survival and interest. This means that the individual cannot achieve his or her interest without the society into which he or she is born.

The integration of individuality into community in African traditional society is so essential and thoroughgoing (Wiredu, 1996:71). A person is not just an individual born to their parents, but also one indicating in her projects and achievements an adequate sense of responsibility. An individual is a person in the fullest sense when he or she "...shows a responsiveness to those ideals in confirmed habits of life" (Wiredu, 1996:58) of the society. These "confirmed habits" and behaviours are always the ones deemed acceptable by the community as a whole and not a part of the community. These are usually acts or practices that promote the human life and thereby ensure the peaceful continuity of the community. Every Akan citizen of sound mind and heart aspires to be a human existence. The Akan say that *onipa firi soro besi a, obesi onipa kurom* -when a man descends from heaven, he descends into a human society (Arthur, 2001:82). The import of this proverb is that humans are originally born into a society and therefore they are social beings from the outset. It is thus impossible for people to live in isolation because, not only will that be contrary to their nature, but also, individuals by themselves do not have sufficient capabilities to meet basic human requirements. As the Akan put it, *obi yieye firi obi*- the prosperity of one depends upon his fellow (Arthur, 2001:82). The communal nature of the society therefore is seen as a consequence of human nature as well as that which makes for personal well being and wealth.

3.4.1.2 Value of Human Life and Common Humanity

The Akan belief that life is the most valuable thing in the whole world is expressed by the aphorism: *nni awu na nkwa yenton*-do not kill for life is priceless (Arthur, 2001:92). Human life is too precious to be wasted by senseless killing. The Akan also say that *nyimpa ye few sen sika*- the human being glitters more than gold; that is, the human being is more beautiful and more valuable than wealth or treasures. The Akan belief is that human life has within itself the power of change, growth and development. This dynamic, creative power in the human being must work towards building up and not destroying (Arthur, 2001:92).

The Akan tradition seeks to recognise and promote the value of humanity which the community deeply appreciates. To Wiredu this recognition of human value is "...intrinsically

linked with recognition of the unity of all people, whether or not they are biologically related” and also whether or not they are of diverse religious backgrounds or of kingroup (Wiredu, 1987:76). Wiredu acknowledges that:

“...the deep appreciation for humanity is reflected in such communal social structures as the clan, the extended family, and complex networks of social relationships and the African custom of opening one’s door to strangers and showing them acts of generosity and hospitality.” (Wiredu, 1987:45)

The social structures are all aimed at promoting human life and communality. They also enhance the continual survival of the community. An Akan proverb goes: *nyimpa nyinara ye Onyankopɔn mba*-All human beings are children of God; no one is a child of the earth (Arthur, 2001:92). In view of this all human being constitutes into one universal human family. In African societies, human relations are highly valued. Greeting people one meets is an important element in promoting human relations and in making people feel good about themselves (Arthur, 2001:92). The greeting is considered a way of acknowledging the other person as a fellow human being. A person may feel deeply hurt if you pass him by without greeting him (Wiredu, 1996:26). In view of this, Busia acknowledges that an Akan child is socialised to greet those he meets; even the stranger whom he may never meet again (Busia, 1962:104).

3.4.1.3 Reconciliation for Peaceful Co-existence

The Akan society does not allow broken relations to go unhealed. Apart from the various avenues available for the settlement of litigations and disputes such as the royal court, the Sacrifices are performed and communal meals held to restore normalcy. Since the African defines himself or herself in terms of a two-way relation, reconciliation in an African context aims at the restoration of a harmonious relationship with God and other sacred beings, with fellow human beings and other creatures. The need for harmony and restoration of broken relations explains the central place given to sacrificial practices in African religion (Asante, 1995:174). This need for harmony and for the restoration of broken relations arises from the

African understanding of sin as the infringement of ethnic taboos and laws. Wrongful acts create disharmony by breaking relations between human and God and among humans and their ancestors. Unlawful actions violate the Akan people's appreciation of the self as a being-in-relation to other (Asante, 1995:174-175). A society characterized by disharmony is in danger of self-destruction. To avert reprisals from the deity and to ensure the maintenance of society's equilibrium, particular sacrifices are offered that aim, first and foremost, at the restoration of the disrupted harmony. The traditional African believes it is only in the context of harmony that she or he can live in peace (Asante, 1995:175).

3.4.2 Traditional Morality

3.4.2.1 Traditional Akan Norms as Social Ethics

Morality has the sole and ultimate purpose of guiding the behaviour of members of society. Morality essentially entails social rules and norms. Being intrinsically social, morality arises out of the relations between people (Gyekye, 1996:55). In other words, moral norms of the Akan people never emerge from outside the societal beliefs in the right and wrong behaviour informing and underlying good and bad character.

Moral values of the Akan people are thus "nonindividualistic" and so have the ultimate aim of ensuring the success, survival and, in fact, the smooth running of the community as a whole (Gyekye 1996:58). In other words, moral ethics are meant mainly to ensure the well-being of every member of the society. The core and the fundamentals of morality then are unyielding consideration for others and a sense of duty to their interests (Gyekye, 1996: 55).

In line with the social dimension of Akan morality, acts which demonstrate concern for others, bring peace and security are highly cherished and steadfastly encouraged. These actions are considered good because of their consequences for human well-being or social welfare. Any action that is detrimental to social harmony is considered bad or evil (Kwame Gykye, 1996:58).

3.4.2.2 Traditional Akan Moral Values: Religious?

While some historians such as Danquah (1968), Sarpong (1972) and Arthur (2001) consider Akan moral values as being grounded on religion quite a few like Wiredu (1996) and Gyekye (1996) have rejected this view point. Gyekye, for instance, rejects any attempt to attribute Akan morals to a supernatural force (Gyekye, 1996:56). He argues that traditional religion is not a revealed religion and so does not enjoy the privileges of the written dictates of the Supreme Deity, which in other religions such as Christianity and Islam have become the foundations of their moral ethics (Gyekye 1996: 56). Sporadic messages received from the deities by the priests on behalf of the people only play complementary/supplementary role to existing moral values. The foundations of the African morality are the experiences and world view of the people thanks to the people's unyielding quest for a common and harmonious society (Gyekye 1996:57). Gyekye argues further that the fact that religion is not basically the source does not rule out its role in matters of morality. Religion plays a major role by offering sanctions and penal measures to moral conducts and behaviour (Gyekye 1996:57).

Gyekye raises two important issues which are crucial for Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana. Firstly, the Supreme Deity sanctions in terms of giving his approval to whatever the people deem as their common good and interest. Secondly, this common good is progressive, human welfare oriented and is largely depended on the unique experiences and world view of the current generations. Wiredu toes the line of Gyekye to refuse the notion of religious basis of Akan moral codes. He even goes further to call for "...a review of the enthusiastic...attributions of religiosity to African peoples" (Wiredu 1996:49). Morality is meant to achieve a particular purpose here and now. Wiredu postulates that any notion among the Akan people of "after life" is meant actually and ultimately to have a "this worldly" effect. While playing down the role of the Supreme Deity and the spiritual beings as basis for morality, Wiredu elevates rather the pivotal role of the ancestors, the inhabitants of the world of the dead and considers it as "this worldly" eventually (Wiredu, 1996:58).⁴⁶To Wiredu, an important aspect of "this worldly" ethics of the Akan people is a basic commitment to the values and ideals of society. These ideals of society are habits of life recognised and confirmed by the entire membership of the community and are meant to foster cooperation and fruitful encounters among people and ultimately the human well-being (Wiredu,

⁴⁶ No notion of possible salvation and eternal bliss. What afterlife there is thought to be is envisaged very much on the model of this life. It is not pictured as a life of eternal fun for the immortals but rather as one of eternal vigilance-vigilance over the affairs of the living with the sole purpose of promoting their well-being within the general constraints of Akan ethics.

1996:58). In this way, Wiredu rebuts “other worldly” views of Akan moral ideals, thus discounting the role or the notion of *Nyame* (and for that matter religion) in the individual’s pursuit of moral virtue and noble ideals (Wiredu, 1996:57). What is puzzling is that Wiredu, like Gyekye, fails to eliminate entirely the role of the supernatural. He attempts to describe the supernatural in terms of what he calls “the sacred”. He describes “sacredness” in ethical terms to mean that “most worthy of respect, reverence and commitment” (Wiredu, 1996:58) which, in Akan life, is that which helps promote the supreme good of the society. In other words, there is a thin line, in the African mentality, between the supernatural, the sacred and the natural and the secular.

3.5 CONCLUSION

The traditional Akan life provides notable models of interreligious encounter in Ghana. The Akan people believe in the One, Supreme Deity who is also deemed as the Father, the Great Ancestor and provides for all His people (Muslims and Christians). He is also the creator and ruler of the universe and all that takes place in it. He is the source of all religious and moral norms, themselves essentially the foundation of the various religious traditions. He would be a vital force in facilitating Christian-Muslim encounters. The Akan people crucially accept the universality of divine truth and perceive religion more as prevailing system than institution with significant capacity to embrace both Christianity and Islam as complementary entities in ensuring communal solidarity and harmony.

Also, the social systems of kinship are given an elaborate cover with especial reference to the extended family in terms of blood relations, affine relations and putative ancestor. These kinship institutions are the bedrock of the society and they help to cement social relationships among family members, unite Muslim and Christian families by means of blood relations, mutual helpfulness, and reciprocal responsibility. The traditional Akan understanding of society is expounded with particular reference to the concepts of communism, universal human family and human relationship.

The traditional socio-religious and communal structures are all perpetuated in the interests of the greater community harmony, ultimate goal of Christian-Muslim relations.

Now, in what ways are beliefs in the Supreme Deity, universality of divine truth and the incessant quest for the unity of religions critical issues in Christian-Muslim exchanges? What are the place of inclusivist stances of both Christianity and Islam in the light of the traditional Akan unrestrained open attitude to other cultures and religious traditions? What role could the dynamism and progressiveness of Akan traditional religious belief systems and moral values play in the formulation of contemporary beliefs and attitude to Christian-Muslim relations?

CHAPTER FOUR: RELIGIOUS AND MORAL CONCEPTUAL ISSUES IN CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter looks at the role the traditional Akan religious values- belief in the Supreme Deity, universality of divine truth and the persistent quest for the unity of religions- play in facilitating Christian-Muslim relations. Thus, it expounds the fundamental Akan belief in the Supreme Deity as the Father, Creator and Ruler of the universe and its implications for Christian-Muslim encounters. It also engages a discussion on inclusivist stances of both Christianity and Islam in the light of traditional Akan unrepressed tolerant attitude to other cultures and religious traditions with special reference to the values of the universality of divine truth and the concept of core and peripheral virtues of society. Furthermore, the chapter considers the essentials of the dynamism and progressiveness of Akan traditional religious belief systems and moral values, and how they could help promote Christian-Muslim relations especially in formulating belief systems through appropriate interpretation of past encounters.

4.2 THE SUPREME DEITY AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

Deliberations regarding issues of Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana cannot be adequately handled without recourse to the fundamental belief of the Supreme Deity. The concept of the Supreme Deity remains a central belief among the African people and the Muslim Akan and Christian Akan of Ghana for that matter (Rattray, 1923; Parrinder, 1961; Danquah, 1968; Mbiti 1969, 1970; Idowu 1965; Pobee, 1969; Sarpong, 1981; Busia, 1951). In a religious and social environment where Christians and Muslims use the same traditional Akan names and attributes of the Supreme Deity for God and Allāh respectively it is absolutely ludicrous to assume that different deities are involved. Proverbs about *Nyame* and his other names are used by Christians and Muslims in their speeches, wax prints, “High-Life” songs and traditional art works. By the use of these names Akan people are acknowledging, in no uncertain terms, that

the *Nyame* of their ancestors is the same God or Allāh they are worshiping now as Christians and Muslims, a fact that has been a crucial first stage in efforts at ensuring a harmonious co-existence and relations between the two great traditions. If the use of the traditional names is not a problem for Christian Akan it should not be for Muslim Akan even as the Qur’ān encourages Muslims to “... Call upon Allāh or call upon Ar-Rahmān: by whatever name ye call upon Him, (it is well) For to Him belong The Most Beautiful Names” (*Sūrah*, 17:110; *Sūrah*, 59:23; *Sūrah*, 2:255).

The utilization of indigenous names and attributes for the Supreme Deity, however, is not new in Christian and Islamic traditions. Arabs of pre-Islamic era used the name “Allāh”, the Islamic name of essence for their Supreme Deity.⁴⁷ In view of this, Christian Arab use the term “Allāh” for the ‘Christian God’ to the extent that God is even translated Allāh in the Arabic version of the Bible. The reason, Christian Arab argue, is simply, that the term is not originally Islamic but Arab (Hitti, 1970).

The closeness of the pre-Islamic conception of Allāh and the Akan notion of *Nyame* is strikingly puzzling. The pre-Islamic Allāh was essentially the supreme provider and one to be invoked in time of danger just like *Nyame* of the traditional Akan

The Akan Supreme Deity (*Nyame*) is the only One and is considered the Father of all people (Fisher, 1998). As father, the Supreme Deity is a personal deity (Parrinder, 1961; Anyanwu, 1981), the head of the family, who alone provides for his people (Rattray, 1923; Danquah, 1968). The vertical relationship thus established between the Supreme Deity and His people, Muslim and Christian alike, calls for a horizontal relationship among all people. As children of the Supreme Deity, people are closely related to each other irrespective of their cultural and religious backgrounds (Fisher, 1998; Azad, 2003) and are called upon to engage in relationships. The Akan Muslim and Christian call on *Nyame*, their Father, for assistance.⁴⁸

This Akan conception of the Supreme Deity as the Father is not unknown to the Judeo-Christian tradition and for that matter many other world religions who evoke God as ‘Father’. The deity is often considered the ‘father of gods and of men’. Among the Israelites,

⁴⁷Before the origins of Islam the Arabs had the belief in a ‘high god’ referred to as Allāh. Allāh was the principal but not the only deity. Those pagans who acknowledged Allāh as creator also held that the other deities could intercede with Allāh on their behalf (*Sūrah*, 10: 18; *Sūrah*, 19:81; *Sūrah*, 35:40; *Sūrah*, 36:74). See also: Watt, 1988:31-36; Mawdūdī, 2006:35, 39.

⁴⁸No wonder that many a time inter-religious prayer sections are organized at various levels for the people of Ghana. In Ghana, the most eventful, colourful and successful interreligious worships are all organized by the state. This is not to say that the various religious organizations are not capable, rather, they lack the courage, to say the least.

God is called ‘Father’ inasmuch as he is creator of the world (Dt 32:6; Mal 2:10). Even more God is Father because of the Covenant and the gift of the law to Israel, ‘his first-born son’ (Ex 5:22). God is also called the Father of the King of Israel. Most especially he is ‘the Father of the poor’, of the orphaned and the widowed, who are under his loving protection (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 68:6). By referring to God as ‘Father’, the language of faith indicates two main things: that God is the first origin of everything and transcendent authority; and that he is at the same goodness and loving care for all his children. God’s parental tenderness is expressed here. Jesus revealed that God is Father in an unheard-of sense: he is Father not only in being Creator; he is eternal by his relationship to his only Son who, reciprocally, is Son only in relation to the Father (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994:55-56). The concept of God as Father is not directly found in Islam, at least not in the traditional 99 (ninety-nine) names and attributes of God (Al-Ghazālī, 1992:49-50) yet it could be deduced from the concept of *ar-Rabb* which according to Mawdūdī, has, among other things, the sense of looking after someone, to improving a person’s situation by providing for his needs (Mawdūdī, 2006:60). This concept of the Supreme Deity as father would not be a problem for the Muslim Akan who obviously believes that Allāh is the actual head of his nuclear and extended family.

The Supreme Deity is also the creator and origin of all things (Gyekye, 1987:34; Mbiti, 1975:35). Since the Supreme Deity created the universe, it is subsequently dependent on Him for its continuity and harmony. In view of this, the Supreme Deity is the king of the universe. The Akan say, “*Onyame ne Hene- God is king*” (Akoi, 1969:68). To the Akan, the Supreme Deity, the King, directs the affairs of the world and so nothing happens by chance and at random in the universe. For this reason, the Akan Muslim and Christian believe that *Nyame* is involved in their day to day activities and so the expression, *Onyame pɛ a*, (If *Onyame* wishes-*insha* Allāh by Muslims), is constantly on the lips of the Akan” (Asante, 1995:95). The Muslim Akan and Christian Akan are then expected to recognise religious plurality at least as the work of the Supreme Deity and not to wonder why Islam or Christianity should exist. Morals and institutions of societies should not in substance, necessarily contradict each other when *Nyame* is the ultimate source. In other words, the very core of all these moral norms ought to synchronise since they evolve from the same source, the Supreme Deity.

The concept of the Supreme Deity is pivotal in matters of Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana. It calls on all stake holders of dialogue to place the Supreme Deity at the centre of

discussions, especially when all the three religions-Traditional religion, Christianity and Islam- have a common understanding of the Supreme Deity as the only One, the Father and the Ruler of the world. This belief puts the Supreme Deity at the source of all activity and the initiator, the potent force behind religiosity. It also takes the centre stage in unifying all religious traditions around the creator and the ruler of the universe.

4.3 INCLUSIVIST PERSPECTIVE TO RELIGIOUS RELATIONS

4.3.1 Karl Rahner and “Anonymous Christianity”

Rahner, a prominent Catholic theologian, presents a submission that all people of the world are Christians and refers to the non-Christian as “anonymous Christian” (Rahner, 1966: 391). He calls for a second look at and a new interpretation of Christian principles and ideals with regard to non-Christians. The need for reinterpretation is necessitated by the modern socio-religious climate which has seen Christianity losing its hold and influence on even its historical starting places. It is also required by the inability of Christianity to reach every part of the world especially regions untouched by Christianity such as the Muslim worlds of the Middle East and Asia, and even in Africa (Rahner, 1966:390). Furthermore, religion is no longer considered the only way to the understanding of human nature and the universe. In the face of these challenges, Rahner contends that the Christian doctrine of salvation of man by belief in God through Christ is to be given a broader connotation especially when this faith is in itself necessary and therefore demanded absolutely and that salvation is unattainable outside the Church (Rahner, 1966:391).

Rahner initiates a discussion of Christianity and its relations with the non-Christian tradition in the modern world by positing that somehow all people must be capable of being members of the church in both rational and chronological sense (Rahner, 1966:391). Rahner suggests levels of membership of the Church: the baptised Christian and “anonymous Christian”. In this way, Rahner characterises non- Christian religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism and Islam as “anonymous Christianity” (Rahner, 1966:391). Rahner’s “anonymous Christianity” theology brings into the Christian fold and makes salvation available to all those who lived before the Christ-event and those who, after the Christ-event

have not come to accept the Christian Message.

Rahner gives a new meaning to “being a Christian.” To be a Christian, to Rahner, is to accept oneself fully. The non-Christian is a Christian when he really accepts “himself completely.” A person “accepts himself” when he performs his duty of service to humanity especially to those under his care, in patience and dedication (Rahner, 1966:394). In the “acceptance of himself” a person is accepting Christ as the absolute perfection and in this way move towards God by grace (Rahner, 1966:394). In this way, Rahner’s submission alludes to the Akan understanding of a human personhood which reaches its perfection in their advancing communal interest in human sympathy, sensitivity to the need of others, and harmonious adaptation of their own interests to the interests of others in society (Wiredu, 1996: 129).

4.3.2 Vatican Council II and the Christocentric Approach

The Second Vatican Council was one of the most important mission conferences of the twentieth century for the Roman Catholic Church. The Council aimed at opening the doors and windows of the Church for fresh wind to blow through the Vatican. The Council toned down the Church’s earlier exclusivist⁴⁹ position and spelt out an inclusivist⁵⁰ stance on the Church and its relations with other religious traditions in some of its documents: *Lumen Gentium* and *Nostra Aetate*. In these documents, the Council reaffirms the centrality of the Catholic Church in God’s plan of salvation: “The Church...is necessary for salvation. For Christ, made present to us in His Body, which is the Church, is the one Mediator and unique Way of salvation” (*Lumen Gentium* 14). The Church is the Catholic Church and all in communion with it. Besides, the Council clearly establishes the possibility of salvation outside the church and recognizes the Orthodox and the Protestant churches as members of the people of God: “The Church...is linked with those who, being baptized, are honoured with the name of Christian, though they do not profess the faith in its entirety or do not preserve

⁴⁹The exclusivist position holds that salvation (or being accepted by God) is realised only through belief in Christ and membership of the Christian community, a view represented by the Swiss Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886/1303-1968/1388) and Ernst Troeltsch (1901) and Paul Tillich (Goddard, 2000:150). The exclusivist attitude is negative to all other set of beliefs and asserts its own as the only source of truth.

⁵⁰ The inclusivist stance holds that salvation is made available through only one religious tradition and in the case of Christianity through Christ, but that this should be understood inclusively, so that members of other religious communities may be saved, but through grace (Goddard, 2000: 150). Inclusivism is one of the several approaches to the understanding of the relationship between religions. It asserts that while one set of beliefs is absolutely true, other sets of beliefs are at least partially true.

unity of communion with the successor of Peter” (*Lumen Gentium*, 15).

