

Vlastimil Fiala  
(Editor)

## Multiple Identities in post-colonial Africa

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## BEING CHRISTIAN IN AFRICA: IDENTITIES LIVED WITHIN A CATHOLIC COMMUNITY IN CENTRAL GHANA

Anna Niedźwiedz

Jagiellonian University, Institute of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Kraków, Poland

Even a short walk through a small town (or village) in the central part of Ghana reveals a mosaic of religious communities living nearby. Minarets of mosques located in the zongo areas<sup>162</sup> are modest, but equipped with powerful sound systems. The mosques stand behind the rows of various Christian chapels which stretch along two sides of the main street. A colorful signboard at the crossroad welcomes visitors to a spiritual prayer camp. Another one indicates the way to the local fetish priest and informs about his ‘working hours’. A cell phone number is also listed to arrange an appointment and a healing session.

The predominantly Christian community of Jema town (District Profile 2010) – where I did my field research during my stays in 2009–2011 – loudly and elaborately celebrates its weekly prayers.<sup>163</sup> Seventh Day Adventists perform their service on Saturday. Late evening and overnight drumming, singing and clapping reverberate from the Pentecostal chapels. In the dark of night rhythmic shouts of: “Fire! Fire!” echo from the football pitch of the Methodist school, where young people of so-called ‘Fire-Church’ started their meetings a few months before my arrival. Sunday morning is welcomed by a bell ringing from a water tower in the Catholic mission. Women with fancily-braided hair, wear colorful dresses; while men in European-style suits or traditional African attire greet each other on the main street, at the trotro and at the taxi station.<sup>164</sup> People slowly gather in front of their churches: Methodists, Presbyterians, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Catholics. Additionally, there are smaller communities which do not have their own buildings, like Christ Apostolic Church and Love Assembly: God Church. These groups rent classrooms in various local schools in order to perform their Sunday services. For a few hours, the hot Sunday air in town is filled with loud music, drumming, the scratching of overused microphones and loud speakers, the words of psalms and prayers, and the passionately called name: “Jesus!”

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<sup>162</sup> “Zongo is the Hausa word for “stranger quarter.” Such quarters are found throughout West Africa and are typically an agglomeration of Muslim migrants” (Pellow 2009, 59). In Jema town, where I conducted my field research, *zongo* is the area inhabited mostly by migrants from the northern part of Ghana. Two Jema mosques are located in *zongo*. However, apart from Muslims there is also a significant number of Christians (among them also Catholics) living in Jema *zongo*.

<sup>163</sup> During the years 2009–2011, I visited Ghana three times. My field research in Jema was based on two stays (December 2009–February 2010 and November 2010–February 2011). The 2010–2011 studies were part of a research project financed by the Polish Ministry of Science and Education.

<sup>164</sup> *Trotro* is the most popular and the cheapest public transportation in Ghana – it is mainly mini-buses. The name *trotro* derives from the Ga language (*tro* in Ga means three pence) and appeared probably in the early fifties in the Greater Accra area. There the drivers of shared taxis started encouraging potential passengers by announcing low prices and shouting *trotro*.

The variety and density of churches and denominations in Jema mirrors the general situation of religious mosaic in contemporary Ghana, where “there could be more than 7000 separate religious establishments, mostly within Christendom” (Assimeng 2010: 245). This complicated situation is additionally diversified in the context of linguistic, tribal, and ethnic differences. In Jema town for the last few decades, as in many other places in central Ghana, the tribal composition has been changing as various groups from the northern parts of the country have been settling there, mostly for economic reasons.<sup>165</sup>

