

THE NEED FOR CHRISTIAN-ASANTE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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ABSTRACT

African Traditional Religion is the indigenous and the oldest of these three religions while the other two were brought into Africa by Christian and Islamic missionaries from Europe and Saudi Arabia respectively. It is on record that African Traditional Religion welcomed these two missionary religions with open arms and accommodated them for many years, however, the early Western missionaries and the adherents of the latter religions were often hostile and disrespectful towards the indigenous Traditional Religions. This paper draws data from Ejisu Juaben Municipality used as a case study and calls for a conscientious attempt to promote dialogue between Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion. Asante Traditional Religion shares a lot in common with other African Traditional Religions. They include the belief in the Supreme Being, spirits, life after death and the rites of passage such as naming ceremony, puberty rites, marriage rites and burial rites even though there are some divergences. The paper also suggests that Asante rites of passage such as naming ceremony, puberty rites, marriage rites and burial rites could be integrated into the Christian rites of passage in order to minimise the duplication of rites among Christians in Ejisu Juaben Municipality in Ashanti Region, Ghana. Lastly, the paper recommends that Christian leaders should take Asante Traditional Religion seriously, study it and dialogue with it.

Keywords: *Christianity, Asante, African Traditional Religion, dialogue, inculturation.*

INTRODUCTION

We often hear about and see concretely and in practice, a conscientious effort on the part of Christians and Muslims to engage each other in mutual dialogue. There have been several meetings of dialogue between Christianity and Islam at different levels and several dialogues are currently going on between various denominations of Christians. We have the Programme for Christian Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) with headquarters located in Nairobi, Kenya and several national and local programmes for Christian and Muslim Dialogue. We also have the Catholic-Methodist Dialogue,² Anglican-Roman Catholic Dialogue or Anglican Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC)³ and so on. However, we hardly hear about dialogue between Christianity and Traditional Religion except on *ad hoc* basis, when a problem arises between the two Religions. We wonder why this has not taken place after several calls by Church authorities to begin the process. Why has the call for dialogue between Christianity and Traditional Religion fallen on deaf ears? Asante Traditional Religion has been the indigenous religion

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² see Information Service 122 (2006/II), 58-59 “Address of Cardinal Walter Kasper at Signing Ceremony of Methodist Association with Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification” (Seoul, South Korea, 23 July 2006) url; http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/chrstuni/meth-council-docs/rc_pc_chrstuni_doc_20060723_kasper-seoul_en.html , accessed October 19, 2018.

³ See International Anglican-Roman Catholic Commission for Unity and Mission website (IARCCUM.org), accessed October 19, 2018.

of many Asantes before conversion into Christianity, and the milieu in which many Asante Christians were socialised and brought up. Until quite recently, Asante Traditional Religion and culture were not recognised or taken seriously by some Christians.

At a recent International Conference on Inter-religious Dialogue and Global Peace organised by the Department of Religious Studies of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), scholarly works on African Traditional Religion(s) were scanty. The majority of the topics presented and discussed at the conference were mainly on Christianity and Islam. One would have expected that the topics presented and discussed would focus on all the three main religions in Ghana, namely African Traditional Religion, Christianity and Islam. However, this was not the case. Why did the conference consciously or unconsciously exclude topics with focus on African Traditional Religion?

Osofo Komfo Dr. Kwabena Damuah (after 25 years in the Roman Catholic priesthood) decided to form the *Afrikania Mission* in 1982 when he attended a conference of religious leaders in Moscow in 1981 and “noticed that almost everybody was Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, or Christian but no one represented African Traditional Religion.”⁴

It seems to the writer that very often Christians dialogue with Asante Traditional Religion on *ad hoc basis*, only at times when problems crop up between the two religions, as in the case, when the devotees of the Traditional gods of Aberewa and Kune saw that their prestige and source of income were threatened and became hostile to Christians and attacked Churches in Achinakrom, in the Ejisu Juaben Municipality.⁵

In this paper, I intend to critically examine the prospects of Christianity and Asante Traditional Religious dialogue, some of the similarities and differences that call for dialogue and defend the thesis that dialogue with Asante Traditional Religion is not unnecessary. The motivation for the paper is that one cannot convince other people without talking with them. Therefore, it is important to provide insight into the issue of dialogue between Asante Traditional Religion on the one hand and Christianity on the other.

