

The Encounter Between Christianity and Asante Culture: Impact and Repercussions

Anthony Kofi Anomah^{1,2}

1. PhD candidate, Department of Religious Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, UPO, Kumasi, Ghana

2. Rector of the Spiritan University College, PO box 111, Ejisu Ashanti, Ghana

Abstract

The Asante Traditional Religion was in existence and the home of many Asantes long before Western missionaries introduced Christianity and Islam into Asanteman. The Asantes believe in the Supreme Being, spirits, ancestral veneration and life after death. However, with the introduction of Christianity and Western education, Western missionaries condemned Asante culture and religion and taught Asantes to abandon their culture and religion, and convert into Christianity. Some Asantes who converted into Christianity were asked to imbibe Western European culture and religion and to become like Western Europeans in thought and action. They were to assume the names of European saints and abandon some of their traditional names and practices which were considered pagan. Christian rites of passage were introduced to replace the time-tested Asante rites of passage. With the introduction of Christianity and Western education, many young Asante converts abandoned their culture and traditional religion and adopted the Western European culture and religion as a way of life. Even though official Church teachings and documents urged European missionaries to be Asantes with Asantes, some missionaries still abandoned caution and judged the Asante converts from the perspective of a European worldview. The author conducted a doctoral research in 2017 at Ejisu Juaben Municipality among three selected Churches, namely, the Roman Catholic Church, the Methodist Church Ghana and the Church of Pentecost using 377 respondents and nine purposive in-depth interviews. The study also reviewed existing literature available on the subject. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences software for Windows, version 23 was used to analyse the data. Majority of respondents agreed that early Western missionaries provided formal education, health care and charitable services to the needy in the municipality. However, they also admitted that the early Western missionaries interfered with Asante culture and considered Asante Traditional Religion as pagan. The early Western missionaries were unable to study the language and culture of the Asantes and so could not penetrate the deep-rooted traditional Asante culture and religion. This paper proposes that Christian missionaries should synthesise the Christian message with Asante culture in order to win the heart of the Asante convert into Christianity.

Keywords: Encounter, Christianity, Asante culture, Asante Traditional Religion

DOI: 10.7176/JPCR/42-04

Publication date: March 31st 2019

1. Introduction

The battle for dominance that erupted following the introduction of Christianity to Asanteman by Western Christian missionaries over three hundred years ago still rages on and no truce appears to be in sight. Asanteman is the land mass occupied by an ethnic group in modern Ghana called Asantes. In the political history of modern Ghana, this land mass inhabited by the Asantes has become known as the Ashanti Region.

Consistent with the case of other African ethnic groups, the Christian missionaries brought the Gospel to the Asante people wrapped in a foreign culture - a European culture - and insisted that before conversion to Christianity, the indigenous Asante should become a European of some sort. As Kofi Asare Opoku (1978) puts it, the missionaries demanded "there must be Europeanization before Christianization, and consequently traditional life was brought under heavy fire." This prerequisite that was imposed on potential converts meant that to become a Christian, the indigenous Asante must first embrace and cherish western culture and civilization because the Christian missionaries perceived all Asante cultural practices and traditional religion as evil. Therefore, the missionaries heavily criticised and scrutinized every aspect of Asante traditional religious rites and culture.

Consequently, the Asante Christian converts were not only obliged to abandon traditional religious rituals but also disregarded their ancestral gods, priests, and other functionaries who constituted the critical mass of personnel that oiled the wheels of traditional religion. The neglect of the gods meant that the taboos and other prohibitions associated with the worship of the gods were no longer to be observed by Asante Christian converts (Opoku 1978). This was a hard choice to make.

Be that as it might, the missionary effort was not in vain. Christian converts were made among the Asante, albeit at a gargantuan cost. For example, the beautiful rites of passage (such as nobility rites, marriage rites, naming ceremonies and funeral rites) were replaced by European practices with the concomitant use of European

garments, instruments and other paraphernalia. Baptism replaced the child naming ceremony and candidates for Baptism were required to assume the names of European, American or Jewish ancestor of faith (saints) instead of names of known familiar and gallant Asante ancestors. This had to happen because the missionaries preached that the foreign names were “Christian” names while the Asante names, though more meaningful to the Asante converts, were derided as pagan names and thus, were not suitable for Christian use. Marriage became a complicated event and has remained so to date. Traditional marriage has been corrupted by elements from the European wedding ceremonies and style. The mix of styles has culminated in a situation that now requires the Asante bride and groom to go through three separate marriage rites (traditional, ordinance marriage rite and Ecclesiastical marriage rite) in order to be recognised as properly married and admitted into the Christian Sacraments.

