

# The Patriarch Abraham, His Family and Christian-Muslim Dialogue in Contemporary African Societies

Cosmas Ebo Sarbah<sup>a,1\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup>*Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana, West Africa*

<sup>1</sup>*ebosarb@gmail.com\**

*\* Corresponding author*

## ABSTRACT

The religiously plural nature of today's society often calls for the cooperation among various existing religious traditions for peaceful co-existence. Cooperation between religious bodies work optimally when the parties can identify a common ground which serves as a rallying point for their purposeful conversation and meaningful encounters and interaction. This paper offers a critical study of the Patriarch, Abraham and his immediate family from both Christian and Muslim perspectives as presented in the sacred texts. It goes further to discuss how the patriarchy narratives, in spite of the challenges they have posed to Christian-Muslim encounters in history, could actually be a medium for promotion of cooperation in contemporary society.

**Keywords:** *Patriarch Abraham, Sarah, Hagar, Identity Construction, Christian-Muslim Dialogue*

## Introduction

On November 26, 1979, John Paul II in a Mass for Christians in Ankara (Turkey) noted: "Faith in God, which the spiritual descendants of Abraham, Christians, Muslims, and Jews profess, when it is lived sincerely so that it penetrates life, is an assured foundation of human dignity, brotherhood, and freedom and a principle of rectitude for moral conduct in life and society. As a consequence of this faith in God the transcendent Creator, human beings find themselves at the summit of creation" (Michel 2010, 82). By this statement the Pope advocates that the three religious traditions have a lot to offer the world by recognizing their ancestral root in Abraham. The same line of thought influenced the Muslim leader Fethullah Gulen when, in the Vatican on February 9, 1998, suggested to Pope John Paul II that the town of Harran (near the city of Urfa), identified and regarded as the place where the Patriarch Abraham was born, must be set up as a global center for Jewish-Christian-Muslim understanding. Thomas F. Michel acknowledges that "Abrahamic associations" made up of members of Judaism, Christianity and Islam can be found in more than ten countries across the world (Michel 2010, 83).

This paper follows up with the thoughts of these two renowned religious leaders to undertake a

critical study of Abraham (the patriarch) and his immediate family. It involves a discussion of Abraham from the Judeo-Christian perspective in the biblical text. The biblical literature presents the image of Abraham from a perspective of the family (lineage). In this case, the figure and family of Abraham are often described in exclusivist terms and perspectives which cannot be dissociated from their election, covenant and history. Many argue that the biblical narrative is the source of a covenant relation with a family (God and Jews) which makes it fundamentally unsuitable for interreligious purposes (Goshen-Gottstein 2002, 165-183). It appears champions of the exclusivist family position of Abraham tend to associate and identify Jewish people and the descendants of Abraham with a particular religion (Judaism) and assume that the descendants of Abraham have and will always belong to Judaism. What they fail to realise is that over the years various experiences in life have turn a significant number of the descendants of Abraham into not only Christianity and Islam but also humanist religions and even atheism.

It also delves into Islamic perspectives with detailed study of the Qur'an and the Ahadith. The stories of Abraham and his immediate family are largely confirmed in Islamic sources. Abraham marries Sarah who was initially barren. Sarah persuades unwilling Abraham to

have intercourse with her maid, Hagar. This surrogate arrangement is acceptable by the Mesopotamian culture. Hagar gives birth to a baby boy and Abraham names him Ishmael (Ismail). A family dispute between the wives and Isaac (Ishaq) and Ishmael which began with the jealous Sarah resulted in the separation of the family. Hagar and Ishmael were driven away into the desert, they sort for water for survival. God provided water, later blessed, and promised Ishmael large descendants. Abraham eventually left Sarah and Isaac and went looking for Ishmael. He found Ishmael and the mother, Hagar in the desert in Mecca. Abraham and Ishmael built what has become the most spiritual site of Islam, the *Ka'aba*.

The paper contends that the image of Abraham as an ancestor of a family in the biblical and Islamic narratives is suitable for the promotion of interreligious dialogue not only between Jews and Jewish-Christians and Jewish-Muslims but also Christians and Muslims. The paper argues that despite the striking differences in both Islamic and Christian perspectives they both acknowledge and present a certain commonality of immediate family of Abraham which cannot be ignored in such discussions. The descendants of Abraham include children of both Sarah and Hagar. The descendants of Abraham can be found in Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Furthermore, it engages a discourse on the challenges the patriarchal narratives of Abrahamic family relations have posed to Christian-Muslim encounters throughout history. Finally, using the Akan understanding of lineage and putative ancestor as a model the paper offers a thorough discussion on how Abraham and his family could be a medium for promotion of dialogue and cooperation in contemporary societies.