The ethnographic field research I conducted in Ghana was focused on a Catholic parish and ‘lived Catholicism’ in Jema (as well as neighboring hamlets and villages). In this article, which is based on material from my field research, I will try to present how various identities and group associations are shaped, negotiated, crosscut, and practiced in this contemporary local community in central Ghana. My use of the term ‘identity’ here will be mostly concerned with its communal and social dimension. From my studies of lived and practiced religion I will choose particular examples which reveal how various identities are manifested, lived and practiced. When stating that identities are lived and practiced I am suggesting that they are created, re-created, discovered, revealed, and shaped through social and cultural actions. As Philip Riley has stated, I understand that social identity is “established, attributed, negotiated and manifested” through the social processes (Riley 2007: 87) and as such is a dynamic category connected with communicating with ‘others’ who “are principal source of identity” (Riley 2007: 87) as “we do need other people to tell us who we are, and [...] they do so all the time” (Riley 2007: 86). The question to be asked here would be: how, when, and where people position themselves as ‘we’ and ‘others’ and what identities they manifest and create in a context of contemporary lived Catholicism in the central part of Ghana.

### **‘We’: the Black Catholics**

The Catholic Church, being a transnational and nominally ‘catholic’ (i.e. ‘wide-ranging,’ ‘broad,’ ‘wide-reaching,’ ‘all-embracing,’ ‘extensive’<sup>166</sup>) structure, is a very interesting case for ethnographers to study. It is an example of a religion which is lived, practiced, experienced, and shaped by people in various cultures and local communities in different parts of the world. It is important to emphasize that Catholicism in Sub-Saharan Africa (similarly to other Christian ‘mission churches’) has had a huge shift during the last few decades. It has evolved from an implemented, outer structure, led by European clergy and perceived as ‘the white man’s faith’, to become a local Christianity shaped and led by local leaders. The issue of African-Christian identity and the concept of African Christianity are situated in the core of a contemporary discourse in African theology (see: Bediako 1995: 256). The term “African Christianity” appears in relation to notions of indigenization and inculturation “by which Christianity is accepted into African

<sup>165</sup> The north part of Ghana is generally much poorer and less developed than the south part of the country.

<sup>166</sup> See e.g. Microsoft Word thesaurus for the word ‘catholic’.

patterns of thought and behavior” (Mawusi 2009: 24).

To illustrate a contemporary situation of local Catholicism in Ghana it is worth mentioning that all active bishops of Ghana are native Ghanaians. What is more, the Ghanaian Catholic Church hierarchy has produced such internationally influential figures as Peter Kwasi Sarpong, Archbishop Emeritus of the Archdiocese of Kumasi who introduced various concepts of Africanizing Catholicism (e.g. he was an author of the broadly debated Mmass rite based on the Akan notion of a sacrifice, see: Sarpong 2002: 115) or Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, who since 2009 has been the president of the Council of Justice and Peace in the Vatican, and by numerous Ghanaians is seen as a possible future candidate for the first black pope. Fr. John Kofi Takyi, a Vicar General of the Catholic Diocese of Techiman, in an interview given to me in November 2010, pointed out that, at this moment, the majority of professors teaching in Ghanaian seminaries are indigenous priests and theologians. He also mentioned that after a period of missionary activities there is a need to deepen Christian faith by integrating it with the lives of African people, which he assumes, can be done only by indigenous priests, who understand local cultures.<sup>167</sup>

Concurrently, the need for deeper inculturation and openness to local cultural values, as well as acceptance of a development of a new concept of African Catholicism, is explicated also by non-African priests working in Ghana. For example, Fr. Jon P. Kirby, is an American Divine Word Missionary who is also an educated cultural anthropologist and a founder of the Tamale Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies. He spent many years in Ghana and he emphasizes that a new missionary approach based on “dialogue for mutual enrichment rather than conversion” is a crucial issue in contemporary ministry formation (Kirby 2003: 42). He realizes that the churches of Africa propose a new vision of Christianity, “one that is markedly different from the world-vision of faithful Westerners” (Kirby 2003: 42).

