Asante Catholicism: An African Appropriation of the Roman Catholic Religion

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The following discussion, while addressing the Asante integration of Roman Catholicism into the lives of Christians in Ghana, also highlights how they as actors employ both Asante topography, gestural idioms, and Christianity for self-definition and community building. In the process of living out their faith, these Christians become social critics and religio-cultural architects as they redraw the contours of both the Roman Catholic and Asante cultures.

With its large membership of over seventy million, a highly trained local and foreign clergy and lay apostolate, and rapidly expanding ministries, African Roman Catholicism has become a powerful religious and social reality in Africa (Hastings 1989, xi). It has a commanding lead in professionalism, financial support (Hastings 1979, 261), and a strong hierarchically structured institution. In its postconciliar movement, the church has aggressively embarked on vernacular liturgy, healing services, publications in local languages and in English, scripture translation, retreat centers, social concerns, and intense training of local clergy and other church personnel. The church is also making serious efforts to combine indigenous African religio-political elements with Christianity. The church has come to see itself as “one in diversity” whereby “Catholicity,” or “universality,” does not mean uniformity (Abega 1978, 597–605). Christ’s incarnation becomes concrete through every people’s God-given ways within which all humanity can have access to him.

The joyous and solemn celebrations of Christian festivals, liturgical renewals such as that of Ndzon-Melen in Cameroon, Benedictine and Cistercian monasteries in Dzogbegan in Togo, Bouake in the Ivory Coast, Koubri in Burkina Faso, and Lumbwa in Kenya have become the focus of scholarly inquiry (Becken 1976; DeCraemer 1977; Abega 1978; Shorter
The African church has developed charismatic renewal groups and pilgrimage and healing centers by tapping indigenous religious experience and Christianity, especially Catholic mysticism, to help mold the identity of the African Christian. Factors that have given birth to such developments in African Christianity are vast and varied. Under both external and internal stimuli, Africans draw on their worldviews and values to respond to the new cultural and religious circumstances. Asante Catholicism is therefore a specific African response to world Christianity by which the Asante of Ghana define themselves and make meaning of life as well as contribute to religious transformation.

The sheer numbers of Catholics in Ghana and the apparent deterioration of appearances of indigenous shrines and temples have led casual observers to conclude that Christianity has dominated the indigenous religions, customs, and attitudes of the Asante of Ghana. The following essay seeks to shed light on how Catholicism has come into continuity with Asante religious and cultural history. Thus, we will briefly touch on the significance of healing in the Akan understanding of health and wholeness and the importance of Asante dance within Catholicism.

In order to understand some basic features about Roman Catholicism as a faith that was brought by missionaries to Ghana, it is important to touch on some principles that have governed its spread. In responding to a plural landscape of religions, cultures, languages, and peoples with their communicative imperative, Catholicism has developed an institution and polity for controlling ethics, knowledge, and identity of all who convert to that faith (Hefner 1993, 25–35). The management and standardization of belief and practice are accomplished through the following: the church defines the boundaries and membership of its religious community, establishes the relationship between religion and political power, and promotes overarching ethos among its pan-ethnic community.

Roman Catholicism in Ghana was a latecomer on the missionary scene after many false starts between the fifteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, it restarted after the 1880s under the S.A.M. (Society of African Missions) and later local agents and has now become the largest denomination in Ghana with about three million members.

The Asante Diocese, which is the focus of this paper, is one of nine dioceses in the country and has a membership of over four hundred thousand, with Bishop Peter Sarpong, a social anthropologist and an Asante, as its diocesan pastor. The Asante are an Akan-speaking people of Ghana, West Africa. They occupy mainly the Asante region, but some of them are found in other parts of the country such as the eastern, western, central, and Brong Ahafo regions. The Kumasi Diocese covers an area of 9,700
square miles and has hospitals and clinics, agricultural projects, literacy programs, a press, seminaries, schools, clergy, sisters and brothers, nuns, and a strong lay apostolate.

Postconciliar Asante Catholicism has become vibrant because the leadership is seeking to fuse Asante ways of life with Christian ritual practice. In spite of Vatican II's encouragement for local churches to incorporate their indigenous values into Christianity to enrich the latter, such "culture building" or reforging of values has become a delicate dance. It is a delicate dance because the Asante Diocese, like others in Africa, tries to appropriate and articulate a Roman Catholic religion by retaining its canonical links with the Vatican, thus having communion with the universal church, while at the same time remaining authentically African. In that sense Roman Catholicism becomes an Asante religion since it is integrated into Asante religious history and practice. It is worth noting that as the two religious traditions encounter each other there arise areas of conflict, innovation, and accommodation. Such innovations, conflicts, and accommodations result from the fact that Catholicism enters a well-structured religious and cultural system and both traditions seem to have some correspondences and divergences between their form and structure.

Apparent Convergence

Indigenous religious life and practice involve ritual and sacrifice, protective amulets, herbs, incantations, the use of sacred space and time, color, and bodily gestures to convey religious meaning. The Catholic Church with its "liturgical color of vestments . . . , holy water, medals, guardian angels, prayers for the dead" provided some "symbolic and structural continuity" (Hastings 1979, 71) with Asante indigenous religious experience. The Hebrew scriptures contain examples of sacred space, place, and time. Mountains, desert spots, and Jerusalem were sacralized as places where God and humans encountered each other. Such pilgrimage centers resonate with African notions of sacred groves, sacred mountains, rocks, towns, and shrines. Thus, when the worshipers select a hilly and rocky place to consecrate it for healing, worship services, and pilgrimage (such as Buoho near Kumasi), they are extrapolating from both the Bible and their indigenous religious experience, using their imagination to create a new phenomenon to meet their psychological, social, and spiritual needs. Despite the apparent congruence between the externals of Asante indigenous ways and Christian values and ritual practice, the following discussion will touch on how there are divergences in content and referents within the congruencies.

For our purposes, we will examine an Asante Catholic healing center and their celebration of Corpus Christi.
Postconciliar Liturgical Renewal

Prior to Vatican II, traditional Catholic mass was said in Latin, starting with prayers, praise in the Gloria, and repentance for sin in Confiteor, misericordia (Abega 1978). In the area of religious singing, the canticles and songs written in Latin with European melodies were hopelessly meaningless to the local people. Moreover, the priest stood apart from the worshipers in location, language, and the meaning of what he did. The congregation appeared passive as mere spectators. The liturgical style was alien to the worshipers. But in this postconciliar period, under the Asante Diocesan Liturgical Committee, the church has translated songs into Asante Twi, composed new songs with Christian images and personalities and Asante rhythmic melodies and idioms (Obeng 1996). By so doing, religious singing has been brought within the reach of the African Christian. Asante mass is now celebrated differently.

