

“IN OUR AGE,” AND CULTURE: THE RECEPTION OF NOSTRA AETATE IN
NORTH AMERICA AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ITS INCULTURATION IN
GHANA

By

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Submitted to the Faculty of

The Catholic Theological Union at Chicago

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Ministry

10 February 2026

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ACKNOWLEDGE

I wish to express my sincere gratitude to my thesis-project director and academic advisor, Professor Scott C. Alexander, PhD, for his generous guidance, intellectual rigor, and sustained commitment throughout the development of this project. His careful reading, constructive critique, and scholarly mentorship were indispensable to the completion of this work.

I am also grateful to all scholars whose works are cited in this study and to the research participants who generously shared their time, insights, and experiences.

Special thanks are extended to Eugene Abdul Muhaymin Priester, III, for his assistance in facilitating data collection among some Ghanaian Muslim respondents and for serving as a peer reviewer on my review board.

Finally, I want to thank my other review board members, Professor Roger Schroeder and Janet Cruthirds, for taking up this role.

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Abstract

This Doctor of Ministry thesis examines the reception of *Nostra Aetate* in North America, particularly in Chicago, and explores its implications for inculturation within the Ghanaian religious context. Employing practical theology and qualitative methods, the study analyzes Catholic–Muslim relations alongside African Traditional Religious frameworks of coexistence. It argues that Western institutional models of interreligious dialogue inadequately account for Ghana’s lived, communal pluralism. Drawing on indigenous values such as sacred hospitality, relational personhood, and ritual praxis, the thesis proposes an inculturated model of dialogue that is both faithful to Catholic teaching and responsive to Ghanaian socio-religious realities.

Key Words

Nostra Aetate, Inculturation, Interreligious Dialogue, Ghanaian Communal Ethics, Catholic-Muslim Relations.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Genesis of the Study

The genesis of this thesis-project proposal finds its roots in my personal experiences and professional ministerial journey. Growing up in Ghana, I lived in a household that included both Christians and Muslims, which provided me with firsthand insights into how people of different faiths coexist in everyday life. This early exposure to interreligious living fostered an appreciation for mutual respect and understanding across religious boundaries. As I grew older and assumed various pastoral roles, these experiences continued to shape my approach to ministry, particularly in contexts where Christian-Muslim interactions are shared.

As a Religious and Moral Education teacher in Ghana, the curriculum stressed interreligious studies, especially the three main religions in Ghana. I encountered numerous instances of interreligious spaces where students studied together, as well as couples in interreligious marriages. While sometimes controversial, these unions demonstrated that individuals from various religious backgrounds can and successfully do find common ground for building meaningful relationships. I conducted my master's research on marriage, which deepened my understanding of how religious groups coexist in Ghana, especially where social, political, and economic factors necessitate collaboration across religious lines. In this context, I discovered firsthand that the concept of coexistence is not merely theoretical; it is a lived reality that influences many parts of community life.

The historical and contemporary religious dynamics in Ghana have profoundly influenced my ministry. The country's religious landscape is characterized by a unique blend of Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATRs). These

faith communities have coexisted for centuries, drawing from indigenous African cultural values that promote tolerance, respect, and peaceful coexistence. African Traditional Religions emphasize community cohesion and mutual support, values that have shaped how interreligious relationships develop in Ghana. In fact, these indigenous frameworks laid the foundation for Christian-Muslim coexistence long before formal Church teachings on interreligious dialogue were introduced.

Professionally, my work in pastoral care and interreligious advocacy has further convinced me of the necessity of fostering dialogue between Christians and Muslims. In Ghana, religious groups often collaborate on political, social, and economic initiatives, creating a practical framework for peaceful coexistence. Because theological discourse on interreligious engagement has often prioritized doctrinal clarity over relational praxis, there remains a need for deeper theological reflection on what it means to engage in dialogue without compromising one's religious identity. This issue will be further explored in subsequent chapters. This realization has deepened my commitment to exploring how *Nostra Aetate* might be meaningfully inculturated within the Ghanaian context, where historical, cultural, and religious factors have already shaped rich traditions of interfaith coexistence. I am aware, however, that invoking *Nostra Aetate* as a framework for theological dialogue is not without its challenges. Critics rightly point out the document's relative silence on indigenous religions and its implicit hierarchy of religious traditions. Some might even argue that *Nostra Aetate*, rather than facilitating deeper dialogue, reinforces paradigms that marginalize non-Abrahamic worldviews and thus risks being a hindrance in African contexts.

Yet, I contend that these limitations make it all the more important for Ghanaian Catholics, and potentially for Christians and Muslims alike, to engage

Nostra Aetate critically. Wrestling with this document does not imply uncritical acceptance; rather, it invites contextual reinterpretation and theological innovation. For Ghanaian Catholics, especially, *Nostra Aetate* remains a living text whose dialogical ethos can be reimagined through African communal values, oral traditions, and indigenous epistemologies. This thesis, therefore, signals an awareness of these tensions and critiques, and it proposes a constructive engagement that holds *Nostra Aetate* accountable to its own call for mutual understanding and respect, values that resonate profoundly with Ghana's interreligious and intercultural realities.

Another significant influence on this thesis project is my experience of living and studying in Chicago, a city renowned for its religious diversity and well-established interreligious initiatives. Chicago's interfaith landscape is characterized by institutionalized structures, including theological consortia, interfaith councils, and government-supported programs, that foster formalized and policy-driven dialogue. By contrast, while Ghana also maintains structured platforms for interreligious engagement, such as the National Peace Council and various interfaith networks, much of its dialogical life is sustained informally through the rhythms of daily interaction. Interreligious coexistence in Ghana is not confined to conferences or formal institutions; rather, it is woven into the cultural fabric of society, expressed through shared rituals, communal celebrations, interfaith marriages, and spontaneous acts of neighborly solidarity. This daily, grassroots-level dialogue is often more influential than formal initiatives, reflecting a form of lived theology grounded in indigenous values and social cohesion. The comparative insight between these two contexts, Chicago's formalism and Ghana's cultural embeddedness, enriches this research by demonstrating that effective interreligious dialogue is not solely dependent on institutional frameworks. Instead, it must also resonate with the lived

experiences of communities. This realization further underscores the importance of inculturating the theological vision of *Nostra Aetate* within culturally specific paradigms of dialogue that are already operative, even if not explicitly named as such.

Rather than merely seeking to inculturate *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana, this thesis employs the document as a heuristic lens through which to analyze the challenges and opportunities of interreligious dialogue within the Ghanaian context. While *Nostra Aetate* remains a foundational Catholic resource for promoting interfaith engagement, this project does not treat its inculturation as an end in itself. Instead, the document serves as a theological and methodological point of departure for identifying areas where Catholic interreligious commitments can be reimaged in light of indigenous Ghanaian cultural and religious realities. In this sense, *Nostra Aetate* functions as a critical framework to assess the current state of interfaith relations, interrogate the limitations of existing paradigms, both Western and local, and propose strategies for developing more contextually grounded, dialogical, and transformative approaches to Christian-Muslim engagement. By drawing on African communal values, everyday religious pluralism, and theologies of mutual presence, this project contributes to a Catholic practical theological approach to Interreligious dialogue that is both faithful to magisterial teachings and responsive to Ghana's complex religious and cultural landscape. This work thus reflects not only my academic and ministerial formation but also my commitment to fostering authentic, inclusive, and theologically meaningful interreligious relationships in Ghana and beyond.

1.2 Background of Study

Dialogue is not a novel occurrence in human societies. Historically, wherever people have cohabited in communities marked by religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity, forms of engagement and mutual exchange have naturally emerged. This

phenomenon, often described as the “dialogue of life,” is observable in marketplaces, neighborhoods, family units, educational settings, social institutions, and places of worship where individuals of divergent backgrounds interact naturally.¹ In Ghana, for instance, it is common to witness Muslim-Christian couples, such as my aunt (a Methodist) and her husband (a Muslim), coexisting in enduring marital harmony for decades. Similarly, during interviews for my master’s research, many respondents shared experiences of interfaith marriages involving African Indigenous believers, Christians, and Muslims. These instances of lived interfaith engagement reflect a longstanding, *de facto* form of coexistence that is deeply ingrained in Ghanaian society.

However, it is crucial to distinguish between these natural, everyday forms of *de facto* dialogue and the intentional, ecclesially grounded *de jure* dialogue promoted in the Catholic Church’s post-Vatican II theology. While *de facto* dialogue arises from shared communal living and socio-cultural necessity, *de jure* dialogue, as exemplified in *Nostra Aetate*, is a theologically intentional praxis that emerges from a formal ecclesiological commitment to interreligious engagement. The Church’s teaching on dialogue marks a shift from merely observing coexistence to actively promoting mutual understanding as a fundamental aspect of Christian witness. This study, therefore, does not conflate these forms of dialogue but rather proposes a theological framework that critically engages the Church’s vision of *de jure* dialogue while drawing from the richness of Ghana’s indigenous and communal practices of *de facto* coexistence. By bridging these two dimensions, the thesis aims to foster a model

¹ John Borelli, “Interreligious Dialogue as a Spiritual Practice,” *Islam in the Age of Global Challenges*, 2008, 145.

of inculturated interreligious dialogue that is both theologically strong and culturally deep.

Many prominent Catholic theologians and religious studies scholars, and post-Second Vatican Council popes, have long underscored the transformative nature of interreligious dialogue. The recently deceased U.S. American theologian, David Tracy, defines dialogue as a mutually transformative encounter that requires openness and vulnerability.² Another renowned Catholic theologian, Hans Küng, further asserts that interreligious dialogue enriches one's own faith without diminishing it.³ Leonard Swidler emphasizes the ethical dimensions of dialogue, rooted in honesty, listening, and mutual respect.⁴ For Paul Knitter, dialogue is an act of both proclamation and liberation, requiring participants to uphold their beliefs while remaining open to learning from the other.⁵ *Ecclesiam Suam*, Paul VI describes dialogue as intrinsic to the Church's mission, reiterating it seventy times in the document.⁶ St. John Paul II, drawing on the Second Vatican Council's *Ad Gentes*, affirmed the presence of the "seeds of the Word" (*semina Verbi*)⁷ in all religious traditions, a theological notion rooted in the early Church Fathers, especially Justin Martyr, who introduced the concept of *logos spermatikos* in his *First Apology*.⁸ By retrieving this patristic vision, the Church reframed interreligious dialogue not merely as a sociological necessity but

² David Tracy, "The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism" (Wiley Online Library, 1981).

³ Hans Küng et al., "Christianity and the World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism," 1986.

⁴ Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue," *Horizons* 10, no. 2 (1983): 348–51.

⁵ Paul F Knitter, "Theologies of Religions," *Orbis* 110 (2002).

⁶ Pope Paul VI, "Ecclesiam Suam," in *Encyclical* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964).

⁷ Vatican II Council, *Ad Gentes: Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church*, ed. Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996), 11.

⁸ Saint Justin, *The First and Second Apologies* (Paulist Press, 1997).

as a theological and ethical imperative grounded in the universal action of the Word (*Logos*) across cultures and faiths.⁹

The Catholic Church's commitment to dialogue was institutionally embodied in the Second Vatican Council's *Nostra Aetate*.¹⁰ This groundbreaking document redefined the Church's relationship with non-Christian religions, calling for openness, collaboration, and mutual understanding. It marked a shift from a conversion-focused mission to a dialogical encounter, emphasizing shared values and the dignity of all human beings.¹¹ To borrow a locution from Benedict XVI, in the sixty years since its promulgation, *Nostra Aetate* has served as the “Magna Carta” for Catholic interfaith engagement, inspiring the establishment of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and national offices such as the USCCB’s Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs.¹²

Yet the evolution of dialogue predates Vatican II. As Borelli recounts, figures such as Said Nursî envisioned Muslim-Christian cooperation as early as 1911, and the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh laid the groundwork for ecumenical and interfaith engagement.¹³ Paul VI’s initiative in renaming the Secretariat for Non-Christians and St. John Paul II’s promotion of interfaith prayer gatherings, notably Assisi 1986, further cemented dialogue as an ecclesial and global necessity. Scholars

⁹ Borelli, “Interreligious Dialogue,” 145.

¹⁰ *Nostra Aetate*, “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” *Vatican Council II*, 1965.

¹¹ Pim Cirelli, Anthony; Valkenberg, *Nostra Aetate: Celebrating 50 Years of the Catholic Church’s Dialogue with Jews and Muslims*, ed. Pim Cirelli, Anthony; Valkenberg (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 239, <https://doi.org/10.5840/thought19926743>.

¹² Cirelli, Anthony; Valkenberg.

¹³ Borelli, 146.

such as Francis X. Clooney¹⁴ and John Cobb Jr.¹⁵ advance dialogue as a comparative theological methodology and a dynamic process of mutual transformation.

While interreligious dialogue is richly embedded in Ghana's socio-cultural life, particularly at the grassroots level, it is essential to distinguish between everyday dialogical interactions and what the Catholic Church formally identifies as the "dialogue of theological exchange."¹⁶ The latter entails scholarly engagement among religious experts seeking a deeper understanding of their respective doctrines.¹⁷ In the Ghanaian context, such structured theological dialogues remain relatively limited, particularly in integrating African Traditional Religions (ATRs) as full interlocutors. This is not to suggest an inherent inadequacy in the Ghanaian model of interreligious coexistence, but rather to highlight a gap in the formal theological domain that invites further development. The predominance of Western theological frameworks in Ghana's institutional interfaith initiatives has often shaped the terms and boundaries of these engagements. While these frameworks have made valuable contributions, their uncritical dominance risks marginalizing indigenous religious epistemologies and dialogical modes rooted in African cosmologies. Scholars such as Ezra Chitando and Kwame Bediako have urged a more contextually grounded theological discourse, one that draws upon African religious values, including ancestral mediation, cosmic

¹⁴ Francis X Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010).

¹⁵ John B Cobb Jr, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998).

¹⁶ Pope John Paul II, "Permanent Validity of the Church's Missionary Mandate," *Redemption And Dialogue: Reading Redemptoris Missio and Dialogue and Proclamation*, 2009, 1.

¹⁷ Edward Agboada, "African Christian Theology and Christology: A Study of the Contributions of Kwame Bediako, John S. Mbiti, Justin Ukpong and Charles Nyamiti," *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (2023): 315, 317.

harmony, and sacred hospitality, as critical resources for reimagining interfaith engagement in the Ghanaian context.¹⁸

Ghana presents a distinctive case of pluralism, where Christian-Muslim-ATR coexistence is sustained more by embodied social practices than by formal ecclesiastical or juridical mandates. While various interpreters within the Islamic tradition have drawn on Qur'anic verses that acknowledge the multiplicity of prophets sent to different peoples,¹⁹ it would be misleading to suggest that Islam fundamentally embraces pluralism. As in Christianity, perspectives within Islam vary significantly, ranging from exclusivist to pluralist interpretations. Seyyed Hossein Nasr, for instance, emphasizes elements within the Islamic intellectual tradition that resound with pluralistic values.²⁰ Nonetheless, it is crucial to recognize that such views reflect particular theological readings rather than a monolithic stance. In the Ghanaian context, despite opposition from some Islamic and Christian reformist movements to syncretic practices, local communities continue to embody a dialogical ethos. This ethos is evidenced in shared religious festivals, reciprocal participation in rites of passage, interfaith marriages, and communal mourning practices, demonstrating a form of interreligious cohabitation that is more pragmatic than doctrinal.

Despite the vibrancy of Ghana's grassroots interreligious interactions, evident in interfaith marriages, shared communal rituals, and mutual participation in rites of passage, the formal reception and theological appropriation of *Nostra Aetate* remains underdeveloped. While these lived practices embody the spirit of interreligious dialogue, they have not yet been sufficiently integrated into ecclesial structures or

¹⁸ Ezra Chitando, "PHENOMENOLOGY OF RELIGION AND THE STUDY OF AFRICAN TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 17, no. 4 (2005): 301, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23551743>.

¹⁹ Qur'an 10:47; 16:36

²⁰ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity* (HarperOne, 2002), 103.

theological discourse. Instead, many institutional interfaith initiatives in Ghana have tended to replicate Western models that inadequately reflect the indigenous religious and cultural frameworks that sustain religious pluralism on the ground. As Alejandro E. Williams-Becker illustrates through Latin American and Caribbean contexts, Vatican II principles have taken on a deeper character when embedded in localized ecclesial structures.²¹ Ghanaian ecclesial bodies may similarly need to reimagine theological dialogue in ways that foreground African modes of relationality, sacred hospitality, and cosmological harmony. In this regard, the issue is not a lack of interfaith encounters per se, but rather the disjuncture between lived interreligious experiences and the dominant theological paradigms that shape formal Church engagement.

Accordingly, this study argues that the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana should move beyond mimetic applications of Western paradigms and instead draw substantively from African religious and cultural resources. Such an approach does not dismiss *Nostra Aetate*'s theological vision but seeks to fulfill it through a contextualized dialogical practice that booms with Ghana's communal values and religious imagination. By engaging indigenous categories, such as *ubuntu*-inspired relationality, oral and symbolic epistemologies, and the moral-theological functions of communal rituals, Catholic interreligious dialogue in Ghana can be both faithful to magisterial teachings and responsive to the cultural context. This convergence of tradition and local spirituality offers a more sustainable and theologically robust model for interfaith harmony and theological innovation.

²¹ E. Alejandro Williams-Becker, "Inter-Religious Relations," in *Christianity in Latin America and the Caribbean*, ed. Todd M. Johnson Kenneth R. Ross, Ana María Bidegain (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University press, 2022), 49, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctv2mzb0p5.46>.

1.3 Problem Statement

While *Nostra Aetate* has catalyzed significant global advances in Catholic interfaith engagement, its impact in Ghana has remained limited, largely restricted to academic and clerical elites and insufficiently integrated into the lived religious experiences of ordinary Ghanaians. Efforts to promote *Nostra Aetate* and related Vatican II interreligious documents have often reinforced rigid distinctions between religious identities, unintentionally obscuring the deeper socio-economic and political roots of conflict in Ghana. Moreover, the formal models of interreligious dialogue adopted tend to replicate Western paradigms, privileging doctrinal debate over relational and communal praxis. In contrast, indigenous African frameworks of coexistence, rooted in traditional communal, familial, and interreligious practices, offer a more organic, sustainable, and culturally resonant approach to fostering interfaith harmony. This study argues that reappropriating the vision of *Nostra Aetate* through African cultural and theological lenses, by integrating Catholic interreligious values with indigenous traditions, holds greater promise for transforming religiously charged tensions and advancing authentic, inclusive, and lasting Christian-Muslim dialogue in the Ghanaian context.

1.4 Research Objectives

The principal objectives of this thesis project are:

1. To critically analyze the theological vision of *Nostra Aetate* and its reception and practical application in North American (particularly Chicagoan) Catholic interreligious contexts.
2. To examine the historical and contemporary dynamics of interreligious coexistence in Ghana, with special attention to indigenous frameworks rooted in African Traditional Religions (ATRs).

3. To assess the limitations of Western theological paradigms in the application of *Nostra Aetate* within the socio-religious context of Ghana.
4. To propose a model for the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana that integrates Catholic theological principles of interreligious dialogue with indigenous African values of communal living, hospitality, and relational harmony.
5. To explore the pastoral and ministerial implications of a contextualized approach to Catholic-Muslim dialogue in Ghana, aimed at equipping religious leaders, theological educators, and interfaith practitioners.
6. To contribute to the field of practical and contextual theology by offering a Ghanaian theological perspective on Catholic interfaith engagement that is faithful to Catholic tradition while responsive to indigenous cultural and religious realities.

1.5 Research Questions

This thesis project will address the following central research questions:

1. How has *Nostra Aetate* been received and practiced in North America, particularly within the context of Chicago's interreligious initiatives?
2. What indigenous Ghanaian religious frameworks historically fostered interreligious coexistence among Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATRs)?
3. What theological and pastoral limitations arise when Western models of interreligious dialogue are applied to the Ghanaian context without adaptation to local cultural realities?

4. How can indigenous African values, such as communalism, sacred hospitality, relationality, and respect for religious diversity, be integrated into a Catholic model of interreligious dialogue envisioned by *Nostra Aetate*?
5. What insights can be gained from comparing the structured interreligious initiatives of Chicago with the more relational, community-based models of interreligious engagement in Ghana?
6. What ministerial strategies and theological recommendations can be developed to foster a sustainable and culturally grounded Christian-Muslim dialogue in Ghana?
7. How can Catholic theological commitments be faithfully maintained while fostering genuine interreligious relationships through indigenous African frameworks of coexistence?

1.6 Methodology

1.6.1 Theoretical and Methodological Framework

This study employs an integrative methodology that draws from both practical theology and qualitative research to explore Christian-Muslim interreligious dialogue within African contexts, with a primary focus on Ghana and its connections to interreligious dynamics in Chicago. The methodological construction of this research emerges from a careful distinction between theory and method, recognizing the importance of both conceptual and procedural frameworks in shaping a comprehensive analysis. Theory provides the foundational lens through which interreligious engagement is understood, drawing from *Nostra Aetate*²² and Indigenous African religious traditions²³ while method refers to the specific research

²² *Nostra Aetate*, “Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” *Second Vatican Council* 28 (1965).

²³ Agbonkhianmeghe E Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot* (Orbis Books, 2008).

strategies employed to investigate interfaith interactions in different social and theological environments. The methodological framework is further informed by Practical Theology, as outlined by Cahalan and Mikoski,²⁴ is characterized by a typology encapsulated in the acronym AMPHITHOTIS²⁵ which emphasizes the balance of theological reflection, empirical engagement, and contextual sensitivity, ensuring that both theoretical insights and lived experiences contribute to the study of interreligious dialogue.

Practical theology plays a crucial role in this methodology by providing a framework for theological reflection that is praxis-oriented and deeply engaged with lived experiences.²⁶ Within this domain, the research emphasizes a correlation between Catholic theological traditions and African religious worldviews, particularly in fostering spaces for interfaith encounters that integrate religious principles with social realities. Complementing this theological approach, qualitative research methods provide the necessary tools for systematically collecting and analyzing data, allowing for an in-depth exploration of personal and communal religious experiences.²⁷ This dual engagement ensures that interreligious dialogue is not merely explored as an abstract theological concept but as a dynamic and socially embedded reality that evolves within particular contexts.

²⁴ Kathleen A Cahalan and Gordon S Mikoski, *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

²⁵ AMPHITHOTIS represents **A**ttentive to theory-praxis complexity, **M**ultidimensional nature of social context and embodiment, **P**ractice and performance-oriented, **H**olistic, **I**nterdisciplinary, **T**heologically normed, **H**ermeneutical, **O**pen-ended, **T**eleological and eschatological, **I**nterventionist and critically constructive, and **S**elf-reflective and self-implicating. See Kathleen A. Cahalan and Gordon S Mikoski, *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014).

²⁶ Terry Andrew Veling, *Practical Theology: On Earth as It Is in Heaven* (Orbis Books, 2005).

²⁷ John W Creswell and Cheryl N Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches* (Sage publications, 2016).

1.6.2 The Social Theology of Pierre Bourdieu

To deepen the study's analytical capacity, this research incorporates Pierre Bourdieu's sociological insights, particularly his concepts of *habitus* and *symbolic capital* as applied to religious social "fields."²⁸ Bourdieu's framework offers a means to critically examine the social structures, power dynamics, and historical legacies that shape interreligious relations. The study will draw upon the concept of *habitus* as the socially ingrained patterns of thought, behavior, and perception to help interpret how religious actors navigate their interreligious engagements based on their cultural and theological conditioning. It will draw upon the concept of *symbolic capital*, which refers to the authority and recognition that religious leaders and institutions possess, as a means of analyzing how Catholic, Muslim, and Indigenous religious figures negotiate their influence within interreligious spaces.

In the Ghanaian context, Bourdieu's framework enables an exploration of how religious leaders engage in dialogue within an indigenous African religious environment, where religious identity is often interwoven with social, economic, and political factors. Catholic actors and Muslim leaders bring different forms of religious capital to interreligious engagement, often influenced by historical missionary activities, colonial legacies, and contemporary socio-economic challenges. By examining these interactions, this research sheds light on the ways in which theological commitments intersect with social realities.

In contrast, interreligious dialogue in Chicago often takes place within structured institutional settings, including universities, interreligious organizations, and policy-driven initiatives. Here, Bourdieu's framework assists in analyzing how

²⁸ Andrew McKinnon, "Religion and Social Class: Theory and Method after Bourdieu," *Sociological Research Online* 22, no. 1 (2017): 161–73.

interreligious actors develop new forms of religious *habitus*, shaped by pluralistic, multicultural, and often secular environments. By integrating this sociological perspective, the study ensures a multidimensional analysis of interreligious dialogue that considers both theological and social factors.

1.6.3 Practical Theology and Critical Correlation

Given that this research seeks to contextualize *Nostra Aetate* within African interreligious dialogue by integrating Catholic and indigenous frameworks, the methodological approach must allow for a constructive engagement between tradition and lived experience. To achieve this, the study employs the critical correlation method,²⁹ which facilitates a dynamic and reciprocal interaction between Catholic theological perspectives and indigenous African religious thought. Rather than treating these traditions as separate or competing, critical correlation seeks to place them in dialogue, ensuring that cultural and contextual realities inform theological insights.

This method is particularly significant in exploring how core African religious values, such as communalism, oral traditions, sacred hospitality, and ancestral honor, can inform Catholic interreligious strategies. African religious traditions emphasize relationality and the interconnectedness of human and spiritual existence, which aligns with the Catholic commitment to dialogue and solidarity articulated in *Nostra Aetate*. This research examines how these values can be meaningfully integrated into Catholic interreligious efforts through the critical correlation approach, making dialogue more culturally resonant and theologically robust. By allowing indigenous religious insights to shape theological reflection, this method ensures that

²⁹ Tracy, “The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism.”

interreligious engagement is not a one-directional imposition of Catholic thought but a mutual exchange that enriches all religious traditions involved.

1.6.4 Qualitative Research: Narrative Inquiry and Phenomenology

In addition to theological reflection, this study relies on qualitative research methods, particularly narrative inquiry and phenomenology, to explore interreligious dialogue as individuals and communities experience it. Narrative inquiry³⁰ provides a way to access and analyze personal and communal stories, recognizing that religious identities and interreligious interactions are often best understood through lived experiences. This study seeks to uncover the underlying theological and social themes that shape interreligious relationships by collecting and interpreting narratives from Christian, Muslim, and Indigenous religious leaders. These narratives offer insight into how interreligious dialogue is practiced, negotiated, and transformed within specific contexts, whether through formal theological discussions, informal community interactions, or shared social initiatives.

Phenomenology³¹ complements narrative inquiry by allowing for a deeper exploration of the essence of interreligious dialogue as it is perceived and experienced by participants. This method seeks to move beyond surface-level descriptions to examine interreligious engagement's fundamental meanings and lived realities. In Ghana, phenomenology enables an investigation into how religious communities experience dialogue in the midst of deeply rooted indigenous spiritual traditions, while in Chicago, it allows for an analysis of how participants navigate interreligious encounters in a pluralistic and often secularized environment. By combining narrative inquiry and phenomenology, this study ensures that theological reflection is informed

³⁰ D Jean Clandinin, *Engaging in Narrative Inquiry* (Routledge, 2022).

³¹ Max Van Manen, "But Is It Phenomenology?," *Qualitative Health Research* (Sage Publications Sage CA: Los Angeles, CA, 2017).

by real-life experiences, making interfaith dialogue both an empirical subject and a theological endeavor.

1.6.5 Research Process and Ethical Considerations

The research process involves multiple data collection strategies, including semi-structured interviews, surveys, participant observation, textual analysis, and archival research. Interviews and surveys will be conducted with African Indigenous, Christian, and Muslim religious leaders, community members, and scholars actively engaged in interreligious dialogue in Ghana and Chicago. These conversations will provide firsthand insights into religious actors' motivations, challenges, and aspirations in interreligious engagement. Additionally, participant observation in religious gatherings, interreligious meetings, and cultural ceremonies will allow for a more immersive understanding of how dialogue unfolds in lived contexts.

Textual analysis will focus on *Nostra Aetate* and related Vatican documents and Christian, Muslim, and Indigenous African religious narratives to examine how theological principles are articulated and applied within different traditions concerning interreligious dialogue. Ethical considerations are central to this research, ensuring that all interactions are conducted with respect, sensitivity, and integrity. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and confidentiality will be maintained to protect the identities and perspectives of those involved. Given the religious and cultural sensitivities inherent in interfaith research, particular care will be taken to approach discussions with humility and openness, recognizing the sacred dimensions of religious dialogue.

1.6.6 Towards a Contextually Responsive Methodology

Both practical theology and qualitative research are iterative processes that require ongoing reflection and adaptation. As this study engages with Christian and Muslim communities in Ghana and Chicago, the methodological approach will remain flexible, allowing for refinements based on emerging insights and challenges. This adaptability is essential for a study that seeks to honor the complexity of interreligious relations and ensure that theological reflection remains responsive to lived realities.

This study maintains a balance between theological depth and empirical richness by integrating critical correlation in practical theology with narrative inquiry and phenomenology in qualitative research. This methodological synthesis allows for *Nostra Aetate* to be explored not as a static document but as a dynamic theological resource that can be meaningfully contextualized and inculturated within African interreligious dialogue. Furthermore, the study affirms dialogue not only as a theological subject but also as a methodological stance, one that values engagement, listening, and mutual transformation as essential aspects of interfaith scholarship.

1.6.7 Meta-Method in the Field of Practical Theology

Designing a qualitative study that contextualizes *Nostra Aetate*³² for African interreligious dialogue requires a robust methodological approach grounded in practical theology. As Creswell outlines, qualitative research is shaped by ontological, epistemological, axiological, and methodological assumptions, which influence how reality is perceived and knowledge is constructed.³³ However, since Creswell's

³² Aetate, "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions."

³³ John Creswell, "Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches.," 2013: 15.

framework is deeply rooted in Western academic traditions, this study critically engages his typology to align with more authentically Ghanaian and African epistemological perspectives. Following the principles of social constructivism, this research integrates Catholic interreligious dialogue with Indigenous African religious frameworks, recognizing that meaning is co-constructed through experience and dialogue.³⁴ At the same time, this approach remains attentive to the ministerial realities of interreligious engagement, particularly within the Ghanaian and Chicagoan contexts where theological discourse intersects with lived religious practices.

From an ontological standpoint, this study embraces the coexistence of multiple religious and cultural worldviews. Creswell asserts that qualitative research acknowledges diverse realities, a stance that resonates with the pluralistic nature of religious coexistence in Ghana and Chicago.³⁵ Rather than deconstructing the Catholic magisterial vision of interreligious dialogue, this study seeks to engage and enrich it critically through Indigenous African theological insights. Scholars such as John Mbiti³⁶ and Kwame Bediako³⁷ argue for a contextual theological approach that acknowledges the long-standing traditions of African religious communities. This study, therefore, foregrounds Indigenous African frameworks that have historically facilitated interreligious harmony, recognizing them as legitimate theological resources alongside *Nostra Aetate*. By embracing this multiplicity, the research challenges Western epistemological dominance while ensuring that Catholic interreligious efforts remain open to transformative engagement with African religious worldviews.

³⁴ Creswell, "Qualitative Inquiry," 20.

³⁵ Creswell, 21.

³⁶ John S Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (Heinemann, 1990).

³⁷ Kwame Bediako, "The Roots of African Theology," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 13, no. 2 (1989): 58–65.

Epistemologically, this study prioritizes relational and experiential knowledge, reflecting both Creswell's assertion that qualitative researchers co-construct knowledge with participants³⁸ and traditional Ghanaian epistemologies that emphasize communal wisdom. Given this research's ministerial and dialogical nature, knowledge is not merely extracted from participants but emerges through mutual encounters and dialogue. The Catholic Church, through *Nostra Aetate*, upholds the dignity of interreligious engagement as a process of learning and transformation.³⁹ This research extends that vision by integrating African oral traditions and community-based knowledge-sharing practices. Through qualitative methods such as narrative interviews and historical case studies, the study foregrounds the voices of spiritual leaders and interreligious practitioners, recognizing them as co-creators of theological knowledge.

Axiologically, this study acknowledges the role of values in shaping research, aligning with Creswell's rejection of positivist neutrality.⁴⁰ *Nostra Aetate* affirms the ethical imperative of interreligious dialogue, emphasizing mutual respect and cooperation.⁴¹ However, as African theologians have noted, Western models of interreligious dialogue often fail to account for African relationality and the communal nature of religious identity.⁴² This research explicitly acknowledges its theological commitments while remaining reflexive about the limitations of a Catholic-centered framework. By situating *Nostra Aetate* within African ministerial contexts, the study ensures that interreligious dialogue is not merely an abstract theological ideal but a lived reality shaped by cultural and historical particularities.

³⁸ Creswell, 22.

³⁹ Aetate, "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions."

⁴⁰ Creswell, 20.

⁴¹ Aetate, "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions."

⁴² Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*.

Methodologically, this study employs a constructivist and interpretative approach, recognizing that meaning is generated through historical and social interactions.⁴³ As articulated by Cahalan and Mikoski, practical theology affirms that theological reflection arises from ministerial praxis and is refined through iterative engagement with lived experience.⁴⁴ This research adopts a multi-method approach that includes historical analysis, case studies, surveys, and interviews to examine the reception and application of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana and Chicago. The study ensures its methodology is contextually relevant and ministerially transformative by engaging social constructivism, critical theory, and theological reflection.

Finally, this research affirms the importance of engaging Ghanaian religious and cultural values authentically within Catholic interreligious dialogue. As Creswell notes, interpretive frameworks significantly shape research design and analysis, making it crucial for theological reflection to be sensitive to diverse cultural contexts.⁴⁵ African theologians such as Bediako⁴⁶ and Orobator⁴⁷ advocate for a theological approach that engages African religious worldviews on their own terms rather than imposing external categories. By integrating Indigenous African spiritualities into Catholic interreligious initiatives, this study moves beyond a Eurocentric reading of *Nostra Aetate*, offering a model of interreligious dialogue that is both theologically sound and culturally resonant.

In conclusion, this study employs qualitative methodologies that prioritize multiple realities, relational knowledge, and value-laden inquiry, ensuring that *Nostra Aetate* is inculturated within Ghanaian interreligious contexts in a way that is both

⁴³ Creswell, 24.

⁴⁴ Cahalan and Mikoski, *Opening the Field of Practical Theology: An Introduction*.

⁴⁵ Creswell, 25.

⁴⁶ Bediako, "The Roots of African Theology."

⁴⁷ Orobator, *Theology Brewed in an African Pot*.

faithful to Catholic theological commitments and responsive to Indigenous African traditions. Through the integration of social constructivism, critical theory, and theological reflection, this study advances a practical theological model that bridges the gap between doctrinal frameworks and lived interreligious engagement, contributing to a more contextualized and transformative approach to Catholic-Muslim dialogue in Ghana and Chicago.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

The scope of this study is defined both geographically and thematically. Geographically, the research focuses primarily on Ghana and secondarily on Chicago, offering a comparative perspective between a West African and a North American context of interreligious engagement. Thematically, the study addresses Catholic-Muslim relations, with due acknowledgment of the role of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) in shaping the Ghanaian religious landscape. The principal focus is on interreligious dialogue as envisioned by *Nostra Aetate* and its applicability within Ghanaian socio-religious realities. Particular emphasis is placed on indigenous African frameworks of values, hospitality, relationality, and communal ethics as vital resources for Catholic interreligious praxis. Recognized limitations include:

- **Geographic Constraints:** Due to immigration and travel restrictions, direct in-country field research in Ghana will not be possible. However, substantial efforts will be made to access Ghanaian voices through remote interviews and diaspora community networks.
- **Contextual Specificity:** Findings will be grounded in the specific contexts of Ghana and Chicago. Therefore, generalizations to other African or global settings must be made cautiously and contextually.

- **Reception Challenges:** The study acknowledges potential theological tensions in proposing the integration of indigenous African frameworks with Catholic teachings, particularly among practitioners who adhere closely to traditional Western theological paradigms.
- **Language and Cultural Nuances:** While English will be the medium of research, the study recognizes that some indigenous religious expressions and experiences may not fully translate into Western academic categories. Efforts will be made to interpret such nuances faithfully within the research.

Despite these limitations, the study endeavors to offer meaningful insights into how *Nostra Aetate* can be contextualized for more effective, authentic, and sustainable Catholic-Muslim dialogue in Ghana and beyond.

1.8 Structure of Work

This thesis is structured into seven interconnected chapters, each building toward a coherent contextual theology of interreligious dialogue rooted in both Catholic tradition and Ghanaian religious experience. Chapter One introduces the study by outlining the genesis, background, problem statement, research objectives and questions, theoretical framework, and methodology. Drawing from both personal pastoral experience and theological scholarship, this chapter establishes the rationale for investigating the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana. It also defines the scope and limitations of the study, underscoring its dual focus on the Ghanaian and Chicagoan contexts.

Chapter Two explores the religious and cultural landscape of Ghana with particular emphasis on African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and their long-standing contributions to interreligious coexistence. The chapter examines precolonial religious pluralism, the cosmological and ethical functions of ATRs, and the indigenous values

of sacred hospitality, communalism, and harmony. Drawing on scholars such as Sarbah, Mbiti, Magesa, and Bediako, it establishes a descriptive anthropological foundation that highlights the deep roots of pluralism and peaceful religious interaction within Ghanaian society.