In the case of Ghana, Catholics comprise 11–15 % of the society.<sup>168</sup> Keeping in mind the situation of a religious and denominational mosaic, it is important to indicate that in Ghana, as in other West African countries, next to mission churches countless new Christian communities, which might be loosely termed ‘new religious movements’

<sup>167</sup> Interview with Fr. John Kofi Takyi, part of field research project by Anna Niedźwiedz, 21 November 2010.

<sup>168</sup> The estimations are based on various data. For example statistics available on a website “The Hierarchy of the Catholic Church” (2011) recall 12,43 % of Catholics living in Ghana. Peter Addai-Mensah states that “according to national census of 2000 Christians constitute about 63%. Out of this number, Catholics are about 20%” (Addai-Mensah 2009: 10). Unfortunately, before completion of this text I was not able to receive the results of the 2010 national census according number of declared Catholics in the whole country. However, in Techiman Diocese where I led my research, data released in March 2011 estimates 11,4 % of Catholics (Techiman Diocese 2011). It is important to emphasize regional differences between various dioceses, with south, east-south and central regions being more Catholic than other parts of the country. Extreme cases are: 33,01 % of Catholics in Ho Diocese, and 1,09 % in Yendi Diocese (The Hierarchy of Catholic Church 2011). The estimated number of Catholics also varies depending on applied criteria, which might be based on a number of baptismal cards, church attendance, or declared identity, sometimes not followed by sacramental and official Church membership.

(Haynes 1996: 169) appeared, especially “those of Pentecostal or Charismatic nature which were not founded by European missionaries,” instead they “were founded by Africans in protest to some features of Christianity of the missionary churches” (Mawusi 2009: 51). The large scale and rapid development of spiritual and African independent churches, which “try to fit Christian beliefs into an African worldview” (Boi-Nai 2003: 69-70) has had a significant impact on the stance of ‘old mission churches.’ This trend has made the older churches more open for Africanization and inculturation in order to better fulfill the needs and expectations of African people. In the case of Catholicism the Second Vatican Council was of course the main motor of indigenization and inculturation, especially with reforms in the liturgy in 1963 and an introduction of local languages into liturgy. The inculturation issue was also extensively discussed during the First Synod of Bishops for Africa in 1994, which brought the continued development of the concept of African Catholicism (Fisher 1998: 177) summed up by Pope John Paul II in the post-synodal exhortation *Ecclesia in Africa*. Furthermore, the issues connected with a specifically African Catholicism reemerged at the Second Synod of Bishops for Africa in 2009. During the inaugural mass of this synod, Pope Benedict XVI highlighted a specific ‘African way’ of adopting and living Christianity. The Pope referred to the African continent as “an enormous spiritual ‘lung’ for the humanity” of today (Morrow 2009: 2).

The development of African Christian theology and the popularization of the term African Christianity exemplify not only an emergence of identity which is discussed in transnational and global forums, but also an emergence of identity which is to be lived, negotiated, manifested and recreated on local levels.

### Old symbols in new contexts

Many old African societies were reliant on the oral transmission of tradition. Consequently, various visual symbols developed which summarized some traditional knowledge and philosophy. In the Akan culture, so-called ‘Adinkra designs’ were simple, pictorial forms used to express sayings and proverbs from the Twi language.<sup>169</sup> Traditionally, Adinkra symbols were stamped on textiles and a batik technique was used to produce ‘Adinkra cloths.’ These were usually worn during funerals and were supposed to express a farewell to the departed soul (*kra*) (Fisher 1998: 53). Nowadays, Adinkra symbols are broadly present in contemporary popular Ghanaian culture. They are painted on the walls of private and public buildings, they are carved in wood and appear on traditional Akan wooden stools,

<sup>169</sup> There are many hypotheses explaining the appearance of Adinkra symbols in the Akan culture. One of the most popular points is the slaying of the King of Gyaman (named Adinkra) by the King of Ashanti. This occurred at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Designs, and the techniques for making them, are said to be the spoils acquired by the Ashanti and named after the defeated King of Gyaman. Many researchers also point that the Akan word *adinkra* is derived from *kra*, which in the Akan concept of a person means a ‘soul.’ This is understood as a unique gift from God (*Nyame*) given to a human being at the moment of birth and returning to him after death of a person. That is why Adinkra cloths are associated with funeral celebrations in Akan cultures.