In response to the spirit of Vatican II's Sacrosanctum concilium, the Ghana Bishops Conference, including Bishop Peter Sarpong of Kumasi, have put forward the following:

The mystery of the incarnation demands that Christianity be inculcated. 
... The Christian faith should be implanted in all cultures. In view of this, African thought patterns, life-style, dress, ways of celebrating, art, music, preferences for colour and materials, etc., must be reflected in our being church and incorporated in our Christian liturgy, catechesis and theologies.

The bishops further assert that the African for many years is “still not at home with Christianity,” since in its “theologies, spirituality, style of worship, prayers, rites, structures, and even architecture” it is European.

The Asante Diocese under Bishop Sarpong has translated liturgical rites and the Bible into Asante Twi; uses Asante symbols in liturgical celebrations; has composed and employs liturgical songs based on local tunes and idioms; and makes use of local musical instruments such as drums, flutes, shakers, and xylophones. In addition, the diocese has decorated some walls of their congregations with Asante religious art forms, as well as employing locally woven cloths and vestments for their priests.

Bishop Sarpong, for example, enters St. Peter’s Cathedral and other churches to the sound of kete (the Asante king’s drums) accompanied by songs and the sound of castanets. As he approaches the altar, he removes his sandals and miter before he genuflects. He then sits on an asipim (an Asante king’s ceremonial chair) under a special large umbrella. Sarpong’s crozier, which is held to accompany him like a linguist staff (held by the king’s spokesperson), bears Asante proverbial emblems. One of such is the two-headed crocodile with one stomach, which is an Asante symbol of unity in diversity. This Asante symbol, called nkabom, is the heart of their
Anointing of the Sick/Healing: Health and Wholeness

Asante indigenous medicine and techniques were in use before the arrival of Western medicine and Christian healing practices. At the moment many healing rituals coexist in the Asanteland. For the Asante, a breach in their interpersonal and human-spirit relationships not only threatens the well-being of the community but also affects the individuals who constitute the social unit. According to the Asante, yadee (illness) is expressive of disturbed relationships affecting others and the spirit world and may be attributed to punishment from the nananom nsamanfo, bad magic from someone, or an enemy who uses sorcery.

Given the above cognitive map, even if an indigenous Asante cannot give reasons for some misfortune in her/his life, the individual believes that nothing happens by chance. The Asante may consult an oracle to divine the cause. Consequently, healing involves the righting of relationships with humans and the spiritual beings (Twumasi 1975, 4f.). Indigenous healing mobilizes the Asante worldview to frame and reframe illness and therapy. The acknowledgment that illness is not simply caused by physical and biological dysfunction and thus has to be cured with spiritual assistance provides a basis for the Catholic sacrament of the anointing of the sick. The Asante Catholic Church draws on a fusion of worldviews (Asante, Christian, and Western biomedical) to reformulate concepts of illness and therapy.

After Vatican II, the church emphasized the anointing of the sick, which is conferred on sick members who are not necessarily at the point of death. The church’s shift of emphasis from “extreme unction” (meant for assisting a person’s soul as it enters eternity) to ensuring that a person receives both physical and spiritual wholeness, was greatly accepted because it meets critical needs in the lives of the worshipers. The rite is given to a person before surgery, at home, or during mass, as will be discussed here later.

In its Five Year Development Plan of Health Services (1987-1992), the Kumasi Diocese states in its preamble:

The Church is committed to the total development of Man and is involved in promoting health as a continuation of Christ’s healing works. The plight of the poor, deprived and neglected is of great concern to the church...
Not only does the church affirm its commitment here to holistic healing for the human being; it also reiterates the same commitment elsewhere. For instance:

The sick have a privileged place within the Body of Christ, and ought to receive special care and love from the community. Sick persons who accept their sickness in surrender to the will of God and in union with the suffering Christ, “make up all that has still to be undergone by Christ for the sake of His Body, the Church (Col. 1:24–25) and become the source of saving grace, not only for themselves but for the whole Body of Christ and society as a whole. (Catholic Diocese of Kumasi, 1984, sections 5, 16)

The diocese expresses a commitment to healing ministry which is exercised through the sacrament of anointing to provide “inner healing, inner peace, and consolation, through repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation” for the sick person. “Bodily healing,” it states, “is a sign of faith for the person and for the whole Body of Christ.” Thus the diocesan health policy embraces the provision of bodily and spiritual health care through its hospitals and clinics, primary health care and healing ministry. Healing ministries have been developed at all parish levels at which prayer for healing is “part of Catholic life” in the Diocese of Kumasi. (1984, 17)

Prayers for healing that I gathered in 1988 underscored how and why selected aspects of God, the Holy Spirit, and Jesus Christ were mobilized during the anointing of the sick. For instance, although the Asante priests and their parishioners did not dismiss the fact that some people still believe in witches and other malevolent spirit beings, they emphasized the sovereign power of God above all powers. Their prayers and songs referred to the God who is always able to heal, and Jesus who raised the dead. Christ is king because he has power above all powers on earth and sickness. The acceptance of some elements of Asante belief system and their teaching that Christ’s authority is able to effect some transformation in the people’s life enhances confidence in some of the Catholics to seek healing in the church and not elsewhere. The church’s teaching and practice, including healing, help make Jesus relevant to their present needs. For those who appropriate the healing powers of Jesus Christ, he is real, here and now, and he works for them. It is no accident that a rocky hill outside of Kumasi has become a Roman Catholic shrine where people go for healing and other miracles.

Buoho Catholic Shrine

The shrine was built on the idea of Lourdes, where people go to meditate and say prayers and receive healing. According to the Catholic priest who
was the founder of the shrine and was then head at the center, the shrine was built to help people appreciate the gospel and Christ’s life “visually and pictorially.” Through that experience he noted that people can deepen their faith. The shrine was constructed on a rocky landscape on a hill at Buoho, outside of Kumasi. The various stations of the cross and scenes from Christ’s last days are strategically constructed to reenact Christ’s passion during his final hours on earth. According to the priest, as visitors and clients climb the hill and feel physical exhaustion they are better able to seek spiritual renewal.

For almost sixty years the center has attracted people from all parts of Ghana and other West African countries such as the Ivory Coast, Togo, and Nigeria. On Fridays people spend the night there praying for various needs. It has a small community of about twenty people who have farms around the shrine. They help the sick and their families when they visit to seek healing. The community also has people who help in the upkeep of the shrine by clearing bushes and running errands for the director and others.

Like healing centers in independent African churches and indigenous religions, the shrine has facilities for families that need to stay with relatives who visit to receive healing. On my visit I met a seventy-year-old man and his family and a fifteen-year-old girl whose mother and some of her siblings were also there. The seventy-year-old was said to have suffered a stroke and was paralyzed on one side. According to the director, he prayed for the man, anointed him with oil, and made the client walk up the hill of the “Stations of the Cross,” and “he was able to regain the use of his arm and walk properly,” according to the priest. The fifteen-year-old suffered from what the priest called “madness” inflicted on her by evil spirits. When the girl was brought to the shrine, her hands were tied because “the spirit in her was potentially dangerous to others and herself,” said Father Tawia. Like the other case, the priest was able to heal the girl after praying over her and anointing her with oil to cast out the spirit that brought the madness on her. These two success stories, according to him, were only two of many such miracle stories at the Buoho shrine.