Chapter Three introduces the theoretical and conceptual tools necessary for a critical engagement with interreligious dialogue. This includes an analysis of *Nostra Aetate* and foundational Catholic theological voices such as Jacques Dupuis, Hans Küng, and David Tracy. It also presents critiques of Eurocentric religious categories through the works of Masuzawa, Said, and Asad, while affirming contextual theological approaches through the contributions of Bevans, Schreiter, and Bediako. The chapter concludes by proposing prophetic dialogue as a framework for Ghanaian theological reflection, thus offering a critical lens for interpreting subsequent chapters.

Chapters Four through Seven provide the analytical and constructive core of the thesis. Chapter Four examines the historical reception and theological limitations of *Nostra Aetate* globally and in Ghana, pointing out how formal and Western-oriented models have often obscured indigenous contributions. Chapter Five offers a comparative case study between Ghana and Chicago, illuminating differences between institutionalized models and organic community practices. Chapter Six synthesizes these insights into a proposal for a Ghanaian-inculturated version of *Nostra Aetate*, grounded in indigenous practices and Catholic theology. Finally, Chapter Seven reflects on the ministerial implications of this synthesis and proposes practical recommendations for seminaries, dioceses, and interfaith platforms, thereby bridging theology and praxis for a transformative model of interreligious engagement.

1.9 Conclusion

Chapter One has laid the foundational framework for this thesis by weaving together personal narrative, scholarly insight, and theological inquiry into a compelling rationale for the contextualization of *Nostra Aetate* within the Ghanaian religious landscape. It established that while *Nostra Aetate* marked a profound turning point in the Catholic Church's approach to interfaith relations, its application in Ghana has largely followed Western paradigms that inadequately account for indigenous frameworks. The chapter emphasized the need for a theological and pastoral model of dialogue that resonates with the lived experiences and spiritual resources of African communities.

By delineating clear research objectives and questions, alongside a robust methodological and theoretical orientation, the chapter affirms the significance of integrating practical theology, Bourdieu's social theory, and qualitative inquiry into the study of interreligious dialogue. These approaches ensure that both theological depth and sociocultural complexity are addressed. Furthermore, the emphasis on African communal values such as sacred hospitality, storytelling, and relational harmony as theological resources marks a shift from viewing African religiosity as peripheral to one that positions it at the center of ecclesial engagement.

The next chapter will expand this foundation by exploring the indigenous religious context of Ghana, focusing on how African Traditional Religions have historically shaped patterns of coexistence among diverse faiths. This cultural and spiritual backdrop will provide critical insight into the dialogical ethos that predates Christian and Islamic missions, thereby equipping the study with the necessary historical consciousness to argue for a culturally rooted inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana. The move from foundational framing to contextual description sets the

stage for a theology of dialogue that is both authentically Catholic and indigenously Ghanaian.

CHAPTER TWO

THE GHANAIAN RELIGIOUS LANDSCAPE AND INDIGENOUS FRAMEWORKS FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the religious and socio-cultural context of precolonial Ghana- with a particular emphasis on African Traditional Religions (ATRs) as dynamic systems of theological reasoning, moral governance, and intercommunal engagement. Far from being static or peripheral, ATRs- especially as practiced among the Akan, Mole-Dagbani, Ewe, Ga-Adangbe, and Kulango- constitute the foundational religious milieu from which indigenous modes of coexistence, reconciliation, and sacred responsibility emerge. Long before the advent of colonialism and either Christian or Muslim missionary interventions, Ghanaian societies had already cultivated dialogical frameworks rooted in cosmo-theological inclusivity, sacred hospitality, ritual pluralism, and communal ethics. These frameworks provided the socio-religious grammar for sustaining peaceful coexistence across diverse spiritual landscapes.

This chapter identifies ATR frameworks for interreligious dialogue as a *locus theologicus*- and in so doing offers a synthesis of the most salient features of the theological anthropologies that have informed indigenous religious life in Ghana for centuries. It demonstrates that, in the Ghanaian historical context, what North Atlantic modernism refers to as “interreligious dialogue” and/or “coexistence” is anything but a unique creation of late modern colonial and post-colonial North Atlantic cultures and therefore not an externally imposed ideal, but an internally coherent, ritually

mediated, and ethically sustained practice, albeit with its own distinct culturally situated features. This intellectual groundwork is crucial for any meaningful analysis of the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* within the Ghanaian context. By retrieving and analyzing the symbolic, ritual, ecological, and relational dimensions of ATR, this chapter argues that indigenous interfaith sensibilities are not only historically embedded but remain theologically generative for contemporary Catholic-Muslim-ATR dialogue. The sections that follow unpack these dimensions, offering a textured account of pluralism, ritual systems, and communal personhood as enduring resources for contextual theology.

2.2 Precolonial Religious Pluralism and African Cosmological Imaginaries

2.2.1 Defining African Traditional Religion (ATR)

African Traditional Religion (ATR) is fundamentally a living, dynamic, and integrated system of belief and practice that embodies the totality of African social structure from cosmology through to moral, social, political, and environmental life. It is not a monolithic or dogmatic religious framework, but rather a spectrum of locally rooted yet thematically consistent traditions that function as a way of life. Theologian James N. Amanze aptly defines ATR as

original, indigenous, home-grown, living-faith of the African people. It consists of beliefs, practices, rituals, religious symbols, religious specialists, sacred places, spirituality, and ethics which are distinct from those found in other world religions.⁴⁸

Unlike the Abrahamic faiths, which often depend on sacred scriptures for doctrinal authority, ATRs derive their normativity from the “book of nature,” including the

⁴⁸ N. James Amanze, “African Traditional Religion in Contemporary Africa: Challenges and Prospects,” in *Biblical Studies, Theology, Religion and Philosophy*, ed. N. James Amanze, F. Nkomazana, and Kealotswe (Zapf Chancery Publishers Africa Ltd, 2010), 284, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv9c6054.20>.

rhythms of the environment, the authority of the ancestors, and the continuity of community rituals. The absence of codified texts does not denote theological impoverishment but rather reflects a decentralized spiritual epistemology that privileges orality, communal memory, and sacred symbolism. It is thus best approached not as a “*religion*” in the narrow Western sense of institutional creeds and dogmas, but as a holistic religious ethos that animates everyday life.

On the whole, ATRs are inherently relational and communitarian, positing worldviews in which human beings exist in constant interaction with spiritual forces, nature, and the ancestral realm. For John Mbiti, religion constitutes an ontological reality for Africans; it is fundamentally about existence and being. He argues that, for Africans, to exist is to be inherently embedded within a religious worldview. As such, Mbiti maintains that “to live is to be caught up in a religious drama,”⁴⁹ highlighting the inseparability of life, community, and spirituality in African thought. The individual, therefore, derives meaning and identity through participation in the communal and sacred order that frames every aspect of existence. This ontological orientation permeates most if not all ATRs, where rituals, prayers, and libations are means of harmonizing relationships between the living, the dead, and the yet-to-be-born. The sacred and the secular are not separated but rather connected, such that moral behavior, agricultural practices, naming ceremonies, death ceremonies/rituals, social gatherings, and healing rituals all carry spiritual significance. For example, among the Akan of Ghana, to violate taboos is not simply a social transgression but a disruption of the sacred order inherently woven into the natural world. Such an act demands ritual redress to restore harmony within the integrated cosmological

⁴⁹ Edward Agboada, “African Christian Theology and Christology: A Study of the Contributions of Kwame Bediako, John S. Mbiti, Justin Ukpong and Charles Nyamiti,” *E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences* 4, no. 3 (2023): 316.

framework where the spiritual is manifested through, and inseparable from, material reality. Thus, ATRs are not simply about worship, but about maintaining and negotiating cosmological *order*, or, as Laurenti Magesa refers to it, “the ethics of life” in African religion.⁵⁰

The embeddedness of ATRs in African culture is exemplified in institutions such as sacred groves, chieftaincy, shrines, and ancestral stools, all of which function not as mere symbolic representations but as physico-spiritual realities within a holistic cosmology. These elements are integrally woven into socio-political structures and communal life. Among the Fante, for example, blackened ancestral stools are not inert relics of the past but active conduits of ancestral presence and authority. They are ritually consulted in matters of chieftaincy and communal discernment, reflecting the enduring agency of the ancestors. Political decisions are not simply secular acts but are ritually sanctioned, with oaths sworn before deities or ancestors, affirming that moral accountability of leaders to the living and the dead, to beings and realms more readily perceptible and less readily perceptible to the senses. In this framework, sacred institutions are not divided into physical and spiritual categories but are inseparable loci of agency, sacrality, and communal coherence.⁵¹ Similarly, among the Ewe of southeastern Ghana, the *tro-xoviwo* (ritual specialists) play roles that straddle the domains of religion, law, and healing, thus blurring the lines between priest, judge, and healer. These examples highlight that ATRs function not as a compartmentalized *religion* alongside politics, culture, art, literature, etc., but as a primary medium in which the organizing praxes of African life are performed.

⁵⁰ L Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (Orbis Books, 1997), 77, <https://books.google.com/books?id=CZrXAAAAMAAJ>.

⁵¹ Mr. Ackom, personal conversation with the Author, via Phone Call, May 10, 2025.

Ecologically, ATRs articulate a deeply rooted indigenous cosmological imagination in which nature is not conceived as a passive object for human domination, but rather as the very ground of being the living matrix from which religious, moral, and communal life emerges. The natural world is not merely "*woven into*" religious life; it *is* the sacred continuum within which relational existence unfolds. Rivers, trees, mountains, and animals are not simply symbols or instruments; they are living presences imbued with spiritual agency and ancestral resonance. In this worldview, there is no sharp distinction between the spiritual and the material, for nature itself discloses the sacred in ways that are intimate, immanent, and experiential. As Bolaji Idowu insightfully observes, the world of nature in ATRs is a *theophany*,⁵² a term that, while rooted in Western theological discourse, here gestures toward an indigenous understanding wherein divinity is not *beyond* but *within* the created order.⁵³ This sacralization of the natural world is reflected in ritual practices and taboos that function not only as spiritual observances but also as mechanisms for ecological preservation. Examples include prohibitions against fishing or farming on certain days, the protection of sacred groves, and the ritual cleansing of polluted water bodies. These customs, often dismissed as superstitions by external observers, are in fact sophisticated systems of environmental governance that sustain biodiversity and promote ecological equilibrium.

This cosmological orientation stands in absolute contrast to dominant Western paradigms that have historically viewed nature through utilitarian and mechanistic lenses, leading to widespread ecological degradation. ATRs, by contrast, foster

⁵² While terms such as "theophany" may bear Western theological lineage, their appropriation by African scholars signals a postcolonial reclamation and adaptation of language that seeks to express African religious experience in globally intelligible ways. This hybrid usage reflects the evolving character of ATRs as they engage both ancestral heritage and contemporary theological discourse.

⁵³ E Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition* (Orbis Books, 1973), 145.

various ethics of interdependence and reverence for all forms of life, offering a profound theological resource for reimagining human relationships with the earth. In this light, ATRs make significant contributions to emerging contextual theologies that prioritize environmental ethics, climate justice, and land-based spirituality. Such theologies resonate strongly with the ecological vision articulated in *Laudato Si'*, the 2015 encyclical by Pope Francis, which calls for an “integral ecology” that unites concern for the poor with concern for the planet.⁵⁴ The convergence between ATR and *Laudato Si'* underscores the possibility of an intercultural ecological theology, one that draws from indigenous African wisdom to enrich global Christian responses to the environmental crisis.

In summary, ATRs are not merely a set of rituals or supernatural beliefs, but a comprehensive theological system deeply rooted in African cultural logic, moral imagination, and social organization. Its oral transmission, communal orientation, and ecological consciousness mark it as a sophisticated and adaptive religious system. While colonial and missionary discourses often dismissed ATR as primitive or demonic, contemporary scholarship increasingly affirms its depth and relevance. Scholars such as Kofi Asare Opoku⁵⁵ and Kwame Bediako⁵⁶ have argued for the theological recovery of ATR as a vital resource for African Christian theology and interreligious dialogue. As the next sections will show, understanding ATR not only illuminates the religious landscape of precolonial Ghana but also provides critical insight into the cultural frameworks that continue to shape religious pluralism and dialogue today.

⁵⁴ Pope Francis, “Laudato Si,” *Vatican City: Vatican Press*, May 24 (2015): w2.

⁵⁵ Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Tradition* (Accra: FEP International Private Limited, 1978).

⁵⁶ Bediako, “The Roots of African Theology.”

2.2.2 *Practices, Rituals, and Sacred Systems*

The spiritual vitality of African Traditional Religion (ATR) is most tangibly expressed in its elaborate ritual systems, which embody a deeply relational cosmology. Far from being archaic remnants or mere cultural performances, the rituals and sacred practices within ATR serve as indispensable vehicles for affirming spiritual order, restoring moral balance, and sustaining communal identity. These practices are embedded in a metaphysical framework where the visible and invisible realms are mutually constitutive, and where religious performance is both theopoetic and socio-political.

Rituals within ATR encompass a wide range of activities: libations, sacrifices, initiation ceremonies, divination, sacred festivals, and healing rites. Each of these is embedded in the community's ethical and spiritual life and functions to maintain harmony between the living, the ancestors (the "living dead"), nature spirits, and the Supreme Being. Mutale Kaunda, a religious researcher, highlights the significance of rites of passage, particularly for women, as not merely cultural transitions but also as forms of spiritual empowerment and ecological awareness, underscoring how these rituals contribute to the moral ecology of African communities.⁵⁷ The performance of rituals thus affirms relational existence and enacts what Laurenti Magesa calls "the ethics of life."⁵⁸

Festivals serve as communal liturgies of memory, critique, and thanksgiving. Consider, for instance, the Ga-Adangbe *Homowo* festival, which translates to "hooting at hunger." This ritual cycle not only reenacts the ancestral triumph over

⁵⁷ Mutale Kaunda, "Mother Earth, Mother Africa and African Women's Role in Indigenous Religions," *African Journal of Gender and Religion* 27, no. 1 (May 19, 2021): 91-93, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48802985>.

⁵⁸ Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions*, 77.

famine but also sanctifies agricultural labor through spiritual invocation. The communal preparation and sharing of *kpokpoi*, ritual cornmeal food, serves as an embodied theology of gratitude to the ancestors and deities. Libations poured before speeches and ceremonies not only invoke spiritual presence but also ritually consecrate the social space, bridging past, present, and future.

Similarly, the *Kundum* festival among the Nzema and Ahanta peoples of the Western Region integrates agrarian cycles with communal purification. The climactic “*Avudwene*” rite, as described by Samuel Etikpah, enables communities to engage in symbolic reversals, satirical performances, and the critique of political leadership, functioning both as a moral renewal and a sacred resistance.⁵⁹ These festivals, far from being mere seasonal festivities, are theological events that inscribe divine-human relations into the very rhythms of time and space.

Divination and spiritual diagnosis are essential to ATRs’ interactive theology. Through the mediating roles of diviners (*akomfo*), priestesses, and traditional healers, communities seek spiritual insight into misfortune, illness, or communal discord. These figures interpret dreams, natural omens, or cosmograms such as cowrie shells or kola nuts to uncover the root causes of existential crises.⁶⁰ Divination, in this sense, is not merely predictive but pastoral, diagnosing ruptures in moral and spiritual order and prescribing ritual acts of reconciliation. This illustrates that ATR theology is not abstract speculation but concrete negotiation with the sacred.

⁵⁹ Samuel Etikpah, “Associations and Agents in the Ritual Critique of Power and Behavior: Nzema Kundum ‘Avudwene’ Ceremony,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 33, no. 1 (May 19, 2019): 38–40, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/45217806>.

⁶⁰ A brief discussion of *Akomfo* (traditional Priests/priestesses) among the Akans during Test of CTU 2025.

Participation is central. Rituals are not performed on behalf of passive observers; they involve the whole community through drumming, dance, chant, and symbolic offerings. In these embodied acts, worship becomes a form of pedagogy and a catalyst for spiritual transformation. As observed among the Akan, Ewe, and Dagomba, ritual language is highly codified, and its performance teaches intergenerational values, history, and cosmology. For example, during Akan funeral and chieftaincy installation rites, the recitation of clan names and the offering of libations reinforce kinship networks and ontological solidarity between the living and the dead. In this worldview, life itself is ritualized, marked from birth to death with ceremonies that mirror cosmological stages and ethical obligations.

Moreover, ATRs' sacred systems are intrinsically linked to spatial and ecological consciousness. Shrines, sacred groves, ancestral stools, and altars function as ontological centers, places where the spiritual and material converge. These sacred spaces are not isolated but constitute part of the communal architecture of meaning. As noted in the previous subsection, they anchor political decisions, moral authority, and spiritual mediation. In places such as Techiman, Badu (where a new chief was installed in 2025 but under contention, following this process), Aburi, Yendi, and others, chieftaincy rituals often begin with invocations at ancestral groves, reinforcing the legitimacy of leadership as derived from both the people and the spirits.

ATRs manifest a practical theodicy: when disharmony occurs, be it drought, disease, or social conflict, it is interpreted not as divine punishment in the Western juridical sense, but as a breach in relational order. The response is not guilt but responsibility, leading to acts of reconciliation. This spiritual accountability extends to the environment, as evident in rituals for rainmaking or land purification following

deforestation or mining. These practices are both theological and ecological, repairing broken relationships with the land, ancestors, and divine beings.

Hence, ATR's ritual and sacred systems are not secondary to belief; they are the syntax of belief itself. They encode metaphysical insight, moral formation, historical memory, and ecological wisdom. As the thesis contends, understanding these systems is not only vital for appreciating Ghana's religious landscape but also essential for any authentic contextualization of *Nostra Aetate*. Dialogue with ATR must take ritual seriously as a *locus theologicus*, a source of theological reflection. Only by engaging these practices as genuine theological expressions can Catholic-Muslim-ATRs' interfaith dialogue in Ghana move beyond doctrinal abstraction into the spiritually grounded encounter.

2.2.3 Nature and Characteristics of African Traditional Religions (ATRs)

African Traditional Religions (ATRs) are best understood as a holistic religious orientation permeating life's totality in many Ghanaian societies. Rather than operating as separate or systematized religions in the Western doctrinal sense, ATRs integrate metaphysical, moral, ecological, and communal dimensions into a cohesive worldview. As previous sections have shown, ATRs frame reality through a complex interaction of spiritual forces, ancestral presence, and communal obligations. What distinguishes ATRs is not merely their breadth, but their relational and performative logic: to be religious, in this context, is to live in harmony with the divine, others, and the natural environment. This lived spirituality is reflected in the rituals, symbols, and social norms that structure Ghanaian daily life. As John Mbiti insightfully noted, African religiosity is not confined to sacred times or spaces; it is a constant orientation

to life itself.”⁶¹ In this way, ATRs remain a vibrant and evolving tradition that continues to shape ethical behavior, communal identity, and interfaith engagement across Ghana’s pluralistic landscape.

However, articulating the nature of ATRs present specific hermeneutical challenges, especially when transposed into the analytical categories shaped by Christian theological frameworks. For instance, the suggestion that ATRs are monotheistic⁶² may risk collapsing diverse religious imaginaries into Western models of theological unity. As one of the supervising remarks provocatively notes by Scott Alexander, a theologian and serving as my advisor and supervisor, we must ask whether this framing represents an authentic indigenous self-understanding or whether it reflects a strategic translation, a kind of intellectual apology, designed to secure ATRs’ legitimacy within Christian discourse.⁶³ Indeed, the names of God across Ghana’s ethnic groups, *Nyame* (Akan), *Mawu* (Ewe), *Naawuni* (Dagbani), *Yege* (Kulango), and others, do reflect a shared intuition of a Supreme Being. However, these conceptions may not serve the same theological function as the monotheistic deity of Abrahamic traditions. Therefore, it may be more accurate to say that ATRs articulate a vision of divine presence that, in Catholic parlance, might be described as “sacramental,” where divinity is mediated through a plural yet cohesive spiritual ecology.

Within this sacred ecology, intermediaries such as ancestors, nature spirits, and tutelary deities are not rivals to the Supreme Being but vital expressions of divine relationality.⁶⁴ As Joseph Chakanza rightly notes, this is not a chaotic plurality but a

⁶¹ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (Heinemann, 1990), 1-2.

⁶² Thaddeus Metz and Motsamai Molefe, “Traditional African Religion as a Neglected Form of Monotheism,” *The Monist* 104, no. 3 (May 20, 2021): 394-6, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48765220>.

⁶³ Scott Alexander, personal conversation with the researcher. Via Zoom, August 1, 2025.

⁶⁴ Metz and Molefe, "Traditional African Religion," 395-97.

spiritually ordered cosmos governed by reciprocal obligations.⁶⁵ Among the Akan, *abosom* dwelling in rivers or waterbodies like *Tano* or *Bosomtwe* are not invoked independently but approached with libations that acknowledge Nyame as the ultimate source.⁶⁶ The Ga-Dangme invoke *wɔŋ* and *tsutsu* during festivals and rites such as *Homowo* and naming ceremonies, while the Dagbani consult *tindaamba* (earth priests) who interpret the will of *Naawuni* through land deities.⁶⁷ These interactions disclose a cosmology wherein hierarchy does not entail exclusivism, but relational mediation.

Still, we must be cautious not to reduce these distinctions to mere linguistic differences akin to *Gott*, *Dieu*, or *Dios* in Roman Catholic liturgical contexts. Instead, the names and narratives of Ghanaian deities may encode culturally distinctive theological logics. Jon Levenson's insights in *Inheriting Abraham* suggest that we attend not just to surface resemblances but to how each tradition organizes and authorizes its sacred narratives.⁶⁸ To speak of *Nyame*, for instance, may evoke an entire cosmology distinct from *Naawuni*, not merely different names, but potentially different theological epistemologies. Thus, this thesis affirms that the ontological integrity of ATRs must be acknowledged on their own terms, not merely as a proximate version of Christian or Islamic theism.

The performative and pragmatic dimensions of ATRs are likewise central to their theological grammar. As field interviews in northern Ghana confirm, ritual

⁶⁵ Joseph C Chakanza, "Divinity or Divinities?," in *Mission in Malawi: Essays in Honour of Klaus Fiedler*, ed. Jonathan S Nkhoma, Rhodian Munyenembe, and Hany Longwe (Mzuni Press, 2021), 510-11, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv25j12j4.25>.

⁶⁶ Nana Ansu, a subchief in Sunyani, personal conversation with the researcher, May 7, 2025.

⁶⁷ Wunpini, Sa-ad Mohammed, Personal Communication by the author, via WhatsApp Call, May 21, 2025

⁶⁸ Jon Douglas Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, vol. 3 (Princeton University Press, 2012), 156-78.

responses to drought, epidemics, or communal crises are not abstract theodicies but concrete ethical responses embedded in sacred practice.

When the land fails to yield crops and rivers dry up, the community turns to traditional spiritual structures for mediation. Elders and *tindaamba* (earth priests) are summoned to consult diviners who employ sacred instruments such as cowrie shells or ancestral relics to determine the spiritual cause of the affliction, often attributed to the offense of a land deity or ancestral spirit. If such a rupture is identified, rituals of appeasement are initiated, involving libations, the sacrificial offering of a white goat or fowl at a sacred grove (*ting bana*), and sometimes public confession of communal or individual moral failings. In Dagomba cosmology, God is known as *Naawuni*, while minor deities are referred to as *wuni* or *bugli*. Priests (*ba'a* or *bagsi*), mostly male, though rarely female, are summoned by the chief (*Naa*) to perform these rites, especially during annual sacrificial periods or emergent crises. The priest consults the gods to identify the specific deity linked to the problem and communicates the required sacrificial items, which the chief provides. The rites are not generic but tailored to the particular cause, often accompanied by penance, such as feeding the poor. Symbolically, the color of the sacrificial animal conveys the nature of the plea: white animals are used for peace, joy, or restoration, while black animals are reserved for matters related to warfare or conflict. This ritual process underscores the theological pragmatism of ATR, where theodicy is not abstract but enacted through culturally embedded, ethical, and communal responses to suffering.⁶⁹

Mohammed Sa-ad Wunpini's account of these practices suggests an interweaving of religious logics, but raises a legitimate question: to what extent do hybrid religious identities shape these explanations? Would an ATR practitioner without Christian or Muslim affiliations frame the ritual with the same theistic coherence?

Among the Kulango, who are one of the minority groups in the Bono, Bono East, and Ahafo Regions of the Akans in Ghana and southeastern Côte d'Ivoire, communal afflictions such as epidemics, strange deaths, or infertility trigger consultations with *gokphe* (spiritual mediums), who communicate with deities believed to inhabit rivers, forests, and ancestral stools.⁷⁰ In such cases, spiritual

⁶⁹ Wunpini, Personal Communication.

⁷⁰ Mensah, Kofi, interview by the author, Badu, Ghana, November 4, 2023.

pollution is cleansed through ritual bathing, libations, and animal sacrifices, often led by clan leaders or ritual priests, to restore social and cosmic balance. For the Bono people of central Ghana, especially in Techiman and Wenchi, similar situations of public misfortune are interpreted through the lens of broken taboos or spiritual neglect. The *Akomfoɔ* (traditional priests) mediate divine revelations from tutelary deities, such as *Taakora*, *Tano*, and *Ntowa*, directing ritual responses that include town sweeping, public silence, or sacrifices at the deity's shrine.

Among the Anlo-Ewe of the Volta Region in Ghana, communal disturbances such as mysterious deaths, flooding, or widespread illness are often interpreted as manifestations of spiritual imbalance or divine displeasure, typically from *Mawu*, the Supreme Deity, or from powerful deities like *Yewe*, the god of thunder. In response, the community undertakes elaborate purification rituals that involve sacred drumming, dirges, trance-induced dances, and the pouring of libation to water spirits, particularly those associated with sacred bodies like the Keta Lagoon. These rites are not merely symbolic but are deeply theological and functional, seeking to restore harmony between the spiritual and physical realms. They reflect a cosmology in which crises are not merely natural events but indicators of ruptured relationships between humans, ancestors, and the divine. The use of trance and possession during these rituals is understood as a means of direct communication with the divine, allowing the spirits to offer guidance or demand specific reparations. Such rituals reinforce communal cohesion and affirm the spiritual centrality of music and dance in the Anlo-Ewe religious system. As Emmanuel Kwaku Akyeampong notes in *Between the Sea and the Lagoon: An Eco-social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana*,

these purification ceremonies remain vital expressions of a theologically grounded, ecologically attuned, and communally sustained religious worldview.⁷¹

In all these traditions, suffering is neither viewed as random nor merely physical; it is understood as a spiritual crisis that requires a communal and ritually grounded response. These examples illustrate ATRs' theological pragmatism, where ritual acts do not speculate abstractly on the origin of evil but instead aim to restore moral and ecological order through practical reconciliation. Thus, ATRs reflect a deeply relational worldview in which every crisis, whether environmental, social, or spiritual, is interpreted and resolved through ethical and communal rites aimed at rebalancing life with the divine, the ancestors, and the cosmos.

Another defining characteristic of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) is its oral and symbolic epistemology, which constitutes an alternative theological grammar grounded in performance, embodiment, and relational memory. In contrast to Abrahamic traditions, where textuality often undergirds religious authority, ATRs transmit knowledge through a rich medium of oral narratives, proverbs, ritual drama, and symbolic gestures that are embedded within communal life. As James Amanze affirms, this does not reflect theological deficiency but instead offers an epistemological model where the “book of nature,” ancestral authority, and communal rituals serve as *loci theologici*, sites of theological reflection and moral education.⁷² This oral transmission is inherently participatory, privileging embodied knowledge over abstract doctrinal formulations. For instance, in Akan libation rituals or Ewe dirges, moral teachings are transmitted through chants, drum language, and sacred

⁷¹ E K Akyeampong, *Between the Sea and Lagoon: An Eco-Social History of the Anlo of Southeastern Ghana to Recent Times c. 1850 to Recent Times*, vol. 3 (Ohio, OH: Ohio University Press, James Currey, 2003), 112-119.

⁷² Amanze, “African Traditional Religion,” 283-285.

invocations, thereby reinforcing ethical norms and cosmological truths in performative, rather than propositional, forms.

This oral-symbolic mode of knowing is not merely a cultural object but a theological statement: it asserts that divine knowledge is encountered within the rhythms of life, the seasons of agriculture, the wisdom of elders, and the rites of passage. The absence of a codified scripture, often misunderstood in Western theological paradigms, instead reflects an incarnational epistemology where the divine is mediated through relational experience and communal memory. As the thesis argues, any contextual application of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana must recognize and engage the symbolic-theological imagination embodied in African Traditional Religions. Such oral forms should not be seen as peripheral but central to theological discourse and interreligious dialogue, precisely because in these traditions' conceptual abstractions of the Supreme Deity do not occupy the same role as in Christian and Muslim praxes. Instead, their theological force emerges through narrative, ritual, and symbol, which function as primary mediators of divine reality.

Closely connected to this epistemology is the communitarian ethic that brace up ATRs. In African cosmology, the individual is not an autonomous self but a being-in-relation, whose identity is shaped by ancestral lineage, communal obligations, and spiritual interconnectedness. This echoes the African moral philosophy of *ubuntu*, a Zulu-Xhosa term expressing the principle that “I am because we are.”⁷³ It reflects a worldview in which personhood is attained through ethical participation in community life. Laurenti Magesa appropriately describes this as “the ethics of life,” a moral system that prioritizes relational harmony, interdependence, and the

⁷³ Sandiswa Lerato Kobe, “Forgiveness and Ubuntu: A Study of the Theological Contribution of Desmond Tutu” (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, 2023), <https://doi.org/10.5463/thesis.502>.

preservation of life in all its dimensions.⁷⁴ This ethic functions not only as a moral compass but also as a mechanism of social cohesion and conflict resolution. In traditional Ghanaian settings, reconciliation rituals often require not just the offender and the offended, but the entire community, reflecting a restorative rather than retributive justice system. This communitarian orientation offers a profound resource for the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate*, particularly its vision of mutual understanding and reconciliation among peoples of different faiths.

Furthermore, ATRs embody views of nature that, in Roman Catholic parlance, might be described as sacramental, which sees creation not as a static matter but as animated by divine presence. This cosmology perceives rivers, forests, stones, animals, and celestial bodies as vessels of spiritual agency or abodes of deities. Bolaji Idowu encapsulates this understanding when he asserts that “nature in ATRs is a theophany, a visible manifestation of the divine.”⁷⁵ This ontological reverence for nature manifests in practical ecological theologies: sacred groves are preserved as dwellings of deities; certain animals are protected as totems; and taboos regulate fishing, hunting, and farming cycles. These practices, often misunderstood by external observers, function as ecological safeguards embedded in spiritual consciousness. As highlighted in the thesis, these dimensions align remarkably with Pope Francis’ *Laudato Si’*, which calls for an “integral ecology” that unites environmental care with social justice and spiritual wisdom.⁷⁶

This theological sacralization of the environment reinforces the argument that ATRs are not merely an anthropological curiosity but a profound religious tradition

⁷⁴ Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions*, 159.

⁷⁵ Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, 83-86, 140-166.

⁷⁶ Francis, “Laudato Si.”

with ecological, ethical, and dialogical implications. More than symbolic projection, it reflects an implicit and explicit recognition of the natural world as a medium of divine presence and action, where rivers, forests, and mountains are experienced as *loci* of the sacred. In this sense, ATRs' cosmology offers a robust framework for reconceptualizing interreligious dialogue not simply as a theological exchange of doctrines, but as a shared moral responsibility for sustaining life, both human and non-human. The thesis rightly contends that any contextual theology of dialogue in Ghana must take seriously this holistic, life-affirming worldview, recognizing in it a vital resource for reinterpreting *Nostra Aetate* in ways that are both spiritually faithful and culturally resonant.

In my theological assessment, African Traditional Religions (ATR) emerge not as a residual or peripheral tradition but as a dynamic and integral religious system essential for any authentically inculturated approach to interfaith dialogue in Ghana. Drawing from my ethnographic and ministerial engagements, I understand ATRs' oral-symbolic knowledge, communitarian ethic, and sacramental ecology as constitutive of a coherent theological grammar. This indigenous framework does not merely supplement Catholic theology but actively informs a contextually grounded reinterpretation of Church teaching. My thesis contends that any meaningful engagement with interreligious dialogue in Ghana must affirm the theological integrity of ATRs, allowing its relational and symbolic imagination to reorient the dialogical process toward the lived spiritual realities of African communities.

Moreover, through my contextual study, I have recognized that ATRs' framework of spiritual accountability distinguishes it as a morally robust and theologically sophisticated system. Ethical behavior is not confined to adherence to divine commands within this cosmology. Still, it is understood relationally, embedded

within a pattern of obligations to ancestors, deities, the community, and the environment. Transgressions, whether through the violation of taboos or neglect of ritual obligations, are not simply legalistic infractions but disruptions in the spiritual and moral equilibrium of the cosmos. These ruptures are often experienced as illness, misfortune, or communal unrest. However, ATRs' theodicy, as I have observed in field interviews and traditional rites, is restorative rather than retributive. Divinatory consultations, sacrificial rites, and communal acts of reconciliation function not only to redress wrongs but to repair the very fabric of relational life. This moral and theological logic provides rich resources for developing a theology of reconciliation that echoes deeply with African modes of interfaith coexistence and conflict resolution.

My theological and ethnographic engagement with ATRs confirm they are neither archaic nor incompatible with contemporary Catholic dialogue. On the contrary, they constitute a comprehensive religious worldview that shapes African identity, communal ethics, ecological awareness, and metaphysical imagination. ATRs' inclusive monotheism, ritual sophistication, environmental consciousness, oral and symbolic epistemologies, and restorative ethics are intellectually compelling and spiritually generative. For the purpose of this thesis, namely, the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* within Ghana's religious milieu, ATRs offer both a theological vocabulary and a lived anthropology that can enrich Catholic-Muslim relations. From this integrated vision, I draw practical and theological insights to propose a dialogical model that is faithful to magisterial teachings and rooted in Ghana's indigenous spiritual wisdom.

2.2.4 Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Coexistence

In my contextual exploration of Ghana's religious heritage, I affirm that pluralism was not an anomaly nor a peripheral dynamic, but a central and constitutive feature of preexisting religious life. The indigenous religious imagination in Ghana, especially among groups such as the Akan, Mole-Dagbani, Ewe, and Ga, was marked by what Sarbah and Anane Adjei describe as a "prevailing system of spiritual relationships," in which divinities, ancestors, and the Supreme Being functioned within an integrative planetary whole.⁷⁷ These systems did not demand exclusive adherence to a single tradition but allowed for concurrent participation in multiple spheres of sacred engagement. For example, a single ritual act might simultaneously acknowledge *Nyame*, ancestral spirits, and a local *abosom* without any perceived contradiction.

This integrative orientation provided the social and theological scaffolding for a society where interreligious coexistence was deeply embedded in both public and private life. Pluralism was not an imposed strategy of tolerance but an organic mode of religious reasoning. Communal prayers, inter-clan rituals, and shared observances of sacred days were commonplace across ethnic and spiritual lines. Even today, one can observe in many Ghanaian villages, such as those in the Bono, Ahafo, Bono-East, Ashanti, or Volta regions, ritual practices that unite individuals across faiths through the joint pouring of libation, or the offering of prayers that invoke both ancestral and divine presence in public forums. These practices reflect not syncretistic confusion

⁷⁷ Cosmas Ebo Sarbah and Manson Anane Adjei, "The Akan Indigenous Concepts of Religion and Nyame (the Supreme Deity) and the Promotion of Inter-Religious Relations in Ghana," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 10, no. 2 (2024): 23–26.

but a deeply internalized recognition of religious interconnectedness and mutual spiritual obligation.

John Mbiti's oft-cited observation that "Africans are notoriously religious" continues to offer crucial insight, not as an essentialist claim but as a phenomenological affirmation of how African religiosity permeates all aspects of life in ways that are fundamentally relational and dialogical.⁷⁸ In this worldview, religious identity is rarely absolutized; it is interwoven with community, lineage, and social responsibility. The spiritual world is conceived not as a realm of isolated doctrinal camps but as a communal horizon of shared powers, presences, and moral commitments.

In her Master of Philosophy course on African Traditional Religion at the University of Ghana, Professor Elizabeth Amoah observed that African Traditional Religions possess a distinctive capacity to accommodate multiple articulations of the divine without compromising internal coherence. According to Amoah, ATRs are simultaneously receptive, inclusive, and exclusive, an orientation that enables the coexistence of multiple faiths within shared social and spiritual spaces, while also allowing adherents to seek assistance from diverse spiritual sources as needed.⁷⁹ Within this cosmology, religious participation is not grounded in abstract doctrinal formulations or the quest for a singular theological system, but in inherited relational structures, rites of passage, and collective memory. Engagement with the sacred is mediated through kinship networks, communal rituals, and customary obligations, thereby fostering an inclusive religious ethos without succumbing to theological

⁷⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 1.

⁷⁹ Elizabeth Amoah, remarks during a Master of Philosophy class on African Traditional Religion, Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana, Legon, 2022.

relativism. Rather than perceiving difference as a threat, this worldview fosters a culture of sacred mutuality, where religious plurality is viewed as complementary and harmonious.

My own field observations affirm this legacy. In communities such as Klikor, Nogokpo, Badu, Kumasi, Accra, Sunyani, Odumasi, Dzodze, Jirapa, Saboba, Techiman, Wenchi, Subinso, and many other Ghanaian communities, I have witnessed elders and religious leaders from ATRs, Christian, and Muslim backgrounds engage in joint ceremonial acts during funerals, naming rituals, and festivals. These interactions are not formalized “dialogues” in the institutional sense, yet they reveal a dialogical praxis that is both spontaneous and spiritually grounded. Mutual respect, reciprocity, and shared symbolic languages characterize these interactions, indicating that the theological anthropology underpinning such engagements prioritizes relational harmony over religious exclusivism.

