


Christian Faith and Akan Culture in Ghana: A Review of Major Works of Sidney George Williamson



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ABSTRACT

Christian growth must not only be considered in terms of the growth of numbers. The growth in the church must also be considered in the level of depth and the quality of Christian conversion within a cultural milieu. The depth of the faith has a lot to do with how the Gospel speaks directly to the minds and hearts of its hearers. Moreover, the Gospel can speak to the hearts and minds of its hearers when the indigenous world views that condition the inner lives of the people are given serious consideration. The study is a review of the major works of Sidney George Williamson on the Christian faith and Akan culture in Ghana. As an early student of the tension between the Christian faith and Akan culture and the challenges of Christian identity, Williamson draws attention to the fact that Christianity can adequately meet Akan Christian needs when it pays attention to the cultural world view of the people it seeks to serve. The study as a qualitative one uses both primary and secondary sources. Interviews and observations were conducted in some Akan communities on the integration of Christian faith and Akan cultural worldview. The study points to the fact that the construction of theology among Akan Christians must be done from the inside to the outside and not from outside to the inside, the approach that Western missionaries adopted. The spiritual needs of Akan Christians will be adequately met when they hear the Gospel in their own cultural understandings rather than theology done in the West offered to the Akan in European worldview. The study further calls attention to the preparedness of the churches in the Akan cultural environment for paradigm shifts in the Christian faith and Akan Cultural engagements in post-missionary African Christianity.

Keywords: Akan Culture, Christian Faith, Local Theologies, Sidney George Williamson

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INTRODUCTION

Christian growth must not only be considered in the growth of numbers. The growth in the church must also be considered in the level of depth and the quality of Christian conversion. S.G Williamson¹ has asked African ministers to account for the depth of the Christian faith among African Christians. Williamson has noted that, 'it is customary for the missionaries and African ministers to account for this by adducing a deficient spiritual life brought about by a growth in numbers but not in depth.'²

¹ Sidney G. Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith –A Comparative Study of the Impact of Two Religions*, (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1965).

² Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 45.

The depth of the faith has a lot to do with how the gospel speaks directly to the minds and hearts of its hearers. Moreover, the Gospel can speak to the hearts and minds of its hearers when the indigenous world views that condition the inner lives of the people are given serious consideration. Noel Smith has urged for, ‘a fresh consideration of the social and religious factors embodied in the indigenous Akan world-view and which condition the inner life of the people, so that the message of the Gospel may speak directly to their minds and hearts.’³

Smith has further noted that the advent of the Christian faith has not disconnected the people from their cultural worldviews. The effort of disintegration of the Christian faith from the cultural worldview must explain the challenges of Akan Christians conversion experience. According to Smith, ‘the advent of Christianity and the adoption of the Christian faith by many Africans have not changed the traditional worldview, and it is this fact that has given rise to many of the problems which beset the Christian church today.’⁴ Robert Rattray has subsequently argued for the cultural ennoblement of Akan cultural values. He observed that, ‘we have been at too much pains to ignore the value of their own past beliefs, and to hasten to destroy them.’⁵

There is a need for responses to the challenge of depth among Akan Christians. In responding to the challenge of the depth in Akan Christian faith, Williamson has noted that considerations must be given to integration by ministers and theologians. He argues that, ‘the issue of importance is, not whether the church has been established, but what kind of church and whether it is integrated with Akan society and able to meet in a real and vital fashion Akan spiritual need.’⁶ It is when the Christian faith is allowed to be well rooted in Akan cultural values that the spiritual needs of Akan Christians can be met. According to Williamson, ‘the church can meet Akan Christian needs only if it is adequately integrated into the cultural world-view of the people.’⁷ The tension in Akan Christian converts will be addressed when the Christian faith is well-grounded in the cultural values. Williamson has argued that, ‘the church is an alien institution, not yet rooted in Akan traditional life and failing to meet Akan spiritual need.’⁸

Theology done outside the cultural milieu of the hearers does not help much. According to Robert Schreiter, ‘there was a growing sense that the theologies being inherited from the older churches of the North Atlantic community did not fit well into these quite different cultural circumstances.’⁹ Theology that speaks to the hearts and minds of the recipients of the Gospel must be done from the inside the cultural world views of its context.