The agenda of the early Western missionaries was greatly aided by the introduction of Western education, which in turn produced a new order and a new set of values. This created a situation where the products of these western institutions no longer felt like belonging to their original communities. According to Opoku (1978), many traditional ways of transferring knowledge which facilitated the transfer of indigenous knowledge suffered low patronage, because the products of the western mission schools refused to perform traditional practices. Such an attitude made the educated people more secular than religious in their perspectives about life.

In spite of these massive proselytising activity by Christians, the indigenous religion has remained resilient alongside the Christian religion. Scholars of religion have observed that some Christians revert to the indigenous religion in times of difficulties such as inability to give birth or recurrent misfortunes such as fatal deaths, and loss of wealth in weird circumstances. In such instances, such people usually visit the local shrine to consult the traditional priest (Opoku 1978). Even today, with modernity, civilisation and proliferation of Christian Churches in Asanteman, the Asante culture and religion are often used by the highly educated elites to solve their problems than Christianity.

In this article, we appraise the encounter between Christianity and Asante culture and its impact and repercussions on Asante Christians today.

2. Evangelisation through Formal Western Education and Provision of Health Facilities

The Western missionaries promoted Christianity through the use of education and general improved standards of living. The method used by the early Western missionaries in evangelisation in Asanteman has impacted on Asante Christians today. The Asantes, like other African converts found the sermons of the missionaries unattractive and boring but listened to them anyway because at the end of their religious services or lectures, the missionaries distributed dresses, bottles of kerosene, heads of tobacco and items of household use to converts (Onuora cited by Onwubiko 1991). It appears, therefore, that it was the material benefits rather than interest in the Christian religion that kept some Christians closer to Christianity. Moreover, the wearing of European clothes was a symbol of a new status, and so they were sought after for the sake of the status they conferred.

In addition to spreading the Gospel, the Western missionaries had education as one of their primary goals. Wherever they went, the missionaries constructed mission houses with chapels and schools. The local intelligent boys were taken as servants or house boys to enable them become acquainted with European culture and practices. The intelligent ones were sent to the mission schools for higher education. This practice laid the foundation for the establishment of boarding schools. The missionaries also emphasised human equality and education of women for the benefit of society. In this perspective, mission Christianity pioneered formal education and made outstanding contributions to primary and senior high school education in Asanteman. This is evident from the number of schools established by mission Churches in Asanteman. Many leaders of Asanteman are products of mission schools such as St. Louis Senior High School and St. Louis College of Education, Kumasi, Opoku Ware Senior High School, Prempeh College and many more and nearly all of them had professed the faith at one time or another. The Church has also produced many catechists, evangelists, laymen and women, Church elders, nuns, deacons, pastors, ministers, priests, bishops and archbishops from some of these schools.

Many Western missionaries made contact with most of the Asante communities through the school educational system. They were convinced that the future of the Asantes lay in the hands of the children. So, to effect the desired change in culture and religion, they thought it was better to start with the children, the fathers and adults of tomorrow. The attention paid to the children was motivated by the fact that the missionaries clearly saw that the adult Asantes were men and women already deeply rooted in traditional culture and religion. They were traditionally religious to the core and to Christianize them in the light of the new and foreign social environment would be very difficult. Thus, according to Onwubiko (1991), “they turned to the children who were still tender and therefore pliable.” The school children in their innocence were taught to disregard traditional laws and customs and therefore in no time they showed their contempt for traditional society (Onwubiko 1991).

The response of Asantes to school education was initially one of skepticism but with time they accepted its

positive outcome. School education was seen as a passport for getting involved in the civil service and European trade and of course in the Christian religion, which then offered a new status symbol. However, for most of the Asantes, what they wanted was the literacy the school offered and not necessarily the religion. Some of the Asante children were attracted to the Church and school and went to them on their own without their parents' consent because becoming a Christian then meant breaking up family ties and opting out of the family; and to become a Christian was to "break the link between converts and their pagan environment" (Onwubiko 1991).

According to Onwubiko (1991), having impressed upon the converts in the church, and the children in the schools that performing traditional ceremonies was bad and sinful, the converts and the missionary saw nothing good in those ceremonies, rites and rituals which expressed the traditional African religiosity.