Matthew Heaney offers an important theological dimension to this conversation. He argues that African Christianity, particularly in its grassroots manifestations, has been profoundly shaped by the ATRs’ worldview, which provided the symbolic grammar and ritual vocabulary through which Christianity was initially encountered and received.⁸⁰ This implies that even when new religious expressions emerged, they were absorbed into a pre-existing atmosphere of spiritual meaning that valued dialogue, coexistence, and relational depth. Christianity, in this sense, did not enter a religious vacuum but was interpreted, refracted, and recontextualized through the lenses of African religious sensibilities.

⁸⁰ Robert S Heaney and Christopher Rowland, “The Theological of African Traditional the Religions:,” in *From Historical to Critical Post-Colonial Theology*, 1st ed., The Contribution of John S. Mbiti and Jesse N.K. Mugambi (The Lutterworth Press, 2016), 95–97, <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt1c999pw.10>.

In summary, I argue that Ghana's indigenous pluralism offers a profound theological and anthropological resource for contemporary interfaith dialogue. The African Traditional Religious worldview, with its dialogical metaphysics, symbolic openness, and communal ritual life, models an approach to religious diversity that transcends formal toleration and instead embraces mutual recognition, shared sacredness, and spiritual interdependence. Such a framework challenges modern interfaith paradigms that often prioritize structured dialogue over relational practices and encourages the Church to read *Nostra Aetate* not as a universal template to be applied, but as a dialogical impulse to be inculturated. Within the Ghanaian context, this means recovering the indigenous spiritual rationality that has long sustained peaceful religious coexistence, not as a relic of the past, but as a living foundation for building interreligious engagement today.

2.3 Indigenous Frameworks of Harmony: Sacred Hospitality, Ubuntu, and Communalism

In African Traditional Religions (ATRs), social and spiritual life are deeply intertwined, forming an environment in which religious pluralism is not merely tolerated but embedded in the structures of communal existence. Ghanaian indigenous epistemologies, particularly those grounded in *sacred hospitality*, *ubuntu*, and *communalism*, provide a culturally rich foundation for interreligious engagement. These frameworks operate less through formal theology and more through enacted values that shape interfaith coexistence as a way of life.

2.3.1 Sacred Hospitality (*Akwaaba* and *Ritual Welcome*)

Among the Akan and other ethnic groups in Ghana, the practice of *akwaaba*, commonly translated as "welcome," is far more than a gesture of politeness or social etiquette. It is a spiritual and cosmological imperative deeply embedded in African

Traditional Religions (ATRs). Within this indigenous framework, welcoming the other, especially the stranger, is construed as a sacred duty. This duty arises from the belief that each human being embodies spiritual value and may serve as a conduit for divine encounters. As Gyekye articulates, “the stranger is never just a stranger; he or she is an emissary of the moral order and must be treated with dignity.”⁸¹ What is striking here is that hospitality is not conditioned by familiarity or religious commonality but flows from recognizing shared humanity and spiritual reciprocity. This contrasts with certain strands of Christian theology, where hospitality practices have often been filtered through hierarchical schemas of religious authenticity. In this light, *Akwaaba* offers a corrective: it suggests a vision of interreligious hospitality that is not constrained by exclusivist judgements but grounded in the sacred worth of the other.

This indigenous philosophy mirrors the broader religious motif found in Abrahamic traditions, particularly in the Hebrew Bible and the Qur'an. In Genesis, Abraham welcomes three strangers into his tent with lavish hospitality, not knowing that they are divine messengers.⁸² His openness leads to two significant events: the sparing of his nephew Lot and family from the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah,⁸³ and the divine promise of a son to his barren wife, Sarah.⁸⁴ The Qur'an affirms this episode in Surah Hud, emphasizing the sanctity of hospitality and divine reward: “Has the story reached you of the honored guests of Abraham? When they entered upon him and said, ‘Peace!’ He answered, ‘Peace,’ and hastened to entertain them with a roasted calf...”⁸⁵ Both scriptures thus affirm that hospitality has soteriological and

⁸¹ Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing, 1996), 37.

⁸² The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version. Genesis 18:1–15.

⁸³ Genesis 18:19.

⁸⁴ Genesis 18:9-15

⁸⁵ The Qur'an. Surah Hud 11:69–73.

revelatory dimensions, a spiritual insight that echoes with indigenous Ghanaian theologies.

In practice, sacred hospitality in Ghanaian society is enacted through ritualized ceremonies and communal gatherings. For instance, during the Odwira Festival among the Akuapem-Akan, strangers and visitors are not only greeted with food and drink but also integrated into sacred rites that involve the pouring of libations, the invocation of ancestors, and the presentation of other items to welcome the people. These acts are not arbitrary cultural performances, but theological affirmations that demonstrate the guest's participation in the spiritual economy of the community. Fulgence M. Nyengele underscores the theological weight of these actions, stating that they “affirm the unity between the host, the guest, the ancestors, and the spiritual order.”⁸⁶ Cultures in which the kola nut forms part of the welcoming rites, most notably in northern Ghana, serve as a symbol of life, peace, and covenant, thus linking the act of welcome to deeper commitments of mutual respect and recognition.

Historically, this ethic of hospitality was instrumental in shaping interreligious coexistence during periods of extensive migration, trade, and religious diffusion. In the precolonial Bono-Takyiman and Ashanti regions, Muslim traders from Mali and Hausa territories were routinely hosted by local chiefs and given land to establish mosques and trading posts.⁸⁷ These acts of accommodation were not driven merely by economic interest but by the spiritual logic that the stranger carries blessing, wisdom, or even ancestral connections. Oral histories from the Gonja and Dagomba regions recount similar gestures extended to Christian missionaries in the early 20th century,

⁸⁶ Fulgence Nyengele, “African Spirituality and the Wesleyan Spirit: Implications for Spiritual Formation in a Multicultural Church and Culturally Pluralistic World. Paper Read at the Practical Theology Section of the Oxford Institute of Methodist Theological Studies” (Oxford, England, 2013), 12-13.

⁸⁷ Ivor Wilks, *Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante* (Ohio University Press, 1993).

including the symbolic sharing of food and water, a sacramental act in many indigenous cultures that binds participants in a relational obligation.

In contemporary Ghana, the tradition of sacred hospitality persists in both secular and religious contexts. During public events such as durbars or national festivals, it is not uncommon to begin proceedings with both Christian and Muslim prayers, alongside libations to ancestors, signifying a pluralistic invocation of blessing. These ceremonies reaffirm that sacred hospitality remains a living tradition that accommodates religious diversity while upholding communal unity. Interfaith marriages, inter-community funerals, and even educational partnerships across religious lines further attest to the enduring power of this indigenous ethic.

Theologically, this model of hospitality exemplifies what John Mbiti calls the “religion of life,” in which religious identity is lived out through relational and communal practices rather than doctrinal formulations.⁸⁸ It is a form of *embodied dialogue* that predates and complements formal interfaith encounters. The dialogical gesture in this context is not primarily verbal but performative, manifested in acts of welcome, ritual participation, and communal sharing. Such practices align with a theology of sacred presence, where to welcome the other is to encounter the divine. This indigenous theology affirms that dialogue begins not with debate, but with presence, being with the other in hospitality, mutual regard, and sacred space.

2.3.2 Ubuntu and Communal Personhood

The Southern African notion of *ubuntu*, often rendered as “I am because we are,” has become a widely invoked African ethic of relational personhood and social harmony. Although originating from Bantu linguistic and philosophical roots, the

⁸⁸ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*.

essence of *ubuntu* finds deep significance within West African, particularly Ghanaian, ontologies of identity and communal life. Among the Akan, Ewe, Mole-Dagbani, and Ga peoples, personhood is not regarded as an inherent or individualistic status but as something achieved through participation in the community. As Magesa emphasizes, African moral systems are relationally defined, affirming that “no one exists alone; a person is only a person because of others.”⁸⁹

Desmond Tutu's theology of *ubuntu* foregrounds this African anthropological insight within a theological and Christocentric framework. In *No Future Without Forgiveness*, Tutu asserts that “each of us is a God-carrier,” expressing a spiritual anthropology rooted in the *imago Dei*.⁹⁰ His concept of restorative justice is grounded in this communal understanding of personhood, where dignity is affirmed through and in relationships. Tutu’s reimagining of *ubuntu* for South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) highlighted not only the imperative to forgive but also the necessity of communal healing through truth-telling and moral mutuality. In the Ghanaian context, although our historical lineages differ, the foundational logic of *ubuntu*, namely relational personhood, dignity, and reconciliation, bears significant theological and practical implications.

In everyday Ghanaian life, the spirit of *ubuntu* is deeply endorsed through interreligious and interethnic interactions. One notable example is the communal ethic of child-parenting. In many towns and villages, religious boundaries are porous in terms of caregiving and moral instruction. Muslim children may attend Christian schools, participate in shared recreational spaces, and learn from Christian educators, while Christian children grow up observing Ramadan and Eid celebrations among

⁸⁹ Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral*, 45-47.

⁹⁰ Desmond Tutu, *No Future without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 2009), 93.

Muslim neighbors. These reciprocal experiences are not merely functional; they are expressions of communal trust and shared moral responsibility.

Similarly, life-cycle rituals such as funerals, puberty rites, and outdoorings ceremonies are often marked by inclusive participation across faith traditions. As Opoku notes, among the Akan, these events are not solely religious acts but communal affirmations of belonging.⁹¹ It is common to witness Christian pastors, Muslim imams, and traditional priests jointly present at funerals, festivals, social gatherings, and other public events, each offering prayers or blessings according to their respective traditions, underscoring a lived ethic of pluralistic solidarity. In such settings, *ubuntu* operates not as an abstract theory but as a theological anthropology that insists on coexistence as a moral necessity.

This communal worldview is also evident in indigenous proverbs and idioms that parallel the logic of *ubuntu*. For instance, the Akan saying "*onipa ye abusua*" (*a person is family*) or "*obi nnim a, obi ɔkyere*" (*if one does not know, another teaches*) reflects an ethic of mutual interdependence. These maxims suggest that the community is both the condition and consequence of personal development, a view that has profound implications for interfaith dialogue. Within such cosmogeny, interreligious engagement is not an intrusion but a continuation of communal interconnectivity.

Modern civil society in Ghana has strategically drawn on *ubuntu*-like principles to foster national cohesion and resolve tensions. For example, during election periods, when political polarization can align with religious or ethnic identities, organizations such as the Ghana Peace Council and the Ghana Conference of Religions for Peace (GCRP) have employed strategies of communal listening,

⁹¹ Opoku, *West African Tradition*, 34.

interreligious youth engagement, and neighborhood peace walks. These interventions often mirror the participatory vision espoused by Tutu and Schreiter, that reconciliation and peaceful coexistence must be grounded in relational and local processes, rather than elite-driven policies alone.⁹²

Moreover, the Ghanaian ethic of communalism has been critical in conflict mediation, especially in regions like Dagbon, where traditional chieftaincy disputes have occasionally escalated into religious and ethnic violence.⁹³ In such contexts, the principle of *ubuntu*, as reimagined through local values such as *nkabom* (unity) and *ahobrease* (humility), guides reconciliatory efforts led by elders, faith leaders, and youth groups. These actors often emphasize the spiritual and moral interconnectedness of all parties involved, encouraging healing through public dialogue, shared meals, libation rituals, and symbolic acts of forgiveness.

However, as I critically engage with the discourse on *ubuntu*, I must also acknowledge the caution raised by several interlocutors: invoking *ubuntu* without attending to structural justice risks reducing it to a sentimental figure of speech devoid of transformative capacity. While *ubuntu* is often celebrated for its reconciliatory ethos, its relevance to interreligious dialogue in Ghana must go beyond symbolic gestures. As Desmond Tutu's role in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) revealed, relational ideals like forgiveness only become theologically credible when paired with material reparations, institutional reform, and deep psychological healing. Judith Herman insightfully contends that any dialogical or restorative process that marginalizes the voices of victims or elides traumatic

⁹² Robert Schreiter and Reconc Reconciliation, *Mission & Ministry in a Changing Social Order*, 3rd ed. (New York: Orbis Books, 1992).

⁹³ Steve Tonah, "The Politicisation of a Chieftaincy Conflict: The Case of Dagbon, Northern Ghana," *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 21, no. 1 (2012): 20.

memory inevitably perpetuates cycles of harm.⁹⁴ In the Ghanaian context, *ubuntu* must therefore be reclaimed not merely as a moral sentiment but as a justice-oriented praxis, one that speaks into foreign excesses, systemic inequality, and the silencing of marginal communities.

Ghanaian theologians, particularly Mercy Amba Oduyoye, sharpen this perspective by emphasizing that *ubuntu* must be inclusive of women's agency and theological voices. While African communal ethics are foundational to interfaith coexistence, they have often been framed through patriarchal lenses. In my analysis, any interreligious engagement that draws on *ubuntu* must consciously center the lived experiences of women and girls, not as peripheral contributors but as vital agents in the preservation of cultural wisdom, healing rituals, and spiritual mediation.⁹⁵ Interfaith dialogue that ignores gendered dynamics risks reproducing the very exclusions it seeks to overcome.

In summary, *ubuntu*, reinterpreted within the context of Ghanaian communal personhood, serves not only as a cultural ideal but also as a deeply theological and ethical resource for interreligious dialogue. It affirms that personhood is not an isolated possession but a relational vocation nurtured through shared life. Thus, interreligious coexistence in Ghana becomes more than a pragmatic necessity; it embodies a sacred commitment to the dignity and presence of the religious Other. Viewed in this reframed light, *Ubuntu* is not merely a Southern African import; it is a dynamic, contextually grounded ethic of sacred mutuality, communal justice, and dialogical integrity within Ghana's pluralistic religious landscape.

⁹⁴ Judith Herman, *Truth and Repair: How Trauma Survivors Envision Justice* (New York: Basic Books, 2023), 77, 93, 109, 113-115, 118-119, 145.

⁹⁵ Mercy Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*, vol. 6 (A&C Black, 2001).

2.3.3 Communalism and Collective Responsibility

In Ghanaian indigenous societies, particularly among the Akan, Mole-Dagbani, Sisalas, Frafra, Ga-Adangbe, and Ewe, communalism is not merely a social preference but a theological anthropology that defines personhood, authority, and spiritual responsibility. My understanding of this communal ethic emerges not only from scholarly reflection but from lifelong immersion in the cultural logic of Ghanaian community life. In this worldview, moral responsibility is collective rather than individualistic, and governance is understood as a spiritual vocation rather than a purely political role. Governance structures, especially in rural and peri-urban contexts, are sacramentally embedded in communal life and ritually sanctioned through African Traditional Religious (ATR) frameworks. These indigenous modalities of leadership and consensus-making offer a critical theological resource for interreligious dialogue.

Chieftaincy, as a theological and political institution, illustrates how collective discernment operates within spiritually mediated public life. Decisions within the chief's court or council of elders are rarely based on the authority of a single individual; instead, they are negotiated through dialogical processes grounded in ancestral protocols. The invocation of ancestors and deities through libation at the beginning of deliberations is not mere tradition, it is a theological act. It signifies the recognition that truth and justice are not human constructs alone, but are discerned in the presence of the divine and the ancestral. As Kwasi Wiredu observes, such deliberative processes are reasoning in public, guided not only by rational consensus but by spiritual obligations and inherited communal memory.⁹⁶ The very process of

⁹⁶ Kwasi Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars: An African Perspective* (Indiana University Press, 1996), 89.

dialogue here becomes sacramental: a means of encountering truth through relational interdependence.

What makes this system particularly relevant for interreligious dialogue is its inclusiveness across religious boundaries. Communal responsibility in Ghanaian settings is not limited to ethnic or religious affiliation but is extended through moral citizenship and relational embeddedness. In Northern Ghana, for instance, it is not unusual for land or marital disputes to be adjudicated by interfaith panels comprising Muslim imams, Christian clergy, and traditional religious custodians. The Zongo communities of Tamale and Kumasi have long practiced a form of judicial pluralism, where religious leaders serve not as sectarian advocates but as moral stakeholders in pursuit of collective justice.⁹⁷ This form of spiritual jurisprudence affirms the theological insight that the sacred is not the monopoly of any one tradition, but is discerned in communal praxis.

Modern Ghanaian governance, though shaped by democratic institutions, continues to draw upon these indigenous logics of consensus and interdependence. The National Peace Council, a formal body for conflict mediation and civic dialogue, regularly integrates chiefs, priests, pastors, and imams in its consultative processes. This approach mirrors what Kwame Anthony Appiah has termed cosmopolitan rootedness, a disposition where ethical engagement is locally grounded yet globally open.⁹⁸ In such settings, religious pluralism is not merely tolerated; it is practiced through participation in shared moral and political life. It is this logic, rooted in relational ontology, ancestral accountability, and sacred hospitality, that must inform how the Church engages in interreligious dialogue.

⁹⁷ Benjamin Soares, *Muslim-Christian Encounters in Africa*, vol. 6 (Brill, 2006).

⁹⁸ Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (OUP USA, 1992), 119, 135.

Thus, interreligious dialogue in Ghana must not be viewed as a foreign or ecclesiastically imposed construct. It is already inscribed in the communal lifeworld of the people, and my thesis insists that the Church's dialogical mission must be discerned through this lens. Within ATR, dialogue is not about polemics or theological debate; it is a form of sacred engagement mediated by ritual, consensus, and ethical responsibility. The inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* in this context requires a shift from formalism to embodiment, from abstract proclamations to participatory praxis. Dialogue must be enacted through mechanisms that are recognizable within indigenous frameworks, such as communal storytelling, public arbitration, symbolic rituals of reconciliation, and interfaith festivals that reaffirm cosmic and social harmony.

In this sense, communalism becomes not only a sociological category but a theological imperative for interreligious dialogue. It embodies the core insight that, in the African sense, to be religious is to be in proper relation with God, ancestors, the community, and the stranger. A Catholic theology of interfaith engagement in Ghana, therefore, cannot remain detached from these embodied, historically grounded practices. Instead, it must integrate them as *loci theologicus*; sites where God's Spirit is already active, inviting the Church into more profound solidarity with others. Through such a paradigm, *Nostra Aetate* can be reimagined not merely as a conciliar document but as a living invitation to walk with others in the shared pursuit of justice, peace, and the common good.

2.4 Ethnic Realities of Religious Coexistence

The ethnic dimensions of Ghanaian interreligious life offer critical insight into how pluralism functions not merely as a theoretical framework but as a lived, embodied social reality. Interfaith coexistence is woven into the moral and relational

composition of daily life across various communities, from the Zongo neighborhoods of Tamale to the cosmopolitan quarters of Cape Coast, Techiman, and Kumasi. This section highlights three key arenas where religious diversity is negotiated and ritualized: kinship and marriage, festivals and ritual spaces, and public marketplaces. These expressions of what could be termed vernacular dialogue⁹⁹ are essential for understanding how *Nostra Aetate* might be meaningfully inculturated in Ghana. They exemplify a theologically charged ethic of presence, mutuality, and pragmatic coexistence.

2.4.1 Interfaith Marriages and Kinship Integration

Ethnographic evidence gathered from among the Kulango people of Ghana during fieldwork conducted for my master's thesis in 2023 reveals that interfaith marriages are not anomalous occurrences but are deeply embedded within Ghanaian socio-religious life. These unions, particularly between Christians and Muslims, are typically structured not by theological consensus but by cultural frameworks that prioritize kinship cohesion, respect for elders, and social continuity. In numerous ethnic communities, it is customary for marriage ceremonies to commence with traditional rites, including the pouring of libation to ancestral spirits. These rites constitute the foundational *customary marriage*, which customarily precedes what is informally referred to as the “white wedding” or “church marriage.”

Drawing from both personal observation and ecclesial practice, it has been consistently noted that most mainline Christian denominations in Ghana will only officiate or bless a marriage within the church after the respective families have duly performed the requisite customary rites. A church wedding conducted without prior

⁹⁹ Stephen B Bevens and Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, vol. 30 (Orbis Books, 2004), 277.

fulfillment of customary obligations is often perceived as irregular or socially unacceptable. Notably, the invocation of ancestors during these rites occurs irrespective of the participants' religious affiliations, whether Christian, Muslim, or adherents of African Traditional Religion (ATR), thereby underscoring the precedence of cultural and familial bonds over strict confessional identities.¹⁰⁰¹⁰¹

In such households, pragmatic arrangements are made to honor religious diversity. A Christian husband may ensure his Muslim wife has time and space for Friday Jumu'ah prayers, while she might actively participate in Easter or Christmas festivities with her in-laws. These acts are not theologically assimilative but relationally negotiated. Children in such households often receive dual religious exposure, attending Qur'anic classes on weekdays and church services on Sundays. Rather than viewing this as syncretism, families see it as a comprehensive moral formation, a response to Ghana's pluralistic reality. As Chitando argues in his analysis of religious hybridity in African marriages, these unions function as practical theology in motion, showing how ordinary people navigate the spiritual economy of difference without resorting to conflict.¹⁰²

This coexistence within the home sphere reflects broader indigenous values that understand religion not as a privatized belief system but as a communal, negotiated relationship. Oduyoye insists that African familial theology requires sensitivity to gender, communal obligation, and mutual care, dimensions that are clearly visible in interfaith marriages, where respect, tolerance, and moral integrity often override dogmatic differences.¹⁰³ In my own pastoral and familial contexts, I

¹⁰⁰ Opoku, *West African Tradition*, 101.

¹⁰¹ Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral*, 56.

¹⁰² Ezra Chitando, "Phenomenology of Religion and the Study of African Traditional Religions," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 17, no. 4 (2005): 305, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23551743>.

¹⁰³ Oduyoye, *Introducing African Women's Theology*.

have witnessed interfaith couples resolve religious tensions through dialogical decision-making rooted in shared cultural ethics rather than creedal conformity.

2.4.2 Shared Ritual Spaces and Festivals

Ghana's religious calendar is punctuated by communal festivals that function as ritual spaces for interfaith engagement and cultural solidarity. Celebrations such as the Odwira Festival among the Akuapem, the Kundum Festival among the Nzema, the Fojo Festival among the Badu Kulango, Homowo among the Ga of Accra, and the Damba Festival in northern Ghana are notable for attracting broad participation from Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of African Traditional Religion (ATR). These events embody a pluralistic ethos, wherein religious identity does not preclude participation in culturally significant rites. For instance, during the Odwira Festival in Akropong, it is common to observe both Christian and Muslim youth assisting in the purification of sacred stools, and elders from various religious backgrounds, including Christians and Muslims, joining traditional priests in the offering of libations.

In one encounter during field observation in a town in the Bono Region, a catechist affiliated with one of the mainline Christian denominations also served as the *okyeame* (chief linguist) of the town. As the *okyeame*, he was responsible for leading the libation rites during public festivals. This dual role became a point of contention within his congregation, where lay members raised concerns about syncretism and demanded that he be relieved of his catechetical duties. However, the local priest offered a divergent perspective, asserting that the role of *okyeame* was a cultural obligation rather than a religious one. This incident underscores a broader epistemological challenge within African contexts, namely, the difficulty of delineating between cultural responsibilities and religious identity. Such cases

highlight an indigenous cosmology in which the land, ancestors, and community are deemed sacred, transcending confessional boundaries.¹⁰⁴¹⁰⁵

These festivals become spaces for “ritual coexistence,” where spiritual significance is shared without theological homogenization. Elders often interpret such participation not as religious compromise but as a moral duty to maintain the spiritual ecology of the community. As Mbiti famously observed, “Africans are notoriously religious,” meaning that all of life is sacred and that multiple religious expressions may coexist within a shared ethical and spiritual order.¹⁰⁶ My field observations in Badu and Akropong confirm that during communal rituals, such as town purification or harvest blessings, ritual actions are not delineated by religious exclusivism but by ancestral obligation and communal stewardship.

Moreover, these festivals foster what Lamin Sanneh describes as translatability of religious meaning, whereby theological symbols are reinterpreted across cultural boundaries.¹⁰⁷ The act of a Christian joining a shrine procession or a Muslim donating to a festival does not indicate theological drift, but rather relational solidarity. These shared spaces thus offer a lived model of what *Nostra Aetate* envisions, a respectful recognition of the sacred in the religious other, grounded in shared humanity and divine origin.

2.4.3 Dialogue through Market and Social Interactions

The Ghanaian marketplace remains one of the most vivid sites of interreligious interaction. In commercial hubs such as Kumasi’s *Kejetia* Market, Accra’s Makola Market, Techiman main market, and Tamale’s Market, daily

¹⁰⁴ Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral*, 77.

¹⁰⁵ Sarbah and Anane Adjei, “The Akan Indigenous Concepts,” 25.

¹⁰⁶ Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 1.

¹⁰⁷ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture* (New York: Orbis Books, 2015).

encounters among Christian, Muslim, and traditionalist traders reflect a theology of coexistence embedded in social practice. Here, vendors greet one another with phrases such as “Peace of Christ,” “*Salaam Alaikum*,” or “*Wankayeye*,” regardless of religious identity. These greetings are not superficial; they signal a moral expectation of honesty, fairness, and mutual support, values deeply rooted in indigenous cosmologies and Islamic-Christian ethics.¹⁰⁸¹⁰⁹

Shared calendars also govern ethical behavior. It is common for Christian vendors to respect Islamic prayer times or for Muslim traders to pause sales during Christian processions. In many cases, traders contribute financially or logistically to each other’s religious celebrations, a Christian supporting a Muslim’s Eid festivities or a Muslim participating in a Christian harvest. These actions are underpinned by a social theology that recognizes community peace and economic prosperity as collectively negotiated blessings.¹¹⁰

This mode of engagement aligns with the African moral philosophy of *ubuntu*, where identity and responsibility are co-constructed within the community. “I am because we are” takes on practical significance in these interreligious spaces, as traders rely on trust and reciprocity rather than confessional allegiance. As Wiredu notes, communal reasoning in African societies is often mediated by spiritual obligations and relational ethics, even in non-religious settings such as markets.¹¹¹

From a theological perspective, these everyday practices constitute a form of “dialogue of life,”¹¹² in which people of different faiths witness to their beliefs not through debate but through coexistence, cooperation, and shared vulnerability. These

¹⁰⁸ Opoku, *West African Tradition*.

¹⁰⁹ Nasr, *The Heart of Islam: Enduring Values for Humanity*.

¹¹⁰ Robert J Schreiter, “Reconciliation: Spirituality and Strategies” (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), 29.

¹¹¹ Wiredu, *Cultural Universals and Particulars*, 89.

¹¹² Elie Wiesel, *Nostra Aetate, Thought*, vol. 67, 1992, 97, <https://doi.org/10.5840/thought19926742>.

market interactions thus challenge ecclesiastical models of dialogue that prioritize formal structures over lived witness. For *Nostra Aetate* to be effectively inculturated in Ghana, it must take seriously the vernacular theology that animates daily life. Here, religious meaning is not evaluated against abstract hierarchies of doctrinal authenticity or minimal thresholds of monotheistic ideation, but emerges from an everyday sacramentality in which faiths coexist within a shared moral economy. In this register, interreligious life is not structured by suspicion or rivalry but by reciprocity, obligation, and mutual recognition that make religious plurality possible and vital.

2.5 Conclusion: Reclaiming Indigenous Ground for a Contextual Theology of Dialogue

This chapter has demonstrated that Ghana's religious landscape, particularly as shaped by African Traditional Religions (ATRs), presents a robust theological and cultural foundation for interreligious dialogue. The values of sacred hospitality, *ubuntu*, communalism, and symbolic participation constitute not only social norms but theological orientations that make peaceful coexistence both natural and spiritually meaningful. Through rituals, festivals, libations, and kinship networks, indigenous religious communities have long engaged in a form of interfaith practice that is relational, performative, and ethically grounded. These practices are not marginal expressions of spiritual life but embody the lived theology of mutual respect, shared sacredness, and the communal pursuit of harmony among diverse faiths. In this light, Ghana's interreligious dynamics emerge not as abstract ideals but as active, embodied expressions of a spiritual cosmology that is deeply responsive to the presence of the other.

Yet, despite this rich religious heritage, these indigenous frameworks remain underrepresented in formal Catholic theological discourse and interreligious strategy. This chapter affirms that any meaningful inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* must begin by taking seriously the theological legitimacy of these African systems, not as supplementary curiosities, but as foundational expressions of dialogue. By recognizing the spiritual rationality of ATR and its contributions to communal ethics and religious coexistence, the Church is invited to reframe dialogue not only as doctrinal exchange but as embodied presence, shared memory, and relational depth. The next chapter will provide the conceptual tools for such a reframing. It will examine *Nostra Aetate* in its theological context, explore critiques of dominant interfaith models, and develop a contextual theological grammar that aligns with Ghana's dialogical ethos. This theoretical framework will then serve as the lens through which the reception, adaptation, and pastoral application of interreligious dialogue in Ghana are analyzed in subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER THREE

THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Introduction

Having established in Chapter Two the indigenous theological matrices that undergird religious pluralism in Ghana, including African Traditional Religions (ATRs), sacred hospitality, *Ubuntu*, and communal ethics, this chapter transitions the study from ethnographic and historical description to analytical and constructive theological engagement. The aim here is not only to introduce theoretical models but to interrogate them through the lived religious pluralism of Ghana, especially as it pertains to the inculturation and reception of *Nostra Aetate*, a 1965 document within African contexts in the twenty-first century. Chapter Two has demonstrated that Ghanaian society is neither religiously monolithic nor theologically neutral, but rather animated by a complex cosmology that has long facilitated interreligious coexistence through relational, ritual, and ethical frameworks deeply embedded in the African lifeworld. In this light, *Nostra Aetate*, though a monumental shift in Catholic theological orientation, must be reread, critiqued, and ultimately inculturated through a lens that honors the theological integrity of these indigenous systems.

This chapter, therefore, provides the conceptual and theological scaffolding for a contextual reinterpretation of *Nostra Aetate*, offering a bridge between descriptive contextualization and critical theological construction. It brings into conversation magisterial texts, contextual critiques, and contemporary theological models that bear relevance for the Ghanaian context. It is concerned not merely with interpreting dialogue as a doctrinal imperative but with reimagining it as a lived theological practice shaped by the symbolic, ritual, and communal grammars of African religiosity. The central premise is that interreligious dialogue in Ghana cannot

be meaningful without engaging the ontological, epistemological, and ritual assumptions of ATRs and Islam, alongside Catholic theological frameworks.

Accordingly, this chapter is divided into five interlocking sections. The first section revisits *Nostra Aetate* as a foundational yet unfinished theological document. It explores its contributions to Catholic openness to other religions, its Christocentric orientation, and the lacunae that necessitate contextual adaptation, particularly its silence on ATRs. The second section introduces contextual and critical religious theory, engaging the works of Tomoko Masuzawa, Talal Asad, and Edward Said to highlight the epistemic limitations of Western theological categories that continue to inform Catholic ecclesiology and interfaith engagement. The third section analyzes contextual theology and the methodology of inculturation, drawing on the works of Stephen Bevans, Roger Schroeder, and Kwame Bediako. These thinkers offer frameworks for understanding theology as an embedded, culturally shaped activity, especially in postcolonial and African Christian contexts.

The fourth section turns to the model of prophetic dialogue, a missiological paradigm developed by Bevans and Roger Schroeder, which seeks to hold proclamation and dialogue in a productive and non-dualistic tension. Prophetic dialogue, as a paradigm, resonates with the dialogical ethos already present in Ghanaian religious life and provides a theologically robust model for Catholic engagement with Islam and African Traditional Religion (ATRs). Finally, the fifth section offers a synthesis of these theoretical insights to propose a local theological grammar for interreligious dialogue in Ghana. This grammar attends to the symbolic languages, ethical practices, and ritual structures that constitute dialogue not as an institutional program but as a theological way of being-with-the-other in the pluralistic spaces of Ghanaian life.

Thus, this chapter serves a dual function: it critically evaluates existing models of interreligious engagement and begins to articulate an alternative theological vision rooted in both the Catholic tradition and the religious textures of Ghana. By constructing a conceptual framework that privileges contextual fidelity and theological depth, the chapter prepares the ground for Chapter Four, which will explore the global and local receptions of *Nostra Aetate* and assess the conditions under which its inculturation in Ghana may be theologically credible, pastorally fruitful, and dialogically transformative.

3.2 *Nostra Aetate* and the Catholic Theology of Dialogue

Nostra Aetate, promulgated on October 28, 1965, during the Second Vatican Council, represents a watershed moment in the Catholic Church's engagement with religious diversity. The declaration, officially titled *Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions*, begins with a universal affirmation: "The Church considers above all in this declaration what people have in common and what draws them to fellowship."¹¹³ This inaugural statement signaled a marked departure from theological exclusivism and polemical ecclesiocentrism toward a dialogical vision anchored in shared humanity, divine providence, and the intrinsic dignity of all people. As Jacques Dupuis explains, *Nostra Aetate* introduced a "new theological climate," one marked by openness to the presence of grace and truth in other religions, even as the Church maintained its Christocentric foundation.¹¹⁴

¹¹³ Second Vatican Council, "Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *Vatican Council II*, vol. 28, 1965, art. 1, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

¹¹⁴ Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Orbis Books, 1997), 180-82.

The document affirms that other religions “often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all people,”¹¹⁵ and it explicitly mentions Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam. Most notably, it elevates the Church’s stance on Judaism, recognizing the ongoing covenantal relationship between God and the Jewish people. However, this otherwise expansive orientation is notably silent on African Traditional Religions (ATRs), revealing the Eurocentric and Christocentric contours of its theological imagination. While the document laid a theological foundation for dialogue, its framework was undeniably shaped by Western theological assumptions and ecclesiastical priorities that historically marginalized oral, indigenous, and non-scriptural traditions. As Tomoko Masuzawa critiques, the category of “world religions” as used in Western theological discourse often presupposes literate, text-based systems, thus relegating religions like ATRs to the periphery of interreligious recognition.¹¹⁶

The absence of ATRs in *Nostra Aetate* underscores a structural silence that has theological consequences. In its engagement with Hinduism and Buddhism, the document affirms “rich spiritual content” and expresses appreciation for the religious quest of the East. In contrast, its complete omission of African spiritual traditions reflects what Talal Asad terms “epistemic asymmetry,” whereby non-Western religious traditions are rendered either invisible or inferior within dominant ecclesiological narratives.¹¹⁷ This absence is particularly problematic in the African context, where ATRs constitute a foundational spiritual grammar for millions of people, including those who now identify as Christians or Muslims.

¹¹⁵ Second Vatican Council, “Nostra Aetate,” Art 2.

¹¹⁶ Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (University of Chicago Press, 2012).

¹¹⁷ Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Jhu Press, 1993), 2, 8, 133.

Nevertheless, *Nostra Aetate* should be approached not as a closed system but as a theological horizon open to re-interpretation and contextual deepening. Pope John Paul II, speaking at the 1986 Assisi Interfaith Prayer Gathering, emphasized that *Nostra Aetate* is not a final word but a “starting point” for renewed theological engagement that honors the religious other as a bearer of sacred wisdom. His own ministry, particularly in encounters with traditional African and Asian religious leaders, demonstrated a pastoral and theological willingness to extend dialogue beyond the confines of textually codified traditions.¹¹⁸

In the African context, and specifically in Ghana, where Christianity, Islam, and ATRs coexist in overlapping communal and ritual spaces, the theological implications of *Nostra Aetate* must be critically reevaluated. The omission of ATRs reflects not only a Eurocentric bias but also a theological lacuna that fails to recognize indigenous African cosmologies as *loci theologici*. Kwame Bediako insists that the African Christian identity cannot be understood apart from its pre-Christian religious heritage. He argues that ATRs provide the conceptual categories through which the Gospel was initially received and continues to be understood in African societies.¹¹⁹ This insight echoes with Robert Schreiter’s emphasis on inculturation as a necessary process through which theology becomes embedded in local cultures and worldviews.¹²⁰

In Ghana, religious pluralism is not an abstract principle but a lived reality shaped by sacred hospitality (*akwaaba*), ritual cooperation, and communal personhood (*ubuntu*). These indigenous models of dialogue were not only present

¹¹⁸ Pope John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (Knopf, 1995), 77, 95.

¹¹⁹ Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1995).

¹²⁰ Robert Schreiter, “Local Theologies in the Local Church: Issues and Methods,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 1981, 97-99.

long before Vatican II but continue to inform everyday interreligious relations. As Sarbah and Anane Adjei have noted, the African religious landscape is inherently dialogical, characterized by relational openness and mutual recognition of the sacred.¹²¹ Thus, any authentic appropriation of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana must be grounded in these indigenous dialogical grammars.

Furthermore, the practical theology of dialogue envisioned by *Nostra Aetate* must be expanded to account for the symbolic and oral theological expressions of ATRs. ATRs articulate a robust theological worldview through rituals, festivals, libations, proverbs, and ancestral memory. As Laurenti Magesa emphasizes, ATRs are religions of life, where theology is embodied in the moral, ecological, and communal rhythms of existence.¹²² These expressions demand theological recognition, not as anthropological artifacts but as genuine contributions to the religious quest for God.

The Ghanaian context, then, presents a profound opportunity to reframe *Nostra Aetate* as a dialogical invitation rather than a doctrinal finality. This means moving beyond the mere inclusion of ATRs into Catholic interreligious discourse to actively listening to and learning from their theological insights. For example, the ATRs' view of the land as sacred and the cosmological interconnectedness of all life aligns with Catholic ecological theology as articulated in *Laudato Si*.¹²³ Similarly, the communal rites of reconciliation in Ghanaian culture offer rich resources for sacramental theology and interfaith pastoral ministry.

