The 12 Annual-Lecture in Honor of Professor Nehemia Levtzion Held at the Levtzion Center for Islamic Studies, Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

"Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Coexistence: Muslims in the Context of Ghanaian Society."

A Presentation by Professor David Owusu-Ansah, James Madison University, Harrisonburg, Virginia, USA.

An Abstract:

In many parts of the developing world, religion is singled out as the course for violent clashes. At the 2007 TrustAfrica workshop in Dakar, religious leaders, scholars, and experts from 12 African countries and the Diaspora were assembled to explore this concern under the theme of "Meeting the Challenges of Religion and Pluralism in Africa." The organizers of the workshop noted that religiously justified conflicts were often the repackaging of community concerns regarding issues of social, economic, and political injustices, inequities and exclusions. A project on "religious pluralism and interfaith coexistence in Ghana" that examined the role of local traditions as foundational to interfaith dialogue was funded in 2008 and my colleague Dr. Emmanuel Akyeampong of Harvard University and our research team conducted interviews with traditional religious leaders in Ghana and reported our findings to TurstAfrica subsequently.

Prior to the TrustAfrica funded research, there was also an investigative project into Islam and Religious Tolerance that was funded through Michigan State University and Harvard. Invited to participate in this project, I gained the support to complete my investigation into Muslims and secular education in Ghana—a project that has since been published under the book title *Islamic Learning, the State and the Challenges of Education in Ghana* (2014).

Several issues emerging from the field conversations are pertinent to topics that Professor Levtzion wrote about. *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa* (1968), *Conversion into Islam* (1979), and his *Rural and Urban Islam in West Africa* (1987) all dealt with the challenges that faced Muslims who lived within indigenous communities. This presentation is a continuation of the conversation about how Ghanaian indigenous religious values were critical in shaping the manner by which interreligious peace has been maintained.

I: An Introduction

Let me start this presentation with an expression of a heartfelt thanks to Dr. Liat Kozma and the Nehemia Levtzion Center for extending an invitation that gives me this opportunity to talk to such an august audience.

The last time I was in Jerusalem was during the 1984/85 academic year when I arrived here as the Lester Martin Fellow at the Truman Institute. I recall a very warm reception and support from the Institute; and it was not long that I felt a part of the community. I continue to be thankful to those who made the stay in Jerusalem a great experience—Professors Edy Kaufman, Naomi Chazan, Miriam Hoexter and, of course Nehemia, Tirtza and the Levtzion family. I have and I continue to remember all of you fondly.

Particularly important to me is how this opportunity allows me to be a part of something special that is associated with the name and prestige of Professor Nehemia Levtzion—a very respected scholar. Nehemia showed pride in the students he mentored and he guided us to make research and scholarship have an impact in this field of the study of Islam in Africa.

The first speaker of this series was Professor Michael Brett, formerly of the University of London's School for Oriental and African Studies. He eloquently examined the implications and dynamics of the Islamization of Egypt and North Africa. Last year, Professor Lena Salaymeh of Tel Aviv University discussed the legal traditions regarding circumcision in antiquity and as it related to Jewish, Christian, and Muslim existence. She argued against the linear and genealogical relationship between the two traditions but noted the widespread practice of circumcision in the Near East.

In the Risala of Ibn Abi Zayd (10^{th} century North African Muslim jurist), circumcision was presented as an important practice for the perfection of a man's Islam but he also instructed Muslims not to follow the Jewish requirement of circumcising the child on the eighth day of birth. Rather, Ibn Abi Zayd argued that the Muslim boy was to be circumcised before he was able to pray on his own, which should be about age ten. Such an instruction was indeed problematic for Africans who converted to Islam late in life. For example, while Kabaka Mutesa, who ruled his Kingdom of Buganda in the Lake Victoria region of East Africa into the 1880s, may have found Abi Zayd's exemption from circumcision on the grounds that the practice could be injurious to one's health as a good compromise, the caveat that the testimony of an uncircumcised person could not be admissible in the court of law was an affront to the authority of the king. For an absolute monarch, the possibility that his words may not be acceptable in his own court because of his refusal to be circumcised was illogical. After all, the perfection of the king was due to his unblemished state of being. The Kabaka gave up Islam and tried his fate on Christianity.

