

Interview with Archbishop Dr. Peter Akwasi Sarpong:

June 15, 2006

Interview Conducted by Dr. Emmanuel Akyeampong, Harvard University.

Place of Interview: Kumasi, near Santaase

Also present at interview Rebecca Tandoh (who in traditional life is the Queen mother of Kuntense, Asante and a PhD student at the University of Ghana).

Purpose of Interview: To investigate how the various religious persuasions in Ghana come together in ecumenical respect/interaction.

Opening statement by Dr. Akyeampong: In the context of Asante or Akan society, there is a tendency toward ecumenism. The office of the Nsumankwaa (for Asante) exists to harmonize the different spiritual powers that can be brought together to serve the Asantehene. We had interviews with others, and in the one with the Sumankwaahene, he indicated that the herbalist (*odunsini*) has medicine or powers, and the Muslim has medicine (power), but when I asked him about the power of the Christian priest, he responded that laughed but did not respond directly. He however went ahead to mention the Friday gathering at the Manhyia palace when Muslims come to make “prayers and perform rites” which indicate the incorporation of Muslims but we see from history that Christianity is not rejected. We see this from the exiled life of Asantehene Prempeh [I] and his embrace of the Anglican Church and religion. So today, we would like to hear your own thoughts on this subject. In my conversations, one of the difficulties we have encountered is with the practitioners of traditional religion. They seem not to be willing even to tell us about a day in their lives as if it is a derogatory practice and yet we know people live this life. So whatever you can provide for us in the form of comments on all these religious activities and also about your reflections.

Archbishop Sarong: I would have liked you to begin with a specific question. It is very difficult to start now. But let us start with thoughts about Christianity since I am one. Within Christianity, the seed of dissension was there from the beginning. So Christianity reached us [here in Ghana and in Africa] in fragmented form. Missionaries who came here brought with them the historical dissension and rivalries from Europe. First the Catholics came in the 15th century but they did not come as missionaries. They came as chaplains to explorers and when they have said mass in the morning on the ships and they have nothing to do, they would come out to evangelize and they did succeed in establishing a prosperous Christian community here on the coast of Elmina. Later on the [Catholic] Portuguese were ousted by the Danes [should be the Dutch] who brought their own brand of Christianity, and they were ousted by the Dutch who came with their brand of Christianity, and then the British came with Anglicanism and Methodism. They established a stronghold and Methodism was strong in the Central and Western Regions [of the country] and to a point in the Greater Accra Region. Presbyterianism was very strong in the now Eastern Region and also the Accra Region. The Anglican Church was strong in the urban centers as Cape Coast, Accra, Kumasi and so on. But gradually they have come to recognize that the fact that we belong to various and different Christian denominations does not mean that we should be enemies. So they have tried to [find ways to work together]. The Protestants started first and they established the Christian Council and then [came] the Catholics later on in the 1880s [after] the other denominations. When we came, the Christian Council had already been established and that is why we are not part of it. So we have our own Catholic Bishops Conference. In pursuit of unity we have tried to find areas or operations about which we can meet and discuss issue. One thing is that the Catholic Church

does not have a head [in Ghana], so we cannot talk about the Head of the Catholic Church in Ghana, we have conference of Bishops, but there is a Head of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Head of the Methodist Church of Ghana, and so on. The Head of the Catholic Church is the Pope so the Head of the Catholic Head in Kumasi or in Accra, or Cape Coast etc, is the Pope. So structurally, it is difficult for the Catholic Church as Members of the Ghana Christian Council. But we still come together as leaders and not heads of churches and we try to identify areas of cooperation and that is how we come together to work.