Furthermore, the Council takes a giant step towards acknowledgement of non-Christians as capable of salvation and affirms its high respect for Muslims. The Council asserts that non-Christians, and in particular Muslims are connected in various ways to the Church:

“But the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims: these profess to hold the faith of Abraham, and together with us they adore the one, merciful God, mankind’s judge on the last day.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 16)

“Those also can attain to everlasting 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.” (*Lumen Gentium*, 16)

In the statements, the Council regurgitates the Church’s belief that Christ Jesus calls all people to Catholic (universal) unity. This Catholic union is not available to only catholic faithful or even only Christians but also by grace of God to all people (*Lumen Gentium*, 13). This notwithstanding, John Paul II, in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio*, keenly observes the human obstacles which have prevented certain people from direct embrace of Paschal Mystery of Christ:

“But it is clear that today, as in the past, many people do not have an opportunity to come to know or accept the gospel revelation or to enter the Church. The social and cultural conditions in which they live do not permit this, and frequently they have been brought up in other religious traditions.” (*Redemptoris Missio*, 10)

However, these human obstacles cannot be a lasting blockage for such people. For, salvation reaches the non-Christians by virtue of grace. This grace which emanates from Christ Jesus

through the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit engages the non-Christian in a non-formal, mysterious relationship to the Church. The grace enlightens the non-Christian in accordance with their spiritual and material circumstances while offering them the possibility of sharing in this Paschal Mystery in a manner known to God alone (*Gaudium et Spes*, 22; *Redemptoris Missio*, 10).

In spite of the social and cultural impediments of other traditions, the Council recognizes the positive values and contributions of such traditions to human development. *Ad Gentes* acknowledges the presence of “seeds of the word”, and points to “...the riches which a generous God has distributed among the nations” (*Ad Gentes*, 11). Again, *Lumen Gentium* refers to the good which is “found sown” not only “in minds and hearts”, but also “in the riches and customs of people” (*Lumen Gentium*, 17). Making its own the vision and terminology of some early Church Fathers, *Nostra Aetate* apart from recognizing the presence in these traditions of “...a ray of that Truth which enlightens all”, goes further to enumerate some of the positive elements of Islamic tradition:

“The church has a high regard for Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has also spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God’s plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his Virgin Mother they also honour, and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgement and reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.” (*Nostra Aetate*, 2)

These few references suffice to show that the Council openly acknowledges the presence of positive values not only in the religious life of individual believers of other religious traditions, but also in the religious traditions to which they belong. It attributes these values to the active presence of God through his Word, pointing also to the universal action of the Spirit: “Without doubt,” *Ad Gentes* affirms, “the Holy Spirit was at work in the world before Christ was glorified” (*Ad Gentes*, 4). These elements, viewed as a preparation for the Gospel

(*Lumen Gentium*, 16), have played and do still play a providential role in the divine economy of salvation. This recognition propels the Church to enter into “dialogue and collaboration” (*Nostra Aetate*, 2; *Gaudium et Spes*, 92-93) leading the council to state: “Let Christians while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral good found among non-Christians, as well as their social and cultural values” (*Nostra Aetate*, 2).

The statements issued on Islam by the Second Vatican Council are signs of real change of attitudes. The Council, by these statements, espouses a new attitude towards other religions particularly Muslims and Islam. It accords Islam the respect it deserves thus: “The Church has high regard for Muslims.” By this statement, the council counteracts its attitude, which fitted Islam into the Jewish-Christian frame of reference and so classified Muslims as Christian heretics. In other words, the council no longer sees Muslims in the way they differ from Christians. Islam, then, is considered a religion in its own right. This positive and healthy attitude to Islam is in line with the church’s adoption of the inclusivist model in terms of her relations with other religions in general and Islam in particular. But the Council’s refusal to use the term “Islam” in these statements raises eye brow. The Council’s failure to refer to Muslims by the name of their religion could be seen as its unpreparedness to acknowledge Islam as a religion. But, the Vatican Documents would be much more appreciated when analysed in terms of the spirit behind the words which accords due respect to non- Christians and provides a really good beginning along the difficult but necessary path to inter-religious relations.

4.3.3 Islam and the ‘*dīn al-fiṣrah*’ Approach

The Islamic tradition presents a rather unique inclusivist approach to other religions. It considers its prophet, Muḥammad, as one of a line of biblical prophets which stretches back to Adam and reaches forward through Abraham and Moses, David and Solomon, until it reaches Jesus (*Sūrah*, 19:30). In line with this, the Qur’ān sings the praises of the messengers of the Christian and Jewish communities and their message. However, Muḥammad had predecessors; he would have no successor. He is the seal of the prophets: “Muhammad is not the father of any man among you, but he is the messenger of Allah and the seal of the

prophets; and Allah is ever aware of all things” (*Sūrah*, 33:40) Muḥammad is not just a messenger of God but also the last of the prophets.

The advent of Muḥammad and the Qur’ān were necessitated by the inability of previous religious communities⁵¹ to keep to the covenant God made with them through their prophets (*Sūrah*, 5:13). Their error was that they had partly corrupted the revelations they received and fabricated new doctrines which contradicted the right path to the Supreme Deity. The Qur’ān came as the final and perfect expression of God’s will: “And this Qur’ān is not such as could ever be invented in despite of Allah; but it is a confirmation of that which are before it and an exposition of that which is decreed for mankind-Therein is no doubt- from the Lord of the Worlds” (*Sūrah*, 10:37). All the portions of the Word of God, which were corrupted, deliberately or not, are believed to have been preserved in the Qur’ān and Islamic religion (McAuliffe, 1991). The content of the Qur’ān is the ultimate, complete, eternal and immutable revelation. The Qur’ān itself attests to this: “Say: Verily, though mankind and the jinn should assemble to produce the like of this Qur’ān, they could not produce thereof though they were helpers one of another” (*Sūrah*, 17:88). The superiority of the Qur’ān to previous scriptures is herein indicated (McAuliffe, 1991). So through the prophet Muḥammad, God’s guidance to humankind has reached completion and perfection. It is in support of this that Rahman writes: “...there has been an evolution in religion, of which Islam is the final form” (Rahman, 1980:81). Muḥammad is the seal of the prophets and the revelation he received is the only straight path and the community he has formed (the community of Muslims) is the rightly guided.

In Islam’s view, the previous historical religions are products of *dīn al-fiṭrah*,⁵² containing within them varying degrees of it (*Sūrah*, 2:135; *Sūrah*, 4:123; Al-Faruqi, 1982:139). It attributes religious differences from *dīn al-fiṭrah* to history, i.e., of place, time, culture, leadership and other particular conditions. Islam therefore agrees that all religions are

⁵¹ “People of the Book” (*ahl al-kitāb*) consists, specifically, of the Jews and Christians who according to the Qur’ān, received revealed Scriptures just as the Muslims received the Qur’ān (Peters, 1990:345).

⁵² *dīn al-fiṭrah* or *religio naturalis* (natural religion), which Muslims and non-Muslims possess by birth, is always to be kept distinct from the religious traditions of history. Every human being is born a Muslim; it is the parents and the environment which make the person a non-Muslim. What God has implanted in human nature, namely the recognition of His transcendence, unity, holiness and ultimate goodness is prior to any tradition. Hence, *dīn al-fiṭrah*...is the original religion. Its possession by every man, regardless of the religious tradition or culture in which he was born or nursed, defines his humanity and casts upon him a very special dignity. It entitles him to full membership in the religious community of man, the universal brotherhood under God (*Sūrah*, 3:19; Al-Faruqi, 1982:139).

religions of God, issuing from and based upon *dīn al-fiṭrah*, and representing differing degrees of acculturation with history. As a result, the people of other religions (especially Jews and Christians) have either gone astray or have angered God as the first *sūrah* indicates: “Thee (alone) we worship; Thee (alone) we ask for help. Show us the straight path. The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor those who go astray” (*Sūrah*, 1:5-7). “Those who thou hast favoured,” refers to the new Muslim community. “Those who earn Thine anger,” and “Those who go astray,” are the people of other religions. This new community, Islam, is different from the communities of the people of the Book. It is superior to and replaces all old religious communities. Within this new community, the fullness of revelation subsists. The new community is the original and true religion (*dīn al-fiṭrah*). It identifies itself completely with it, subjects itself totally to its principles and dictates. The new Islamic community is the pure monotheistic community that is in line with the religion of Abraham: “Say (unto them, O Muhammad): Nay, but (we follow) the religion of Abraham, the upright, and he was not of the idolaters” (*Sūrah*, 2:135). Abraham was neither a Jew nor a Christian but a monotheist (*hanīf*)⁵³ who submitted to God (Muslim). The Qur’ān calls on Jews and Christians to repent and submit to God in the new community of believers: “And if they believe in the like of that which ye believe, then are they rightly guided. But if they turn away, then are they in schism and Allah will suffice thee (for defence) against them” (*Sūrah*, 2:2-4). This is what Waardenburg refers to as “returning to the pure monotheistic religion of Abraham which now takes shape among the faithful Muslims” (Waardenburg, 1999: 7). This new community, however, would not only be a model for mankind but also would ensure that good prevails: “And there may spring from you a nation who invite to goodness, and enjoin right conduct and forbid indecency. Such are they who are successful” (*Sūrah*, 3:104).

⁵³ *Hanīf* (pl. *hunaḥā*) refers to a group of Arabs whom Muslims believe had abandoned polytheism even before the advent of Islam. These seemed to have followed a monotheism which differed from the monotheistic religions which were present in Arabia, notably Christianity and Judaism (Hoyland, 2001:54).

4.3.4 Critique of the Inclusivist Positions to Christian-Muslim Relations

Inclusivist approaches to other religious traditions are considered by many as the offshoot of the exclusivist stance which still falls short of expectation in the pluralistic environment. In his article 'The non-Absoluteness of God' John Hick sets out to tear apart the exclusivist and even inclusivist doctrines of Christianity in order to address the superiority that Christianity has been undeservingly assuming over the centuries. Hick argues that available knowledge of other religions such as Judaism and Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, Confucianism and Taoism and African primal religion have revealed immense spiritual riches comparable to Christianity (Hick, 1987:17). He further contends that every religious tradition contains within it valuable and harmful elements. Each is internally highly diverse, some of its aspects promoting human good and others damaging the human family. In the face of these complexities, Hick asserts that no religious tradition has contributed a more favourable balance of good and evil, than others (Hick, 1987:30).⁵⁴

Invariably, critics of the inclusivist model such as Hick find unacceptable the various explanations given by both Christianity and Islam. They consider them attempts to grant a secondary authenticity to other religious traditions even though all cultural and religious traditions constitute different 'lenses' through which the divine Reality is differently perceived. For, all human awareness involves an indispensable contribution by the perceiver (Hick, 1983:83; 1989: 240,242). They take exception to the Christian inclusivist approach championed by Karl Rahner and Gerald McCool that non-Christian religions should not be accepted uncritically and placed on a par with Christianity. From the Christian point of view, non-Christian religions are the utterances of men, human ignorance, weakness, and malice which the Church, under the protection of the Holy Spirit has the responsibility to point out (McCool, 1975:214). In other words, a non-Christian religion contains elements of a natural knowledge of God mixed up with human depravity which is the result of original sin and later aberrations. It contains supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given to men as

⁵⁴ However, critics of the inclusivist approach do not consider the various religions as essential rivals. The religious traditions began at different times and in different places, and each expanded outwards into the surrounding world of primitive natural religion until most of the world was drawn up into one or other of the great revealed faiths (Hick, 1973:137). Again, no religious community has produced higher quality of saintliness than any other religious community to claim the custody of a greater power than any of the other great world faiths (Hick, 1987:23-24). The other world religions have produced equally great saints, mystics and thinkers as Christianity has and it is wrong accord the only second grade in God plan of salvation. They have also been great sources of spiritual and moral life and the heart of cultures for centuries (Hick, 1983:78). The Christian societies are also bedevilled by social vices of high proportions (Hick, 1987:25).

a gratuitous gift on account of Christ. For this reason non-Christian religions should be recognised as lawful religions without denying the error and depravity contained in them (McCool, 1975:215). The critics of inclusivist model also reject the Islamic inclusive view which considered the non-Muslim religions as having dissipated, lost, and tampered with the content of their revelation (Al-Faruqi, 1982:135). Though the universalism of prophecy follows from God's transcendence, non-Muslims have lost the originality of their religion and moral teaching. They have semblance of divine revelations (Al-Faruqi, 1982:136).

The inclusivist theology is deemed by many as inadequate for the twentieth-century theology of religions in the light of the greatly expanded knowledge of the religious experience (Hick, 1983:77). It is still couched in and haunted by the traditional Roman Catholic doctrine, 'Outside the Church there is no salvation', and its Protestant missionary equivalent, 'Outside Christianity there is no salvation' (Hick, 1983:77). God's saving activity is his gradual creating of 'children of God' out of human animals. Salvation consists in human beings becoming fully human, by fulfilling the God-given potentialities of their nature regardless of religious traditions. And this is not a sudden, all-or-nothing affair but a gradual growth, which indeed takes much longer than the span of our life on this earth. Salvation, then, is a slow and many-sided process (Hick, 1983:79).

To people like Hick the inclusivist theology of religions are mere attempts by theologians to acknowledge on the theological level the traditional exclusiveness, the conviction that there is salvation only through one religious tradition and on the historical and practical level, that salvation is in fact taking place outside Christianity (Hick, 1983:80). On the whole missionary endeavours have achieved little positive outcomes in the light of the fact that the great majority of people still hold on to the religion into which they were born (Hick, 1983:79). Between Christianity and Islam there have been little more than rather rare individual conversions. Even in Africa where both Christianity and Islam seem to be making inroads the greater part of the conversions have been from the adherents of traditional religion (Hick, 1973:138). Conversion from Christianity to Islam and Islam to Christianity has been insignificant despite the huge effort and time invested in the project.

In short, the inclusivist model presents one religion as authentic and its community the sacrosanct religious community. The one religion and its scripture become the measure of true religion and scripture of which all other religious traditions are deviations of the original religion. This inclusive position could itself be an obstacle to dialogue in that it still has some

negative attitude to other religion. But there is nothing wrong in thinking one's religion is better or more authentic than others.

4.4 TRADITIONAL AKAN RELIGIOUS VALUES AND THE RELATIONS OF RELIGIONS

4.4.1 Universality of Divine Truth and Christian-Muslim Relations

The Akan people believe that truth is communal and also universal to all religions. The Akan word usually translated, as truth is '*nokware*'. This word is made up of two words, *ano*, meaning literally 'mouth', and *kɔr*, meaning 'one'. It indicates being of one voice. This oneness of voice often refers to "communal unanimity" and unison; so that the truth is that which is agreed to by the community (Wiredu, 1996:105). In view of this, any ideal that appeals only to an individual or a section of the society is not considered to be the truth. This understanding of truth suggests that every community ought to have its own truth in which the individuals and institutions of the community can share. It also proposes that the universal community made up of several communities of the world could have a universal truth, one voice, which each community can identify with. This universal truth will reaffirm the truism that truth is one.

Furthermore, the Akan people believe that truth is divine and that divine truth is universal. Nevertheless, they do not believe in the universality of particular religion. For there exists a vast difference between the two concepts mentioned. In the past, the quest for a common humanity fuelled the concept of the universality of particular religion which saw divisions overcome, barriers fall, and people come together. The concept was effectively couched into doctrines and used by both Christianity and Islam which brought into being the great Christian and Islamic empires. Even the unity thus accomplished was framed in the existing terminologies of particular religion (Kamali, 1976: 6). However, a critical study of universality of a particular religion reveals the particularities of the universality quite noticeable in its cultural traits, which tend to undermine its universality by revealing its limitations (Kamali, 1976: 7). Today, the continued existence as well as usefulness of particular religions does not merely depend on their universality but on the perpetuation and

enrichment of their individuality. This leads the particular religions back to reflection of their universal significance. In the past, such reflections have led to the comprehension of universality of a particular religion as all that is good in itself and resides therein especially as it claims to be the best, unique and the final (Kamali, 1976:10-11). In the light of these weaknesses inherent in the universality of religious traditions Kamali makes certain recommendations for the various religious communities in the world: first, particular religions should strive to eliminate the danger of their development and initiatives proving to be self-seeking and ill-planned. Second, in the event of the conflict of two or more religions the harsh things they would be saying and doing against each other would eventually appear to be self-defeating and self-condemning. Third, particular religions would have to demand loyalty and submission of their followers with caution. The loyalty and submission should rather be channelled to God or to the pure universality of Religion (Kamali, 1976: 12-13). Underlying these proposals of Kamali is the truism in the spirit of religious plurality that "...many things placed together in a given situation need not try to displace each other" (Kamali, 1976:12).

Thus, the Akan perception of universality of divine truth as against the universality of particular religions ought to be placed in their proper perspective. Each religious tradition has divine truth, a deposit of faith. To the Akan, truth is divine and is not the preserve of one particular religion or culture (Mbiti, 1989:101; Opoku, 1996:67). Every religion and for that matter culture contains within it a certain degree of divine truth, the veracity of which, to the Akan people, is determined by its fruits (spiritual and material) and not just by the mere content of its deposit of faith. In view of this, religion is functional, experiential, and it is judged to be true or false by its capacity to provide solutions and render legitimate services (Asante, 1995:139). This understanding of religion and divine truth, significantly, explains the reason many an Akan, Muslims and Christians alike, accept, tolerate, and would not hesitate to appropriate the divine truth when need be, wherever it could be found (Berinyuu,1978:147). In fact, among the Akan people, any attempt to present a particular religion as the only way to the Supreme Deity is almost impractical and futile. The notion of universality of divine truth, coupled with functionalism of religion, apart from enabling different religious viewpoints to exist side by side⁵⁵ also generates a certain general attitude of doctrinal apathy which

⁵⁵The traditional religious environment has a number of seemingly contradictory symbols and beliefs: the Supreme Deity dwells in the sky yet is present among his people indicating the Immanence and the Transcendence of God in the Christian Theology; the relation between the Supreme Deity and the gods; the role of the gods and the ancestors; regional, local and family gods all operate without any role conflict. Besides, the ideas, myths and rituals also seem conflicting. Yet, all these nevertheless exist side by side with relative ease

Lochmann alluded to in his comment that:

“The Negro is rather indifferent to religious questions. He respects the principle ‘live and let live’. Attacking him in the street preaching one will seldom meet with resistance.” (Lochmann, 1959:29)

4.4.1.1 Implications of Doctrinal Apathy to Christian-Muslim Relations

The general doctrinal apathy,⁵⁶ which is the consequence of the belief in universality of divine truth and functionalism of religion, has two implications for Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana. Firstly, the indifference to religious particularism underlies the tolerant attitude, openness and even utter acceptance that both Muslim Akan and Christian Akan display in view of available approaches to the Divine, interpretations of the origin and destiny of human existence (Opoku, 1993). In view of this, religious fanaticism which demonizes association with members of other religious traditions has no place in Ghanaian religious imagination. Ellis describes the tolerant attitude of the Akan in his observation that:

“...there is an absolute toleration, and it is considered quite natural that other people should have other gods. The endeavour to force upon others his own views, whether concerning religious or other subjects, is

(Opoku, 1993:69). In his Preface and Acknowledgements Meyerowitz acknowledged marked similarity between traditions of both Egypt and Ghana when he observed that none of the aspects of these traditions ever became obsolete (Meyerowitz, 1954:13).

⁵⁶This indifference to doctrinal issues should be distinguished from that of the first period of Christian-Muslim encounter which saw Christians (the church) adopt an attitude of adaptation and indifference to their new Muslim masters. This covers mainly the period of the Umayyad Dynasty and the early periods of the Abbasid. At this time, the Muslims governed a vast empire with a very large Christian population (640-850). The Muslim rulers treated the Christians with indulgence and accorded the conquered people the status of protection, *dhimma*. Christians were allowed to practice their own religion. For the fact that their religion was left untouched the Christians tended to hold aloof and keep to themselves. No attempt was made to understand what Islam really meant. Christian writers such as St John of Damascus (675-753) fitted Islam into a Jewish-Christian frame of reference, rather than considering it in itself. They saw the way Islam differed from Christianity and thereby classified it as a Christian heresy or a judgement of God on Christians who had erred in their Christological formulations (Goddard, 2000: 48). Some discussions took place in writing but they centred on each other's theological doctrines and they were directed towards scoring points. In view of this, no progress in mutual understanding and no attempt to know about each other's religion which invariably hampered communication between the Christians and Muslims. Rather, they led to a certain estrangement between Christians and Muslims.

altogether foreign to the primitive man, who so highly values personal independence.” (Ellis, 1887:20)

Secondly, the doctrinal apathy also enables the Akan people to, consciously, consistently, and rightly so, reject aggressive and extreme religious exclusivism perpetuated by some Christians and Muslims which could endanger community harmony. The rebuff of religious exclusivism of extreme fundamentalist understanding of a religious tradition in this way sets the ball rolling for a credible, practical and fruitful inter-religious engagement. Thus the doctrinal indifference generates a religious consciousness that is open and tolerant, understanding and all-embracing which permits Christians and Muslims to eschew prejudices as well as acrimonies of the past. It also grants Christians and Muslims the opportunity to learn from one another as they cooperate and work together to achieve a common goal of enhancing their collective well-being.