Indigenous religious life and practice of sacred groves, mountains, and spots have found literal and symbolic correspondence with the Bible at Buoho. The people also draw upon such sacred places for worship, healing, and fasting. A sacralized Asante mountain spot has become a place for spiritual renewal. Here again we observe how pilgrims to the shrine and relatives who take their sick people there seem to articulate a belief that illness can be cured by spiritual means and that miracles do still occur. Besides the practical purposes such as cooking for the sick and taking care of them, families do provide group solidarity for the sick.
A site that was the worship place of local divinities still has social and religious significance. The sacred aspect of Buoho has been reinterpreted to provide continuity as well as discontinuity. It is the same site, but at present it is the Catholic Church that administers healing there. Since Buoho is visited by both Christians and non-Christians, Ghanaians and other nationals, the church is continuing to translocalize an Asante sacred spot. This spot, according to the caretaker, was frequented by people from all over West Africa before the church came to build a shrine there. The diocese has not limited its medical care to healing rituals. It also has hospitals and clinics, as discussed elsewhere (Obeng 1996, 161-64).

Finally, the timing, process, and content of Asante Corpus Christi will reveal ways in which this Roman Catholic feast has been incorporated into the rhythmic cycle of Asante adae (fortieth day and annual festivals).

**Corpus Christi**

All religious activity is designed to achieve some kind of union between the divine and the human. Whatever means (symbols, gestures, rites) are employed for this purpose have a “sacramental” character. They are external signs by which God encounters man, and man encounters God. The transcendental has intervened decisively in... history in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ. The sacramental, and, therefore, liturgical life of the church exists to dramatize publicly and symbolically what has taken place, is about to occur in the future and is actually happening here and now. (Sarpong 1979, 3)

The feast of Corpus Christi is one more concrete situation in which the Kumasi Diocese under Bishop Sarpong applies “true evangelization” (Pope Paul VI, encyclical *Evangelii Nuntiandi*, “Evangelization in the Modern World”) to the life situations, sensibilities, aspirations, hopes, anxieties, and paradigms of the Asante people.

From 1246 to 1264 Corpus Christi was first celebrated only in the diocese of Liège when Pope Urban (1261-1264) decreed its observance throughout the Catholic world. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) described the feast as a “triumph over heresy and condemned those who protested against the procession of the Sacrament” (Cowie and Gummer 1974, 106).

The feast of Corpus Christi (Body of Christ) is celebrated after Pentecost, whereas Christ the King feast occurs on the last Sunday of the Catholic Church’s ecclesiastical calendar. Asante Catholicism has combined the two feasts into one, and it is celebrated on the last Sunday of the church calendar. As a result of this combination, the external celebration
and the solemnity of the feast of the Body of Christ have been reworked into the feast of Christ the ohene, held annually in Kumasi.

The striking novelty about the festival lies in its timing and the process, form, and content of the celebration. The “coincidence of timing and congruence of functions” (Brooks 1984) of Asante Corpus Christi will reveal how the apparent unchanging Catholic feast with its symbolic structure intersects with Asante festivals, royal titles, colors, and ritual practice.

Asante Corpus Christi is aimed at portraying Jesus Christ as the ohempon (ultimate king) to the Asante nation. As ohene he greets and blesses the people as he is carried in an apakan (palanquin) processing through the major streets of Kumasi. He is enthroned at one stage for people to pay homage to him. At different phases, the feast is marked by ritual and recreational acts of singing and dancing, performed by a variety of actors.

African dance as an important marker of inculturation when Christianity interacts with indigenous religions has received much attention (Bame 1991; Kane 1991; Isichei 1995). T. A. Kane’s discussion in particular stresses the liturgical importance of African dance by stating that “the experience and history of a particular tribe or community is the starting place to express the deepest Christian mysteries” (1991, 1). This focus seeks to tell us about the cultural relevance of African dance for translating the mysteries of the church. It does not, however, address the psychosocial dimensions of those who dance. Ranger’s analysis of the beni ngoma of East Africa, rather raises some more interesting points for our present discussion. T. O. Ranger asserts that the beni ngoma dance was part of how the East African dancers were writing themselves into modernity, resisting colonialism, structuring their independence, entertaining themselves, and so on in the urban areas (1975). Dance can thus be utilized to accomplish a variety of goals. Besides its polyvalent nature, dance is at times gendered in Africa.

With the exception of men’s secret society dances, women tend to be involved in all dances in Africa. Women play both key and minor roles in performances that range from recreational to possession dances. Dance is an integral part of African life. The African dances when a child is born, during puberty rites, marriage, funerals, religious ceremonies, festivals, and for recreation (Opoku 1968; Nketia 1973; Chernoff 1979). Africans also use dance idioms to express hostility, cooperation, friendship, and expectation (Agordoh 1994, 3). Africans therefore through this meta-language live, reflect on life, and communicate with one another and with the spirit world. In addition, the Blakelys point out that a combination of “verbal art” and “artful gesture” such as dance provides interactional resources during which profound statements are made by individuals and groups. “Dia-
logue” and decision making occur instead of “straight-line logic, plain talk” (1994, 438). Dance is not an avoidance strategy. It can be a meaningful avenue to address issues in the open.

In light of the above, we will look at specific Akan dance forms, examining women’s roles in them to understand how the indigenous contexts for dance may have changed but women are able to recall indigenous dance narratives to address new social and religious circumstances.

Dance in the Indigenous Settings

Adakam is an Akan recreational dance found among the Brong Ahafo region of Ghana (Bame 1991, 10). It derives its name from its main musical instrument, which is a wooden box (adaka, an Akan Twi word). During the dance women form a chorus, clapping their hands, singing, and dancing. The women dancers also embark on congratulatory dances by going around the other dancers and waving handkerchiefs over their heads. Dancers may dance solo or with the opposite sex. The body language in this dance involves dancers keeping their upper torso slightly tilted forward as they move “forward in measured steps with a handkerchief in the right hand and waving the two hands in criss-cross pattern” (ibid., 11). Although women engage in the dance, they tend to be those who acknowledge the skilled dancers when they circle the dancers while waving their handkerchiefs.

Another Ghanaian dance is the Akom, or possession dance. It involves varying dance gestures which an indigenous priest/ess employs to enter a trance or get out of it. During the trance, such religious specialists are able to communicate with spirit beings. They may receive messages about how to cure diseases, who are sorcerers in the community, who commits antisocial acts, and so on.