I reference the case above, not merely to link my presentation today to Michael Brett's inaugural lecture or Professor Salaymeh's from last year. Ultimately, what I want to highlight is the fact that conversion has consequences—especially as it does not take place in a cultural vacuum. The particular environments within which conversion takes place and events resulting out of such circumstances have long-term impacts. It is for this reason that the historic peaceful spread of Islam in particular regions of West Africa continues to be of scholarly importance.

II: The Color of Water: Contextualizing the work of Nehemia Levtzion into Ghana's Cultural Tradition of Religious Tolerance

In his first book titled *Muslims and Chiefs in West Africa* (1968), Professor Levtzion focused not so much on the spread of Muslim traders in the region, but rather on the activities of Muslim clerics whose venture into the non-Islamic territories of the Volta Basin (see map below) started the process of Islamization of the area and beyond.

Composed of the Dagomba, Gonja, Gurma, and Nanumba now in territories of modern Ghana, and the Mossi, Gurma and Grunshi in modern Burkina Faso, Levtzion, similar to scholars as Lamin Sanneh and Ivor Wilks, traced the history of Muslim clerical services performed for non-Muslim rulers. Over time, Dagomba and Gonja rulers came to "accept" Islam but the majority of their rural communities remained traditionalists.

From the writings on the Islamization of North Africa and Egypt as Michael Brett presented, to those on the role of Muslim clerics in traveling trading caravans across the Sahara and even to the works on conversions and the Islamization of sub-Saharan West Africa, urban centers were presented as representing the seats of traditional rulers and therefore of commerce. Such locations favored traders and clerics who spread the influence of Islam. The rural regions where the majority of the non-Muslim locals resided were locations where puritan Muslims retreated when they became dissatisfied with the quality of urban Islam, and in some cases these were sites from where jihads were planned and staged. Cases of the rural-urban interplay in the history of West Africa were illustrated in the Nehemia Levtzion and Humphrey Fisher 1987-edited book, titled *Rural and Urban Islam in West Africa*. Predominantly, however, the African villages remained traditional and retained the purity of the local cosmology that attributed spiritual agency to all factors of production—believing that hard work and the fertility of land alone were not sufficient guarantors of productive outcomes.

In the Akan forest environment, which includes territories in modern Ghana and parts of the Cote d'Ivoire, balance was sought between the sacred and profane existence and knowledge of those who were able to tap into spiritual power were of great importance for the collective good of the community. It was crucial to maintain relations with the spirit-world because of the various benefits inherent in such association. While much emphasis in the research has focused on the impact of urban Muslims in converting West African communities, it is the position of this presentation that it was rather the strength of the rural and indigenous cosmology that often shaped inter-religious relations—for the color of water is only a reflection of the soil over which it flows.