Consequently, the traditional religious consciousness of recognising truth outside one’s immediate environment or religious persuasion rather than being regarded as a canker and so another sign of weakness (Opoku, 1996:68) must be recognised as one of strength, be commended, and also positively promoted if the challenges of modern pluralistic environment are to be met squarely.⁵⁷ The religiously open attitude is all the more crucial with an upsurge of Muslim-Christian polemics in Ghana in the last two decades. Christian and Muslim groups

⁵⁷ In tracing the history of religious development Hick (1973) came to an understanding of what he calls “the divine self revelation to mankind” and so took Opoku’s argument to another level. He writes that: “...the divine reality has always been self-revealingly active to mankind, and that the differences of human response are related to different human circumstances. These circumstances-ethnic, geography, climatic, economic, sociological, history-have produced the existing differentiations of human culture, and within each main cultural region the response to the divine has taken its own characteristic form” (Hick, 1973:138). Hick (1973) admits of the historical and cultural considerations which could conveniently be referred to human elements that cloud the divine truth among all people. These different circumstances of the recipients of divine truth and so revelation come to play and they reinforce the strength and maturity of this Akan religious mentality. It is the second point, which is of much importance to us. This goes to confirm our argument that it is virtually and absolutely impossible for African Christians and Muslims to accept and practice Christianity and Islam in the same way as that of Europeans and Arabs. This is because, to Hick, the circumstances of these groups of people are completely different. African Christianity should and must be shaped by their circumstance, which is unique. The same is true of African Islam. For example, the historical events that helped shape the encounter of Christianity and Islam in the past should not be allowed to shape the future for African Christians and Muslims as they encounter one another. The crusades should not be a major issue in Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana. The majority of Muslims and Christians in Africa do not have any idea, whatsoever, about the reasons for which they were waged and the eventual outcome. To make, for instance, the crusades and military conquests (holy wars) issues in religious encounter is ridiculous and grossly inappropriate in the Akan religious consciousness. Rather, their own history and culture should be allowed to shape, if not prevail, over the historical events for a better future.

have emerged, engaged in religious apologetics and polemics with the professed objective of converting each other. The obvious result is the intermittent altercations and often violence in many areas. In Accra, for instance, some of the Christian groups with avowed interest in converting Muslims include Christ to the Muslim Mission, in Osu and the Centre for Good News, in Nima. Over the years, these Christian groups have toned down their public polemics as, it seems, they have learnt the lessons of the futility and dangers of such endeavour.

4.4.2 Core and Peripheral Values of Societies

The notion that religious images and moral principles of the Akan people are progressive and so susceptible to modification is subject to misinterpretation. The notion has the tendency of portraying the Akan religious systems and practices as lacking permanence and structural foundations. There are aspects of traditional belief system that are intransient and indicate permanence and others that are ephemeral and point to transience. Wiredu prefers to classify the tenets of Akan religious and moral values into cultural universals and cultural particulars. In Wiredu's view cultural universals are intransient, common norms and moral imperatives on the bases of which intercultural communication and dialogue are always feasible (Wiredu, 1996:1). In other words, cultural universals are norms that are absolutely essential to human communities. These intransient beliefs relate to the core values of the Akan society. Cultural universals are predicated on common biological identity of human beings as a species of bipeds (Wiredu, 1996:1) and also as social animals. The core values of society are believed to be supernatural and are often referred to as the revealed aspects of the belief systems. They are unalterable and universal. The ephemeral aspects of religious and moral principles relate to the peripheral values which are temporary. They are of human origin and so are subjective.

The Akan understanding of core and peripheral virtues of society and indeed every society on earth have decisive implications for Christian-Muslim encounters and exchanges. In the first place, it places all societies and cultures on the same pedestal by virtue of each having core and peripheral values. The attainment of superiority is predicated on the due prominence society and individuals give to core and intransient values. In other words, individuals and societies become superior as they place due emphasis on the mainstay values that build them into better people and society. It also proposes to people of all cultures unique

way to interreligious and cultural exchanges which dwell on essential commonalities of societies. As societies and cultures uphold their core values, truth becomes stronger and deeper and it continues its function of leading their people to the Supreme Deity, the source of all truth, and the final destination (Opoku, 1996:68) as well as building bridges between cultures and societies. Hence, to the Akan people there is no good reason to assume that one religious tradition is superior to the others on the bases of the content of the deposit of faith which is available to all societies. All societies are replete with core values of religious and moral truth which propel individuals and society in general towards the realization of their better selves. In this way, all societies and cultures are “tributaries of truth” of the Supreme Deity as he shares his truth liberally with all people (Opoku, 1996:68). Hick alludes to this Akan conception in his submission that all religious traditions are capable of producing the kind of transformation in human beings that are desirable (Hick, 1987:23-24). But unlike Hick who classifies all societies and religious traditions into valuable and harmful elements, the Akan people prefer the classification of core and peripheral elements of society. The replacement of core values with ephemeral ones leads to social anarchy and chaos which ultimately hinders intercultural and religious encounters.

4.4.2.1 Christian Values in the light of Traditional Akan Ethical Code

In view of the Akan understanding of core and peripheral values of all societies it is unthinkable for anyone to consider the Christian doctrine of Christology as a major obstacle to interreligious dialogue and fruitful Christian-Muslim relations. The Christian doctrine of Christology, then, becomes a problem for dialogue and intercultural exchanges when what it stands for is either misinterpreted or narrowly interpreted. When confronted with the issue of the Christology, Hick found it expedient to deny entirely the doctrine in his book, *God and the Universe of Faiths* in order to expound his theory of religious pluralism (Hick, 1973). The denunciation of the Christology to make room for dialogue of religions and cultures is disingenuous. For the denial approach feeds on the wrong interpretation of the incarnation and the Christ-event in history, often by Christians which has led to the denial of the central and unique position of Jesus in every religion.

As the Word (*Logos*) of God made flesh (Jn 1:1-4, 14; Rom 1:3; Gal 4:4; Phil 2:7; 1

Tim 3:16; 1 Jn 4:2) Jesus is the epitome of the core values of society. He personifies in Himself what the Akan call the core virtues of every society and religion. These core values are essential values which enhance communal interests and promote welfare of the individuals. They are love, truth, mercy, humility, forgiveness, reconciliation, justice, cooperation, etc. Jesus is the embodiment of the main aspects of the moral values of cultures. In other words, the core values of society which Jesus embodies in Himself are essentially those values which function to ensure the continual survival of society in harmony and peace, with the eventual aim of promoting common human fraternity. These core values are the foundation, the heart of the every culture. They are divine, permanent, eternal and they are found (actually the same) in every society and religion on earth. It is these core values that the *Nostra Aetate* affirms and considers as “true and holy” in all religions and which point to a “a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men” (*Nostra Aetate*, 2). They are sharply contrasted with peripheral values of each society which are primarily human inventions and traditions, the result of human attempts to understand and apply the core values. They are usually the less important aspects of culture. They are less important because they are temporary and susceptible to change.

In the light of the Akan perception of religious and moral imperatives, Jesus’ statement: “When I am lifted up I will draw all people to myself” (Jn 12:32) is properly understood. By this statement, Jesus is actually saying that when the core values, the cultural universals of each society are cherished, upheld and given the necessary attention they deserve, it is Him who is being upheld and in that sense he is being lifted up. A lot of studies have been conducted to come to the meaning of the pronouncement of Jesus in the Gospel of John 14:6 which reads, “I am the way, and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me” (Jn 14:6). To Cracknell, instead of reading Christian exclusivism into the verse we should rather understand it with the element of “...mystery, of redemptive suffering of life through death” which are essential elements of all cultures (Cracknell, 2005:60). In the view of scholars like Cracknell, Jesus by Jn 14:6 is actually calling on all people to focus on Him, the Word (*Logos*) of God, and the core values of society. It is only by upholding the core values of society that human beings submit to the will of the Supreme Deity.

The redemptive suffering of Jesus, in Cracknell’s view, is likened to “the anguish of God” for the entire universe of creation, his “tender forgiveness” for the marginalised, his “ready pardon” for all sinners irrespective of culture and religion (Cracknell, 2005: 60). In

this way Cracknell and others like him, gives Christology an all-inclusive, all-embracing, comic and true universal character, just as the Akan give to the core virtues of society, presenting Christ as the pre-existent reality which fills the entire universe. The rejection, betrayal (Jn 18: 1-11), suffering and death (Jn 18:28-30; Lk 23: 44-48) and even burial (Jn 19: 42; Lk 23: 50-56) of Jesus is the most important aspect of the doctrine of Christology. It basically and actually stands for the denunciation of core values of society, it is the betrayal of selfless love, truth, trust and friendship (Lk 22:54-61; Jn 18:15-18, 25-27) and everything that promote social cohesion. The suffering (Lk 23: 26-38) and humiliation of Jesus (Lk 22: 63-65; Jn 19: 17-24) represent the humiliation, the denial of the values of justice, mercy, forgiveness, reconciliation of societies, and communities of the world. Just as the rejection of Jesus (Lk 23: 13-25) meant the acceptance of the criminal Barabbas (Jn 19: 39 & 40), so the rejection of the mainstay values of society has always meant the adoption of the peripheral values of the lie of the ‘non-essentials’ which lead to extremism, fanaticism and fundamentalism, relativism and individualism, greed, the farthest quest for the satisfaction of sensual desires and the like. When these peripheral, non-essential values and the cultural particulars are wrongfully and sadly adopted and made to function as core, central values and as such cultural universals, society and individuals eventually plunge into chaos because these superficialities promise what they cannot give and they turn to rob society of peace and continual survival. Suffice it to say that history abounds moments when “fallible conceptions of universals” in both intellectual and ethical forms and principles, are transposed or imposed upon other peoples as infallible and eternal universals (Wiredu, 1996:2). In other words, cultural particulars or peripheral values (non-essentials of cultures) are presented as core and universals. Not unnaturally, the practice has earned universals and essentials a bad name. But, the culprits are the hasty purveyors of universals, not the idea of universals itself.

The resurrection of Jesus (Lk 24: 1-12; Jn 20: 1-10) is the absolute testimony of the permanence of the mainstay values whose rejection, betrayal and even utter destruction are only temporal. By the resurrection of Jesus is meant the re-emergence, the eventual victory, the triumph of the core values of societies which are indestructible and eternal. In this way the Christian would realise that Jesus Christ is already present in all cultures and society, though on ‘rays of the Truth’ and ‘seeds of the word’.

4.4.2.2 Islamic Values through the Lens of Traditional Akan Moral Code

In the same vein, the Muslim needs to come to the realisation that though the Qur'ān is the final revelation and supplanting all others, the earlier revelations are not entire invalid (Fitzgerald & Borelli, 2006:90) but contain therein intransient aspects which are not susceptible to corruption and fabrication. The traditional Akan conception of universality of divine truth in relation to intransient and ephemeral imperatives of societies has parallels in Islamic traditions. Some verses of the Qur'ān indicate that different prophets have come to different peoples and nations at different times: “How many a prophet did We send among the men of old” (*Sūrah*, 43:4). Again: “Lo! We have sent thee with Truth, a bearer of glad tidings and a warner; and there is not a nation but a warner hath passed among them” (*Sūrah*, 35:24). The messages of these prophets emanate from a single source which the Qur'ān refers to as “the Hidden Book” (*Sūrah*, 56:78); “the Heavenly Book” (*Sūrah*, 57:22). Prophet Muḥammad believed in the Torah and the Gospel: “I believe in whatever scripture Allah hath sent down” (*Sūrah*, 42:15). The Arabic word translated here as “scripture” is *kitāb*.⁵⁸ These messages are essentially the same and universal. The multiplicity of prophets and the sameness of their message point to the Akan notion of the intransient, supernatural and universal values which should be made to take central role as source of unity and diversity of religions.

Thus, the diversity of religions and so cultures is in the divine plan for mankind: “Mankind were one community, and Allah sent (unto them) prophets as bearers of good tidings and as warners and revealed therewith the scripture with the truth that it might judge between mankind concerning that wherein they differed” (*Sūrah*, 2:213). The Arabic word translated ‘community’ here is ‘*ummah*’ which though it originally means ‘a nation, community’ is used here to mean ‘a religious community.’ Furthermore, “And if thy Lord had willed, He verily would have made mankind one nation, yet they cease not differing” (*Sūrah*, 11:118). The word ‘*ummah*’ is again used and translated as a ‘nation.’ Accordingly, God has not wished for a single religious community for mankind. The Muslim commentators are not sure about the duration of the period when “mankind were one community.” In the light of this, the plurality of religious communities is for a purpose, i.e. for the good of mankind. It is in line with this that Ayoub writes: “The diversity of races and languages, and by implication

⁵⁸ *kitāb* originally means “book” but here it is used in a generic sense to refer to the totality of divine revelations.

of religions and cultures, is a sign of divine wisdom in the ordering of human society” (Ayoub, 1997:146). The Qur’ānic and Islamic recognition and actual acceptance of diversity of society and so religious community indicate an acceptance of intransient and transient values of all societies which the Akan people uphold. The importance of religious differences lies in the opportunity to engage in fruitful discussions. This discussion, then, is a healthy one, which manifests itself in goodness. It is worthy of note that the Qur’ān does not only affirm other traditions of faith but also advocates and encourages fruitful inter-religious discussion and relations.

Furthermore, the followers of all religions will have a place with God on the Last Day: “Lo! those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans-whoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right-surely their reward is with their Lord, and there shall no fear come upon them neither shall they grieve” (*Sūrah*, 2:62; 5:69). This verse, however, has been problematic in the history of Qur’ānic exegesis. Some commentators have found a way out to interpret it to satisfy their rigid exclusive views. Mention could be made of Qutb, the Egyptian radical Islamist activist, who argues strongly that the verse refers to Jews and Christians etc who have accepted the faith as preached by Muḥammad (Qutb, 1999). Qutb is of the view that since Muḥammad is sent to all mankind it is incumbent on all, irrespective of religious affiliations to believe in him. However, Parrinder contends that the verse (*Sūrah*, 2:62) explicitly acknowledges and declares that people of other religious traditions could be worthy of salvation if they have scripture and believe in one God (Parrinder, 1965:154). Thus, the validity of other religions is indicated. People of other faith traditions are not called upon then to abandon their tradition and become Muslims, the only way to salvation, but to keep to the worship of one God and righteous conducts which could be found in their religions (McAuliffe, 1991: 7).

There are also verses, which reject claims of exclusivism of other communities, who have the tendency to look down on other communities. Exclusive claims of revelation by some religious communities (particularly by Jews and Christians) the Prophet encountered are criticized: “And the Jews say the Christians follow nothing (true), and the Christians say the Jews follow nothing (true); yet both are readers of the scripture” (*Sūrah*, 2:113) Again, “And they say: None entereth paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian. These are their desires. Say: Bring your proof (of what ye state) if ye are truthful” (*Sūrah*, 2:111). No particular

religious community is so special to God that it must be guided uniquely. It is in line with this that Rahmān writes: “Guidance is not the function of communities but of God and good people, and no community may lay claims to be uniquely guided and elected” (Rahman, 1980:165). These Qur’ānic prescriptions seem to put all religious communities on the same pedestal. The Qur’ān then believes in the genuineness and validity of all revealed religions.

Additionally, other Qur’ānic prescriptions indicate that salvation is for the good, the just and so the one who uphold the core values of their society. It does not matter to which community one belongs: “Lo! Those who believe (in that which is revealed unto thee, Muhammad), and those who are Jews, and Christians, and Sabaeans-whoever believeth in Allah and the Last Day and doeth right-surely their reward is with their Lord” (*Sūrah*, 2:62; 5:69). The question, then, arises as to why the Qur’ān occasionally, openly criticizes other religions. Ayoub finds the answer in the fact that the sharp reproaches are aimed at particular beliefs, attitudes or actions of particular persons or groups with whom the Prophet had direct dealings, and not at their faith and religious affiliation (Ayoub, 1997:146). The Qur’ān then does not condemn Christianity, Judaism etc but the wrong behaviour of some Christians, Jews etc. It indicates that belief in one God and righteous living in accordance with core values is paramount and ranks high above religious and cultural differences.

4.4.3 The Quest for Unity of Christians and Muslims

An understanding of religion among Akan people of Ghana that has survived the upsurge of institutional Christianity and Islam is that of religion as a prevailing system. It is the offshoot of the Akan belief in universality of divine truth and the concept of transient and intransient virtues of societies. The notion of religion as a prevailing system is the most appropriate understanding of religion for proper and fruitful interreligious encounters as it looks beyond the limitations set by religious traditions to embrace the entirety of religious entities. The notion has the sense of religiosity.

Today, it appears meaningless to talk of religion as a force for unity in the world. This is particularly true when the term ‘religion’ is frequently given a pathetic narrow interpretation of ‘institution’ with defined boundaries in the likes of political parties and business enterprises. The Akan conception of religion as a unifying force is best understood

when the term 'religion' is perceived in the broader sense of 'a prevailing system'.⁵⁹ As a prevailing system, religion takes the form of a 'parent' body whose component parts are the various religious communities or traditions in the larger society. In this sense, both Islam and Christianity and even the traditional religions are recognised as the various arms of the one religion or the various ways in which the 'parent' religion expresses itself.

It is in this capacity as a 'parent' body and so a prevailing system that religion is most able to execute its organizing and unifying function of bringing together and actually integrating into a whole its several parts (Goode, 1951:54; Parsons, 1964:183; Clarke, 1967:432). In the traditional Akan society, the chief of the community is the chief priest of this 'parent' religion and all other traditional priests and priestesses (*akomfo*) of different persuasions share in his common priesthood. He becomes the priest of the Supreme Deity in his community. However, in the modern Akan society where the religious function of the chief is significantly diminished and religious communities are institutionalised with clearly defined differences, by style not substance, an understanding of religion which actually embraces all the traditions for a peaceful co-existence and harmonious encounters is even more needed. In the context of Africa and for that matter Ghana where the two great religious traditions (Christianity and Islam) rub shoulders one can hardly think of a better way of dealing with religious pluralism. The conception of religion as a prevailing system would propel both Islam and Christianity to adjust to one another and in particular to drop their extremely exclusivist and negative tendencies which in themselves are developed in response to social and political issues at the time.

The Akan notion of religion as a prevailing system has a lot in common with what Ratzinger considers as the most realistic approach to the relations of religions in his book *Truth and Tolerance*. Ratzinger contends that issues of religious relations could be properly

⁵⁹In this sense, besides individual deviants, the membership of the total society and the membership of the religious communities are virtually co-existent (Parsons, 1963:175; Foster, 1909; James, 1903; Radcliffe-Brown, 1935:397). In an Akan society, common set of religious values are acceptable and expected to be promoted by the various religious communities largely to reinforce common sentiments, religious and social integration in view of advancing this one prevailing religious entity (Merton, 1957:30). Religious communities which fail to act in accordance with this common good are either isolated or allowed to escape into oblivion. These acceptable religious values, made strong by customs and traditions, shape social intercourse of human beings (Parsons, 1963:177; Goode, 1951:54)). The people are united in this one prevailing religious system and united by it. In view of this, Parsons writes: "...the land and the people-individuals, families, villages and clans- are all organized by religion" (Parsons, 1964: 179). Parsons' understanding of religion is similar to the Akan understanding of a "parent religion" which unites the totality of society by integrating the various religious communities thanks to common values.

dealt with in the perceptive of a broader perception of religion as “...an overall designation of the relationship of man to the transcendent” (Ratzinger, 2003:51). This broader understanding of religion offers the various religion persuasions the opportunity to have a better understanding of themselves in terms of their role in the world. Ratzinger contends that the broader understanding of religion enables the true believer of all religions to endeavour to “purify his conscience” and thus moves toward the “purer forms of his own religion” (Ratzinger, 2003:54). He argues further that the conception is that which empowers the true believer needs to ignore the myth that inherited forms of their religious tradition are sufficient in themselves in order to seek people and precepts of other religions with an open and sincere heart. In other words, it calls for a going beyond traditional and institutional religion and a looking for something greater, thus embracing the “dynamic of the conscience” and of the silent presence of God. It is this understanding of religion which is constantly leading religions towards one another and guiding people onto the path to God. This broader understanding of religion does not suppress the human capacity to search deeper into their religion for something authentic and effectual (Ratzinger, 2003:54). In other words, this ‘parent’ notion of religion brings the individual to meet the ever changing crises of life by ensuring security and stability. In this way, religion avoids the danger of itself becoming the means of insecurity and instability (Parsons, 1951:195; Durkheim, 1915:417).

As a prevailing system, religion embraces spirituality as its goal, and in fact, it is its logical outcome. Montilus defines spirituality as:

“...the integrating power, the merging faculty, which pulls together all parts of our cosmos. It is the enlightenment which dissolves the boundaries of our multiplicity, and fades away all internal dissension. Then there is no distinction, no separation, but only oneness.” (Montilus, 1989: xiv)

By this statement, Montilus touches on the very essence of spirituality which obviously looks beyond religious traditions. Spirituality goes beyond institutional structures and even the content of revelation to focus and deal with human beings themselves in their relationship to one another and to their maker and God. Montilus makes a striking distinction between institutional religion and spirituality to the effect that whilst the former teaches about the

prayer offered, the latter teaches about the person who engages in prayer and how that person assimilates and assumes the prayer, and allows it to influence his decisions, actions and attitude for common good. Again, unlike religion which is a primarily communal activity, spirituality is a personal endeavour, enterprise and journey. The spirituality that evolves out of the understanding of religion as prevailing system interiorizes religious activity and changes it first and foremost into personal and individual benefits (Montilus, 1989: xviii-xix) and then into communal good. Spirituality asks for a great deal of human commitment toward the common good and interest. Thus, Montilus views spirituality as that force or “integrating power” which crashes the human relativism and has the capacity to break down the religious institutional frameworks in order to position the individual to embrace the great totality which makes genuine Christian-Muslim relations and encounters possible. The individual becomes “bodiless and limitless”. Furthermore, Montilus conceives of spirituality in a social context in view of its quest for harmony and the absolute values of society. In spirituality the individual becomes the epitome of the features of the society that brought him forth (Montilus, 1989: xix).