Then we come to Islam. Islam has been here for some time. [In fact], Islam came to Ghana before Christianity. For some reason, they came from the Sahara through trade. One Asante king [Osei Kwame, 1777-1803] was almost made a Muslim. So they the [Muslims] have been here for sometime. The orthodox Muslims have not been active proselytizing and evangelizing. In fact, evangelism in Islam is associated with the Ahmadiyya Mission and they came in and they have good ideas, and established schools, hospitals, and clinics and these attracted some people and then they drew the attention of what I will call the orthodox Muslims to the fact that they were themselves lacking in these [areas of progress]. What I have found is that among themselves [Muslim groups] there used to be some degree of conflict. The mainline [orthodox] Muslims in Ghana tend to be Sunni [and as such they saw the Ahmadiyya as heretics]. There is not much love lost between them. But they are not externally antagonistic toward each other. What I have found out also is that this mainline Sunni group has such a great respect for the Catholic Church you would not believe. They do so much respect the Catholic Church and compare the Catholic Church to themselves and compare some personalities of the Catholic Church such as Mary (Mariam), Yusufu (Joseph), Issa (Jesus) and thing like that. And interestingly, the Catholic Cathedral in Kumasi is located right in the middle of the Muslim residential community in the city. **And if you go to St. Peter's School right now, it is full of Muslims I think that more than 60 percent of the pupils at St. Peter's primary and Junior Secondary School (JSS) are Muslims.** In the evening, many of them come for night studies and we have very good relations with them.

Personally, I am an Asante [by ethnicity] and my father's village is adjacent to my mother's village. If you go to my village and somebody did not tell you that this building is in Maase [village in the Offinso District] and the next one is Mpenne [?], you will not know where the boundary begins. From my mother's side, I come from Mpenne and therefore I am a citizen of Mpenne and from my father side I come from Maase [a town/village which is more known]. Interestingly, in my mother's house we had Muslims who lived there and in my father's house there were also Muslims. Everyday, at my father's house the Muslims were teaching the Muslim children the Quran, and suddenly I was even reciting the Quran [as a child]. So there was such a good [relationship] and that was my experience. Even now when the chief Imam celebrates the Ramadan [fast] and they kill a cow or a sheep, they present me with some and whenever I go on pastoral visits to villages I have the great satisfaction when Muslims come to meet me, not just to greet me, but they attend my mass and after mass they will come to receive the blessing from me. At the higher level, we came to the conclusion that probably one of the causes of conflict between Christians and Muslims could be that Christians and Muslims do not understand one and another. Some time ago, in the 1970s, I used to be a member of a group called Authorship Development Committee set up by the government to write books and to promote books and to promote the writing of books for K-1 to university level and I was part of that and I was the chairman. At one point we decided that we can promote inter-religious harmony through the

development of text books. And so we actually drew up syllabi and wrote text books on religion that is acceptable to Muslims, Catholics and Protestants—these three religions. We did write these books but that was in the 1970s and I do not know where the books are now [in the educational system]. But what we did was, instead of concentrating on the doctrine and faith and the teachings and such things, we came to the conclusion that faith always resulted in moral behavior and said that if you believe in Allah and Allah does not want you to commit adultery, and if you believe in Jesus Christ and he does not want you to steal, so why don't we take topics or issues such as stealing, idolatry, adulatory, hard work and so on and make these the themes of the book. So we approached religion thematically—God's power, of course Muslims believe in the power of God; we [Christians] believe in God's power. Then obedience to God, the place of authority and we developed these things and when we touched on doctrine, we will refer the teacher to the appendix for more information. It worked very well and therefore any teacher can take any religious book and teach it in the classroom. And when it came to doctrinal issues he can open the appendix and find information and that part can be dealt with outside the classroom. And if you took personalities, the Appendix A for example can talk about Catholicism, about Mary, Jesus and the Saints and so on; for Protestants, the Biblical personalities would be like Moses, Abraham, and so on (so there will be Appendix B information for that); And Appendix C for example can have information for Muslims on Muhammad and so on. Outside the classroom, the Catholic teacher can take Appendix A and append it to his material for instruction for his pupils. This is what we did and it worked, but some people who criticized us for watering down the teachings of the Catholic Church, or that we were watering down the teachings of the Islamic faith. But we wanted to deal with the problems [of information] at the roots and we did something but it is a pity that we have forgotten about that nowadays. But in spite of that, we set up a commission for inter-religious dialogue (Protestants, Catholics, and Muslims. Because [we set] this joint committee up, Catholics and Protestants have been meeting at the level of the Committee of Cooperation. Apart from that, from time to time, we organize inter-religious forums and Mualvi Wahab Adam of the Ahmadiyya Mission is very open-minded and he will organize a forum and invite us to come to not to debate but to explain. I remember he called one such meeting at Prempeh Assembly Hall [in Kumasi] and he asked us the Catholics to tell the audience what we mean by certain things that they the Muslims do not understand. What is this thing about Mary, or the Saints and so on? Then I will give a talk to explain from the point of view of the insider and not from the point of view of the outsider because outsiders do not know what they talk about. In the same way, Catholics criticize others from the outside just as others criticize us. We criticize African traditionalists from the outside without knowing what they are doing. I remember one day at the forum at the Prempeh Assembly Hall after my talk, one Muslim got up and asked: "You Catholics, you say, God the father, God the son, and God the Holy Ghost". Does God have a wife? And I responded that God does not have a wife. So he asked again, "Then how can he have a son?" As soon as he said that Wahab Adam said, Bishop let me answer the question for you. So he got up and said: "Look, any concept can be looked at from many angles, so you are looking at the concept of sonship from the point of view of biology. But there can be other types of sonship not biological. You can call your father's brother "father" and he calls you "son". Does it mean that he is your biological father? So we have adopted father, stepson "ship", and so on. So if God has a type of son that we do not understand [as Muslims] it should not [necessarily] pose a problem for us. The concept of son "ship" between God and his "son" is quite different from ours, and if we understand God the way he is, then we will [not] become God and there will be no need for God." So we cannot water down sonship to the biological level. This was good and this is what we have been doing and