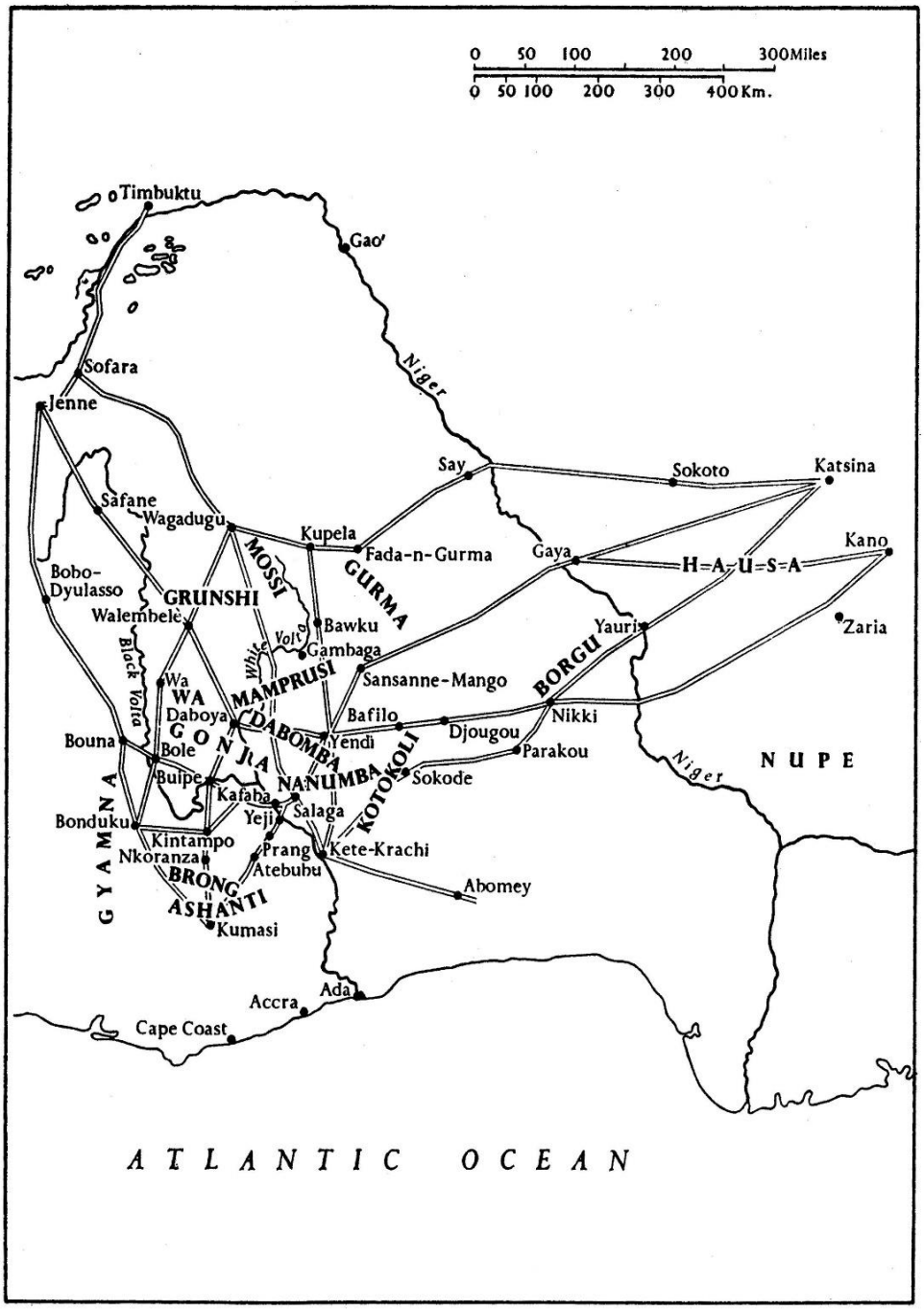


FIG. I. ROUTES TO THE VOLTA BASIN

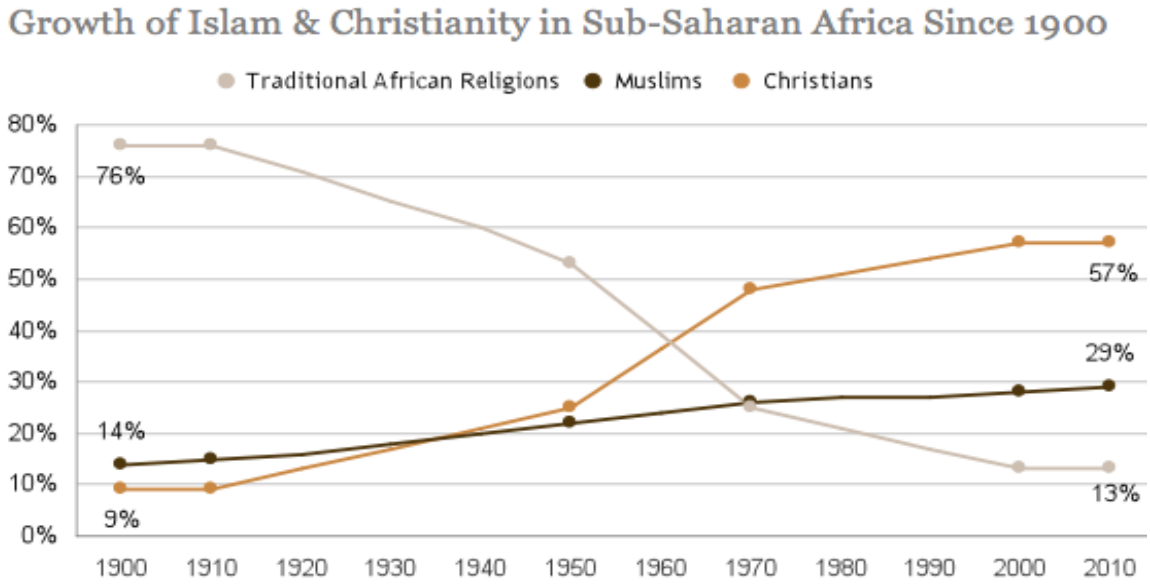
Scholars such as J.D.Y. Peel and Robin Horton saw this African rural character to be something with which Islam was familiar. Cosmologically, the presence in Islam of a powerful God whose blessings could be immediately tapped through the services of clerics was attractive and one of the compelling reasons for conversion. But as much as Levtzion