¹²¹ Cosmas Ebo Sarbah and Manson Anane Adjei, "The Akan Indigenous Concepts of Religion and Nyame (the Supreme Deity) and the Promotion of Inter-Religious Relations in Ghana," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 10, no. 2 (2024): 31.

¹²² Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 62, 159, <https://books.google.com/books?id=CZrXAAAAMAAJ>.

¹²³ Francis, "Laudato Si."

In light of these reflections, *Nostra Aetate* must be reread not merely as a Western ecclesial document but as a theological template capable of being reshaped through inculturation. Rather than imposing its framework upon African contexts, the document must be engaged in a dialogical hermeneutic whereby African religio-cultural experiences actively reinterpret the text. David Tracy, in his articulation of the *analogical imagination*, insists that authentic theology arises from a mutually critical correlation between the Christian tradition and the particularities of contemporary experience, including cultural and religious plurality.¹²⁴ Applying this framework to interreligious dialogue in Ghana, the task is not only to implement *Nostra Aetate* but to reimagine it through the epistemologies, symbolic practices, and communal sensibilities that characterize African religiosity, thus enabling a theology that is both Catholic and contextually resonant.

In summary, while *Nostra Aetate* remains a foundational document for Catholic interreligious dialogue, its limitations, particularly its silence on ATRs, necessitate critical contextual engagement. In the Ghanaian context, this engagement involves a double movement: honoring the magisterial vision of mutual respect and recognition while also expanding its theological categories to include the rich traditions of ATRs. As the Catholic Church in Ghana continues to live out the implications of *Nostra Aetate*, it must do so not as a passive recipient of Western theology but as an active co-creator of a truly global and intercultural theology of dialogue.

¹²⁴ David Tracy, "The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism" (Wiley Online Library, 1981), 413.

3.3 Critiques of Western Religious Frameworks

Western theological frameworks, particularly as they inform Catholic approaches to interreligious dialogue, have been the subject of sustained critique by postcolonial theorists and scholars of religion. These critiques challenge the foundational assumptions and classificatory systems that underpin Western religious thought, particularly its universalizing tendencies and epistemological exclusions.

Tomoko Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions* presents a seminal examination of how the concept of "world religions" was constructed within 19th-century European imperial discourse. Masuzawa argues that the classification of certain traditions as "world religions" has privileged textual and codified systems, such as Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism, while marginalizing oral, non-textual, and indigenous traditions, including African Traditional Religions (ATRs). This epistemological privileging, Masuzawa contends, was not merely academic but deeply ideological, functioning to render ATRs invisible or irrelevant in global religious discourse.¹²⁵

Talal Asad further develops this critique in *Genealogies of Religion* (1993), arguing that modern Western definitions of religion are neither neutral nor universal, but rather historically contingent and culturally situated. He critiques the liberal-secular premise that posits religion as a private, belief-based system divorced from power and politics. Asad exposes how such frameworks obscure the embeddedness of religion in socio-political relations and delegitimize non-Western religious forms that do not conform to these criteria. In particular, Asad draws attention to the epistemic

¹²⁵ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 3-18.

violence inflicted by classificatory regimes that fail to recognize the complexity and legitimacy of religious practices, such as those found in ATRs.¹²⁶

Edward Said's foundational work *Orientalism* complements these perspectives by unveiling how Western scholarship on the East was often complicit in colonial domination. Said demonstrates that knowledge about non-Western religions was frequently generated through a lens of cultural superiority and exoticism. These orientalist representations informed missionary and colonial strategies that presented Christianity as the zenith of religious evolution and dismissed indigenous religions as backward or demonic.¹²⁷

These critiques are not merely theoretical. Their implications are efficient for the Ghanaian context, where ATRs continue to be treated as inferior in both ecclesial and state-sponsored religious discourses. The omission of ATRs in *Nostra Aetate* itself reflects what Asad describes as an epistemic asymmetry, an ontological violence that delegitimizes entire cosmologies. For example, Ghana's educational curriculum and many interfaith initiatives, particularly those shaped by Western Christian paradigms, often marginalize ATRs, relegating it to the realm of folklore or cultural heritage rather than treating it as a living, theological system.

This structural marginalization has real-world consequences. For instance, in interfaith gatherings organized by diocesan commissions in Ghana, ATRs practitioners are rarely invited as theological interlocutors. When included, they are often asked to perform rituals rather than engage in doctrinal or theological discussion. Such tokenism reflects the very epistemological bias that Asad,

¹²⁶ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 27-54.

¹²⁷ Edward W Said, "Orientalism," *The Georgia Review* 31, no. 1 (1977): 162-87.

Masuzawa, and Said critique: a reduction of ATRs to anthropological spectacle rather than recognizing it as a bearer of theological truth.

Moreover, Catholic theological discourse, when imported without adaptation, often fails to resonate with the Ghanaian religious imagination. The dominance of Western Christological and ecclesiological categories, which emphasize dogma and propositional belief, contrast sharply with the symbolic, communal, and performative grammar of ATRs. As Laurenti Magesa has argued, ATRs is a religion of life, wherein moral order, ritual performance, and ecological balance are deeply theological realities.¹²⁸ Similarly, Kwame Bediako (1995) insists that African Christianity must rediscover the spiritual languages of its indigenous past if it is to be fully authentic.¹²⁹ These insights demand a reorientation of Catholic dialogue frameworks to include ATRs as a full participant in theological exchange.

Practical models for such reorientation already exist. For example, the National Peace Council's interfaith educational programs in Ghana have recently begun including ATRs leaders in curriculum design and ethical dialogue workshops. In these programs, ritual specialists and Christian and Muslim clerics co-develop frameworks for peacebuilding that incorporate indigenous cosmologies of reconciliation, such as libation and ancestral mediation, alongside Qur'anic and Biblical models of forgiveness.¹³⁰ This is not syncretism but contextual theological engagement. Another example is the work being done in the Diocese of Sunyani, where Catholic catechists are being trained to recognize ATRs moral principles as preparatory pedagogical tools for evangelization and dialogue. Here, ATRs is engaged

¹²⁸ Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions*, 62, 159.

¹²⁹ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*.

¹³⁰ Fauzu Masawudu, "Peace Council to Boost Religious Tolerance in High Schools," Citi Newsroom, accessed May 15, 2025, <https://citinewsroom.com/2025/02/peace-council-to-boost-religious-tolerance-in-high-schools/>.

not merely as a cultural backdrop but as a theological resource. Such initiatives align with what Robert Schreiter describes as local theologies that emerge from the lived experiences of particular communities.¹³¹

Therefore, any meaningful inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana must begin by deconstructing the Western theological frameworks that have historically shaped Catholic interfaith engagement. This involves a methodological shift, from extraction to conversation, from tolerance to recognition, from periphery to theological center. It also demands epistemological humility, recognizing that Western theology does not possess a monopoly on truth, and that the symbolic, oral, and ritual grammars of ATRs are not only valid but necessary for constructing a truly global Catholic theology of dialogue.

In conclusion, the critiques posed by Masuzawa, Asad, and Said, when read alongside African theological voices like Magesa and Bediako, offer indispensable tools for interrogating and reimagining Catholic interreligious frameworks in Ghana. By challenging the colonial legacies embedded in the Church's theological apparatus, these critiques open up space for an interfaith dialogue that is both faithful to the magisterial vision and responsive to local spiritual realities. The Ghanaian Church must not merely implement *Nostra Aetate* but re-theologize it, through the voices, rituals, cosmologies, and moral systems of the people it seeks to serve.

3.4 Contextual Theology and Inculturation

Contextual theology, as articulated by Stephen Bevans, is not a peripheral or secondary task but the fundamental way theology must be done in our age,

¹³¹ Schreiter, "Local Theologies in the Local Church," 97-101.

particularly in culturally plural societies like Ghana.¹³² Theology divorced from context risks becoming abstract, irrelevant, or even oppressive. In contrast, contextual theology assumes that every articulation of the Christian faith is necessarily shaped by the particularities of place, culture, history, and lived experience. This approach is especially pertinent for African contexts, where indigenous cosmologies, oral traditions, and ritual frameworks are not only repositories of meaning but living theological grammars.

Bevans' *models of contextual theology*, particularly the praxis and anthropological models, offer critical lenses through which the inculturation of Catholic theology can occur in Ghana. The praxis model emphasizes theology as a reflective engagement with human experience in light of faith, urging a method that arises from the lived struggles, hopes, and social conditions of the people.¹³³ Meanwhile, the anthropological model foregrounds culture itself as a *locus theologicus*, a site of divine revelation, ethical wisdom, and symbolic depth.¹³⁴ When applied to the Ghanaian context, these models reveal the profound theological insights embedded in traditional values such as sacred hospitality (*Akwaaba*), *Ubuntu*, and communal personhood.¹³⁵

Building upon Bevans' framework, Robert Schreiter deepens the conversation by framing inculturation as a dialogical, rather than monological, process. In his view, inculturation is not a unidirectional imposition of the Christian message onto a passive culture, but rather a mutual and creative encounter between the Gospel and local

¹³² Stephen B Bevans, "Contextual Theology as Practical Theology," in *Essays in Contextual Theology* (Brill, 2018), 30–35.

¹³³ Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Revised an (NY: Orbis Books (Maryknoll), 2002), 70–79.

¹³⁴ Bevans, *Models of Contextual*, 60–69.

¹³⁵ cf. Chapter Two

tradition.¹³⁶ Schreiter insists that every theology must be “a theology in context,” forged in the crucible of cultural symbols, language, suffering, and aspirations.¹³⁷ In this respect, African Traditional Religions (ATRs), with their rich symbolic universe, oral theologies, and ethical cosmologies, are not mere anthropological curiosities but indispensable interlocutors in the theological enterprise. Their exclusion from official Catholic dialogue frameworks, as observed in *Nostra Aetate*, reflects not only a failure of recognition but also a limitation of theological imagination.

Kwame Bediako represents a powerful African voice in this theological path. For Bediako, African theology must emerge from within African cultural and religious systems, rather than merely adapting foreign categories. He contends that ATRs, far from being primitive or pagan, constitute the primary religious background through which most African Christians have come to understand the Gospel. The incarnation of Christ, Bediako argues, must occur *in African terms*, through African idioms, symbols, and communal practices.¹³⁸ This implies a “theological decolonization,” a deliberate re-reading of Christian tradition in a way that validates the pre-Christian religious experiences of African peoples as authentic avenues of divine revelation. Such a move echoes with *Nostra Aetate*’s affirmation that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions,”¹³⁹ a claim that remains incomplete without its genuine application to African religiosity.

Indeed, my theological formation, nurtured in both Ghana and Chicago, confirms this hermeneutic necessity. Growing up in a family that practiced both Christianity and Islam, while also honoring ancestral traditions, I have experienced

¹³⁶ Robert J Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Orbis Books, 2015), 27-29.

¹³⁷ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*.

¹³⁸ Bediako, “The Roots of African Theology.”

¹³⁹ Second Vatican Council, “*Nostra Aetate*,” art 2.

firsthand the complex interaction of religious belonging and cultural identity. As a Religious and Moral Education teacher in Ghana and later as a ministerial student engaging in interfaith work in Chicago, I have witnessed how theology is often enacted “on the ground” and transcends rigid doctrinal categories through ritual participation, communal celebrations, and ethical responsibility.¹⁴⁰ These lived expressions call for a theology that is not only doctrinally sound but also existentially and culturally reverberating.

The Ghanaian context provides a compelling canvas for such theological innovation. The cosmology of ATRs is not centered on abstract metaphysics but on *relational ontology*, where human beings exist in harmony with the divine, the ancestral realm, and the ecological order.¹⁴¹ The land is sacred, the ancestors are alive, and rituals are modes of maintaining cosmic balance. These themes align closely with Catholic theological insights, particularly in sacramentality, moral theology, and ecological ethics. For instance, ATRs’ reverence for nature as theophanic resonates deeply with Pope Francis’ calls for an “integral ecology,” suggesting fertile ground for theological convergence.¹⁴²

Moreover, Chicago's interreligious landscape, characterized by structured interfaith councils, academic consortia, and policy-oriented dialogue platforms, offers a contrasting yet instructive model to Ghana’s dialogical terrain. While Ghana is not devoid of formal interreligious institutions, such as the National Peace Council and various faith-based councils, much of its interfaith engagement is sustained through grassroots mechanisms that are deeply woven into the social and cultural framework.

¹⁴⁰ cf. Chapter One

¹⁴¹ cf. Chapter 2.2.3

¹⁴² cf. *Laudato Si*, 2015.

These informal yet potent avenues include interfaith marriages, shared rituals, market interactions, communal celebrations, and indigenous reconciliation processes. As established in Chapter One and further elaborated in Chapter Two, the majority of Ghanaians participate more fully in these informal dialogical spaces than in formal institutional initiatives.¹⁴³ Ghana thus offers an incarnational and participatory model of interreligious dialogue, rooted in indigenous practices such as palaver, storytelling, ritual hospitality, and *ubuntu* ethics. These frameworks must not be subordinated to Western theological paradigms but instead elevated as authentic and enriching contributions to global Catholic theology. Recognizing the theological and epistemic value of Ghana's informal dialogical systems affirms the need for a contextualized and culturally echoing reinterpretation of *Nostra Aetate*.

Therefore, inculturation must go beyond mere adaptation or translation. It demands a mutual transformation, a “dialogical inculturation,” where both the Church and the local culture are challenged and renewed. In this sense, contextual theology becomes a prophetic act: it challenges ecclesial structures to move beyond Eurocentric universals and invites the local Church to theologize from its own spiritual memory and cultural imagination. It also guards against the dangers of superficial syncretism by grounding theology in deep cultural hermeneutics and ecclesial discernment.

In practice, this means rethinking theological education in Ghanaian seminaries to incorporate ATRs as a foundational source of theology, rather than merely as a historical or sociological subject. It means equipping ministers with the tools to discern and integrate indigenous rituals, ethical traditions, and oral narratives

¹⁴³ cf. Chapters One & Two

into pastoral life. It means empowering lay communities to reflect theologically on their lived experiences using both Scripture and inherited wisdom. This entails reinterpreting magisterial texts, such as *Nostra Aetate*, through the lens of Ghanaian religio-cultural epistemologies, which prioritize community over individualism, relationship over abstraction, and ritual over rhetoric.

In conclusion, contextual theology and inculturation, particularly as developed by Bevens, Schreiter, and Bediako, provide a robust framework for reimagining Catholic theology in Ghana. Rooted in both global Catholic tradition and local African wisdom, this approach affirms that authentic theology arises not from cultural neutrality but from the creative tension between the Gospel and the worldviews of specific communities. In this regard, Ghana is not merely a recipient of theology but a co-creator of Catholic theological vision, capable of shaping a more inclusive, dialogical, and spiritually grounded Church.

3.5 Prophetic Dialogue as a Model

The paradigm of *prophetic dialogue*, as proposed by Stephen Bevens and Roger Schroeder, presents a compelling and contextually adaptable model for engaging in interreligious mission in pluralistic societies, such as Ghana, and metropolitan contexts like Chicago. As a theological framework, prophetic dialogue holds in tension the proclamation of the Gospel and the humility to listen deeply to the religious other, affirming both the rootedness of Christian identity and the transformative potential of mutual encounter. This model is not a compromise between proclamation and dialogue but a dynamic, Spirit-led process of “being with” others while bearing faithful witness to Christ.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ Stephen B. Bevens and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Orbis Books, 2011), 38-40.

In *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*, Bevans and Schroeder argue that this model is especially crucial in a world where interreligious coexistence is both a pastoral necessity and a theological imperative. Mission is no longer to be understood as a unilateral imposition of the Christian message but as an incarnational and dialogical movement of mutual conversion, “a dance” between proclamation and presence, between critique and compassion.¹⁴⁵

In Ghana, prophetic dialogue finds natural character with longstanding indigenous frameworks such as sacred hospitality (*Akwaaba*), communal discernment, and proverbial wisdom traditions. While formal interfaith institutions, such as the National Peace Council and other interreligious councils, do exist, their reach is often limited compared to the pervasive influence of informal, everyday modes of encounter. These grassroots spaces, family gatherings, funerals, festivals, and neighborhood interactions are where interreligious life is most dynamically lived. Within these settings, dialogue is not staged in formal conferences but unfolds organically through shared rituals, moral reciprocity, and relational integrity. Rather than presenting dialogue as a specialized activity, the Ghanaian context reveals it as a social-theological ecology where religious plurality is not merely tolerated but integrated into the rhythms of communal life. This incarnational model of dialogue, deeply embedded in ordinary practices, affirms the divine presence in the lived experience of religious others and challenges the Church to discern God’s activity beyond formal doctrinal spaces.

This approach avoids both relativism and triumphalism. As Bevans and Schroeder insist, prophetic dialogue affirms the uniqueness of the Christian message

¹⁴⁵ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 17.

while recognizing the work of the Spirit in other traditions.¹⁴⁶ It is, therefore, a model that invites conversion not only of the other but of oneself, an insight that speaks profoundly to the relational intersections of Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATRs) in Ghana. In a society where religious identity is often intertwined with kinship, ethnicity, and communal belonging, the model of prophetic dialogue allows for a theological interpretation of these interfaith encounters as moments of grace, rather than threats to doctrinal purity.

Globally, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) has adopted prophetic dialogue as the defining mode of mission in pluralistic Asia. Their "threefold dialogue" with the poor, with cultures, and with religions has inspired theologians such as Edmund Chia and Jonathan Tan to speak of the Church as a *community of dialogue*.¹⁴⁷ In my own engagement with the urban interfaith movements in Chicago, such as the Council of Religious Leaders and Catholic-Muslim dialogues at institutions like Catholic Theological Union, prophetic dialogue becomes a space to affirm shared commitments to justice, peace, and human dignity while also articulating one's faith with clarity and love. These settings reflect what Bevans and Schroeder describe as "entering someone else's garden," where one does not seek to dominate but to listen, serve, and be transformed.¹⁴⁸

In *Constants in Context*, Bevans and Schroeder emphasize that prophetic dialogue must be rooted in God's Trinitarian nature, "communion in mission." The Church does not possess a mission; rather, God's mission possesses the Church.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 54.

¹⁴⁷ Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, "FABC Papers No. 48," *Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences Papers* (Hong Kong: Office of Social Communication, Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences, 1987), 3.

¹⁴⁸ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 72-86.

¹⁴⁹ Stephen B Bevans and Roger P Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today*, vol. 30 (Orbis Books, 2004), 290-91.

This understanding dismantles ecclesiocentric triumphalism and reorients mission as participation in God’s dynamic, outward-moving love. It echoes the Indigenous Ghanaian worldview in which the divine is always already present in community, history, and nature. In this worldview, the stranger is a potential messenger, and the sacred is encountered not in abstraction but in relationship. Thus, prophetic dialogue aligns naturally with African theologies of *Ubuntu*, *ɛban mu nkyerekyerɛ*, and interdependence.

My personal acceptance of prophetic dialogue arises from both my theological training and lived experience. In Ghana, I have witnessed Muslims join Christians in communal labor (*nnoboa*), and traditional priests bless Christian leaders during harvest festivals. I have prayed alongside Jewish rabbis and Muslim imams in Chicago for peace and racial justice. These experiences affirm that mission, at its best, is not about conquest but communion, not about superiority but solidarity. Prophetic dialogue enables me to name these moments theologically as encounters where the Spirit is already at work, inviting us to recognize Christ hidden in the faces of our religious others.¹⁵⁰

Ultimately, prophetic dialogue, as articulated by Bevans and Schroeder, is not merely a strategic framework but a spirituality, a theological disposition marked by “letting go and speaking out,” inviting the Church into a posture of humility, vulnerability, and faithful witness.¹⁵¹ Within the Ghanaian context, where interreligious engagement is often mediated through communal rituals, sacred hospitality, and relational wisdom, prophetic dialogue echoes deeply as a lived

¹⁵⁰ Matt. 25:40 (NRSV): And the king will answer them, ‘Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me

¹⁵¹ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 88-99.

theology rather than a doctrinal abstraction. It calls for a kenotic openness that does not dilute the Gospel but embodies its incarnational essence, Christ dwelling among us, speaking truth in love, and recognizing the sacred in the other. This model offers a compelling response to the challenges of religious exclusivism, cultural alienation, and ecclesial triumphalism, particularly in societies like Ghana where Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATRs) co-inhabit the same moral and spiritual universe. In this light, prophetic dialogue becomes integral to the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate*, not as an imported theological accessory but as a contextual grammar of mission that affirms the image of God in every religious other and calls the Church to mutual transformation through dialogue, solidarity, and embodied witness.

3.6 Synthesis: Toward a Local Theological Grammar of Dialogue

The convergence of the theological and conceptual frameworks developed thus far necessitates a move toward a localized theological grammar for interreligious dialogue in Ghana. This grammar is not merely a system of communication but a hermeneutical and ethical posture, one that seeks to articulate the logic, language, and practices through which dialogue becomes both intelligible and transformative within the Ghanaian context. It arises as a theological imperative in light of the inadequacies of Western frameworks that have often universalized their categories without sufficient regard for African religious epistemologies, symbolic worlds, and moral logics.

This local grammar must first critically decenter the normative gaze of Western theology. As demonstrated by Tomoko Masuzawa,¹⁵² Talal Asad,¹⁵³ and

¹⁵² Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

¹⁵³ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*.

Edward Said,¹⁵⁴ the epistemic violence embedded in foreign religious categories continues to shape theological engagement in postcolonial contexts. In Ghana, such frameworks often marginalize African Traditional Religions (ATRs), reducing them to anthropological curiosities or mere cultural artifacts. A contextual grammar, by contrast, begins with the affirmation of ATRs as a theologically valid system. Drawing from Kwame Bediako's insistence that ATRs provide the cultural substructure for African Christian identity, the grammar must treat ATRs not as a pre-Christian stage, but as a *locus theologicus*, a site where divine revelation is encountered through ancestral wisdom, ritual practice, cosmological harmony, and moral accountability.

Equally vital is the engagement with Islam, which, alongside Christianity and ATRs, forms the triadic religious foundation of Ghanaian society. In contrast to Western models that often prioritize scriptural comparison or doctrinal apologetics, the Ghanaian dialogue grammar would be relational and experiential, foregrounding lived coexistence, shared sacred spaces, and mutual participation in social, economic, and political life. Islamic-Christian-ATRs interactions in Ghana are marked not by polemic but interdependence, as seen in interfaith marriages, joint festivals, and collective responses to community crises. A local grammar would prioritize *dialogue of life*, a concept echoed in *Dialogue and Mission*¹⁵⁵ but recalibrated through Ghanaian communal ethics, sacred hospitality (*Akwaaba*), and *ubuntu*.

Theologically, such a grammar is not abstract but sacramental. As Laurenti Magesa has noted, ATRs embodies a theology of life, wherein rituals, symbols, and

¹⁵⁴ Said, "Orientalism."

¹⁵⁵ Secretariatus pro non christianis, "The Attitude of the Church Towards the Followers of Other Religions," *Reflections and Orientations on Dialogue and Mission* Pentecost (1984).

moral actions are not ancillary to belief but are themselves theological.¹⁵⁶ In this sense, storytelling, drumming, libation, proverbs, and dance become forms of theological expression. Dialogue, then, is not only discursive but performative and liturgical. This echoes with Robert Schreiter's notion of local theology, where theological meaning emerges from the people's symbolic universe.¹⁵⁷ Hence, a Ghanaian theological grammar would articulate a dialogical method grounded in oral tradition, communal discernment, and cosmological reverence.

Pope Francis's notion of a theology in the streets *Ad Theologiam Promovendam*,¹⁵⁸ provides further ecclesial validation. He calls for a theology that is close to the people, born of their joys and sufferings, and practiced in the public square. The Ghanaian context, with its blend of everyday interfaith cooperation and grassroots ritual collaboration, is fertile ground for such a theology. By embracing local symbols, idioms, and religious performances, the Church in Ghana can contribute to a global theological conversation that is both Catholic and inculturated.

This local theological grammar would thus function on three interrelated levels: symbolic, ethical, and structural. Symbolically, it affirms Ghanaian cultural resources as vehicles of theological insight. Ethically, it mandates a posture of humility, listening, and mutual transformation. Structurally, it calls for the institutional recognition of ATRs and Muslim leaders not merely as guests in Catholic dialogue but as co-theologians in constructing a shared moral vision. Such a vision

¹⁵⁶ Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*.

¹⁵⁷ Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies*.

¹⁵⁸ Pope Francis and Christopher Evan (translator) Longhurst, "Ad Theologiam Promovendam (On Promoting Theology)," *Apostolic Letter Issued Motu Proprio* (Rome: Vatican Press, 2023), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378710067>.

would echo the vision of Vatican II and the FABC's threefold dialogue, with the poor, cultures, and religions, yet reimagined through Ghanaian religious experience.

The theological grammar proposed in this section is not merely a conceptual tool but a call to embodied praxis. It invites the Ghanaian Church to move beyond doctrinal abstraction toward a lived dialogue theology shaped by context, culture, and community. Rooting the reception of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana's symbolic, relational, and ethical lifeworld is essential for cultivating a dialogical ethos that is both theologically grounded and pastorally practical. While this section has offered the foundational contours of such a grammar, its practical adequacy and theological credibility will be further explored in the next chapter, which critically examines the reception and contextual limitations of *Nostra Aetate* in both global and Ghanaian settings.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has established the conceptual and theological scaffolding necessary to contextualize *Nostra Aetate* within the Ghanaian religious landscape. By engaging Catholic magisterial teachings, postcolonial critiques, and contextual theological models, the chapter has proposed a shift from Western theological universalisms toward a locally rooted grammar of interreligious dialogue. It has been argued that such a grammar must affirm African Traditional Religions (ATRs) not as peripheral or pre-Christian relics but as vital theological interlocutors. Moreover, prophetic dialogue, as a missiological model grounded in mutuality, witness, and vulnerability, echoed Ghana's indigenous frameworks of sacred hospitality, *Ubuntu*, and communal ethics deeply.

This synthesis revealed that a meaningful reception of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana must move beyond formal doctrinal engagement to embrace relational, symbolic, and performative modes of theological encounter. As developed herein, a local grammar of dialogue affirms ATRs and Islam as co-creators of theological meaning within Ghana's pluralistic society. Such a framework challenges the Church to rethink its dialogical posture from tolerance to embodied mutual transformation.

Having laid this theoretical foundation, the next chapter critically examines *Nostra Aetate* itself, its global reception, theological assumptions, and the inherent limitations of its application within the Ghanaian context. Chapter Four will interrogate the historical genesis of the document, trace its interpretive developments, and explore how its Western paradigms, when uncritically applied, fail to engage indigenous African religious realities. In doing so, it will further assess the need for a Ghanaian-inculturated reinterpretation of *Nostra Aetate*, thereby testing the viability and relevance of the theological grammar proposed in this chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RECEPTION AND LIMITS OF *NOSTRA AETATE* IN GHANA AND BEYOND

4.1 Introduction

The promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* during the Second Vatican Council in 1965 marked a decisive turning point in the Catholic Church's approach to non-Christian religions. Emerging from the Council's broader vision of *aggiornamento*, the declaration reoriented Catholic theology toward dialogue, affirming that other religious traditions contain elements of truth and holiness. In doing so, it initiated what many scholars regard as the beginning of a new theological climate, one that sought to transcend exclusivist paradigms and open pathways for mutual understanding among diverse faiths.

Yet, as transformative as *Nostra Aetate* was within the Catholic imagination, its reception across different contexts has been uneven. In Western Europe and North America, it inspired institutional frameworks, academic disciplines, and interfaith initiatives that continue to shape theological discourse and practice. In African contexts, however, including Ghana, its impact has been far more limited. This is not due to indifference to interreligious engagement but rather to the text's underlying theological architecture, which reflects Western categories of religion and omits the lived pluralism that defines African societies. Most notably, *Nostra Aetate* excludes African Traditional Religions (ATRs) from its purview, thereby sidelining traditions that remain central to Ghanaian cosmology, ritual life, and interreligious coexistence.

Building on the foundations laid in earlier chapters, particularly the mapping of Ghana's religious landscape and the discussion of contextual theology, this chapter

critically evaluates the reception and limits of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana and beyond. It argues that while the declaration remains a milestone in Catholic interreligious thought, its silence on indigenous traditions and its Christocentric orientation necessitate critical re-theologization if it is to serve as a credible resource for dialogue in the Ghanaian context.

The analysis unfolds in four movements. First, it traces the historical genesis of *Nostra Aetate* within Vatican II and its global theological reception. Second, it examines the document's impact on Catholic interfaith engagement at institutional and scholarly levels. Third, it highlights the challenges posed by its application in Ghana, particularly its Western assumptions and the marginalization of ATRs. Finally, it draws comparative insights from Chicago's interfaith infrastructures, showing how formalized models of dialogue illuminate both the potential and the limits of *Nostra Aetate* when considered alongside Ghana's embodied, grassroots religious coexistence.

Ultimately, this chapter contends that *Nostra Aetate* must be reread not as a static conciliar artifact but as a living text, open to reinterpretation through the symbolic grammars, communal ethics, and dialogical practices of Ghanaian religiosity. Only in this way can the declaration move beyond its historical limitations to become a resource for genuine interfaith solidarity and theological inculturation in the twenty-first century.

4.2 The Genesis and Global Reception of *Nostra Aetate*

The promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* on October 28, 1965, during the Second Vatican Council, marked a profound shift in Catholic engagement with religious plurality. Born out of a post-Holocaust ecclesial introspection and the *aggiornamento*

spirit that animated Vatican II, the document sought to reposition the Catholic Church in a posture of openness and dialogue toward the religious *other*. Originally envisioned as a brief statement on Jewish-Christian relations, championed by figures such as Cardinal Augustin Bea and Pope John XXIII in response to the horrors of the Shoah,¹⁵⁹ *Nostra Aetate* evolved into a broader reflection on the Church's relationship with non-Christian religions, including Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam.¹⁶⁰

Theologically, the declaration represented a break from the exclusivist and triumphalist paradigms that characterized much of pre-conciliar ecclesiology. By affirming that “the Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions,”¹⁶¹ the document laid the foundation for a dialogical theology in which non-Christian traditions were no longer dismissed outright but were recognized as potential vehicles of truth and grace. Drawing upon John W. O’Malley’s assessment of the transformative ethos of Vatican II, *Nostra Aetate* may be understood as inaugurating a new theological climate, a shift that, while preserving a fundamentally Christocentric orientation, nonetheless opened the doors to mutual understanding and theological reciprocity among the world’s religions.¹⁶² Building on the conciliar vision inaugurated by *Nostra Aetate*, Francis X. Clooney develops a comparative theology in which interreligious engagement becomes an occasion for tolerance and mutual transformation. He describes this discipline as acts of faith seeking

¹⁵⁹ Raymond Canning, “Nostra Aetate (1965) Historical Genesis, Key Elements, and Reception by the Church in Australia,” *The Australasian Catholic Record* 93, no. 4 (2016): 387–418.

¹⁶⁰ Kail C Ellis, *Nostra Aetate, Non-Christian Religions, and Interfaith Relations* (Springer Nature, 2020): 2-3.

¹⁶¹ Second Vatican Council, “Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions,” *Vatican Council II*, vol. 28, 1965, §2

https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

¹⁶² John W O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2010).

understanding, a theological practice that intentionally embraces vulnerability to be deeply changed by the encounter with another tradition.¹⁶³

The document's global impact has been significant. It catalyzed the establishment of structures such as the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and inspired numerous national episcopal conferences to form interfaith commissions and educational programs. John Borelli, who served as Associate Director of the USCCB's Secretariat for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, was part of an institutional framework explicitly created to foster relations with non-Christian religious communities.¹⁶⁴ On a global scale, *Nostra Aetate* has been instrumental in promoting high-level dialogues between Catholic representatives and leaders of Islam, Buddhism, and Judaism, including the historic interfaith prayer meeting in Assisi convened by Pope John Paul II in 1986.¹⁶⁵

Nevertheless, the theological architecture of *Nostra Aetate* reflects certain epistemological assumptions rooted in Western Christianity. As Tomoko Masuzawa¹⁶⁶ and Talal Asad¹⁶⁷ have observed that the document privileges religions that conform to scriptural, institutional, and metaphysical norms, criteria historically constructed through the lens of European Enlightenment rationality and colonial anthropology. As a result, traditions like African Traditional Religions (ATRs), which are oral, performative, and communally enacted, are obviously absent from the document's purview. This exclusion is not a mere oversight but suggestive of what

¹⁶³ Francis X Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 10-11, 36.

¹⁶⁴ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "CADEIO Connection, Spring 2004" (Washington, DC: Conference on Christianity and Dialogue, 2004), https://cadeio.org/blog/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/CADEIOConnection_2004Spring.pdf.

¹⁶⁵ John Paul II, *Prayer for Peace: World Day of Prayer for Peace, Assisi, 1986* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1986).

¹⁶⁶ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

¹⁶⁷ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*.

Masuzawa terms “the invention of world religions,”¹⁶⁸ a classificatory regime that renders indigenous spiritual systems invisible or inferior.

In this sense, while *Nostra Aetate* articulates a historic theological openness, its scope remains circumscribed by a conceptual framework that presupposes a particular form of religion, one that aligns with Western models of doctrinal systems, sacred texts, and universal moral codes. As David Chidester has shown, such frameworks have long been complicit in the colonial project, where indigenous religions were reified as *primitive* or relegated to the realm of cultural artifact rather than recognized as living theological systems.¹⁶⁹ This blind spot has had concrete implications for the reception of *Nostra Aetate* in African contexts like Ghana, where religious life is not only plural but is structured by cosmological and ritual logics that defy Western theological categories.

Moreover, the Christocentric orientation of *Nostra Aetate*, though faithful to Catholic dogmatic commitments, poses challenges for balanced interreligious dialogue. The affirmation in one of the church’s documents, *Lumen Gentium*, that the fullness of religious life exists in the Catholic Church¹⁷⁰ and the centrality of Christ as the definitive revelation of God, while theologically valid within Catholic tradition, creates a dynamic in which the Church engages the religious other from a position of presumed superiority. As Paul Knitter¹⁷¹ and Peter Phan¹⁷² have argued, this asymmetry complicates the possibility of truly mutual dialogue, particularly in

¹⁶⁸ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

¹⁶⁹ David Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (University of Virginia Press, 1996): 4, 230-32, 247-49, 251-53.

¹⁷⁰ Pope Paul VI, “Lumen Gentium,” *Light of the Nations* 29 (1964), §8.

¹⁷¹ Paul F Knitter, “Theologies of Religions (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 110, 2002).

¹⁷² John-Peter Pham, *Heirs of the Fisherman: Behind the Scenes of Papal Death and Succession* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

contexts where indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies are not granted equal theological weight.

This asymmetry is further worsened in African settings by the historical legacy of missionary encounters that often dismiss or demonize ATRs. As Kwame Bediako insists, any meaningful Christian theology in Africa must begin with affirming the theological integrity of Africa's pre-Christian religious heritage.¹⁷³

ATRs, far from being "pagan remnants," constitute the symbolic and ethical grammar through which the Gospel was first received and continues to be interpreted by African Christians. In a class discussion, Roger P. Schroeder supports this view, emphasizing the necessity of local theologies arising from particular communities' lived experiences and spiritual traditions.¹⁷⁴

Therefore, the global reception of *Nostra Aetate* must be understood as uneven. While its influence in Europe, North America, and parts of Asia has been substantial, especially in institutional and academic interfaith initiatives, its resonance in Africa has been limited by both its silence on indigenous religions and its embedded Christological assumptions. In Ghana, where Christianity, Islam, and ATRs coexist not merely as belief systems but as interwoven ritual and moral economies, applying *Nostra Aetate* requires more than translation; it demands re-theologization.

Pope Francis's emphasis on encounter and his ecological theology in *Laudato Si'*¹⁷⁵ offer promising pathways for such reimagining. His call for an "integral ecology" and recognition of indigenous wisdom as vital to the care of our typical

¹⁷³ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*.

¹⁷⁴ Roger P. Schroeder, Classroom Discussion with the Researcher, *C5700: Praxis for Cross-Cultural Transformation*, Fall 2024/25 Academic year.

¹⁷⁵ Francis, "Laudato Si."

home signal a magisterial openness to religious worldviews that had previously been marginalized. Indeed, the cosmological and ecological dimensions of ATRs resonate strongly with the Catholic vision of creation as sacrament and the Church's preferential option for the poor and the earth.

Finally, African theologians such as Laurenti Magesa,¹⁷⁶ John S. Pobee,¹⁷⁷ and Kwame Bediako¹⁷⁸ argue that theological dialogue in postcolonial contexts must proceed through the symbolic languages, artistic expressions, and moral economies of the people. In Ghana, this means engaging sacred hospitality (*akwaaba*), communal personhood (*ubuntu*), ancestral reverence, and ritual reconciliation as authentic *theological loci*. Thus, the reception of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana cannot be measured by institutional adoption alone; it must be assessed by its capacity to resonate with, and be reshaped by, the theological and cultural narratives of the people.

In conclusion, *Nostra Aetate* remains a seminal text in the Catholic Church's journey toward interreligious understanding. Yet, as this chapter continues to demonstrate, its reception in Ghana, and Africa more broadly, demands a hermeneutic of inculturation that is both critical and constructive. It must be reread through the lens of African religiosity, reimagined in conversation with ATRs, and enacted through the dialogical rhythms of everyday life. Only then can *Nostra Aetate* become a historical declaration and a living document, ever evolving, ever contextual, and ever dialogical.