## **The Family of Abraham in the Sacred Texts**

### ***Judeo-Christian Tradition***

The story of the Patriarch begins with the call of Abraham. He is called to leave behind the country of his ancestors and to begin an entirely new existence in a foreign land (Gn 12:1). The call demanded not only geographical but also religious movement; it involves a movement from polytheistic life to monotheistic one. With the call of Abraham, God introduces something completely new in the history of humankind.

He intervenes directly and chooses a man who would become the father of a family through which salvation would come to the world.

Abraham established his family by marrying Sarai (Sarah). Sarah is barren probably because of her old age and she persuades Abraham, who preferred monogamous marriage, to get a child by Hagar (Gn 16:2), her Egyptian maid. Mesopotamian law permitted a barren wife to make this kind of arrangement with her husband. This happened also with Rachel (Gn 30:1-6) and Leah (Gn 30:9-13). Their maids Bilhah and Zilpah were rendered to Jacob their husband for the purpose of childbirth. The Ghanaian biblical theologian, Emmanuel Kojo Ennin Antwi underscores that the practice of this kind of surrogate motherhood was common among the people of Ancient Near East. It is permitted by law that a barren wife gives her maid to her husband to bear children for her (Antwi 2017, 14). The code of Hammurabi, Nuzi and Neo-Assyrian texts present countless examples of such arrangements.

Hagar conceived and gave birth to Ishmael. Later Sarah also conceived miraculously and delivered a baby boy, Isaac. Abraham named both children and accepted them as his own. The birth narratives of Ishmael and Isaac in Genesis 16 and 21 respectively, present an image of Isaac which is more positive than that of Ishmael. Abraham's free wife Sarah gave birth to Isaac. Ishmael is the son of the maid, Hagar. Isaac received circumcision; Ishmael did not receive circumcision (Antwi 2017, 14). Abraham celebrated the birth of Isaac with a feast on the day that Isaac was weaned, but no feast was organised for Ishmael.

### ***Islamic Traditions on Ibrahim***

The Qur'an presents Abraham (Ibrahim) as someone who refused to accept the image of God as presented to him by his pagan environment. Ultimately, Abraham refused to accept that the star, the sun, the wind and even the moon are gods. Abraham was a monotheist; God, to him, was one. He was a monotheist not in the sense of a Jew or a Christian. Rather, Abraham was a Muslim in the sense of a *hanif* (someone who essentially and intrinsically knows that there is really only one God) (Ali Khalidi 2005, 144). Unlike the biblical Abraham, the Islamic Abraham never made a

movement from a life of polytheism to monotheism.

We can see similarities between the Islamic narratives and biblical stories. The marriage of Abraham and Sarah, the initial barrenness of Sarah and Abraham accepting and having a son with Hagar, are confirmed by Islamic sources. It is also accepted that Sarah later was blessed with a son, Isaac. But Hagar was the daughter of Egyptian king. According to ‘Abd ar-Rahmān as-Suddī, Kufa, d. 127/745 AD): “Sara said to Abraham, ‘you may take pleasure in Hagar, for I have permitted it.’” So, he had intercourse with Hagar and she gave birth to Ishmael. Then he had intercourse with Sara and she gave birth to Isaac. When Isaac grew up, he and Ishmael fought. Sara became angry and jealous of Ishmael’s mother.” (As-Suddī 1993, 569).

Muslims regard Hagar in very high esteem. Muslims call her *Sitti Hajar* (my Lady Hagar) as a sign of respect. The story of Hagar is narrated in the Bible but Islamic traditions have a more elaborate narration. As far as the main story is concerned, we can say that the Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions largely agree. It is also fair to say that each of these sources presents unique aspects of the story of Hagar which depicts the importance of her role in God’s plan for humanity. It is important to note that all the two sources mention the merciful care God showed to Hagar and her child in the loneliness of the desert. In the New Testament, we hear of Hagar in the letter to Galatians (Ga 4:21-25). Here, Paul identifies both Hagar and Sarah and presents them as critical images of the Old Covenant (between God and the Jews on Sinai) and the New Covenant (established in Jesus Christ) (Michel 2010, 83).