often demonstrated in his writings, conversion was at times a rational decision and therefore, the Muslim presence in West Africa even when it led to conversion did not necessarily lead to the abandonment of the indigenous practices. Professor Ivor Wilks on his part, attributed the legacy to tolerate the gradual Islamization and the retention of vestiges of indigenous practices that was characteristic of Islam in the Volta Basin, to the teachings of al-Hajj Salim Suware. The 15th century Mande scholar advocated that true conversion occurred in God's own time and not by the force of the sword—a syncretic situation that often led to the mixing of Islamic practices with the indigenous religious culture.

Syncretism, if embraced in this pluralist culture will presuppose that citizens who are committed to different and not necessarily agreeable religious doctrines will arrive at a consensus for their common good. Given the history of jihad in parts of Africa as the effective mode of Islamization, it is difficult to accept the argument that the teachings of Salim Suware were the only sources to which peaceful propagation of Islam might be attributed. So one must also ask whether there was anything worthy in the indigenous religious environment itself to be considered as additional explanation.

In our two recent ethnographic projects (2005 and 2008) in which my colleague Emmanuel Akyeampong at Harvard University and I were a part, we tried to explore this very question. The first project, "Diversity and Tolerance in the Islam of West Africa," was funded in 2005. The second was the TrustAfrica-sponsored research that focused on indigenous shrines. By this second project, we expanded the interviews on tolerance and religious pluralism in Ghana to include a larger spectrum of beliefs. Muslims, Christians and Indigenous Practitioners have a record of peacefully coexisting in the country. We reported from the fieldwork that indeed, in the case of Ghana, it was rather the indigenous cosmology that laid the foundation for religious ecumenism.

In comments on religious pluralism in Senegal, the country's former leader, President Leopold Senghor was purported to have claimed that Senegalese are 95% Muslims, 5% Christians, and 100% animists. Analysis of the influence of Africa's local cultures on religious practices in the recent Pew Foundation Forum on Islam and Christianity in Sub-Saharan Africa (April 2010) lends credence to the Senghor claim. It is from similar observations that the strict interpretation of information such as in the graph below without a local content analysis could be misleading.



Source: World Religion Database. Historical data draw on government records, historical atlases and reports of religious organizations at the time. Later figures draw on U.N. population estimates, surveys and censuses.

Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, April 2010

The idea of a local content must still be noted even where the demographic information isolates small parts of the population that identifies its religious affiliation as strictly indigenous. In the last national census of Ghana in 2010, Christians from all denominations were recorded at the 60th percentile, 16 percent Muslims, and the remaining to be Indigenous and "others". A more recent estimate divides the population into about 70 percent Christians, almost 18 percent Muslims and the rest as Indigenous and others. Yet, the Ghanaian soil in which Islam and Christianity were sown contributed enormously to the accommodative interfaith relations in the country. So, Dr. Akyeampong and I ended our research on the conclusion that the greater the level of syncretic pluralism, the higher the possibility of religious tolerance. I present here three separate ethnographic accounts from the field as examples of indigenous ecumenism that continues to define religious tolerance in the modern state of Ghana.