Before the priest/ess does the possession dance, women and drummers gather to perform singing, drumming, and dancing to prepare the devotees and spectators. The tempo of the drumming and singing increases when the priest (okomfo) or priestess (okomfobaa) wearing raffia skirt, besmeared with white powdered clay emerges. The okomfo or okomfobaa wears talismans and may hold a cow tail (bodua) or a ritual stick (kotokoro). The ritual stick or cow tail is used by the religious specialist to acknowledge the Supreme Being and at times point out antisocial people in the crowd. The okomfo, according to Opoku,

walks around greeting people and dispensing powdered clay.... He acknowledges God who is the spirit of the earth, the source of physical strength and material well-being. He also acknowledges the four winds which
carry to him the words of God. He then begins the ntwaabo circling in a series of pivot turns, to illustrate the perfection, wholeness and oneness of God. Then follows the adaban, a retreating and advancing movement of great power and fascination combined with spins and turns in the air. (1968, 10)

By their dance, the priests/esses utter their religious beliefs. Aspects of their faith embedded in dance movement are announced: human inescapable dependence on the Supreme Being for sustenance and revelation, as well as the Supreme Being's wholeness and perfection. Since both men and women do the akom, it follows that they both receive revelations from spirit beings, communicate with such entities, and also engage in social critique.

At the Buronyaa shrine in Juaso in the Asante region of Ghana, the okomfooba's husband is her attendant and he interprets her messages to her devotees when she is in a trance. Here, it is a woman at center stage. Her role is not to simply acknowledge skilled dancers.

There are other dance forms in which both men and women wield equal communicative power to address the community. Among such dances are the fontomfrom, adowa suite, and the nwonkoro (exclusively performed by women in the indigenous communities). Since all three dances are discussed below, we will only highlight some aspects at this stage.

Fontomfrom dance consists of a series of gestures some of which are mimes of combat, showing valor, and others are the queen mother's dance of peace, stability, and motherliness (Opoku 1968, 38). When a chief or king dancing to the fontomfrom music points his forefinger to the sky, the ground and to his chest, he asserts: "Except God and Mother earth, there is none besides him in authority" (Bame 1991, 25). When any other dancer uses similar gestures but at the end points to the chief or king, it implies that the dancer acknowledges the authority of that chief or king. When queens or chiefs dancing the fontomfrom point their right hand to the north, south, east, and west, and then cross their arms over their chest and stamp on the ground, they mean they own all they survey; also, they will trample on their enemies (Bame 1991, 26).

A queen mother or any woman who has lost a dear one, can use the fontomfrom suite to express her loss and pain as well as her hope. For instance, she may point her right finger at her eyelid, thereby implying, "look what has happened to me." Sometimes she may put both palms against her lower abdomen with her upper torso tilted forward a little, or use the palms to support her tilted head or put the palms over her head during the dance all to embody and convey pain and dejection (Bame 1991, 26). The woman dancer may throw herself into the hands of a chief, family
elder, or a person she regards as the source of her support. The one into whose hands she throws herself is expected to catch her. This gesture reminds the source of support of his responsibility toward her, and at the same time assures the bereaved person that she has someone on whom she can depend. But women dancers do more than simply remind others of their responsibility.

Adowa dance consists of graceful and elegant gestures accompanied by drumming and singing. Men and women dancers hold the left hand forward as they make a series of motions over the left with their right hand. The dancer may turn, spin, and bow depending on the drum beat and the messages being communicated. Bame states:

two women rivals may employ symbolic gestures to vent the feelings they harbor against each other. One rival may stretch a right thumb overclenched fingers pointed towards the other thus telling the other that “she is a beast.” The other also may briefly stop dancing, focus on her rival and then give a right-hand brush of her whole foot to signify that she regards her rival as a chicken or she has no regard for her; she brushes her aside. (1991, 27)

Consequently, adowa can be deployed to generate and express resentment and animosity between people in the open. There are times when men and women dance to articulate conflicts in their social relationships. Dance in such contexts is disruptive because it can widen the rift between people. Like the adowa, nwonkoroko suite is used for praise and critique. This orchestra has traditionally been composed only of women. As mentioned above, some of the open criticism and countercriticism does not always lead to peaceful resolution, since animosities may deepen between some individuals in society.

Although nonverbal, nondiscursive, and non-straight-talk, Akan dances provide social avenues for people to make open issues that matter to them by criticizing others or praising them, for entertainment and for religious purposes. Skilled dancers, in addition to helping others to focus on specific messages, also gain the admiration of members of their community. As in every endeavor, dancers who do very well are applauded by their people and that enhances their self-esteem. For instance, the woman whose dance is at the heart of this discussion was applauded by people in the crowd including her bishop. Sometimes spectators acknowledge a dancer’s skills by posting money on the dancer’s foreheads, which is ego boosting.

The above discussion has touched on the multiple uses to which Akan dances are put. Such disciplined use of the body to convey a wide range of emotions, beliefs, and expectations, occurs within some culturally appropriate and meaningful modes. Let us now turn to how the Asante woman
dancer has not forgotten dance in the face of social and religious changes. How relevant is the Akan dance narrative during this period of postmodern communication technology? The Akan have always used dance to order their lives, relate to one another and outsiders, and for promoting peace and tranquility as well as channeling frustrations.

Since its inception in the Asante region in the early 1900s, the Roman Catholic Church has provided health centers, schools, agricultural projects, and so on (Obeng 1996). The church has also become a crucial mediating institution for the rearticulation of Asante dance narratives and the narratives of the dancers, with their attendant religious and social implications.

Within the celebration of Corpus Christi among the Asante, Asante Catholics create their own world for religious and cultural renewal. It is in this new cosmos that women dancers recreate and redeploy culturally meaningful and transforming gestural idioms that extend beyond Asante sociopolitical systems. The women utilize their dance lexicon to reevaluate and challenge aspects of the Catholic Church and, by so doing, ratify and reinvigorate Asante women dancers' role as social critics and cultural innovators.

Kinship and royal descent among the Asante are understood and interpreted in structures of matriliny, and festivals such as adae (nine cycles of forty days during which royal ancestors are communed with) and odwira (celebration in which the nation and community are sanctified or blessed) processions "might freely and openly acknowledge the generic and social significance of... matriliny" (McCaskie 1995, 166). T. McCaskie points out that despite the importance of matriliny, such celebrations articulate male-dominated power. Thus, when the Asante Catholic Diocese incorporates aspects of such male-dominated tradition into its liturgy, the obvious conclusion one may hastily make is that women's role in the feast of Corpus Christi is either negligible or nonexistent. However, Asante Corpus Christi opens and holds up intriguing possibilities for women dancers to take center stage to foster the restructuring of power relations within the church and outside of it.

Before 1970, Corpus Christi was celebrated with pomp and pageantry, accompanied by the playing of a brass band. According to Bishop Sarpong during an interview in November of 1979, "when we were using a brass band to accompany Christ, many people did not know what we were doing. Now that we use Asante instruments such as regalia borrowed from the Asantehene, even non-Christians know at least that we are presenting Christ as the ultimate obene."