meet a lot and discuss and bond with one another.

When it comes to African Traditional Religion, [indigenous] religion by nature is not founded by any particular person. We can say that it lacks structure. The religions with the Book are the religions that are intolerant because the book says this or that. Take Christianity for example, and the people who are going around saying that “the Bible says this and that.” They have not come to terms with things not in the Bible and that is the danger inherent with the religions with the book. The most dangerous aspect is also the interpretation of what the Bible says. It may not be what was intended by the author who wrote 3,000 years ago. So we have Muslims who are attached to the Quran and will say that what Islam is against must be condemned or what the Bible condemns must be condemned. Let me give you an example: Muslims (the few who are militant) if they took their time to examine their religion, they would find out that the word Islam itself has the sense of peace in it. They forget this and they go into literal interpretation of the Quran. This is what some of us call fundamentalism and this is the problem between Muslims and Christians and even Muslims and Hindus in India. **So it is not quite the case that there is total religious tolerance in Ghana because from time to time, we have conflict erupting and when you investigate you will see that it is caused by these small fundamentalist groups who insist on the literal translation of either the Bible or the Quran. This does not exist in Traditional religion because we do not have a book that says this or that. So it makes Traditional Religion much more tolerant** than any other religion with the book.

You talked or mentioned the Sumankwaahene: Whether at a formal occasion or informal occasion, when the Sumankwaahene sees me, whether he is engaged in formal activities or not, this man will bow to me [in recognition]. He calls me “Nyame Komfo” [the fetish priest of the Christian God]. Many of the things I say in my books are not taken from books. I am a typical village boy. I was born not in a village that you can make out when you drive through Ghana but in a very typical village or [rural area]. I [started] schooling by accident and I lived the life of nature and the true African boy at a village about three miles from Maase. And there in my household, I had five fathers which means that my biological father had four brothers [and I call all of them father] and it was very interesting. One wife will cook the food and bring it to the house of my fathers’ house and all of the fathers will gather to eat, and then when the wife of another brings food, they will all gather again to eat and disperse. So everyday, from 5 to 7 PM, they will come together 5 times to eat. And we the children, we will be given our food and we will eat together, and so would the girls they will be given their food and they will eat together. Now I realize how fortunate that experience was. I am not talking about food, but about religion. **The interesting things in the set up of my household was that my father’s eldest brother (Kwadwo Gyinaye) was a [traditional] fetish priest, then the other brother (Kwaku Agyin) was a Catholic, then came my father (Kwabena Marfo, popularly known as Kwabena Donkor because his father [died?] about the time he was born and he was born during the Yaa Asantewaa War in 1900) who became a Catholic three months following my birth. His other brother (Amo) was a Catholic and the last brother (Kwaku Badu) wasn’t anything or could have been anything.** Later on, the first brother Kwadwo Gyinaye the traditionalist became a Catholic, and Amo, the good catholic, became a traditional priest. And I can tell you that he became a zealot Catholic who used to call himself “Adikan abedi akyire” [the last who has become the first] and he called himself “Paul”. So as I was saying, many of the things I have written about in my books (if I am not exaggerating) they have come from the experiences of my childhood. So here I was in the middle of religious tolerance. So when the Catholics went to

their mass in the morning, it presented no problem for anybody. They went to mass and came back home. They fulfilled their domestic obligations and so on as well. So at my house in the village there were Catholics, and some of the people at the village came from Burkina Faso and were Muslims and we have no problems with them; and some of these Muslims named their children after my people and we all lived together.