III: **Field Interviews and Observations:**

a) Professor Emmanuel Akyeampong Interview with Archbishop Dr. Kwasi Sarpong, dd. 15 June 2005, Santaase, Kumasi.

In several publications spanning almost five decades, Catholic Archbishop of Kumasi Dr. Peter Kwasi Sarpong observed that the African traditional religious environment contributes greatly to peaceful ecumenical relations that allows for religious unity. While he admitted that the Ghanaian environment has not been free of conflict, he attributed the occasional clashes to those he referred to as "small fundamentalists

groups who insist on the exact interpretation of the words of either the Bible or the Quran." He further observed that "indigenous religion has not been a source of religious conflict in Ghana because it does not have a 'Book' that says categorically this or that. Rather he pointed to traditional cultural practices, which are always imbued with religious value. In addition, shared family and community activities such as the performance of rite of passages (celebrating births, marriages, and funeral as public and community events) provide public spaces and a built-in ecumenism and therefore venue for peaceful interactions. Such performances do link to spiritual agents that are believed to contribute to the common good.

In other words, religiosity was defined not in terms of affiliation to any specific Christian denomination, Islamic sect, or any particular local shrine. Rather, religiosity was presented as relating to the sense of believing in and associating with spiritual agents that are understood to be capable of contributing to a peaceful and prosperous existence; and to serve the practical needs of a people. Therefore, it is not surprising to find members of the traditional extended family who share the common compound but still affiliate to different religious faiths. The Archbishop illustrated this with a story of his own childhood experiences where his family kept a shrine but also switched from one religious faith to another—including association with Muslims.

What Archbishop Sarpong talked about as domestic ecumenism and pluralism in Ghanaian traditional society does not mean a lack of a definite knowledge of a monotheistic God. His central thesis was the argument that the European missionaries, who propagated the gospel, did not appreciate the culture within which they worked. He therefore called on the Church in its modern setting to develop an African theology by which Christian values would be explained appropriately to the people. Had that been done, he argued, the common religious values inherent in the local culture would have been tapped to strengthen the Christian message in Africa.

b) A Day at the Antoa Anyaman River: Injunctions, Adjudication, and Reconciliation. Field Observations at Antoa by David Owusu-Ansah and Emmanuel Akyeampong, 12 July 2008.

A shrine is the most traditional religious object and site in Ghana. In the precolonial era, every important household in the village setting had a shrine similar to that commented upon in the narrative by Archbishop Sarpong. Additionally and across the country, there were popular and powerful shrines that people from all walks of life visited for consultation—for divination, and to seek amulets and charms defensively for protection and offensively to attack enemies. Since the shrines counseled righteousness, it was imperative that the traditional communities adhered to the moral code of conduct associated with any given shrine with which they are attached. The day spent at the Antoa Anyaman River Shrine provided the best example of how deities adjudicated conflicts and intolerance.

From our research and visit to Antoa, a village not far from Kumasi, we came to know that the shrine has an attending priest but the river belongs to the local chief and

therefore the elders of the village royal family serve as custodians and village council to the shrine. Thus, all cases brought before the shrine are first introduced to these elders who adjudicate cases in the name of chief and deity. The elders discuss the cases before them, ask a lot of questions of the consulting clients, provide advice and punishment, and recommend fines but the priest of the shrine performs all the rites associated with cleansing.

The process of adjudicating conflict at the shrine is similar to the way conflicts would be addressed at any traditional home or village in Ghana. Household or village elders constitute as council to address disagreement, adjudge wrongdoers and assign fines, but alternatively, a party that feels aggrieved may invoke the name of a deity to declare absolute innocence. Such an act is understood in Akan culture as a declaration of an injunction, which immediately brings the deity into the adjudication process. The consequence of guilt is costly and in the olden days might have even resulted in the punishment of death. This was the case because the invocation of the deities in the declaration of injunction was always predicated on the challenge that the full force of the deity must be used to punish those who make unfounded accusation. The deities are pure; they detest lies, cheating, dishonesty, and hold the position that there could be no reconciliation and forgiveness without truth telling and the full admission of guilt by offending parties. Thus, it is believed that where the name of a deity is invoked in a conflict, ultimately the guilty party will be inflicted with sickness or misfortune as a sign of guilt. This can only be removed with a visit to the deity where the appropriate rituals are performed following the peaceful adjudication of the original conflict to the satisfaction of all parties.