The incorporation of Corpus Christi into the Asante calendrical rhythmic cycle of adae (clarified below) creates new avenues for a new cast of
actors and ritual performances with their attendant power relations. For example, the indigenous Akan *wuronkoro* or *adowa* woman singer's and dancer's roles are recast in a Roman Catholic context. When women dancers and singers perform their function in their new context as Christians, they affirm the existence and importance of their indigenous roles as those who perform and sing songs about social conditions and power relations. Their new function therefore points to the cultural implications of their indigenous role by way of symbol synonymy, since the meanings of their visual action and symbols tend to be influenced by the emotions and concepts their society utilizes in defining and experiencing analogous roles.

Asante Corpus Christi therefore presents, *inter alia*, two distinct spheres of influence for the worshipers. The first arena is the spatio-temporally formed sanctuary experience where male priests are the chief officiants. The second is the *Asantehene Manhyia* (place of gathering, the Asante King's palace grounds). It is here that the body of Christ in a monstrance (silver or gold vessel for carrying the consecrated Host) is enthroned for worshipers to renew their allegiance to Christ by singing and dancing. Women dancers in the latter sphere are able to mobilize Asante indigenous songs and bodily gestural idioms to reevaluate and restructure their status and make social comment. Further, the setting becomes a sacred space for worship, during which dancers provide leadership in orienting the gathered community toward Jesus Christ.

During my stay in Kumasi in 1979, I observed a woman dancer whose encoded message mentioned at the beginning of the paper needs explaining here. While she was dancing at the king's palace grounds, she employed dance gestures to ask permission from Jesus Christ, who was enthroned by bowing before him and then repeating the bow before the singers, drummers, and the hierarchy of the church. After that she pointed both hands skyward, thus indicating that she looked to God for guidance, protection, and courage. Having taken permission and alluded to the fact that she "looked up to God," she followed that gesture with the kinesthetic statement that implicated a particular priest, as mentioned above. My interview with her later revealed that she was unimpressed by the behavior of a particular priest and so she was expressing the fact that in the presence of Christ, both priest and parishioner need to be humble.

Thus, during dance a laywoman parishioner has evoked conceptions of appropriate power relations between priests and parishioners and reconstructed the setting by drawing on her indigenous metaphors that submit priest and parishioner to the authority of Christ.

Hence, within the intended purpose of Asante Corpus Christi, with its prefabricated cast of characters, there emerges a range of possibilities for
women dancers to articulate and redefine power relations and their identities. The above example shows that within each seemingly unchanging celebration of Corpus Christi lies the critical variable of the current psychosocial concerns of the participants. Further, the discussion will shed light on how dance idioms are marshaled to blur the lines between priest and parishioner at the king’s palace grounds (manhyia). Such blurring of boundaries rearticulates legitimate spheres of power relations, pregnant with symbolic ambiguities, enabling the dancer to transmit visually performed messages to Jesus Christ (the host of the feast), the priestly authorities (who are male), and to the gathered community (male and female, both the living and the dead who come to witness and participate). Finally, the dancer redefines her role as a social critic and thereby puts on public record the relevance of that function for self-critique as well as reviewing power relations within the church and the larger community.

I draw attention to the above example because neither the indigenous Asante society nor the Roman Catholic Church has satisfactorily dealt with why women are sometimes treated as second-class people. Much scholarly literature has been devoted to the larger issues of gender relations, but my concern here is a limited one. I focus on the flexibility within Asante Corpus Christi for real people engaged in ritual action to negotiate and transform “shifting configurations of power” (Gilbert 1994, 118).

Attention has also been given to the significant roles of Asante queen mothers, and to the fact that women in matrilineal societies prolong the longevity of their lineage because of their mogya (blood), which reproduces society. Further, a queen mother, for instance, in her own right as a woman possesses “moral quality of wisdom, knowledge, emotion, compassion... symbolically, not granted by man, but as a person with the innate quality of a woman who moves in a man’s sphere of action; a person without formal political authority in a court of male power” (Gilbert 1993, 91).

In spite of the above attributes and the importance the Akan descent system attaches to women, only postmenopausal women are able to perform religious ritual acts in their own right in the indigenous society. The Catholic Church, on the other hand, disqualifies all women from exercising priestly and thus sacramental duties. It is within the context of such “matriphobic practice” (Taylor 1990, 244) and the liturgical regimen of Corpus Christi that this discussion presents the Asante Catholic woman dancer as an interpreter and architect of power relations. One context in which women dancers have always pledged their loyalty and honor to their political leaders is during festivals such as the adaeb.

A brief description of an Akan adaeb here will help contextualize the symbolic continuity that arises between Corpus Christi and Asante calendrical rhythm and illuminate the latitude that exists for participants.
A Brief Outline of Adae

The Akan calendar year has nine cycles of forty days that are called *adae*. An *adae* may fall on a Wednesday (*Wukudae*) or on a Sunday (*Akwasidae*). Each *adae* is a day of celebration and worship. *Adae Kese* (Big *Adae*) marks the end of the year. During an *adae*, the chief or king and his elders go to the stools-room (*nkonguafieso*) to feed the stools in which reside the royal ancestors. The day before an *adae* is called *dapaa*, which is a day of preparation. Townspeople clear bushes from their surroundings and clean their houses. They also re-clear paths to farms, rivers, and wells (Opoku 1970, 7f.). As the other citizens tidy up their surroundings, stool carriers and court officers also clean court paraphernalia such as white stools, cooking and drinking utensils, and drummers and horn blowers tune up their instruments for the next day. The preparation is of both hygienic and cosmological significance. They clear their surroundings and clean the instruments and utensils, to welcome the ancestors who will be participating in the next day’s festivities.

On the day of *adae*, the king’s chief drummer, rising early in the morning, recounts the history of the people and praises the royal ancestors as well as the ruling leader. Some of the phrases he uses in his drum language are:

Mighty and valiant king
I salute you sir...
I bid you *adae dawen*
King that captures kings

After that the drummer continues to use praise poems for the king:

Great and valiant...
King of hosts
Who is ever sought for an ally in battle
Benevolent one
Unconquerable one...
He that balances the keg of gunpowder upon his head
And somersaults over the flames
Out, and come with me!
Out, and come with me!

The chief or king and his elders then come out to go to the stool house. They all remove their sandals and tuck their clothes around their waists as a sign of reverence before their elders the ancestors. As the king puts mashed yam and egg on the stools, he invites the spirits to come using words such as the following:

Spirits of my grandsires,
Today is *adae*
Come and receive this food
And visit us with prosperity;
Permit the bearers of children
To bear children [etc.]

The *apae* (prayer and praise) is marked by ceremonial horn blowing, recounting the great feats of the ancestors, and praising them, at the same time exhorting the ruling king to emulate the greatness of his ancestors.

When the spirits of the ancestors arrive to eat, an attendant rings a bell and everyone is silent. After the ritual the chief changes his dark cloth (which marks mourning) into brightly colored cloth and goes to meet his townspeople. The climax of the public ceremony is when the chief holds a durbar in his courtyard and his subchiefs and citizens pay homage to him as they also hear him promise to use his office to protect their well-being.