¹⁷⁶ Laurenti Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life* (New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 38, <https://books.google.com/books?id=CZrXAAAAMAAJ>.

¹⁷⁷ John Samuel Pobee, *Toward an African Theology* (Abingdon, 1979).

¹⁷⁸ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*.

4.3 Theological Limits and Epistemological Gaps in the Ghanaian Context

Although *Nostra Aetate*¹⁷⁹ opened new possibilities for Catholic engagement with non-Christian religions, its reception in Ghana reveals deep theological limitations and epistemological gaps. These gaps are historical oversights and structural consequences of the document's Western ecclesial imagination. In Ghana, where Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions (ATRs) coexist within interwoven social, cosmological, and ritual frameworks, *Nostra Aetate* must be critically assessed and contextually reinterpreted if it is to serve as a credible framework for interfaith dialogue.

4.3.1 *The Omission of African Traditional Religions*

The most striking limitation of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana is its complete silence on ATRs. While the document affirms truth and holiness in Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam, it excludes indigenous African traditions, which continue to shape Ghana's cosmology, ethics, and interreligious coexistence.¹⁸⁰ This omission cannot be regarded as accidental; it reflects what Tomoko Masuzawa calls the "invention of world religions," a classificatory regime that privileges scriptural and institutional traditions while marginalizing oral, performative, and community-based systems.¹⁸¹

Talal Asad similarly critiques the epistemic asymmetry of modern Western religious frameworks, which delegitimize non-Western traditions by measuring them against Christian categories of belief and textual authority.¹⁸² In the Ghanaian context,

¹⁷⁹ Second Vatican Council, "Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions."

¹⁸⁰ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 20-21.

¹⁸¹ Masuzawa, 121-126.

¹⁸² Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 54-55.

this omission is not only academic but existential. ATRs are not relics of a pre-Christian past; they remain integral to family rites, festivals, ecological practices, and moral life.¹⁸³ Their exclusion from *Nostra Aetate* delegitimizes the very religious systems that form the foundation of Ghanaian religious identity and the matrix within which Christianity and Islam themselves have taken root.

David Chidester demonstrates that such exclusions are deeply tied to colonial projects that rendered African religions “primitives of the modern world.”¹⁸⁴ In the Ghanaian context, this theological blind spot perpetuates a hierarchy in which ATRs are tolerated as mere “cultural background” but denied full recognition as theological interlocutors.

4.3.2 Western Ecclesial Imagination and Ghanaian Relational Grammars

A second limitation concerns the ecclesial imagination underpinning *Nostra Aetate*. The document presupposes that religion is best understood through categories of doctrine, sacred text, and institutional structures. By contrast, Ghanaian religiosity, especially ATRs, is expressed through ritual, symbol, proverbs, festivals, and communal ethics. As Laurenti Magesa emphasizes, African religion is not primarily about abstract belief but about “the ethics of life,”¹⁸⁵ sustaining harmony with God, ancestors, community, and creation.

This difference in epistemology generates a significant gap. While *Nostra Aetate* calls for “esteem” toward other religions, its framework tends toward hierarchical comparison rather than dialogical mutuality.¹⁸⁶ By doing so, it risks obscuring the dialogical resources embedded in Ghanaian traditions, such as *akwaaba*

¹⁸³ John S. Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy* (Heinemann, 1990), 1-2.

¹⁸⁴ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, 252-54.

¹⁸⁵ Magesa, *African Religion*, 77.

¹⁸⁶ Paul F Knitter, “Theologies of Religions,” *New York*, 2002, 59-59.

(sacred hospitality), *ubuntu* (communal personhood), and ritual reconciliation.¹⁸⁷

These are not peripheral cultural traits but constitutive *theological loci*, functioning as vernacular theologies that sustain interreligious coexistence.

As Chapter Two of this thesis showed, precolonial Ghanaian societies already possessed dialogical frameworks rooted in cosmology, ecology, and kinship. These relational grammars cannot be subsumed under Western doctrinal categories without distortion. Thus, *Nostra Aetate*'s ecclesial imagination must be re-theologized to account for the relational epistemologies of Ghanaian religiosity.

4.3.3 Christocentrism and Ghanaian Communal Theologies

The Christocentric orientation of *Nostra Aetate* presents another challenge in the Ghanaian context. While the affirmation of Christ as the fullness of revelation is non-negotiable within Catholic dogma,¹⁸⁸ it creates a dialogical imbalance when applied in contexts where African Traditional Religions (ATRs) and Islam remain constitutive of religious identity. The assertion of Christ as the definitive revelation risks positioning dialogue partners as deficient interlocutors rather than as bearers of theological wisdom in their own right.

Kwame Bediako insists that African Christianity cannot be understood apart from its pre-Christian religious heritage. Christ, he argues, must be received not as a foreign imposition but as the fulfillment of Africa's deepest spiritual aspirations.¹⁸⁹

Lamin Sanneh develops this further through his notion of "translation theology,"¹⁹⁰ which underscores that Christianity becomes authentically African when it is

¹⁸⁷ Kofi Asare Opoku, *West African Tradition* (Accra: FEP International Private Limited, 1978), 44-45.

¹⁸⁸ Pope Paul VI, "Lumen Gentium," §14

¹⁸⁹ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 94-95.

¹⁹⁰ Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*, *American Society of Missiology Series, No. 42*, 2nd rev. a (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

articulated through indigenous cultural categories rather than imposed as a cultural transplant. Similarly, Andrew Walls observes that the Christian faith takes root in any society only through a process of cultural translation, in which it becomes *clothed* in the language, thought-forms, and social life of that community. This is termed the *indigenizing principle*, whereby believers encounter Christ not as a foreign intrusion but as genuinely at home within the rhythms of their cultural and religious life.¹⁹¹

In Ghana, this means that Christological reflection cannot be abstracted from the symbols, rituals, and ancestral categories of ATRs. These include practices of libation, ancestral honor, ecological reverence, and communal rites of reconciliation, which constitute the symbolic grammar through which divine presence is mediated.¹⁹²¹⁹³ If Christian theology bypasses these frameworks, it risks perpetuating the epistemic asymmetry identified by Asad¹⁹⁴ and Masuzawa,¹⁹⁵ whereby only “textual” or “monotheistic” systems are considered worthy of theological recognition.

During one of my pastoral assignments in Ghana, I was sent to a community where Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of African Traditional Religions lived together. As part of my pastoral approach, I made it a point to visit every household, including the homes of community elders and religious leaders, regardless of their faith. These visits were not occasions for proselytization but for building relationships through presence and action. I often explained to them: “*Though we belong to*

¹⁹¹ Kenneth Cracknell, “The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History. Studies in the Transmission and Appropriation of Faith. By Andrew F. Walls. Pp. X+ 284. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books/Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2002.£ 16.99 (Paper). 1 57075 373 3; 0 567 08869 3,” *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 55, no. 1 (2004): 219–20.

¹⁹² Mbiti, *African Religions & Philosophy*, 1-3.

¹⁹³ Magesa, *African Religion*, 73-76.

¹⁹⁴ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*.

¹⁹⁵ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

different faiths, we are one people. Christ, whose life I follow, visited all without discrimination, and so I too must extend myself in the same way.”

This simple posture of respect and openness often surprised community members. Some would remark: “*You are not like the others who think that because we are not Christians, we do not exist.*” Such encounters opened doors for deeper trust. In fact, many community elders began to guide me on acceptable and unacceptable behaviors that preserved harmony within the community, insights drawn from their long experience of sustaining peace across religious boundaries. These interactions taught me that interreligious engagement in Ghana is not abstract but rooted in lived practices of respect, hospitality, and mutual recognition, where one’s faith is communicated less through argument than through action.

Bevans and Schroeder propose “prophetic dialogue” as a theological paradigm that resists both exclusivism and relativism.¹⁹⁶ Prophetic dialogue affirms Christ’s distinctiveness while recognizing the theological validity of indigenous symbols of reconciliation, ecological ethics, and communal belonging. This model resonates strongly with Ghanaian communal theologies, emphasizing *ubuntu*, sacred hospitality (*akwaaba*), and ancestral responsibility as the foundations of coexistence. In such a framework, Christ is not set against ATRs but is encountered as the One who deepens and fulfills the ethical and cosmological values already embedded in Ghanaian religiosity.

Thus, a contextual Christology in Ghana must be both incarnational and dialogical. It must avoid triumphalist claims that undermine the integrity of ATRs and Islam, while still bearing witness to the uniqueness of Christ as the fullness of

¹⁹⁶ Stephen B. Bevans and Roger P. Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Orbis Books, 2011): 61-63.

revelation. Rather than reducing Christocentrism to exclusivism, such reinterpretations can ground it in incarnational dialogue, recognizing Christ in the rhythms of communal life, ecological stewardship, and ancestral memory. In this sense, Christocentrism does not eclipse Ghanaian religious systems but engages them as genuine theological partners, thereby enriching both African theology and Catholic interreligious dialogue.

4.3.4 Epistemological Gaps in Catholic Interreligious Practice

Another set of challenges lies in Catholic interreligious practice itself. Most institutional forms of dialogue in Africa reflect the Western institutional dialogue model. As helpful as this may be, the institutional level of engagement has major limitations in equipping various African community members to deal with tensions and conflicts.¹⁹⁷ In Ghana, however, interreligious dialogue is most vibrant not in academic conferences but in lived interactions: interfaith marriages, shared festivals, market exchanges, communal funerals, and neighborhood solidarity. These sites of everyday encounter embody an analogical imagination, wherein theology arises through a correlation between tradition and lived experience.

This epistemological gap reflects a persistent bias in Catholic practice toward textual and propositional theology at the expense of oral, ritual, and embodied theologies constituting African Traditional Religions (ATRs). As demonstrated in Chapter Two, ATRs communicate theological insight through proverbs, libations, festivals, and ancestral rites, which remain marginalized in Catholic dialogue because they do not conform to Western categories of scripture and doctrine. Asad's critique

¹⁹⁷ Francis Acquah, "Building Bridges and Trust Through Interfaith Relations in Africa: The Role of African Indigenous Religious and Cultural Values," *International Journal of African and Asian Studies* 66 (July 31, 2020): 36, <https://doi.org/10.7176/JAAS/66-06>.

of “epistemic asymmetry”¹⁹⁸ is particularly relevant here: when Catholic dialogue privileges textual traditions, it structurally excludes oral cosmologies and embodied rituals from recognition as theological interlocutors.

During one of Catholic Theological Union’s student activities, *Taste of CTU*, I was invited to give a short presentation on “anything African.” I chose to speak about the Akan priesthood (*komfo*). After my presentation, several Western scholars expressed genuine curiosity and gratitude for the insights, affirming that such perspectives broadened their understanding. However, an African colleague at CTU approached me with sharp criticism. While I welcomed critique as part of the academic process, for knowledge is deepened by readers and authors engaging with feedback, what unsettled me was his approach. He condemned the Akan priesthood outright, deploying Western categories of judgment without realizing that he was unconsciously applying the very paradigm of incommensurability. His dismissal echoed the old colonial framing that labeled the Akan priesthood as “pagan,” “fetish,” or “barbaric.” I responded by asking a simple but disarming question: *Who set these standards of judgment in the first place?*

This exchange illustrates the very epistemological challenge at the heart of institutionalized interfaith dialogue. Too often, dialogue proceeds under frameworks shaped by Western assumptions that prioritize conversionist agendas or doctrinal uniformity. Such models overlook the fact that African Traditional Religions embody their own epistemologies and theologies, which demand recognition on their own terms rather than through borrowed categories.

¹⁹⁸ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam*.

In Ghana, this oversight truncates dialogue at precisely the point where it is most alive. Shared funerals, for example, often draw Christians, Muslims, and ATRs practitioners into common ritual spaces, where libations and prayers may occur alongside hymns and Qur’anic recitations. Such moments, while rarely acknowledged in ecclesial reports, reveal a dialogical practice already operative at the grassroots. Similarly, interfaith marriages, though sometimes contested by clerical authorities, demonstrate the possibility of building households that negotiate difference without erasing it, embodying what Magesa calls the African “ethics of life.”¹⁹⁹

My own studies on marriage during my MPhil program in Ghana revealed this complexity. In Muslim-Christian unions, it is common for a Muslim man to marry a Christian woman. Yet when a Muslim woman seeks to marry a Christian man, tensions escalate dramatically. In some cases, families disown the woman, and in most contexts, it has become conventionally accepted that Muslim women “belong” to Muslim men. On the Christian side, a similar interplay of custom and faith emerges: before a Christian marriage can be blessed in church, the couple must first complete the customary rites of traditional marriage. Mainline churches, in particular, enforce this sequence strictly. These practices reveal a profound lesson: interfaith encounters in Ghana are shaped not by abstract theological debates but by negotiated processes of mutual recognition, sequencing, and reciprocity. They embody a grassroots hermeneutic of dialogue, one that Catholic theology must acknowledge as a locus of lived interreligious wisdom.

Indeed, examples from Ghana’s National Peace Council illustrate how these epistemological gaps might be bridged. In several interfaith programs, Christian,

¹⁹⁹ Magesa, *African Religion*, 74.

Muslim, and ATRs leaders have co-developed frameworks for peacebuilding, drawing simultaneously on libation, ancestral mediation, Qur’anic ethics, and biblical models of forgiveness. Rather than reducing ATR to cultural performance, such initiatives treat its practices as theological resources, capable of shaping public ethics and reconciliation. This aligns with Schreiter’s notion of “local theology”²⁰⁰ authentic theological articulation emerges from within the life of communities, not as imported abstractions.

What emerges, then, is a double challenge. On the one hand, Catholic interreligious practice in Ghana risks epistemological reduction when it frames dialogue exclusively in Western theological categories. On the other, the lived religious pluralism of Ghana offers precisely the kind of dialogical grammar, rooted in ritual, symbol, and communal ethics, that can revitalize Catholic theology if taken seriously. As Bediako has argued, African Christianity cannot be understood apart from its pre-Christian religious heritage;²⁰¹ to ignore that heritage is to sever theology from the very soil in which it has taken root. Therefore, A renewed Catholic dialogue practice in Ghana must move beyond text-centered frameworks to embrace indigenous epistemologies as *loci theologici*. Only then can *Nostra Aetate*’s call for esteem and mutual understanding be credibly enacted within the Ghanaian context.

4.3.5 Toward a Ghanaian Re-theologization of Nostra Aetate

If *Nostra Aetate* is to serve as a viable theological resource in Ghana, it must undergo a process of re-theologization through inculturation. This involves a double movement: first, a *critical deconstruction* of the text’s colonial and Eurocentric

²⁰⁰ Robert Shreiter, “Local Theologies in the Local Church: Issues and Methods,” *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America*, 1981; 105.

²⁰¹ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 94-94.

limitations; and second, a *constructive reconstruction* that retrieves Ghanaian religio-cultural resources as genuine *loci* for theological reflection.

Critical Deconstruction. The silence of *Nostra Aetate* on African Traditional Religions (ATRs) cannot be dismissed as a mere historical accident. Rather, it reflects what Tomoko Masuzawa calls the “invention of world religions,” a classificatory framework that privileges traditions with sacred texts and universal doctrines while rendering oral, ritual, and communal systems, such as ATRs, invisible or marginal within theological discourse.²⁰² In the Ghanaian context, this omission is not simply an academic oversight; it is an existential neglect of the very spiritual fabric through which many Ghanaians understand life, community, and the sacred. As Talal Asad argues, modern Western conceptions of “religion” are deeply bound to Christian and Enlightenment categories, which risk imposing external criteria that distort indigenous self-understandings.²⁰³

Constructive Reconstruction. Re-theologization requires a new hermeneutic that affirms ATRs as authentic theological interlocutors. Rather than dismissing indigenous cosmologies as “primitive,” Catholic theology in Ghana must recognize ATRs as *loci theologici*, sites where divine presence is discerned through ritual, memory, and relational practices. Laurenti Magesa describes ATR as a “religion of life,” rooted in a moral and ecological vision that sustains harmony between God, community, ancestors, and nature.²⁰⁴ Similarly, Kwame Bediako argues that African Christianity cannot be understood apart from its pre-Christian heritage. ATRs provide the conceptual and symbolic grammar through which the Gospel was first received

²⁰² Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 20-25.

²⁰³ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, 20-25.

²⁰⁴ Magesa, *African Religion*, 36-38.

and continues to be interpreted in Africa.²⁰⁵ By retrieving indigenous categories such as sacred hospitality (*akwaaba*), communal personhood (*ubuntu*), ritual reconciliation, and ancestral mediation, Catholic theology can deepen its understanding of dialogue and witness in Ghana.

This constructive process finds resonance within Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, where he articulates the vision of an "integral ecology" that unites care for the poor with reverence for creation.²⁰⁶ This magisterial perspective converges with the cosmological imagination of ATRs, in which land, rivers, and forests are not inert resources but sacred entities imbued with divine and ancestral presence. As Chapter Two illustrated, indigenous ritual practices such as the protection of sacred groves or libations to water deities embody a theological ecology that safeguards both community life and the natural environment. In this convergence lies a profound opportunity: ATRs can enrich Catholic ecological theology, grounding it in local wisdom while extending its reach into interfaith collaboration, particularly with Muslims and practitioners of ATRs who share similar ecological sensibilities.

Dialogical Horizons. Beyond ecology, the Ghanaian reception of *Nostra Aetate* must be measured not by its institutional adoption alone but by its capacity to inhabit and be reshaped by Ghana's dialectical theologies. The indigenous ethos of hospitality, the ethical vision of communal belonging, and the ritualized practices of reconciliation and solidarity all embody what Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder describe as *prophetic dialogue*: a mode of mission that holds together proclamation and openness to the other in mutual vulnerability and respect.²⁰⁷ In this sense, the re-

²⁰⁵ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, 94-95.

²⁰⁶ Francis, "Laudato Si," 146.

²⁰⁷ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue*, 18-21.

theologization of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana does not undermine its Christocentric foundation but reframes it through African categories that value relationship, community, and holistic flourishing.

Thus, *Nostra Aetate* must be received in Ghana not as a static artifact of Vatican II but as a living, contextual document. Its theological credibility depends on its ability to embrace indigenous religious grammars and to speak meaningfully to the lived pluralism of Ghanaian society. When reread through the lens of African religiosity, the document becomes a resource for building interfaith solidarity, promoting ecological justice, and embodying the Spirit's call to communion across difference. This re-theologization lays the foundation for the constructive proposals of Chapter Six, where a Ghanaian-inculturated model of *Nostra Aetate* will be articulated as a pathway toward authentic, dialogical, and transformative ministry in the twenty-first century.

4.4 Lessons from Chicago: Formalism vs. Embodied Coexistence

The interfaith landscape of Chicago provides a valuable comparative lens through which to assess the possibilities and limits of *Nostra Aetate*'s reception in Ghana. Chicago stands as one of the most religiously diverse cities in North America, with well-established interfaith infrastructures and civic initiatives such as the Council of Religious Leaders of Metropolitan Chicago (CRLMC), Interfaith America, Chicago Coalition for Interreligious Learning (CCIRL), Council for Parliament of the World's Religions, Hyde Park and Kenwood Interfaith Council, Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR-Chicago), Interfaith Refugee and Immigration Ministries (Chicago), Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), Humanitarian Faith Initiative, and The Interfaith Union (Chicago). Seminary-based centers for interfaith studies (e.g., at the Lutheran School of Theology, Chicago Theological Seminary, and

Catholic Theological Union). These institutions embody a highly organized, formalized model of interreligious engagement that has proven effective in creating spaces of mutual recognition, scholarly rigor, and civic cooperation. They operate within a framework of conferences, publications, educational curricula, and policy-driven alliances that articulate interfaith dialogue as both an intellectual discipline and a civic responsibility.²⁰⁸

However, these institutionalized models also reveal certain limitations. They are often bureaucratic and elite-driven, accessible primarily to religious leaders, academics, and civic officials, while less connected to the rhythms of grassroots religious life. As Chapter Three demonstrated, the categories through which Western interfaith models operate are frequently shaped by Enlightenment rationality and “world religions” discourse, privileging traditions with texts, formal doctrines, and hierarchies.²⁰⁹ While this framework offers clarity and structure, it risks reducing interreligious engagement to academic debate or institutional policy, thereby marginalizing the dialectical theologies, ritual practices, and symbolic grammars that animate religious coexistence at the grassroots.

By contrast, Ghana’s interreligious landscape, as explored in Chapter Two, is profoundly embodied. Here, interfaith engagement emerges organically from daily life: through shared participation in festivals such as *Hogbetsotso*, *Homowo*, *Akwasidae*, *Kundum*, *Apoo*, *Adae Kese*, *fojo*, *Odwira*, and *Damba* by side, and kinship networks that often cross religious boundaries. Practices such as sacred hospitality *akwaaba*, *ubuntu*-inspired communal personhood, and ritual reconciliation

²⁰⁸ John Borelli, “The Catholic Church and Interreligious Dialogue,” *Christian Perspectives on Transforming Interreligious Encounter: Essays in Honor of Leo D. Lefebure*, 2024, 263-65.

²⁰⁹ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 20-25.

function as cultural customs and theologies of encounter.²¹⁰ These indigenous dialogical frameworks, far from being peripheral, represent what Robert Schreiter terms “local theologies” that arise from the lived experience of particular communities.²¹¹ In this sense, Ghanaian interreligious dialogue does not require the establishment of elaborate bureaucratic structures; it is already deeply inscribed in the everyday lifeworld of the people.

The juxtaposition of Chicago and Ghana thus yields important lessons for the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate*. First, it demonstrates that formal structures and grassroots practices need not be opposed but must be held in creative tension. Chicago illustrates the strengths of institutionalization: the ability to produce resources, shape public discourse, and foster sustained theological reflection. Ghana illustrates the strengths of embodiment: the ability to nurture dialogical coexistence through kinship, ritual, and communal ethics. Any contextual reception of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana must therefore avoid uncritically importing institutional models that replicate foreign epistemologies, while also recognizing the value of structured platforms for theological exchange, particularly in academic and ecclesial contexts.

Stephen Bevans’s assertion that “all theology is contextual” underscores this point.²¹² Theological models must take root in the symbolic, spiritual, and moral languages of the people they serve. If interfaith dialogue in Ghana is to be sustainable and transformative, it cannot rely solely on external frameworks of institutional formalism; it must emerge from the indigenous epistemologies already operative within Ghanaian religious life. At the same time, Ghana’s dialogical practices can be

²¹⁰ Magesa, *African Religion*, 36-40.

²¹¹ Robert J Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Orbis Books, 2015); 6-8.

²¹² Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, Revised ed (NY: Orbis Books (Maryknoll), 2002): 3-5.

enriched by insights from Chicago's institutional models, particularly in fostering formal theological exchange, documentation, and global networking.

This comparative insight prepares the ground for the constructive agenda of Chapter Five, where Ghana and Chicago will be analyzed side by side in greater detail. There, the thesis will demonstrate how Chicago's institutionalized formalism and Ghana's embodied coexistence can be brought into mutually transformative dialogue. The aim is not to valorize one context over the other but to discern how each illuminates the other's strengths and limitations, thereby contributing to a more holistic and inculturated reception of *Nostra Aetate*.

4.5 Conclusion: The Imperative for Ghanaian Reinterpretation

This chapter has demonstrated that while *Nostra Aetate* represents a theological milestone in Catholic interreligious engagement, its uncritical application in Ghana exposes theological silences and contextual inadequacies. Chief among these are the omission of African Traditional Religions (ATRs), the persistence of Western ecclesial assumptions, and the Christocentric framework that, while doctrinally essential to Catholic theology, risks creating asymmetry in interfaith encounters. Yet, these shortcomings, far from rendering the document irrelevant, open a space for contextual creativity.

The task before Ghanaian theologians and practitioners is one of critical retrieval and constructive reinterpretation. Indigenous categories such as sacred hospitality (*akwaaba*), *ubuntu*-inspired communal personhood, ancestral mediation, and ecological ethics are not peripheral cultural symbols but genuine theological resources. To receive *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana, therefore, is to allow it to be reshaped by these dialectical theologies, thereby transforming it from a conciliar statement

framed in European categories into a living, dialogical resource embedded in Ghanaian religious experience.

Moreover, as argued in the preceding subsections, theological inculturation requires attending not only to doctrinal formulations but also to embodied practices of coexistence: interfaith marriages, market solidarities, communal festivals, and funeral rituals that already embody dialogical ethics. In these everyday spaces, Ghanaian pluralism is negotiated, contested, and lived out. For Catholic theology to ignore these practices is to truncate dialogue precisely where it is most alive.

Finally, the comparative reflection on Chicago underscores the importance of recognizing that all theology is contextual. Whereas Chicago demonstrates the strengths and limitations of highly institutionalized, formal models of interfaith dialogue, Ghana illustrates the power of embodied, grassroots practices. The juxtaposition of these contexts highlights that no model of dialogue can claim universality; each must be continually reinterpreted in light of local histories, cultures, and spiritual grammars.

This recognition leads directly into the next chapter. If Chapters Two through Four have established the theological, historical, and comparative foundations, Chapter Five turns to the voices of the people themselves. Through interviews with Christian, Muslim, and ATR practitioners, theologians, religious scholars, grassroots and other relevant individuals, the thesis now shifts from theoretical analysis to empirical grounding, exploring how interreligious dialogue is experienced, interpreted, and embodied in Ghana and Chicago today. These narratives will provide the raw data through which the claims of this chapter can be tested and deepened, moving the argument from conceptual critique to lived experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS OF FIELD INTERVIEWS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the central findings and analyses derived primarily from qualitative interviews with Christian, Muslim, and African Traditional Religion (ATR) practitioners, as well as with experts in interreligious dialogue across Ghana and North America, particularly in Chicago. These interviews constitute the core empirical data for the chapter and offer sustained insight into how *Nostra Aetate* is received, interpreted, embodied, and, at times, contested within distinct yet comparable religious contexts. In addition to interview data, the chapter also draws selectively on complementary sources, namely, a published pastoral reflection and a publicly documented ecclesial encounter, which serve to illuminate and corroborate patterns emerging from the field rather than to replace or override interview-based analysis.

The Ghanaian and North American contexts examined here represent contrasting but dialogically fruitful environments. Ghana's religious pluralism is primarily shaped by longstanding indigenous frameworks of coexistence, where interreligious engagement is embedded in everyday social life, kinship structures, and communal moral expectations. By contrast, the Chicago context reflects a more formalized and institutionally mediated approach to interfaith engagement, developed in response to complex patterns of religious diversity, secular governance, and socio-political fragmentation. Bringing these contexts into analytical conversation allows the chapter to examine interreligious dialogue both as a lived social reality and as a consciously articulated theological and pastoral practice.

Across the interview data, four major thematic patterns emerged with notable consistency. First, participants articulated *diverse yet complementary understandings of the purpose and goals of interreligious dialogue*, emphasizing peace, mutual respect, social cohesion, and human flourishing rather than doctrinal negotiation. Second, respondents identified *distinct models of engagement operative within their respective contexts*: largely informal, relational, and culturally embedded practices in Ghana, and structured, institutional, and programmatic forms of dialogue in Chicago. Third, significant attention was given to the *cultural and ethical resources that sustain dialogue*, including hospitality, communal responsibility, respect for religious authority, and moral accountability, values deeply rooted in Ghanaian social structures and expressed through civic and institutional frameworks in North America. Fourth, participants highlighted *persistent constraints and vulnerabilities that threaten the sustainability of dialogue*, such as doctrinal rigidity, socio-political pressures, fears of syncretism, and the marginalization of indigenous religious voices, particularly ATR.

Together, these themes illuminate the complex interplay between lived religious experience, cultural ethics, and theological commitments in shaping interreligious relations. They also connect organically with the historical, theoretical, and contextual analyses developed in earlier chapters, especially the discussion of inculturation, prophetic dialogue, and contextual theology. Most importantly, the findings of this chapter provide the empirical grounding necessary for the constructive theological proposals advanced in Chapter 6. In this sense, Chapter 5 functions not merely as a presentation of data but as a dialogical bridge between description and construction, ensuring that the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* is informed by the

concrete voices, practices, and moral worlds of those who inhabit the religious landscapes under examination.

5.2 Interreligious Dialogue as a Shared Quest for Peace and Human Flourishing

Across the interviews conducted in Ghana and North America (Chicago), respondents articulated a remarkably consistent conviction: interreligious dialogue is fundamentally a pursuit of peace, mutual understanding, and the flourishing of the human community. This closely corresponds to the theological vision of *Nostra Aetate*, which describes dialogue not as a peripheral activity but as an expression of the Church's commitment to recognize the "common origin and destiny of humanity" and to foster "mutual understanding and collaboration."²¹³ The interviews reveal that this conviction is not merely theoretical but deeply grounded in lived experience, indigenous values, and the socio-religious realities of contemporary Ghana and Chicago.

In Ghana, participants consistently emphasized peaceful coexistence as the primary purpose of dialogue, shaped by longstanding cultural values and everyday interfaith interactions. A Catholic theologian at the Department for the Study of Religions at University of Ghana, Cosmas Ebo Sarbah, noted that interreligious dialogue "develops attitudes for proper engagement with people of other religions and ultimately fosters peaceful coexistence,"²¹⁴ highlighting that the aim is not doctrinal negotiation but cultivating relational dispositions. This aligns with African communitarian anthropology, where identity is formed through interdependence, and where, as the same theologian argued, Ghanaian Christians and Muslims first

²¹³ Second Vatican Council, "Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *Vatican Council II*, vol. 28, 1965, #1

https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

²¹⁴ Cosmas Justice Ebo Sarbah, "Interview by Manson Anane Adjei" (Accra, Ghana, 2025).

understand themselves as “a Ghanaian who has a religion,” meaning that “the bonds of fraternity are stronger than the religious difference.”²¹⁵ The social composition of Ghana thus provides a cultural grammar that naturally sustains dialogue.

Muslim respondents reinforced this anthropological reading. One scholar, Haruna Zagoon-Sayeed, who is a theologian at the Department for the Study of Religions at the University of Ghana, explained that religious plurality is an enduring human condition, stating, “There will never be a time where everyone becomes Christian or Muslim... therefore we must live and work together to preserve peace.”²¹⁶ This echoes the Qur’anic affirmation that God created humanity into diverse “nations and tribes” so that they “may know one another,”²¹⁷ and rings with the argument of modern theologians such as Hans Küng, who insists that “there will be no peace among nations without peace among religions, and no peace among religions without dialogue.”²¹⁸ Within Ghana’s multi-religious households, shared family life becomes a natural school of dialogue, producing what African scholars describe as *lived theology*, a mode of being in which peaceful interreligious engagement is socially normative rather than externally imposed.

Similarly, lay Muslim participants, Yussif Obour, who was a politician during his time in Ghana and is now in Canada, noted that mutual support, shared celebrations, and informal dialogue characterize interreligious life in Ghana. He described how Christians, Muslims, and ATR practitioners participate in each other’s events, noting: “When they celebrate their festivities, we celebrate with them... when

²¹⁵ Michael Quaicoe, “Interview by Manson Anane Adjei” (Accra, Ghana, 2025).

²¹⁶ Haruna Zagoon-Sayeed, “Interview by Manson Anane Adjei” (Accra, Ghana, 2025).

²¹⁷ Qur’an 49:13

²¹⁸ Hans Küng, *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* (Chicago: Parliament of the World’s Religions, 1993): 18.

we celebrate, they join us to cook, to clean, to make merry.”²¹⁹ These findings substantiate what earlier chapters argued: that Ghana’s interfaith relations are deeply rooted in *de facto* dialogue, embodied practices that long predate formal theological frameworks.

By contrast, interviewees in Chicago highlighted the institutional and structural dimensions of interreligious dialogue, shaped by historically developed interfaith networks. A Catholic interfaith director for the Archdiocese of Chicago, Daniel Oslen, explained that the goals of dialogue include “mutual understanding... peace-building... reduction of prejudice,” emphasizing the ethical obligation to understand the religious other “as they would describe themselves.”²²⁰ He further noted that Chicago’s context, home to the Parliament of the World’s Religions and robust bilateral and multilateral councils, has cultivated a model where formal relationships, shared initiatives, and crisis-responsive collaboration sustain dialogue.²²¹ These institutional commitments enable what David Tracy calls “public conversation,” where religious communities learn to speak both *to* and *with* one another for the common good.²²²

Notably, Chicago respondents also affirmed that dialogue is grounded in relationships rather than theological abstraction. An interfaith practitioner, Susan M. Pudelek, who currently works with the Archdiocese of Chicago’s ecumenical and interreligious office, stated, “The most important thing... is that it is based in relationships... listening with respect... seeing who they are in the eyes of God.”²²³

²¹⁹ Yussif Iddrisu, *Interview by Manson Anane Adjei*. Via Zoom, November 2025.

²²⁰ J. Daniel Olsen, *Interview by Manson Anane Adjei*. Chicago, IL, November 2025.

²²¹ Olsen, Interview.

²²² David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (University of Chicago Press, 1994):1-27.

²²³ M. Susan Pudelek, *Interview by Manson Anane Adjei*. Via Zoom, 2025.

This mirrors the Ghanaian emphasis on relationality, suggesting that despite contextual differences, the core anthropological motivation for dialogue is universal.

Rita George Tvrtković, a theologian at the University of Mary of the Lake at Mundelein, understands interreligious dialogue as a sustained process that holds together two inseparable dimensions: relationship-building over time and the shared search for truth. Dialogue, in this account, cannot be reduced to superficial harmony or polite coexistence, but requires trust, honesty, and the willingness to engage genuine differences. At the same time, George Tvrtković emphasized that dialogue must preserve fidelity to one's religious identity, echoing *Nostra Aetate's* insistence on openness to the religious other without abandoning confessional integrity. This tension between transparency and fidelity, rather than being resolved, is identified as constitutive of authentic dialogue and reflective of the Church's postconciliar theological development.²²⁴

Still, Chicago interviewees acknowledged contemporary challenges, including polarized political climates and internal suspicion about interfaith work. Yet even these challenges reinforce the urgency of dialogue as a means of sustaining social stability and protecting vulnerable minority communities. Taken together, the interviews reveal that interreligious dialogue is widely perceived as indispensable for peaceful coexistence, national stability, and communal well-being. While the modes differ, Ghana emphasizes cultural and relational integration, and Chicago emphasizes institutional collaboration, the underlying purposes converge: to safeguard the dignity of the human person and promote the flourishing of diverse communities. This

²²⁴ Rita George Tvrtković, *Interview by Manson Anane Adjei*. Via Zoom, November 2025.

convergence affirms *Nostra Aetate*'s theological intuition that dialogue arises not from doctrinal compromise but from a shared human vocation toward peace.

5.3 Models of Engagement Across Contexts: Informal, Relational, and Institutional Pathways

This section examines the existing models of interreligious engagement that emerged from the field interviews, with particular attention to how dialogue is practiced, sustained, and transmitted within Ghanaian and North American (Chicago) contexts. While earlier chapters traced the theological and historical foundations of interreligious dialogue, especially as articulated in *Nostra Aetate*, the interview data reveal how these ideals are translated into lived practice through distinct but complementary models of engagement. The findings demonstrate that interreligious dialogue does not unfold through a single universal framework; rather, it is shaped by culture, social organization, and institutional capacity.

5.3.1 Informal and Relational Models in the Ghanaian Context

Across the Ghanaian interviews, respondents consistently emphasized that interreligious engagement is primarily lived through informal, relational, and everyday social interactions, rather than through formal programs or institutional structures. Dialogue in this context is not usually labeled as “interfaith dialogue,” yet it functions as such through daily practices embedded in family life, communal labor, economic exchange, and ritual participation.

A recent courtesy visit by representatives of the Catholic Church to the Bono Regional Chief Imam provides a concrete illustration of how interreligious dialogue in Ghana is frequently enacted through symbolic and relational gestures rather than formal theological exchange. The visit emphasized mutual respect, hospitality, and

recognition of religious authority, embodying a dialogical grammar rooted in Ghanaian cultural norms. Such public acts function as lived dialogue, reinforcing social harmony and modeling peaceful coexistence through presence and relationship rather than doctrinal discussion.²²⁵

Several participants highlighted interreligious families and mixed households as the most formative site of dialogue. Obour Yussif explained that extended families commonly include Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of African Traditional Religion (ATR), noting that funerals, weddings, naming ceremonies, and annual ancestral rites are attended by all, regardless of religious affiliation. In his words, “you will not find a family that is purely one religion when you go beyond the nuclear level; we all meet under the same umbrella.”²²⁶ This finding reinforces the argument advanced in Chapter 2 that Ghanaian religiosity is shaped by communal belonging prior to confessional identity.

Economic and social spaces likewise function as dialogical arenas. Marketplaces, neighborhood associations, and informal trade relations bring adherents of different religions into constant contact. A Catholic priest, Michael Quaicoe, the Director of the Governance, Justice and Peace Directorate at the National Catholic Secretariat of Ghana, with extensive pastoral experience, observed that Ghanaian Christians and Muslims “first understand themselves as Ghanaians who have a religion,” meaning that ethnic kinship and social obligation often outweigh doctrinal difference.²²⁷ This echoes strongly with African communitarian anthropology,

²²⁵ Catholic Diocese of Sunyani, “Courtesy Call by the Bishop of Sunyani on the Bono Regional Chief Imam” (Sunyani: Facebook, 2025), <https://www.facebook.com/61552213522688/videos/the-catholic-church-paid-a-courtesy-call-on-the-bono-regional-chief-imam/1299556231573708/>.

²²⁶ Iddrisu, Interview.