The process towards the construction of theology is as important as the theology itself. To avoid a situation where a particular theology becomes alien to a faith community, the construction process must equally be theological. The indigenous theological perspectives must therefore inform the construction of the theology. The indigenous perspectives can be identified and appreciated when the search is done from the inside of the indigenous knowledge systems.

There is a prevailing tension between the Christian faith and the Akan cultural world. The church must account for the tension and disintegration in Akan Christian conversion and respond to the call to have the church grounded firm and deep in Akan cultural soil in order to avoid alien churches on Akan cultural soil, an investigation that the research seeks to provide some responses.

METHODOLOGY

The research, a qualitative study was pursued through primary and secondary sources. Observations were conducted on Asante indigenous knowledge systems in some palaces, communities and congregations. Williamson’s major works on Asante¹⁰ i.e., *Christianity and African Culture*, and *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith – A Comparative Study of the Impact of Two Religions* were extensively examined together

³ Noel Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana, 1835-1960*. (Accra: Ghana University Press, 1966), 280..

⁴ Smith, *Presbyterian Church of Ghana*, 65.

⁵ Robert S. Rattray, *Religion and Art in Ashanti*. (London: Oxford University Press, 1927), 291.

⁶ Williamson, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 73.

⁷ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 172-173.

⁸ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 172-173.

⁹ Robert J. Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*. (New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 1.

¹⁰ Sidney G. Williamson’s work on the Christian Faith and the Akan Culture include, *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, Accra: Ghana University Press, 1965 and *Christianity and African Culture*. (Accra: Christian Council of Gold Coast, 1955).

with other relevant available materials on the engagements of the African cultural values with the Christian faith. Through observation on the interplay of Akan cultural values and Christian faith in some Asante congregations and interviews, the study identified the need to pursue Akan Christian theology from the inside and not from the outside.

Williamson and the Impact of the Christian Faith on Akan Culture

Sidney George Williamson, a Methodist missionary to Ghana, played a very significant role in the formation of Christian leadership in Ghana. When the Christian churches decided to pursue ecumenical theological education in Ghana, Williamson was appointed as the founding Principal of Trinity College at Kumasi (now Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon) in 1942. The initial challenge of the independent church in Ghana involved the development of Christian leadership theology that would be relevant to the churches in Ghana. Williamson considered the integration of indigenous intellectual resources into theological education as the approach towards the construction of relevant theologies in Ghana.¹¹

Williamson extended the quest for the construction of relevant Christian theologies into the public academy. When the Department of Divinity, now the Department of Study of Religions, was established in 1948 at the University of the Gold Coast (now Ghana), Williamson again joined the Department as Senior Lecturer. The Department has nurtured many of the Christian leaders who desired further studies as it then offered one of the few opportunities in the country for higher theological education.

He, later on, became the Chairman of the Christian Council of Gold Coast (Ghana). When Williamson became the chairman of the Christian Council of Ghana, the preoccupation of the council, among others, was to seek answers to the place of indigenous intellectual resources in Christian interpretation. Efforts were made in the form of national consultations to explore how the church could be rooted in African cultural soil. In 1955, the Christian Council of Ghana subsequently organized a national conference on Christianity and African culture under his chairmanship.

Williamson as chairman and editor of the proceedings wrote the summary paper of the conference. He indicated that the conference title of creating Christianity and African cultures as separate entities and therefore a clash of cultures was a misfortune. He stated, 'it is a misfortune that Christianity and African culture should appear on the title page of the conference agenda as separate spheres of experience. Yet they do so because for so many this is the experience of life.'¹² His challenge was the fact that the Christian faith and the African culture were presented as two different faiths at the conference. Williamson noted further that while there was growth in the church in terms of numbers, the church members were living their faith with inner tension as they were still ruled by their indigenous knowledge systems.