The king's procession in his palanquin, with his subchiefs under their large umbrellas, through the major streets of town is marked by pageantry during which power, gold, and wealth are displayed. Ritual objects captured in war, royal artifacts, and other regalia are expressive of the king's political and military powers (Gilbert 1994). Other visual objects symbolic of the king's power are skulls of enemy kings who were killed during Asante wars. These skulls are hung on the *fontomfrom* (king's drums). Such intentional show of the king's possessions and power enhances the dignity and importance of the ruler as well as helping people appreciate their rich heritage.

Although the king's roles as judge and military leader and notions of his personal sanctity have changed, the deployment of his symbolic status serves to unite the community. His ritual role (ideally) fosters the political unity of his people. As the king accompanied by the *nsumankwahene* (chief priest) and other religious specialists perform their rites during *adae*, the community is believed to be cleansed from all the pollution that results from various human infractions of community laws and taboos during the year. The festival reconstructs by reenacting and expressing the "transformational movement from defilement toward purification; from disintegration toward integration" (McCaskie 1995, 212). The Asante festival stresses the renewal of the community's well-being at the end of a cycle or a year as it is ushered into a new year and the significant role ancestors play in renewing the community and fertility of the land and humans. Also, the symbolic and literal power of the king as made manifest in royal artifacts, the retinue accompanying him, the size of his umbrella, and the gold and colors with which he adorns himself are highlighted. Of interest to us is how the form and content of an Asante *adae* have been reconfigured to
articulate a pan-ethnic religious festival such as the Roman Catholic Corpus Christi.

**At Manhyia (the King’s Palace Grounds)**

Groups and individuals went to pay homage to Christ and to be blessed by him. As Christ arrived, the bishop, Asantehene’s spokesperson, and all gen-

They then sang:

\[
\begin{align*}
Ote \text{ bo daa} & \quad \text{He lives forever} \\
Yesu ote \text{ bo daa} & \quad \text{Jesus lives forever} \\
Oye nyanka Yesu & \quad \text{He is the Jesus of orphans}
\end{align*}
\]

The monstrance made of gold was placed on the asipim (the Asantehene’s ceremonial chair). It bears a combination of geometrical figures such as squares and circles called Nyame Ntaakyire (God’s spiritual support and protection) (Sarpong 1974a, 101). When the king sits in state on the chair, he symbolically seeks God’s help in the exercise of his royal authority. The figures convey feelings of warmth, welcome, and security (ibid.). Jesus Christ had then been enthroned. Mary’s statue was raised beside the Host with large fans lying beside her. This was after she had accompanied Christ during the procession through the town. The menson (seven horns) were sounded at that stage because Christ had sat in state.

All the priests bowed and knelt before the king Jesus. At that stage the bishop invited all to come and bow before the Blessed Sacrament in a certain order—priests, the Apostolic Pro-Nuncio, then sisters, followed by the Asantehene’s representative, the seven horn blowers, then two police officers, and so on. After those acts of paying homage, some traditional dance ensembles played and danced in honor of Jesus. The first of the groups to dance was the Adowa, followed by the Fante Catholic Union. Other groups that followed suit were the Frafra, Nwonkorof performers, and Eve group, which sang and danced aghudza, and the Kasena Nankani.

Following the singing and dancing, the bishop carried the monstrance to bless the people, escorted by two Knights of Marshal and the six sword bearers. After the blessing he put the monstrance back on the throne. When the grand durbar in honor of Christ was over, the people went back to the cathedral to end the feast.

The pomp and pageantry that greet the Asantehene when he emerges from the stools room are similar to what happened when the Host (Jesus Christ), borne in an apakan, came out of St. Peter’s Cathedral. In the procession were many choirs and church organizations in addition to people
of varying ecclesiastical ranks. Behind Christ were the mpintin, kete, and fontomfrom drums playing. Right in front of Christ’s apakan were two mass servers, one carrying the asipim chair followed by another who carried a pillow that is often placed on the chair. This assignment of positions in the procession replicates that which occurs when the Asantehene is carried in procession during a festival.

Like the Asantehene, when Christ sat on the asipim on a podium at Manhyia, the faithful came and bowed before him. So did musical groups play in his honor. In addition, beside Christ’s throne was Mary, mother of Christ, just like the Asante queen mother. If Corpus Christi were simply a matter of replacing Christian elements with Asante ones, the discussion would end here. In order not to gloss over the problems that emerge as the Asante Catholic Church applies Asante sociopolitical structures and values to Christian ritual communication, it is important for us to examine some aspects of divergences.

In addition to festivals being occasions for leaders of the Asante and their people to affirm their values and reinforce their relations, they also help people to celebrate life as a whole. Adae, for instance, is when the ancestors are fed. Corpus Christi as an annual feast provides opportunity for the faithful to renew their faith in Christ by affirming their togetherness as a people of God, and to publicize Christ as the obene whom they worship. The Asantehene’s authority is exercised in Asante. On the other hand, Christ’s sphere of influence as declared during the feast extends beyond Asante to other parts of the world. In that sense the Asantehene becomes a subject of Christ, according to the bishop. This assertion is borne out by the Asantehene’s offering some of his regalia to be used by the Catholic Church on the occasion of the feast. When Asante “object language” such as designs, regalia, clothing, and all kinds of adornment are used (Morain 1987, 119), it is supposed to enhance the power of the Asante king and nation. During Corpus Christi, however, the redeployment of the same object language presents an aspect of Christianity that ideally replicates a universal culture.

Corpus Christi drew from Kumasi ethnic groups in the church who brought their music and dancing. The nwonkoro group performed when Christ was enthroned at Manhyia. Nwonkoro songs are sung among the Akan of Brong Ahafo like Wenchi, Abetifi, Kwahu, and Oda of the Eastern region and can be heard in Mampong and Kumasi in the Asante region. According to Nketia, the themes of the songs relate to “loved ones, relations and prominent men of a locality” (1973, 17). They also contain ideas of praise, hope, satire, disappointment, and death. These songs are often sung by adult women.
On the day of Corpus Christi the Asante Catholic Nwonkoro group sang, amidst clapping and dancing, *Nana eba o, nana eba. Awurade Yesu ba o, Nana eba!* (Jesus Christ as obene or nana is arriving!) The women were using the same traditional melody, rhythm clapping, and cantor-chorus style of singing to praise Jesus. The difference, however, was that *Nana eba* was not alluding to an earthly king. It was Christ whose arrival was being heralded. As the singing, clapping, and dancing continued, the women one after the other stepped out of the semicircle they formed before Christ and danced. They all completed their turn by bowing before the enthroned Christ.

The *Adowa* band, whose melodic characteristics resemble those of *Nwonkoro*, also played and danced. The *Adowa* band had three cantors singing the lead one after the other as the chorus joined in. During the singing, the gongs and drums such as the hourglass drums and *atumpan* (talking drums) were being beaten. As Bishop Sarpong points out, “Dancing depends very much on bodily movements. Foot-work, manipulation of the neck, manual gestures, gesticulations with the arms... pliability of the torso, shaking of the lower part of the trunk” (1974b, 123).