The negative aspects of the missionaries' evangelisation effort do not mean that the Asantes do not appreciate the good things that came along with evangelisation, particularly with regard to the provision of formal Western education and health facilities that have continued to provide access to senior high schools and post-senior high school education to the youth and cater for health needs of the people. From data of a doctoral research project collected in 2017 (Table 1), majority of respondents (83.2%) based on 371 valid responses out of 377 people interviewed in the Ejisu Juaben Municipality within the Asanteman agreed that Western missionaries built schools that have provided education for a lot of people in the area.

Table 1: Respondents' Stand Regarding Missionaries' Provision of Access to Western Education in Asanteman

Responses	Frequency (n)	Frequency II (n2)	Percentage (%)	Percentage II (% 2)
I strongly disagree	11	41	3.0	11.1
I Disagree	30		8.1	
I Neither agree nor disagree	21	21	5.7	5.7
I agree	166	309	44.7	83.2
I strongly agree	143		38.5	
Total	371		100	100
Missing Number	6	6		

Source: Field Survey 2017

The importance the missionaries attached to education was not far-fetched. Establishment of schools was an important prerequisite for the establishment of the Church in the areas they evangelized. As mentioned earlier on, the missionaries realized at the beginning that the minds of the elderly Asantes were already set, so they elected to evangelize the children who were open to the new way of life through schools. The objective of the schools, therefore, was to convert the children who would in turn convert their parents to Christianity. Catechists were employed as the first teachers in the schools where human sciences were taught with emphasis, in the case of the Roman Catholic missionaries, on Catholic religion (Osegboun 1996). Osegboun (1996) quoting Fafunwa noted that "Knowledge of the Bible, the ability to sing hymns and recite catechisms, as well as the ability to communicate both orally and in writing, were considered essential for a good Christian."

In the area of social and medical work, undoubtedly, Western missionaries did a lot of good work for the people and won their goodwill and admiration. Many clinics and hospitals were established by the Western missionaries and became the basis for the development of a health care delivery system in Asanteman (e.g. St. Patrick's Hospital, Offinso, St. Martin's Hospital, Agroyesum, St. Michael's Hospital, Pramso). Today, the mission hospitals still play important roles in health care delivery system in Asanteman. The Church continues to run hospitals, clinics and dispensaries, and supply doctors and nurses to work in faith-based establishments.

This method of evangelization had an immediate result. The converts were obsessed with their new religion and treated traditional religion and culture with contempt and worked to undermine them. They were then to shed off all traces of their former life, spiritual and cultural, in order to fit properly into the new world of the Christian.

Table 2 shows data collected for a doctoral research showing the views of 373 valid respondents out of 377 regarding the missionary effort in providing health care facilities in the municipality.

Table 2: Respondents’ Stand Regarding Missionaries Providing health care facilities in Ejisu Juaben Municipality with Asanteman”

Responses	Frequency (n)	Frequency II (n2)	Percentage (%)	Percentage II (% 2)
I strongly disagree	15	43	4.0	11.5
I Disagree	28		7.5	
I Neither agree nor disagree	29	29	7.8	7.8
I agree	138	301	37.0	80.7
I strongly agree	163		43.7	
Total	373	373	100	100
Missing Number	4	4		

Source: Field Survey 2017

Like Jesus, the missionaries believed that preaching the word of God and curing of diseases were means of spreading the Kingdom of God. Therefore, they built hospitals and clinics which were run by the religious Sisters and Brothers as means of preaching the gospel and curing diseases. They ministered to the sick and the aged and taught high standards of hygiene to prevent disease. As a result of these, many Asantes became Christians by baptism, by schooling or by charitable institutions established by the early missionaries as means of conversion or evangelisation. However, this way of conversion did not go down deep enough into the fabric of the Asante Christians who were so rooted in Traditional Religion of their ancestors as a heritage.

Christian health facilities in the Ejisu Juaben Municipality within Asanteman provide health education on smoking, excessive drinking, drugs, suicide. Abortion is prohibited in Christian health facilities hence there are rare chances of death resulting from abortion complications. A group called “40 Days for Life-Ghana” has been formed at St. Anthony’s Parish, Ejisu whose sole aim is to minimize abortion by educating young people in senior high schools on the dangers of abortion. There is no doubt that health education campaigns run by these hospitals and clinics promote healthy lifestyle, healthy citizens and constitute the country’s work force. On the other hand, sick and weak citizens constitute a burden to the state, family, economy and drain to economic resources. Some Churches organize free health screening and give counselling to those who need them. Many people prefer to go to mission hospitals than public hospitals because public hospitals demand money before treatment whereas mission hospitals consider the life and health of patients as their priority.

Table 3 reports extracts of data gathered during the doctoral research project showing the views of 373 people regarding the missionary effort in providing charitable or humanitarian services to the poor and needy in Ejisu Juaben Municipality in Asanteman.