Surprisingly, the story of Hagar is not directly found in the Qur’an. Rather, it is recounted in the hadith related by Ibn ‘Abbas and found in the very reliable hadith collection of Bukhari (Al-Bukhari 2006, 481). However, the Qur’an makes some indirect reference to Hagar with regards to the building of the *Ka’aba* by Abraham and Ishmael (Surah 2: 127) in Mecca. God saved Hagar (*Hājar*) and her child by producing the spring of Zamzam. Another indirect Qur’anic reference is found in Surah 14:39 in which God answers the petition of Abraham with the birth of Ishmael and Isaac (Ishaq).

## **Historical Controversies: Family Conflict in both Narratives**

### ***Judeo-Christian Perspective***

The conflict between Sarai and Hagar tells also of the frequent tensions existing among co-wives in African polygamous marriages. In the Biblical story we are told Hagar looked on Sarah with disdain (Gn 16:4-5). Sarah became jealous of Hagar as the mother of Abraham’s only child and heir. Sarah then abused Hagar so much that she fled into the desert (Gn 16:6). The Lord’s messenger found Hagar by a well in the wilderness and asked Hagar to go back to her mistress and submit to her abusive treatment (Gn 16:7). But she was promised numerous descendants.

Sarah noticed Ishmael and Isaac playing together and she did not like it. Children normally do not show discrimination based on race, color, and religion. No element of hatred or jealousy is found in the interaction between the two sons of Abraham. Sarah demanded that Ishmael be driven away. Though Abraham was distressed by that yet God asked him to listen to Sarah. Abraham did send Hagar and the child away.

### ***Islamic Perspective***

The family conflict of Abraham is also narrated by Ibn ‘Abbas as recorded by Bukhari: “When Abraham had differences with his wife, because of her jealousy of Hajar, Ishmael’s mother), he took Ishmael and his mother and went away. They had a water-skin with them containing some water, Ishmael’s mother used to drink water from the water-skin so that her milk would increase for her child. When Abraham reached Mecca, he made her sit under a tree and afterwards returned home” (Al-Bukhari 2006, 481). As- Suddī also noted that: “When Isaac grew up, he and Ishmael fought. Sarah became angry and jealous of Ishmael’s mother” (As-Suddī 1993, 567). It is the Islamic sources which introduce the idea of the children of Abraham fighting.

The family conflicts in both Biblical and Islamic sources began with the two wives of Abraham. The relationship between Sarah and her slave maid, Hagar, became tense even though Sarah herself had offered Hagar to

Abraham her husband because of her childlessness. The biblical Hagar was accused of looking on Sarah with disdain or disrespect. In the Islamic version it was Sarah who was jealous of mother Hagar. Hagar's attitude towards Sarah changed following her conception. We also hear of tension between the children of Abraham. The story of the tension of the two sons of Abraham is told in Genesis 21:9. Sarah did not like Ishmael playing with her son, Isaac. Levenson contends that Sarah's request was motivated by the issue of inheritance. She did not like the idea of her son, Isaac, sharing the promise with Ishmael (Levenson 2012, 35). The laws of the Ancient Near East, gives a son of a surrogate mother the right of inheritance (Antwi 2017, 15). The tense environment eventually necessitated the departure of Hagar and her son into the wilderness.

## **Consequences of the Family Conflict**

### ***Separation of Family***

According to a hadith attributed to Ibn Abass as narrated by Bukhari, Hagar left the family and roamed aimlessly in the desert when Abraham left her and the child. The biblical narration also mentions the separation of the family. Abraham, Sarah and Isaac lived together as a family according to the biblical story. Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael lived together according to the Islamic tradition. As Hagar ran out of water, she put the child on a shrub. Ishmael began to cry and the Lord heard his cry. She climbed the Safa mountain in order to look for help. The difficulty in getting water made her complete seven rounds (of running) between al-Safa and al-Marwa. This action of Hagar and the cry of Ishmael resulted in the provision of a well of water by the angel Jibril for the boy to drink. Ishmael grew up in the desert and married an Egyptian woman (Peters 1994, 131).

Much of what Islamic tradition is about and even some of the rituals such as the Hajj (pilgrimage) stem from the pre-Islamic era and are translated into Islamic rituals through Abraham. As a re-enactment of this gesture of running between the two hills of Hagar, Muslims perform the pilgrimage ritual of "running" back and forth between the two hills

of al-Safa and al-Marwa for spiritual blessings (Peters 1994, 131).