4.4.4 Transreligiosity among Akan Christians and Muslims

A religious dynamic, often referred to as ‘transreligiosity’, is the obvious consequence of this ‘parent’ understanding of religion. This transreligious attitude makes it possible for the individual to go beyond the ‘live and let’s live’ mind-set to actually accept and appropriate religious ideas and rituals of all the available institutions, while at the same time remaining in their own tradition (Azumah, 2001:50).⁶⁰ When this appropriation is efficiently managed, proper exchanges of religious ideas and rituals would ensue, enriching both Christianity and Islam. In the light of this, religious differences or particularities of Christian and Islamic

⁶⁰Underlying this transreligious attitude is deep-rooted belief that religious institutions are not enemies of each other; they are meant to complement each other for all religions have only one source, the Supreme Deity. In this way, Africans and for that matter, Akan people perceive of religion in a holistic and spiritual sense which enable them to deal with their religious pluralistic environment with relative ease and so stunning to the outsider. Hollenweger acknowledges this in his observation of the ease with which Africans deal with the pluralistic religious situation in their countries: “...the traditional religious dynamics-Far from making religion ‘a private affair’, as is the case in Europe, they try to see complementaries in the different religions” (Hollenweger, 1993: XI).

traditions become hugely beneficial to the Akan Muslim and Christian. In fact, the diversities of the two great traditions (Christianity and Islam) become an asset rather than a liability thus confirming Sanneh's assertion that "Christianity and Islam are ...united less by the things they have in common than by what divides them" (Sanneh, 1996:6).

Among the Akan Muslims and Christians this transreligious quality is not just attitudinal but most importantly ceremonial which is proudly displayed at public ceremonies of marriage, funeral, naming of a newborn, religious festivals which attract people from different religious backgrounds, Muslims and Christians alike (Appiah, 1992:119; Sanneh 1996:24). There is hardly any Christian ceremony that a Muslim will not be present and vice versa in the Central Region of Ghana. Many a time the presence of the other is so huge and significant that they are allowed to take active part by singing, preaching, praying etc. Appiah recounts a story of a typical modern Akan wedding at which the transreligious attitude is exhibited:

“...It was, as it happens, my sister's wedding, and the legal ceremony occurred in a Methodist church...But, not long after we began, the Catholic archbishop of Kumasi (remember, this is after a Methodist ceremony) said prayers, and this was followed by the pouring of libations to my family ancestors, carried out by one of the king's senior linguists.”
(Appiah, 1992:119)

This scenario, or religious phenomenon, is so familiar to the Akan (Muslim or Christian) that it is hardly possible to recognise any obvious religious contradiction therein. It is in this sense that religious plurality in the Ghanaian context is to be seen, understood and appreciated. For, it does not involve the mere existing of religious institutions side by side with parallel doctrines and rituals and Christians and Muslims sceptical and suspicious of one another. It actually, in most cases, involves a mixing of rituals and rites of various religious denominations and traditions at public ceremonies.⁶¹ That Appiah (1992:120) prefers to call transreligious ceremonies of this kind 'non-traditional' is not surprising. 'Non-traditional' to Appiah (1992:120) obviously because at such ceremonies could be found beliefs and rituals of

⁶¹It must be pointed out that the phenomenon of transreligiosity has nothing in common with Assimeng's "Phenomenon of plural belonging" in which case people officially belong to more than one religious traditions (Assimeng, 1989:196).

different religions coexisting, a reality almost unthinkable in other cultures. But what Appiah has failed to realise is that this attitude in the Ghanaian situation is not 'non-traditional'. It is 'traditional' not only in the sense of its common occurrence but also because this is an inherent quality which stems from a traditional Akan understanding of religion.

However, Appiah's questions regarding these ceremonies are legitimate. How can all these elements coexist? What makes this conceptual melee not a source of intellectual tension and unease but a resource for a tremendous range of cultural activity? The answer to these questions is to be found in traditional Akan religious theory- a theory that focus on the benefits and results of acts (action), rites, ritual and the fact that as the Akan proverb says: 'too much fish does not spoil the soup.' Appiah finds answers to his questions when he writes that:

“Most Africans, now, whether converted to Islam or Christianity or not, still share the beliefs of their ancestors in an ontology of invisible beings...It is this belief in the plurality of invisible spiritual forces that makes possiblea Catholic bishop praying at a Methodist wedding in tandem with traditional royal appeal to the ancestors. For most of the participants at the wedding, God can be addressed in different styles- Methodist, Catholic, Anglican, Moslem, traditional-and the ancestors can be addressed too. Details about the exact nature of the Eucharist, about any theological issues, are unimportant: that is a theoretical question, and theory is unimportant when the practical issue is getting God on your side.” (Appiah, 1992:135)

Over the years and even in recent times, Christian and Muslim 'puritans' both African and foreign have expressed concern and open objection to transreligiosity, describing this 'inclusive religiosity' as 'nominalism', lack of faith or incomplete conversion, descriptions that reveal a lack of appreciation of African religiosity. Indeed, as far as the "nominal" Muslim Akan and Christian are concerned, engaging with other traditions is an expression of deep religiosity (Berinyuu, 1988:140).

4.5 FORMULATION OF THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS: THE ROLE OF SOCIAL CIRCUMSTANCE

4.5.1 Social Context and Attitudes of Christians and Muslims in History

A cursory look at the history of Christian-Muslim relations reveals the crucial importance of social and political setting in shaping and developing the opinions, beliefs and attitudes of Christians and Muslims towards each other. The acrimonious interactions between Christians and Muslims largely demonstrated by theological, polemic writings of the Middle Ages cannot be properly appraised when isolated from their social and political milieu (Goddard, 2000:60). The theological formulations of Christian-Muslim encounters as well as the images and the attitudes that accompanied them were designed mainly to score political and psychological points and not grounded on any sound and accurate perception of each other.

During the formative period (850-1050AD) changes in political and social conditions in favour of the Muslim rulers made Christians turn inward which later sparked off polemic writings from both sides (Goddard, 2000: 50).⁶² The status of *dhimma* which was supposed to be the expression of the supreme, fixed, theologically grounded Muslim idea of the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims (Ye'or, 1985:29) kept changing in response to the existing social and political climate. The word *dhimmi* actually means “protégé” (protected person). The *dhimmi* is someone who lives in a Muslim society without being a Muslim (Jew, Christians and occasionally “animist”). He has a social, political, and economic status (Ye'or, 1985:28). When they were submissive to their minority Muslim rulers the *dhimmis* were given the freedom to continue their religious and domestic affairs. At these times Muslim rulers were benevolent, religiously tolerant, culturally amiable, racially closer, and politically charitable. They provided the *dhimmis* protection from external aggression and exempted them from military services in exchange for poll-tax (*jizya*). When they refused to

⁶² Correspondence between Christians and Muslims became polemical and antagonistic in character in the late ninth century (Goddard, 2000:56).⁶² Christian writers wrote to the Christians living in the Muslim-conquered lands and the mass of Christians who had recently converted to Islam (Goddard, 2000: 54). Their writings were, generally, full of insults at Islam, Muhammad and Muslims. Muhammad was portrayed as an epileptic fit (Goddard, 2000:92), ignorant charlatan, a false prophet, inspired by Satan, and a sexually licentious who misled the people and used force to convert his opponents (Goddard, 2000:57). Islam was portrayed as an attempt to restore Polytheism and even the cult of Satan (Goddard, 2000:94), and so was considered an idolatrous and demoniac religion (Goddard, 2000:58) and Christians were repeatedly warned against the contamination of Islam. Muslims were considered blind for accepting Muhammad as a prophet. One felt a kind of resentment of Christians and of other populations who have suffered defeat at the hands of the Muslims.

submit to their minority Muslim rulers, the *dhimmi*s were branded people of corrupted faiths (Dharmaraj & Dharmaraj, 1999:85, 86) and tampered with scriptures. The *dhimmi*s were humiliated or forced to embrace Islam in such situations. They would also be severely restricted in building new churches or synagogues (Dharmaraj & Dharmaraj, 1999:89).

Furthermore, one cannot also rule out the political and economic factors for the wars of the crusades and the aggressive attitudes of Christians which were supported by the Popes and church leaders at the time (Riley-Smith, ed. 1992:75-78; Hillenbrand, 1999:51). The need to regain the Holy Land for Christian pilgrimage is always cited as the central reason for such aggressive attitudes to Muslims but one cannot play down the overwhelming importance of socio-political motives of mainly helping out the Byzantium power to gain back its lost territories especially those occupied by Muslims (Gaudeul, 2000:108-110; Goddard, 2000:84). It is not incongruous to say that socio-political reasons were couched in religious motives and terms to justify the crusades. As a consequence of these military campaigns several Christian states were founded in Palestine and Syria and the need for reinforcement to consolidate these states led to the subsequent crusades (Hillenbrand, 1999:50; Goddard, 2000:90-91). Although the crusades were generally unsuccessful, memories of them are still fresh and a legacy of mistrust left throughout the Muslim world even till today (Goddard, 2000:91). Again, the quest for political and cultural unity in Medieval Spain also demanded religious unity which led to the adoption of inhuman policies of assimilation and inquisition by which a decree banned aspects of Islamic culture such as dressing and speaking (Gaudeul, 2000:110). Many were forced to become Christians. Even though the inquisition achieved its aim of bringing the people together to form one political nation, using religion as a medium, it also led to excesses, which many Muslims are still embittered about. Hostile indifference seems to characterize the encounters between the people at the time (Gaudeul, 2000:111). There were no sign of true friendly encounters taking place between Christians and Muslims. Christians and Muslims existed side by side without really relating to each other.

Similarly, social and religious realities of the modern era which saw Muslims and Christians living side by side both in the Arab and Western Worlds also influenced the statements of Vatican II on Islam and Muslims. The Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches changed their images of and attitude to Islam. The Vatican Council II enumerated some positive elements that it recognizes in Islam. This is quite unlike the past when the Christians saw all that was wrong and negative in Muslims but could not see anything right

and positive. The council even went further not only to list some of these positive elements as: One God, obedience to God, resurrection of the dead, prayer, alms-giving and fasting but actually to acknowledge these as values Christianity and Islam both share. This is a sign of big change, a major turnaround in the Church's attitude to other religions in general and Islam in particular (*Nostra Aetate*, 3).⁶³

In these statements (*Lumen Gentium*, 1964) the church acknowledges unequivocally that it is not the only way to salvation but Christ is. In other words, the church, then, is not the only possessor of the deposits of faith sufficient and necessary for salvation thus giving the axiom, "Outside the church there is no salvation", though not originally applied to non-Christians, its right and proper interpretation (Isizoh, 2002:7). In its statement, "...the plan of salvation also includes those who acknowledge the Creator, in the first place among whom are the Muslims" the Council admits that other religions such as Islam, though not mentioned, also contain some elements of sanctification and genuine approaches to redemption by focussing on two important and central issues of papal encyclicals: "...man as the image of God"(Pope Pius XII, *Summa Pontificamus* n.38) and " the unity of the human race" (Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, 1964) as a common ground for inter-religious dialogue. In view of this, the council puts humanity, not the church, at the centre of deliberations and thus demonstrates, in clear terms, its inclusivist view of other religions.

4.5.2 Evolution of Images and Models of Christian-Muslim Encounters in Ghana

4.5.2.1 Akan Moral Objective

Akan Christians and Muslims have to look into their cherished traditions for theological ideals and moral values that promote the welfare of the society and the individual. The communal understanding of morality promotes peaceful co-existence and co-operation, and

⁶³ It must be noted here that the church's use of the term "speaker to men" in the *Nostra Aetate* (1965) falls short of expectation. The term avoids any reference to Muhammad, the Qur'an, and the whole concept of Islamic prophethood. Again, Muslims do not honour Mary officially, but the Qur'anic picture of her is very positive. In any case, by avoiding the old technique of demonising Islam and Muslims and adopting new and wholesome approach the Church sends some signals of its readiness to engage in fruitful dialogue with Muslims, one based on mutual respect and friendship. It then erases the negative impression and paints a new picture of Muslims. In these statements the church abandons its exclusivist attitude which had been the bedrock of its missionary endeavour to Muslims.

harmonious human and religious relationships and ultimately the smooth continuity of the society (Antubam, 1963:48; Gyekye, 1996:57). Social ethics are crucial for Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana where some myopic, divisive ideals or ideas are often imported wholesale, orchestrated without due regard for history and culture, and perpetuated in the name of the supernatural which tend to bring about division, untold hardships and cruelty regardless of the common welfare and social interests of Ghanaians. Such degraded ideological, philosophical and theological stances couched in Christian or Islamic fashion and often the divisive methods of their perpetuation, to the Akan, are not good moral principles, even when they are proven to be located in Holy Scriptures. They cannot be good morals because they are found to promote the interests of either the Christian or Muslim population at the expense of the larger community. One such ‘religious’ ideal is the segregating Salem quarters established by the Presbyterian Church in particular as it has begun its effort to evangelising the ‘heathen’ people of Gold Coast. These Salem settlements sought to set the Christian converts apart and so separate them from their kinship groups and the rest of the community. Ghanaians would rather that Christians and Muslims whose acts and actions, behaviour and attitude should not fall short of ensuring “...an overriding concern for harmonious and cooperative living of the entire membership of the community” (Gyekye, 1996:55).

4.5.2.2 Dynamism of Akan Moral and Social Imperatives

The Akan religious ideals and moral imperatives are dynamic, evolving and pragmatic. Many scholars such as Danquah, Mbiti and Azumah have attributed the dynamism of the African religious beliefs and practices to the unavailability of written documents in the likes of sacred scripture such as the Bible of Christians and the Qur’ān of Muslims (Danquah, 1952: 2; Mbiti, 1975: 15, 16; Azumah, 2001:48). This lack of sacred documents, they argue, makes the belief systems of Akan religious tradition fluid and subject to modification over time.

Nevertheless, the dynamism and progressiveness of Akan traditional belief systems and moral values go beyond the lack of codification. Rather, the progressiveness is the product of the fundamental Akan notion that religion ought to be relevant to the current practitioners by serving their needs and interests (Gyekye, 2003: 14) in their contemporary circumstances. The basic need of society is its continual welfare and survival. Since these

social needs and interests are not constant, religious beliefs and moral codes also do change to meet the changing requirements of society. Religion, which encompasses moral principles, is meant to propel society into achieving its basic and ultimate need which is forever undergoing transformation. In other words, the changing needs of society in view of their welfare and continuous survival call for religious beliefs and moral codes that are dynamic and progressive, pragmatic and realistic.

Indeed, religion, the heart and soul of the culture, is considered essentially as a means for attaining the needs, interests, and happiness of human beings in life on earth (Gyekye, 2003: 14). It is in the light of this Wiredu characterises the Akan traditional religion and moral codes as “this worldly” (Wiredu 1996:49). Religion and morality are meant to achieve a particular purpose here and now. Wiredu postulates that any notion among the Akan people of “after life” is even meant actually and ultimately to have a “this worldly” effect. He contends that the role of the Supreme Deity and other spiritual beings in matters of morality is minimal in Akan ethical issues. Though he touts the pivotal role of the ancestors, the occupants of the world of the dead, Wiredu considers the whole concept “this worldly” as well. In fact, the non-availability of Akan belief in a possible heaven and eternal happiness is a clear evidence of “this worldly” implications of morality (Wiredu 1996:58). Notions of “afterlife” are visualized very much on the replica of life here on earth. In other words, the afterlife is not imagined as a life of final judgement, eternal enjoyment and of beatific vision of the Supreme Deity as believed by both Christians and Muslims. It is one of perpetual watchfulness over the affairs of the living with the sole purpose of promoting their well-being in accordance with traditional norms of morality couched within the framework of their social and even economic conditions.

Thus an important aspect of “this worldly” ethics of the Akan people is a basic commitment to the values and ideals of society. These ideals of society are habits of life recognised and confirmed by the entire membership of the community and are meant to foster cooperation and fruitful encounters among people and ultimately the human well-being (Wiredu, 1996:58).

4.5.2.3 The Role of the Current Generation of Christians and Muslims

Just as social and political circumstances helped shaped interreligious images and attitudes in the past one cannot see why they must not be made to play a major role in developing new images, issues and models of interreligious exchanges in pluralistic Ghanaian environment. The social-political environments that brought into being negative images and attitudes in the historical Christian-Muslim encounters are completely different from the socio-political context found in contemporary Ghana. In other words, there is absolutely no socio-political justification for negative images and attitudes in Christian-Muslim exchanges which could engender religious acrimony and antagonism in Ghana today. In its present state, the socio-political environment of Ghana demands positive beliefs, images and attitudes to Christian-Muslim relations. It is in view of this that, Christians and Muslims should give a new interpretation to images and ideals especially those regarding relations of religions in line with the essence of “this worldly” ethics of the Akan people. In other words, Christianity and Islam in Ghana should evolve and adopt issues and models of Christian-Muslim encounters that are compatible and commensurate with their current social-political circumstances. Thus, the ideals, images and values of both Christianity and Islam with regard to each other should be subject to alteration in view of the changing needs of society if they are to be relevant to the Akan Christians and Muslims. Hence, whatever Akan Christians and Muslims have learned about each other over the centuries must first be understood in their context and second must also be applied with sufficient knowledge of their own Ghanaian circumstance in mind.

Accordingly, the contents of the moral codes of both Christianity and Islam with regard to interreligious encounters should not only be the brainchild of the past generations but also, and most importantly, the product of the current practitioners if they are to meet their needs and aspirations (Mbiti, 1975:15). That is, the present generation of Christians and Muslims in Ghana should be able to adopt new beliefs, images of and attitudes to each other by building on whatever they have inherited in line with the collective needs of their contemporary circumstances. Likewise, authentic Christian and Islamic religious images of and attitudes to each other would be significantly defined and shaped by the unique circumstance of the current practitioners (Asante, 1995:139). Thus, the current generation has

the capacity and authority to ensure that the foundations and models of Christian-Muslim exchanges are in furtherance of the contemporary need of peaceful co-existence of the various religious traditions. Images and attitudes of religious adherents, then, must remain the creation of the thinking and experiences of the ancestors or forebears but also most importantly the product of the current practitioners of the community (Mbiti, 1975:12) through human wisdom, conscience and inner inspiration. In other words, the current generation of Muslims and Christians must formulate new religious images, beliefs and approaches, it must observe religious ceremonies and rituals, tell proverbs and myths that carry fresh religious meanings and cooperation, and must also develop laws and customs of harmonious encounters, which preserve the life of the individual and their community by constant study of their socio-religious environment.

Invariably, people of different generations should add and submit to religious beliefs and practices they inherit as they live on. Christians and Muslims would have to scrutinise the various issues and models of religious encounters as handed down to them by past generations with the view of making necessary amendments to them to suit their social circumstances of life and in pursuance of peaceful co-existence. This means that certain aspects of the belief systems and in particular attitudes, approaches and positions of Christian-Muslim exchanges are bound to be rejected over time (Addo, 1997:45). Whatever would be rejected about the foundations, issues and models of inter-religious relations would be rejected because contemporary Akan Christians and Muslims concerned find it irrelevant to their needs and situations of life. New necessities demand prompt and significant alterations (Mbiti, 1975:15, 16). The Akan perception of religious dynamism is succinctly alluded to by Hick when he says:

“Theological formulations...are the work of people living in a certain place at a certain time, subject to particular historical exigencies, and using the philosophical and linguistic tools available to them within their own culture. As such, their results are inherently provisional and reformable (changeable), and indeed have continually to be reviewed and rethought in each new cultural epoch.” (Hick, 1997:2)

4.5.2.4 The Role of the Supreme Deity

Another Akan religious issue that has crucial implication for Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana is the role of the Supreme Deity in issues of morality which also explains the evolving and progressive quality of Akan moral codes and religious ideals. The Supreme Deity allows societal members to fashion out their own way of ensuring harmony in their society. The Supreme Deity, through the instrumentality of the *abosom* (lesser gods), comes into issues of morality at the end only to give His approval when common good reigns supreme and disapproval when there is discord, factionalism and disaster (Ackah, 1988: 95; Wiredu, 1996:47). In other words, unlike Christianity and Islam, the Supreme Deity does not dictate moral values to Akan people; He gives His consent and blessing to ethical codes already conceived and deemed valuable to them. In the same way, the Supreme Deity disapproves of any values and acts, perpetuated by both Christians and Muslims alike, which militate against the societal progress and have the tendency of sowing seeds of discord, suspicion and engendering division, tension and even conflict. In other words, the Supreme Deity expects Christians and Muslims to discard vile moral teachings or better still, give them new interpretations in line with their cultural ideals.

As they justifiably and reasonably appropriate the immense riches of the history of their various traditions particularly issues of Christian-Muslim dialogue to suit their current pluralistic environment, the Akan Christians and Muslims would not only be following the spirit of their traditional moral principles but also walking in footsteps of a general universal practice.

4.5.3 Critique of the Akan Traditional Approach to Religious Relations

The Akan approach to religious relations tends to accept and justify the truth of any and every religious belief, which is expressed in a living language. It seems to have a leaning towards relativism which would accept any concept of religion and theological claim as true and authentic simply because it has a real application and use. Intrinsic in this Akan understanding of religious truths is the tendency to reject the existence of absolute truth given the diversity of religious and cultures. It would seem to follow that anyone living in a pluralist society has good reasons for accepting all religious faiths.

However, the Akan approach has a leaning toward the views of advocates of pluralism of religions. It accepts the truism, veracity and even authenticity of all religious traditions. But unlike the pluralistic approach to inter-religious relations the Akan model does not deny the unity of mankind and religious traditions. The Akan view point does not see pluralism of religions in the sense of blocks standing forever side by side without direct and positive engagement as advocated by people of pluralistic model. It is neither the absorption of religions by a single one as championed by extreme inclusivist model. It call for an encounter into a unity that transforms pluralism into plurality in which case individuals remain loyal members of their traditions yet could recognise the good in the others to the extent of real appropriation in time of need. The Akan model is found in the mid way between pluralism and inclusivism.

