

Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue: An Interpretation of the Akan Proverb *Ti Koro Nko Agyina*

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Abstract

In our diverse world today, cultivating relationships between different religions and denominations is essential for fostering mutual understanding and promoting global harmony. This paper investigates the Akan saying *ti koro nko agyina* (one head does not sit in council) as an indigenous sacred text that encourages ecumenism and interreligious conversation. The saying highlights the importance of collective knowledge and collaboration among various religious communities to tackle societal challenges, asserting that no single faith possesses the entirety of wisdom. The study looks into the Akan governance system, which is marked by decentralization and a confederation lifestyle, where different clans, each with unique cultures and beliefs, come together to deliberatively engage in communal discussions and reach agreements. The significance of the *okyeame* (linguist) is underscored due to its crucial role in accurate interpretation and successful communication. The research employs a methodology that focuses on developing Akan contextual hermeneutics by incorporating indigenous knowledge, metaphors, and symbols, and contrasting it with conventional biblical hermeneutics. It promotes an expanded use of contextual hermeneutics to encompass indigenous texts, thereby enhancing interreligious discourse. Ecumenism is understood in both narrow and wide contexts, emphasizing interfaith connections and global religious cooperation. Different forms of interreligious dialogue are examined, such as life dialogue, educational exchanges, community participation, philosophical and theological discussions, and reflective practices. The proverb is positioned as a significant contribution to ecumenism, highlighting the importance of shared wisdom in addressing global issues.

Keywords: Akan proverbs, Akan political system, ecumenism, interreligious dialogue, multiculturalism

Introduction

African Christian theologians since the 1950s have attempted to construct an African Christian theology for and by the Africa people. In this quest, methods and methodological issues have become critical in doing African Christian theology (Bediako 1994). Most African Christian theologians from both the liberation and inculturation divides have tried to develop an African Christian theological method and methodology devoid of Western epistemic influence (Mbiti 1994). This does not imply that African Christian theologians are attempting to shift totally away from Western epistemology since both knowledge poles can learn from each other. What African Christian theology seeks to do is to develop “authentic” African Christian methods and methodologies which will aid them in their theological construct. In this regard, African Christian theologians will be doing theology using their own indigenous resources and tools.

The development of such methods and methodologies from the resources of the African context has the tendency of responding effectively to critical issues affecting the people. This is because the solution becomes real to the people since it is coming from resources that they are already familiar with. Kim (2017), a Korean theologian thus argues that if one wants to address any critical issue within his/her context, then it is important to resort to one’s cultural/indigenous epistemology and ontology as resources in resolving such issues. Lattu (2019) concurring with Kim’s argument noted that indigenous knowledge is an important resource in engaging in interreligious dialogue. As the focus of this paper is to assess indigenous resources in engaging in ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, Lattu’s argument becomes vital. He further noted the importance of exploring oral narratives, symbols, and rituals as sources in developing methods within the context of interreligious engagements or dialogues (Lattu 2019). In this regard, the oral Akan proverb will become the key indigenous knowledge resource for this paper.

Therefore, this paper will seek to demonstrate the contribution of indigenous knowledge to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue, by first developing Akan contextual hermeneutics as my main approach for this paper. It will further demonstrate how Akan contextual hermeneutics will be used to interpret the indigenous Akan proverb of *ti koro nko agyina* as an indigenous text in presenting ways of engaging in ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. It is important to mention that although there have been various forms of contextual hermeneutics which has been developed, most of these hermeneutics are largely concerned with the field of biblical studies or reading the bible and culture as a text side by side in presenting a women/feminist/womanist/liberation theology. Some of these methods/ approaches do not present comprehensive African contextual hermeneutics that has the capacity or ability to read any text irrespective of the nature of the text before relating it to issues of contextuality.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative research framework grounded in phenomenology and informed by the tenets of oral tradition to examine the Akan proverb *ti koro nko agyina* as it pertains to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. The methodology is designed to engage thoroughly with the cultural and contextual intricacies of Akan indigenous knowledge, ensuring an insightful interpretation of the proverb within its social, cultural, and political context. A qualitative approach is selected to encapsulate the richness and complexity of human experiences inherent in the Akan socio-cultural landscape.