### ***The Sacrifice of Ishmael or Isaac?***

The narratives on the sacrifice of the son of Abraham has also become a source of controversy. According to the biblical and Islamic stories, Abraham was asked to demonstrate his devotion to God: "I want you to sacrifice your own flesh and blood for me" (Gn 22:2). Abraham passed the test in both Judeo-Christian and Islamic narratives because he was prepared to do it, in his submission and devotion to God. In history, controversy has surrounded as to which of the son (Ishmael and Isaac) was to be sacrificed. The biblical narrative is clear on the son, Isaac. The Bible states emphatically that this child of sacrifice was Isaac (Gn 22:1-2). Isaac is also mentioned as the son of the sacrifice in the New Testament (Hb 11:17; Jm 2:21).

Even though there is a difference of opinions as to who the child was in Islamic tradition, Muslims, generally, feel that Ishmael, the dearest son was the one to be offered up by Abraham (Ali Asharaf 1987, 124). They believe that the biblical narratives support this by its declaration that Abraham offered his *only son* (see above verses). Ishmael was Abraham's only son for over 13 years, which would make it impossible for Isaac to be the child of sacrifice (Gn16:16, 21:5). The majority of the later Muslim scholars say it was Ismail, many of the early scholars said it was Isaac (*Ishaq*). The submission of Abraham and his son, Ishmael, is even celebrated and commemorated by Muslims on the days of Eid al-Adha (Peters 1994, 131). Muslims believe that scribes later corrupted the original reading from Ishmail to Isaac.

It must be noted that the Qur'an does not mention the name of the sacrificial son (Surah 37:99-106). The ambiguity of the Qur'anic text has left many Islamic scholars guessing as to whether the child was Isaac or Ishmael. Yusuf Ali makes a note of this in his commentary: "This (i.e. the child promised to Abraham and later commanded to be sacrificed) was in the fertile land of Syria and Palestine. The boy thus born, was, according to Muslim tradition (*which however is not unanimous on this point*), the first-born son of Abraham, viz Ishmael ..."

(Yusuf Ali 1939, 1204 and 4096). Muhammad H. Haykal, in his classic biography *The Life of Muhammad*, also wrote that historians of this period disagree on the matter of Abraham's sacrifice of Ishmael. He argues further that the question of 'who the sacrificial son was' is amply answered when the place of the sacrifice comes to play. The son is Isaac if born in Palestine; he is Ishmael if born on mountain of Mina near Mecca (Haykal 1976, 24-25). Nevertheless, Muslims, generally, accept that Ishmael, the dearest son, was the one to be offered up by Abraham (Ali Asharaf 1987, 124).

### ***Abraham and the Ka'aba***

Islamic sources associate Abraham with the building of the *Ka'aba* in Mecca. An Al-Bukhari narration collected from Abu Al-Qasim presents that Abraham got permission from his wife Sarah and visited his son (Ishmael) in Mecca. He found Ishmael near the Zamzam well. The father and son set out to build God's temple (Al-Bukhari, *Sahih al-Bukhari*, 483). The dedication of the house of God is indicated in the Qur'an when it states: "And when Abraham and Ishmael were raising the foundations of the House, (Abraham prayed): Our Lord! Accept from us (this duty). Lo! Thou, only Thou, art the Hearer, the Knower (Surah 2: 127). In connection with this dedication, Zamakhashari (d. 1144 C.E.), renowned Qur'anic commentator, also noted in his work *Al-Kashshaf*: "then God commanded Abraham to build it, and Gabriel showed him its location. It is said that God sent a cloud to shade him, and he was told to build on its shadow, not to exceed or diminish its dimensions. It is said that Abraham built it from five mountains: Mount Sinai, the Mount of Olives, Lebanon, al-Judi and its foundation is from Hira. Gabriel brought Abraham the Black Stone from Heaven."<sup>1</sup> It is, generally, believed that the angel Jubril intalled the black stone in the *Ka'aba*.

### **The Family of Abraham: A Model for Interreligious Dialogue?**

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<sup>1</sup> Abu Al-Qasim Mahmoud ibn Omar Al-Zamakhashari 1074 –1143) was a medieval Muslim scholar of Iranian descent. He lived in Mecca and