Again if you go back to the faith or the belief in traditional religion, [you will hear that] some people call traditional people as “the Annu Nyame fo” [those who did not know or worship God]. Are you trying to tell me that the traditionalist did not know God? Did they know that before the traditional priest begins his functions he calls on the Almighty God? Do you understand the white clay the traditional priests smear on themselves and why they wear white? Because of [their belief in] God as being pure. Why does he dance and ask God for his needs? So if you talk about faith, what is the difference between the faith of the Traditionalist and that of the Christian? From the point of view of faith, the traditionalists believe in God more than [if not just as much as] the Christians and the Muslims. The traditionalists refer to one God and there is no other being that an Akan for example will call Onyame (God) just as in Islam or in Christianity [there is only one God]. He believes in the power of God as giver of rain and the sun, and that he is kind, etc. He [the traditionalist] believes in God as the creator of everything including the shrines. The shrines are generically referred to as “abosom” but each of them have their names and belong to a class in themselves and they are believed to be [or] supposed to be the children of God (Onyame) and as [such] representatives of Onyame (God). Even here in Asante that is the case but I was going to say that even in West Africa the functions of these spirit deities (because I do not call them gods), they represent aspects of God. Take the Yoruba for example, their supreme being is “Oludumare” and there is nothing else called by that name. He has power, and riches and so on but has bequeathed aspects of his power of his creativity to a deity known Orishanla [?] in creative matters so if a woman wants a child she will go to Orishanla [?] for help; so too has He given aspects of wisdom and knowledge to another spirit, Orunmila. So when you want to know of secrets you go to Orunmila, and He has given the power to punish evil doers to Ogun so nobody would like to tell lies before Ogun because they are afraid of being struck by lightning and so on. And here too [in Ghana] we have shrines or spirits that are in charge of hunting, of the sea, and so on. The priest for these spirits takes care to interpret the wishes that these spirits receive from God. So to call them “Annu Nyame fo” [they who do know God] it is sad because they knew God very well. But of course you will find a traditional leader who may cause problems. But if you talk about the faith, what is the difference between the Christian and the Traditionalist? We all believe that there is One God, who is all powerful, that he is kind, who gives water, and light and so on. Of course Christianity comes in with some things that are particularly and peculiarly Christian, and that is the trinity— One God in three persons; and then you have Jesus Christ (the son of God) becoming man, but at the end of the day, the believe in God, the believe in Angels, believe in the existence of the devil, and spirits, in ancestors and potentates and powers as we find in the Bible, we have the same things too in traditional religion. And above all, traditional religion was able to create the acceptable citizen. This is not the fault of Christianity but most of the serious crimes [in this country] are caused by [people who call themselves] Christians. These things did not exist in the traditional religion. When somebody committed a heinous crime [in the traditional culture] he would be asked “Don’t you fear God to commit such a crime?” or “How can you steal from a blind man?” “How can you have sex with a baby?” and so on. Not that these crimes did not exist but not to the level that they are now [because the traditional society had a higher moral

regulation in terms of the fear of the shines]. So from the point of view of morality, they [the traditional religionists] were able to produce the acceptable citizen. Most the things that are going on now [these days] were unthinkable in the past in Ghana. Homosexuality, for example, people talk about legalizing it. Imagine in the past, when a woman was seen to have two boyfriends at the same time she was interpreted or considered to be equal to prostitution. But today, look at what is happening? There are thousands of prostitutes and many of these girls might even have gone to Catholic schools but look. So the nature of traditional religion was misunderstood and the Europeans thought that traditional religion was devil worshipping, superstition, and so on. **But I must say that doctrine and practices aside and of course you will come across cases of religious intolerance, but if you examine them carefully, you will see that these cases are more political than religion. Take for instance the case of not drumming during certain times of the year:** people such as the Ga [of Accra], appeal to religion [when] they are saying that do not drum, but I do not think that they are talking about religion at all. They have been under pressure and they think that their land [in the capital] is overwhelmed by foreigners and their prestige is at stake, so don't drum during our festivals, keep quiet and so on [is about social control]. So I think that this will go on for some time.