Phenomenology acts as the philosophical basis, concentrating on grasping the lived experiences and viewpoints of individuals within the Akan community. This methodology facilitates a detailed investigation of how the proverb is understood and utilized in communal discussions and interreligious settings. The inclusion of oral tradition as a guiding principle honors the Akan cultural practice of passing down knowledge through proverbs, stories, and dialogues, which are vital to the community's epistemological framework. A comprehensive review of pertinent literature on Akan culture, contextual hermeneutics, ecumenism, and interreligious dialogue is performed. This encompasses scholarly books, journal entries, and theological works by both African and international academics.

The review lays a theoretical groundwork for formulating Akan contextual hermeneutics and positioning the proverb within wider theological and cultural dialogues. Observations of Akan council meetings at both local and paramount levels are undertaken to scrutinize the practical application of the proverb in governance and decision-making. These observations concentrate on the contributions of key figures, such as the *okyeame* (linguist), chiefs, and clan representatives, in fostering dialogue and achieving consensus. Field notes are compiled to record the interactions and the employment of indigenous knowledge during these exchanges. The proverb *ti koro nko agyina* is examined as an indigenous text through the lens of Akan contextual hermeneutics. This process involves analyzing its linguistic composition, metaphorical dimensions, and cultural implications. Historical and cultural documents, including Akan oral histories and proverbs, are referred to in order to situate the proverb's evolution and application.

Contextual hermeneutics

The second Vatican Council which played a significant role in issues of contextualities coupled with the shift of the center of gravity of Christianity from the North to the South has enabled scholars and theologians alike to do their studies from their specific context (Bevans 2018). Most scholars have reiterated the importance of contextuality in one's field of studies. Narrowing it to the field of theology, Pope-Levison (1992) have pointed out the influence and commitment of all theologies to a particular context or social locations. Bevans (2009) thus argues against the idea of a universal theology stating that all theologies are contextual. Thus, in every field of studies contextuality plays an important role to addressing key problems since the experiences of people are not the same. Phan (2000) in expanding on the issues of contextuality in one's field of study further outlines some possible resources in such quest; The cultures of individuals, the histories of their challenges, their faiths, their sacred texts, oral histories, widespread religious practices, economic and political situations, global occurrences, notable historical figures, narratives of marginalized communities seeking justice, freedom, and dignity. Existence, and togetherness...the entirety of existence serves as a foundational element for theology...this suggests theologically that one is engaging with 'context' (or contextual realities in a fresh manner).

These resources that are outlined by Phan (2000) become text, which scholars interpret in their quest to engage in contextual theologies. African scholars like Mbiti (1970), Ukpong (2000), Bediako (1989) and Nyamiti (1971) have pointed texts/resources like African culture, myths, symbols, music, experiences, and histories etc. as sources in engaging in African contextual theologies. An important question worth of asking is if these indigenous resources can be considered as text or sacred texts? For the purpose of the topic under discussion, I will limit my argument to proverbs.

Finnegan (1970) contends that proverbs act as forms of "verbal art" possessing intrinsic authority, frequently referenced to guide behavior or settle disputes. Their persistent application in social

settings imparts a referential quality similar to written documents. Walter Ong (1982) additionally noted that oral traditions, including proverbs, demonstrate "text-like" features owing to their mnemonic structure and rhetorical accuracy. Conversely, Isidore Okpewho (1992) describes proverbs as "textual units" that encapsulate societal values and historical memory, serving as reference points in conversation. Furthermore, Bernth Lindfors (1994) asserts that proverbs are "micro-texts" rich in meaning, subject to analysis like poetry or prose. Kwesi Yankah (1989) observes that Akan proverbs are utilized in legal contexts as "verbal precedents," comparable to legal documents. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986) in *Decolonizing the Mind* examines proverbs as "literary pearls" that connect oral and written traditions, solidifying their textual identity. Daniel and Akoto (2002) and Gikandi (2007) gather proverbs as literary works, providing annotations that treat them as referenceable texts for cross-cultural analysis. Their presence in academic databases and anthologies further reinforces their classification as texts with referential value. Schipper (1991) chronicles proverbs as texts utilized in global scholarship, through translations and analyses that present them as sources for reference.

Mbiti (1990) asserts that African oral traditions, including proverbs, are essential to spiritual life, acting as conduits for divine and ancestral wisdom. Gyekye (1997) further emphasizes that oral traditions like proverbs embody Akan philosophical and spiritual concepts, often associated with divine and ancestral authority. On the other hand, Okpewho (1992) points out that proverbs provide moral and spiritual guidance, embedding ethical teachings within African oral traditions. Finnegan (2012) maintained that African oral forms, which encompass proverbs, hold ritual, spiritual, and communal significance in their various contexts. Parrinder (1974) suggested that African oral traditions, including proverbs, possess theological aspects and express indigenous spirituality. Mieder's (2004) comparative analysis of proverbs underscores their universal function as wisdom texts, particularly with African proverbs reflecting sacred attributes comparable to global religious sayings.