Table 3: Respondents Stand Regarding the missionaries “provision of charitable/humanitarian services to the needy”

Responses	Frequency (n)	Frequency II (n2)	Percentage (%)	Percentage II (% 2)
I strongly disagree	17	46	4.6	12.4
I Disagree	29		7.8	
I Neither agree nor disagree	31	31	8.3	8.3
I agree	121	296	32.4	77.3
I strongly agree	175		46.9	
Total	373	373	100	100
Missing Number	4	1		

Source: Field Survey 2017

Table 3 shows that out of 373 respondents, 296 (77.3%) agreed that Christianity had provided charitable and humanitarian services to the needy in the municipality while 46 (12.4%) disagreed. The original sample was 377 people but four of them had no opinion. This means that the majority of respondents interviewed agreed that Christianity had provided charitable and humanitarian services to the needy in the municipality.

3. The Dynamics of Evangelisation and the Encounter between two viable Cultures.

According to Kalu Ogbu (1979), Western missionaries came with an amazing degree of confidence in the supremacy of Christianity and European social and economic order. They came with the certainty that they were obeying the Great Command to go into the entire world, baptizing and making disciples of all nations (Mt 28:19). This sense of certainty often produced hard-headed insensitivity towards indigenous cultures.

Moreover, the Western missionaries believed that pagan religions and culture were inseparable. Therefore, they had to destroy the pagan religion before a new Christian religion could be established. The Christian community was a new community ranged against the traditional background. Some Asantes who believed in a human world besieged by evil forces sought more potent protectors and joined forces with the Christian religion.

Custodians of tradition rejected Christianity in order to protect the traditional culture that bound the community together, but the educated elites sought power within the Church. The result is that traditional values have persisted in Asanteman. Evidently, Christianity has spread enormously in many parts of Asanteman but the resultant Church is basically weak because there are still some Christians who resort to traditional religion in times of crisis. Christianity must therefore be traditionalized or inculturated in Asante culture if the Christian message is to survive.

4. Religion in Asanteman as a Heritage from God

Religion plays an important role in the life of Asantes. In Asanteman, there is no dividing line between religion and culture. Asantes believe that religion and culture originated from God, and cannot be parted with or replaced. Religion in Asanteman is the heritage into which many Christians were born. Conteh (2012) shared the same view when he observed that to completely give up one's God-given heritage in favour of a foreign culture, as the Church requires, seems a very difficult task, and is tantamount to losing one's heritage, identity, and place, both spiritually and physically within one's religio-cultural community. This is the reason why even long after their conversion into Christianity the Asante world view persists in the lives of Asante Christian converts.

5. The Attitude of Western Missionaries and Inculturation in Asanteman

Much of the earlier aversion to Western Christian missionaries' establishment was centred on the opposition of the alien missionaries to the Asante ways of life. Several Western missionaries showed intolerance for, and open hostility towards the Asante customs. They wished to completely uproot the cultural foundations of the Asante so as to transplant the Christian message unto the Asanteman soil. Assimeng (1989) agreed that some early Christian missionaries disregarded the techniques of caution and cultural orientation given by Pope Gregory the Great to some priests who attempted to convert Britons in 601.

Similarly, Missionary Congregations warned their members to refrain from making their converts Europeans or Americans but rather become one with them wherever they go and adapt themselves to the culture of the people with whom they minister. For example, Venerable Fr. Francis Mary Paul Libermann (1847), co-founder of the Congregation of the Holy Spirit (Spiritans) asked his missionaries not to judge the Africans at first sight or on what they have seen in Europe or what they are used to in Europe. Rather he asked them to be Negro with the Negroes and to judge them as they should be judged; and to train them as they should be trained and not in the European manner in order to make of them a people of God.

Moreover, Waliggo et al. (1986) has done an extensive work on the guiding principles and instructions to missionaries and reiterates that evangelisers must respect the cultures of the peoples they evangelise, so that they might accept Christianity and be able to regard it as their own. Most of the Founders of missionary societies told their members to study the language and culture of the people they were to evangelise and to avoid as much as possible turning their converts into Asian- or African-Europeans but to leave their converts as they are, African Christians. In the same way, the Europeans were to renounce their European cultures and categories of thought and become Asians to Asians and Africans to Africans (Waliggo et al. 1986).