as well as on various musical instruments and on jewelry. Adinkra symbols are eagerly used by local artists in their works. They also appear as graphic embellishments in books published in Ghana. Souvenirs and curios produced for and sold to tourists are loaded with Adinkra symbolism. Adinkra symbols are associated, by Ghanaians as well as by visitors to Ghana, with an image of a genuine, African, local culture and are seen as a treasured part of Ghanaian history and tradition.

Adinkra symbols have also been adopted and used by local Catholic communities. Especially those Adinkra symbols which recall *Nyame* – the traditional Akan name for God – are implemented into the contemporary religious discourse of Ghanaian Catholicism. *Gye Nyame*, which means “except for God”, is one of the most popular Adinkra symbols used in the interiors of contemporary Catholic churches and chapels. Above the main altar in a newly built cathedral of the Diocese of Techiman, another Adinkra design is shown – this one symbolizing the Akan saying *Nyame biribi wo soro na ma embeka me nsa* (“*God, there is something in the heavens, let it reach me*”) [Fig. 1]. The Adinkra symbols appear on bishops’ thrones, they embellish altars, as well as liturgical cloths, hymnals and prayer books. The symbols can also be seen on various posters and leaflets with church announcements and on other materials of this type.

In 1976, the Catholic Book Centre in Accra published a small meditation booklet - written by Angela Christian and titled *Adinkra Oration* - which combined the traditional meanings of Adinkra symbols with Christian interpretations. The book consists of chosen Adinkra designs which are depicted next to short explanations of their “traditional Ashanti meaning and symbolism and biblical extracts which express the same sentiments and evocation” (Christian 1976: 4). In a short introduction, the author even points out that “the actual *Musuyidie* [one of the Adinkra symbols] design is a cross – a sign to remove evil” (Christian 1976: 4).<sup>170</sup> It seems that, for her, it is not a coincidence that in traditional society the *Musuyidie* cloth was used by Asantehene (the king of Ashanti) as a purifying and protective cloth. As she writes:

*It is significant, that a cloth stamped with the Musuyidie design lay along the side of the King of Ashanti’s bed, and that the first act he performed each morning when he arose, was to place his left foot on the cloth three times* (Christian 1976: 4).

The phenomenon of applying Adinkra symbols within the Catholic Church in Ghana can be interpreted on two levels. On the one hand, it exemplifies an inculturation process and a general development of African Catholicism and change of the Christian attitude toward African cultures. Now African cultures and traditions are no longer seen as purely ‘pagan’ and totally opposed to Christianity. On the other hand, the implementation of Adinkra symbols seems to be a very suitable solution to the issue of religious and devotional art. The Catholic Church in Ghana exists next to strong Protestant churches and

<sup>170</sup> Actually, the *Musuyidie* symbol resembles the Christian cross only vaguely. It consists of four longitudinal and slightly oval forms which create a shape resembling the letter ‘X’ and a cross with slanted limbs.

next to rapidly growing new religious movements, which are often rooted in charismatic and pentecostal spirituality. Some of my informants mentioned that the legitimacy of figural religious art is often questioned by various Christian communities in Ghana. They also say that the Catholic Church is depicted as the one promoting idolatry and misunderstanding of Christian doctrine. So, Adinkra designs (which consist not of figural art but of abstract symbols) not only bring African values and traditions closer to Christianity, but also, due to their abstract and symbolic appearance, they serve as an acceptable and ecumenically negotiable form of Christian art, and as such are highly valued by members of Catholic communities.