He further noted that, 'as every pastor in the church can testify, while the majority of Christians have accepted the church in its outward forms, their inward spirit is still ruled by the attitudes and outlook of the old culture. The two are kept apart, not necessarily and because they belong to opposing areas of life, but because men and women desire and expect to keep them apart. The committed Christian would say, this happens because the majority will not surrender their all to Christ. The non-Christian, concerned for his traditional culture, would say it is because the church is 'foreign' and cannot speak to the real need of the people. The probability seems to be that both are right.' He admonished that the church can help its new converts by allowing the Christian faith to speak to African Christians in their own cultural thoughts and understandings. He opined that, 'it is for the church to think its way through this problem and proclaim its faith as God's word to Africa.'¹³

Williamson seeks to consider the impact of the Christian faith on Akan indigenous belief systems. The key question that Williamson sought to answer is how the church could be rooted in Akan cultural soil. The question was raised with the realization that Christianity can meet the spiritual needs of the people when it is interpreted in the cultural categories of the people that it seeks to serve. The Christian faith among the Akan people had been presented as an alien institution. Williamson considered the integration of the Christian faith into Akan cultural categories as the key component that must be pursued if the church would become indigenous and relevant to the people it has been called to serve.

¹¹ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*.

¹² Sidney G. Williamson. *Christianity and African Culture*, (Accra: Christian Council of the Gold Coast 1955), vi.

¹³ Williamson. *Christianity and African Culture*, vi.

The church in the Akan cultural milieu is still confronted with the challenges of tensions and disintegrations since the first work of Williamsons was published almost six decades ago. The question that still must be answered is not whether the church has been established in Akan or not but does it have depth in the Akan cultural milieu. Akan Christians will need a faith grounded firm and deep in their indigenous knowledge systems to meet their spiritual needs.

Akan Christian Conversion

Western missionaries presented the Christian faith to the Akan people who had their own indigenous belief systems and cultural values. The acceptance of the Christian faith, however, demanded that the new converts disconnect themselves from their indigenous belief systems. The impression was that the Christian faith and Akan indigenous belief systems do not have common grounds for integration. Williamson has indicated that, 'the convert learned to avoid all kinds of traditional practices, and all too often to despise the old pattern of life.'¹⁴ The missionaries saw their task as calling the Akan into new life. In his effort to explain the attitude of the Western missionaries, Williamson argues that the missionaries' approach to the indigenous belief system was, 'unfavourable to Akan customary ways and traditional life. He understood his purpose in terms of calling the convert from traditional associations in heathen surroundings into a new way of life.'¹⁵

The new converts were confronted with the question of living their newfound Christian faith without disconnecting themselves from their cultural and belief values. Busia has opined that 'the new convert is poised between two worlds: the old traditions and customs he is striving to leave behind, the new beliefs and practices to which he is still a stranger. The church would help him better if it understood the former while it spoke with authority about the latter.'¹⁶ The effort to accept the Christian faith without its preparedness to integrate into the indigenous knowledge systems did not allow the new converts to have depth as they could not relate the Christian faith to their cultural past. Busia has argued that 'for conversion to the Christian faith to be more than superficial, the Christian church must come to grips with traditional beliefs and practices, and with the world-view that these beliefs and practices imply.'¹⁷

Akan Christian Attitude Towards their Own Cultural Values

The disconnection of the new converts from the cultural values became paramount in missionary efforts. Williamson has noted that, 'the primary task of missionaries among the Akan was the destruction of traditional superstition and the implantation of the Christian faith.'¹⁸ Church members paid allegiance to church leaders more than their traditional leaders. The new Akan Christian converts and the educated Christians considered their church leaders and missionaries as their community leaders without much recognition to the traditional leaders.

The relationship of the Christians with their traditional leaders and indigenous knowledge systems could be explained by the kind of Christian formation presented by the missionaries. According to Busia, 'by becoming Christians, they have put themselves under a new authority. Their disputes are settled by the catechist, the leaders of the congregation, or the priest or minister. Church law and discipline regulate their conduct. They regard themselves as a separate community under the authority of the European missionary who is the head of the church. This is how most Ashanti Christians think of their new status. That is how the chiefs see it too.'¹⁹

Salem and Christian Formation

To facilitate Christian living, new Christian settlements were created for the new converts most often in the outskirts of the town. The effort to create Christian settlements was defended with scriptural bases. Williamson noted that, 'the Basel Mission went farther, separating its converts geographically, grouping them

¹⁴ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 57.

¹⁵ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 56.

¹⁶ Williamson (ed). *Christianity and African Culture*, iii.