African Indigenous proverbs can be regarded as sacred texts due to their spiritual authority, moral direction, ritual importance, and ties to African cosmologies and theologies. Grounded in divine or ancestral wisdom, they function as oral scriptures that safeguard and convey sacred knowledge within African communities. Their performative strength, ethical teachings, and theological insights align them with global sacred texts, challenging Western perspectives that elevate written scriptures. By recognizing proverbs as sacred, we validate the richness present in African oral traditions and their lasting spiritual significance. A deeper exploration of specific cultural proverbs or their application in contemporary African religious movements could enhance this comprehension.

Some of these scholars being African Christian theologians, have argued that the bible should be interpreted in the light of African socio-cultural traditions/experiences. For instance, Ukpong (2000) presents an inculturation hermeneutics which is expressed in two approach models that refer to Africa in the Bible studies and evaluative studies. He further argues that the first, examines the presence of Africa and its people in the bible, whereas the second approach can be divided into five different approaches. The first assesses the elements of African religion, culture, belief, or practices in relation to the biblical witness, to understand it and its value for the Christian. The second focuses on what the biblical text had to say on a particular issue in a particular context and the lessons that may be drawn from it. The next approach assesses how biblical texts/themes are interpreted against the background of African religion, culture, and life experiences which will respond to African Christian contextual issues. The fourth focuses on constructing "bridgeheads"

for transmitting the biblical message and finally, the last approach is how the study of the bible points to insights that present a theological foundation for modern practices in church or society (Nyamiti 1995). In this regard, Nguyen (2016: 15) asserts that “for the Word of God to have contemporary relevance for people across the globe, contextual biblical hermeneutics that takes into consideration the social location of the reader is essential.” Nguyen (2016) thus, argues for contextual hermeneutics, when scholars/theologians attempt to interpret a particular text. Although Nguyen argues for contextual hermeneutics, he is specific in the type of hermeneutics that he is recommending, ‘contextual biblical hermeneutics.’

In this regard, Nguyen seems to limit the text that is supposed to be interpreted to the bible. Not only Nguyen (2016) but various scholars or theologians limits the concept of contextual hermeneutics to the bible as being the primary text. For instance, Padilla (1981) defines contextual hermeneutics as the process of ascribing due weight to both the contexts of ancient texts as well as the context of the modern text in one’s quest to interpret the bible. Padilla (1981) stresses the importance of the culture to the biblical text both in ancient and contemporary times. Dada (2010) describes contextual biblical hermeneutics from the African perspective as the quest to reflect on the African socio-cultural and political milieu in the reading and understanding of the biblical text. Spanje (1996:195) on the other hand by attempting to present an understanding of the word contextual hermeneutics attempts by defining contextualization, which he describes as the method of communication through which the timeless kerygma (‘text’) is adapted to a particular historical context within a local culture (‘context’) in ways that resonate with the recipients. In his definition of contextualization, it could be observed that the background of such definition is the bible as being the text that he is referring to.

Narrowing the argument of contextual hermeneutics to African women theologians, as already argued, borrowed from existing aspects of African biblical hermeneutics like post-colonialism and inculturation and gave it a feminist perspective. Other African women theologians on the other hand came up with different hermeneutics (Nkabala 2013). Examples of African women hermeneutics are Mercy Amber Oduyoye’s inculturated feminist hermeneutics, Musa Dube’s postcolonial hermeneutics, Masenya Madipore’s *bosadi* hermeneutics, and Teresa Okure’s hermeneutics of life. Collectively, these hermeneutics are called *Talitha Cum* African women’s hermeneutics (Nkabala 2013).

The focus of these African women theologians was the relationship that existed between African hermeneutics and Christian theology. They sought to find ways in which they could read and interpret the biblical message in the light of their experiences in a context where masculinity, manhood, and patriarchy had become tools of oppression that were and are used to oppress women in the African religio-cultural system. The reading and interpretation of the biblical message in the light of the African culture was an attempt to liberate women from aspects of cultures which is not life-giving.