²²⁷ Quaicoe, Interview.

particularly the notion that personhood is constituted through relationality rather than individual belief alone.

Notably, respondents emphasized that shared participation in rites of passage, especially funerals, serves as a powerful mechanism of interreligious solidarity. Funerals in Ghana are communal events that suspend strict religious boundaries in favor of family obligation and social cohesion. Muslims attend Christian funerals, Christians attend Muslim burials, and both may participate respectfully in traditional rites.²²⁸ Such practices exemplify what this study terms an “anthropology of encounter,” wherein dialogue is embodied rather than discursive.

These informal models challenge classical theological typologies of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. As Sarbah noted, most ordinary believers are unfamiliar with these categories; instead, they engage one another through attitudes, behaviors, and everyday ethical dispositions.²²⁹ This confirms the earlier argument that Ghana’s interreligious praxis operates through a practical theology of coexistence, one that precedes and, in some cases, exceeds formal ecclesial reflection.

5.3.2 Institutional and Structured Models in the Chicago Context

By contrast, interviewees in Chicago described interreligious engagement as largely institutionalized, programmatic, and structurally supported. Dialogue in this context is often mediated through ecclesial offices, academic institutions, interfaith councils, and non-profit organizations. Rather than emerging organically from shared kinship structures, it is sustained through intentional frameworks designed to manage religious diversity within a pluralistic and often polarized social environment.

²²⁸ Abirat Zakaria, *Interview by Manson Anane Adjei*. Via Zoom, 2025.

²²⁹ Sarbah, Interview.

Several respondents highlighted the role of interfaith councils and bilateral dialogues, such as long-standing Catholic–Jewish and Catholic–Muslim dialogues in the Chicago area. Olsen explained that these relationships, some spanning over four decades, prioritize theological literacy, trust-building, and sustained leadership engagement.²³⁰ These structures allow religious leaders to respond collectively to social crises, political tensions, and communal trauma, thereby institutionalizing dialogue as a public responsibility rather than a private virtue.

Universities emerged as particularly significant sites of engagement. A Muslim chaplain at DePaul University in Chicago, Imam Abdul-Malik Ryan, described how chaplaincy spaces, shared prayer facilities, and interfaith programming create opportunities for encounter among students from diverse religious backgrounds.²³¹ Unlike Ghana, where dialogue occurs primarily through family and community life, Chicago’s university context provides intentional pedagogical spaces for learning across difference. These spaces, however, also introduce challenges, including political polarization, suspicion of institutional motives, and generational skepticism toward interfaith initiatives.

George Tvrtković described a university-based model that intentionally moved beyond elite theological exchange toward practices accessible to non-specialists. This model combined shared meals with prayerful reading of the Bible and Qur’an, drawing on the Christian practice of *Lectio Divina* while inviting Muslim students to select Qur’anic texts for reflection. The voluntary nature of participation, the centrality of scripture, and the emphasis on friendship over debate were identified as key factors in sustaining long-term relationships. This approach exemplifies the

²³⁰ Olsen, Interview.

²³¹ Imam Abdul-Malik Ryan, *Interview by Manson Anane Adjei*. Via Zoom, 2025.

dialogue of religious experience and dialogue of life articulated in *Dialogue and Proclamation*, demonstrating how institutional settings can foster embodied and relational forms of engagement rather than purely academic encounters.²³²

Additionally, respondents pointed to action-based dialogues, such as joint service projects, advocacy for social justice, and peacebuilding initiatives, as especially practical. One interviewee emphasized that collaboration around shared ethical concerns often precedes theological agreement, echoing *Nostra Aetate*'s call for cooperation in "promoting together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare."²³³ This action-oriented approach reflects what scholars such as Paul Knitter and Catherine Cornille describe as the dialogue of life and the dialogue of action, in which shared practice serves as a foundation for deeper understanding.

5.3.3 Complementarity Rather Than Competition

Rather than framing Ghanaian and Chicagoan models as opposing or hierarchical, the interview data suggest that they are mutually illuminating and complementary. Ghana's informal, relational pathways reveal how dialogue can be sustained without formal institutions, drawing instead on cultural values such as hospitality (*akwaaba*), communal responsibility, and kinship solidarity. Chicago's structured models demonstrate how dialogue can be preserved and protected within complex, diverse, and politically charged societies through intentional organization and institutional commitment.

This complementarity is particularly significant for the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana. While the document emerged from a Western ecclesial context that

²³² George Tvrtković, *Interview*.

²³³ Second Vatican Council, "Nostra Aetate," #2.

assumes institutional mediation, the Ghanaian case demonstrates that its core theological vision, respect, encounter, and collaboration, is already embodied through indigenous social practices. At the same time, the Chicago experience offers resources for strengthening Ghana's interreligious relations through more sustained formation, leadership training, and conflict-prevention mechanisms, especially as Ghana's religious landscape becomes increasingly influenced by global ideological currents.

5.3.4 Implications for Subsequent Chapters

The models outlined in this section provide a crucial bridge to Chapter 6, where the study proposes a contextual and inculturated framework for interreligious dialogue in Ghana. The empirical findings here affirm that any such framework must honor Ghana's lived anthropology of encounter while also engaging selectively with institutional tools that can consolidate peace and address emerging tensions. In this way, the models of engagement identified through the interviews do not merely describe existing practices; they function as theological resources for re-imagining the reception of *Nostra Aetate* "in our age and culture."

5.4 Cultural and Ethical Resources for Dialogue: Ghanaian and North American Perspectives

While the previous subsections explored the purposes and operational models of interreligious engagement, this section shifts focus to the moral and cultural resources that make such engagement socially understandable and ethically sustainable. Instead of asking how dialogue takes place, this subsection looks at what sustains it, the core values, moral visions, and ethical attitudes that allow interreligious coexistence to persist beyond specific programs or initiatives.

5.4.1 Ghanaian Cultural Ethics as Moral Infrastructure

Interview data from Ghana reveal that interreligious coexistence is undergirded by a dense moral ecology rooted in indigenous social ethics rather than in formal religious doctrine. Respondents consistently framed harmony among Christians, Muslims, and ATR practitioners as an extension of cultural obligations embedded in kinship systems, communal responsibility, and ancestral consciousness.

A recurring theme was *abusua* (extended kinship), which functions as a moral horizon that relativizes exclusive religious identity. Several participants emphasized that family affiliation carries binding ethical claims that supersede confessional difference, making exclusion both socially disruptive and morally unacceptable. Quainoe explained that religious identity in Ghana is typically layered within kinship rather than positioned against it, such that “the obligation to family precedes religious distinction.”²³⁴ This kinship-based ethic provides a durable framework for coexistence even in moments of theological disagreement.

Closely related is *nkabom* (communal unity), which respondents described not merely as social cooperation but as a moral expectation. Communal life presumes mutual participation in rites of passage, collective labor, and social responsibilities, regardless of religious affiliation. This expectation generates what may be described as a *pre-dialogical ethic*: dialogue is not first a choice but a consequence of shared social belonging. As Obour observed, communal rituals, particularly funerals and family gatherings, create unavoidable spaces of encounter in which religious difference is acknowledged but not absolutized.²³⁵

²³⁴ Quainoe, Interview.

²³⁵ Iddrisu, Interview.

Hospitality (*akwaaba*) further emerged as a key ethical resource. Rather than functioning as symbolic tolerance, hospitality operates as a normative moral practice that requires recognition of the other's dignity and space. Interviewees repeatedly noted that making room for the religious other, whether by accommodating prayer practices, sharing food during festivals, or offering protection of religious spaces, is understood as a matter of moral decency rather than an interfaith strategy.²³⁶ This ethical posture echoes strongly with *Nostra Aetate's* call to esteem what is "true and holy" in other religious traditions, even though it arises from indigenous moral reasoning rather than conciliar theology.²³⁷

The public encounter of the Catholic Bishop of Sunyani also highlights hospitality (*akwaaba*) and respect for religious leadership as ethical practices that sustain interreligious harmony in Ghana. By prioritizing courtesy, relational acknowledgment, and moral decency, the visit demonstrates how dialogue is often grounded in culturally intelligible actions that precede theological articulation. These practices form part of the moral infrastructure that enables peaceful coexistence and reflect an indigenous ethical logic that parallels the conciliatory spirit of *Nostra Aetate*.²³⁸

Importantly, these Ghanaian cultural ethics do not erase theological difference. Rather, they regulate how difference is lived socially. In this sense, Ghanaian interreligious harmony is sustained less by doctrinal convergence than by a shared

²³⁶ Quaicoe, Interview.

²³⁷ John Azumah, *Interview by Manson Anane Adjei*. Via Zoom, 2025.

²³⁸ Catholic Diocese of Sunyani, "Courtesy Call by the Bishop of Sunyani on the Bono Regional Chief Imam."

moral grammar that prioritizes relational accountability, ancestral continuity, and social cohesion.²³⁹

5.4.2 North American Ethical Commitments and Civic Moral Frameworks

By comparison, interviewees in Chicago identified ethical resources that are less kinship-based and more civic and institutional in character. Here, interreligious dialogue is sustained by shared commitments to pluralism, public responsibility, and procedural respect within a multicultural society. Respondents emphasized that ethical norms such as fairness, inclusion, and mutual recognition provide the moral legitimacy necessary for dialogue to function within highly diverse and politically complex environments.

Several interviewees highlighted *listening* as a core ethical discipline rather than a methodological tool. Pudelek described listening as an act of moral restraint, resisting the impulse to correct, persuade, or instrumentalize the religious other, and as the ethical foundation of trust across difference.²⁴⁰ This ethical emphasis reframes dialogue as a practice of moral formation rather than merely an exchange of ideas.

Additionally, institutional commitments to equity and protection of minority rights were repeatedly cited as essential ethical safeguards. In the absence of shared kinship structures, institutions, universities, dioceses, and interfaith councils function as moral arbiters that uphold norms of inclusion and accountability.²⁴¹ Olsen noted that long-standing interfaith relationships in Chicago endure precisely because they

²³⁹ Azumah, Interview.

²⁴⁰ Pudelek, Interview.

²⁴¹ Ryan, Interview.

are embedded within ethical expectations of civic responsibility and public solidarity, particularly during periods of social or political crisis.²⁴²

Yet, interviewees also acknowledged the fragility of these ethical commitments, especially when interreligious engagement becomes entangled with polarized political discourses. In such moments, ethical clarity, commitment to peace, nonviolence, and relational integrity, rather than institutional power alone, was identified as the decisive factor sustaining dialogue.²⁴³

5.4.3 Ethical Character and Theological Significance for Inculturation

Despite their contextual differences, the Ghanaian and North American cases reveal a shared ethical intuition: interreligious dialogue is sustained not primarily by theological consensus or organizational efficiency, but by morally formative practices that shape how religious difference is perceived and inhabited.

Ghana's indigenous ethics emphasize *belonging before belief*, while North American frameworks emphasize *responsibility within diversity*. Together, they illuminate complementary pathways for the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate*. The Ghanaian case demonstrates that the document's theological vision can be meaningfully received through pre-existing cultural moralities, while the Chicago context illustrates how ethical commitments can be institutionalized to withstand social fragmentation.

This analysis suggests that the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana need not rely solely on doctrinal reception or ecclesial programs. Instead, it can be grounded in the ethical resources already operative within Ghanaian society,

²⁴² Olsen, Interview.

²⁴³ Pudelek, Interview.

resources that regulate difference, sustain coexistence, and embody dialogical openness as a moral way of life. These findings directly inform the constructive proposals developed in Chapter Six, where cultural ethics are treated not as auxiliary supports but as theological *loci* for interreligious engagement.

A published interview with Gabriel Palmer Buckle, the Archbishop of Cape Coast, Ghana, further illuminates how Ghanaian religious experience is often interpreted through a lens of hospitality, encounter, and openness, extending far beyond the local context. Writing from a pastoral and missionary perspective, Palmer Buckle situates Ghanaian interreligious life within a broader ecclesial horizon, suggesting that everyday practices of welcome, shared humanity, and reverence for God function as theological resources in their own right. Such reflections reinforce the argument that Ghana's interreligious harmony is not merely pragmatic but is sustained by deeply embedded moral and spiritual intuitions that align with the vision of *Nostra Aetate*, even when articulated outside formal academic discourse.²⁴⁴

5.5 Constraints and Vulnerabilities in Sustaining Dialogue

While respondents across Ghana and Chicago articulated a strong commitment to interreligious coexistence and collaboration, the interviews also revealed persistent constraints that complicate the long-term sustainability of dialogue. These vulnerabilities do not negate the achievements described in the preceding sections; rather, they expose the fragile conditions under which dialogue operates and the structural, theological, and socio-political pressures that continue to shape interreligious relations. In both contexts, respondents emphasized that dialogue cannot

²⁴⁴ Gabriel Charles Palmer-Buckle, "Greetings From Ghana: Christians and Muslims Side by Side in Ghana" (Propagation of the Faith, Roman Catholic Diocese of Charleston, 2019), <https://www.propfaithcharlestonsc.com/greetings-from-ghana>.

be assumed as a permanent achievement but must be continually cultivated, protected, and renewed. This section analyzes these constraints under three interrelated dimensions: doctrinal rigidity, socio-political fragility, and the marginalization of African Traditional Religion (ATR).

5.5.1 Doctrinal Rigidity and Exclusivist Tendencies

A recurrent concern across interviews was the persistence of doctrinal rigidity within Christian, Muslim, and, to a lesser extent, ATR communities. Respondents observed that exclusivist theological frameworks, often inherited through formal religious education, continue to inhibit openness to genuine encounter. Several Ghanaian scholars and practitioners noted that while everyday interreligious relations remain largely peaceful, deeper engagement is often curtailed by theological anxieties, particularly fears of syncretism, relativism, or doctrinal compromise. Sarbah remarked that some clergy and lay leaders still operate with a mindset that “dialogue weakens faith,” a perception that limits the Church’s capacity to embody the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* at the grassroots level.²⁴⁵

This concern was echoed by Muslim respondents, who acknowledged similar tensions within Islamic institutions. Some interviewees pointed out that certain *madrasas* and Islamic training contexts emphasize defensive apologetics rather than dialogical competence, reinforcing a binary worldview of “truth versus error.”²⁴⁶ Such formations, while intended to preserve religious identity, often foster suspicion toward dialogue initiatives, especially when these initiatives are perceived as externally imposed or theologically ambiguous.

²⁴⁵ Sarbah, Interview.

²⁴⁶ Zagoon-Sayeed, Interview.

Importantly, respondents emphasized that these exclusivist tendencies are not limited to Ghana. Chicago-based practitioners identified comparable challenges within Christian and Muslim communities in North America, particularly among groups shaped by politicized religion or ideological polarization. Olsen noted that suspicion frequently arises around questions of motive, whether dialogue is a covert strategy for conversion or political manipulation, thereby undermining trust before engagement even begins.²⁴⁷ These findings confirm the analysis in Chapter 3, which demonstrates that doctrinal exclusivism is not merely a theological position but a socio-cultural posture reinforced by institutional practices and historical memory.

From a theological perspective, these constraints expose a tension within the reception of *Nostra Aetate*: while the document affirms openness to other religions, its implementation depends largely on the interpretive frameworks adopted by religious educators and leaders. Scholars such as Paul Knitter²⁴⁸ and Stephen Bevans²⁴⁹ have long argued that dialogue requires not only official endorsement but also a transformation of theological imagination at the level of formation and praxis. The interviews suggest that without sustained investment in dialogical education, both clerical and lay, the normative vision of *Nostra Aetate* risks remaining aspirational rather than operative.

5.5.2 Socio-Political and Cultural Fragilities

Beyond doctrinal concerns, respondents consistently highlighted the socio-political fragility of interreligious peace. In Ghana, several interviewees described religious harmony as “stable but delicate,” warning that seemingly minor incidents

²⁴⁷ Olsen, Interview.

²⁴⁸ Knitter, “Theologies of Religions.”

²⁴⁹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*.

can quickly escalate into broader tensions. A Muslim academic observed that disputes over religious symbols in schools, public spaces, or state institutions often become flashpoints, revealing unresolved anxieties beneath the surface of coexistence.²⁵⁰ These observations resound with earlier analyses in Chapter Four, which demonstrated how colonial legacies and postcolonial governance continue to shape religious visibility and competition.

Respondents provided concrete examples of how political events or policy decisions can be reframed along religious lines, even when their origins are non-religious. One scholar recalled instances in which immigration, education, or security issues were interpreted through a Christian–Muslim lens, thereby intensifying communal suspicion.²⁵¹ Such dynamics underscore the vulnerability of interreligious relations to external pressures and confirm José Casanova’s argument that religion in the public sphere is often mobilized in moments of social uncertainty.²⁵²

Chicago-based respondents identified parallel vulnerabilities, particularly in contexts marked by racialized politics and global conflicts. Several interviewees noted that international crises, especially those involving Israel–Palestine, global terrorism, or migration, frequently reverberate within local interfaith settings, placing strain on established relationships.²⁵³ Pudelek emphasized that dialogue becomes most difficult precisely when it is most needed, as communities retreat into defensive postures shaped by fear, grief, or political allegiance.²⁵⁴

²⁵⁰ Zagoon-Sayeed, Interview.

²⁵¹ Olsen, Interview.

²⁵² José Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (University of Chicago Press, 1994).

²⁵³ Olsen, Interview.

²⁵⁴ Pudelek, Interview.

Despite these challenges, respondents also emphasized that sustained relationships can mitigate fragility. Where trust has been built over time, through shared service, regular communication, and institutional commitment, communities are better equipped to withstand moments of crisis. This finding reinforces the argument developed in Section 5.2: that relational depth, rather than formal dialogue alone, is essential for resilience. Nevertheless, the interviews make clear that interreligious peace cannot be presumed; it remains contingent upon continuous investment, ethical leadership, and vigilant mediation.

5.5.3 Marginalization of ATR and Other Indigenous Traditions

Perhaps the most significant structural vulnerability identified by respondents concerns the marginalization of African Traditional Religion (ATR) within formal interreligious frameworks. While ATR practitioners are deeply embedded in Ghana's lived religious landscape, interviewees noted that their voices are frequently absent from official dialogue platforms. Several respondents observed that interfaith initiatives often default to a Christian–Muslim binary, thereby reproducing patterns of exclusion inherited from colonial and missionary epistemologies.²⁵⁵

ATR practitioners and sympathetic scholars argued that this exclusion undermines the authenticity of dialogue in Ghana, where indigenous cosmologies continue to shape communal ethics, ritual life, and moral reasoning. One respondent remarked that ATR is “present everywhere but invited nowhere,” highlighting the paradox of visibility without recognition.²⁵⁶ This critique aligns with the historical

²⁵⁵ Azumah, Interview.

²⁵⁶ Azumah, Interview.

analysis in Chapter Three, which demonstrated how *Nostra Aetate*, while groundbreaking, remains limited by its silence on indigenous African religions.

The marginalization of ATR also has theological consequences. By excluding indigenous epistemologies, dialogue risks privileging text-based, institutional religions while dismissing embodied, ritual, and cosmological forms of knowledge. Scholars such as Kwame Bediako²⁵⁷ and Laurenti Magesa²⁵⁸ have argued that African religious worldviews offer indispensable resources for understanding hospitality, relationality, and the sacredness of life, values repeatedly affirmed by interviewees as foundational for peaceful coexistence. The interviews suggest that without intentional inclusion of ATR perspectives, interreligious dialogue in Ghana remains structurally incomplete.

Chicago respondents, though operating in a different context, recognized analogous patterns affecting Indigenous and non-institutional spiritual traditions in North America. Several practitioners acknowledged that interfaith platforms often struggle to engage traditions that do not conform to Western religious categories, thereby revealing the global relevance of this challenge.²⁵⁹ These parallels strengthen the case for a broader reimagining of dialogue, one that moves beyond bilateral engagement toward genuinely plural and intercultural frameworks.

In sum, the constraints identified in this section do not signal the failure of interreligious dialogue but rather illuminate the conditions necessary for its maturation. Doctrinal rigidity, socio-political fragility, and the marginalization of indigenous traditions expose the limits of dialogue when it is insufficiently grounded

²⁵⁷ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*.

²⁵⁸ Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*.

²⁵⁹ Olsen, Interview.

in formation, justice, and cultural humility. These findings prepare the ground for Chapter 6, which advances constructive proposals for an inculturated reception of *Nostra Aetate*, one that is dialogical not only in principle but also in structure, pedagogy, and practice.

5.6 Comparative Insights from Ghana and Chicago: Convergence and Divergence in Practice

This subsection synthesizes the comparative dimension of the research by placing the Ghanaian and Chicago contexts into deliberate analytical conversation. Rather than treating these contexts as parallel case studies, the comparison reveals how distinct social ecologies generate different yet complementary practices of interreligious dialogue. The findings demonstrate that Ghana and Chicago embody contrasting modalities of engagement, relational and institutional, that converge around shared ethical and theological intuitions while diverging in structure, mediation, and sustainability. This comparative lens deepens the reception of *Nostra Aetate* by showing that its dialogical vision is neither culturally uniform nor contextually neutral but must be embodied differently across social worlds.

5.6.1 Points of Convergence: Shared Ethical and Anthropological Foundations

Despite significant contextual differences, interview data reveal a notable convergence between Ghana and Chicago at the level of ethical intention and anthropological orientation. Respondents in both settings consistently framed interreligious dialogue as fundamentally oriented toward peace, social cohesion, and the dignity of the human person. Dialogue was not described primarily as a theological luxury or an academic exercise, but as a moral necessity demanded by plural living. This convergence affirms *Nostra Aetate*'s core intuition that dialogue arises from a shared human condition rather than from doctrinal agreement alone.

In both contexts, relationality emerged as the indispensable foundation of dialogue. Ghanaian respondents articulated this relationality through kinship, communal belonging, and shared social life, while Chicago respondents emphasized interpersonal trust cultivated through sustained engagement and institutional partnership. Yet in both cases, dialogue was understood to begin not with abstract theological claims but with encounter, listening, presence, and recognition of the religious other as a moral subject. This shared anthropology of encounter suggests that the dialogical vision of *Nostra Aetate* resonates across cultures precisely because it appeals to relational dimensions of human existence that precede formal theology.

A further point of convergence lies in the emphasis on praxis over proclamation. Interviewees in Ghana and Chicago alike stressed that cooperation in areas such as education, social welfare, peacebuilding, and community development often precedes and sustains theological dialogue. This action-oriented convergence reflects a practical reception of *Nostra Aetate*'s call to "promote together for the benefit of all mankind social justice and moral welfare."²⁶⁰ In both settings, dialogue gains credibility when it is embodied in shared responsibility rather than confined to discourse.

5.6.2 Points of Divergence: Social Location, Mediation, and Sustainability

While Ghana and Chicago converge ethically and anthropologically, they diverge significantly in how interreligious dialogue is mediated, sustained, and transmitted. These divergences are not accidental but arise from contrasting social structures, historical paths, and modes of pluralism.

²⁶⁰ Second Vatican Council, "Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions."

In Ghana, dialogue is predominantly embedded within everyday life. Religious difference is negotiated through family systems, communal rituals, informal economies, and shared cultural norms. As a result, dialogue is largely implicit rather than programmatic. It is lived before it is named. This embeddedness gives Ghanaian interreligious relations a remarkable depth of social integration, but it also renders them vulnerable to disruption when broader political or ideological pressures intrude, as discussed in Section 5.4. Because dialogue is rarely formalized, it often lacks mechanisms for intentional formation, conflict mediation, or institutional continuity beyond personal relationships.

By contrast, in Chicago, dialogue is largely mediated through institutions, religious offices, universities, interfaith councils, non-profit organizations, and civic platforms. These structures provide durability, visibility, and procedural clarity, enabling dialogue to persist even amid social fragmentation and political polarization. Institutional mediation also allows for intentional leadership formation, theological literacy, and coordinated responses to crisis. However, this same institutionalization can distance dialogue from everyday life, making it appear abstract, elite-driven, or disconnected from grassroots religious experience. Several respondents noted that without sustained relational grounding, institutional dialogue risks becoming performative rather than transformative.

A further divergence concerns the relationship between religion and public space. In Ghana, religion permeates social life and public culture, allowing interreligious encounter to occur naturally across multiple spheres. In Chicago, where religion often operates within a secular public framework, dialogue must be deliberately organized and justified within civic norms of pluralism and inclusion.

This difference shapes not only how dialogue is practiced but also how it is perceived: as a social given in Ghana and as a negotiated commitment in Chicago.

5.6.3 Mutual Learning Across Contexts

The comparative analysis reveals that Ghana and Chicago function not as models to be replicated wholesale, but as dialogical partners offering mutual correctives. Ghana's strength in grassroots relationality exposes the limits of dialogue that relies excessively on institutional frameworks without deep cultural embedding. The Ghanaian case demonstrates that sustainable interreligious coexistence is possible even in the absence of formal structures, provided that cultural ethics, kinship bonds, and communal responsibility remain strong.

Conversely, Chicago's institutional sophistication highlights what Ghana may require as its religious landscape becomes increasingly complex and globally entangled. Respondents implicitly suggested that Ghana's largely informal model may benefit from selective institutionalization, particularly in areas such as interreligious education, leadership training, and conflict prevention, without undermining its indigenous relational ethos. In this sense, Chicago offers not a template but a repertoire of tools that can be critically adapted rather than imported.

This reciprocal learning underscores a central claim of this study: the inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* is not a unidirectional process from "center" to "periphery," but a dialogical movement across contexts. Ghana and Chicago each illuminate dimensions of *Nostra Aetate* that the other risks neglecting, embodied relationality on the one hand, and structured sustainability on the other.

5.6.4 Theological Significance for the Inculturation of Nostra Aetate

The comparative insights generated here have direct theological implications. They reveal that *Nostra Aetate* cannot be inculturated in Ghana merely through doctrinal reception or ecclesial policy. Its reception must engage Ghana's lived anthropology of encounter while remaining attentive to emerging vulnerabilities that require intentional formation and structural support. At the same time, the Chicago experience cautions against reducing dialogue to institutional management detached from cultural life.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the most faithful inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* will be neither purely informal nor rigidly institutional, but integrative, holding together relational depth and structural resilience. This comparative synthesis thus prepares the ground for Chapter Six, where the study advances constructive theological proposals that draw simultaneously from Ghanaian indigenous resources and North American institutional wisdom.

In this way, the transnational comparison does more than illustrate difference; it generates theological insight. By reading Ghana and Chicago together, the study demonstrates that interreligious dialogue, as envisioned by *Nostra Aetate*, is most fully realized when cultural particularity and theological universality are held in creative tension rather than resolved prematurely.

5.7 Integrative Summary of Findings and Theological Orientation toward

Chapter Six

This chapter has examined contemporary practices of interreligious dialogue in Ghana and Chicago through qualitative field interviews, revealing how *Nostra Aetate* is variously received, embodied, and contested across distinct cultural and

institutional contexts. Rather than treating dialogue as a static ecclesial mandate, the findings demonstrate that interreligious engagement is a lived, socially mediated practice shaped by cultural ethics, institutional structures, historical memory, and political vulnerability. As such, Chapter Five has functioned as the empirical core of the study, grounding the broader theological argument in the voices and experiences of practitioners, scholars, and community leaders.

Several key insights emerge from this analysis. First, the interviews confirm that, across Ghanaian and North American contexts, *interreligious dialogue is widely understood not as theological relativism but as a moral and social necessity rooted in the shared pursuit of peace, coexistence, and human flourishing*. This conviction closely mirrors the anthropological assumptions underlying *Nostra Aetate*, particularly its insistence that dialogue flows from the Church's recognition of a common human origin and destiny. Yet the data also reveal that the ways this vision is enacted vary significantly across contexts, underscoring the need for a contextual rather than uniform theological reception.

Second, the chapter demonstrates that *Ghanaian interreligious praxis is sustained primarily through informal, relational, and culturally embedded practices*. Dialogue in Ghana is not typically organized under formal interfaith programs but is woven into family systems, communal rituals, economic cooperation, and shared moral obligations. These indigenous frameworks: hospitality (*akwaaba*), kinship (*abusua*), communal unity (*nkabom*), and respect for elders, function as a moral infrastructure that regulates religious difference without requiring doctrinal convergence. The findings thus confirm the proposal's central claim that African Traditional Religious and cultural resources have long facilitated interreligious

coexistence, even before the arrival of Christianity and Islam, and continue to shape Christian–Muslim relations in Ghana today.

Third, the Chicago case study highlights *a contrasting but complementary model, one in which interreligious dialogue is sustained through institutional scaffolding, academic collaboration, and ecclesial and civic policy frameworks*. In a pluralistic and politically complex environment, dialogue requires intentional organization, leadership formation, and ethical safeguards to endure. While this model offers durability and crisis-responsiveness, the interviews also caution that institutionalization alone cannot substitute for relational depth. Dialogue remains effective only when structures serve to encounter rather than replace it. This comparative insight fulfills a core objective of the research proposal: to identify mutual learning opportunities between Ghana and Chicago that can inform contemporary interreligious engagement.

Fourth, Chapter 5 has identified persistent constraints that complicate the sustainability of dialogue in both contexts. *Doctrinal rigidity, socio-political fragility, and the structural marginalization of African Traditional Religion expose the limits of dialogue when it is insufficiently grounded in praxes of formation, justice, and cultural humility*. Particularly significant is the repeated observation that ATR voices remain underrepresented in formal interfaith spaces, despite their pervasive influence on Ghanaian moral and cosmological life. This finding reinforces the proposal's critique that *Nostra Aetate*, while theologically groundbreaking, remains shaped by Western religious categories that inadequately account for indigenous African epistemologies.

Taken together, these findings clarify the central theological problem this dissertation addresses: *Nostra Aetate* has been received in Ghana largely through Western ecclesial frameworks that do not fully engage the indigenous moral, relational, and religious grammars already operative within Ghanaian society. Chapter Five thus demonstrates that the challenge is not the absence of dialogue in Ghana, but the absence of a theological articulation that recognizes, affirms, and integrates these indigenous practices as legitimate loci of interreligious engagement.

This integrative summary prepares the ground for Chapter 6 which moves from empirical analysis to constructive theological synthesis. Building on the insights of Chapter Five, the next chapter proposes a Ghanaian-inculturated interpretation of *Nostra Aetate* grounded in deep inculturation, prophetic dialogue, and indigenous social ethics. Rather than importing dialogue models wholesale from Western contexts, Chapter 6 will articulate a contextual theological framework that holds together Ghana's lived anthropology of encounter and the institutional wisdom gleaned from North American practice. In doing so, the dissertation advances toward its ultimate ministerial goal: to develop a culturally resonant, theologically faithful, and pastorally viable articulation of *Nostra Aetate* "in our age and culture" for the Ghanaian context.

CHAPTER SIX

TOWARD A GHANAIAN-INCULTURATED *NOSTRA* *AETATE* FOR OUR TIME

6.1 Introduction: From Reception to Reconstruction

This chapter constitutes the constructive culmination of the study's inquiry into *Nostra Aetate* and its reception within contexts of lived religious plurality. Building on the historical analysis of Vatican II and post-conciliar developments (Chapters 2-4), as well as the empirical findings drawn from Ghanaian and North American fieldwork (Chapter 5), this moves decisively beyond the question of whether *Nostra Aetate* remains relevant. Instead, it addresses the more urgent theological task of how the declaration must be critically received, expanded, and re-articulated so as to speak credibly within contemporary plural societies. The chapter assumes that conciliar authority is not exhausted by textual repetition but unfolds through reception, interpretation, and contextual embodiment. *Nostra Aetate* is therefore approached not as a closed or exhaustive doctrinal statement, but as a foundational yet unfinished theological horizon whose dialogical intent invites further development in response to concrete historical and cultural realities.

Central to this reconstruction is the recognition that Ghana's religious landscape represents not merely a field of application for Catholic interreligious theology, but a genuine locus of theological insight. In Ghana, Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religions coexist within overlapping familial, ritual, and social spaces that resist rigid confessional boundaries.²⁶¹ Dialogue in such contexts is not

²⁶¹ Cosmas Ebo Sarbah and Manson Anane Adjei, "Toward an Activated Convivencia: A Practical Theological Reflection on Muslim-Christian Relations in Ghana," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 11, no. 12 (2025): 627–38, <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.202511124>.

primarily institutional, programmatic, or elite, but is embedded in everyday practices of hospitality, kinship, communal ethics, and shared responsibility for social harmony. These lived forms of interreligious coexistence predate Vatican II and continue largely independent of formal ecclesial structures. As the chapter argues, such realities expose both the strengths and the limitations of dominant post-conciliar models of dialogue, particularly their reliance on Western epistemological assumptions that privilege textual reasoning, institutional representation, and formalized encounters. Reading post-conciliar developments through Ghanaian and North American lenses thus reveals a persistent gap between ecclesial dialogue as officially articulated and dialogue as actually lived.

In response to this gap, this chapter advances a constructive theological proposal that integrates conciliar theology, post-conciliar developments, and indigenous religious resources into a re-imagined vision of dialogue. After revisiting *Nostra Aetate* alongside other Vatican II documents (6.1) and critically assessing post-conciliar paths (6.2), the chapter retrieves African Traditional Religions, communal ethics, and relational personhood as *loci theologici* capable of deepening Catholic understandings of dialogue (6.3). Through the framework of prophetic dialogue (6.4), it articulates a model that holds together Christian faithfulness and genuine openness without collapsing into relativism or syncretism. This theological path culminates in a hypothetical rewriting of *Nostra Aetate* “in our time” (6.5–6.6), extending its dialogical vision to include religions with and without scriptures, founders, or global visibility, and re-centering dialogue within everyday religious life rather than elite discourse. In doing so, the chapter contends that inculturating *Nostra Aetate* does not provincialize Catholic theology but universalizes it, allowing the

Church to rediscover dialogue as a way of being rooted in lived encounter, human dignity, and the mysterious activity of God beyond visible ecclesial boundaries.

6.2 Theological Foundations from the Second Vatican Council

Any attempt to reconstruct *Nostra Aetate* for contemporary contexts must begin by returning to the theological vision of the Second Vatican Council itself.²⁶² Vatican II represents a decisive moment of ecclesial self-reorientation, in which the Catholic Church articulated a renewed understanding of revelation, mission, ecclesiology, and the Church's relationship to the modern world and to religious others. Interreligious dialogue did not emerge at the Council as an isolated pastoral concern but as an expression of a broader theological shift grounded in human dignity, the universality of God's salvific will, and the recognition that divine grace is operative beyond the visible boundaries of the Church. Within this conciliar framework, dialogue is inseparable from the Church's identity as a pilgrim people journeying with humanity through history, called to witness to the Gospel through encounter, discernment, and solidarity rather than domination or exclusion.

This section, therefore, situates *Nostra Aetate* within the wider conciliar corpus to clarify both its promise and its limits. The first subsection (below) offers a critical rereading of *Nostra Aetate* as a foundational yet intentionally incomplete text, highlighting its theological breakthroughs while attending to its silences, particularly regarding African Traditional Religions. The subsequent subsection then places *Nostra Aetate* in sustained conversation with other Vatican II documents, *Ad Gentes*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Gaudium et Spes*, *Dignitatis Humanae*, and *Unitatis Redintegratio*, to demonstrate that interreligious dialogue emerges from a coherent conciliar theology

²⁶² Moses Awinonya, "Personal Conversation with Manson Anane Adjei" (Chicago, IL, 2025).

rather than a single declaration. Read together, these texts provide the doctrinal and anthropological foundations necessary for the constructive task undertaken in this chapter: the inculturated reconstruction of *Nostra Aetate* in light of lived religious pluralism in Ghana and comparative contexts such as North America.

6.2.1 *Nostra Aetate Revisited: Promise and Incompleteness*

A constructive rereading of *Nostra Aetate* requires holding together two inseparable claims: first, that the declaration constitutes a decisive theological breakthrough in the Catholic Church's engagement with religious plurality; and second, that it remains an intentionally open and historically conditioned text whose reception demands ongoing contextual development. The enduring significance of *Nostra Aetate* lies not in its exhaustiveness, but in its capacity to reorient the Church's posture toward the religious other through a grammar of respect, discernment, and encounter.²⁶³

Theologically, *Nostra Aetate* introduced several foundational shifts. It explicitly rejected religious contempt and violence, affirmed the presence of "truth and holiness" in other religious traditions, and grounded dialogue in a shared human origin and destiny under God.²⁶⁴ These affirmations marked a departure from earlier ecclesial paradigms that tended to frame non-Christian religions primarily through the lenses of deficiency or fulfillment. Instead, the declaration articulated a dialogical horizon in which encounter with the religious other becomes a site of moral responsibility and theological discernment rather than a threat to Christian identity.

²⁶³ Second Vatican Council, "Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *Vatican Council II*, vol. 28, 1965, §1, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

²⁶⁴ Second Vatican Council, §2.

At the same time, *Nostra Aetate* is marked by notable silences that are especially significant for African contexts. Most prominently, the document does not address African Traditional Religions (ATRs), despite their deep historical, cultural, and theological significance for large portions of the global Church. This omission reflects not merely an oversight but the broader epistemological and ecclesial frameworks within which the Council operated, frameworks shaped largely by Western categorizations of “world religions,” privileging textual, institutional, and doctrinal traditions.²⁶⁵ As demonstrated in earlier chapters, such categories do not adequately account for the ritual, oral, and cosmological grammars through which ATRs articulate religious meaning and sustain communal life in Ghana.