¹⁷ Williamson (ed). *Christianity and African Culture*, iii.

¹⁸ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 54.

¹⁹ Kofi Abrefa Busia. *Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), 137.

in a segment of the town, called Salem, and using such scriptural injunctions as 2 Cor 6: 17.²⁰ Paul according to (2 Cor. 6:17), admonished that since the Corinthians have become Christians, they were expected to disassociate themselves from unbelievers. They were supposed not to associate themselves with those who did not believe in the Christian faith. Christians were the light of the world and therefore should not be associated with darkness. The Christian settlements were created on the assumption that the Christian faith and Akan indigenous belief systems could not live side by side. The effort to come out of their own cultural communities meant a disassociation from the cultural identity and community.

The Christian settlements became missionary responses to the nurturing of new converts. The acceptance to locate to the Christian settlements was an indication that an individual was prepared to disassociate from the families and cultural values. The new converts subsequently developed an attitude of shame and rejection of their indigenous belief systems. According to Williamson, 'the convert learned to avoid all kinds of traditional practices, and all too often to despise the old pattern of life.'²¹

The mission house, the church and schools became the new centres of nurturing of moral and other values. The Christians were unwilling to integrate their Christian faith into their indigenous knowledge systems. Determination of appreciable living standards in the communities became the preserve of Christian leaders. The Christian faith, however, was understood within the Western missionaries' cultural understandings. Williamson argues that, 'drawn away from his tribal pattern of living, he entered a new type of society, whose centre was the mission house, the church, and the school, and where new ideas and concepts, religious and social, expressed in terms of a European culture and not integrated with his own background, were set before him.'²²

Salem created religious tension within the new Akan Christian converts. What the new converts heard from the church, they actually interpreted within the religious values that they received during the celebration of the various rites of passage. Williamson noted, the conflict with traditional beliefs and practices is, moreover, present within the church. The convert enters the church as a traditional Akan attracted to an institution whose demands and concepts are basically foreign to him. However great the attraction, and however sincere his attachment to the church, he cannot deny himself, or the society within which he has been nurtured. He carries within himself his traditional outlook and attitudes, the religious and social valuations of his people. What he hears he interprets in terms of his own thoughts. He seeks to fit the church's demands and teachings into his own social and religious moulds. It is not therefore surprising that wherever one turns in the church the religious and social valuations of the Akan people manifest themselves.²³

Rites of Passage as Akan Formation Patterns

The primary Akan indigenous formation pattern is the rites of passage. Akan rites of passage include rites covering naming ceremonies, puberty rites for young people, marriage rites and funerals. According to Kwabena Nketia, 'the rites of passage are the rites that are performed to initiate an individual through the various developmental stages.'²⁴ The naming rite gives Akan children acceptance and identity. The naming rites also determine acceptable moral values as infants are named after individuals whose moral lives receive approval. Infants are not named after those that society frowns upon in their moral lives.²⁵

Puberty rites prepare young people for adulthood. Girls are educated in home management, hygiene, relationship with in-laws and community participation. It also provides checks on youthful emotional challenges as the virginity of the adolescent becomes one of the measures to determine approval for participation in the marriage rite. Marriage among the Akan is a union not just between two young people who love each other. Marriage in the Akan cultural thought is between the families of the young people. The marriage rites are celebrated to announce the union between the families.²⁶

Funeral rites prepare the dead for the next world. For the Akan death is a transition. The world of the dead must be prepared to accept an individual. Nketia noted that 'the rites that are performed for the dead

²⁰ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 56.

²¹ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 57.

²² Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 57.

²³ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 74.

²⁴ Interview with Kwabena Nketia May 19, 2004 Madina Accra.

²⁵ Interview with Kwabena Nketia May 19, 2004 Madina Accra.