Of course this does not mean that in Ghanaian Catholic churches and shrines there are no images or statues of Christ, Mary or the saints. They are, however, not as numerous as in some other African countries, and usually they are direct imports derived from European old imagery or contemporary Catholic imagery (statues of Mary of Lourdes, depictions of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and, lately, more and more popular are images of the Divine Mercy [Fig. 2]). There is also an interesting trend in Christian imagery which combines traditionally European representations with elements of local cultures. In southern and central Ghana one of the most distinguishing attributes of chiefs and local kings is an umbrella (Warren 1975: 16). In all Akan societies, neither chiefs nor queen-mothers are allowed to move around publicly without a decorative umbrella held above their heads by umbrella carriers (Nkansa-Kyeremateng 2004: 59). Umbrellas that are similar to those a chief would use are commonly applied in Catholic churches. In Techiman's Cathedral, the bishop's chair is distinguished from other chairs by an umbrella that stands above it; similar to how a chief's chair is set apart by an umbrella. The symbolism of the umbrella as an attribute of *ohenepe* (king, chief) is also used in Catholic iconography of holy figures. Statues of Christ or saints are often presented according to the artistic canon of the holy figure – the canon directly imported from European Christian art. These objects have appropriate attributes of saints, while statues of Christ follow some popular iconographical schemas like the Sacred Heart of Jesus or Christ in Majesty. Quite often, however, those traditionally European iconographical representations of holy figures are 'localized' and Africanized by adding the Akan's chief umbrella.

One of the most distinctive iconographical representations of this type is the statue of Christ in front of the Catholic Cathedral in Kumasi (the capital city of Ashanti region and a seat of Asantehene – King of the Ashanti) [Fig. 3]. The Kumasi statue follows a Catholic artistic pattern of combining the iconography of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with the iconography of Christ the King of the Universe. A combination of those two iconographical subjects was popularized in Southern and Western Europe at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Klekot 1997: 63). Following the pattern, the figure of Christ in Kumasi is presented standing, wearing a long grey-white robe, with a symbol of a heart depicted on his chest. In his right hand he holds a royal scepter typical for European iconography of Christ the King. In his left hand he holds – instead of a royal apple, as it would appear in a 'classic' European representation of Christ the King – a globe with a clearly visible

outline of the African continent and colorfully marked borders of Ghana. The left arm of Christ is covered with a big piece of red cloth wrapped around his body. The cloth reminds the viewer of both the coat covering Christ in European traditional Christian iconography as well as the traditional African man's outfit consisting of "one large piece of cloth ('full piece') draped loosely over the body" (De Witte 2001: 129). This kind of outfit is worn by Ghanaian men during important celebrations like funerals, church services, national public events, and local and annual festivals.<sup>171</sup> Also chiefs and kings during public appearances wear a big piece of cloth draped over the body, and covering the left arm, leaving the right arm uncovered. This attire is obligatory when the chief or king is performing rituals or when appearing during annual festivals. The loose association between the statue of Christ and the figure of the Akan chief is clear especially when we note that the Kumasi Christ is depicted standing under the typical chief's umbrella (in that case, however, the umbrella is Christianized and topped with a small cross), as well as on a pedestal resembling a traditional chief's stool. In Ghana, traditional Akan stools are seen as powerful objects. They are connected with the individual and communal spirit (*sunsum*) which is believed to reside in them (Fisher 1998: 45). The chief's stools represent royal authority and power of the king (*ohene*) as well as his relationship to sacredness and the non-human world. The statue of Christ with attributes of Akan *ohene* installed in front of the Kumasi Cathedral in 1980 for the centenary of Ghanaian Catholicism, symbolically depicts the transformation of Christianity on the African continent and the mixing of identities of the Ghanaian people.<sup>172</sup>

### Lived identities

Identities are not only visualized, depicted and symbolized; they are also lived and practiced. Often when identities are established and accepted in social and cultural actions, they need to be frequently re-established, confirmed, manifested or transformed in public rituals. Religious public practices are to reveal, first and foremost, denominational identities. These practices very often, however, reveal a mixture of identities which might appear in various configurations.