At the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue held in November 1992, the Council discussed the issue of dialogue with followers of Traditional Religions. Prior to this meeting, a letter had already been written on the subject to the Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences of Africa and Madagascar.⁶ According to Arinze, the Council felt that

since Traditional Religions are present in different forms not only in Africa, but also in Asia, the Americas, Oceania, it would be useful to call the attention of the Episcopal Conferences of these continents to the importance of pastoral attention to the Traditional Religions and the usefulness of an exchange of reflections and experiences in this field.⁷

Twenty-five years now since the call by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious dialogue, it seems that this call has fallen on deaf ears and no serious attempt has been made or very little has been achieved if any attempt has been made at all. It seems that Christian leaders in Ashanti Region, Ghana have not taken this call seriously and made effort to dialogue with Asante Traditional Religion. As a missionary in this area for the last twenty years, I feel that this is the opportune time to begin a serious dialogue with Asante Tradition Religion because Asante Traditional Religion will continue to be practised alongside Christianity since it is the home of many Asante Christians today; and some Asante Christians resort to some Asante Traditional Religious practices in times of crisis. Yet there is no dearth of empirical studies on inter-religious dialogue between Asante Traditional Religion and Christianity.

⁴“Afrikania Mission (Religious Movement)” available at url: <http://what-when-how.com/religious-movements/afrikania-mission-religious-movement/>, accessed October 1, 2018

⁵ The Methodist Church Ghana Wesley Cathedral, Achinakrom Souvenir Programme Centenary Anniversary (1902-2002) held at Wesley Cathedral, Achinakrom from 5th – 11th August 2002 at 9:30 am (Asafo-Kumasi: Wilas Press Limited, 2002), 3

⁶ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions” (November 1993), 1.

⁷ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 1.

Traditional Religions: Foundation to Christianity

Arinze defines Traditional Religions as “those religions which, unlike the world religions that have spread into many countries and cultures, have remained in their original socio-cultural environment.”⁸ According to him, “the word ‘traditional’ does not refer to something static or unchangeable, but rather denotes this localised matrix.”⁹ Arinze admitted that there is no single name used to refer to these religions. Some names such as paganism, fetishism “convey a negative meaning and do not really describe the contents of these religions.”¹⁰ In Africa, “these religions are ordinarily referred to as African Traditional Religions.”¹¹

Arinze argues that “Traditional Religions generally have a clear belief in One God, in a Supreme Being Who goes by such names as Great Spirit, Creator, the Great One, the Mighty Spirit, the Divine, the Transcendent, the One who lives above, Heaven, etc.”¹² He explains that “There is also a belief in other beings which are above humankind but are less than the Supreme Being.”¹³ These beings are called spirits or deities or gods by experts on Traditional Religions. Africans also believe in deceased adult relatives called ancestors. According to Arinze, “cults or worship in Traditional Religions is directed generally to the spirits and the ancestors and to God. Fear of the evil spirits or ancestors motivates many acts of worship.”¹⁴ Traditional Religions are handed down from generation to generation. They do not have revealed books written down as in Christianity or Islam, nor do they have statements of theological or philosophical nature. However, according to Arinze, “the riches of their contents, and their many values are more often found in their celebrations, stories and proverbs, and conveyed through their attitudes, customs and codes of conduct.”¹⁵ Arinze admits that Traditional Religion rarely have a founder.¹⁶

Many traditional societies have a strong sense of the sacred and religion permeates life to the extent that it is often difficult to distinguish strictly between religious elements and local custom.¹⁷ African Traditional Religion has great respect for life and celebrate rites of passage from birth to death in such rites as naming ceremony, puberty rites, marriage ceremonies, burial rites and ceremonies and so on. There is also a strong sense of family as members maintain a close relationship between the living, the dead and the yet unborn.

Arinze notes that, “the influence of Traditional Religions remains strong, particularly in moments of crisis”¹⁸ in spite of the people’s encounter with Christianity, Islam, Western culture, modern science and technology.

It is very important to understand the context of the African convert. According to Arinze, “Traditional Religions constitute the religious context in which a good number of people live or have lived.”¹⁹ He observed that “Many recent converts to Christianity come from a background of traditional

⁸ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 2.

⁹ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 2.

¹⁰ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 2.

¹¹ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 2.

¹² Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 3.

¹³ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 3.