²⁶ Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye May 14, 2004 Legon Accra.

open doors for the dead to the world of the dead and contribute to their acceptance.²⁷ If an individual is not properly buried, they may not attract the acceptance of the ancestors. Meanwhile, the belief is that the dead have a significant role to play among the living. They may bring blessings or curses on the living. The fear of incurring the anger of the dead compels the Akan people to adequately observe the funeral rites. Busia has opined that ‘the ancestors are believed to send help to their descendants.’²⁸

The Quest for Un-Alien Akan Churches

The creation of Christian settlements and the interpretation of the Gospel to Akan Christian in a European cultural worldview created the impression that the church was alien to the Akan cultural milieu. Christian faith presented by the Basel Mission had its origins in Europe. Christianity however, must be considered as a universal faith that is capable of surviving in all cultural environments.²⁹ Christianity was presented to the Akan from its inception by the Basel Mission according to Williamson, ‘as a foreign religion, in effect as a European religion. Christianity was a foreign religion from the start, not only in the sense that Christianity as a spiritual apprehension of divine reality must be foreign whenever it is introduced but in the sense that the Christian faith was expressed in a European mode through European propagators. The Christian faith is seen as the white man’s religion, rather than as a universal faith for hearers.’³⁰

Akan people have accepted the Christian faith. Even though the Christian faith was introduced to the Akan people by Western missionaries, the acceptance of the Akan people makes the faith cease to be a foreign belief system. Christianity as a universal faith must therefore find an eternal home in the Akan cultural milieu.³¹ The Christian faith ceases to be a foreign belief system when it is allowed to adopt the indigenous knowledge systems for its expression and interpretation.

The Basel missionaries offered the Akan Christians the Gospel within the cultural worldview of Europe and not the Akan milieu.³² The approach was not in tandem with the example of the early New Testament Apostles who presented the Gospel in the then known world within the various cultural environments. Williamson admits that the ‘the missionary enterprise among the Akan did not take this line, but being western in outlook and emphasis felt bound to deny the Akan world view, not only on the basis of what was essentially Christian belief but on the ground of what was, in effect, a European world view.’³³

The early Western missionaries’ approach of presenting the Gospel within the European cultural worldview did not encourage the integration of the faith within the Akan worldview. The primary formation and socialization patterns like the rites of passage were not considered in the development of Christian formation patterns. According to Williamson, ‘the church has failed to incorporate into its life valued Akan customs connected with rites of passage.’³⁴ The Basel Mission Christian formation pattern among Akan Christians sought to call them out from their cultural belief system. The intention was not to redeem them within their cultural setting. Christian education and formation in Akan churches must engage the rites of passage.

The Need for Paradigm Shift

The post-missionary Akan churches must consider a paradigm shift in the development of their Christian nurturing and understanding to make it more grounded in Akan cultural values.³⁵ The task towards un-alien churches on the Akan cultural milieu must go beyond what missionaries did or did not do. Akan Christians who have benefited from the missionary efforts of the Western missionaries must accept the responsibility of the task of integration of the Christian faith in Akan cultural worldview.³⁶ It must be admitted that the attitude of Akan converts to their own cultural values was not different from the Western missionaries. However, they

²⁷ Interview with Kwabena Nketia May 19, 2004 Madina Accra.

²⁸ Busia, *The Position of the Chief in the Modern Political System of Ashanti*, , 25.

²⁹ Kwame Bediako, *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture Upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa*, (Oxford: Regnum Books 1992).

³⁰ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 19.

³¹ Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*. (New York: Orbis Books), 1996.

³² Robert S. Rattray, *Ashanti*. (London: Oxford University Press), 1955.

³³ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 168.

³⁴ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 75.

³⁵ Smith, *The Presbyterian Church of Ghana*.

³⁶ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 171.

are the very people who must accept the responsibility of the task of working on Akan local theologies that pay attention to Akan indigenous knowledge systems. It is anticipated that Akan Christians will appreciate their own cultural values and make them available for the development of relevant local Christian theologies.³⁷

The Akan converts, Williamson indicated, were to be involved in the creation of what he considered to be a creative attitude that was needed for the integration in theological construction. The Akan converts were identified as playing roles in the condemnation of their traditional past. Williamson sought a change in attitude not only by the missionaries but also by the Akan people. He observed that, 'the convert often approved the missionaries' ways and outlook, and copied them. Instead of providing the missionary with the insights whereby a creative attitude to traditional Akan life might be worked out, the convert sided with him, possibly outdid him, in the condemnation of the traditional past.'³⁸

The Task that still must be done

Theology is the reflection of faith in a given situation. Its relevance is determined by its familiarity with the environment of its recipients and its ability in meeting needs.³⁹ The theology that Akan Christians received through the early missionaries was not allowed to fully engage the Akan indigenous intellectual resources. As Noel Smith indicated, 'the task is still to be done.'⁴⁰ Relevant Akan Christian theology must prepare Christians who will remain Christians and Akan. The task that the post-missionary Akan Christian theologians ought to pursue involves making the Christian faith find a permanent home in Akan indigenous knowledge systems.