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: You talked about the absence of structure in the traditional religion and the absence of a revealed book and a coherent set of doctrine. But when you talked about religious cooperation, you talked about the Catholics, the Protestants, and the Muslims, and many of the people I have talked to all talk about these three religions of the book, but leave out the traditionalists in terms of the issue of inter-religious cooperation. Is this because they lack structure or is it because we look down upon them?

Archbishop Sarpong: There are so many reasons. But the key factor is because they have no structure. Who are you going to dialogue with? If you want dialogue among Christians, and Muslims in Asante region, who do you go to? And if you identified somebody [in the traditional religion] what authority does he/she have to represent the traditional religion? But if you identified Islam, they have Imams and so on and the Protestants have their bishops, and so on and the Catholics have their bishops, but who represents the traditionalist. The main problem there is the lack of leadership. Traditional region is a celebration of life and there is no dichotomy between religion and politics. So our dialogue with traditional religion is not a person to person dialogue as we have with the other religion but is found more in examining the values of traditional religion. We know that traditional religion is not a private affair and people cannot do whatever they like; if you break a taboo the whole society is affected in traditional religion and you are your brother's keeper. So we dialogue with traditional religion by examining its values and see what is contrary to our beliefs.

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: The picture that is often painted [about traditional religion] is that it is a religion that is in decline. But if it is a religion of life or a way of life, then one can become a Catholic and bring their traditional values to it. But there are those who would say that as for me I want to be only a Christian or a Muslim. What would you say to this? Because at first, if you broke taboos or committed crimes, the shrine spirits killed you, but today, there is nothing of that sought in the new religions.

Archbishop Sarpong: That is the point. Why should one be a Christian and do all these crimes. The traditional religion had the point because fear is a virtue. After all haven't we said that "the

fear of God is the beginning of wisdom?” So would you fear God and go ahead and do whatever you like? So what is wrong about doing the right thing out of fear, as opposed to doing the wrong thing in the absence of fear? But some people will say [that traditional religion was not good because there was no forgiveness]. But the concept of fear is hierarchical and it comes after love. It is much better for me to refrain from hurting you because I love you, because you are my mother or brother, than for me to refrain from hurting you because of fear of being killed [by a deity spirit]. So Jesus Christ came to add the concept of love. The idea of fear was there in Judaism and people feared God because he was retributive. He killed people who opposed him. But then Jesus came “to perfect the law and not to abolish it” so he stressed love as an important concept. It is good if you don’t do [evil things] out of fear, but it is much better if you don’t do it out of love. So in the past the law was written that “you should hate your enemy but I [Christ] say that love your enemy as much as you love yourself.” In the past our people knew what love was, but it was conditional. What Jesus was teaching was about unconditional love.

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: Can I speak to two books both of which you are familiar with. The first is by Williamson on Akan religion and the Christian faith, and he was trying to show the parallel between ancestors and saints and so, that when people became Christian they did not find many things that were different from the old faith. The second book is Pashington Obeng’s book which looks at Asante Catholicism as an effort to take what is good in traditional culture and use it for the Catholic faith. So what are your thoughts on these books?

Archbishop Sarpong: Oh, I happen to agree with Williamson. I have a book titled Ancestral veneration of the stool or a topic like that and I also draw those parallels so I have no problems with that. What was the rest of the question?

Question/clarification by Dr. Akyeampong: If you look at Williamson’s book, there is a flow in one way where traditionalists come to Christianity with concepts that help them understand the new faith. One thing you have been doing is to open it up for conversation [as indicated in Pashington’s books?]

Archbishop Sarpong: yes, that is what I do. Jesus Christ is supposed to be in all mankind if he is not found in all culture. So he must be at where the Muslim is, where the Zoroastrian is, he must be where the Jew is, so there must be God in all the cultures, and God has planted in man this inner voice. So it is not in only Christianity that you have this inner voice. So wherever you are this inner voice tells you of God. So it is better to remain in traditional religion and follow your conscience than to become a Christian and then relax about morality. But if that is that case that God lives in us, then why don’t we remain what we are but come to Christianity? The answer is the view that Christianity has something over and above the other religions. The first example is the idea of unconditional love and that Jesus was God in person. Another thing for Catholics is that Jesus’ body and soul is in our communion, so there are some specifically Christian dimensions that we can bring to our religion.