In this regard, African women theologians seek to deconstruct aspect of culture that is oppressive through their interpretation of the biblical message. Musimbi Kanyoro’s cultural hermeneutics thus attempts to identify aspects of culture that promote toxic masculinity (Kanyoro 1995). Kanyoro’s comment on the search for cultural hermeneutics posits that, our focus on biblical scripture is not merely to criticize the culture but to find methods to examine it so we can engage with women who are trapped by it (Kanyoro 1995:20). Thus, Adamo (2016:5) asserts that African cultural hermeneutics, also known as

African Biblical Studies, possesses three key attributes: it is liberating, transformative, and attuned to cultural nuances.

From the literature that have been reviewed, it could be observed that the concept of contextual hermeneutics is not a new endeavor and that various scholars and theologians have worked extensively on it. Irrespective of that, it could be noted that the text that most of these scholars have focused on in their quest to develop these contextual hermeneutics has always been the bible. This is not a form of weakness or criticism to such scholars because these are Christian theologians and the primary text that they deal with is the bible, thus it is in the right order for them to develop their methods and approaches around their primary text, which is the bible. Although I will resort to this method in my work, I will attempt to develop Akan contextual hermeneutics which will focus on an Akan indigenous text.

Akan Contextual Hermeneutics

In developing Akan contextual hermeneutics, various scholars like Kim (2017) and Kung (1995) have argued about the significance of owing to one’s own root-metaphors in developing paradigms, methods or theories in modern epistemology. In this regard, I will use Akan metaphors and indigenous knowledge in the development of this approach. The word hermeneutics originates from the ancient Greek language, which is associated with the Greek god Hermes, who was the messenger of the gods. Hermeneutics is defined as “to utter, to explain, and to translate” (George 2000:1). It was first used by scholars to assess how divine messages or cognitive ideas are expressed in human language. In modern days, hermeneutics includes both verbal and non-verbal communication (George 2000). Furthermore, in present times, hermeneutics has been given an additional direction by Ricoeur (1970) who includes language, specifically linguistic forms which include metaphors, symbolisms and narrative. Thus, one cannot ignore languages, metaphors, symbols, and narrative in the hermeneutics enterprise. In my construction, I will focus on an important Akan office in the Akan political system/structure. The Akan States (Asante, Akyems, Fanti, Bono etc.) though have thick resemblance in terms of structures, cultures, and religion, for the purpose of uniformity and contextuality, this paper resort mainly to cultures from the Akyems and Asantes.

A brief description of the Akan political system is a combination of decentralization and confederation. The structure in most Akan States have paramountcy with other sub-chiefs serving under the paramountcy (Gyekye 1997). In each of the local courts of the palace, there are representatives from the various families in the particular town, villages, etc. Similarly, a replica of that can be seen in the paramountcy. But within the paramountcy, the sub-chiefs of the various villages serve as representatives for their people. The various paramountcy’s either meets their sub-chiefs monthly or quarterly to discuss issue of their “states” concerns (Danso 2020). It is worth to mention at this point that within the local and paramountcy courts of the palace, the representatives belong to different clans and families and they have their unique cultures, ideologies, deities etc. but meets to deliberate on issues and reach a consensus. An important office in this political system which features at both the local and state level is the office of the *okyeame* (linguist).

The *okyeame* is the linguist or spokesperson of the king or indigenous leader (Yankah 1995). As stated earlier, the word hermeneutics denotes uttering, translating and the interpretation of words from the divine which originated from the function or role played by Hermes. In similar function, the role of the *okyeame* in the Akan political system function like that of Hermes. Breaking down the Akan word “*okyea-me*” into two syllabi will translate literally as he “bends-me.” The literal meaning of the word ascribes important role to the

okyeame. The *okyeame* speaks or interprets the words of the king to his subject. The *okyeame* must present the words of the king in manner that will portray the king as a possessor of wisdom. If the king in any way errs in his communication to his subject, the *okyeame* present the message to the people in a manner that is devoid of errors or anything that can bring the king to ridicule or make him unpopular among his people. In this regard, a “good” *okyeame* can make the king gain admiration from his subject whereas a “bad” *okyeame* can make the king to become a public ridicule. This points out the significance of the *okyeame* in the Akan political system and his interpretation of the message he receives can have both negative and positive impact on the source of such words.