Theology must be relevant to the context within which it functions. It must reflect and respond to the questions of the people involved. The recipients must come to the realization that their own faith and spiritual questions have been. Such people, it can be said have discovered Christ for themselves.⁴¹

The studies of the early students of the relationship between the Christian faith and Akan cultural worldview points to the fact that there exist indigenous knowledge systems that must be intentionally explored for the Christian understanding and formation of Akan Christians. The advice that they left for the churches was that deeper exploration must be pursued into the indigenous knowledge systems to identify the available indigenous intellectual resources necessary for Christian expression and interpretation.⁴²

The Task Towards Integration

The contributions of the Basel Mission and other Western missionaries among the Akan people are duly recognized by the early students of the missionary enterprise in Akan societies. The concern, however, is the inadequate integration of cultural values into the Christian faith.⁴³ The challenge that has remained among Akan Christians especially in the post missionary churches is how the church should be able to meet the real spiritual needs of the people. Christianity moreover must not present itself as an alien institution to the people. Williamson insists that, 'the church is an alien institution, not yet rooted in Akan traditional life and failing to meet Akan spiritual need.'⁴⁴

The church in the Akan community had remained a Christianity of the West according to Williamson.⁴⁵ The post missionary Akan Christians were expected to accept the challenge of the task towards integration for Akan Christian interpretation and understanding to be properly rooted in the cultural milieu. The specific areas that he identified as being of a Western form of Christianity included church polity, church organization and leadership, liturgy, and Christian formation. He noted, 'the polity and organization, the liturgies and devotional expressions, the discipline and instruction, the total outlook derives directly from the parent missionary societies and the churches supporting them. The Christianity of the Akan area proves to be the denominational Christianity of the West.'⁴⁶

³⁷ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*,171.

³⁸ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*,171.

³⁹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*.

⁴⁰ Smith. *Presbyterian Church of Ghana*, 8.

⁴¹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*.

⁴² Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*,171.

⁴³ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*,171.

⁴⁴ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*,172-173..

⁴⁵ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*,171.

⁴⁶ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 165.

Williamson suggests that if the Christian faith was rooted in the Akan cultural values, then the construction of Christian theologies in the areas he identified must not adopt European cultural resources for their expression. Expression of Christian worship, leadership and organizations, Christian formation and teaching must be done with Akan indigenous intellectual resources to ensure not only making the Christian faith indigenous but also capable of meeting the spiritual needs of the members.⁴⁷

Williamson anticipated a change in the missionary attitude towards Akan indigenous resources. At least the attitude of condemning everything African was specifically condemned. Williamson noted that, 'the missionary attitude to indigenous beliefs and practices and to traditional institutions has left at least the impression that in the eyes of western missionaries everything African is to be condemned.'⁴⁸

He anticipated a new way of theological construction that would pursue a departure from the nineteenth-century practice where missionaries considered Africa as a dark and barbaric continent. Williamson observed that the construction of theology and pursuit of Christian ethics among Akan communities were not different from the phenomenon he described. He observes, 'the Western missionary impact can be seen as a concomitant of the total western import in its religious and humanitarian aspects upon the Akan world. The nineteenth-century ideal of redeeming 'darkest Africa' from its 'barbarism' by the application, through governance and missions, of western civilization and the Christian religion found particular expression in its religious and ethical form through the missionary task.'⁴⁹

Smith expected African Christians and theologians to play a pioneering role in the conversion and re-interpretation of Africa culture. He noted, 'we still await African theologians who will pioneer in this task of re-interpretation.'⁵⁰ His emphasis on African theologians pioneering the conversion and reinterpretation of African indigenous resources stemmed from the fact that they possessed insights into the cultural resources and were expected to be sympathetic to their cultural understanding. According to Smith, 'ultimately the problem of indigenizing Christian worship rests with African Christians who have an insight into the Christian faith and a sympathetic understanding of the problems of worship in their own changing society.'⁵¹