The gestural language conveyed as the female dancer stepped forward made the bishop stretch his right hand, parting his index finger from the middle finger to acknowledge the dancer’s skill and elegance. Mobilizing Asante gestural idiom, the woman dancer pointed to her left and right using both hands and then pointed both hands toward Christ.

Dance among the Asante of Ghana is used for other purposes as well. A chief may dance and mime his own political power, which would appear to threaten that of the king, but through body language, the chief enhances his own reputation (Gilbert 1994, 118). Thus, dance is a way of knowing, reflection, expression of the self, and relating to self and others. Asante dance is utilized for ordering experience and articulating the nature of relationships, be they positive or negative. Blacking (1973, 28-30) points out that music and dance that express and comment on relationships between individuals and community tend to have political ramifications. He asserts also that the effectiveness of nonverbal symbols articulated in dance enables people to appropriate personal power as they participate in culturally constructed actions. Thus, people’s personal and social identities become intertwined in real ways, since the self develops through its interaction with others in varying social contexts. Consequently, the dancer is able to restructure relations of power and identity.

The Asante also through dance articulate and create conceptions of social relations, stabilize society, validate one’s own authority over others, and pay homage to a deity or a person in authority. According to J. L.
Hanna (1979, 136–46), dance may be used by people to cope with subordination, to constrain political power, and for redress and transformation of individual and society.

Of interest in this paper is the function of dance for symbolic self-assertion to redefine one’s identity in the face of perceived or real domineering authority. This is when dancers seek to publicly restructure and establish their worth in relation to “the powerful” without any apologies. The Christian women dancers recontextualize themselves in their indigenous cultural values to assert their identity and simultaneously claim membership in the Roman Catholic culture. Such a double heritage enables them to utilize Asante singing and dance to instruct and impose restraint on any abuse of power within the church. Thus, through “cybernetic ... psychobiological patterns, and persuasion dynamics,” the dancers create an interrogative dance (Hanna 1979, 128).

Such condensed symbolic action recasts the cultural history of gender relations in which women rework names, events, and personal experiences into their songs either to praise or castigate people of the community, particularly men. As the women utilize their bodies in motion marked by delicately executed steps, disciplined in action and purpose, their dance opens up a range of possibilities for restoring order and equity. The public gains access to aspects of certain behavior patterns as they are dramatized through the sensory-motor images and idioms by the dancers. Dance therefore becomes a medium for people to “transact relationships more favorably, affect the dynamics of a corporate group, and sanction correct relations” (Hanna 1979, 118). The dance and song evoke the power of women as well as the cultural foundations of such intentional nonverbal kerygmatic idiom to restructure and transform male–female relations. The female dancers may be titleless and ordinary parishioners, but their message is aimed at priests, lay people of the church, and non-Catholics because their “congregation” is larger than that of the faithful who only gather in the sanctuary and therefore come under the direct sway of male priests.

The women dancers do not structure their notions of themselves as social and religious critics along the priestly line of power. In fact that avenue is not available to them. They reassert themselves along those indigenous routes of body language and the music of their culture. By their critique, they step outside “the cone of authority” (Matory 1993, 68) and create their own legitimate authority to proclaim a message that both enhances the purpose of the feast and helps restructure the identity of women.

Christ’s royal power is properly placed above the ecclesiastical authority of priest and parishioner and thereby relativizes whatever perceived or real
control there may be of priest over parishioner. On that field of priest and parishioner occupying the same position before Christ, the dancer maximizes the dance space and time to give meaning, express freedom for reflection and meditation, tell her story, transform the limits of priest and parishioner relations, and, ultimately, publicly give a new understanding of self and the other. By use of a delicate and successful execution of body language drawing on drama and pantomime, private and collective experience is both articulated and used to redress the wrong.

In that ritual context, gender history and ecclesiastical structure dominated by men are recalled and reviewed, and a new vision breaks loose. The new vision provides possibilities in which women can make personal and collective assertion to transform power relations within ecclesiastical structure. If before the feast of Corpus Christi, some parishioners had felt intimidated to speak to the priest in question, women have succeeded in utilizing symbolic gestures to bring into the open what bothers them.

Alternative Sacred Space

The dancers employing a set of complex gestural idioms reinforce and enrich the worship and honor of Christ. For instance, as they dance, pointing both hands or the right hand skyward, they affirm that they look to God for guidance and protection. When they roll both arms inward and the right arm stretches simultaneously with end beats of the music, they express the point that even if someone bound them with cords, they would break them into pieces with the power of God. The central role the dancer plays in this alternate arena is evidenced by the following:

In subtle flexions of hands and fingers—our prayers; in thrusting of the arms—our thanksgiving; in leaps and turns—mockery at our foolishness; stamping and pauses—our indignation at the precariousness of the human condition; tensed frame—our defiance at that which threatens human well-being; halting steps and a bow—reverence and allegiance. (Opoku 1968, 21)

The mood and temperament created by music and dance foster an experience in which the dancers and the gathered community participate in the drama of worship.

It is worth observing that the specific Asante drum languages such as those of the kete, fontomfrom, and mpintin, which are reserved for the Asantehene, enhance the honor the faithful give to Jesus Christ. The kete drumming, according to Nketia, has an akatape piece that says "sre sre bi di nye akronobo" (to beg here and there for something to eat is not stealing). The piece does not encourage laziness and begging. Rather it stresses the
interdependence in society and, subsequently, the mutual dependence between humans and spirit beings. Another piece of the kete is adinkra. That piece says Yede brebre bekum adinkra (steadily, we shall kill Adinkra). Adinkra was an obene of the state of Gyaman, who fought the Asante on several occasions until he and his people were defeated. It was thus played by the Asante to celebrate that defeat and to honor the Asante king and his soldiers for their persistence and courage. A spokesperson of the Asante-ohene who also is a Catholic informed me that since the Asante wars ended between 1896 and 1900, the piece is now used to publicize Christ's power, achievement, and victory over all his enemies, death, and evil. The mpintin drumming also has a piece which, Nketia says (1963, 132f.), is used to close the dance at Adae ceremony. It is called Akwadaa mo (well done or bravo, young one). The words are as follows:

- **Akwadaa mo** Well done, young one
- **Yaa nua mo** Thank you, brother or sister, well done.

The mpintin provides processional music to which the Asante-ohene marches or when he is carried aloft in an apakan. The fonontofon from also has variant pieces. Among them is the nnawea, which Nketia points out is the music for a dance of joy, a “triumphant music” played behind the obene when he is returning from a celebration to his palace or sits in state. The rhythms, he continues, mean:

- **Efiri tete** It is an ancient truth
- **Banin ko, banin dwane** A man fights, a man flees
- **Okofo dammirifu** Condolences, warrior
- **Banin ko, banin dwane.** A man fights, a man flees. (1963, 138)

The war imagery in the above pieces cannot be overemphasized. As powerful Asante kings sought to add to the power and wealth of the nation, drummers and various dance ensembles composed pieces to honor the achievements of those kings.