Furthermore, Charles Lavigerie, the Founder of the White Fathers (Missionaries of Africa) in his instruction to the first group of missionaries to Uganda and Tanzania in 1878-9 insisted that his missionaries be

assimilated into the societies they were to evangelize, to eat the same food, build similar houses, use the same social manners, adopt a dress acceptable to the people, learn the language and the customs of the people, make the Christian doctrine simple, void of European philosophy and expand it gradually as converts progressed in understanding and have a sympathetic and understanding attitude to "immoral" practices, especially polygamy. For he concluded, it was difficult to change ancient practices over-night (Waliggo et al. 1986) (Emphasis added).

Waliggo et al. (1986) shared similar sentiments. They were of the view that the Old Testament was able to form the Israelites into the people of God because it incorporated their world view, their histories, their wisdom, their culture, their aspirations and their total Identity. It was expressed in words, similes, symbols and proverbs that people understood. It was not a mere sacred Book to them but the way of life to be lived. The God of the Hebrews was nearer to them than any other god of any people. The Bible, therefore, remains the first and powerful source and principle of inculturation. Any efforts to make it become life and reality to peoples of each age and culture, to make it clear in word, symbols, and meaning to each people within their life situation is a movement of inculturation. Therefore, "no one can usefully expound the richness of the Bible to African Christians without serious consideration and study of their world view, their cultures, their institutions, their histories, their wisdom, their thought-patterns and their aspirations" (Waliggo 1986).

If these useful pieces of advice and guiding principles encouraging inculturation were given to the early Western missionaries, then why did some of them deviate from them and did not heed to these instructions? It is plausible to believe that if some of the early missionaries in their attempt to convert the Asantes had

approached their customs and traditions with respect probably there would have been a smoother conversion experience. Otherwise they would not be able to win converts.

However, the sense of inadequate understanding on the part of some of the Western missionaries could be traced to the general attitude of moral and cultural superiority that characterised their worldview of non-Western continents. Some of the missionaries came and taught Asantes to renounce their religious values and culture and embrace their Western Christian beliefs, ideas and customs. Thus, Assimeng (1989) observed that there is enough evidence to show 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 those beliefs and practices imply. The missionary must always find ways of adapting to the culture of the people in situations where Christianity and the culture are compatible, otherwise Christianity will remain a foreign religion and its appropriation will be nothing more than skin-deep. This culturally disruptive role of the early Western missionaries extended to the banning of drumming in the Churches. They imported the liturgy which was originally not intended for export and which did not satisfy the Asantes. This is because Assimeng (1989) said, “the liturgy of a living church must grow out of the church’s own devotional life and must bear the stamp of her own meditation.” To buttress this point Mbiti (1997) said,

African Christians often feel complete foreigners in mission Churches. For example, much of formal Christianity is based on books but there are older Christians who do not read; the hymns are translated from European, English and American versions and are sung to foreign tunes which have little rhythm and without bodily movements like clapping the hands or twisting the loins as a religious expression. Worship in mission Churches is simply dull for most Africans (Emphasis added).

Christianity and the missionary efforts were directed towards drawing converts away from traditional life towards what missionaries’ thought was the proper, civilised and Christian expression of the faith. The Asante became a Christian by cleaving to the new order introduced by the Western missionary rather than by working out his salvation within the traditional religious milieu. The result of this is that what passes for Christianity, as so many understand it, is disbelief in gods and fetish, membership of the Church, payment of its dues, and obedience to its regulations. Mission Christianity has proved unable to sympathize with or relate its message spiritually to Asante spiritual outlook because it did not redeem them within (Mbiti 1997).

Thus, according to Mbiti (1997), in terms of the conversion of a people, the Church failed, partly at least, because it has largely been unable to present to converts more than a western image of its faith. The Church, Mbiti (1997) observed, “can make men at home in a nation, or in the world, only if they have first learnt to be at home in local terms.” In this way, what missionaries have meant to bring to converts has been given in part while withholding another part. Thus, we can also say that the Asantes received Christianity in part while rejecting other parts (Mbiti 1997).

In conclusion, for some converts, Christianity is quite superficial, and has no real answers to life’s personal difficulties, nor any real influence on the people’s social problems. Mission Christianity has not gone deep into the Asante traditional religiosity. For some Asante Christians the function of religion is understood in terms that are largely utilitarian and materialistic. Christianity confers a certain status in society and it is associated with civilisation. This is why some Asante Christians remain Christians in name but not in practice.