Expanding the Old With the New Insights

The Basel Mission and other Western Missionaries that worked among the Akan presented the existing Christian understandings on issues as then pertained in their home countries. The new Akan converts did not get the opportunity to know and understand how they developed their Christian understandings. The Western missionaries developed various educational programmes that were used in church and schools to educate church members. The educational programmes and materials were not developed with the new Akan Christians. The Western missionaries only presented what they knew and considered to be needful for their new converts.⁵²

The Akan Christians did not ask questions about how they could add to what their missionaries handed over to them from their own cultural milieu. That became possible because they were not allowed to consider the theological weight in their own indigenous knowledge systems. The non-participation of the Akan Christians in the development of the Christian understandings and interpretations of the Gospel for their use made the integration of the Akan indigenous knowledge systems in the Christian faith near impossible. The Akan Christian faith though has witnessed growth, also had challenges with depth because the faith was considered as foreign to the Akan cultural values.⁵³

The post-missionary Akan church must continue with the search into the relevant resources in their own cultural heritage. They understand their people better and are part of the cultural heritage. Akan Christians need to pursue a new dimension of exploration into the cultural understandings and the values adequately. There is a need for a critical review of the indigenous systems and their place in Christian interpretation and understanding.⁵⁴ This discipline must be pursued in terms of Akan Christians' own conceptions of what they

⁴⁷ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 165.

⁴⁸ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 168.

⁴⁹ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 166.

⁵⁰ Smith. *Presbyterian Church of Ghana*, 272.

⁵¹ Smith. *Presbyterian Church of Ghana*, 274.

⁵² Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 166.

⁵³ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 166.

⁵⁴ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 166.

want, how they see church life and worship. Akan Christians need to build values and standards that are deeply rooted in the indigenous knowledge systems.

Kwame Gyekye⁵⁵ and Nana Addo Dankwa⁵⁶ have established Akan indigenous knowledge systems that are embedded in their oral literature, ideas, values, and philosophies. These are the elements that inform their interpretation of the Gospel. Akan Christians must build their own Christian understandings based on the insights from the cultural milieu. The new Akan Christian worldview includes the old pre-missionary worldviews. There is the need to expand the old which was initially rejected with the new insights obtained over the years.

Akan Christian understandings must embrace what the people can do in terms of their experiences of the past and the new insights that they have received from their reflections on their contemporary cultural environment. The approach of Western missionaries should have been theological construction from inside to outside to expand what the Akan have and to throw away certain things because the insight has shown that some experiences have changed.⁵⁷ Integration must be pursued into Christian worship and understanding based on a thorough understanding of the indigenous knowledge system to be able to ascertain what must be integrated and what lacks integration.

Constructing Christian Theology from the Inside to the Outside

Christian understandings and interpretation of the Gospel for Akan churches must be developed from inside of the cultural milieu to the benefit of the outside global Christian community and not from outside (European cultural worldview) to the inside (Akan cultural worldview), but that has been the Akan Christian experience over the years.⁵⁸ The approach of building theology from outside to inside has not been very helpful, however, the Akan Christians did not also know enough of the inside and that has not encouraged them to do it from inside to the outside.

Constructing theology from inside is based on the assumption that ‘God meets us at where we are and therefore the reflection on the Christian faith must be done from what is known and properly understood.’⁵⁹ The parables Jesus told often presented cultural examples like farming, fishing, inheritance system that his audience was familiar with. The Christian faith therefore must be allowed to engage the questions of the people. The people concerned can claim the outcome of such theological development as their own.⁶⁰

Theological construction, which is made out of the indigenous knowledge systems is therefore built based on the understandings of the tradition and heritage of the local people. Construction of theology from inside must be pursued with available cultural resources. Cultural values and resources are in the process enabled to facilitate the interpretation of the Christian faith. Theology, when built from inside, is the attempt to remove the foreign cultural world-views which were used and allowed to dominate theological development among the recipients of the Christian faith.⁶¹

Foreign cultural worldview when allowed to serve as the dominant cultural resource in the interpretation of the Christian faith eventually gives cultural impositions and dominance to the process of Christian understanding and interpretation. When it happens this way, Williamson has suggested that it will make the Christian faith an alien institution to its recipients.⁶²

Theology when done from outside to the inside tends to make the foreign cultural categories superior to the receptor cultural milieu. Theology becomes richer and more relevant when the Christian faith is allowed to engage the cultural values of its new environment. When such is done, the Christian faith really finds a home and properly becomes integrated into the new cultural milieu. The approach of constructing theology from outside to the inside has become the experience of the Akan church. This approach it must be noted has not been very beneficial.