During the day of our visit, we noted that visitors to the shrine included persons from all walks of life and religious backgrounds. The cases brought before the elders of the shrine for adjudication were very similar to those that would be brought before a court of law—marital issues and disagreements, basic theft, land issues regarding disputes over ownership and boundaries, conflicts over rent payments between renters and property owners, basic unfounded accusations of which the accused was seeking redress and damages, and even to redress unfulfilled promises that lovers made in the state of passion.

What was impressive was the rapidity with which people agreed to tell the truth. The guilty parties, prior to being taken to the riverside for cleansing, were individually paraded through the streets of the village in public disgrace. This whole process provided opportunity for moral education and conflict reconciliation. Thus, even though many Ghanaians identified themselves as Christians in the national census, their fears and modes of resolving conflict could very well be determined by their traditional cultures. Values in the culture do reflect a history of tolerance that is based on the idea that a sinful society is a community at risk of self-destruction.

c) Conversation with Baffour Amissare II, Chief and Custodian of Tano Shrine at Tano Obuase: Interview by David Owusu-Ansah, dd. 15 July 2008).

"Abosom" or deities are attached to every important stool in Akan societies; this point was repeatedly affirmed in our conversations with traditional elders regarding the role of shrines in the history of Ghanaian culture. Among the Akan of Ghana, the stool symbolizes political authority because it is believed to encase ancestral spirits. Thus, the history of deities and their importance to society are intrinsically linked to that of prominent traditional families or settlements. Both deity and the traditional state prefer tranquility. The role of the deities as protectors of the traditional state and as agencies for the assurance of stability and peace are therefore part of the national history on tolerance.

The narratives of the relationships between deity and state are preserved in local oral traditions in the context of stories about migrations and the search of new settlement sites, or as explanations of religious and/or political change, in interpretations for the outcomes of past military encounters in the earlier state formation period, and/or as precedence in customary laws.

What I want to share here is an interview I had with a local chief who is a custodian of another important shrine at Tano Oboase in the Brong-Ahafo Region—a historic site from where many southern Ghanaian Akan speakers link their ancestor prior to their dispersion. The chief of Tano Oboase, Nana Baffour Amissare II, identified himself as a member of the local Catholic Church and yet he did not see any conflict in the performance of his traditional obligations to the shrine.

Asked if the Church sees any conflict in the position of a chief as a member of its congregation but one who is custodian of an indigenous shrine, the chief responded as follows:

> Look, I go to Church and I pay my membership dues. *The Church says "thou shall have no God besides the Lord" and we know that the deities believe in God and we believe in this one God* (authors' emphasis). I have chosen on my own accord, however, not to attend the communion but in my heart I do not see any conflict or disagreement between serving the shrine and worshiping God at the Church because the deity derives its power from the same God. So, I am not concerned about what humans will tell me regarding a possible conflict between these two ways of serving God. I go to Church and nobody chases me out from worshiping there. And on the occasions when I perform our duties regarding the shrine, they (the people from the community) also come to join us. And besides, no Pastor of the Church has ever assumed the leadership of the Church in this community without coming first to greet me before he takes his post.

Even though the chief admitted that such clerical visits could amount to courteous protocol extended to him as head of the village community rather than an acceptance of his primary role as custodian of the shrine, he rationalized also that, were there not a Tano River Shrine at the settlement, there would not have been any village for a Church to be established there. Indirectly, therefore, those clerical visits were also in recognition of the shrine.