6. Asante Christians’ Encounter with Christianity and Western Culture

Asante Christians encountered Christianity in a Western package. Isichei (1995) argues that each generation of Christians have tackled the task of disentangling the Christian message from the foreign context, and inculturating it into their own worldview. According to Mbiti (1997), the missionaries who began this modern phase of Christian expansion in Africa, together with their African helpers, were devout, sincere and dedicated men and women but they were not theologians. Some of them had little education, and most of the evangelists and catechists were either illiterate or had only little formal learning. These workers were more concerned with practical evangelism, education and medical care, than with any academic or theological issues that might arise from the presence of Christianity. Isichei (1995) argues that some Europeans believed at times that the most inadequate white clergy were preferable to the local product. The linkage of mission with western political, economic, and cultural dominance has been disastrous for Christianity itself. The missionary enthusiasm for empire was based on the conviction that white cultures were superior, and that it was the duty of Europeans to be trustees or guardians of the supposedly less civilized. There is a complexity of encounter between the new faith and traditional cultures. Some missionaries condemned traditional cultural practices and created a social vacuum. Many traditions were forgotten and not replaced creating a cultural vacuum. However, Isichei (1995) believes that some of the traditional institutions, more or less maimed, survived and influenced some Christians to live two lives concurrently.

7. Christianity as a Foreign Religion

Christianity is still considered by some Asantes as the “European’s religion” which brought “new teachings and new way of life” and attempted to “deliberately destroy” Asante culture. Christianity attacked the Asante culture and required a complete abandonment of Asante culture and practices. In Conteh’s (2012) view, “Attempts were not made to answer the needs of Africans yet the missionaries enforced on Christian converts, a complete break from the African beliefs and culture that met those needs.”

Table 4 reports survey data from the doctoral research project referred in the previous sections showing that a majority of the sample survey (72.1%. n =377) were of the opinion that Christian beliefs are alien to Asante culture and religion.

Table 4: Respondents’ Stand on “Christian beliefs as alien to Asante culture and religion”

Responses	Frequency (n)	Frequency II (n2)	Percentage (%)	Percentage II (% 2)
I strongly disagree	19	65	5.1	17.6
I Disagree	46		12.5	
I Neither agree nor disagree	38	38	10.3	10.3
I agree	165	274	44.7	72.1
I strongly agree	109		27.4	
Total	369	369	100	100
Missing Number	8	8		

Source: Field Survey 2017

Table 4 indicates that out of 369 respondents, 274 (72.1%) agreed that Christian beliefs were alien to Asante culture and religion as against 65 (17.6%) who disagreed. Eight respondents had no apparent opinion on the issue and 38 were undecided. When the researcher enquired about the Asantes’ response to Christianity, an informant said, “Christianity was seen by Asantes as a foreign religion.” The picture above confirms the notion that Asantes saw Christianity as a foreign religion.

8. Christianity and Cultural Transfer

Schineller (1991) defines imposition as a method or process by which doctrines, religious customs, morals, and ways of praying and acting are brought from outside, from a foreign or alien culture. It shows no appreciation, no respect or regard, for the values, customs, and religious traditions of the group that is the object of mission. Similarly, Shorter (1998) defines domination as the unwelcome transference of foreign cultural traits; symbols, meanings, values and behaviour, from one culture to another. The transfer may occur simply because one culture overwhelms another. Its technology is superior, for example, or its ideas are compelling, or its media of communication irresistible (Shorter 1998). According to Shorter (1998), the use of moral and physical force to impose a foreign culture is a violation of human rights, since people have a right to their own culture and a right to develop it in the way they wish. This of course, explains the immense interest of African theologians in the concept and practice of inculturation.

Cultural domination, according to Shorter (1998), may be characterized by a posture on the part of the dominating culture that is so strong as to amount to the claim to be a “world culture.” Shorter (1998) noted that at various periods in history, British and Americans have deemed their own culture to be superior because their wealth commanded the respect of their nations. No culture should be imposed on others. Shorter (1998) argues that people must not forgo their culture before becoming Christians in as much as they cannot do away with their God-given and time tested cultural or religious practices which make them who they are as Christians. It is always important to distinguish between what is essentially Christian or what is European or American culture. Unfortunately, this was the case among some early Western missionaries who failed to recognize and appreciate non-Christian cultures.

Abioje (2015) observed that there seems to be no authentic form of Christianity by which African Christianity can be judged. It seems rare, if not non-existent, to find a comprehensive list of principles by which an authentic Christianity is to be measured; or to which country or place that one can go to understudy it. Indeed, Abioje (2015) quizzed, is there an authentic Christianity, pure and undiluted in any nation, society, or community? If so, then there is a need for dialogue and inculturation.