The *okyeame* in his linguistic responsibility plays a dual role. First, uttering, interpreting, and communicating the message of the indigenous leader to the people, and second uttering, interpreting and communicating the responses of the people as well as the messages to the king. Thus, the *okyeame* becomes a conduit within with various “texts” goes through and are refined before it is communicated. The *okyeame* must have mastery of indigenous knowledge or text this is because the *okyeame* should have the skills and ability to interpret, translate, and present accurately the proverbs, historical facts, dances, music, and other indigenous texts that will arise during the council meetings. In this regard, the Akan hermeneutical process is dialogical which goes through different stages and modes of interpretation. In *Okyeame* work, one cannot ignore biases or experiences playing a critical role of how he interprets a particular message. Although in such courts, the indigenous leader hears the people speak and the people can also hear the indigenous leader, it is the words of the *okyeame* which is considered the “actual message.”

Consequently, one would argue that then the office of the *okyeame* becomes hegemonic within the Akan hermeneutical process. This assertion might not be entirely true, since there are some key actors within this hermeneutical process who play key roles regarding the interpretation of indigenous texts. These actors include an indigenous priest who utters, translates, and interprets the messages from the gods and ancestors, elders in the communities and clans as well as the chiefs both at the local or paramountcy level. Any individual within the community who has an understanding of indigenous knowledge and culture can interpret these texts.

In most chieftaincy and land dispute cases that are brought before the paramountcy, one could observe various indigenous leaders, interpreting historical antecedents as well as cultural facts to resolve such problems within their kingdom. It is important to note that the *okyeame*, the elders, individuals, and chiefs who engage in this interpretation, do so from their own perspectives and understanding of the texts which is before them. Thus, one can identify the dynamism and complexities that exist within the interpretation process known as the “hermeneutical circles,” whereby interpreters and texts engage mutually. In this hermeneutical process, the experiences and history of the interpreter, the worldview of the interpreter, and finally the text that the interpreter is attempting to interpret plays a significant role in this process (Padilla 1981). Thus, contextuality, history, and experiences are critical to the interpretation of a text. In this regard, no form of interpretation can claim neutrality. Although Husserl (1982) acknowledged in this regard the interpreter’s biases, he was convinced that it is possible to bracket those biases and presuppositions. Heidegger (1999) on the other hand disagreed that this could be possible.

The development of various indigenous texts especially Akan proverbs which this paper is focusing on, was constructed by a particular group of people who lived in a particular context in response to life issues. The Akan proverbs were again developed out

of the experiences of these people. Their experience might to a certain degree be similar to contemporary times, but the settings and experiences and histories, and changes that have occurred over a period of time have had a significant impact on how the current generation thinks or assess such proverbs. Therefore, in the Akan contextual hermeneutical process, interpreters must first understand the context within which these indigenous texts were developed. This helps the interpreter to understand the meaning of the text to the people who developed it, hence making its application in contemporary times meaningful. This might imply an interpretation or reinterpretation or reconstruction of such proverbs to address the current needs of society.

From the above, it could be observed that the hermeneutical process, or better still interpretation of the indigenous text in various forms, has been part and parcel of the Akan and to a larger extent the indigenous people. Akan contextual hermeneutics is as old as the Akan indigenous culture and religion itself. This is becoming interpretation of such texts has been with the people as it forms part of their culture. In this regard, Akan contextual hermeneutics will imply the process of interpreting various indigenous texts within the Akan context. A broader definition of contextual hermeneutics will then also imply the interpretation of various texts within a particular context. Next will be interpretation of the Akan proverb *ti koro nko agyina* as an indigenous contribution to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. But before I interpret this Akan proverb, I will first look at the concept of ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue.

The word ecumenism comes from the Greek word *oikumene* which is translated as the “inhabited earth” (Kessler 1998:279). Ecumenism thus is a terminology that is used to refer to the inhabitation of every living and non-living beings inhabiting the earth irrespective of their race, color, religion, group, caste, etc. Ecumenism has been described from two perspectives. The narrow and broad definition of the terminology. Hudson (1969:4), from a limited viewpoint, defines ecumenism as the Christian international organizations that represent the church’s interest in political, social, and economic matters on a global scale. This definition pertains to the relationships among different Christian organizations, including the World Council of Churches (WCC), the Council for World Mission (CWM), the World Council of Reformed Churches (WCRC), the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), as well as various national and local church councils in different countries. The goal of these relationships and dialogues is not to create a singular “church,” but instead to enhance connections among the diverse Christian organizations and to raise a collective voice on national, continental, and global issues.