During the Corpus Christi celebrations in Jema parish, I witnessed the dynamics of various identities and their representations. The Corpus Christi Feast is one of those occasions when members of the Jema parish can manifest their Christian identity within the public space of Jema town. What is more, Corpus Christi is a celebration connected with the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist, and, as such, is unique to the Catholic

<sup>171</sup> The Christ in Kumasi wears a long robe under the draped piece of cloth. This makes him distinct from the traditional African look and recalls European iconographical tradition. But still, the shape of his coat might resemble the typical attire of Ghanaian men.

<sup>172</sup> Catholicism appeared in the area now known as Ghana as early as 1471 with a landing of the Portuguese on the Gold Coast. However, the year 1880 (connected with reestablishment of a Catholic mission by the Society of the African Mission) is usually treated as the beginning of a presence of Catholicism among Ghanaian people.

Church. In the religiously diverse setting of Jema town and the neighboring villages, this aspect is important as the Corpus Christi procession goes through the various quarters of the town. Many of my informants noted this celebration as a presentation of their church affiliation and expression of belonging to the specific Christian community.

In Ghana, celebrations of Corpus Christi are adjusted to local climate conditions. In the Catholic calendar, the Corpus Christi feast is celebrated on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, which is the first Sunday after Pentecost (Pentecost is celebrated fifty days after Easter). As a result, Corpus Christi usually falls in June. In Ghana, however, June is the culmination of a rainy season and a very intensive working period for farmers. Because of this, parish priests in the Ghanaian Church are allowed to decide whether to celebrate Corpus Christi on its usual date, or to combine it with the celebration of the feast of Christ the King, which falls on the last Sunday of the liturgical year, before Advent. This seems to be better timing for this region, as the feast then falls in November (i.e. during a dry season). This is also a time when people in southern and central Ghana can enjoy fresh yam crops and are able to relax a bit after a period of intensive farming.

It is also worth adding that, in popular theology, the concept of Christ as king, which recalls a familiar figure of *ohene* (king, chief), is more readily comprehensible than the abstract concept of Christ present in the Eucharist. The Catholic understanding of 'Eucharist' seems additionally problematic in the African context – where sharing a communal meal with everybody is a very basic expression of the unity of life. The exclusive distribution of communion among those who fulfill sacramental and Catholic moral standards is often not understood by people who attend Catholic or other Christian churches in Ghana.<sup>173</sup> The percentage of communicants in Ghanaian Catholic churches is usually very low. In Jema parish, many members of the Catholic community, among them very active ones (like choir members, members of various church societies and even catechists from out-stations) are not communicants. This is most often due to lack of baptism or due to their marital status (lack of sacramental matrimony). Without a doubt, several Catholic moral concepts are foreign to traditional values of many African cultures and do not sound convincing in local cultural settings. This is especially true for Catholic concepts connected with monogamous marriages, as well as the Christian concept of a sin, free will and personhood (see e.g. Meyer 1999: 80; De Witte 2001: 138).

In November 2010, a few days before the Corpus Christi procession, the church elders of Jema Catholic parish visited a local chief to deliver an official invitation to the feast (on behalf of the Catholic community). The most important (and accepted by the chief) was an invitation for an opening and blessing of newly built classrooms in the Catholic Primary School, which was a significant point in the two-day long Corpus Christi and Christ the King feast. During the same visit, the elders asked the chief for a special favor: could he lend them his ceremonial decorative umbrella? They wanted to use the

<sup>173</sup> A dividing aspect of the Catholic concept of the Eucharist in the context of a variety of Christian churches in Africa and in the context of traditional African worldview is very interestingly discussed by Kwabena Assamoah-Gyadu (see Assamoah-Gyadu 2010, 57-59).

umbrella during the procession as a canopy above the monstrance holding the Eucharist.