9. Inculturation

Schineller (1991) defines inculturation as the correct way of living and sharing one’s Christian faith in a particular context or culture. John Paul II (1975) in a speech at the Foundation of the Pontifical Council for Culture considered the Church’s dialogue with the cultures of our time to be a vital area, one in which the destiny of the world at the end of this twentieth century is at stake. He insisted that “the synthesis between culture and faith is not just a demand of culture but also of faith. A faith which does not become culture is a faith which has not been fully received, not thoroughly thought through, not fully lived out” (John Paul II 1975).

Waliggo et al. (1986) argued that the early centuries of the Christian Church's life witnessed a massive inculturation of the Christian message as it passed from its birth in the Hebrew culture to God's People of the Old Covenant to become the religion of the Empire, so culturally diverse from its original milieu. They were of the opinion that "the union of Christianity with the Mediterranean culture was so successful, so complete and so long lasting that we forget that we have received Christianity in this cultural matrix." Waliggo et al (1986) argued it beautifully that

"Christianity as such" does not exist. It exists when people believe; and it becomes deeply rooted when it touches people and their lives where and as they are. The faith is not a culture, but it can only find expression and live within cultures. Faith must remain faith but it only becomes living in terms of culture, understanding by culture the integral life of men and women and their values (Emphasis added).

Hence, one cannot but agree with Paul VI (1975) that "Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is addressed, if it does not use their language, their signs, their symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life."

In conclusion, an evaluation of the foregoing discussion suggests that to be truly Asante and truly Christian, the Church must adapt herself to the language, signs and symbols of the Asante culture.

9. A Truly Asante Christianity

There is a difference between Asante Christianity and Christianity in Asanteman. Christianity in Asanteman represents the belief that Christianity is a universal and uniform religion throughout the world. Based on this assumption some scholars insist on Asante Christian theology and inculturation. The fear that the Asante culture may impose itself upon the essence of the Bible message, and inculturation will colonize Biblical studies is unsubstantiated. In fact, Uzukwu (1996) thinks that "the real fear is that of the loss of power." This is because to impose foreign cultural forms on people who have their own culture as the only possible way of expressing the faith and living it can be an obstacle to catechesis. Catechesis presupposes the inculturation of the faith. Therefore, Christianity must be and should be at home with Asante culture and use the Asante language if it should find roots among the Asantes.

The western missionaries did not encourage the use of the Asante culture in the liturgical celebrations. Innocuous customs such as libation, ancestral veneration, puberty rites and rites of passage which were some of the mainstay of good life, commendable behaviour and praiseworthy conduct were forbidden. Asante traditional political, legal and economic systems were frowned upon because the principles underlying them were different from the principles of those governing the same institutions in Europe and America. Thus, Asante Christians were taught to believe that harmless and innocent practices such as drumming and dancing are repulsive, intolerable and idolatrous. Today, Christians neglect Asante values such as belief in God, fear of God, sexual decency, love of neighbour, hospitality, generosity, compassion, kindness, honesty, truthfulness, forgiveness, hard work, tolerance, justice and peace, care for the needy and poor and fight for power, prestige, wealth and false solidarity. If Asante Christians know their culture and appreciate it, they would be truly Asante and truly Christian. However, Sarpong (2016) said, "there are some non-Christians who are better human beings and Christians than many, many Christians." However, all is not lost. The essential values of the Asante culture will survive any amount of ecclesiastical condemnation. On a positive note, there are some Asante Christians who have realized that culture is not a foe but an ally to Christianity. They are therefore going back to their roots to re-discover what they have taken for granted and to realize that a truly Asante would also be a truly Christian if converted into Christianity and a better human being for that matter.

10. Conclusion

In conclusion, we have discussed the encounter of Christianity and Asante culture. We have seen the positive impact of Christianity on Asante culture in the establishment of school and hospitals. We have also seen some of the negative effects of Christianity in Ashanti Region which included the early Western missionaries and the ecclesiastical condemnation of some Asante cultural practices, and the demand on converts to make a complete break from traditional religion and culture.

However, in spite of all these, Christianity has made significant contributions to the development of Asanteman in both towns and villages, in schools and hospitals. The encounter has not been one-sided but reciprocal. Asante culture has not been completely overthrown but survives and continues to play an important role in the lives of many Asante Christians. Many traditional institutions continue to exist side by side with Christianity. Traditional religion still exerts strong influence on Asantes. According to Opoku (1978), "Traditional religion is a way of life and especially in times of crisis or when the well-being of individuals is sought, it offers satisfying values. It is so intricately woven into the fabric of the Asante culture that one cannot choose to opt out of it."