Nevertheless, the incompleteness of *Nostra Aetate* should not be interpreted as a theological failure. Instead, it reveals the conciliar insight that Church teaching unfolds through reception, interpretation, and contextual embodiment. Vatican II did not intend its documents to function as static prescriptions; instead, they invite the local Church to participate actively in the ongoing articulation of doctrine in response to lived realities.²⁶⁶ In this sense, the absence of ATRs becomes a theological summons rather than a dead end, a call for African theologians and pastoral communities to extend the dialogical vision of *Nostra Aetate* beyond its original horizons.

Within the Ghanaian context, where Christianity, Islam, and ATRs coexist within overlapping familial, ritual, and social spaces, *Nostra Aetate* can only function credibly if it is reread through indigenous religious experience. Such a rereading does not negate the declaration’s Christological grounding but situates it within a broader

²⁶⁵ Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*.

²⁶⁶ O’Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*.

theology of encounter attentive to local cosmologies, communal ethics, and lived pluralism. As earlier chapters have shown, Ghanaian interreligious coexistence predates Vatican II and is sustained through cultural practices such as sacred hospitality, kinship solidarity, and ritual participation. These practices reveal that dialogue is not merely a programmatic ecclesial initiative but a theological reality already operative within society.

Thus, *Nostra Aetate* may be understood as a foundational yet intentionally generative—one whose theological logic presupposes an openness to ongoing discovery rather than a closed inventory of religious truth. The Council’s affirmation that the Church “rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions” is rendered intelligible only if such truth and holiness are not presumed to be exhaustively known or finally delimited at the moment of conciliar articulation. While the document does not explicitly theorize interreligious dialogue as an unfinished project, its language implicitly resists closure, inviting reception, discernment, and context development across time and cultures.

6.2.2 Other Vatican II Texts on Mission and Dialogue

While *Nostra Aetate* provides the most explicit conciliar articulation of interreligious dialogue, its theological vision is substantially deepened when read alongside other Vatican II documents. Together, these texts articulate a coherent ecclesial anthropology in which dialogue emerges not as an optional pastoral strategy but as an intrinsic dimension of the Church’s identity and mission.

Ad Gentes, the “Decree on the Missionary Activity of the Church,” reconfigures mission by situating it within a theology of witness, presence, and encounter. Rather than defining mission solely in terms of conversionary expansion,

the document affirms that God is already at work in the histories, cultures, and religious traditions of peoples prior to explicit Christian proclamation.²⁶⁷ This recognition introduces a crucial theological humility: the missionary does not bring God where God is absent, but bears witness to Christ within contexts where divine grace is already operative. For plural societies such as Ghana, this vision resonates strongly with lived religious realities, in which Muslims and ATR practitioners are recognized as moral agents and spiritual leaders rather than merely objects of evangelization.

Lumen Gentium, the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, further grounds dialogue by rearticulating ecclesial self-understanding. By describing the Church as the “People of God” journeying through history, the document emphasizes relationality, pilgrimage, and openness rather than juridical closure. Most significantly, *Lumen Gentium* affirms that elements of truth and sanctification exist outside the visible boundaries of the Church, thereby providing a theological basis for recognizing the salvific presence of God beyond institutional Catholicism.²⁶⁸ This affirmation is particularly consequential for African contexts, where religious belonging is often fluid and relational, and where communal identity frequently transcends confessional boundaries.

Gaudium et Spes, the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, introduces an explicitly anthropological foundation for dialogue. Its opening declaration, solidarity with the “joys and hopes, griefs and anxieties” of humanity,

²⁶⁷ Ad Gentes, “Decree on the Mission Activity of the Church,” *Second Vatican Council. Vatican City*, 1965.

²⁶⁸ Pope Paul VI, “*Lumen Gentium*.”

locates the Church's mission within shared human experience.²⁶⁹ Dialogue, within this framework, is grounded not primarily in doctrinal exchange but in common struggles for dignity, justice, peace, and social well-being. As demonstrated in Chapter Five, Ghanaian interreligious cooperation often emerges precisely at this level of shared life: education, healthcare, conflict mediation, family gathering, funerals, and communal celebrations. *Gaudium et Spes* thus offers a conciliar rationale for recognizing such collaborations as authentic expressions of ecclesial mission.

Building upon these foundations, *Dignitatis Humanae*,²⁷⁰ the Declaration on Religious Freedom, provides a decisive theological and juridical framework for dialogue by grounding religious freedom in the dignity of the human person and the inviolability of conscience. By affirming that faith must be freely embraced and never coerced, the Council establishes respect for conscience as a non-negotiable condition of authentic religious engagement. In African societies such as Ghana, where religious diversity is deeply interwoven with national identity and social cohesion, *Dignitatis Humanae* undergirds interreligious coexistence as a matter of justice rather than mere tolerance, offering a conciliar rationale for safeguarding minority religious communities and sustaining peaceful pluralism. In the North American context, particularly in Chicago's multicultural and multi-faith environment, the declaration provides a moral grammar for Catholic participation in a pluralistic public sphere

²⁶⁹ Pastoral Constitution, "Gaudium et Spes," URL: [Http://Www. Vatican.va/Archive/Hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/Documents/Vat-II_const_19651207_gaudi-um-et-spes_ge.html](http://www.vatican.va/Archive/Hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/Documents/Vat-II_const_19651207_gaudi-um-et-spes_ge.html) (01.11. 2018), 1965.

²⁷⁰ Second Vatican Council, "Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on Religious Freedom" (Vatican City: Vatican, 1965), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html.

marked by constitutional protections, civic negotiation, and ongoing debates about the place of religion in public life.

Closely related is *Unitatis Redintegratio*,²⁷¹ the Decree on Ecumenism.

Although primarily concerned with unity among Christians, its theological method and spiritual disposition significantly shape the Church's broader dialogical posture. The document emphasizes humility, repentance, and mutual conversion, insisting that the Church herself must be continually reformed in response to the Gospel. This self-critical stance destabilizes triumphalist ecclesiologies and cultivates habits of listening and learning that readily extend beyond intra-Christian relations. In African contexts, where denominational plurality often intersects with Muslim and ATR communities within shared families and neighborhoods, *Unitatis Redintegratio* models a dialogical spirituality capable of sustaining difference without fragmentation. In Chicago, its emphasis on cooperation and shared witness among divided Christian communities strengthens the credibility of Christian participation in wider interreligious initiatives.

When read together through African and North American lenses, these conciliar texts articulate a unified theological vision in which dialogue is inseparable from mission, ecclesiology, anthropology, human dignity, and conscience. Dialogue emerges not as an accommodation to modern pluralism but as a theological consequence of the Church's confession of God's universal salvific will and humanity's shared vocation. This integrated vision resists any strict opposition between proclamation and dialogue, insisting instead on their mutual implication within concrete historical contexts.

²⁷¹ Second Vatican Council, "Unitatis Redintegratio: Decree on Ecumenism" (Vatican City: Vatican Council II, 1964), https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decree_19641121_unitatis-redintegratio_en.html.

For the Church in Ghana and in a U.S. city such as Chicago, this conciliar synthesis offers both affirmation and challenge. It affirms existing practices of coexistence and collaboration while challenging ecclesial structures to recognize indigenous religious traditions, especially African Traditional Religions, and culturally embedded forms of dialogue as legitimate theological partners. Vatican II thus provides not a closed or exhaustive theology of dialogue, but a capacious framework that invites inculturation, critique, and expansion. The task of the following sections is to carry this conciliar vision forward by reconstructing *Nostra Aetate* for “our time,” drawing deliberately on the lived religious realities of Africa and North America as sites of genuine theological insight.

6.3 Post-Conciliar Developments in Catholic Interreligious Engagement

The promulgation of *Nostra Aetate* marked a decisive theological reorientation in the Catholic Church’s relationship with non-Christian religions. Yet, the document itself did not specify how its dialogical vision would be concretely embodied across diverse cultural contexts. The post-conciliar period, therefore, became a critical phase of reception, experimentation, and institutionalization, during which the Church sought to translate conciliar principles into pastoral practice, ecclesial structures, and global engagement. This section examines how Catholic interreligious dialogue developed after Vatican II, attending to both its achievements and its structural limitations, particularly as these emerge when post-conciliar models are read through African (Ghanaian) and North American (Chicago) contexts.

6.3.1 From Conciliar Orientation to Ecclesial Praxis

In the decades following the Second Vatican Council, Catholic interreligious engagement underwent a decisive transition from theological declaration to concrete

ecclesial praxis. While *Nostra Aetate* articulated a new doctrinal orientation toward non-Christian religions, its deeper significance lay in inaugurating a process of reception through which dialogue gradually became embedded in the Church's lived self-understanding. Dialogue was no longer framed primarily as an apologetic concession to modern pluralism or as a tactical instrument of mission, but as an intrinsic dimension of the Church's identity as a pilgrim people called to witness to God's universal salvific will within a religiously diverse world.²⁷²

Post-conciliar theology increasingly interpreted dialogue as a *modus ecclesiae*, a way of being Church, rather than a discrete pastoral activity.²⁷³ This shift reflected a broader reconfiguration of Catholic ecclesiology emerging from Vatican II, particularly the understanding of the Church as the *People of God* journeying in solidarity with humanity.²⁷⁴ Dialogue, within this framework, was grounded in the recognition of the inherent dignity of every human person, the conviction that divine grace is not confined to visible ecclesial boundaries, and the moral imperative to foster peaceful coexistence in a fractured world.²⁷⁵ As a result, interreligious engagement came to be understood not as peripheral to the Church's mission but as inseparable from its witness to the Gospel in contexts marked by religious plurality.

²⁷² Second Vatican Council, "Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions."

²⁷³ See, for example, **Paul VI**, *Ecclesiam Suam* (1964), where dialogue is presented as intrinsic to the Church's self-understanding; **Jacques Dupuis**, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), which frames dialogue as integral to the Church's engagement with religious plurality; **David J. Bosch**, *Transforming Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), where dialogue is embedded within *missio Dei*; **Stephen B. Bevans** and **Roger P. Schroeder**, *Constants in Context* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004), which situates dialogue as a permanent dimension of missionary ecclesiology; and **Francis**, *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), where dialogue is articulated as a habitual posture of the pilgrim Church in plural societies.

²⁷⁴ Pope Paul VI, "Lumen Gentium."

²⁷⁵ Council, "Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on Religious Freedom."

Postwar global transformations significantly shaped this movement from conciliar orientation to ecclesial praxis. Processes of migration, globalization, and postcolonial realignment intensified encounters among religious communities, rendering interreligious relations an unavoidable pastoral reality rather than a theoretical concern.²⁷⁶ In North America, especially in major urban centers such as Chicago, the rapid diversification of religious life posed new challenges and opportunities for the Church. Catholic communities increasingly found themselves living alongside Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, and adherents of other traditions, often within shared neighborhoods, schools, and civic institutions. These realities demanded structured ecclesial responses capable of addressing interreligious tensions, combating prejudice, and articulating a credible public witness rooted in respect, cooperation, and social responsibility.²⁷⁷

Within such contexts, post-conciliar dialogue was frequently institutionalized through diocesan offices, academic centers, and interfaith councils. Dialogue took on visible forms through organized encounters, joint statements, and collaborative social initiatives, reflecting what David Tracy describes as the emergence of religion within the “public realm,” where theological commitments intersect with shared ethical and civic concerns.²⁷⁸ In cities like Chicago, this institutional turn enabled the Church to participate actively in broader interfaith networks, contributing to peacebuilding, advocacy for religious freedom, and responses to social crises. At the same time, this structured approach tended to privilege formal representation, expert discourse, and

²⁷⁶ Peter C Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Orbis Books, 2015).

²⁷⁷ John Borelli, “Interreligious Dialogue at Vatican II,” *The Oxford Handbook of Vatican II*, 2023.

²⁷⁸ Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*.

programmatic engagement, shaping dialogue in ways that reflected Western ecclesial and cultural assumptions.

In contrast, the post-conciliar moment in African contexts such as Ghana unfolded within societies where religious plurality was neither recent nor disruptive but deeply embedded in social, familial, and cultural life. Long before Vatican II, Ghanaian communities had developed indigenous frameworks of coexistence through interfaith families, shared rituals, communal festivals, and everyday economic interaction.²⁷⁹ Christianity and Islam, having taken root within an already plural religious landscape shaped by African Traditional Religions, were themselves integrated into complex networks of kinship and communal belonging. Consequently, the challenge posed by Vatican II in such contexts was not how to initiate dialogue *ex nihilo*, but how conciliar theology might meaningfully recognize, affirm, and accompany dialogical practices that were already operative at the grassroots level.

This divergence in context reveals an important tension within post-conciliar ecclesial praxis. While Vatican II provided universal theological principles for interreligious engagement, their practical realization proved highly contextdependent. In Ghana, dialogue often remained implicit, embodied in lived relationships rather than formalized structures. As a result, ecclesial implementations of post-conciliar dialogue, often modeled on Western institutional frameworks, sometimes appeared disconnected from the everyday realities of interreligious life. The task facing the Church in such settings was therefore not merely pastoral adaptation but theological discernment: how to translate the conciliar vision of dialogue into forms that resonate

²⁷⁹ Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*.

with indigenous religious grammars without subsuming them under imported categories.

This contrast between North American and African experiences underscores the significance of the post-conciliar shift from orientation to praxis. Vatican II did not prescribe a uniform model of dialogue; rather, it inaugurated a dynamic process through which local churches were called to interpret and embody dialogical principles in light of their own historical and cultural realities. The movement from conciliar declaration to lived ecclesial practice thus remains an ongoing and unfinished task, one that requires attentiveness to context, humility in reception, and openness to learning from the diverse ways in which religious coexistence is already lived across the global Church.

6.3.2 Magisterial Paths and Papal Leadership

In the decades following the Second Vatican Council, papal leadership played a decisive role in shaping the Catholic Church's evolving theology and practice of interreligious dialogue. While *Nostra Aetate* established the foundational conciliar orientation, it was the post-conciliar popes who interpreted, extended, and embodied this vision in response to changing global, cultural, and ecclesial realities. Each pontificate accentuated discrete dimensions of dialogue (e.g., ecclesial, symbolic, rational, pastoral, etc.), thereby contributing to a multifaceted magisterial legacy that continues to inform Catholic interreligious engagement across diverse contexts, including Africa and North America.

Paul VI provided the first authoritative post-conciliar articulation of dialogue as intrinsic to the Church's identity and mission. Although it was issued during the conciliar period, in his 1964 encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*, he presented dialogue not as

a tactical response to modernity or religious plurality, but as a defining posture of the Church toward the world. Dialogue, for Paul VI, was rooted in God's own communicative initiative toward humanity and therefore belonged to the very logic of revelation and salvation history.²⁸⁰

Paul VI described dialogue as marked by clarity, humility, trust, and prudence, insisting that authentic engagement with others must be both faithful to Christian identity and genuinely open to encounter. This theological framing decisively shifted Catholic interreligious engagement away from polemics and toward relational reciprocity. Dialogue was no longer conceived merely as a means to an end, such as conversion or apologetic defense, but as a constitutive dimension of ecclesial witness itself.

Crucially, Paul VI's vision translated into institutional form. His pontificate witnessed the consolidation of permanent ecclesial structures dedicated to relations with non-Christian religions, most notably the Secretariat for Non-Christians (later the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue).²⁸¹ This development signaled that dialogue was not an optional pastoral experiment but a sustained ecclesial commitment requiring formation, expertise, and continuity. While these structures emerged largely within Western ecclesial contexts, they laid the groundwork for the

²⁸⁰ Pope Paul IV, "Ecclesiam Suam," in *Encyclical* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964), 70-78.

²⁸¹ The growing ecclesial centrality of interreligious dialogue is reflected institutionally in the evolution of the **Secretariat for Non-Christians**, established by **Paul VI** in 1964 as a direct post-conciliar implementation of *Nostra Aetate*. Under **John Paul II**, this office was elevated and renamed the **Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue** in 1988, signaling dialogue's incorporation into the Church's ordinary missionary and pastoral structures. A subsequent period of institutional contraction occurred during the pontificate of **Benedict XVI**, when the Council was placed under the Pontifical Council for Culture (2012), reflecting a more cautious theological framing of dialogue. This trajectory was decisively reversed by **Francis**, whose apostolic constitution **Praedicate Evangelium** restored the body's autonomy and elevated it as the **Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue** (2022), thereby reaffirming interreligious dialogue as a constitutive dimension of the Church's evangelizing mission rather than a subsidiary cultural engagement.

global diffusion of Catholic interreligious initiatives, including in African churches such as Ghana, even if their institutional logic did not always align seamlessly with local religious cultures.²⁸²

John Paul II significantly expanded the scope, visibility, and moral urgency of interreligious dialogue. His pontificate was marked by an acute awareness of global violence, ideological conflict, and the fragmentation of the human family, particularly in the aftermath of the Cold War. Dialogue, in this context, was presented as a spiritual and ethical response to humanity's shared vulnerability and interdependence.

The most emblematic expression of this vision was the 1986 interreligious prayer gathering in Assisi, where leaders of diverse religious traditions assembled to pray for peace. Assisi represented a decisive shift from dialogue conceived primarily as a theological exchange to dialogue enacted through symbolic and performative encounter. Without erasing doctrinal differences, the event dramatized a shared moral commitment to peace and human dignity.²⁸³ This model resonated strongly in North American contexts such as Chicago, where public interfaith gestures have often functioned as powerful counter-narratives to religious prejudice, political polarization, and social fragmentation.

At the same time, the Assisi model revealed important limitations. Symbolic dialogue, when detached from local cultural grammars, risks remaining episodic or externally imposed. In African contexts such as Ghana, where interreligious coexistence is embedded in everyday life, kinship structures, and ritual participation, high-profile symbolic events do not always translate into deeper ecclesial recognition

²⁸² Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue, "The History of the Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue" (Dicastery for Interreligious Dialogue), accessed January 10, 2026, <https://www.dicasteryinterreligious.va/our-history/>.

²⁸³ Dialogue, "The History of the Dicastery."

of indigenous dialogical practices. Thus, while John Paul II's approach powerfully affirmed the moral necessity of dialogue on a global stage, it also exposed the need for cultural mediation and inculturation if symbolic encounter is to become theologically and pastorally sustainable in non-Western contexts.

Benedict XVI brought a distinct theological emphasis to post-conciliar interreligious dialogue, foregrounding the role of reason, truth, and intellectual coherence. While consistently affirming dialogue as an essential dimension of the Church's mission, he expressed concern that dialogue could devolve into relativism or superficial consensus if detached from substantive truth claims. His approach sought to ground interreligious engagement in rational discourse, ethical reasoning, and shared commitment to objective truth.²⁸⁴

This emphasis reinforced academic and expert-driven models of dialogue, particularly influential in university-based and ecclesially sponsored initiatives across North America. In cities such as Chicago, where theological institutions and research centers play a central role in interfaith engagement, Benedict XVI's framework provided intellectual rigor and doctrinal confidence, enabling dialogue partners to articulate their convictions without fear of dilution.²⁸⁵

In African contexts, however, the limitations of this rationalist orientation became more apparent. Many African religious traditions, including African Traditional Religions, articulate theological meaning primarily through oral narratives, ritual performance, symbols, and communal memory rather than abstract conceptual discourse. Consequently, dialogue models privileging rational

²⁸⁴ Benedict XVI, "Caritas in Veritate: Encyclical Letter on Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth" (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2009), https://www.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate.html.

²⁸⁵ George Tvrtković, Interview.

argumentation and textual exchange often struggle to engage these traditions on their own epistemological terms.²⁸⁶ Benedict XVI's contribution thus clarified the importance of theological integrity but also underscored the cultural contingency of certain dialogical methodologies when applied beyond Western intellectual settings.

Francis has further broadened the post-conciliar vision of interreligious dialogue by emphasizing encounter, lived experience, and attentiveness to voices on the peripheries of both Church and society. Dialogue, in his magisterium, is not primarily a matter of institutional protocol or intellectual exchange but a concrete practice of fraternity, social friendship, and shared responsibility for the common good.

Through encyclicals such as *Fratelli Tutti*²⁸⁷ and *Laudato Si'*,²⁸⁸ Pope Francis has explicitly connected interreligious dialogue with concerns for social justice, ecological responsibility, and the dignity of marginalized peoples. His recognition of indigenous wisdom traditions as vital interlocutors in addressing global crises represents a significant expansion of Catholic dialogical imagination beyond Eurocentric frameworks.

For African societies such as Ghana, this orientation resonates deeply with communal cosmologies, relational ethics, and holistic visions of life in which religion, society, and the environment are inseparably intertwined. In North American contexts like Chicago, Francis's emphasis has encouraged a shift away from elite, institution-centered dialogue toward grassroots, neighborhood-based, and community-driven

²⁸⁶ Azumah, Interview.

²⁸⁷ Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti: On Fraternity and Social Friendship* (Our Sunday Visitor, 2020).

²⁸⁸ Francis, "Laudato Si."

engagement, where interreligious cooperation is expressed through shared social action and mutual accompaniment.

Taken together, these papal lines reveal a post-conciliar magisterial tradition that is neither monolithic nor static. Paul VI grounded dialogue in ecclesial identity; John Paul II elevated its symbolic and global significance; Benedict XVI safeguarded its intellectual and theological coherence; and Pope Francis has re-centered it on encounter, solidarity, and the lived realities of diverse communities. This layered legacy provides rich resources for Catholic interreligious engagement while also exposing the need for contextual discernment. When read through African and North American contexts, it becomes evident that papal leadership has opened expansive dialogical horizons, even as the task of translating these horizons into culturally echoing and locally credible practices remains an unfinished ecclesial responsibility.

6.3.3 Institutionalization and the Professionalization of Dialogue

One of the most significant post-conciliar developments has been the institutionalization of interreligious dialogue. The establishment of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and parallel national and diocesan offices formalized the Church's commitment to sustained engagement with other religious communities. Alongside these structures emerged academic centers, theological institutes, and interfaith councils that professionalized dialogue through conferences, bilateral commissions, and policy-oriented collaboration.

In North America, and particularly in Chicago, these developments proved highly effective. The city's dense network of universities, seminaries, and interfaith organizations enabled coordinated, publicly visible, and responsive dialogue during civic crises. Dialogue in this context often takes the form of structured encounters

among trained representatives, supported by institutional resources and articulated through shared ethical language. A telling illustration of this institutionalized reception of Vatican II can be found at Catholic Theological Union (CTU), where interreligious engagement is not peripheral but structurally embedded within the academic and ecclesial life of the institution. During a classroom lecture, the Muslim Director of the Catholic–Muslim Studies Program remarked, “I am working here (at CTU) because of *Nostra Aetate*.”²⁸⁹ This observation captures with striking clarity the long-term ecclesial impact of the conciliar documents: Vatican II did not merely authorize dialogue in theory but concretely reconfigured Catholic institutions in ways that made it possible, and theologically legitimate, for scholars of different religious traditions to teach, research, and exercise leadership within Church-sponsored settings. In this sense, documents such as *Nostra Aetate*, *Gaudium et Spes*, and *Dignitatis Humanae* function not only as theological texts but as enabling charters that opened ecclesial space for interreligious expertise, collaboration, and shared intellectual labor within the life of the Church in North America.

In contrast, the institutionalization of dialogue in African contexts has been more limited and uneven: although episcopal conferences and national religious councils in Ghana have adopted formal interfaith initiatives, much of the country’s interreligious life continues to unfold outside institutional frameworks, and post-conciliar structures shaped largely by Western ecclesial assumptions have often struggled to recognize or engage the informal, relational, and culturally embedded forms of dialogue that characterize Ghanaian society, with the result that institutional dialogue sometimes operates parallel to, rather than in continuity with, lived interreligious practice. A concrete illustration of this embodied mode of coexistence

²⁸⁹ “Personal Communication of the Director of Catholic-Muslim Study Program” (Chicago, IL, 2024).

can be seen in the annual Easter Monday Picnic in Badu, where communal sporting activities, especially football matches, are organized along ecumenical lines among the town's mainline Christian churches, with pastors and lay members participating together, while Muslims serve as the officiating officials without controversy or self-consciousness. This everyday interreligious trust is further evident in the spatial proximity of religious communities, as the Catholic Church's historic land, including its church, schools, and rectory, stands directly opposite the Muslim community, and the mutual "disturbances" caused by the *adhān* (the Islamic call to prayer) and by church bells and liturgical music during Mass are openly acknowledged, often with humor, yet have never occasioned conflict, being received instead as ordinary features of shared life that demonstrate how religious difference in Badu is negotiated through habitual coexistence, social familiarity, and a deeply ingrained ethic of mutual accommodation. Most neighbors even use the dawn *adhān* as an alarm (wake-up time).²⁹⁰

6.3.4 Dominant Post-Conciliar Models of Dialogue

In the decades following Vatican II, Catholic interreligious engagement was articulated through a set of dialogical models that sought to translate conciliar theology into pastoral practice. These models, commonly described as the dialogue of life, dialogue of action, dialogue of theological exchange, and dialogue of religious experience,²⁹¹ have provided the Church with a shared conceptual vocabulary for engaging religious plurality. Within many Western contexts, particularly in North

²⁹⁰ Iddrisu, Interview.

²⁹¹ Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, "Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ" (Vatican City: Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 1991), https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html.

America, these frameworks have enabled structured encounters among religious leaders, scholars, and institutions, offering clarity about the aims and limits of dialogue while safeguarding doctrinal integrity. As such, they have played a crucial role in normalizing dialogue as a legitimate and necessary dimension of ecclesial life rather than a marginal or experimental activity.

Practically, these models have functioned most effectively where religious identities are institutionally defined and where dialogue can be organized through representative leadership. Interview data from Chicago consistently reflects this reality: interreligious dialogue is frequently facilitated through diocesan offices, academic centers, and long-standing bilateral or multilateral councils, often involving trained interlocutors who speak on behalf of their communities.²⁹² In such contexts, the dialogue of theological exchange and the dialogue of action, joint advocacy, social service, and public witness, are particularly prominent. These practices demonstrate the strengths of post-conciliar models in environments where institutional infrastructure supports continuity, accountability, and public visibility.

At the same time, even within North American settings, practitioners increasingly acknowledge the limits of these typologies. Several interviewees noted that while the models are helpful, lived interreligious relationships often precede formal dialogue and exceed its categories. Grassroots friendships, neighborhood cooperation, and shared civic vulnerability frequently generate trust long before any structured dialogue occurs. This observation suggests that post-conciliar models function best not as exhaustive descriptions of interreligious reality, but as reflective tools that interpret practices already underway. This insight becomes even more

²⁹² Olsen, Interview.

significant when these models are read through non-Western contexts, where the conditions that originally shaped them are not always present.

6.3.5 Epistemological and Cultural Limits of Post-Conciliar Engagement

When post-conciliar dialogical models are examined within the Ghanaian context, their cultural and epistemological limits become more visible. In contrast to critically outmoded Western assumptions about religion as a discrete system of beliefs or institutions, religious life in Ghana is deeply embedded within kinship networks, communal rituals, and shared moral worlds. Interview participants repeatedly emphasized that interreligious coexistence is not experienced as a specialized activity called “dialogue,” but as an ordinary feature of social life. Mixed families, shared festivals, funerals, markets, and communal labor create daily spaces of interreligious encounter that do not fit neatly into formal dialogical categories.

From a practical theological perspective, this means that the dialogue of life in Ghana is not one model among others but the ground from which all other forms of engagement emerge. Theological exchange, as classically conceived, remains marginal and largely confined to academic or ecclesial elites, while dialogue of action occurs organically through communal cooperation rather than organized interfaith initiatives. As several Ghanaian interviewees observed, many ordinary believers engage with religious difference without possessing the conceptual language of dialogue.²⁹³ They live in interreligious coexistence intuitively, guided by cultural values of kinship, hospitality, and social harmony rather than explicit theological frameworks.²⁹⁴

²⁹³ Azumah, Interview.

²⁹⁴ Zagoon-Sayeed, Interview.

These realities expose the epistemological bias embedded in many post-conciliar models, particularly their privileging of textual reasoning, formal representation, and institutional mediation. Such assumptions risk misrecognizing or undervaluing embodied, oral, and relational dialogical practices. In Ghana, where meaning is often transmitted through ritual participation and social practice rather than abstract discourse, dialogue cannot be reduced to conversation alone.²⁹⁵ A practical theology of dialogue must therefore attend not only to what is said between religious actors, but to how religious difference is negotiated through shared life, memory, and moral responsibility.

6.3.6 Implications for African and North American Contexts

One of the most significant consequences of these epistemological limits is the persistent marginalization of African Traditional Religions (ATRs) within formal Catholic interreligious engagement. Despite their profound influence on moral imagination, ritual life, and communal identity in Ghana, ATRs remain largely absent from post-conciliar dialogue structures. Interview data consistently reveal that many Christians and Muslims continue to participate in traditional rituals, honor ancestral obligations, and draw upon indigenous cosmologies, even when these practices are not publicly acknowledged as “religious.”²⁹⁶ This disconnect highlights a gap between lived religious reality and ecclesial recognition.

In practical terms, the exclusion of ATRs risks reproducing colonial patterns of religious recognition, in which Christianity and Islam are treated as legitimate discussers while indigenous traditions are rendered invisible or reduced to cultural

²⁹⁵ Sarbah, Interview.

²⁹⁶ Muhammad Abdulrahim Bamba, *Interview by Eugene Abdul Muhaymin Priester, III*, Kumasi, Ghana, Summer 2025.

background.²⁹⁷ Such patterns undermine the credibility of Catholic dialogue in African contexts, where religious plurality cannot be understood apart from indigenous frameworks. A theology of dialogue that ignores ATRs not only misrepresents Ghanaian religious life but also contradicts the conciliar affirmation that truth and holiness are present beyond the visible boundaries of the Church.

A parallel dynamic can be observed in North American contexts, where Native and Indigenous spiritualities often remain peripheral to mainstream interfaith initiatives. While the historical and cultural conditions differ, the underlying issue is similar: post-conciliar dialogue tends to privilege traditions that conform to Western definitions of religion.²⁹⁸ The comparative lens of Ghana and Chicago thus reveals that the challenge facing Catholic interreligious engagement is not merely geographic but epistemological. Without a broader theological imagination, dialogue risks becoming selective rather than truly catholic.

6.3.7 Concluding Synthesis

Taken together, these observations suggest that post-conciliar Catholic interreligious engagement represents a genuine theological maturation, yet one that remains incomplete. In North America, especially in cities like Chicago, institutional dialogue has fostered visibility, cooperation, and public witness, particularly during social crises. These developments demonstrate the enduring value of Vatican II's dialogical vision and its capacity to shape ecclesial practice in pluralistic societies. At the same time, such engagement often remains confined to formal settings and professional actors, with limited integration into everyday parish life.

²⁹⁷ Azumah, Interview.

²⁹⁸ George Tvrtković, Interview.

In Ghana, by contrast, interreligious coexistence is deeply woven into daily life, yet it often lacks theological articulation and ecclesial affirmation. The Church benefits from a rich reservoir of lived dialogue but has not fully named or claimed these practices as theological resources. This imbalance points to the need for a dialogical theology that can move fluidly between institutional and informal modes of engagement, recognizing both as authentic expressions of the Church's mission in a religiously plural world.

This concluding synthesis does not call for the abandonment of post-conciliar models, but for their critical reconstruction through inculturation. The task that follows in this chapter is therefore constructive: to re-articulate *Nostra Aetate* in a way that is faithful to its theological intent while allowing Ghana's lived religious pluralism to shape its meaning. In doing so, the Church does not dilute the conciliar legacy but deepens it, allowing dialogue to emerge not only as a program or policy, but as a way of being Church rooted in everyday human encounter.

6.4 Indigenous Ghanaian Resources for a Re-Imagined Theology of Dialogue

This section advances the argument that any credible inculturation of *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana must move beyond the mere adaptation of Western dialogical models and instead retrieve indigenous religious resources as active theological contributors. Ghanaian religious life is not structured primarily around abstract doctrinal boundaries but around relational, ritual, and ethical systems that sustain communal life across religious difference. As demonstrated in earlier chapters, African Traditional Religions (ATRs) have historically provided the cosmological and moral grammar through which Christianity and Islam were received, negotiated, and embedded within Ghanaian society.

Rather than treating ATRs as a pre-Christian residue or cultural background, this section argues that they function as *loci theologici*, sources of theological insight, particularly for dialogue. Their significance lies not in offering an alternative magisterium but in articulating a relational ontology that already embodies the dialogical vision Vatican II sought to promote. In Ghana, dialogue is not primarily initiated through ecclesial programs or elite theological exchanges; it is enacted through kinship, hospitality, ritual participation, and shared moral responsibility. These indigenous resources provide a theological depth that can correct both the abstraction and institutional narrowness often associated with post-conciliar interreligious engagement.

6.4.1 ATRs as *Loci Theologici*

Recognizing African Traditional Religions as *loci theologici* requires a methodological shift from viewing them as objects of evangelization or anthropological curiosity to engaging them as dialogical conversers. ATRs articulate a coherent theological worldview in which God, ancestors, humanity, and the natural world are held in dynamic relational balance. This worldview is not codified through texts but enacted through ritual, oral tradition, and communal ethics, challenging Western theological assumptions that privilege doctrinal systematization as the primary mode of theological reasoning.

In Ghanaian contexts, among the Akan, Ewe, Dagomba, Ga, and others, religious meaning is generated through practices that already presuppose religious plurality. Hospitality toward strangers, reverence for elders and ancestors, and the moral obligation to preserve communal harmony function as theological principles long before they are named as such. As Chapter 2 demonstrated, ATRs historically

accommodated religious difference through ritual inclusion rather than exclusion, allowing Islam and Christianity to enter existing cosmological frameworks without necessitating social rupture.

Theologically, ATRs challenge Christian dialogue partners to rethink revelation, mediation, and community. God is understood as universally accessible, not monopolized by a single tradition, while moral truth is discerned communally rather than imposed institutionally. These insights echo with *Nostra Aetate*'s affirmation of "truth and holiness" beyond the visible boundaries of the Church, yet they push the document further by grounding dialogue in lived religious epistemologies rather than abstract theological claims. In this sense, ATRs do not dilute Christian identity but expand the horizon within which Christian faith can be authentically lived and witnessed in Ghana.

6.4.2 Communal Ethics: Hospitality, Kinship, and Relational Personhood

Ghanaian communal ethics, particularly *akwaaba* (hospitality), *abusua* (extended kinship), and relational personhood, constitute one of the most compelling indigenous foundations for a theology of dialogue. These values are not peripheral cultural traits but theological virtues that structure moral life and religious coexistence. As the field interviews revealed, interreligious engagement in Ghana is sustained less by formal dialogue initiatives and more by everyday practices of welcome, shared responsibility, and familial obligation.²⁹⁹

Hospitality (*akwaaba*) functions as a sacred obligation that transcends religious affiliation. To receive the religious other is not an act of tolerance but a moral imperative grounded in the belief that every human being bears spiritual

²⁹⁹ Muhammad Abdulrahim Bamba, Interview.

dignity.³⁰⁰ This ethic directly parallels Vatican II's emphasis on human dignity³⁰¹ but is lived in Ghana as a concrete practice rather than a juridical principle. Similarly, *abusua* reframes religious identity within a broader kinship network, where belonging to a family or community often precedes confessional allegiance. As noted in Chapter Five, many Ghanaian families include Christians, Muslims, and ATR practitioners who participate mutually in rites of passage without perceiving this as a theological threat.

Relational personhood further deepens this ethical framework. Identity is constituted through relationships rather than individual belief systems, making rigid religious boundaries socially untenable.³⁰² Dialogue, therefore, is not an exceptional activity but the default condition of communal life.³⁰³ This challenges Western dialogical models that presuppose clearly bounded religious subjects engaging across fixed lines. In Ghana, dialogue precedes theory; it is lived before it is named. These communal ethics thus offer a practical and theological corrective to ecclesial approaches that risk over-institutionalizing interreligious engagement.

6.5 Prophetic Dialogue as a Bridge between Faithfulness and Openness

The model of prophetic dialogue provides a critical theological bridge between Christian fidelity and genuine openness to the religious other, particularly in contexts where fears of syncretism remain acute. Drawing on the missiological framework developed by Bevans and Schroeder, prophetic dialogue refuses the false binary

³⁰⁰ Muhammad Abdulrahim Bamba.

³⁰¹ Council, "Dignitatis Humanae: Declaration on Religious Freedom."

³⁰² Azumah, Interview.

³⁰³ Zagoon-Sayeed, Interview.

between proclamation and dialogue, insisting instead that authentic Christian witness emerges precisely through attentive listening, vulnerability, and moral courage.³⁰⁴

In the Ghanaian context, prophetic dialogue goes deeply into lived religious practice. Christians regularly inhabit interreligious spaces, familial, social, and ritual, without perceiving these encounters as compromises of faith. What sustains this balance is not doctrinal relativism but a relational confidence rooted in communal ethics and shared moral accountability.³⁰⁵ The prophetic dimension lies in the Church's capacity to name injustice, promote peace, and witness to Christ, while the dialogical dimension lies in its willingness to be taught, corrected, and transformed through encounter.³⁰⁶

Importantly, prophetic dialogue addresses pastoral anxieties surrounding ATRs by reframing inculturation as discernment rather than absorption. Engaging ATRs does not entail uncritical adoption of all practices but requires a spiritually attentive process of listening, testing, and mutual conversion. As the interview data indicate, religious leaders in Ghana often navigate this tension intuitively, affirming both Christian commitment and interreligious cooperation in public life. Prophetic dialogue thus emerges not as an imported theory but as a theological articulation of what Ghanaian Christians already practice.

6.6 *Nostra Aetate* “In Our Time”: A Contemporary Rewriting

This section proposes that *Nostra Aetate* must be reread not as a closed conciliar artifact but as a living text whose authority is exercised through reception and contextual reinterpretation. A rewriting does not replace the original declaration

³⁰⁴ Bevans and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*.