On the Sunday of the feast, after a lengthy outdoor morning service outside of the Catholic Church, a festive procession began. People clapped and danced as they followed a jazz brass band and traditional Dagaaba drummers. As the procession wound through Jema town, the dancing became so ecstatic that it caused a huge cloud of dust. The dust stirred up a little bit of envy and a lot of admirations among the spectators from other churches. Above the cloud of dust and above the heads and clapping hands of dancing people was the chief's ceremonial umbrella shaking rhythmically and protecting the golden monstrance with the Eucharist. The scene was deceptively similar to the scene I witnessed in exactly the same place just two weeks before. During the local yam festival, a similar procession ran through Jema town, and the exact same ceremonial red umbrella was rhythmically shaken. However, at that time, the chief was in the shadow of the umbrella; wearing his royal jewelry and holding his swords, he was carried on the arms of his people after he publicly ate the new, fresh yams – officially completing one farming cycle and opening the new one.

The monstrance and the Eucharist in the Corpus Christi feast, like the Kumasi statue of Christ, appeared in Jema town under an umbrella, which is an easily recognizable attribute of *ohene*.<sup>174</sup> People, surrounding the monstrance and dancing in the ecstatic crowd, expressed feelings of happiness and togetherness. Like the traditional African annual festivals, during which all community members gather together, the Corpus Christi celebrations are treated as a very serious communal matter. In African societies being present, participating actively and contributing to the communal good is seen as the highest value and as a social obligation.

Various communal identities were visibly manifested during the procession in Jema. Apart from general ties bonding all participants of the procession, smaller groups prominently presented their affiliations. The internal divisions within the Catholic community of Jema parish are divided into two strong forms of identity: tribal and societal. The tribal composition of the parish mirrors the tribal composition of the district (South Kintampo District). One group consists of local people (Bono) and other Akan (all of them speak Twi as their primary language). The other group is generally referred to as 'the Northerners' – they include various tribes from the northern parts of the country (Frafra, Dagaaba, Grusi, Konkomba etc.). Tribal identities are publicly manifested during each Sunday service as Twi and Dagaaba choirs appear in a negotiated order during the mass celebration. The Twi choir leads during the main parts of the service and the Dagaaba choir leads during the so-called second-collection.<sup>175</sup> During the Corpus Christi

<sup>174</sup> Significantly, the parish priest of Jema, who is a European was very unhappy with an initiative of the church elders about the borrowing of a chief's umbrella. From his point of view this was a 'pagan' and non-Christian element deforming the Catholic concept of Eucharist and Christ the Lord, who is significantly different from the Akan *ohene*. Interestingly, Ghanaian priests taking part in celebrations did not seem to be disturbed with an adoption of *ohene*'s attributes into the Corpus Christi procession and a figure of Christ.

<sup>175</sup> In Ghanaian Catholic churches there are usually organized two collections of monetary donations. The first one is connected with the collection plate during the offertory part of the mass. The second one is

procession, this division also appeared as the Twi choir – in its distinctive attire – led the procession and was followed by the local people, while the Dagaaba choir with drums followed the monstrance. All ‘Northerners’ gathered around ‘their music’ – and danced to the rhythms of their dances.

Colorful attires and uniforms of different societies represent identities connected with small communities. Catholic parishes in Ghana are very strongly based on small communities and various groups which are organized and led by lay people. On the one hand, these are prayer groups which organize prayer meetings, healing sessions, and bible study. On the other hand, the small communities work as strong, supportive social groups literally creating a second family for their members (De Witte 2001: 137). Those who are in the same society often call each other ‘brother’ or ‘sister’ and treat each other as members of an extended family.<sup>176</sup> Members of these societies support each other in the event of spiritual problems. They are also expected to give each other financial support, especially during life-changing or life-crisis situations (i.e. illness, giving birth, a death in a family, marital crises). In Jema parish, there are more than ten different groups and societies of this kind (e.g. Legion of Mary, St. Anthony’s Guild, Charismatic Renewal Group, Males Society, and Catholic Youth Organization). Members of all of these groups attend the Corpus Christi and Christ the King celebrations wearing societal attire and taking responsibility for various parts of the feast. Sometimes societal affiliations overlap with tribal identities. In Jema parish this tendency for combining tribal and societal identities is apparent in two very active females’ organizations: the Christian Mothers’ Association and the Catholic Women’s Association. The Christian Mothers’ Association consists almost entirely of ‘Northerners’, while a prevailing number of the Catholic Women’s Associations are Akan. The 2010 Corpus Christi procession was a huge moment of pride for members of the Christian Mothers’ Association as they carried the platform with the monstrance during a part of procession as the official representatives of the Parish Women’s Council.