4.6 CONCLUSION

So far, traditional Akan religious values- belief in the Supreme Deity, universality of divine truth and the relentless quest for religious unity- have been discussed as they help promote Christian-Muslim relations. Issues of Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana cannot be adequately handled without recourse to the fundamental belief of the Supreme Deity which continues to be essential among the African people and the Muslim Akan and Christian Akan of Ghana for that matter (Rattray, 1923; Danquah, 1968; Pobee, 1969; Sarpong, 1981; Busia, 1951).

While deliberately ignoring the negative and obsolete exclusivist positions, the chapter narrowed in on the inclusivist stances of both Christianity and Islam which assert that while one set of beliefs is absolutely true, other sets of beliefs are at least partially true. Furthermore, the traditional Akan religious values of universality of divine truth and existence of core and peripheral virtues of society are contrasted with the inclusivist positions of Christian and Islamic traditions. The realization of superior status of particular religions and even cultures is predicated on the due prominence society and individuals give to core and intransient values.

The obvious outcome of the universality of divine truth and the conception of core and peripheral values of each society is the adoption of general attitude of doctrinal apathy which

has enormous consequences for Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana. General indifference to religious particularity underlies the tolerant attitude and openness both Muslim Akan and Christian Akan display towards all religious denominations. Furthermore, the acceptance of religion in a much broader context of a prevailing system, whose component parts are the various religious communities or traditions, also contributes a great deal to the transreligious nature of the Akan people which is displayed both attitudinally and ceremonially by both Muslims and Christians (Appiah, 1992:119; Sanneh 1996:24). Also, the dynamism of Akan traditional religious belief systems and moral values is the product of the fundamental Akan notion of necessity of religious relevance to contemporary stakeholders (Gyekye, 2003: 14). Christians and Muslims would have to follow the beliefs and attitudes to each other as handed down to them by past generations, but should be able to make necessary amendments to them to suit their social circumstances of life.

As religion is the bedrock of the culture, open and tolerant religious issues always underpin social and communal relationships. In view of this, in what ways are the traditional Akan social relationships models of Christian-Muslim relations? What are the contribution of conjugal relationships of Christian-Muslim marriage and the affine relationships to purposeful Christian-Muslim relations? How do the traditional cognate relationships help foster Christian-Muslim exchanges. What are ingredients of the appropriate religious education for the multi-religious Ghanaian environment?

CHAPTER FIVE: TRADITIONAL SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AS VIABLE MODELS FOR CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The current chapter focuses on the traditional social and communal essentials as models for Christian-Muslim relations. It considers the intricacies of conjugal relationships of Christian-Muslim marriage and the contribution of the affine relationships that arose out of marriage to Christian-Muslim relations at the family level. It also treats traditional cognate relationships and its implications for Christian-Muslim relations with regard to the spiritual bonding and reciprocal obligations. Attention is also given to the traditional communal values, the universal human family, and appropriate religious education as foundations for effective Christian-Muslim exchanges in the communal life as a whole.

5.2 TRADITIONAL SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM EXCHANGES

5.2.1 Marriage of Disparity of Cult: Christian-Muslim Marriage

A marriage of a Christian and a Muslim is expected to be the ideal model for Christian-Muslim relations because it inevitably brings two great traditions of faith into a covenant of marriage. It also attempts to reconcile their teachings of marriage, divorce (separation/annulment) and even inheritance. It is Christian-Muslim relations in an extraordinary way. Christian-Muslim marriage, a perfect example of marriage of disparity of cult (mixed marriage), is considered extraordinary in both Christianity and Islam.⁶⁴ A

⁶⁴The marriage of disparity of cult is ordinarily considered “invalid” and non sacramental in the Catholic Church. In view of this, an impediment is constituted in a marriage of a Christian and a Muslim. In other words, the impediment of disparity of cult invalidates a marriage between a baptised catholic (subject to certain conditions) and a non-baptised person, the Muslim. Can. 1086 § 1: a marriage is invalid when one of the two persons was baptised in the Catholic Church or received into it and has not by a formal act defected from it, and the other was not baptised.

marriage is extraordinary when the parties involved do not belong to the same faith tradition. In the Catholic Church, a mixed marriage takes place between a baptised (the catholic partner) and a non-baptised (the Muslim partner) and is considered ordinarily invalid and non-sacramental (Can 1086§1). Likewise, Islamic law places a limited ban on mixed marriage to the effect that a Muslim woman may not marry a non-Muslim man, but a Muslim man may marry a non-Muslim woman so long as she comes from a religion having revealed scripture (e.g. Judaism and Christianity). The Qur’ān puts non-Muslims into two main categories: those with revealed scriptures (*ahl al-Kitāb*-people of the Book) and the others who are generally categorised ‘idolators’ (*mushrikīn*). The first category consists of Christians and Jews and since the Holy Qur’ān refers to itself as a confirmation of the earlier revealed scriptures it recognises (Sūrah, 2:41, 91; 3:3) as valid, marriage between a Muslim man and a woman of any of these religions (Sūrah, 5:5). A clear distinction is thus made between marriages within the *ahl-al Kitāb* and the *ahl-al-Mushrikīn*. Ibn Abū Zayd states that: “God has forbidden intercourse with unbelieving women: but marriage with a scriptural woman is permitted” (Russell & Suhrawardy, 1906:15). Some scholars opine that even the Jewish or Christian women are not good enough. The Malikī School declares such marriage blameable (*makrūh*) and imply that it should be avoided as much as possible (Ruxton, 1978:106). From the life of the prophet himself, one is reluctant to agree with such opinions. At least three of the wives of the prophet were not Muslims at the time they were married. Mārya was a Copt while ʿAfiyyah bint ʿUyayy and Raihānah bint Zayd were Jewish women. Mention is also made of Nashāh bint Rifā’ah, a Jewess, whom the prophet married (Montgomery Watt, 1981). Though there is no express provision in the Holy Qur’ān to support their view, Muslim scholars have claimed evidence from the tradition and hence maintained that a corollary to the verse prohibiting Muslim men from marrying women who are not of the *ahl al-Kitāb* is that a Muslim woman should not marry a non-Muslim man, not even a man from the *ahl al-Kitāb*. Although men are allowed to marry from the people of the Book, women are unequivocally forbidden. The Qur’ānic assertion that “men are in charge of women” (Sūrah, 4:34) makes it hard for a woman to practice her faith while married to a non-Muslim. Anyone who wants to marry a Muslim woman must be a Muslim first (Dharmaraj & Dharmaraj, 1999:247, 248).

5.2.1.1 Temporary Impediment

In both religious traditions, the extraordinary status of mixed marriage implies a prohibition which constitutes an impediment to be removed only by dispensation. In other words, the temporary prohibition could be dispensed under certain conditions. In view of the fact that a dispensation could be acquired for Christian-Muslim marriage to take place, it is convenient to say that such marriages are permitted but not encouraged by both religions.

However, Christian-Muslim marriages have become common among the Akan people not only because Christians and Muslims are now more exposed to each other in a pluralistic environment they find themselves (Fitzgerald & Borelli, 2006:68), but also because the traditional society also permits and facilitates it. In other words, in an Akan society where, traditionally, religious background is not a prerequisite for marriage and the ultimate objective of marriage is alliance between families, it is not a surprise that Christian-Muslim marriages do often happen. Furthermore, interreligious marriage does not pose a problem in traditional Akan society because customs and tradition stipulate clearly the spiritual affiliation of both parties and the children. Traditionally, a person, male or female, worships his or her father's god (Busia, 1951:1; Meyerowitz, 1958:14; Pobee, 1979:49; Ackah, 1988:126). Religion is one of the important cords linking a person to their father. And many fathers are not ready to let go this association to their children. In fact, fathers do not take it kindly when that religious association to their offspring breaks as a result of conversion or marriage. There are cases when fathers have disowned children for denouncing their religious tradition. Christian and Islamic denominations often demand religious background as a requirement for marriage. Often times it is required by the individuals. A person also pays allegiance to the ancestral stool of his or her lineage, without any problem. This means that the various approaches offered by society to the divine, the Supreme Deity, are meant to be complementary and not incompatible in terms of offering spiritual growth to the individual, a feat which is not quite easily tolerated by Islam and Christianity. Despite the suitable traditional socio-cultural environment Christian-Muslim marriage is to be allowed with caution especially when both Christianity and Islam, though believe in one God, are still incompatible in many ways. In other words, though Muslims and Christians access or appropriate each other's spiritual gifts on daily basis in Ghana, theoretically, the practice is frowned upon. It is in this spirit that impediment spelt out by both Christianity and Islam for the temporary prohibition of mixed

marriages such as Christian-Muslim marriage is to be understood.

5.2.1.2 Conditions for Dispensation

Both Christian churches and Muslim denominations have set in place certain conditions the satisfaction of which justifies a dispensation for mixed marriage. For the Catholic Church and probably all Christian denominations, the reason usually given for the impediment associated with mixed marriage is twofold: (1) the difficulty the catholic partner may encounter in practising his or her faith, and (2) the danger that children of the marriage may not be brought up as Catholics. At a deeper level, because a marriage of a Muslim and a Catholic is not sacramental, it is understood not to completely reflect either the covenant between God and his people or the relationship between Christ and the Church as Christian marriage should. Although, marriage is also a strong covenant (Sūrah, 4:21) for Muslims, its covenant nature does not seem to have anything to do with the Islamic legal impediment of mixed marriage. Religious compatibility seems to be a major reason for impediment. ‘Abd al-’Atī a reputable Islamic scholar says of mixed marriage:

“The general rule is that religious homogamy takes preference as the first choice. When both parties adhere to Islam, the probability of mutual harmony is highly assuring. But it is not an absolute condition that mates be of the same religion.” (‘Abd al-’Atī, 1977:137-138)

Abd al-’Atī indicates that religious compatibility is vital for “mutual harmony” between the couple. The fear, in Islamic scholarship, is that the Muslim woman would eventually renounce her faith when she marries a non-Muslim. Critics of Islam find this as another bone of contention that Islam limits the freedom of the woman (Buaben, 1985:21). The faith of the Children of mixed marriage is also of concern to Muslim scholars. In all, the children born in mixed marriage must be raised as Muslims (Dharmaraj & Dharmaraj, 1999:247).

To allow for Christian-Muslim marriage, most Christian Churches particularly the Catholic Church require of the Catholic party to declare formerly that he or she is prepared to remove dangers of defecting from the faith, and is to make a sincere promise to do all in his or

her power to ensure that all the children be baptised and brought up in the Catholic Church. This requirement is to be interpreted carefully in the light of the Council's teaching on ecumenism and religious freedom. It is not to be understood in an absolute sense as if the Muslim party had no rights in the matter. For, any decision on the religious upbringing of the children must take account of the potential effects on the marriage relationship itself as well as on the faith commitment and rights of the Muslim party. Clearly, these are matters which ought to be discussed fully with both parties before marriage, so that misunderstanding may be avoided and possible conflict prevented (Fitzgerald & Borrelli, 2006: 69). This promise of the catholic partner does not mean that the children are not to be taught to appreciate the religion of the Muslim partner, nor does it mean, if it happens that the children are not in fact baptised, that the Catholic partner should give up any idea of teaching them about the faith. They will need encouragement to do this (Fitzgerald & Borrelli, 2006: 69). The Muslim party is to be informed in good time of these promises to be made by the catholic party, so that it is certain that he or she is truly aware of the promise and the obligation of the catholic party. He or she is not required to make any promise. He is only to 'be informed in good time' of the promises made by the catholic party. This is a further recognition of the Muslim party's equal rights within the marriage. Before a mixed marriage takes place, the Muslim party must be in no doubt concerning the undertakings given by the catholic party and the obligations entailed.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Both parties are to be instructed about the purposes and essential properties of marriage, which are not to be excluded by either contractant. They are to receive special instruction on the nature of marriage. Since members of other Christian Churches (or Islam) sometimes have views on marriage different from catholic teaching, the law requires that both parties be fully informed of the purposes (Can. 1055§1) and essential properties of marriage (Can. 1056). The aim of this teaching is to ensure that both parties consent to marriage as understood and taught by the Church.

5.2.1.3 Liturgical and Pastoral Challenges

The issue of Christian-Muslim marriage should not be reduced to whether or not a dispensation will be granted by the local ordinary, it also poses liturgical and pastoral challenges. Both parties would have to decide on the liturgical rite to be adopted for the marriage ceremony. Should a couple decide on an Islamic rite would the Christian community accept the marriage as valid and licit? Or, should two liturgical rites be used for the marriage of disparity of cult? Pastorally, the couple of any mixed marriage will need constant support and encouragement from the respective communities just as in all marriages. The question is: to what extent can the Christian aid go in order not to make the Muslim party feel their religious right being infringed upon? It is to deal with the liturgical and pastoral concerns that Christian-Muslim marriage raise that the Catholic Church, and probably all Christian Churches, require of both Muslim and Christian (Catholic) parties to receive sufficient education regarding the rationale and essential properties of marriage (Can. 1056), fully aware that other religious traditions and denominations may have divergent teachings on marriage. It is highly important that the catholic party is provided with sufficient information concerning the unique marriage teachings of Islam in addition to the catholic teaching. Adequate instruction on polygyny and divorce is essential and is highly recommended especially when traditional Akan society permits them. Islamic law permits a man to marry up to four wives (*Sūrah*, 4:3); a permission which is hardly accepted by any Christian Church. Muḥammad ‘Abduh (d.1905) argued that the Islamic ideal was monogamy on the basis of *Sūrah*, 4:3 and 4:129. Up to four wives were allowed on condition of fair treatment. Since fair treatment was impossible, the Muslim should only take one wife. The former head of al-Azhar Maḥmūd Shaltūt (1963) said that this reasoning violated the plain meaning of *Sūrah*, 4:3 and that this verse permitted polygyny. According to Shaltūt, the purpose of the second verse (*Sūrah*, 4:129) is not to state the impossibility of fairness. Instead, its purpose is to explain the “equality” enjoined in the first verse (*Sūrah*, 4:3). The equality imposed by the Qur’ān (*Sūrah* 4:3) is not an absolute equality; that would be impossible. Rather, it simply means not favouring one wife completely over another (Shaltūt, 1988: 182, 183).

In any case, the Christian woman ought to be concerned that her Muslim party could be polygynous. The issue of polygyny is especially vital when the canon law does not require

Muslim partner to make any promise. The Muslim man also should know that under no circumstance is polygyny allowed by Christian tradition. The question of divorce should also be discussed thoroughly. Some Christian denominations, with the exception of the Catholic Church, give in to divorce as the last resort. Even though in Islam marriage is to be a permanent institution and that all efforts should be made to salvage a failing marriage⁶⁶ a divorce is an option as the last resort (Shaltūt, 1988: 162-171). A Muslim about to marry a catholic should know that under no condition is divorce granted. A divorced Catholic can marry again in the Catholic Church with the death of the partner.

5.2.1.4 Affine Connectivity and Christian- Muslim Encounters

The traditional Akan marriage does not only establish a bond between the spouses but also their families and lineages (Rattray 1929:126; Daniels, 1964:355; Hagan, 1967:61). The tie established between the families of the spouses begins a relationship of affinity amongst them. The affine relationship is regarded, among the Akan people, as kin relationship and it is treated as such (Nukunya 1992: 39). The affine relatives are treated as true kin even though they are not blood related, either true or imaginary (putative). A marriage brings four family groups into affinal communion. These four groups are the mother's and father's families of both the man and the woman. The affine relationship does not only emerge out of inter-religious marriage such as Christian-Muslim marriage, it also comes out of intra-religious marriage like Muslim-Muslim marriage and Christian-Christian marriage. There is hardly any marriage among the Akan people that does not bring Muslims and Christians in affine relationship.

In case of a Christian-Muslim marriage the affine relationship that ensues involves kin relations of Christian and Muslim families. This mixed marriage, considered the ideal interreligious encounter, would set in motion ideal Christian-Muslim relations at the level of the family in the spirit of dialogue of life (*Dialogue and Proclamation*, 42). This relationship

⁶⁶ If the wife is causing difficulties in marriage, the husband may resort to discipline (*Sūrah*, 4:34). If the husband is causing difficulties, the wife should seek peace and reconciliation (*Sūrah*, 4:128). In the case of marital difficulty the couple cannot resolve themselves, they should resort to a process of mediation whereby an arbiter is appointed from the husband's family and one from the wife's family to help resolve the dispute (*Sūrah*, 4:35).

enables Muslims and Christians to live comfortably together, either in a compound house often built by their grandparents or in the same vicinity. Christians and Muslims are obligated by tradition to relate to one another at the personal level. They at times share rooms and meals. They are united as relatives at home and only separated on Fridays and Sundays in the mosques and the churches. Christians and Muslims in affine relationship may argue, quarrel and even fight over religious difference as to whether or not Muhammad is a prophet and Jesus is God, they are always united by virtue of their affine kinship. Christians and Muslims co-exist not so much because their various religious traditions encourage them to but for their affine kin connectivity. Associations based on religion secondary to those based on relationship of affinity.

When Christians and Muslims are as close as the affine association brings them and for that matter true kin relatives, the rampant and wild characterization of each other without any justifiable evidence would be given a stricter scrutiny. The Christian Akan would readily reject the wild claim that Muslims are terrorists, evil and violent when they have Muslim relatives who are not and vice versa. He would eagerly accept that interpersonal relationship and Christian-Muslim exchanges have more to do with personal attitude than religious stances. In other words, the sweeping and hasty generalisation for ill or good that some Christian and Muslim individuals and organisations make regarding the other, would be subjected to serious scrutiny when Christian and Muslim families are involved with one another at the level of the affine relations. For, the Akan people do not pay mere lip service to affine communion; instead they actualise it, especially in their day to day activities. The affine relations of families of varying religious traditions would be largely serious endeavours and mutually beneficial.

The seriousness with which the Akan people attach to affine relations is not just because the association is raised to the level of any kin relation but most importantly because it is governed by the rules, which establish duties and obligations for individuals in all aspects of life in which these individuals and groups interact (Hagan, 1967:69). The rules governing such relations are not dictated by religious persuasions but by customs and tradition concerning affine relationships. In view of this, religious affiliation does not prevent a person from executing their duties to a kin member as demanded by tradition of affine kin associations. Though he is a Christian, his Muslim maternal uncle administered his traditional naming ceremony of his child. Though he is a Muslim his Christian uncle paid for his school

fees or even accepted the traditional drinks and officiated the traditional wedding, accepted by both Christians and Muslims as a necessary first step to holy matrimony. In other words, a person's Muslim background has absolutely nothing to do with their execution of affine duties to his Christian kin colleague and vice versa. The duties of affine relationship involve rights and obligations which reach the apex in mutual helpfulness and cooperation (Hagan, 1967: 62). The individual is obligated by rules of affine relations to give support and assistance to affine kin to the best of their ability. By virtue of the same rules the individual has a right to receive support and aid from their affine colleagues.

The usefulness of affine relationship with regard to enhancing interreligious relations is evident more in the fact that traditional marriage is ultimately to engage families in ties of friendship and for the promotion of peace in the community (Nukunya, 1992:41). In other words, traditional marriage is intended primarily to bring people together and ultimately to ensure that various communities live together in peace and unity. This explains why marriage is not ordinarily permitted among members of the same family or lineage (Meyerowitz, 1958:29). However, it must be stressed that distance is a crucial factor in marriage. By 'distance' is meant a completely different culture (Nukunya, 1992:39). It also explains why marriage goes further than merely uniting the couples to unite families. In view of this peace objective, marriage often takes place between people or families who may have been strangers or even enemies before and makes them affine or kin relations. The marriage institution, then, becomes a means of sealing a peace between even hostile groups and to enable them to co-exist in harmony in the community. This peace objective is, above all, the concern or purpose of all Christian-Muslim endeavours. It is in the spirit of peace and unity that *Nostra Aetate*, the Vatican document on religions, focuses its attention on what religions have in common and not what separates them (Fitzgerald & Borelli, 2006:59). In this vein, Muslim Akan and Christian Akan ought to use any unifying tool they already have at their disposal such as the affine relations as the first stage of viable Christian-Muslim encounters. Since the affine relationship transcends religious bonds it already helps Akan Muslims and Christian to engage in inevitable, though informal dialogue which promotes co-existence. In this way, the affine kinship helps Christians and Muslims to enter into relationship with open minds which are a necessary ingredient in Christian-Muslim associations (Fitzgerald & Borelli, 2006:90).

5.2.2 Cognate Relationship and Christian-Muslim Dialogue

5.2.2.1 The Lineage Institution as a 'Religious Community'

The lineage is comparable with any religious community (Assimeng, 1981: 63). It is a corporate body, which owns property. It has a leader (*ebusua panyin*) who is also the spiritual head. Like all religious communities, the lineage has a shrine in which the ancestral stool is kept. The shrine, as a symbol of unity, is highly comparable to the *Kā'ba* of the Muslims, the Temple of Jerusalem of the Jews and the St. Peter's Basilica of Rome of the Christian Catholic. The leader of the lineage is the living representative of the stool and he ensures that the unity of the entire membership is upheld. The lineage members identify themselves with a particular totem usually an animal which is the emblem on the lineage staff.