Ecumenism from the broader perspective, relates to the interfaith initiative working towards enhanced mutual respect, understanding, and collaboration among global religions (Neufeltt 2011:345). The purpose of interfaith/interreligious relations within the context of ecumenism is not to integrate all the diverse faith in the world as a full, organic unity but instead to advance better relations (Kessler 1998). Interreligious/Interfaith relations has propelled various religious organizations to engage in various forms of dialogues. These forms of dialogues within the religious context have assumed the name interreligious or interfaith dialogue. Some scholars have adopted the name inter-belief dialogue (Mehta 2014), while others use inter-path dialogue to include other groups who do not have “faith” as the basis for their way of life but rather ethical or philosophical beliefs which are foundational for their practice (Eck 1985). Lattu (2019) describes interreligious dialogue as the process of understanding other religions as well as a tool for bringing religious adherents to peaceful interaction. Eck (2017) expatiating on

the meaning of dialogue has identified five different types of dialogues. These are the dialogue of life, which occurs within both the private and public spheres of life through informal interactions. The dialogue of learning is an intentional attempt by people to study one another faith or culture. Thirdly, the dialogue in the community involves the engagement of people in a particular community to address a particular problem or challenge. The philosophical and theological dialogues focus on the engagement between people of other faith on deepest and fundamental issues of faith and finally, the dialogue of reflection which is in relation to the meanings of all these dialogues for our faith.

Although Eck (2017) provides five types of dialogue, this paper focuses on Eck's dialogue of learning, dialogue of communities and philosophical and theological dialogue. These dialogues posit that peoples from various faith, beliefs or paths could learn from each other in addressing problems and challenges facing the society. In similar manner, Schillebeeckx (1990:52) argues the diversity of religions is not a problem that should be eliminated; instead, it is a treasure that should be embraced and appreciated by everyone. Collectively, all religions hold more spiritual truth than any single religion alone. Schillebeeckx's (1990) assertion implies no one religion is a repository of knowledge thus it imperative that all ways, paths, beliefs and systems learn from each other. In this regard, Knitter (2002) argues for a dialogical community of communities. Thus, I will interpret the Akan proverb *ti koro nko agyina* as an indigenous contribution to these dialogues which is important for ecumenism and interreligious dialogue.

Indigenous Textual Contribution to Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue

The Akan proverb *ti koro nko agyina*, at this stage, is interpreted as a contribution to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. The Akan proverb translated into English implies that "one head does not sit in council." In other to analyze this Akan proverb, it is important to revisit the Akan political system or structure. The Akan proverb can be divided into two main parts. First, *ti koro* (one head) and secondly *agyina* (council). The Akan political structure is one that is highly decentralized (Gyekye 1997). At the bottom of the structure are the nuclear and extended families, known as *abusua* with the *abusupanin* being the head. This is the first stage where deliberations/dialogues take place. After, this level comes the clans, which is also called *abusua*. The clans are the expanded version of the extended families, with them coming together because of common ancestry. In the Akan States, there are eight clans with different totems representing them, namely, *Asona* (crow), *Oyoko* (falcon), *Biretuo* (leopard), *Agona* (parrot), *Asenie* (bat), *Aduana* (dog and fire), *Ekuona* (buffalo) and *Asakyiri* (vulture) (Fortes 1973). These clans although belonging to the larger Akan-speaking people, have their own peculiar culture, customs, deities, rituals, and belief systems that distinguish them from the other Akan clans. This is the second stage of deliberations/dialogues.

As stated earlier there are two major council meetings that are held within the Akan states. First, the local council meetings, which is organized by the sub-chiefs of the various villages and chiefs of the various towns and cities. The second council meeting is held at the paramountcy with the sub-chiefs and chiefs within the kingdom present at the palace of the paramountcy. It is worth mentioning that during the council meetings at both the local and paramountcy level, there are representatives from the eight clans. It is at this council meeting that state issues on customs, culture, settling of disputes, and the development of the various communities are discussed. Although the representatives present are coming from different ancestry, histories, and cultures during such deliberations, they share ideas

through dialogues on how best they can resolve the challenges confronting their people. After the sharing of ideas through dialogues, their contributions are synthesized by the paramount chief, who serves as the moderator during such deliberations and a resolution is passed after the council meetings. The Akan political structure makes room for such deliberations and the sharing of ideas because it is believed that no one individual is a repository of knowledge and ideas, not even the paramount chief who is the representative of the ancestors. Thus, when there is an important issue to be discussed, all representatives ought to be present and share their ideas on the matter because it is not possible for one head to sit in the council to take a decision. In this regard, the sharing of ideas through dialogue is key to the Akan governance system.