[Pashington] Obeng came here and did his research and I took him to my services and so on. As you say, we were not trying to marry both tradition religion to Catholicism but he wanted to know why some ideas that are not accepted by some people [Christians] are entertained by the Kumasi Diocese and so on. [Where is he now? To this Dr. Akyeampong answered that Dr.

Obeng is the chaplain at Wellesley Hills Congregational Church and teaches at Wellesley College in Massachusetts].

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: So in the indigenous religion of Africa, there is this core idea of living a good life and a moral life but it is not evangelistic, but in Christianity living a good life is not sufficient because one has to follow a path which leaves to salvation. So the African traditional religion is very ecumenical. So ironically ecumenism is more present in our traditional religion than in the revealed religions of Christianity and Islam.

Archbishop Sarpong: Yes, and those of us who are leaders in the Catholic Church [and informed] know that before the missionaries came here, they had read reports that were written by explorers who were not anthropologists or sociologists but who just observed certain practices and took for themselves what they thought were weird or absurd and so on and so forth. It is surprising how human beings can describe other human being in such terms as having no sense of this and no sense of that. Unfortunately, these were the source material for evangelism. If these sources had not informed them but [missionaries] had come to see things for themselves, thing might have been different. Protestants talk about evangelism but we [Catholics] talk about evangelization, and three things are considered. First is the situation you are going to evangelize in—what is the life style of the people, the beliefs of the people, the sensitivities of the peoples etc so you can conceptualize your message. The second thing is the message itself. You have to know the situation before you bring the message to bear upon the situation, so if the people are murderers, then you can talk about [God's] mercy and so on. The missionaries did not do this and they didn't know the situation. But they knew the situation that they have conceived and brought a message to address a misconceived African situation. The third thing is the agent/agency of evangelization. He must be humble. You do not go into evangelism as if you are the master of the situation, as if there is no sin in your own society, and so on. There was more sin in Europe than here and how can you think about the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade [without thinking about European participation] and yet, they come here and arrogantly lorded over us. This methodology—find out the situation, finding the appropriate message and humbling yourself and working with the people and not lording over them are important. They did not do these things and now we have to find a way to undo what they have done. In the process we see some Christians who have accepted these [missionary concepts of African society] and if we try to examine anything we are told that we are spoiling Christianity. The concept of Christianity reached us in a European envelope [package] and it is not the choirs, the pulpit, and others that matter. What should matter to us is what is in the envelope (love, unity, and so on). These are expressed in different ways in different cultures. In certain cultures, people express happiness by weeping, others greet by robbing noses etc. [the point being that the message should be tailored to the cultures]. So the sentiment is what is important. The expression of it is more different from culture to culture. The thing is that the missionaries did not study the cultures and now it is very difficult to remove the European envelope in which Christianity was presented to us and repackage it in an African envelope. [It] is a very difficult thing to do.

Question by Dr. Akyeampong: Now this is the last question. [We have been] going around [and interviewing] chiefs and others for this research and we have talked to them about the nature of chieftaincy, and about the [deities] spirits, and so on. One cannot but conclude that chieftaincy is one of the institutions, if not the key institution that holds up tradition religion and its values that we have talked about. I come back to your work/words about chieftaincy and Christianity and

there is an implicit tension. If a king or queen mother becomes a Christian, does it mean the jettisoning of these other values and norms that are traditional and seem to underpin the culture? I know this is a big topic but just your thoughts on what happens when a chief becomes a Christian or when a Christian becomes a chief—what are the tensions? What is lost and are there some contradictions? Does one lose the legitimacy of the other?