¹⁴ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 3.

¹⁵ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 3.

¹⁶ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 3.

¹⁷ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 4.

¹⁸ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 6.

¹⁹ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 7.

religions, and many of these converts live in cultures and contexts influenced by these religions.”²⁰ This, he explains is the reason why “at some important moments in their lives, they tend to have recourse to practices of their traditional religions or to prayer houses, healing homes, witch-craft, ‘prophets’ or fortune tellers.”²¹ This is also the reason why pastoral agents and evangelisers in Ashanti should also pay attention to Asante Traditional Religion and culture which go along with it. Arinze was of the view that Christianity should aim at influencing the whole life of the Christian instead of having them live dual religiosity, parallel lives, at different levels.²²

Inculturation

In an address at the 39th Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America, Kilcourse said “the growing reality and awareness of a world Church naturally leads to a focus on the question of inculturation.”²³ The focus of the 39th Annual Convention was how the Church would “announce the Christian message to various cultures and achieve a solid unity consciously built on an accepted diversity and not on the uniformity of its cultural foundations and expressions?”²⁴ Kilcourse defined inculturation as

a demand felt by the local Churches to understand, express and live the gospel message according to their own particular cultural geniuses. Thus, the gospel must penetrate the whole way of life, the cultural fabric of a people; this involves a continual search for meaning. It implies a holistic and a critical approach to culture, and demands a dialogical methodology.²⁵

John II said to the members of the Biblical Commission in his Apostolic exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* of October 1979 that Catechesis, like evangelization

is called to bring the power of the Gospel into the very heart of culture and cultures. For this purpose, catechesis will seek to know these cultures and their essential components; it will learn their most significant expressions; it will respect their particular values and riches. In this manner it will be able to offer these cultures the knowledge of the hidden mystery and help them to bring forth from their own living tradition original expressions of Christian life, celebration and thought.²⁶

John Paul II admitted that

the Gospel message cannot be purely and simply isolated from the culture in which it was first inserted (the biblical world or, more concretely, the cultural milieu in which Jesus of Nazareth lived), nor, without serious loss, from the cultures in which it has already been expressed down the centuries; it does not spring spontaneously from any cultural soil; it has always been transmitted by means of an apostolic dialogue which inevitably becomes part of a certain dialogue of cultures.²⁷

²⁰ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 7.

²¹ Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 7.

²² Francis Arinze, “Pastoral Attention to Traditional Religions,” 7.

²³ George Kilcourse (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, Vol. 39, (Washington, DC: Catholic Theological Society of America, June 13-15, 1984), 122

²⁴ George Kilcourse (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, Vol. 39, 122

²⁵ George Kilcourse (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Thirty-Ninth Annual Convention of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, Vol. 39, 122

²⁶ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 53.

²⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 53.

On the other hand, he argued that, “the power of the Gospel everywhere transforms and regenerates. When that power enters into a culture, it is no surprise that it rectifies many of its elements. There would be no catechesis if it were the Gospel that had to change when it came into contact with the cultures.”²⁸ Evangelisers must, therefore, distinguish between the Christian message and the culture or language with which the Christian message is transmitted. They are two separate entities. John Paul II in *Redemptoris Missio* stated that “Through inculturation the Church makes the Gospel incarnate in different cultures and at the same time introduces peoples together with their cultures into her own community.”²⁹ He advised missionaries who come from other countries to immerse themselves in the cultural milieu of those to whom they are sent, moving beyond their own cultural limitations; and learn the language of the place in which they work and become familiar with most important expressions of the local culture. It is only by so doing that “they will be able to bring to people the knowledge of the hidden mysteries (cf. Rom. 16:25-27).”³⁰ Thus, the Church respects the culture and religion of people without compromising the Christian message.

Some Similarities and Difference for Dialogue

This paper examines some of the similarities and difference between Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion which call for dialogue between the two religions. The data presented here were gathered from Ejisu Juaben Municipality in three selected Churches, namely the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church Ghana and the Church of Pentecost. In the study, 377 respondents were asked to suggest some strategies to be adopted by Church leaders to make Asante converts truly (authentically) Asante and truly (authentically) Christian. Table 1 shows the results:

Table 1: Respondents’ Views on the strategies to be adopted to make Asante converts truly Asantes and truly Christians Regarding Inculturation of the Gospel into Asante Culture.