Unlike Christian and Muslim religious communities whose membership is based on faith and made up of different lineage groups, the lineage religious community is founded on common ancestry through the maternal line and made up of both Muslims and Christians. Whereas the Christian and Muslim communities hold together people of common belief in Jesus, as the Son of God and Muhammad, the Last Prophet of Allāh respectively, the lineage is able, in a unique manner, to hold together adherents of both Christianity and Islam into a complex, spiritual whole. It is in this sense the lineage becomes a veritable model for Christian-Muslim relations. Unlike other voluntary career oriented social organizations such as professional associations whose membership is also made up of Christians and Muslims of the same profession, the lineage membership is uniquely involuntary, recruited by descent (Hagan, 1967:59). Just as it is involuntary to join the lineage it is also involuntary to opt out. A person is a lineage member by birth and for life. The Akan traditional society is structured along lineage lines. The individual is brought up to think of himself in relation to their lineage and to conduct themselves always in such a way as to bring honour to its members (Busia, 1962:33). There is always the superseding importance of one's membership in the lineage. In other words, there can be no satisfactory or meaningful life for an individual except as a member of the lineage, of his family. It is lineage and kinship for that matter, not religion, which differentiates one community from another (Azumah, 2001). The Akan people saw Muslim groups as lineages or clans, with their own culture of which Islam was just a part of the whole. Islam as a way of life or system of beliefs and practices was therefore conceived

by the wider non-Muslim community in relation to particular ethnic groups. It was hardly seen as an institutionalized universal system of beliefs and practices meant for everyone to belong. Furthermore, the early protestant missionaries' rather puritanical policy which led to the creation of *salems* or *Oburoni-kurom* (white man's town), equivalents of the Muslim *zongos* did not materialise. The policy brought Christian converts together to practise their faith away from their 'heathen' relatives (Mobley, 1970). This policy of social isolation based on religion became a failure. The British Colonial policy to restrict missionaries from going into the Northern Territories in the interest of political expediency (Debrunner, 1967) also did not ineffectual. In other words, the attempt to redefine and reorganize the Akan society from lineage and family-based (Nukunya 1992:11) to religion-based one was unproductive. The old traditional foundations of society could not be supplanted by new ones be they political or religious. This is because these policies of mutual and despicable segregation on religious grounds were not only alien to the native Ghanaian but an anathema to the whole socio-cultural intricacies of his community life. As a result, there was and still is a state of affairs in Ghana, where most local Muslims and Christians not only freely mixed with their cognates, but also continue to dabble in traditional religious and cultural practices either out of gross ignorance or wilful indifference to doctrinal divergences (Azumah, 2001). The strong family (lineage) ties in relation to religious bonds is commented on by Trimingham in his observation of West Africa, which is also true to Ghana that "...the change brought about by Islam [and Christianity for that matter]...should not be exaggerated, the old bases of community remain paramount and the ideal of the unity of believers a superimposed linkage" (Trimingham, 1968:85; Azumah, 2001:47).

5.2.2.2 Spiritual Bonding between Muslims and Christians

The notion of common ancestry enables the entire membership of the lineage to perceive themselves as blood relatives. It establishes unequivocal blood connectivity that binds Christians and Muslims together in an institution which does not even ordinarily permit marriage among its members (Meyerowitz, 1958: 29). This lineage, by virtue of the blood relation to one another, further establishes a spiritual bond among the membership that is not only sacred but also real and active. This spiritual bonding is reinforced by the process of

socialization. However, as a human organization and also consisting of many small families the lineage is not always as unified and spiritual entity as it is purported to be. Nukunya, however, observes that the variation or segmentation found in the lineage is not according to religious differences but are “relative to their genealogical positions” stating that “...the closer they are on the chart, the closer and more intimate the relationship” (Nukunya, 1992:16).

Nevertheless, the unity and the spiritual bonding of members are so vital to membership that every attempt is made to ensure that nothing is in disarray. It is a prime duty of the *ebusua panyin* (whose religious affiliation has nothing to do with his duty) as the priest of the ancestral cult to instil discipline and to ensure that peace and harmony prevail (Arthur, 2001:83). He sees to it that enmity and strife, quarrels and dissensions do not occur among relatives in the *ebusua*. Such incidents are inevitable as the Akans recognise that the *ebusua* is like a forest made up of a variety of individual trees (Nukunya, 1992:16). From a distance the trees seem clustered together. When one gets closer to the family or one enters the forest, one finds individual trees or individual persons. Dissensions and quarrels may bring disunity and create factions within the *ebusua*. The *ebusua panin* is responsible for managing these social conflicts from exploding into open disputes and quarrels. He watches over the welfare of the whole group. He has the power and the duty to settle private disputes between any of his fellow members so that peace and solidarity can prevail in the group. He is expected to be fair and firm, protective of all members regardless of religious affiliation and to be benevolent, kind and sympathetic as indicated by an Asante proverb: *Woyε damprane a ase yε nwunu; abusua panin kyerε wo dɔ*-You are like the giant shady tree in the desert; family head assert your affection (Arthur, 2001:83).

The lineage and clan feelings of the Ghanaian still transcend that of religious or political affiliations. As a result there are countless number of ‘inter-faith households’ in Ghana where one can find traditional, Islamic and Christian believing relatives living and sharing things in common in the same house. This spiritual bond of the lineage institution (with *ebusua panyin* as the spiritual head) is strong enough to hold the members together irrespective of religious persuasions (Arthur, 2001:82). It has over the years continued and continues to supplant religious fanaticism and extremism often sadly perpetuated by some uncompromising Muslims and Christians. In other words, religious extremism which in most cases seeks to demonise other religious adherents is almost always neutralised by the strong

and unyielding power of the lineage affiliations. It is the lineage spiritual bond which gives real meaning to religious bonds (Christian or Muslim). It is the foundation on which the religious bonds are often established. This is because in Ghana often Christian and Muslim communities are established on lineage affiliations. That is to say, often lineage members are found to be principal members of Christian and Muslim communities in certain villages and towns.

The lineage spiritual tie has also been a unique model for minimising, if not completely eliminating, inter-religious animosity, violence and conflicts. People united by descent group such as lineage and so by a common ancestry, however putative, are more likely to hold and stand together to resist any force or institution, even religious that might attempt to disintegrate and tear them apart. This common ancestral bonding if anything is able to hold the entire membership of the lineage of completely different religious backgrounds with diverse religious beliefs, practices and experiences together. In view of this, it is no surprise that the lineage is able to foster and reinforce the live and let's live attitude of the people. When a Muslim or Christian deserves respect by virtue of his/her being my cognate he equally deserves it if he is not. When Christians come to recognise Muslims as cognates, fellow human beings and citizens with equal right to be Muslims they will be opening the door to the most hopeful avenue to mankind in seeking international harmony and peace; for cordial and affable religious relations can be achieved only when mutual sympathy and respect are given expression in service to others, sincerely offered, gratefully accepted, and when possible, reciprocated.

5.2.2.3 Reciprocal Obligation among Christians and Muslims as Cognates

The lineage also offers reciprocal obligations to members by means of prescribed status and duties. Besides the spiritual bonding it offers Muslims and Christians alike, the lineage institution also prescribes statuses and duties to members which also take Christian-Muslim exchanges to a deeper and more impressive level. The individual performs his/her duties to cognates as determined by customs and tradition regardless of their religious affiliations. Cooperation and mutual helpfulness are virtues enjoined as essential; without them, the lineage whose survival depends on its solidarity, cannot endure. The lineage life makes for

warm personal relationships and also Christian-Muslim encounters in which every individual has a maximum involvement (Busia, 1962:34). Buah (1998) underscores some benefits of lineage affiliation with regard to mutual helpfulness and cooperation, to members stating that wherever the Akan finds himself he:

“...is received as a member of the local *abusua* or the extended family, enjoying all privileges and rights, and sharing in the customary obligations with his ‘brothers’ and ‘sisters’ there. He also looks to the protection and embraces the rights and duties of his paternal *ntoro* in the area.” (Buah, 1998:8)

The lineage structure, apart from giving Muslims and Christians claim to common ancestral property such as land, also offers mutual assistance in relation to education, health, and funeral expenses of members (Jennings, 2007:64; Buaben, 1985:67; Buah, 1998:8; Pobe, 1979:49, 50; Assimeng, 1981:62). In fact, the ideal set before the individual is that of mutual helpfulness and cooperation within the group of kinsfolk and lineage institution for that matter (Busia, 1962:33). Funeral is an occasion during which the unity, solidarity and generosity of the lineage receive public expression, as funeral expenses are shared among adult members of the lineage. This public display of *abusua* unity and solidarity is depicted by the *adinkra* symbol *abusua dɔ fun* (the family loves the corpse).⁶⁷ Descent, elaborate and expensive funerals constitute a strongly marked goal for Akan. *Ebusua panin* is the chief mourner (Arthur, 2001:83). In line with this mutual helpfulness and co-operation Bannerman wrote of his maternal uncle in his memoir:

“As the practice was among Akan matrilineal ethnic groups ... it was not a child’s biological father who usually educated him. Rather, matrilineal uncles or brothers were responsible for their niece or nephew’s education... My maternal grandfather (mother’s uncle) readily agreed to bear his grandson’s school expenses. Without any delay I was provided

⁶⁷It is not just the physical corpse that is of interest to the lineage (*abusua*) but it is the affinity of the dead person that motivates them. Further, in Akan tradition, the dead are not completely gone. They have merely taken the lead to the next world and the rest would follow to be reunited later.

with a pair of khaki shorts and shirt, a piece of a blackened wooden slate and chalk, plus six shillings for a half-year school fees.” (Bannerman, 2003:10)

Bannerman admitted to this researcher later in an interview conducted on the 23rd of June 2008 that his maternal grandfather was a Muslim. The maternal granduncle footed his educational bills, a support which never wavered even during his theological formation. The grandfather, in this case, performed his duty (ascribed by customs and tradition) as a maternal uncle to a nephew whose religious affiliation made no difference. In a similar vein, Azumah (2001) recounts his priestly ordination service at which his uncle, a staunch Muslim, provided a ram to be slaughtered for the ceremony and all the relatives attended the services in full, irrespective of which religion each one professed (Azumah, 1995). Sanneh acknowledges this unique family and lineage bond of the African and the opportunity it offers for reciprocal helpfulness irrespective of religious connectivity to the effect that: “...African family is saying something to the West about inter-religious encounters which might help to relate Christians and Muslims to each other in society at large” (Sanneh, 1982:65).⁶⁸

This mutual helpfulness and cooperation which cognates offer one another without regard to religion, forms an important foundation and a unique model for Christian-Muslim cooperation at an even larger level of meeting the challenges of society, in matters of communal and national peace and security. People relate to one another at such deep level on the basis of lineage ties and not religion.

⁶⁸ It must be admitted that as a result of social change, spatial mobility or migration, the importance of lineage has diminished as few people tend to depend on lineage property and status is no longer dependent on age or a person’s position in the kinship system (Nukunya, 1992). Though kinship groups are no longer localized, even in these changing social and economic conditions, the importance of lineage has not completely disappeared. Nukunya (1992) observes that kin groups are “...taking different forms and new relationships are replacing old traditional ones.” It must be pointed out that in these situations of change and less stable conditions, found mostly in the cities, these new relationships are dictated by the traditional ones. In view of this, Nukunya notices that in a society in which more emphasis is placed on matrilineal relationships or ties through the mother, what is likely to happen in an urban situation is that “...a more distant maternal relative or kinsman may assume a greater responsibility for an individual in the absence of the immediate maternal uncle who might still be in the village” (Nukunya 1992).

5.3 COMMUNAL RELATIONSHIPS AS MODEL FOR CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM ENCOUNTERS

Society calls on each member and institution to be loyal and committed in advancing the course of the community (Gyekye, 1996:35) in line with its communalistic nature. The course of the community, which is its well-being, is what all the activities of the individual members and institutions are expected to focus on. It could be deduced that the concept of communalism places emphasis on the activity and success of the wider society rather than, though not necessarily at the expense of the individual or the various establishments and organizations (Antubam, 1963:48).

5.3.1 Common Interest: Christian Community and the Islamic *Ummah*

Of vital importance to religious traditions, particularly Islam and Christianity, is a sense of community in which the membership live in harmony with one another. This explains why we frequently hear of Islamic (*ummah*) community (*Sūrah* 2:143; *Sūrah* 3:104; *Sūrah* 5:48) and Christian community (*Redemptoris Missio*, 51) especially in parts of the world where there exists an overwhelming majority of each of the traditions (Laming, 1995; Dharmaraj & Dharmaraj, 1999). In a religiously pluralistic environment where Christians and Muslims now live in such close proximity as in the case of Ghana these religious communities, whatever the differences they exhibit, could still exist without necessarily losing their communal spirit and identity for the good of the larger community. A sense of communality is much deeper and at its best when it is expressed in a broader context to include all the religious traditions. In other words, a sense of a religious community (Christian or Muslim) which virtually excludes the other should be a major cause for concern for all. In fact, both Christian and Islamic communities need to find a way of establishing themselves as vital constituents of the larger community whose ideals, hopes and aspirations completely agree with theirs. This will be in recognition of human interdependence that grows more tightly by the day and spreads by degrees over the whole world. As a result the common good and interest, that is, the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social and religious groupings and their individual members relatively comprehensive and ready access to their own fulfilment, today takes on an

increasingly universal complexion and consequently involves rights and duties with respect to the whole human race and community (*Gaudium et Spes*, 26). In this way, various religious communities exercise their religious right and freedom but in a socially responsible manner (*Dignitatis Humane*, 7). This could be easily achieved. For whenever Christian civilization clashed with an Islamic one in history there was always an offshoot, a courageous people from both sides (Christians and Muslims) who rose beyond the tenets of their particular tradition, and often contrary to the guidance of their spiritual leadership, not only to reach out to the other in the spirit of common brotherhood but also to embrace whatever good they find therein (Gaudeul, 2000:226).

When the interests and well-being of the entire community become the central and ultimate goal of the membership of all religious traditions as is generally the case in the Central Region of Ghana, Christian-Muslim relations in that community is bound to be at its best. Thus, whenever individual and religious organisational interests synchronise, communal harmony is enhanced and individuals live in peace. Individuals pursue their parochial agenda but always with the view of promoting ultimately that of the society as well. Christians and Muslims then, tend to highlight tenets of their beliefs which help build community as a whole and eschew those with superiority and divisive tendencies. In this way, intolerance, tension and conflict are brought to the barest minimum.

For intolerance, tension and conflicts in society are the logical outcome of the clash of individuals and institutions, even religious, touting their own parochial interests (of religious tradition) at the expense of the entire community. The implementation of the *Shari'a* in the Northern Nigeria and the Sudan, a clear case of what Cragg calls “politicization of Islam” (Cragg, 1965:8; Sanneh, 1996:98) and their catastrophic consequences are obvious examples of factional religious interest flouting national constitution and freedom of worship of the entire citizenry. Politicization of religion could be said of the wars of the Christian crusades in the 11th Century which sought to re-establish a Christian state in Palestine once again (Riley-Smith, ed. 1992:75-78; Goddard, 2000:84; Hillenbrand, 1999:48-50). It could also be said of the policy of assimilation and inquisition in Spain orchestrated in 1478 to coerce on pain of death all Muslims and Jews to the Christian religion on the assumption that political unity always calls for religious unity, whatever unity means (Gaudeul, 2000: 216). In advancing their own interests individuals and the various religious traditions tend to paint a picture of the other which is far from reality, a recipe for confusion and instability. However, in most

contemporary West African nation states such as Ghana and also Sierra Leone, Islam, like its Christian counterpart, has become reduced to “a personal belief system” overwhelmed by African nationalism (Hiskett, 1994:132) in accordance with the larger society concept of the traditional Akan society.

Communal values such as sharing, mutual aid, caring for others, interdependence, solidarity, reciprocal obligation, and social harmony, which ultimately unite the people and ensure peaceful co-existence (Gyekye, 1996:35), are cherished values of both Christianity and Islam and are to be highly encouraged and promoted by their adherents and the various establishments. In Akan society, the respect and social standing of the individual and even organizations and religious bodies, the influence they have on others, are proportional to the sensitivity they demonstrate to the needs, demands, and welfare of the larger group (Gyekye, 1996:46). A person is not just a Christian or Muslim or even “an individual of human parentage” (Gyekye, 1996:46), but also one demonstrating in their decisions, activities and achievements a satisfactory sense of responsibility to society. All his convictions, even religious and denominational, ought to conform to the needs of the society. Christians and Muslims with a general communal sense of life and worldview are to be team players, their contributions crucial in terms of advancing the societal course. It is in this Akan understanding of the general societal good that minimises a major obstacle of religious dialogue which Fitzgerald and Borelli calls “privatizing of religion” which leads to “...dichotomy between religious life and public life” (Fitzgerald & Borelli, 2006:91) and the treatment of religious institutions as “clubs”.

In the light of this, the council fathers of Vatican II reiterated its call on all, Christians and Muslims alike, to marshal every resource for the benefit of humanity. It states that: “...for the benefit of all men, let them (Muslims and Christians) together preserve and promote peace, liberty, social justice and moral values” (*Nostra Aetate*, 1965). Here, the council identifies Muslims as possible and equally capable partners in championing a common cause for the good of their community. In pursuance of this noble objective, Pope John Paul II, in October 27, 1986, organized a forum in Assisi which brought members of world religions together to pray for peace and to commit themselves to peace. The forum, actually, rings a bell as to the role that religions can play in championing the cause for the development of people in their society and also in promoting peace.

5.3.2 Common Interest: Christian Mission and Islamic *Da'wah*

An important issue of Christian-Muslim encounters in Ghana is at the level of missions. 'Missions' in Ghana, like every nation in the world, has become a controversial subject especially in the pluralistic environment in which we find ourselves. While some have considered missions as outmoded and irrelevant in the event of its inherent tendency of intolerance and cultural imperialism, others have considered it a mandate and a necessary tool for spreading their religious traditions (*Redemptoris Missio*, 11).

In Ghana, Christian-Muslim relations with regard to the 'mission' of the two religions have been cordial and hospitable though with scant interest in dialogue and mutual engagement (Azumah, 1994:56), thanks to the fact that Christians and Muslims avoided each other and instead directed or focused their missionary endeavours and resources at winning practitioners of traditional religion. This explains why the Assemblies of God and the Roman Catholics, the first Christian Churches to start missions in the north (1906 and 1931 respectively), also worked primarily with the acephalous tribes, who for various reasons acquired a certain aversion to Islam. In other words, the Churches directed all their activities toward the evangelization of the non-Muslims. On the Muslim side, until the advent of the Ahmadiyya Movement, very little is known of active Muslim *da'wah* in Ghana. To Azumah, the reason for this lack of Muslim missionary effort towards Christians was that unbelief (*kufir*) was mainly interpreted by the Muslims as ignorance rather than evil or wrong. In view of this, Azumah continues, the Jakhanke (Suwarian) 'Ulama'/disciples created *majlis*-clerical/educational parishes in their settlements within 'pagan' societies in order to sustain their *sunna*, and by that hoped to present the unbeliever with an example (*qudwa*) for possible emulation (*iqtida'*) which would hopefully lead them to conversion (Azumah, 1994:56). Their main target groups were also the traditional believers. In spite of this, the Muslims of Ghana were, perhaps, influenced by the *dhimma* (people of the book) status of the Christians (Sūrah 29:46) which did not make them prime targets of Islamic *da'wah* and even *jihād* (Ye'or, 1985:45; Gaudeul, 2000:69).

With the concept of the larger community in mind one wonders how Akan Christians and Muslims would be able to undertake their unique "missions" of conversion, divine commands without necessarily endangering communal peace especially when their missionary approaches are largely by proclamation, which even when accompanied by

sufficient knowledge of the other's religion, is still potentially conflict-ridden (Brown, 2000:191). In other words, the larger community concept thrives very well in a society where the notion of 'missions' are understood and carried out in a manner other than as traditionally perpetuated by Christian evangelization (*Ad Gentes*, 6) and Islamic *da'wah* (Rudvin, 1982; al-Faruqi, 1982; Dharmaraj & Dharmaraj, 1999). In the light of this, Pobee in the 'Preface' to *Religion in a Pluralistic Society* rejects the conflict-ridden approaches to evangelisation in the religiously pluralistic African environment⁶⁹ and recommends "...a genuine ideological pluralism which entails a drastic nominalistic toning down of all apologetic generalizations" (Pobee, 1976).

Whereas the Christian and Islamic conceptions of 'missions' have been primarily and largely undertaken by proclamation which consisted largely of preaching and teaching (word of mouth), the indigenous Akan understanding of 'mission' is primarily and exclusively based on the principle of functionalism, *adze pa na tɔn no ho*. To wit: the truism of a claim is its own agent, i.e., the truism of a claim, religious or secular, is in the results or services rendered. Thus, a good religious tradition will spread by virtue of its service to humankind and not necessarily by proclamation. After two thousand years of Christian existence and more than a thousand years of Islamic presence, it is about time both Christians and Muslims do 'less talking but more walking' in their missionary endeavours as has been the practice of traditional Akan society in order to bridge the gap between word and deed, between the religious message and the way religious people live it (*Dialogue and Proclamation*, 73). Christians and Muslims of the 21st Century ought to realise that the era is nigh when they can truly 'win' souls for their respective religious traditions by living the core tenets of faith (Cracknell, 2005:177; *Ad Gentes*, 10, 11). For, people today put more trust in witnesses than teachers, in experience than in teaching, and in life and action than in theories. In the light of this, John Paul II, in his Encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* puts "witness" at the heart of evangelization: "...witness is the very life of the missionary, of the Christian family, and of the ecclesial community, which reveal a new way of living" (*Redemptoris Missio*, 42). This is also similar to *da'wah bil hāl* (*da'wah* by exemplary life) which is considered in Islam as the

⁶⁹Three main types of religion are to be seen on the African soil-Christianity, African Traditional Religion and Islam. These have had varying successes in various countries. Within Islam there are diversities, notably the Orthodox and the Ahmadiyyah Movement. Within African Traditional Religion, there is diversity. Within Christianity we have various denominations- Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Lutheran, and the Pentecostals. Religious pluralism is a feature of the African scene and unavoidable (Pobee, 1976).

most effective form. Presently, adherents of Christianity and Islam are ever ready to argue, fight and even to the extent of dying for religion but they will never live for it. Consequently, Christian and Islamic missions, orchestrated on religious propagandism often based on wilful ignorance and malignant prejudice aimed at denigration and devaluation of the other, are not only vile and depraved but also inefficient and fruitless. Moreover, the enormous time, effort and money pumped into converting Muslims to Christianity and vice versa in sub-Saharan Africa have had no commensurate results (Hick, 1973:138; Sanneh, 1982). In such situations of the larger community concept, the rich and long tradition of sharing in which Christians and Muslims stand revealed to each other in their differences as much as in their similarities are not compromised for religious and doctrinal expediency.