Archbishop Sarpong: I understand the issues. And I respond here from the position that these are my personal views and have nothing to do with the Church's position on these issues. I have told you of my family background. If I go to my background, then I find it ridiculous that people should question the integrity of tradition and therefore the subject of a Christian becoming a chief or a chief becoming a Christian. My own brother [we grew up in the same traditional situation] he is the chief of my village. If I had not become a [Catholic priest] I would probably have become the chief of my village. But my brother is a chief and a Catholic and he goes to communion and he is married with children and he is a very prominent member of the Knights of St. John. Only this past Sunday, less than a week ago, we went to the Asantehene's Palace [the Palace of the King of Asante] to dedicate his Chapel and I brought him "The Stations of the Cross from Rome." He has his child baptized at the Chapel. [Asantehene] Opoku Ware II was probably a better Christian [Anglican] than most [non-chiefs]. But the previous Wednesday, I couldn't have an audience with the Asantehene because he had some traditional rites that he needed to perform. I do not see the problem at all between Christianity and traditional position of the chief. But there are people who could not bring themselves to accept libation and the church. I wrote a book on libation and I was condemned because I am a Catholic priest writing on these topics. On the other hand, I was commended by others who said: "look at the dynamism of the Catholic priest who know what is African and so on." But then, neither of the two groups commenting on the book has read the book. Some were commending me and others were condemning me. At one time I was called to talk [on Radio FM Station] and I think this was controlled by Adventist (SDA) people and they asked me questions and I answered them but you could see that they did not agree with me. But that was fair enough. Another time I was interviewed on another FM Station and somebody called and disagreed with me so strongly that the operator [at the FM Station] had to cut him off because he began to insult me. So what I will say about this is that, I cannot believe that Jesus Christ would have decreed that once you become his follower you could not be a leader of your people. Nor would he have decreed that because you a follower of mine don't lead your people in accordance of their culture. The leader is seen within the norm of culture. After we accept this then we can examine what these leaders do in their cultures. They pour libation, they go to remember their dead. Tell me [or show me] which religion in which the dead are not remembered? Isn't it the case that in Europe, in America, in Ghana [even here at Kumasi Kejetia] there are memorials where the names of fallen soldiers are written in cement memorial that we visit to remember them? What is superstitious about remembering what these persons have done? What they say is that here is a person who held the village intact for so many years so we owe him or her great gratitude for what he or she did. What is wrong with that? There is a story about a Ghanaian in London whose mother died and was buried at the cemetery; and another person (an English man's) mother also died. So they went to the cemetery to commemorate their mother's death. The African bought a bottle of gin but the English man brought a bouquet of flowers and when they went, the English man went to his mother's grave, bowed his head in silence and after that he placed the bouquet on the grave and that was it. Then he went to the Ghanaian's mother's grave and when he got there the Ghanaian was pouring libation by pouring some of the drinks on the grave. So the English man

asked him, my friend, do you really think that your mother is going to drink this thing? He said, of course, she will drink, and when your mother comes to smell the beautiful roses you left her, she will see my mother drinking her gin so that is that [that is, why do you think that your mother will come to smell the roses and my mother will not come to drink this gin?]. The point is that we should look for the abiding principles in cultures and not [just] look at the symbols. Symbols are [sometimes] not important. Is this man a fool to think that his dead mother will come to drink the gin? The principle is not the flower or the gin but the remembrance. The eternity which is preached by Christianity and is also in traditional practices and its expression are different from one society to the other. If we do look at the principle and not at the symbols, the values we can then come back to are what water and drinks stand for. When you come to [people's] house you are offered a drink of water not because I think you are thirsty, but because water stands for cordiality in welcoming to make you feel at home to be recollected enough for you to cool down. So when people pour libation, they are not foolish to think that the dead people will come to drink it, but it is a way to say that we are going to do something very important, etc and that we would like to remember you and not to give the impression that you did not play any part in the success of this society, These are symbolic but they express something very important because in these occasions you do not want to forget your ancestors upon whose efforts you are building.

Question/Statement by Dr. Akyeampong: So perhaps the threats to religious tolerance is religious fundamentalism those of the Islamic and Christian types.

Archbishop Sarpong: Yes, so if you take libation, how can we reject remembering my mother? So don't mention the names of the deity spirits but they are not the personification of evil even though there is evil in the society and since evil is spiritual you want to tackle them spiritually so we call them to deal with them. So these are the rational ways that traditional society dealt with these things.

Concluding statement by Dr. Akyeampong: On that profound note, it is time for football [soccer as the world soccer games were being held]. We thank you very much.

Archbishop Sarpong: God Bless you.