Responses	Frequency (n)	Frequency II (n2)	Percentage (%)	Percentage II (% 2)
I strongly disagree	8	29	2.2	8.0
Disagree	21		5.8	
Neither agree nor disagree	37	37	10.1	10.1
I agree	184	299	50.4	81.9
I strongly agree	115		31.5	
Total	365	365	100	100
Missing Number	12	12		

Source: Field Survey 2017

Table 1 shows that out of 365 respondents, 184 (50.4) and 115 (31.5%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that inculturation of the Gospel into Asante culture is the best way to the understanding of the Christian message and to make Asante Christians truly Asantes and truly Christians while 8 (2.2%) and 21 (5.8%) strongly disagreed or disagreed respectively. Twelve (12) respondents did not answer this question. This means that Asante Christians would live as authentic Asantes while still remaining authentic Christians, without becoming European or Western Christians. An Asante Christian is an Asante who has converted into Christianity. Asante Christians cherish their culture and are proud to use their culture in the Church and in the liturgy. They feel at home with Christianity when they can express themselves in their language and culture, singing, dancing and clapping spontaneously in the liturgy. An interviewee responded:

²⁸ John Paul II, Apostolic Exhortation, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 53.

²⁹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1990), 52

³⁰ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 52-53

A proper inculturation which does not scratch the surface but touches on the philosophy, the concepts and thought patterns of the people should be employed. The inculturation approach should touch the core of the Asante Christian.

In the light of the above, Asante Christian Theologians should dialogue and integrate the Christian message into Asante Traditional Religion and culture in order to make Asante Christians live authentically as Asantes and authentically as Christians.

DIALOGUE BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND ASANTE TRADITIONAL RELIGION

John Paul II admitted that “interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church’s evangelizing mission...a method and means of mutual knowledge and enrichment. It is not in opposition to evangelisation or mission *ad gentes*.”³¹ The Pontiff opined that “followers of other religions can receive God’s grace and be saved by Christ apart from the ordinary means which he has established.”³² However, this does not cancel the call to faith and baptism which God wills for all people.³³ He observed that “through dialogue, the Church seeks to uncover the seeds of the word, a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.”³⁴ The Pontiff’s stance on dialogue resonates in the views expressed by the respondents in the study at Ejisu Juaben Municipality. The fact that four in a five of the respondents appreciated the need for dialogue suggests that they recognise that Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion have some similarities and differences which call for dialogue.

For example, some respondents felt that similarities between Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion are fundamental. Here is how one respondent puts it,

Religion is religion. Every religion has three parts. You must have faith, you must believe in something, without faith it is impossible to please God. In every religion, whether Jewish, Islam, Christianity or what, you must have faith. Flowing from faith is morality, doing something right and avoiding something wrong. Doing something right because the person you believe in wants you to do it. Or he doesn’t want you to do it. Faith is belief in some power you believe wants you to do it or does not want you to do it. Not to steal and you steal. People who have the same faith and the same morality from time to time come together to worship the object of their faith – liturgy only means public worship. When people think of African Religion they only think of worship, drumming and dancing (Interview, 2017).

There is something in this respondent’s views that is significant. That is, people tend to think of Asante Traditional Religion in terms of worship, drumming and dancing. Perhaps this perception of Asante Traditional Religion is one of the areas that dialogue alone can resolve. Apart from structural issues, other similarities are considered in Table 2, Table 3, Table 4, Table 5, Table 6 and Table 7.

Table 2: Respondents’ View on the similarities between Christianity Asante Traditional Religion Regarding Belief in the Supreme Being.

Responses	Frequency (n)	Frequency II (n2)	Percentage (%)	Percentage II (% 2)
I strongly disagree	21	31	5.6	8.3
Disagree	10		2.7	
Neither agree nor disagree	5	5	1.3	1.3
I agree	140	338	37.4	90.3
I strongly agree	198		52.9	
Total	374	374	100	100

³¹ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

³² John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

³³ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 55.

³⁴ John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, 56.