These arguments are less about any specific debate about who recognizes whom. Rather, they relate to religious tolerance—a subject that is often treated and defined by scholars of religious conversion in such terms as syncretism and eclecticism. The most appropriate topic of discussion in this case of religious encounters is embedded in the phraseology of "weight of tradition"—a subject that my colleague Professor Emmanuel Akyeampong has evaluated in the portrait of Asantehene Agyemang Prempeh I, c. 1888-1931, as a Christian and a modern man but a traditional ruler. Akyeampong's essay recounts the story of an Asante king, who is transformed into a "modern" man while in British exile on the Island of Seychelles. The king learned to read and write the English language; he accepted the teachings of the Anglican Christian denomination; and yet he held on to his traditional responsibilities as king (both in exile and upon his return). He attended to the traditional stools of the ancestors; abided by the sanctions of the most sacred object of the state—the Golden Stool; he practiced polygamous marriage upon his return from exile, and yet remained Christian. Akyeampong's portrait of this modern Christian king is about a person who did not abandon traditional ideas, principles, or ideals totally. To ask whether this king was indeed a Christian would be equal to questioning whether the more than 60 percent of the Ghanaian population that responded in the 2010 census to be Christians were indeed what they claimed to be. What is clear, however, is the high degree of religious tolerance that was demonstrated through Prempeh's affirmation of traditional obligations while he attended Church and managed matters of the Asante nation traditionally.

The successful Asante northern military expeditions of the 18th century, which led to the incorporation of territories in the Volta Basin, brought them into contact with Mande Muslim communities with a history of commercial travels to the fringes of the Akan forest that dated back to the heydays of the Trans-Saharan trade. Consequently, Asante officials took advantage of Muslim services that included their knowledge in the making of prayers and Islamic talismans. Even today, a particular group of Muslims still visit the palace of the king and make prayers regularly. All Asante rulers since 1903 see themselves as Anglicans, and see no conflict whatsoever in continuing the traditional practice of allowing Muslims to perform prayers at the palace regularly.

In fact, the Asante kingdom at the height of its power in the early 19th century either controlled or held influence over territories larger than the modern nation of Ghana. Thus, it can be argued that the manner by which traditional authorities in the precolonial era related to Muslim merchants-clerics, as well as to European traders

and Christian missionaries, contributed in a large measure to determining the politics of inter-religious relations in the country today.

IV: Taking Advantage of Religious Tolerance: Councils of Religious Bodies & the National Peace Council—Bring the Past to Bear on the Present.

To be sure, the foundational role of the indigenous religious culture in ensuring interfaith tolerance in Ghana was not lost even on a leading Pentecostal Dr. Mensah Otabil of the International Central Gospel Church. In a 12 July 2006 Owusu-Ansah & Emmanuel Akyeampong interview, Dr. Otabil identified the indigenous religious culture as "the greatest buffer between Islam and Christianity." He expressed concern however that "as elements of the traditional religious culture thins out, [there could be] more confrontations between the world religions in this country." This observation was based on his assessment of the attributes of the local religious culture that Archbishop Sarpong noted earlier on—that the indigenous religious culture is more flexible and adoptive compared to the world religions and therefore more tolerant.

In this same conversation, Dr. Otabil made two important observations: first that often conflict among religious groups arises when fringe movements emerge to challenge the main faith. The second is that, in an environment where the influence of the existing religions are more or less in a state of equilibrium, peaceful relations are best preserved and the destabilizing effects of fringe movements are best controlled if an umbrella forum under which disagreements are redressed exist. Thus, in 1984, a draft constitution for such a religious organization was written and promulgated for the creation of such an umbrella group in Ghana—The Forum of Religious Bodies.