⁵⁵ Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values*, (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company 1996).

⁵⁶ Nana Addo Dankwa III, *The Institution of Chieftaincy in Ghana – The Future*. (Accra: Konrad Adenauer Foundation, 2004).

⁵⁷ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*.

⁵⁸ Interview with Kwabena Nketia May 19, 2004 Madina Accra.

⁵⁹ Interview with Kwabena Nketia May 19, 2004 Madina Accra.

⁶⁰ Interview with Sam Prempeh September 1, 2004 Osu Accra.

⁶¹ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*.

⁶² Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*.

CONCLUSION

Williamson is recognized as one of the key contributors to theological education and Christian leadership formation both in the seminary and public academy in Ghana. His major concern in theological education was that Christian leaders would be well-grounded in the Bible and the indigenous knowledge systems within the cultural milieu which they pursue Christian interpretation and formation.⁶³ Christian leaders who are well grounded in the Bible, he insists must allow the indigenous knowledge systems to inform their Christian understanding and interpretations. According to Williamson, 'it is conceivable that as pure faith, Christianity might have spoken directly to the Akan in his apprehension of reality.'⁶⁴

The disintegration of Akan indigenous knowledge systems from Christian interpretation and theological developments, it has been noted, would make the church remain an alien institution. Theological development and Christian interpretation fail in meeting the real needs of church members if the church becomes an alien institution in a given cultural milieu. The development of relevant Christian theology has a lot to do with the ability of the members to interpret and integrate the Christian faith into their indigenous intellectual resources. They would be able to live the faith when they become stable in the faith, which is well-rooted in their cultural worldview. The lack of recognition of indigenous knowledge systems causes theological tensions in the spirituality and belief system of the church members as they struggle to interpret the Christian faith in their own cultural milieu, the very experience that has taken place in Akan missionary churches.

It is anticipated that the construction of theology in the Akan church would consider the integration of Akan indigenous knowledge systems. Moreover, Akan people who have accepted the Christian faith must provide insights into the indigenous knowledge systems that are needed for the construction of such local theologies. Relevant theology which will make Akan Christians grounded firm and deep in the Christian faith must consider indigenous belief systems. The tension between Akan culture and the Christian faith that Williamson observed six decades ago still exists in Akan Christian communities. Williamson's responses to the Akan cultural worldviews and the Christian faith have not adequately been exhausted.

The study has observed the need for integration in the post-missionary churches and observation that other African scholars like Kwame Bediako,⁶⁵ John Mbiti,⁶⁶ have come to be identified with. Moreover, attention must be paid to indigenous formation patterns such as the rites of passage in Christian formation and education to ensure that the un-alien churches in Akan cultural milieu curriculum of theological education must pay strategic attention to the exploration of African indigenous knowledge systems. Theological construction in African Christianity that will respond to the cultural worldviews that shape the inner mind and hearts of the Akan people must be definitely done from inside the cultural milieu to the outside. The study subsequently points out the re-interpretation of the Christian understanding of the Gospel within the Akan Cultural milieu for relevant development of Akan local theologies that will eventually serve as Akan Christian contribution to African Christianity.

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⁶³ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 168.

⁶⁴ Williamson. *Akan Religion and the Christian Faith*, 168.

⁶⁵ Kwame Bediako. *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

⁶⁶ John, Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy.* (London: Heinemann, 1969).

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APPENDIX

- Interview with Mercy Amba Oduyoye May 14, 2004, Legon Accra.
- Interview with Kwabena Nketia May 19, 2004, Madina Accra.
- Interview with Sam Prempeh September 1, 2004, Osu Accra.
- Interview with Nana Addo Dankwa III November 22, 2004, Akropong Akuapem.