Missing Number	3	3		
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Source: Field Survey 2017

Table 2 shows that out of the 374 respondents, 140 (37.4%) and 198 (52.9%) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that practitioners of both Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion believe in the Supreme Being while 10 (2.7%) and 21 (5.6%) disagreed or strongly disagreed respectively. Three respondents did not answer this question. Upon further questioning about the similarities between Christianity and Asante culture, an interviewee said: “*belief in God, the Supreme Being.*” All the three denominations confirmed this fact. There were 36.6% Roman Catholics, 30.8% Methodists and 23.0% Pentecostals from the survey who confirmed that practitioners of Asante Traditional Religion and Christianity in general believe in the Supreme Being. Thus, the Asante adage, “*obi nkyere abofra Nyame,*” meaning “no one shows the child the Supreme Being.”

From Table 2, it is clear that adherents of both Asante Traditional Religion and Christianity in general believe in the Supreme Being even if the Asante Traditional belief is “imperfect” and differs from the Trinitarian God. This is what Paul did in Athens. In Acts 17:23-43, when St. Paul discovered that the people of Athens were very religious and worshipped an unknown God who is the “same” as the Christian God, he used their “imperfect” knowledge of God to dialogue with them on the belief in the Triune God. In the same way, Christians could use the Asante Traditional belief in the Supreme Being as basis for dialogue with Asante Traditional believers on the true nature of the Supreme Being.

Table 3: Respondents’ Views on the similarities between Christianity Asante Traditional Religion Regarding Belief in spirits.

Responses	Frequency (n)	Frequency II (n2)	Percentage (%)	Percentage II (%)
I strongly disagree	18	38	4.9	10.3
Disagree	20		5.4	
Neither agree nor disagree	8	8	2.2	2.2
I agree	169	325	45.6	87.6
I strongly agree	156		42.0	
Total	371	371	100	100
Missing Number	6	6		

Source: Field Survey 2017

Table 3 above shows that both practitioners of Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion believe in spirits. Out of the 371 respondents, 169 (45,6%) agreed and 156 (42%) strongly agreed that Asantes’ share in common with Christianity the belief in spirits with some differences while 18 (4.9%) strongly disagreed and 20 (5.4%) disagreed. Six respondents did not answer this question. For instance, Christianity could dialogue with Asante Traditional practitioners on the basis of their belief in witchcraft, a form of evil spirit which is believed to be real, active and powerful to wreak havoc to people and their activities.³⁵

³⁵ Emeka C., Ekeke, & Chike A. Ekeopara, “God, divinities and spirits in Africa Traditional Religious Ontology” American Journal of Social and Management Sciences, 1(2):2009-218, 2010, Accessed May 5, 2016

Table 4: Respondents’ Views on the similarities between Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion Regarding Belief in the Power of Prayer.

Responses	Frequency (n)	Frequency II (n2)	Percentage (%)	Percentage II (% 2)
I strongly disagree	6	12	1.6	3.2
Disagree	6		1.6	
Neither agree nor disagree	4	4	1.1	1.1
I agree	146	358	39.0	95.7
I strongly agree	212		56.7	
Total	374	374	100	100
	3	3		

Source: Field Survey 2017

Similarly, Table 4 shows that an overwhelming majority of respondents, 212 (56.7%) strongly agreed that Christianity and Asante culture believe in the power of prayer. Out of the 374 respondents, 358 (95.7%) accepted that both religions believe in the power of prayer, while 12 (3.2%) disagreed. There were three respondents who did not express opinion on this question. This was also confirmed by the analysis of the individual Churches. The respondents agree that Asantes would not begin any important event without pouring libation (a form of prayer offered to the Supreme Being, Asase Yaa (the mother Earth, source of human livelihood), spirits, ancestors (saints) just as Christians do. They commend the beginning and end, their lives and activities into the hands of God, the Earth, Spirits, Ancestors with faith and hope that they would come to their assistance. The Christian belief in prayer and the Asante prayer of libation is another area for Christian-Asante Traditional Religious Dialogue.

Table 5: Respondents’ Views on the similarities between Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion Regarding Belief in life after death.