³⁰⁵ Zakaria, Interview.

³⁰⁶ Sarbah, Interview.

but extends its theological logic to include religious realities it did not explicitly address, particularly minor religions, and the case of this work, African Traditional Religions. As established in earlier chapters, the omission of minor religions such as ATRs reflects historical and epistemological limitations rather than theological exclusion.

Rewriting *Nostra Aetate* “in our time” requires shifting the locus of dialogue from elite theological discourse to everyday religious life. In Ghana, dialogue is not confined to official encounters but unfolds in markets, homes, funerals, and communal rituals. A contemporary *Nostra Aetate* would therefore articulate dialogue as a shared moral vocation rooted in hospitality, kinship, and peacebuilding, affirming Christianity, Islam, and minor religions (ATRs) as co-inhabitants of a common ethical space.

Such a rewriting also holds global relevance. As the Chicago comparison demonstrates, institutional dialogue benefits from the relational depth that Ghanaian practices exemplify. Conversely, Ghanaian dialogue can be strengthened through reflective theological articulation. In this reciprocal exchange, *Nostra Aetate* becomes not merely a document to be applied but a theological horizon continually reshaped by lived encounter.

6.6.1 Hermeneutical Principles for Rewriting Nostra Aetate

Three methodological principles guide this rewriting. First, contextual reception rather than textual repetition affirms that conciliar authority is exercised through lived interpretation. Fidelity to *Nostra Aetate* lies not in reproducing its language verbatim but in extending its dialogical intent into new historical and

cultural contexts. Religious landscapes thus become a legitimate site for theological development rather than a peripheral application field.

Second, recognition of other religions (in this space, ATRs) as dialogical partners corrects the document's original omissions by affirming indigenous and minor religions as bearers of theological insight. This recognition is not symbolic but practical, acknowledging these religions' ongoing role in shaping moral life, ecological responsibility, and communal reconciliation. Such inclusion aligns with the Council's own logic of openness while expanding its epistemological horizon.

Third, dialogue as everyday practice rather than elite discourse reframes interreligious engagement as a communal vocation. Dialogue is not the preserve of specialists but a shared responsibility embedded in daily life. This principle ensures that a rewritten *Nostra Aetate* remains pastorally credible, culturally grounded, and theologically faithful to both Vatican II and other religious realities.

Together, these principles allow *Nostra Aetate* to speak meaningfully "in our time," not as an imported framework imposed upon communities, but as a dialogical vision co-authored through experience, in Ghana's case, African wisdom and Catholic tradition.

6.7 *Nostra Aetate* in the 21st Century

1. The Unity of the Human Family and the Religious Search.

In every age and culture, human beings have sought answers to the profound questions of existence: the meaning of life and death, the origin of the world and of humanity, the presence of good and evil, suffering and hope, destiny and transcendence. Across history, peoples have expressed this search through a great diversity of religious traditions, practices, symbols, narratives, and ways of life.

The Catholic Church, mindful of her responsibility to foster unity and peace among all peoples, considers in this declaration what human beings have in common and what draws them toward mutual understanding. All peoples form one community, since they share a common origin and a common destiny, and since the Creator never ceases to draw humanity toward fullness of life. This

shared origin and destiny ground the Church's commitment to dialogue, cooperation, and respect among all religious traditions.

Religion, in its many forms, expresses humanity's response to the mystery that surpasses all understanding. Whether articulated through sacred scriptures or oral traditions, founded institutions or communal memory, prophetic figures or ancestral wisdom, religious traditions bear witness to humanity's enduring openness to the transcendent and to moral responsibility within history.

2. The Church's Attitude Toward the Religions of the World.

The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in the religions of the world. She regards with sincere respect those ways of life, moral precepts, spiritual practices, and teachings which, though differing in many respects from what she herself holds and proposes, nevertheless often reflect rays of truth which enlighten all people.

These religious traditions, ancient and contemporary, global and local, scriptural and non-scriptural, frequently promote reverence for life, commitment to justice, compassion for the suffering, respect for community, care for the earth, and responsibility before what is held to be sacred. Such values contribute to the moral fabric of societies and to the pursuit of peace among peoples.

The Church therefore urges her children to engage members of other religions with prudence, charity, and humility, through dialogue and collaboration, recognizing the spiritual and moral goods present in their traditions while bearing faithful witness to the Gospel.

3. Religions Expressed Through Sacred Texts and Foundational Traditions.

Among the religions of the world are those that articulate their beliefs through sacred writings, codified teachings, and established schools of interpretation. These traditions often reflect sustained reflection on divine mystery, moral order, prayer, and the discipline of life. Through scriptures, commentaries, and rituals, they seek to guide their adherents toward wisdom, ethical living, and ultimate fulfillment.

The Church acknowledges that such traditions have shaped civilizations, inspired artistic and intellectual achievements, and provided enduring moral frameworks. She recognizes the sincerity with which their followers strive to order their lives according to what they perceive as divine truth, and she encourages respectful theological exchange where mutual understanding may deepen and prejudice be overcome.

4. Religions Rooted in Oral Tradition, Indigenous Wisdom, and Communal Life.

The Church also recognizes religious traditions that do not rely on written scriptures or identifiable founders, but are transmitted through oral memory, ritual practice, ancestral wisdom, and communal life. These traditions, often indigenous and locally rooted, have also shaped civilizations, inspired artistic and intellectual achievements, and articulate comprehensive visions of reality in which the divine, humanity, nature, and the community are held in dynamic relationship.

Such religions frequently express a profound sense of the sacredness of life, reverence for ancestors, responsibility toward future generations, and harmony with the natural world. Through ritual, symbol, and moral custom, they sustain social cohesion, transmit ethical values, and nurture spiritual awareness.

The Church acknowledges that these traditions constitute authentic religious responses to the mystery of existence and that they continue to shape the faith, identity, and moral imagination of countless people. She therefore calls for dialogue that listens attentively to these traditions, respects their integrity, and resists their marginalization or dismissal.

5. Religions of Small Communities and Marginalized Peoples.

Beyond the major religious traditions known globally, there exist many religious expressions practiced by smaller communities, minority peoples, and marginalized groups. Though often overlooked or misunderstood, these traditions contribute to humanity's spiritual heritage and deserve recognition and respect.

The Church affirms that the dignity of religious belief does not depend on numerical size, political power, or historical visibility. Every authentic religious expression, when oriented toward truth, goodness, and the flourishing of life, merits protection and serious consideration. Discrimination, coercion, or contempt toward any religious community is contrary to the will of God and the dignity of the human person.

6. Dialogue, Cooperation, and the Common Good.

The Church earnestly exhorts all to engage in dialogue marked by honesty, patience, and mutual respect. Such dialogue does not seek the erasure of differences nor the confusion of convictions, but aims at deeper understanding, the healing of memories, and cooperation for the common good.

Through dialogue, religious communities are called to work together to defend human dignity, promote justice and peace, care for the poor and the vulnerable, and protect the integrity of creation. In a world marked by division, violence, and ecological crisis, interreligious cooperation is an urgent moral responsibility.

7. The Church's Witness and Mission.

The Church proclaims, and must ever proclaim, Christ as the way, the truth, and the life, in whom humanity finds its fullest reconciliation with God and with one another. Yet this proclamation is inseparable from respect for conscience and freedom, for faith must be embraced freely and never imposed.

In fidelity to her Lord, the Church seeks to walk with all peoples, attentive to the movements of the Spirit beyond her visible boundaries, confident that dialogue and witness, listening and proclamation, are not opposed but belong together within the mystery of God's saving work in history.

8. Final Exhortation

Therefore, the Church calls upon all her members to recognize, preserve, and promote the spiritual and moral goods found among the religions of the world. She urges all to forget past hostilities, to overcome suspicion, and to commit themselves sincerely to mutual understanding and peace.

In doing so, believers of all traditions may contribute to a more just, compassionate, and reconciled world, bearing shared responsibility before God and humanity for the future of the human family.

6.8 Conclusion: Toward a Truly Catholic (Intercultural) Theology of Dialogue

The chapter concludes by affirming that inculturating *Nostra Aetate* in Ghana does not provincialize Catholic theology but universalizes it. By listening to Ghana's lived pluralism, the Church learns anew what Vatican II envisioned: a dialogical faith grounded in human dignity, communal life, and the mysterious activity of God

beyond ecclesial boundaries. This conclusion prepares the transition to the final chapter on ministerial and pastoral implications.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION: MINISTERIAL SYNTHESIS, PASTORAL IMPLICATIONS, AND FUTURE HORIZONS

7.1 Theological and Ministerial Closure

This chapter functions explicitly as the *telos* of this study. It does not introduce new empirical material, theoretical models, or doctrinal claims. Rather, it gathers, discerns, and integrates the theological, contextual, and ministerial insights developed throughout the thesis to articulate their meaning for lived ecclesial practice and future theological reflection. In this sense, the chapter serves not merely as a conclusion but as a moment of theological closure, where the significance of the entire project becomes fully intelligible.

The task of this final chapter is threefold. First, *it gathers the historical, empirical, and constructive strands of the study into a coherent theological vision.* Second, *it discerns their implications for lived ministry within contexts of religious plurality, particularly where dialogue is sustained less by formal institutions and more by everyday coexistence.* Third, *it articulates a forward-looking vision for interreligious dialogue rooted in Ghanaian social and religious realities while remaining accountable to the Catholic Church's universal theological commitments.*

Seen as a whole, the thesis has unfolded through four interrelated movements. It began with lived experience, attending to everyday Christian–Muslim–ATR coexistence in Ghana and comparative experiences in Chicago.³⁰⁷ It then moved to

³⁰⁷ Cf. Chapter One, *Genesis of the Study*.

critical analysis, examining the historical emergence of *Nostra Aetate*, its post-conciliar reception, and the epistemological limits of dominant Western frameworks of dialogue.³⁰⁸ The third movement involved theological reconstruction, retrieving indigenous Ghanaian ethics and African Traditional Religions as *loci theologici* capable of expanding Catholic interreligious theology through inculturation and prophetic dialogue.³⁰⁹ The final movement, toward which this chapter is oriented, is ministerial integration, where theological insight is translated into ecclesial orientation rather than programmatic prescription.

Chapter 7 completes this movement by demonstrating that interreligious dialogue, as lived in Ghana and reflected upon theologically in this study, *is not an auxiliary pastoral activity but a constitutive dimension of Christian discipleship and ecclesial identity in plural societies.*

7.2 Synthesis of Major Findings Across the Thesis

This section offers a thematic synthesis rather than a chapter-by-chapter summary. Its purpose is to demonstrate the internal coherence of the study and to show how its major claims mutually illuminate one another. Five interrelated findings emerge across the thesis.

7.2.1 Dialogue Precedes Doctrine in the Ghanaian Context

A central finding of this study is that, within the Ghanaian religious landscape, dialogue precedes doctrine both chronologically and existentially. Long before the Catholic Church formally articulated interreligious dialogue at Vatican II, Ghanaian societies had already developed durable frameworks of coexistence rooted in kinship,

³⁰⁸ Cf. Chapters Three and Four on the Reception and Limits of *Nostra Aetate*.

³⁰⁹ Cf. Chapter six, “Towards a Ghanaian-Inculturated *Nostra Aetate* for Our Time.”

hospitality, ritual participation, and communal responsibility.³¹⁰ Religious identity in this context is lived relationally rather than asserted polemically; one belongs to a family, a clan, and a community prior to belonging to a confessional tradition.

This reality challenges dialogical models that assume doctrinal clarification as the primary entry point for interreligious engagement. In Ghana, theological difference is negotiated within already existing relationships rather than resolved before relationship can begin. Ethnographic and interview data consistently demonstrate that trust is generated through shared life: funerals, markets, festivals, and family obligations, rather than through formal theological exchange.³¹¹ Dialogue, therefore, is not an ecclesial initiative imposed upon society but an indigenous social reality that theology must learn to interpret and accompany.

7.2.2 Nostra Aetate as Foundational yet Incomplete

The study affirms *Nostra Aetate* as a foundational text in Catholic interreligious theology while simultaneously demonstrating its structural incompleteness, particularly in African contexts. Historically, the declaration marked a decisive shift away from exclusivist paradigms by affirming the presence of truth and holiness in other religions and grounding dialogue in shared human dignity.³¹² Its theological significance remains indispensable.

At the same time, the document's silence regarding minor religions, especially African Traditional Religions, reveals the limits of its original epistemic horizon. This omission reflects Western classifications of religion that privilege textual and institutional traditions while marginalizing oral, ritual, and cosmological systems. In

³¹⁰ Cf. Chapter Two on Indigenous Frameworks of Coexistence.

³¹¹ Cf. Chapter Five, Findings on Lived Interreligious Practice in Ghana.

³¹² *Nostra Aetate*, §2.

Ghana, where ATRs continue to shape moral imagination, ritual life, and communal ethics even among Christians and Muslims, *Nostra Aetate* cannot be received uncritically without theological distortion. The study, therefore, reframes the declaration not as a closed doctrinal endpoint but as an open dialogical horizon requiring contextual expansion through inculturation.³¹³

7.2.3 The Limits of Western Models of Dialogue

A third major finding is that dominant Western models of interreligious dialogue are insufficient on their own for contexts such as Ghana. Models that emphasize institutional structures, elite theological exchange, and clearly bounded religious identities have proven effective in cities like Chicago, where dialogue is often mediated through academic institutions and interfaith councils.³¹⁴ However, they do not adequately account for societies in which religious life is woven into everyday social relations rather than organized primarily through formal infrastructures.

When Western models are applied uncritically in Ghana, they risk misnaming lived coexistence as “informal” or “underdeveloped,” rather than recognizing it as a sophisticated ethical and relational system. The study does not reject Western frameworks outright; instead, it situates them as partial and context-bound. Their proper role is complementary rather than normative, capable of illuminating certain dimensions of dialogue while remaining dependent on indigenous practices for credibility and sustainability.³¹⁵

³¹³ Chapter Six on Conciliar Reception and Inculturation.

³¹⁴ Cf. Chapter Five on the Chicago Context.

³¹⁵ Cf. Chapters Three and Five.

7.2.4 Indigenous Ghanaian Ethics as Already Dialogical

One of the most constructive findings of this study is that indigenous Ghanaian ethics are not merely compatible with interreligious dialogue but are already dialogical in structure. Concepts such as sacred hospitality (*akwaaba*), communal personhood (*ubuntu*), ritual reconciliation, and respect for ancestral authority function as moral grammars that sustain coexistence across religious boundaries.³¹⁶ These ethical frameworks do not treat religious difference as a problem to be managed but as a given reality to be navigated through relationship, responsibility, and mutual presence.

By retrieving African Traditional Religions and communal ethics as *loci theologici*, the study demonstrates that indigenous religious traditions contribute positively to theological reflection rather than serving as obstacles to Christian faith. This retrieval corrects earlier missionary and theological tendencies to marginalize ATRs and affirms their capacity to deepen Catholic understandings of dialogue, reconciliation, and social harmony.³¹⁷

7.2.5 Inculturation as Universalization Rather Than Localization

Finally, the study advances a critical theological claim regarding inculturation: that inculturating *Nostra Aetate* within the Ghanaian context does not localize or relativize Catholic theology but universalizes it. When the Church's dialogical vision is reshaped through Ghanaian lived pluralism, Catholic theology becomes more genuinely catholic, capable of speaking across cultures rather than imposing a single cultural form as normative.³¹⁸

³¹⁶ Cf. Chapter Two, Sections on Sacred Hospitality and Communal Personhood.

³¹⁷ Cf. Chapter Six, Section 6.3-6.4.

³¹⁸ Cf. Chapter Six, Concluding Theological Argument

Inculturation, in this sense, is not a concession to cultural difference but a theological necessity rooted in the Church's self-understanding as a pilgrim people. Ghana does not merely receive Catholic interreligious theology; it actively contributes to its ongoing development. Dialogue thus emerges not as a strategy but as a way of being Church, faithful to the Gospel and responsive to the concrete religious worlds in which that Gospel is lived.

7.3 Concluding Theological Claim: What This Study Ultimately Argues

This study ultimately argues that *interreligious dialogue must be re-theologized not as an ecclesial technique but as a constitutive horizon of Christian existence in plural societies*. When read through the lived religious realities of Ghana and critically correlated with the reception history of *Nostra Aetate*, dialogue emerges not as an optional pastoral supplement but as a mode of ecclesial being. The project, therefore, resists interpretations of *Nostra Aetate* that treat it as a closed conciliar artifact or as a policy document awaiting technical implementation.³¹⁹ Instead, the declaration is received here as a dialogical horizon, a theological orientation that requires continual contextual discernment, expansion, and embodiment in light of concrete historical and cultural realities.³²⁰

Within this horizon, *Nostra Aetate* functions less as a final doctrinal settlement and more as an open conciliar impulse that calls the Church into sustained encounter with religious others. Its authority, therefore, is not exhausted by textual fidelity but is realized through reception, reinterpretation, and inculturation. As demonstrated

³¹⁹ Second Vatican Council, "Nostra Aetate: Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions," *Vatican Council II*, vol. 28, 1965, §1

https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.

³²⁰ Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*.

throughout the thesis, particularly in Chapters 3 and 4, the declaration's silence on minor religions such as African Traditional Religions is not merely a historical omission but a theological summons. It invites local churches, especially in Africa, to extend their dialogical vision beyond their original Eurocentric categories by recognizing oral, ritual, and cosmological religious traditions as genuine theological interlocutors, for they were with us. The idea is not to win or lose since it is not debates or polemics.³²¹ In this sense, the Ghanaian context does not stand at the margins of *Nostra Aetate*'s reception but at its generative edge.

The study further argues that Ghanaian lived pluralism functions as a *locus theologicus*, not simply as a sociological background for dialogue. Chapters 2 and 5 have shown that interreligious coexistence in Ghana is sustained through kinship networks, shared ritual life, communal ethics, and everyday moral accountability rather than formal theological negotiation. These practices disclose theological insight precisely because they mediate meaning, order, and reconciliation in the face of religious difference. Drawing on African communal anthropology and contextual theology, the thesis contends that such lived practices are not pre-theological but *theologically generative*. They reveal how God's presence is discerned relationally, how truth is negotiated communally, and how peace is sustained without the erasure of difference.³²²

Finally, the constructive claim of this study is that interreligious dialogue is not an ecclesial strategy but a way of being Church. To speak of dialogue merely in terms of programs, offices, or commissions risks reducing it to a functional activity

³²¹ Scott C Alexander, "We Go Way Back: A History of Christian-Muslim Relations," *U.S. Catholic*, 2008, <https://www.uscatholic.org/church/2008/06/we-go-way-back>.

³²² Magesa, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*.

rather than recognizing it as an ecclesiological posture. When dialogue is understood as a way of being Church, it reshapes the Church's understanding of mission, identity, and fidelity. Mission becomes presence before proclamation; identity becomes relational rather than oppositional; fidelity becomes dialogical faithfulness rather than defensive closure. This vision, developed constructively in Chapter Six, situates dialogue within prophetic witness, holding together commitment to the Gospel and openness to transformation through encounter. In this sense, the study stands not as commentary on *Nostra Aetate* but as constructive practical theology, offering a re-imagined ecclesial self-understanding rooted in Ghanaian reality yet accountable to the Catholic tradition.³²³

7.4 Ministerial and Pastoral Implications (Culminating Praxis)

Because this project is situated within a Doctor of Ministry framework, its theological claims necessarily culminate in praxis. However, consistent with the logic of the thesis, praxis here does not take the form of prescriptive programs or technical pastoral solutions. Rather, it articulates ministerial orientations and ways of inhabiting ecclesial leadership, formation, and pastoral presence that flow organically from the study's theological conclusions. What is at stake is not the introduction of new structures but a conversion of ecclesial imagination.

7.4.1 Implications for the Catholic Church in Ghana

For episcopal leadership in Ghana, the findings of this study call for a shift from regulatory oversight toward *symbolic and relational leadership*. Bishops function not only as administrators of doctrine but as public theological figures whose gestures, presence, and silences shape ecclesial culture. In a context where Christian–

³²³ Bevens and Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today*.

Muslim–ATR coexistence is already woven into social life, episcopal leadership is most credible when it models trust, public solidarity, and ritual presence rather than control. Interreligious engagement at this level is less about issuing statements and more about embodying a pastoral grammar of recognition, especially during moments of social tension, communal grief, or national crisis.³²⁴

At the level of parish life, the study suggests that interreligious dialogue must be understood as *ordinary ecclesial practice* rather than a specialized ministry reserved for experts. Parishes in Ghana already inhabit interreligious space through mixed families, shared neighborhoods, funerals, festivals, and economic life. The pastoral task, therefore, is not to create dialogue *ex nihilo* but to name, bless, and sustain what is already happening. This requires prioritizing presence over policy, allowing parish life to remain porous to religious others rather than retreating into confessional enclaves. It also calls for relationship over regulation, resisting fear-driven responses to religious difference in favor of trust grounded in shared life.³²⁵

In relation to Catholic–Muslim relations and engagement with ATR practitioners, the study underscores the importance of ritual participation over abstract dialogue. As demonstrated in Chapters Two and Five, shared ritual spaces: funerals, naming ceremonies, festivals, and communal rites, function as primary sites of theological encounter in Ghana. Pastoral ministry that dismisses these spaces as merely cultural fails to recognize their theological depth. By contrast, a ministry attentive to ritual participation affirms that theology is enacted not only in texts and doctrines but in embodied practices of reconciliation, hospitality, and remembrance.

³²⁴ John S Pobee, “Religion and Politics in Ghana, 1972-1978: Some Case Studies from the Rule of General IK Acheampong,” *Journal of Religion in Africa*, 1987, 44–62.

³²⁵ Pope Paul IV, “Ecclesiam Suam,” in *Encyclical* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1964), §64–72.

Such an orientation does not collapse doctrinal boundaries but situates them within lived relationships, where faith is witnessed through presence rather than assertion.³²⁶

7.4.2 Implications for Formation and Theological Education

The implications of this study for formation and theological education are decisive, as this is where the gap between theory and lived reality is most acutely felt. Chapters Three, Five, and Six collectively demonstrate that prevailing models of theological formation, especially those inherited from Western contexts, often privilege textual mastery, doctrinal clarity, and institutional competence while neglecting relational, cultural, and ritual dimensions of ministry. If theology is to remain credible in plural societies such as Ghana, formation must be reoriented toward contextual discernment rather than abstract universality.³²⁷

This requires that seminarians, clergy, and lay ministers be formed not only *about* interreligious dialogue but *within* interreligious contexts. Exposure to Muslim communities, ATR practitioners, and shared social spaces should not be treated as optional enrichment but as integral to ministerial formation. Theological education must cultivate habits of listening, cultural humility, and interpretive patience, virtues necessary for discerning God's presence beyond ecclesial boundaries. Without such formation, dialogue risks remaining an intellectual ideal disconnected from pastoral reality.³²⁸

Finally, this subsection closes the loop of the thesis by showing that formation is the site where theological reconstruction becomes sustainable ecclesial practice. The inculturated vision of *Nostra Aetate* proposed in Chapter 6 cannot take root

³²⁶ Robert Schreiter, "The New Catholicity," *Theological Studies* 59, no. 2 (1998): 362.

³²⁷ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*.

³²⁸ Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning across Religious Borders*.

without ministers capable of inhabiting its dialogical logic. Formation, therefore, becomes the hinge between theology and ministry, ensuring that the Church's commitment to dialogue is not confined to documents but embodied in ministers whose presence reflects the Church's calling to be a sacrament of communion in a religiously plural world.³²⁹

7.5 Ghana and Chicago Revisited: Final Comparative Insight

This section returns to the Ghana–Chicago comparative frame for a final time, not to introduce new empirical data or reopen earlier analyses, but to draw out their ultimate theological significance with clarity and restraint. Having moved through lived experience, critical analysis, theological reconstruction, and ministerial integration, the study is now positioned to articulate what these two contexts reveal when read together rather than in isolation. The purpose here is not to adjudicate superiority or prescribe a single normative model of interreligious engagement, but to discern how distinct ecclesial, cultural, and social conditions illuminate different dimensions of dialogue as a way of being Church.

Revisiting Ghana and Chicago at this concluding stage allows the study to resist both provincialism and model. Ghana discloses the depth and durability of lived pluralism shaped by communal ethics and everyday coexistence, while Chicago clarifies the role of institutional structures, theological articulation, and public accountability in sustaining dialogue within complex urban settings. Holding these contexts in deliberate tension underscores a central claim of the thesis: that interreligious dialogue cannot be absolutized in any single cultural form but must remain contextually embodied, theologically reflective, and ecclesially accountable.

³²⁹ Constitution, “Gaudium et Spes.”

7.5.1 What Ghana Reveals to the Global Church

The Ghanaian context discloses to the global Church that interreligious dialogue is not first a formal ecclesial initiative but a lived social reality that precedes theological reflection. Across Ghanaian communities, especially in Muslim–Christian and ATR–Christian interfaces, religious difference is navigated through kinship, neighborhood life, shared rituals, and moral obligations rather than through doctrinal negotiation. This study has shown that such dialogical practices function as an implicit theology, arising organically from communal ethics of hospitality, reciprocity, and relational personhood. Ghana thus reveals that dialogue is not merely an ecclesial response to pluralism but an ontological condition of communal life in plural societies.³³⁰

More significantly, Ghana challenges the global Church to reconsider the epistemic location of theology itself. The Ghanaian case demonstrates that theological meaning is generated not only through magisterial texts or formal interreligious commissions but through everyday practices that sustain social cohesion across religious boundaries. These practices constitute what this study has argued to be a *locus theologicus*, where God’s reconciling activity is discerned in the ordinary patterns of coexistence. Such a perspective unsettles Western assumptions that theology must move from doctrine to practice; in Ghana, theology emerges from practice toward reflective articulation.³³¹

At the same time, Ghana exposes the limitations of importing dialogue models shaped in Western institutional contexts without sufficient attention to indigenous moral worlds. The study has shown that when ecclesial dialogue frameworks fail to

³³⁰ Sarbah, Interview.

³³¹ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*.

engage local communal ethics, they risk appearing abstract or irrelevant. Ghana, therefore, offers the global Church not a romanticized model, but a corrective reminder: that authentic dialogue must be culturally embedded, ethically grounded, and responsive to lived religious realities rather than imposed as a universal strategy.³³²

7.5.2 What Chicago Clarifies by Contrast

By contrast, the Chicago context clarifies the indispensable role of institutions, structure, and intentional coordination in sustaining interreligious dialogue within complex urban settings. In Chicago, dialogue is often mediated through universities, seminaries, interfaith councils, and civic organizations that provide platforms for sustained engagement, public visibility, and crisis response. These institutional forms allow dialogue to be documented, evaluated, and transmitted across generations, thereby ensuring continuity and accountability. Chicago thus illuminates how dialogue can be stabilized and scaled within pluralistic societies marked by size, mobility, and diversity.

However, this study has also demonstrated that institutionalized dialogue in Chicago often presupposes clearly bounded religious identities and trained representatives who speak *on behalf of* traditions. While effective in many respects, this model risks marginalizing forms of dialogue that occur outside formal settings, particularly among immigrant and grassroots communities whose religious lives are fluid and hybrid. The Chicago case, therefore, clarifies that structure alone does not

³³² Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion Is Christianity?: The Gospel beyond the West* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2003).

guarantee depth; dialogue can become procedural rather than relational if detached from everyday life.

In this sense, Chicago functions as a critical mirror to Ghana. Where Ghana risks under-theorizing its lived pluralism, Chicago risks over-theorizing dialogue at the expense of relational immediacy. The comparative insight of this study lies precisely in holding these tensions together, showing that neither informality nor institutionalization is sufficient on its own. Authentic dialogue requires both the moral density of lived relationships and the support of reflective, accountable structures.

7.5.3 Neither Context Should Be Absolutized

This final comparative return underscores why neither Ghana nor Chicago should be absolutized as normative models for interreligious engagement. Ghana's strengths in lived coexistence do not eliminate the need for theological articulation, institutional support, and mechanisms for addressing structural injustice. Likewise, Chicago's strengths in organized dialogue do not negate the necessity of grounding dialogue in everyday relational practices that humanize religious difference. To absolutize either context would be to misunderstand the contingent and contextual nature of theology itself.

The contribution of this study lies in resisting such absolutization by proposing a dialogical horizon rather than a fixed model. By reading Ghana and Chicago together, the thesis demonstrates that interreligious dialogue must remain adaptive, context-sensitive, and open-ended. This comparative posture reinforces the project's central claim: that dialogue is not a technique to be replicated but a way of being Church that takes distinct forms in response to local histories, cultures, and ethical worlds.

7.6 Contribution of the Study

This section explicitly names the contribution of the study and does so with the intellectual confidence expected of a terminal Doctor of Ministry project. Rather than summarizing findings already articulated, it clarifies *what this thesis adds* to ongoing conversations in Practical Theology, Catholic interreligious theology, and ministerial practice in plural societies. The aim is to situate the project not merely as a contextual case study but as a constructive intervention that offers methodological, theological, and pastoral insight with relevance beyond its immediate settings.

The study's contribution is articulated into three interrelated levels. First, it advances lived interreligious engagement as a legitimate theological method within Practical Theology. Second, it extends the reception of *Nostra Aetate* by pressing beyond its original epistemic limits toward a praxis-oriented, intercultural horizon. Third, it offers a transferable ministerial framework grounded in indigenous communal ethics, capable of guiding pastoral leadership in diverse plural contexts. Together, these contributions underscore the study's claim that interreligious dialogue is not an auxiliary ecclesial activity but a constitutive dimension of faithful ministry in the contemporary world.

7.6.1 Contribution to Practical Theology: Lived Dialogue as Theological Method

This study contributes to Practical Theology by advancing lived interreligious dialogue as a legitimate and generative theological method. Rather than treating practice as an application of prior doctrine, the thesis demonstrates how theological insight emerges from sustained engagement with lived religious realities. By attending to everyday encounters between Christians, Muslims, and practitioners of ATRs, the study positions praxis not as illustrative material but as a primary site of

theological discernment. This methodological move aligns with contemporary practical theological approaches while extending them into explicitly interreligious terrain.³³³

Furthermore, the study expands the methodological repertoire of Practical Theology by integrating comparative contextual analysis across global North and South settings. In doing so, it resists the tendency to universalize Western practical theological frameworks and instead foregrounds the epistemic value of non-Western contexts. Lived dialogue, as articulated here, becomes both descriptive and constructive: it names what is already occurring while offering criteria for faithful ministerial engagement within plural societies.

7.6.2 Contribution to Catholic Interreligious Theology: Beyond the Epistemic Limits of *Nostra Aetate*

At the level of Catholic interreligious theology, this thesis contributes by critically extending the reception of *Nostra Aetate* beyond its original epistemic horizon. While affirming the document's enduring theological significance, the study argues that its dialogical vision remains incomplete without sustained engagement with postcolonial, intercultural, and lived contexts of religious plurality. The reception history examined in this project demonstrates that *Nostra Aetate* must be understood not as a closed text but as an open-ended invitation to ongoing theological reconstruction.³³⁴

By foregrounding Ghanaian lived pluralism and placing it in dialogue with North American institutional models, the study offers a constructive rereading of

³³³ Richard R Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008).

³³⁴ O'Malley, *What Happened at Vatican II*.

Catholic interreligious theology that is both faithful and critical. It shows that the theological promise of *Nostra Aetate* is realized not primarily through expanded doctrinal statements but through dialogical practices that embody mutual recognition, ethical responsibility, and shared social life. In this way, the thesis contributes to a growing body of scholarship that calls for a praxis-oriented reception of Vatican II's interreligious vision.

7.6.3 Contribution to Ministry in Plural Societies: A Transferable Ethical Framework

Finally, this study contributes to ministerial practice by offering a transferable framework for engagement in plural societies grounded in indigenous communal ethics. Drawing on Ghanaian moral concepts such as hospitality, kinship, and relational personhood, the thesis articulates a model of ministry that is adaptable across contexts without being culturally homogenizing. This framework equips ministers to engage religious difference not as a problem to be managed but as a relational reality to be inhabited with theological intentionality.

Crucially, the framework is not limited to Ghana or Chicago. By emphasizing ethical dispositions rather than rigid structures, the study provides resources for pastoral leaders operating in diverse plural settings, urban or rural, institutional or informal. This contribution is especially significant for a Doctor of Ministry project, as it bridges theological reflection and ministerial praxis, demonstrating how constructive theology can inform concrete leadership, pastoral decision-making, and communal reconciliation in religiously diverse societies.

7.7 Limitations of the Study

Every constructive practical-theological project is necessarily shaped by the contours of its context, scope, and methodological choices. This study is no exception. Its primary limitation lies in its deliberate contextual focus on Ghana and Chicago, chosen not for representativeness in a universal sense, but for their analytical and theological contrast. Ghana offers a setting in which interreligious dialogue is deeply embedded in everyday life through kinship, ritual participation, and communal ethics, while Chicago exemplifies highly institutionalized, programmatic interfaith engagement.³³⁵ While this comparative frame has proven fruitful for illuminating the strengths and limits of different dialogical models, it also means that the findings cannot be uncritically generalized to all African or Western contexts. The conclusions drawn here are therefore contextually grounded rather than universally prescriptive, consistent with the methodological commitments of contextual and practical theology.³³⁶

A second limitation concerns the treatment of African Traditional Religions (ATRs). Although ATRs are engaged throughout the thesis as indispensable theological interlocutors and *loci theologici*, the study does not, and cannot, offer an exhaustive account of their internal diversity. Ghana alone contains multiple ATR expressions shaped by ethnic, linguistic, and regional particularities, including Akan, Ewe, Dagomba, Ga-Dangme, and others.³³⁷ This project intentionally foregrounds shared ethical and cosmological patterns, such as communal personhood, sacred hospitality, ritual reconciliation, and ancestral consciousness, rather than attempting a comprehensive ethnographic or comparative mapping of ATR traditions. While this

³³⁵ Cf. Chapter Five: Comparative Ghana-Chicago Analysis.

³³⁶ Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*.

³³⁷ Cf. Chapter Two: Kwame Bediako; Laurenti Magesa.

approach serves the study's constructive theological aims, it necessarily leaves open further work on specific ATR systems, ritual grammars, and theological nuances that exceed the scope of a single doctoral project.

A further limitation emerges in relation to gender and youth perspectives within interreligious dialogue. While interview data and contextual analysis gesture toward the central roles played by women and young people in sustaining everyday interreligious coexistence, particularly in family life, markets, education, and informal social networks, these perspectives are not thematically developed as separate analytical categories.³³⁸ This reflects both the design of the interview protocols and the primary focus of the study on ecclesial theology and ministerial praxis. The absence of sustained gender- and youth-centered analysis should not be read as marginalization, but as an acknowledgment that these dimensions represent distinct and necessary avenues for future research. Recognizing these limitations signals not conceptual weakness, but methodological honesty and fidelity to the study's defined scope.

7.8 Future Directions: Dialogue “In Our Age” and Beyond

If this study has argued that interreligious dialogue must be received as a constitutive horizon of ecclesial life rather than a closed pastoral strategy, then it must also end by remaining open to future theological development. One promising path lies in deeper ATR–Christian theological engagement, moving beyond recognition toward sustained constructive dialogue. Future research could explore how specific ATR concepts, such as cosmological mediation, ritual purification, ancestral intercession, and land-based spirituality, might enter into more explicit conversation

³³⁸ Cf. Chapter Five: Interview Data.

with Christian doctrines of creation, sacramentality, reconciliation, and communion. Such work would extend the inculturational logic of this thesis while contributing to a more genuinely polyphonic Catholic theology of religions.

A second area for future development concerns the liturgical and ritual dimensions of interreligious dialogue. While this study has emphasized dialogue as lived practice and ethical posture, less attention has been given to how ritual action itself functions as a dialogical site. Ghanaian contexts, in particular, offer rich possibilities for examining shared ritual presence at funerals, festivals, naming ceremonies, and public commemorations, where religious boundaries are neither erased nor rigidly policed.³³⁹ Further theological reflection on ritual participation, symbolic hospitality, and embodied presence could deepen Catholic understandings of how dialogue is enacted not only through speech and institutions, but through gesture, rhythm, and communal memory.

Interreligious peacebuilding and public theology also emerge as crucial future directions. As demonstrated in both the Ghanaian and Chicago contexts, dialogue increasingly intersects with political life, social cohesion, conflict prevention, and civic responsibility. Future studies could examine how interreligious dialogue informs public theology in moments of crisis, electoral tensions, religious violence, ecological degradation, or social fragmentation, and how faith communities collaborate without collapsing their distinct identities. Such work would further develop the practical theological claim advanced here: that dialogue is not peripheral to the Church's mission, but integral to its public witness in plural societies.

³³⁹ Cf. Chapter Two and Five.

Finally, this study invites comparative expansion across other African contexts. Ghana provides a compelling case study, but it is not unique. Countries such as Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, and Kenya each embody distinct configurations of Christian–Muslim–indigenous relations shaped by colonial history, political structures, and cultural patterns. Comparative African studies could test, refine, and rearticulate the arguments advanced here, ensuring that a Ghanaian-inculturated reception of *Nostra Aetate* continues to speak beyond its immediate context. Ending the thesis in this open posture is intentional. Faithful to the spirit of dialogue itself, the study does not claim to have resolved interreligious theology “once and for all,” but to have contributed a contextually grounded, ecclesially accountable, and theologically generative voice to an ongoing conversation, one that must continue *in our age* and beyond.

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