The question, however, remains: do Judaism (Christianity) and Islam really share a common story, regarding the figure of Abraham and his immediate family? The two major religions acknowledge Abraham as their father, yet their narratives about him is fundamentally different (Goshen Gottstein 2002, 175). Alon Goshen-Gottstein identifies striking fundamental differences in both narratives which cannot be ignored. He contends that Abraham in the Bible is the recipient of the exclusive covenant of God with Israel. The Qur'anic Abraham is a regular visitor to Mecca; he built the *Ka'aba* with the support of his son, Ishmael. Goshen-Gottstein argues, further, that it is not only too simplistic to claim the term 'Abrahamic' might refer to a common story, but also it overlooks the fundamental dissimilarities that differentiate the biblical and the Islamic narratives and to focus solely on their similarities (Goshen Gottstein 168). Although he acknowledges the significant role the common ancestral figure, Abraham plays, yet Goshen-Gottstein continues to indicate that using a common ancestral figure as a rallying ground for Christian-Muslim encounters and dialogue forces stakeholders in dialogue to adopt a rather superficial approach to the diverse scriptures. He concludes that if interreligious dialogue resorts to such common denominators as an ancestral figure, the endeavour runs the risk of downplaying the significance of the real differences which are all the more reasons we need to dialogue (Goshen Gottstein 2002, 168).

However, issue of the figure of Abraham might not be useful in all the many dimensions of dialogue. But, its importance for dialogue must be understood from the point of view of an identity construction for both Jews, Christians and Muslims. All the three religions trace their identity to this ancestor Abraham who could be understood as a putative ancestor. The conversions of Jews and Christians to Islam following the Arab invasion in the 6th century AD reinforced the need for the broader understanding of the figure of Abraham which is developed by the post-biblical literature (Ye'or 1996, 274). This has become necessary because we find that people of the same lineage

later was called *Jar Allah* (God's Neighbor), a Mu'tazilite theologian, he became a renowned interpreter of the Qur'an. His book *Al-Kashshaf* is best known.

or family headed by Abraham now belong to different religious traditions. It appears champions of the exclusivist family position of Abraham tend to associate and identify Jewish people and the descendants of Abraham with a particular religion (Judaism) and assume that the descendants of Abraham have and will always belong to Judaism. What they fail to realise is that over the years various experiences in life have turned a significant number of the descendants of Abraham into not only Christianity and Islam but also humanist religions and even atheism.

Furthermore, the animosity which has characterised Christian-Muslim relations throughout history can be confronted with the common ancestry or brotherhood model which is promoted by Pope Francis in his recent fraternity and social friendship, encyclical, *Fratelli Tutti* (Pope Francis 2020, 201).

### ***The Akan, Lineage and Identity Construct***

Apart from the Jews and Arabs, other ethnic groups such as the Akan and the Ga of Ghana have constructed identities which associate them with Abraham and so with the Israelites (the Hebrew). Every ethnic group couches its identity based on the past story but with continuity as the goal. The identity construction is often attained when fundamental ideals of the ethnicity are deliberately codified and transmitted to successive generations. Joseph K. Adjaye, an eminent Professor of African Studies, identifies two essential elements in identity construction: “first, recognition of time tested and commonly held values that incorporate the moral and cultural universe of the self, and second, the outward, interactional interpretation of values in reference to the cultural universe of the community with the future in mind.” (Adjaye 2018, 3-4). Agreeing with Adjaye, Charles Weston suggests that an essential aspect of construction of identity of a community often involves the “mythological conception of common ancestry.” He concludes that: “All my ancestors, right back to the creation, have their place in time. In this respect, ethnic identity indeed is past oriented” (Weston 1983, 100).

It is interesting to note that some African ethnic groups have constructed ethnic identities which

associate them with the figure of Abraham as their ancestor. The Turudbe of Sudan Basin (West Africa) trace its identity and lineage to the two sons of Abraham: the first is Ishmael, the firstborn son of Abraham and Hagar, the African/Nubian woman (Shareef 2004, 89). The second is through Esau, who is the grandson of Abraham through his second born son, Isaac. Having composed their historical identity within the Abrahamic line, the Turudbe’ have also established their legitimacy in the Islamic family. Nasab ‘l-Falaata (the Lineage of the Fulbe’) claim that the truth of the Turudbe’ Fulbe’ identity is found in divine message given to the Prophet Muhammad (Shareef 2004, 89).

We would like, at this point, to discuss the matrilineal Akan ethnic group of Ghana who also have narratives which associate them with a putative ancestor/ancestress whom some Akan scholars often replace with the image of Abraham. Such scholars are quick to point out evidence of this linkage with Abraham as seen in their languages, the names and proverbs and in general cultural traits (AYIM-ABOAGYE, Accessed 19<sup>th</sup> of August, 2022, 6 & 8). The Akan people have developed kinship ties in their lineage system which identify them as unique ethnic group in the very line of the lineage of the Patriarch Abraham (Arthur 2001, 82). The Akan lineage (*ebusua*) is a basic social group whose members descended through one line from a common ancestor or ancestress. The lineage is an organized group which owns property (usually land) (Jennings 2009, 64).