As Knitter has already argued for a dialogue of communities, an interpretation of the Akan proverb has demonstrated how the various communities within the Akan political structure engage in dialogues at various stages and levels in other to respond to societal problems. At the various stages of dialogues, different ideas emanate which as I argued earlier are synthesized by the paramount chief. In this regard, there is a fusion of horizons which is done by the paramount chief. Irrespective of this, Habermas (1996) noticed that not all dialogues can result in an authentic fusion of horizons. Habermas (1996) is of the view that dialogues can easily be distorted when one wants to dominate the other by the person's strategic desire. He further points out factors that distort dialogues such as ideologies that can alter the linguistic fabric of the person's horizons. I argue that although Habermas' argument is sound, the nature of the issue being discussed will determine the level of distortion.

For instance, it is easier for such distortion to take place if the dialogue is based on issues of faith among religious practitioners than the dialogue being based on how various religious groups could contribute to the development of their societies. Habermas (1996) thus proposes a solution to this problem which is the theory of communication action. He argues that this action makes a distinction between communication and strategic action. Habermas (1996) argues that communication action implies the process of communication with another person with the aim of reaching a consensus. Whereas he views strategic action as a way in which one attempts to subjugate, manipulate and dominate the other person under the guise of dialogue.

One could observe that the Akan proverb as interpreted in this paper takes the form of the communication action as argued by Habermas. What then is the contribution of this indigenous text to ecumenism and interreligious dialogue? In the same way the various Akan clans are coming from different ancestry, customs, cultures and religion are able to first coexist peacefully and come together to share ideas to aid in the development of their various communities and villages amidst their different ideologies, the various ecumenical/religious bodies can come together in the spirit of deliberating on issues of regional, national and international concerns. One religious group cannot have the answer to societal problems; thus it is important that all ecumenical groups come together in the light of sharing ideas to solve such challenges because *ti koro nko agyina*, in this sense, the *ti koro* represents just a single religion and the *agyina* represents that single religion alone being viewed as the sole repository of the solution to societal problems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Akan saying *ti koro nko agyina* (one head does not sit in council) represents a significant indigenous contribution to the conversation surrounding ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. This paper has shown that the saying captures the core concept of collective wisdom and the need for collaborative action in tackling

societal issues. By examining this proverb through the perspective of Akan contextual hermeneutics, we have underscored the necessity of incorporating indigenous knowledge and cultural insights into modern theological and interfaith conversations. The Akan political framework, noted for its decentralization and confederation, serves as a practical illustration of how various groups can unite to discuss and reach consensus on communal concerns. The function of the okyeame (linguist) in this framework highlights the importance of clear communication and accurate interpretation in promoting dialogue and shared understanding. This model is applicable to ecumenical and interreligious settings, where distinct religious traditions must engage in constructive dialogue to cultivate mutual respect and collaboration. The paper has also stressed that no single faith monopolizes wisdom. Acknowledging this is vital for fostering interreligious dialogue, as it encourages different religious communities to learn from each other and collaborate on shared challenges. The diverse forms of interreligious dialogue discussed, which include dialogue of life, educational exchanges, community participation, philosophical and theological discourse, and reflective practices, all help in building a more peaceful and understanding global community. Moreover, employing Akan contextual hermeneutics to the proverb *ti koro nko agyina* illustrates the significance of indigenous texts in enriching ecumenical and interfaith dialogue. By broadening the application of contextual hermeneutics beyond biblical narratives to encompass indigenous wisdom, we can establish more inclusive and pertinent frameworks for dialogue. This approach not only honors the cultural and historical backgrounds of various communities but also enhances the richness and scope of interfaith interactions.

To summarize, the Akan saying *ti koro nko agyina* provides an insightful viewpoint on the significance of collective intelligence and cooperative endeavors in ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. By valuing indigenous wisdom and contextual hermeneutics, we can facilitate more meaningful and impactful discussions among diverse faith traditions, ultimately leading to a more harmonious and interconnected world.

Conflict interest(s)

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Ethical considerations

The authors declare that this article was conducted in accordance with ethical standards and principles for research.

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