Sensus communis is a fundamental feature of a traditional African worldview (Asamoah-Gyadu 2010: 52) and it is also one of the most visible characteristics of contemporary popular African Christianity. Many researchers and theologians point out that the Christian concept of a person as a morally responsible individual is significantly distinct from the traditional African communal and relational definition of a human being. This dispute concerning the concept of a person and an understanding of a community reveals a significant shift which has developed in African Christianity within the last few decades. The individualistic approach, which predominated the missionary attempts of historical Western missions in the past, is often highlighted by contemporary African

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organized during announcements and often turns into an extensive dancing and community celebration. Financial gifts from the second collection are usually allotted to the expenses of the parish community managed by the church elders.

<sup>176</sup> Actually in Ghana, like in many other African countries, the terms designating ‘brothers’ or ‘sisters’ often are related not only to immediate siblings but also to cousins and members of the extended family (*abusua*).

theologians and philosophers as one of the crucial sources of tensions and conflicts between Christianity and traditional African ontology and cosmology (Asamoah-Gyadu 2010: 47). Therefore, in the contemporary approach, which is developing within various branches of African Christianity, the communal aspect of the Christian religion is emphasized, appreciated and redefined in the context of African traditions. John Mbiti, one of the most prominent African Christian philosophers and an ordained Anglican priest, even finds a parallel between the Christian idea of the Church as the “Christian family” and “African traditional life in which kinship and the extended family play a central role” (Mbiti 1991: 190). In fact, within practiced and lived Christianity “*on a local and social level, the church can [...] be seen as a secondary family*” (De Witte 2001: 138). Various group identities and the feeling of belonging to a community are expressed and confirmed through communal and public celebrations such as the Corpus Christi procession. But, in fact, festive occasions reveal ties which are lived and practiced on local levels and in people’s daily routines. As one of my interviewees summarized: “religion for us is life” and, in the African context, life is connected with being together.<sup>177</sup>

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The historical background and contemporary situation of the Catholic Church in Ghana recalled in this paper, as well as particular examples of practices and symbols ‘lived’ by today’s Ghanaian Catholics confirm that building of communal identity is an important part of social life. Ethnographic description and analysis of manifested identities can bring a deeper insight into the internal structure of the society and the dynamic of cultural patterns. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, identities are lived and practiced, and as such they are a matter of constant modification, negotiation and manifestation. Religious identities coexist with other identities and in certain circumstances can reinforce each other. In the case of Christian, and particularly Catholic identity, the Ghanaian case represents how global structures are adopted and lived on local levels. The contemporary Ghanaian Catholic identity is very strongly connected with general African identity and concepts of specific ‘African culture’ and ‘African spirituality’. However, Ghanaian Catholics within the frames of their religious practices accommodate elements manifesting various tribal identities and internal divisions. Above all, the concept of social identity seems to be very useful in research on African societies, as the communal dimension of life is emphasized as one of the specific values celebrated in the everyday life of African peoples.

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<sup>177</sup> This interview was done in English. In Twi, as in many other West African languages, there is no word for an abstract term ‘religion’. The words used as equivalents of ‘religion’ usually describe the practices connected with serving the God or gods.

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