Clearly, the Catholic Church uses Asante regalia, songs (with their form, melody, rhythm, and messages), musical instruments, and dances prominent in the worship of local deities and heroes, to praise and honor Jesus Christ and to reorder the lives of the worshipers. For example, fonontofon dance, which is a series of victory dances, recounts the achievements of a warlord, during which the dancer asserts the warrior’s supremacy. Such dances publicly portray the prowess of the valiant fighter by using symbolic gestures to mime combat motifs. Such motifs are also manifested in the dancer’s slow procession and trekking, marked by occasional halts, during which brief episodes are expressed. The episodes may articulate relax-
tion movements when warriors rested. Sometimes the episodes allude to Asante warrior retreats and sudden attacks that they launched on their enemies. The heroic deeds of their past are recalled, embodied, and renarrated by the dancers during a Christian worship.

When the dances are performed during harvest festivals, they also express thankfulness for the fruits of the earth, which are symbolic of new life. Other songs previously used only in the context of puberty rituals, funerals, recreation, durbars, and festivals were decontextualized and incorporated into the feast of Corpus Christi. In the recontextualized situation, praise chants used at abemfie, love songs, and others were all reutilized in the service of Jesus Christ.

As the dancers take hold of a Catholic feast such as Corpus Christi, they incorporate it into their dance, their own history, as well as celebrate the kingship of Jesus Christ. The successful execution of the dancers' delicate steps, and other body language, become a dramatic and ritually expressive way in which Jesus Christ is reconfigured and honored. Through what Brooks calls "social and cultural exchanges" (1984, 28) between Asante cultural history and Roman Catholicism, Asante Catholics make Corpus Christi their own and thereby allow for "mutual accommodation" (ibid.) and purging between Christianity and Asante indigenous religion.

It should also be said that the Asante Catholic Church's multiethnic character was expressed, affirmed, and drawn upon by the church to declare Yesu Kristo (Jesus Christ) a pan-ethnic spirit being who cares for both Asante and non-Asante peoples. The presence of the Dagaba, Kasena, Nankani, and Frafra dance ensembles, originally from Northern Ghana, the Kpalogo group from the Ga Adangbe in and around Greater Accra, and the Eve singers and dancers of Volta region was a testimony to the above assertion. The Fante union also added great ethnic diversity to the celebration. They each brought a specific variant of their culture to honor Christ as ohene. All those people participated because of their common faith and allegiance to Christ. Asante adae, during which the chief or king processes through the streets amidst community singing and dancing and later holds a durbar, has found apparent congruence with Corpus Christi.

Most of the songs used during the whole ceremony could be sung by both literate and illiterate people. The fact that such songs were easily accessible to Catholics and non-Catholics made it easy for the spectators to join with the Catholics in singing and dancing throughout the celebration in town.

In one of my interviews with him in November of 1979, Bishop Sarpong argued that the active participation of the worshipers was "both Roman Catholic and Asante." He continued, "Stereotyped, read-to-use prayers,
which give no room to free reverent expression of one’s innermost cravings and experience would be contrary to the Ghanaians’ religious sensibility and traditions.” The feast of Corpus Christi, he contended, must speak to the “different existential situations of the faithful. Christ must mean something to them in the diversity of situations.”

Asante Corpus Christi is much more than “culture building,” and a reworking of the worshipers’ histories and identities. It also provides the worshipers with the fabric to weave Christian theology that bears affinity with the Judeo-Christian titles of Christ as king and priest. Yet beyond such affinity, the Judeo-Christian titles and their significance transform Asante kingly titles. For example, Christ or Messiah was an important title, since it was for the one in whom God’s hope for Israel was to be fulfilled. The title Messiah, which means “anointed one,” was conferred on the king of Israel (Judges 8:22f.; 1 Samuel 8:7). Saul and David were invested with that title in 1 Samuel 12:3 and 16:6 respectively. S. G. Hendry points out that the title is also given to the high priest in Leviticus 4:3f. (1969, 54). In Jesus Christ the expectations of Israel are reconfigured. The roles of priest, king, and prophet came to fruition in him as the one who by his life renews the covenant between God and God’s people. In Christ the people know and experience the will and purpose of God for their lives. He is thus a prophet par excellence. By his life, death, and resurrection, Jesus Christ as priest offers himself in order to cleanse God’s people of all sin and further to reunite them with God. The eschatological dimension of Jesus is also manifest in his role as the Christ (anointed) to be king whose reign transcends death and decay because he rose from death. In that role Jesus Christ’s reign is eternal and he is able to raise his people “to new life in obedience to God” (Hendry 1969, 55) to participate in his royal realm (1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 5:10) until he comes again (Matthew 25:34, 40; Acts 10:42, 17:31). As Asante Catholics celebrate Corpus Christi in time, space, and in their own cultural history, they are also proclaiming and ushering in Jesus Christ, who is the ultimate king, priest, and prophet. There is thus symbolic, structural, and institutional continuity and mutual transformation between Roman Catholicism and Asante lifeways.

As Christians seek meaning and redefine their personal and social identities, they create and recreate, interpret and reinterpret new ideals for themselves. They do not simply internalize and reproduce their past but reforge that experience in new situations, thereby lending a startlingly new slant to Catholicism in Asante. Corpus Christi, like an Akan aadie, provides worshipers with an occasion to renew their loyalty and faith in Jesus Christ the ohempon. Further, as their religiopolitical institutions resonate with Judeo-Christian traditions, the Bible comes alive, the worshipers are helped to renew themselves, and their indigenous traditions are reinvigorated.
The feast of Corpus Christi in Kumasi has become spiritually elevating and emotionally scintillating. To those people Christ's kingdom comes in continuity with Asante abenie. Moreover, people who thought that the Catholic Church's worship style was stale and dry are pleasantly surprised to observe the spontaneity with which the faithful are singing, dancing, and clapping like members of the indigenous churches.

Finally, within the latitude and confines of Vatican II, Asante Catholics are using Asante topography such as indigenous sacred places and Corpus Christi to rearticulate and reorder their personal and collective religious and cultural histories. Thus, as pilgrims visit sacred spaces for health and wholeness, they reclaim the religious sites to address their needs. In the context of male-formulated and male-dominated church doctrine, which excludes women from holding priestly office, women dancers reassert their didactic and social critic's role by appealing to their pre-Christian dance idioms. Their dance gestures of submission to Jesus Christ are symbolic acts of freedom from the pyramid of authority with male priests at the top and a refocusing of attention on the cosmic power of Jesus Christ. In appealing to Asante sacred mountain and in dance to a cosmic Christ, Asante Christians deepen and extend Asante Catholic ritual, restructure their role, win the admiration of others by their skillful performance, and open up new visions to renew the lives of women and men.

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