Responses	Frequency (n)	Frequency II (n2)	Percentage (%)	Percentage II (% 2)
I strongly disagree	10	33	2.7	8.9
Disagree	23		6.2	
Neither agree nor disagree	15	15	4.1	4.1
I agree	162	322	43.8	87.0
I strongly agree	160		43.2	
Total	370	370	100	100
Missing Number	7	7		

Source: Field Survey 2017

Table 5 shows that out of 370 respondents, an overwhelming majority, 322 (87%), representing almost an equal number of those who strongly agreed or agreed that Christianity and Asante Religion believe that there is life after death whereas 33 (8.7%) were opposed. Seven respondents did not answer the question. Both Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion believe in life after death. A respondent observed that Asantes believe in “life after death.” They (Asantes) believe that life continues after death. This is the reason why Asantes bury their deceased relatives with ornaments, clothing, handkerchiefs and other precious minerals for their journey to the other world and some money for their needs. However, whereas Asante Traditional Religion believes that life continues in the next world (**Asamando**) in the same way as on earth; and therefore, the deceased needs money, ornaments, clothing and even servants to serve him/her in next world; Christians believe that the state of life of the deceased changes from physical to spiritual in

the next world and does not need physical properties. These differences in beliefs between the two religions call for dialogue.

Table 6: Respondents’ Views on the similarities between Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion Regarding Rites of passage.

Responses	Frequency (n)	Frequency II (n2)	Percentage (%)	Percentage II (% 2)
I strongly disagree	6	28	1.6	7.5
Disagree	22		5.9	
Neither agree nor disagree	15	15	4.0	4.0
I agree	187	331	50	88.5
I strongly agree	144		38.5	
Total	374	374	100	100
Missing Number	3	3		

Source: Field Survey 2017

Table 6 shows that out of the 374 respondents, 331 (88.5%) strongly agreed that both Christianity and Asante culture have in common elaborate naming ceremonies, puberty rites, marriage rites, burial and funeral rites while 28 (7.5%) disagreed. Three respondents did not answer the question. The Table above shows that respondents accept that both Christianity and Asante culture have rites of passage, namely naming ceremony (Baptism), puberty rite (Rites of Christian initiation of Adults or Confirmation), traditional marriage (holy matrimony) and burial and funeral rites (Rites of Christian Burial). However, Christians do not accept traditional naming ceremony, puberty rites, marriage rites and burial rites as sacraments and insist that Asante Christians who perform these traditional rites of passage undergo the Christian rites of passage before they are admitted into the Christian sacraments. These discrepancies are basis for dialogue between Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion in order to harmonise Traditional naming ceremony with baptism, marriage rite with holy matrimony and burial rites with Christian burial rites. Scholars such as Daniel Kosomo³⁶ and Ignatius Nti-Abankoro³⁷ have called on Christian Theologians to harmonise these Christian rites of passage with Asante rites of passage in order to minimise the unnecessary duplication of rites in the Church and in Asante Traditional society.

Table 7: Respondents’ Views on the similarities between Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion Regarding Belief in ancestral veneration (Communion of Saints).

Responses	Frequency (n)	Frequency II (n2)	Percentage (%)	Percentage II (% n2)
I strongly disagree	42	105	11.2	28.0
Disagree	63		16.8	
Neither agree nor disagree	45	45	12.0	12.0
I agree	131	214	35.0	59.9
I strongly agree	83		24.9	
Total	374	374	100	100

³⁶ Daniel Kosomo. “An Analysis of the Rites of Passage and their relation to Christianity” Vol. 1 (8)(December 2009), 156-166 http://www.academicjournals.org/app/webroot/article/article1379414049_Kasomo%202.pdf.

³⁷ Ignatius Nti-Abankoro. “The Quest For A Truly African Christian Matrimony: Making the Asante Marriage Sacramental (unpublished MA Theology Thesis submitted to Spiritan University College, July 2018), 63, 74-75.

Missing Number	3	3		
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Source: Field Survey 2017

The data in Table 7 show that out of 374 respondents, 214 (59.9%) accepted that Christianity and Asante Traditional Religion share in common the belief in ancestral veneration (i.e. the Roman Catholic Church doctrine of veneration of saints) while 105 (28%) opposed. Three respondents did not answer the question. The analysis of the denominations shows that there were some differences in beliefs between Roman Catholic Christians and Protestant Christians. Whereas 110 (75.3%) Roman Catholics agreed that ancestral veneration and veneration of saints are the same phenomenon, 75 (56%) Methodists and 39 (59.9%) Pentecostals disagreed that they are the same or share anything in common. However, Roman Catholics believe that both saints and ancestors refer to dead people who lived holy lives while they were alive and are given to Christians or Asantes as models of emulation. While Christians call them saints, Asantes call them ancestors but they perform the same role and relate with the living in the same manner. Both saints and ancestors are interested in the wellbeing of the living. It is a matter of semantics or terminology. These areas of differences between Roman Catholic Christians and Protestant Christians and between Roman Catholics and Asante Traditional practitioners call for dialogue.