Reverend Dr. Nathan Samwini, a former director of Christian-Muslim relations at the Ghana Christian Council, noted that the idea of creating this umbrella Forum of Religious Bodies emerged from conversations that dated back to 1978. The primary concern then was how best to bring Muslims organizations in the country into dialogue with Christians. The ability to construct such an organization was predicated on the fact that other religious councils existed in the country and had performed credibly well. The logical next step was the creation of a forum at which members met from time to time for the purpose of redressing religious concerns amicably and, also, to provide a common voice on matters of national interest. Member organizations included in the religious forum were the Ahmadiyya Mission of Ghana, Federation of Muslim Councils of Ghana, Ghana Christian Council, Catholic Bishops Conference, and the Ghana Pentecostal Council. Prior to the formation of the Ghana Religious Forum, the most vocal and credible non-governmental religious groups that engaged governments on issue of social justice, and/or to redress conflicts resulting from partisan politics were the Christian Council of Ghana and the Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Equally critical to maintaining national peace are traditional chiefs whose political and cultural authority are rooted in the veneration of local ancestors and are also legitimized by association to shrines. While the institution of chieftaincy and therefore chiefs are recognized politically as important players in redressing conflicts, the acknowledgement of priests of the indigenous shrines as representatives in national ecumenical peace-building organizations has not occurred recently. I am here referencing the 2011 Parliamentary Act 818 that called for the establishment of National, Regional and District Peace Council Boards that were charged to "facilitate and develop mechanisms for conflict prevention, management, resolution and to build sustainable peace" in the country. Gazetted on 20th May 2011, the composition of the Peace Councils, whose members were limited to four-year terms, has been intentionally ecumenical. They include representations of the Catholic Bishops Conference, the Christian Council, National Council for Christian and Charismatic Churches, Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission, Ahl-Sunnah Muslim Group, Tijaniyya Muslim Group, Practitioners of African Traditional Religion, A member of the National House of Chiefs, 2 Nominees of the Office of the President one of whom must be a woman, and 2 persons who represent "identifiable" groups such as institutions of higher learning, and civil society organizations involved in conflict resolution and peace building.

V: Reflections

The activities of the religious organizations are now an integral part of the history of the country. Similar to chieftaincy, institutions of the Church and Mosque have been traditionalized and have assumed definite roles that are relevant in sustaining national peace through tolerance and conflict resolution. These are examples of the activities of local networks of organizations that TrustAfrica highlighted in its 2006/07 Annual Report. Researchers and scholars were called upon to stress the contributions of these local agencies to sustaining peace and reconciliation. The inclusion of the indigenous belief-practitioners as members of the national agency that mediates peace and reconciliation in Ghana, even at the time when the census reported majority national population to be Christians and Muslims, is a significant indication that agencies that were hitherto described negatively as syncretic or locally viewed as backward, could be so foundational to sustaining pluralistic values that are essential for inclusive democracy; and Muslims benefit from such a peaceful space within which they can express grievances and demand their rights as citizen.

I conclude this presentation with the observation that it is very important for national governments to continue to recognize the importance of such networks of organizations and of religions. I stress also that scholars and researchers should continue to explore, elaborate, and articulate the relevance of these religious traditions and experiences that underpin ecumenism and religious tolerance in Ghana.

For Muslims about whom I have written extensively, this peaceful environment provides opportunities to engage the State and the several religious communities to redress perceived discrimination relative to secular education and Muslim urban youth

unemployment. Of course, there is a general high level of youth unemployment in the country and what needs to be avoided is the situation where these employment challenges become defined in religious and ethnic terms. Instead, it is recommended that members of the Ghana Religious Forum and the National Peace Council lend collective voices to finding solutions to the labor situation. These are issues that I believe some of you would like me to discuss in detail during the Q & A and I will be happy to do so.

In the meantime however, I have pointed to important factors that contributes to laying the foundation upon which I believe this pluralistic tolerant culture in Ghana has been erected—the traditional religious culture that creates those public spaces at which communities interact. Relations among religious bodies with the Ghanaian society is one that has developed in history and have coalesced over time to establish an environment within which conflict can be redressed by religious agencies and traditional institutions that are perceived to be legitimate and at time even more credible and trusted than agencies of the modern state. Some may still argue that the Islam and, for that matter, Christianity that are practiced within this cultural environment are imperfect. Yet the benefits of syncretic pluralism in Ghana are obvious when compared to those regions on the continent where religious purity of the universalistic type is advocated.

As I close this presentation, I still wonder what Professors Ivor Wilks and Nehemia Levtzion would have said about my dramatic conclusion. My only hope is that the quality of my talk today meets the standard set by previous speakers and that you are provoked to continue to think about these issues that are inspired by the writings of Professor Levtzion and his contemporaries. Thank you!

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