In the wake of all this, the only viable way out of the situation probably is the adoption of the traditional religious consciousness which is fundamentally indifferent to polemics but open unreservedly to dialogue, mutual engagement and communal cooperation. By dialogue, we are not merely referring to the formal kind which consists essentially of speeches and candid discussions by experts at conferences (Fitzgerald & Borelli, 2006:95) which not infrequently has engendered public mistrust but the informal sort which involves the day to day encounters of Christians and Muslims, especially in cooperation to face up to the challenges of society (Fitzgerald & Borelli, 2006:95), particularly in fighting social evils, famine, coping with natural disasters and caring for the environment as well as promoting peace. Here, dialogue is best described in sense of 'witness' in the light of lived experience which has constantly proven to be the most advanced and the best missionary strategy.

5.3.3 Common Interest: Universal Human Family

The Akan people acknowledge the common humanity of all human beings (Gyekye, 1996: 24). An Akan proverb affirms: "All human beings are children of God; no one is a child of the earth." Busia acknowledges the Akan recognition of the larger family despite the foremost desire for increase in the membership of one's lineage (Busia, 1962:34). An Akan epigram teaches that "all belong to one family, though they are separate stalks." To this effect, Wiredu notes that the human value is "...intrinsically linked with recognition of the unity of all people, whether or not they are biologically related" (Wiredu, 1987:76) and also whether or not they are of diverse religious backgrounds or of kinship groups. In view of this common

humanity, Muslims and Christians, in fact adherents of all religions constitute into one universal human family, the most important source of unity and a valuable model for Christian-Muslim relations. It is this Akan perception of humanity which Muslim intellectual al-Faruqi, acknowledging its universal appeal and significance as the most authentic and central issue especially in the field of inter-religious encounter, vehemently champions (Al-Faruqi, 1998: 129 & 130) as the way forward in the twenty-first century. Al-Faruqi finds “humane universalism”, a fundamental teaching of Islam, an offshoot of the concept of *tawḥīd* (the absolute oneness of Allāh) which brings all human creatures under the divine authority of the Supreme Deity (Al-Faruqi, 1998:132-4). The Second Vatican Council in its document *Nostra Aetate* had drawn humanity’s attention to this human connectivity: “One is the community of all peoples, one their origin, for God made the whole human race to live over the face of the earth” (*Nostra Aetate*, 1). In Pope Paul VI’s document on the Church, *Ecclessiam Suam*, the Pope noted that the Church shares “...with the whole of human race a common nature, common life” (*Ecclessiam Suam*, 97). Also, in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, the council fathers noted:

“God, who has fatherly concern for everyone, has willed that all men should constitute one family and treat one another in a spirit of brotherhood. For having been created in the image of God, who “from one man has created the whole human race and made them live all over the face of the earth” (Acts 17:26), all men are called to one and the same goal, namely, God Himself.” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 24)

In these documents the Catholic Church acknowledges the common humanity of all people in line with the Akan conception of humanity. Common humanity is also the framework on which the British Council of Churches set out its guidelines in 1981, *Relations with People of Other Faith* which among other things says: “What makes dialogue between us possible is our common humanity, created in the image of God. We all experience the joys and sorrows of human life.”⁷⁰

⁷⁰ British Council of Churches, now called Council of Churches in Britain and Ireland, is a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC). The guidelines quoted here are actually based on the general guidelines provided by WCC.

5.3.3.1 Traditional Akan Network of Social Relationships

The Akan people, over the years, have developed a complex network of social relationships aimed at promoting human life, friendship and enhancing its continual survival which Muslims and Christians cannot but buy into. In other words, to the Akan people, one of the best ways to uphold human life, common humanity and unity is a well developed network of human relations within the community. Christian-Muslim relations among the Akan people would be an important branch of various network of relationship in accordance with the high premium they put on human exchanges. In fact, the Akan would expect Christians and Muslims on the whole to be better at interpersonal communication and encounters given the magnanimity of the deposit of faith they both claim to have.

Social systems which highly promote human relations among the Akan people include greetings, hospitality and deeper associations at all levels which both Christians and Muslims are enjoined to recognise and to hold in high esteem. Greeting people and associating with one's neighbour, irrespective of their religious or social backgrounds is an important element in enhancing human relations and making people feel good about themselves (Arthur, 2001:92). Exchanging greetings is not only a mark of showing respect but is also considered part of decency and decorum. In other words, the starting point of harmonious social relations is, to the Akan, the exchange of greetings. And Greeting is more than showing courtesy; it is considered an acknowledgement, recognition of the other person as a fellow human being. It is to confirm your very existence as a human being. To greet someone, that is, to recognize the existence of one whom you pass by in the street as a fellow human is, to the Akan, an obligation (Arthur, 2001:92). People exchange greetings verbally and/or by handshake. *Mekyia wo*-I salute you; *nantsew yie*-goodbye; *yebehyia bio*-we will meet again; *akwaaba*-welcome; *ebusua ho tse den?*-how is the family?; *wo ho tse den?*-how are you? All these depict some of the common Akan greetings and expression of friendliness, hospitality, and forms of acknowledgement of the basic equality of human beings (Arthur, 2001:92, 93). Greeting here includes asking about the wellbeing of the person and his or her family and even in most cases sending regards to some important individuals of the other's family. Christians and Muslims should consider their greeting of and actually engaging in interpersonal relationship with one another as a way of acknowledging that the other person is first and foremost a fellow human being regardless of their religious persuasion (Wiredu, 1996; Busia, 1962). It is also commonly called dialogue which Cracknell considers "...the most

appropriate form of mission and evangelism” (Cracknell, 2005:144). When Muslims and Christians refuse to greet or associate with one another on the bases of religion dissimilarities, the general social network is badly affected. The case is not just an error of human relation but a social catastrophe put in the ranks of social evils such as verbal abuse, litigation and other divisive attitudes. For, a Christian Akan ought to feel deeply hurt if a Muslim Akan passes him by without greeting or relating with him and vice versa. This is because he feels he is not treated as a human being. An Akan proverb affirms: *wokyia nyimpa na nnye aboa* (we greet human beings and not animals). The other person is a human being regardless of his tribe, clan and even his religious background. Thus, the Akan understanding of exchanging greetings is in line with the Council’s teaching on reverence for human being urging each person to “...consider his every neighbour without exception as another self” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 27).

The high sense of hospitality, immensely recognised and sufficiently rewarded by Akan tradition and customs, should drive Christians to treat Muslims with the friendliness, affability and warmth they deserve as fellow human beings and vice versa. In other words, just as the stranger is welcome, made to feel at home and given the necessary assistance in terms of provision of the best possible hospitality, Christians and Muslims should in no way deprive one another of this invaluable indigenous courtesy and civility. Even though of late many Akan people are not readily able to welcome total strangers or guests for various reasons, Muslims and Christians should always offer to one another or expect to be treated with the best hospitality as though it is their right in acknowledgement of their common humanity. By generous welcome being accorded one another, the Akan Muslims and Christians would also be recognizing in a unique manner the special obligation which “...binds us to make ourselves the neighbour of absolutely every person, and of actively helping him when he comes across our path” (*Gaudium et Spes*, 27). It is in this way that Christian Akan and Muslim Akan would demonstrate their recognition that what brings the human race together is stronger, intrinsic and core to their being than what actually separates them which are mere products of culture (Fitzgerald & Borelli, 2006: 59, 60).

In view of above, the human personality is placed at the centre of inter-religious dialogue. It is this aspect which gives any meaning at all to dialogue in the eyes of the Catholic Church. In *Nostra Aetate*, the Church deals essentially with her relation with non-Christian religions:

“Ever aware of her duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations, she reflects at the outset on what men have in common and what tends to promote fellowship among them...The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions.” (*Nostra Aetate*, 1, 2)

Thus, the Catholic Church’s promotion of inter-religious dialogue is, therefore, an integral part of her openness to and concern for all human beings.

5.3.3.2 A Call for Mutual Respect

The statements issued on Islam by the Second Vatican Council are signs of real change of attitudes. The church through these statements has adopted a new attitude towards Muslims and Islam. For the first time in its relation with Muslims, the church acknowledged Islam as religion in its own right. She accords Islam the respect it deserves thus: “The Church has high regard for Muslims.” By this statement, the council counteracts its attitude, which fitted Islam into the Jewish-Christian frame of reference and so classified Muslims among other things as Christian heretics. The council no longer sees Muslims in the way they differ from Christians. Islam, then, is considered a religion in its own right. This positive and healthy attitude to Islam and Muslims is in line with the church’s adoption of the inclusivist model in terms of her relations with other religions in general and Islam in particular.

The statement of Vatican II also urges all mankind to “...strive sincerely for mutual understanding.” This is a call for dialogue in all its forms. *Dialogue and Mission* (1984)⁷¹ elaborates on the meaning of dialogue to include “not only discussion, but also...all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment” (*Dialogue and Mission*, 3). Isizoh (2002) identifies four aspects of dialogue in the statement of *Dialogue and Mission* quoted above. These are: dialogue of life, dialogue of deeds and collaboration, dialogue of specialists and dialogue of religious experience. This is a call for a proper encounter, an

⁷¹This is one of the documents published by Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue in 1984 which focuses specifically on the relationship between interreligious dialogue and the mission of the Church in the world.

encounter of love and mutual respect. It calls also for a relationship based on right knowledge and friendship as opposed to the past relations based on ignorance, misinformation and falsehood. In pursuit of this call, various centres for promoting dialogue with non-Christians particularly Muslims have been put in place. At the highest level is the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. Through the activities of this council, countless conferences have taken place in various countries at which Christians and Muslims have participated. The benefits of these conferences cannot be overemphasized. These conferences give opportunity to people of different faith to engage in fruitful discussions on Christian-Muslim relations. They are also characterized by the unique opportunity to exchange ideas and to listen attentively and compassionately to each other.

Stemming from different cultures and civilizations, each religion has something unique to offer the others. That Christians may have the opportunity to learn and understand Islam better for fruitful encounters and reciprocal exchanges, the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islam (Rome) was founded. The institute prepares priests, religious and lay people for missions in the Muslim lands. Many books and leaflets have been written and circulated presenting advice and directions for a better dialogue with Muslims. Bishops are encouraged to promote the dialogue with Muslims in the dioceses. This has led to the formation of diocesan dialogue teams in almost every diocese. The teaching of Islam and various models and issues of interreligious dialogue are highly recommended in the seminaries.

5.3.3.3 A More Suitable Platform for Christian-Muslim Encounters

In his book *Towards a New Relationship* Cracknell suggests “sharing of personal faith experiences” as the most appropriate model for fruitful Christian-Muslim encounters. Cracknell points out that Christian-Muslim encounters are not at their best at conferences of experts (both Christian and Islamic theologians). In such encounters of religious experts (*Dialogue and Proclamation*, 42; Fitzgerald & Borelli, 2006:76) dialogue eventually take the form of debate in which case each group attempts to score point by defending logically and philosophically theological positions (Cracknell, 1986:114). Cracknell believes that creative inter-religious encounter is ineffective and futile when it is conducted along the lines of

religious or ideological systems. The experience of dialogue has proven beyond doubt that no one person anywhere is the epithet or epitome of ideas and beliefs to be dispense of to others at will. In other words, much as the profound knowledge of experts of history of religions and even religious leaders such as bishops and chief imāms could be of immense assistance to dialogue in terms of setting it up with adequate and accurate premise (Fitzgerald & Borelli, 2006:76), it could also derail smooth religious encounters by stifling grass root initiative (Cracknell, 1986:114). In Cracknell's view, these experts in most cases share more of the theological positions they have been trained with than their faith experiences as Christians and Muslims. In expounding their theological doctrine the experts risk the danger of approaching the adherents of the other religion with presumptions that tend to label or stereotype them (Cracknell, 1986:114,115). Therefore, dialogue must go on but with the personal experiences of individuals (laity and experts). For, religious systems exclude each other but human beings with common everyday needs do not. Individuals share common joys and sorrows of human life and face the same problems and challenges. The right order of going, then, is to enable ordinary people to meet each other in dialogue (Cracknell, 1986:116).

Cracknell draws our attention to the realities of discourse in a world in which there is not a single system of logic and philosophy. Methods of analysis which appear to make sense in discussions taking place within the Western philosophical framework are rendered useless and inoperable in encounters between cultures and religions which have evolved from fundamentally different propositions. To assume that a certain concept can serve as an outline for an encounter of cultures and religions is naive and unacceptable. It amounts to a form of cultural colonialism that presupposes that a particular culture and its religious tradition can set the rules of the game for authentic and fruitful exchanges between cultures (Cracknell, 1986:116).

5.3.4 Religious Formation in Contemporary Ghana

5.3.4.1 Foundations of Religious Formation in Ghana

The first stage of religious instruction is the Qur'ān schools (*makaranta*) and the Sunday schools of the Christian denominations (the catechism lessons-RCIA- for the Catholic Church). These schools are put on the same pedestal because their curricula are largely to

introduce the catechumen/pupils to the intricacies of their own religions and so to provide religious instruction in a particular faith (Fitzgerald and Borelli, 2006:77). The Qur'ān school, among other things, affords Muslim children the opportunity to learn Arabic and most importantly recitation of the Qur'ān and in particular, the *Fātiḥah* for the daily routine prayers (Trimingham, 1959:158; Sanneh, 1997:130,131).⁷² The establishment of the Qur'ān schools underscores the commitment of Muslims to protect their children from religious adulteration, being Christianised and secularised by schools founded by the Churches (Nuamah, 2001:33). The curricula of the Sunday schools and the Catechism of the Christian denominations basically seek not only to introduce the elements of fundamentals of Christian theology to the students and warding off secularisation but also to deepen their faith. At this level of religious instruction very little, if any at all, could be achieved in terms of learning about other religions, even though the Muslim community and Christian community are initiated and actually formed.

5.3.4.2 The Religious Education Unit of the Ghana Education Service

Another arena for religious knowledge in Ghana is at the various levels of the education system. The Ghana Education Service has in place an Education Unit for the main religious groups. Of the 17, 526 Primary Schools and 11,241 Junior Secondary Schools in Ghana, 50% are run through Education Units under the auspices of the religious bodies in the Country. These are Catholic Education Unit, Methodist Education Unit, Presbyterian Education Unit, Seventh Day Adventist Unit and the Ahmadiyya Education Unit (Nuamah, 2001:36). In 1987, the Islamic Education Unit was also established under the Ghana Education Service of the Ministry of Education. The Islamic Education Unit is headquartered in Tamale with a national secretariat and regional managers. It has regional offices in all the ten regions of Ghana (Nuamah, 2001:38). The schools of the various Education Units are not allowed to admit only pupils of parents belonging to their religious tradition. In most cases, one finds children from various religious traditions (specifically Muslims and Christians) in these schools. The reason for the selection of schools is more of availability and quality of education than opportunity to learn about other religious traditions. Hence, since the Christian schools are noted for their

⁷² By late 1960s, the Ministry of Education had succeeded in convincing a good number of “*makarantas*” to introduce English language as a subject.

excellent academic performance and moral discipline one finds in them more children of varying religious traditions.

The main objectives of the Religious Education Units are to: bring all schools founded by religious bodies at the basic level under the Units and absorb them into the public school system under the Ghana Education Service; see to the appointment of teachers and administrators for the schools; facilitate the day-to-day running of the schools in collaboration with proprietors of the schools; and maintain the religious identity of the schools. Islamic Education Unit aims also at eliminating suspicion and encouraging Muslim parents to send their wards (particularly Muslim girls) to public schools (Nuamah, 2001:37); addressing the gloomy low enrolment of Muslim girls into schools, introducing secular education into all “*makarantas*” as well as offering a common administrative direction for all Islamic schools. These Religious Education Units are allowed to supervise, administer and monitor the running of basic schools (Primary and Junior Secondary Schools) founded by them. Nuamah states emphatically that each Unit is allowed not only to introduce pupils and students to its faith but also to make their schools means for evangelisations (Nuamah, 2001:36). The first motive of introducing pupils to other religious values is praiseworthy as it offers the pupils the opportunity to learn about their own religious groups as well as bring them to know other approaches to the divine other than their own. The second motive of using the basic schools as media of evangelization is unwarranted especially when the children involved are from different religious tradition. In the first place, the pupils are not in school to be converted but to be given knowledge and in this case about religions. In the second place any effort to evangelise pupils using the entire school machinery as is done in the Qur’ān and Sunday schools defeat the first objective of dispassionate transmit of knowledge. Whereas the pupils of Sunday and Qur’ān schools are united by religion the pupils of basic schools are disunited by religion but united by quest for knowledge. The temptation for religious knowledge to be skewed and twisted to induce conversion cannot be ruled out.

5.3.4.3 Religious and Moral Education as a Course of Study

The Religious and Moral education as a subject of study is found at almost every level of the Ghana Educational structure from the basic schools through the secondary schools to the Tertiary level. While the Religious and Moral Education course is taught as a core subject in

the Secondary schools they are elective at the tertiary level. The question of whether or not the course ought to be made a core subject at every stage is still open. In any event, the main objective, among others, of the current Religious and Moral Education course is to provide a comprehensive, unbiased and broad based religious knowledge to students. The curricula, generally, give brief history of religious traditions and particularly basic information about the tenets of various religious groups. The curricula are not meant to evangelise but to give adequate and accurate information of the various religious traditions.

The curricula of the Religious and Moral education courses could go a step further to engage the students in discussions of issues of inter-religious exchanges. Too much time and effort is spent on the history and fundamentals of the various religious traditions. For instance, a lot is covered on Islam with regard to the Prophet Muḥammad and his life in Mecca and Medina, the five Pillars, and introduction to the Qur'ān. Studies on Christianity are also expected to lead the student to a good grasp of the Christ-event, the introduction to the Christian Scriptures (The Old and New Testaments), and the various Christian denominations in the country and their differences. Much as these fundamentals are crucial in the study of religions, the over-emphasis on these however leaves little room for other equally important elements, such as the general issues of the history of Christian-Muslim relations. Furthermore, the central issues and unique models of Christian-Muslim relations in the Ghanaian context are not adequately covered by the curricula. The success of the laudable objective of wholesome religious communion lies in effective elimination of religious ignorance. The eradication of lack of knowledge of the 'other' by the provision of opportunity for rectification of misinterpretation of past relationships and distortions of religious views through the various processes of education should be the main task of all religions (Pratt, 2005:172). However, the learning processes of religious education and their religious curricula should be thought through thoroughly and properly structured to avoid "...the reinforcement of prejudicial perspectives which feed the attitude and mindset that harbours most forms of fundamentalism" (Pratt, 2005:172).

Furthermore, the religious education teachers and masters must be trained to convey or impart their knowledge to students dispassionately and objectively without favour of any religious tradition. Emphasis must be put on suitable methods of presentation of materials. As the contents of the curricula of the Religious and Moral education courses change with the inclusion of topics of Christian-Muslim relations issues, the content of that of the religious

education teacher-training must also see modification.

5.3.4.4 Inter-religious Education in Theological Formation

The need to infuse theological formation with the multi-religious reality of today's world is felt by many scholars of Christian-Muslim relations. This calls for rethinking and re-envisioning of the nature, content, and practice of Christian and Islamic theological education in a multi-religious context to enable neighbours and fellow citizens to continue to live in an environment of tolerance and mutual respect (Brown, 2000:191). The reformulation of Christian and Islamic theological education needs to take critical look at the challenges the religiously pluralistic climate poses. Firstly, given the majority of Ghanaians who have neither had formal education nor access to moral and religious education one wonders whether the religious and moral education department of the schools are able to reach the target population. Secondly, Christian and Muslim communities need to find ways to enable their membership to understand their own faith in the context of the other religion. This would involve a type of religious formation that grounds the laity in their tradition which is always open to, tolerant and accepting of the other religious tradition (Thangaraj, 2000:294). Thirdly, the pastoral ministry of the religious bodies ought to offer guidance and counselling to members who find themselves in inter-religious situations such as in marriage, family and community (Thangaraj, 2000:295). Fourthly, some of the members of both Christian and Muslim communities would find themselves having to work together in the socio-political and economic field for justice and peace (Thangaraj, 2000:295).