The encounter between Christianity in Asante Region has brought about changes in many cultural practices and understanding of human life and natural forces. The Asante culture used taboos, cultural practices, rituals and religion to control such activities as drunkenness, sexual immorality, sexual abuse and violence, land use, land preservation and land degradation. However, conversion to Christianity has led to the neglect of some traditional religious rituals as well as to the disregard of the Supreme Being, gods, priests, and other functionaries. It is regrettable to note that some of our leaders, civil servants, judges, priests and ministers today who are Christians and received Christian education are oppressors, cheats and corrupt in our society. By their behaviour these Christians tell the world that some anonymous Christians who practise traditional religion are often closer to the teachings of Christ than some practising Christians today. It is an undeniable fact that some traditional believers are honest and sincere in their dealings with others, nature, society and God than some Christians.

The assumption is that with the influence of Christianity and Western education, personal responsibility, personal morality and individual freedom would improve. However, the contrary is the case; the picture is not all rosy. Asanteman is bedeviled with many socio-religious problems today. Christianity has clearly not completely taken hold of some Asante Christians. Just as Christians in Europe and North America are struggling with and experiencing decline in Church membership, sexual immorality and aberrations, sexual promiscuity, individualism, materialism, hedonism, consumerism and loneliness, some Asante Christians are reverting to traditional practices and rituals to solve their everyday marital, economic, financial and family problems. This is seen in the proliferation of billboards, radio and television advertisement of traditional shrine and centres of healing. Time will tell whether Christian values will continue to have more influence on Asante Christians or not. One can only hope that it does. The Asante Christian must be truly Asante and truly Christian to survive the pressures of modernity; but there remains a battle to be won.

References

- Abioje, P. O. (2015), "The Identity of African Christianity and the Quest for Authentic Christianity" in *Journal of Applied Thought (A Multidisciplinary Approach)*, Vol. 4 (1), January 2015.
- Assimeng, M. (1989), *Religion and Social Change in West Africa: An Introduction to the Sociology of Religion*. Accra: Ghana Universities Press.
- Conte, S. P. (2012), *Essays in African Religion and Christianity*. Accra: Cynergy Media Ent.
- Ghansah, W. E. (2012). Encounters between Christianity and African Traditional Religions in Fante Funeral Practices: A Critical Discussion of the Funeral Practices of the Fantes in Ghana. A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Theology, University of Oslo, Norway in Partial fulfilment of Master of Philosophy in Inter-Contextual Theology. (<https://www.duo.uio.no/bitstream/handle/10852/32870/MASTERxTHESIS.pdf?sequence=10> accessed Sunday 4th September 2016 at 8:15 pm)
- Isichei, E. (1995), *A History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present*. London: SPCK.
- John Paul II. *Evangelii Nunciandi* (www.vatican.va)
- Kalu, Ogbu U. (1979), "Church Presence in Africa: A Historical Analysis of the Evangelization Process" in Appiah-Kubi & Torres, S. (Ed.). *African Theology En Route*. New York: Orbis Books.
- Libermann, Francis Mary Paul. "Letters to the Spiritan Community of Dakar and Gabon on 19th November 1847."
- Mbiti, J. S. (1997), *African Religions and Philosophy*. London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd.
- Oduyoye, M. A. & Kanyoro, M. R. A. (Eds.). (1992), *The Will to Arise: Women, Tradition, and the Church in Africa*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Onwubiko, O. A. (1992), *Theory and Practice of Inculturation*. Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.
- _____ (1991), *African Thought, Religion and Culture*. Enugu: Snaap Press Ltd.
- Opoku, K. A. (1978), *West African Traditional Religion*. Accra: FEP International Private Limited.
- Osegboun, R. F. (1996), *The Catechist According to the African Synod (994): Implications for Ekiti Diocese, Nigeria*. Ado-Ekiti: Hope and Paper Mills (Nig.) Ltd.
- Paul VI. (1975), *Evangelium Nuntiandi* (www.vatican.va)
- Sarpong, P. K. (2016), *Archbishop Sarpong Explains Key Christian Topics*. Accra. SNAM Press.
- Schineller, P. (1991), *A Handbook on Inculturation*. New York: Paulist Press.
- Shorter, A. (1988). *Towards a Theology of Inculturation*. London: Geoffrey Chapman.
- Uzokwu, E. E. (1996), *A Listening Church: Autonomy and Communion in African Churches*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books.
- Waliggo, J. M., Crollius, A. R., Nkeramihigo, T. & Mutiso-Mbinda, J. (1986), *Inculturation, Its Meaning and Urgency*. Kampala: St. Paul Publications.