The Akan people claim that all members of lineages of the clan are “...the matrilineal descendants of a single remote ancestress” (Manoukian 1964, 17). All lineage members are *mogyakoro* (they related by blood). The lineage, however, recruits members by other means as well. The mother-child relationship is of immense importance in the lineage. The kinship system is based on genealogical linkage. The biological linkage of lineage is often described as the social product which is meant to ensure social cohesion (Mair 1972, 56). The Akan people are less concerned with the truism or not of the blood connection than its function. Of importance to this paper is the two cognate relationship which the Akan lineage membership have developed overtime

to cement their ancestral blood bond and to make it functional for each member. First, there is the *ebusua payin* (the living ancestral representative and spiritual leader) who functions to ensure that internal rivalry, misunderstanding and animosity are quickly dealt with. Second, all members are obligated by customs and tradition to lend support (material and emotional) to each other as a family irrespective of religious background. Mutual engagement and support are high essential values which are upheld at all cost because of ancestral and family linkage. In his book *A History of Ghana*, F. K. Buah comments on the benefits each member derives from the lineage group even as a visitor: "...he is received as a member of the local *abusua* or the extended family, enjoying all privileges and rights, and sharing in the customary obligations with his 'brothers' and 'sisters' there." (Buah 1998, 8). This reciprocal helpfulness also serves as a form of social security and financial support for education, times of sickness and old age.

### ***Concluding Thoughts***

The image of Abraham as an ancestor and a father to Christians and Muslims is significant for dialogue between the two traditions. The lineage connectivity of the Ghanaian Akan thrives beyond religious or political affiliations. The Akan ethnic group is made up of various lineages. Each of these lineages or families consist of people who claim to be blood relatives by virtue of common ancestor and who now belong to various religious persuasions. The large majority of Akan have adopted Christianity and Islam, following the missionary endeavours in Ghana from the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 14<sup>th</sup> centuries respectively. Consequently, each lineage membership is composed of Christians, Muslims and traditional believing relatives. Because of the lineage relationships many inter-faith households or families exist in Ghana. Christians and Muslims live in the same house and share common lineage properties. The head and leader of the lineage or family (the *ebusua panyin*), who personifies the common ancestor, functions to hold the members together irrespective of his/her religious persuasion. The

lineage structures supplant religious institutions and serve as antidote to religious extremism and religious nationalism often preached and practiced by some Christians and Muslims. Just as the lineage bonding of the Akan Christians and Muslims serves as an ancestral connectivity and helps to promote relationship between them, so the children of Abraham from both mothers (Sarah and Hagar) are capable of living together in the Holy (promised) land even though they belong to different religious traditions.

The spiritual tie of Christians and Muslims grounded on faith of Abraham is a model for minimising inter-religious animosity, violence and conflicts. Just as Akan Christians and Muslims are united in a lineage institution largely by virtue of the spirituality of their common putative ancestry so also Christians and Muslims with a spirituality of common Abrahamic ancestry can also hold and stand together to face any challenge or force or institution that might seek to disintegrate them and make them treat one another as enemies. It is this common ancestral spirit of the Akan people which brings members of different religious backgrounds together. When Christians and Muslims acknowledge each other as fellow cognates, human beings with a common spiritual purpose a hopeful avenue is created for global harmony and peace. The figure of Abraham as the spiritual father of Muslims and Christians is good enough reason for proper spiritual relations. The figure also nurtures mutual sympathy and respect among Christians and Muslims across the world which are expressed in service to each other, sincerely offered, gratefully accepted, and reciprocated.

Despite the various contrary arguments put forward by people like Goshen-Gottstein, we contend that the narratives on the family of Abraham in both Islamic and Judeo-Christian traditions could be great sources for promotion of Christian-Muslim dialogue. The idea of Abraham as ancestor could enable entire membership of his lineage and descendants, be they spiritual, to perceive themselves as blood relatives which could serve as a model for Christian-Muslim relations. The common ancestral figure of the Abraham establishes unambiguous blood relationship that ought to

bind Christians and Muslims together not only in particular communities but also across the world (Meyerowitz, *The Akan of Ghana: Their Ancient Beliefs*, 32). The spiritual leaders of Christians and Muslims could, thus, serve as living ancestral representatives to ensure fraternity, love and solidarity are solidly preserved for peaceful co-existence.

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