In view of these challenges religious leaders such as pastors and imāms ought to be appropriately and sufficiently trained in the field of Christian-Muslim relations. This demands sufficient training of people, within the Christian and Muslim communities, with requisite awareness of Islam and Christianity respectively as undertaken by PCID and PROCMURA.⁷³

⁷³ PCID (Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue) has in place two main institutes of higher learning: Dar Comboni for the Study of Islam (Egypt) and Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islam (Rome). The Council is the central office of the Catholic Church for the promotion of interreligious dialogue in accordance with the spirit of the Second Vatican Council. PROCMURA (Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa) is a programme of the World Council of Churches which seeks to keep before the churches of Africa their responsibility for understanding Islam and Muslims of their region (Brown, 2000:188). The project has offered Christian students scholarships to study Islam in institutions such as Centres for Christian-Muslim

The main objective of councils and programmes such as offered by PCID and PROCMURA as well as their Muslim counterparts are to infuse theological formation of Christian and Muslim leaders with requisite knowledge of the beliefs, rituals, and even cultural practices of the religion other than their own. The theological students would also receive adequate information and understandings of issues and foundations of Christian-Muslim encounters. To Thangaraj, this inter-religious education should be achieved not only through lectures, readings, and seminars but also by lively contact with people of other religious tradition (Thangaraj, 2000:295). It is expected that accurate and sympathetic knowledge of each other would help Christians and Muslims avoid unnecessary misdemeanour and prevent them from bearing false witness against each other (Brown, 2000:189). The religiously-pluralistic situation of today and the challenges that religious leaders face in their pastoral settings require a basic knowledge of other religious traditions of all theological students.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The chapter engaged in a discussion of traditional Akan social associations and relationships as models for Christian-Muslim exchanges. The conjugal relationships of Christian-Muslim marriage bring two great traditions of faith in a marriage covenant, deemed generally the ideal kind of Christian-Muslim relations. Sadly, in both Christian and Islamic traditions, the extraordinary status of mixed marriage implies a prohibition which constitutes an impediment to be removed only by dispensation. Nevertheless, the common occurrence of Christian-Muslim marriages is not only because Christians and Muslims are now more exposed to each other in a pluralistic environment they find themselves (Fitzgerald & Borelli, 2006:68) but also because the traditional society also permits and facilitates it. In any event, the issues of Christian-Muslim marriage go beyond granting of dispensation to include liturgical and pastoral challenges. Besides, Christian-Muslim marriage set in motion ideal Christian-Muslim relations at the level of the family among the Akan people.

The cognate relationship establishes spiritual bonding among Muslims and Christians with huge reciprocal implications. The lineage spiritual tie with its time-tested custom of mutual helpfulness and cooperation is a unique model for minimising, if not completely

Relations at University of Birmingham (England), Hartford Seminary (USA) and even Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islam (Rome).

eliminating, inter-religious animosity, violence and conflicts. Attention has also been given to the traditional communal values, the universal human family, and appropriate religious education as foundations of Christian-Muslim exchanges in the communal life as a whole.

CHAPTER SIX: FIELDWORK IN THE CENTRAL REGION

This chapter is not available in the digital version of this thesis

CHAPTER SEVEN: NEW ISSUES AND MODELS FOR UNDERSTANDING AND ENGAGEMENT

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The findings of the study are primarily based on the results of both qualitative and quantitative analysis as discussed in chapter six.

7.2 FINDINGS

7.2.1 Religious Issues in Christian-Muslim Encounters

7.2.1.1 The Supreme Deity is Central to Christian-Muslim Relations

Belief in the Supreme Deity is not only fundamental to the traditional religious conception of the Akan people it is also a prominent issue of Christian-Muslim encounters. Both Muslims and Christians believe they worship the same Supreme Deity, *Nyame* as Allāh and God. This is particularly true as Christians and Muslims use the same traditional Akan names and attributes of the Supreme Deity for God and Allāh respectively. As the only One, the Father of all Akan people (Fisher, 1998) and so the head of the family (Danquah, 1968) *Nyame* is the one to whom both Christian Akan and Muslim Akan pray. *Nyame* provides for the needs of all Akan people irrespective of religious backgrounds. The vertical relationship thus established between the Supreme Deity and His people, Muslim and Christian alike, calls for a true and unshakable relationship among all people which in the case of religion is described as Christian-Muslim relations. The universe is subsequently dependent on *Nyame* for its continuity and harmony. All affairs of the earth are under the direction of *Nyame* on a day to day basis (Akoi, 1969:68). In the spirit of dialogue between religions, Muslim Akan and Christian Akan are then expected to recognise religious plurality as *Nyame's* doing. Moral and religious beliefs of societies and religious traditions are not essentially and entirely parallel entities. They all emanate from *Nyame*, their ultimate source. In other words, the very core of all these moral and religious norms ought to synchronise since they evolve from the same source, the Supreme Deity. All stake holders of dialogue are called upon to place the Supreme Deity at the centre of discussions, especially when all the three religions-Traditional

religion, Christianity and Islam- have a common understanding of the Supreme Deity as the only One, the Father and the Ruler of the world.

7.2.1.2 Universality of Divine Truth for Successful Interreligious Encounters

The Akan notion of the universality of divine truth which enables them to acknowledge the divine source and presence in all available religious traditions enables fruitful Christian-Muslim exchanges. The conception recognizes the potentialities of all religious communities for good by seeing them more as complementaries than adversaries. The conception of divine truth in all religions which denies any religion absolute repository of divine revelation (Opoku, 1996:67) enables Christians and Muslims to accept and to accord each other respect. This belief, which upholds an experiential and functional religion, underlies the attitude of tolerance and openness the Akan people demonstrate towards the belief systems of other religions.

7.2.1.3 Due Attention to Core Values for Effective Christian-Muslim Relations

The Akan belief that every society is the repository of core and peripheral religious and moral virtues helps promote healthy and effectual Christian-Muslim relations. The belief moves the discussions of Christian-Muslim relations a step further away from the issues of custody and authenticity of the deposit of faith towards essential issues of societal and individual responsibility in terms of the apposite application of the content of revelation for the benefit of the universal human community. In other words, the attainment of superiority of a society and individuals is based on the prominence they give to core and intransient values. Thus, the more individuals and societies put emphasis on the mainstay values the better people and society they become and the more they are able to engage in open and fruitful exchanges with people of culture and religions different from their own. The notion proposes to people of all cultures unique way to interreligious and cultural exchanges which dwell on essential common features of societies. It also grants Christians and Muslims the opportunity to learn from one another as they cooperate and work together to achieve a common goal of enhancing their collective well-being.

7.2.1.4 Transreligious Attitude is Hallmark for True Unity of Religions

Peaceful co-existence of Christians and Muslims for social peace and stability is most achievable with an attitude of transreligiosity which not only acknowledges some positive elements in other religious communities but also actually, in true spirit, encourages their appropriation. Underlying a transreligious attitude is a holistic understanding of religion which definitely looks beyond institutional religious structures for a much broader opinion in the sense of spirituality. In this sense, both Islam and Christianity and even traditional Akan religions are recognised as the various arms of the ‘one religion’ or the various approaches in which the ‘one religion’ expresses itself. This transreligious quality is at its best when it is not only attitudinal but most importantly ceremonial as regularly and proudly displayed by Muslim Akan and Christian Akan.

7.2.1.5 Social Understanding is Vital for Effectual Encounter of Religions

As they receive images and attitudes of each other handed down to them by past generations, Christian Akan and Muslim Akan crucially also need to make necessary amendments to them in view of their social circumstances of life. In other words, Christians and Muslims could minimise the negative impact of historical Christian-Muslim encounters on them by continually subjecting such exchanges to critical scrutiny in accordance with the fundamental Akan notion that religious mores and precepts should be relevant to the current practitioners by serving their needs and interests (Gyekye, 2003: 14). As the social climate, needs and interests of society are not constant, religious guidelines and particularly images of religious exchanges likewise could do with suitable adaptations to meet the changing requirements of society. Invariably, people of different generations could revise religious images and attitudes they inherit as they live on.

7.2.2 Social Models of Christian-Muslim Relations

7.2.2.1 Christian-Muslim Marriage

A marriage of a Christian and a Muslim is the perfect model for Christian-Muslim encounters. It brings people of the two great traditions of faith together in a covenant of marriage. It also attempts to reconcile their teachings of marriage, divorce and even inheritance. However, Christian-Muslim marriage, although it has gained currency given the significant traditional societal endorsement it enjoys, is quite often beleaguered and overwhelmed by challenges ranging from the need for dispensation, liturgical, pastoral, and above all spiritual difficulties. A sufficient preparation of the couple is required especially in the areas of polygyny, divorce and even inheritance for such conjugal relationship to take place.

7.2.2.2 Affine Relationship and Christian-Muslim Exchanges

Affine relationship, considered a 'kin relations', also helps a great deal in promoting Christian-Muslim relations at the family level among the Akan people. The affine relationship does not only emerge out of inter-religious marriage such as Christian-Muslim marriage, it also comes out of intra-religious marriage like Muslim-Muslim marriage and Christian-Christian marriage. For, there is hardly any marriage among the Akan people that does not bring Muslims and Christians in affine relationship. This relationship enables Muslims and Christians to live comfortably together, either in a compound house often built by their grandparents or in the same vicinity. In affine relationship, Christians and Muslims are obligated by tradition to relate to one another at the family and personal level. When Christians and Muslims families are in affine association they would reject any rampant and wild characterization of each other without any justifiable evidence. The usefulness of affine relationship with regard to enhancing interreligious relations is evident more in the fact that traditional marriage is ultimately to set families up for friendship and for the promotion of peace in the community (Nukunya, 1992:41).

7.2.2.3 Cognate Relationship is a Vital Model for Christian-Muslim Relations

The notion of common ancestry establishes unequivocal blood connectivity that binds Christians and Muslims together in an institution which does not even ordinarily permit marriage among its members (Meyerowitz, 1958: 29). The lineage, by virtue of the blood linkage, further establishes a spiritual bond among the membership that is not only sacred but also real and active. The lineage spiritual tie has also been a unique model for minimising, if not completely eliminating, inter-religious animosity, violence and conflicts. People united by descent group such as lineage and so by a common ancestry, however putative, are more likely to refuse to go along with any ideology or institution, even religious that is injurious to their unity and conitual survival. Moreover, mutual helpfulness and cooperation which Muslim and Christian cognates offer one another without regard for religion, forms an important foundation for Christian-Muslim cooperation.

7.2.2.4 Universal Human Family is Critical in Christian-Muslim Exchanges

The notion of the universal human family coupled with the need for the communal harmony and continuous survival calls for the entire membership of the society to work together in pursuance of collective goals and interests. In this context, Christian- Muslim relations become an inevitable means of attaining the shared, communal aspirations. This calls for a certain synchronization of individual as well as religious organisational interests for a much broader public ambition. It also demands an adoption of the traditional religious consciousness which is fundamentally indifferent to polemics but open unreservedly to dialogue and communal cooperation. Here, dialogue is best described in the sense of ‘witness’ in the light of lived and shared experiences which have been constantly proven to be the most advanced and the best missionary strategy. In view of this common humanity, Muslims and Christians, in fact adherents of all religions constitute one universal human family, the most important source of unity and a valuable model for Christian-Muslim relations.

7.2.2.5 Appropriate Religious Formation for Fruitful Interreligious Relations

The pluralistic religious environment of Ghana requires appropriate religious education and

formation programmes. Religious and Moral education as a subject of study is available at every level of the Ghana Educational structure from the basic school through the secondary to the tertiary level. While the Religious and Moral Education course is taught as a core subject in the basic and secondary level they are elective at the tertiary level. The question of whether or not the Moral and Religious course is to be made core and examinable for all is still open. The religious and moral education as an academic course aims, among others, to provide unbiased and broad based religious knowledge to recipients. The curricula, generally, gives brief history of religious traditions and particularly basic information about the tenets of available religious groups. The eradication of lack of accurate knowledge of the 'other' by provision of opportunities for rectification of misinterpretation of past records and distortions of religious views through the various levels of education should be a major task of all religious traditions (Pratt, 2005:172).

7.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS

There is no doubt of the plurality of the Ghanaian religious environment. Three main types of religion are found- African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. Diversity is noticeable within these religions themselves. Within Islam there are diversities, notably the Orthodox and the Ahmadiyyah Movement. In African Traditional Religion, there is diversity. Within Christianity we have various denominations- Roman Catholic, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, and the Pentecostals. To Pobee these religious traditions as well as their doctrines and precepts do not exist in water tight compartments. They flow into each other. Indeed, sometimes the views of one tradition are put together as the views of the other (Pobee, 1976: Preface). The religious and denominational diversity of the society has enormous ramifications for the social harmony and stability. It has consequences for evangelisation and mission strategy. It has implications for the political arena as well (Pobee, 1976: Preface).

The plurality of the religious environment is not unique to the Ghanaian context it is gradually becoming a lasting feature of every society in the world and bringing with it attendant challenges. Inter-religious relationships must be a priority to the world if mankind is to overcome its present divisions, religious and otherwise (Gensichen, 1976:32). The findings of the fieldwork conducted in the Central Region reveal that theological and sociological issues and models are at play in dealing with Christian-Muslim exchanges in that part of

Ghana. The religious plurality calls for an active engagement with one another of people from different religious backgrounds even at the deeper level of the extended family in mutual helpfulness. It does not simply demand an indifferent or tolerant attitude to the other. It requires an active attempt to understand, appreciate and even appropriate the invaluable elements of the other given the profound differences among religious traditions. Plurality, then, is about engaging the very differences that exist among religious traditions in order to gain a deeper sense of each other's commitments.

Above all, plurality demands a re-thinking of the notion of religion from a structural sense of institution to embrace a holistic understanding which acknowledges the divine presence in all existing religions. This broader conception has greater prospects for the future of religions themselves and for the international human community as it helps build bridges and eschew negativity, pettiness and parochialism that engulf religious relations. Furthermore, this notion is all the more important in the current climate when no religion is able to identify with one culture and above all religious traditions are still trying to find new homes in cultures which are non-traditional to them, consequently the need to discard their narrow limits of spiritual parochialism stare them in the face (Gensichen, 1976:32). For as religious traditions enter into non traditional areas the necessity for adoption and acclimatisation, often called inculturation, is even more felt if they are to make lasting and meaningful impact in their new homes. This acclimatizing process would often entail adjusting to and adopting new cultural and spiritual traits in the spirit of inculturation.

Religious and cultural encounters are inevitable. However, such encounters ought to be beneficial to the religions and cultures involved by ensuring their advancement. To stimulate further progress both the new and old religious traditions and cultures need to open up (Ratzinger, 2003:59, 60). For whatever elements of any religion and even culture that does not permit such opening up and the eventual cultural exchange represent what is insufficient in that religion. The height of development of a religion and its culture is shown in its openness, in its aptitude to give and to receive, in its propensity to develop further, to let itself be purified and thus to become adapted more to the truth and to man (Ratzinger, 2003:60). And it is in the context of giving and receiving that Christian-Muslim relation is made meaningful and fruitful.

GLOSSARY OF AKAN WORDS

The Fante usage is largely followed in the glossary with Asante usage, where it differs, given in parentheses.

Abosom (Plural of □*bosom*) Lesser deities or divinities subject to the Supreme Deity (*Nyame*) but most generally worshipped.

Aburadze One of the ancient family or clan groupings of the Akan people. Its totem is *Gyata* (lion).

Adwenadze One of the family or clan groupings among the Akan people. A cluster of *odwon* trees is its totem.

Anona Another of the lineage or clan groupings of the Akan people. Its totem is *Anona--Ekoo* (Parrot)

Asafo Company of warriors or militia usually composed of the men of the community

Asaase Yaa The Akan goddess of the earth and fertility

Awar (Asante *aware*) The act or state of marriage

□*baatanpa* Good mother

Ebusua (Asante- *abusua*) Matrilineal family lineage or kindred

Ebusua panyin (Asante: *Abusuapanyin*) Ruling elder of the family or lineage

Gye Nyame Except/ Unless God

Kwona One of the family or clan groupings among the Akan people. Its totem is *Ekua* (The bush cow).

Mogyaa Blood, which a person is believed to inherit from their mother

Nana This word has different usages and may designate a grandparent or ancestor, a

grandchild; a title of respect or honour in addressing rulers.

Nsona One of the ancient lineage or clan groupings scattered among the Akan people. *Its totem is Os na Akunkuran* (the fox and the Whiteringed Raven).

Nton (Asante *ntoro*) Spirit or energy that a person receives from their father

Ntwaa One of the lineage or clan groupings of the Akan people. Its totem is *Ntwaa--Bodom* (The Dog).

Nyame (Asante *Onyame*) The Supreme Deity, the Creator.

Sunsum The personality, soul, or spirit of a man that he passes onto his children.

Twidan One of the lineage or clan groupings of the Akan people. Its totem is *Itwi* (The Leopard).

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APPENDIX

Appendices I to V are not available in the digital version of this thesis

APPENDIX VI

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PARTICIPANTS

Introductory Statement

My name is Cosmas Ebo Sarbah. This request is to enable me acquire more information for a research thesis at the University of Birmingham. The research is about Christian-Muslim relations in Ghana: The Role of the traditional Akan Values. The survey objectives are: (1) to study the traditional Akan society and its models of social cohesion (2) to explore the main issues and models of Christian-Muslim Encounters (3) to analyse the role traditional Akan values play in these encounters.

We will be grateful if you could go through these questions and circle in any of the alternative responses as you deem fit. Where there is the need for you to write in your comment, please be brief. The information is solely for academic purposes and will be treated with the confidentiality it deserves. Participation is voluntary.

(A) PERSONAL DATA

(1) Gender

- (a) Male
- (b) Female

(2) Age _____

(3) Ethnic Background

- (a) Fante
- (b) Ewe
- (c) Fulani
- (d) Hausa
- (e) Dagaba
- (f) None of the above

(4) Education

- (a) None
- (b) Elementary
- (c) Junior High School
- (d) Senior High School
- (e) Tertiary

(5) Religious Denomination

- (a) *Ahlussunna*
- (b) *Tijāniyya*
- (c) *Ahmadiyya*
- (d) Catholic
- (e) Methodist
- (f) Anglican
- (g) Charismatic
- (h) African Independent

B: BELIEF IN GOD

(6) Your belief in the Supreme Deity

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(7) Your belief in the Fatherhood of Supreme Deity for all

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(8) Your belief in the Supreme Deity as Ruler of the universe

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

C: CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

(9) Your relations with Muslims/Christians in Your Family

- (a) Very Bad
- (b) Bad
- (c) Good
- (d) Very Good

(10) Your relations with Muslims/Christians in your town

- (a) Very Bad
- (b) Bad
- (c) Good
- (d) Very God

(11) Do you approve of Christian-Muslim marriage?

- (a) Strongly Approve
- (b) Approve
- (c) Disapprove
- (d) Strongly Disapprove

(12) Would you allow your Offspring to marry a Muslim?

- (a) Strongly allow
- (b) Allow
- (c) Disallow
- (d) Strongly Disallow

(13) When a Muslim friend invites you to the Mosque for a Muslim programme would you go?

- (a) Definitely Yes
- (b) Yes
- (c) No
- (d) Definitely No

D: UNIVERSALITY OF DIVINE TRUTH

(14) Your Belief in Divine Truth in all Religions

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(15) Your Belief in Truth as Functional

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(16) Your Belief in Religious Tolerance

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

E: RELIGIOUS UNITY

(17) Your Belief in Religion as foundation of culture

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(18) Your Belief in Religion as prevailing system

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(19) Belief in Religion as Source of Unity

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

F: MARRIAGE INSTITUTION

(20) Religion as a factor for selection of marriage partner-negative association

- (a) Very Important
- (b) Important
- (c) Less Important
- (d) Not Important

(21) Would you allow your Marriage Partner to stick to their religious tradition?

- (a) Strongly Allow
- (b) Allow
- (c) Disallow
- (d) Strongly Disallow

(22) Do you have Muslim and Christian members in your family?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

G: AFFINE RELATIONS

(23) Regard for Affine Relationship

- (a) Very High
- (b) High
- (c) Low
- (d) Very Low

(23i) Do you have affines who are Muslim/Christian?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

(24) How would you rate an affine kin irrespective of religious tradition?

- (a) Very Close Relative
- (b) Close Relative
- (c) Distant Relative
- (d) Very Distant Relative

(25) Obligation to affine kin irrespective of religious background

- (a) Very Strong
- (b) Strong
- (c) Weak
- (d) Very Weak

G: LINEAGE AS INSTITUTION

(26) Regard for Lineage as Institution

- (e) Very High
- (f) High
- (g) Low
- (h) Very Low

(26i) Do you have Cognates who are Muslim/Christian?

- (a) Yes
- (b) No

(27) How would you rate a lineage Kin irrespective of religious tradition?

- (e) Very Close Relative
- (f) Close Relative
- (g) Distant Relative
- (h) Very Distant Relative

(28) Obligation to lineage Kin irrespective of religious background

- (e) Very Strong
- (f) Strong
- (g) Weak
- (h) Very Weak

H: COMMUNALISM

(29) Sense of Communal Solidarity (unity)

- (a) Very Weak

- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(30) Sense of Communal harmony (good feeling in the community)

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(31) Loyalty and commitment to community (Society) as a whole

- (a) Very Important
- (b) Important
- (c) Less Important
- (d) Not Important

I: COMMON HUMANITY

(32) Your belief in Common Humanity of all people

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(33) All human beings are children of God

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(34) How do you value human relations?

- (a) Very lowly
- (b) Lowly
- (c) Highly
- (d) Very Highly

J: MORAL NORMS

(35) Moral values ensure the survival of the community as a whole

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(36) Sense of Dignity and respect for the other Views

- (a) Very Weak
- (b) Weak
- (c) Strong
- (d) Very Strong

(37) Belief in Peaceful Co-existence

- (a) Very Important
- (b) Important
- (c) Less Important
- (d) Not Important