Table 9: Respondents Views according to Denominations on whether ancestral veneration is the same as veneration of saints.

Response	Denomination						Total
	Roman Catholic		Methodist		Church of Pentecost		
	Frequency (n)	%	Frequency (n)	%	Frequency	%	
No	89	64.0	97	74.6	50	58.8	247
Yes	47	33.8	33	25.4	27	31.8	107

Source: Fieldwork 2017

In terms of religious affiliation, 89 (64%) Roman Catholics, 97 (74.6%) Methodists and 50 (58.8%) Pentecostals disagreed that ancestral veneration is the same as veneration of Saints.

Moreover, when the question was asked whether it is against Christianity to venerate ancestors or whether the veneration of Saints is syncretic, there were divergent opinions between Roman Catholics and Protestants. A female Methodist pastor responded that “veneration of ancestors is against Christianity, it is superstitious and syncretic.” However, respondents who were Roman Catholics opined that the veneration of ancestors was not against Christianity. Rather it was the same as the veneration of Saints in the Roman Catholic Church. A Roman Catholic interviewee responded that Roman Catholics believe “ancestral veneration is not against Christianity. Ancestral veneration in itself is not superstitious. It depends on how it is done.” He further explained,

It depends upon one’s idea of the identity of the ancestors. Ancestors, in the context of the Catholic understanding, are worth venerating. However, the traditional idea of ancestors which is nebulous will call for a real discernment in embarking upon their veneration (Interview, 2017).

Another interviewee answered,

“No. Ancestral veneration is a remembrance of our departed ones who are recognised as worthy of emulation like the Saints. It is a sign that we are still in communion with them” (Interview, 2017).

Moreover, “For the traditional Asante, ancestral veneration is not superstitious, nor is it syncretic. It is an acknowledgement that we are still united. The Asante (African) concept of socialism is based on familyhood which comprises the living, the dead, and those yet to be born” (Interview, 2017). John Paul II in his Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa*, affirmed that “ancestral veneration is the preparation for belief in the Communion of the Saints.”³⁸ Also Conteh noted that Africans believe intuitively that the dead continue to live and remain in communion with the living.³⁹ Therefore, Africans are not doing anything strange when they place importance on the veneration of their ancestors. The veneration of ancestors is in line with Christian teachings.

Sarpong argued that the belief in the existence of the spirits of the dead and the influence they have over the living is found among all people, and in every conceivable religion and culture.⁴⁰ Christians believe in saints who are only good Christians who are dead and are believed to be in heaven enjoying eternal bliss with their Creator and Father. Just as Catholics venerate Saints, Africans also venerate their ancestors. The belief in ancestors and their veneration therefore, are not peculiar to any age, religion or society. Thus, Fasholé-Luke supports the view that “the worship offered to God and that offered to the ancestors can exist side by side without contradiction or idolatry,” meaning that ancestor worship does not constitute idolatry and therefore is not in conflict with worshipping God.⁴¹ The view as to whether Asantes worship the ancestors or venerate them is an important issue that admits of dialogue.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is my candid opinion that the findings of the case study reported in this paper suggest that there are sufficient grounds to encourage dialogue between Asante Traditional Religious practitioners and Christians. The way to promote such dialogue is to encourage open discussion with the purpose of reconciling the understandings of those whose religion is different from ours. The sustainability of such engagement will depend on the sincerity, openness and respect for alternative conceptualisations of the nature and love of God that dialoguing factions put on the table. Be it as it may, the thesis that dialogue between Asante Traditional Religion and Christianity in Ejisu Juaben Municipality is not unnecessary but also appears plausible.

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³⁸ John Paul II, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation, *Ecclesia in Africa* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1995), 43

³⁹ Prince S. Conteh, *Essays in African Religion and Christianity* (Accra: Cynergy Media Ent., 2012), 23

⁴⁰ Peter K. Sarpong, *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghanaian Culture* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1974), 33.

⁴¹ Fasholé-Luke. “Theological Reflection on Ancestor worship” (1974), 211, accessed October 23, 2018. url: <https://docplayer.net/28150498-Theological-reflection-on-ancestor-worship.html>.

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