

An Examination of the Role of Public Theology in the Church's Efforts Toward National Transformation in Ghana



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ABSTRACT

The central argument of this article is that Christianity which is relevant to Ghanaians must be responsive to the realities of the people and committed to promoting social justice and national transformation. Contemporary socio-economic challenges demand the constant participation of the church in the process of social change. The church's participation in the transformation process however must be guided by its Christian beliefs and values. Public Theology that is concerned with how Christian beliefs and values intersect with issues of public life and social transformation must therefore be the catalyst for the church's public witness toward national transformation. The study conducted interviews with significant academics and practitioners in its effort to appreciate the place of the church in the contemporary socio-economic challenges facing the nation as well as reviewing available relevant library materials. It concluded with the identification and recommendation of the church's prospects and capacity for national transformation in challenges like ethnocentrism, religious conflicts, moral decadence and political instability through the church's moral authority, structures for mobilization, legacy and ecumenical relationships.

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Publication History

Received 13th April, 2023

Accepted 7th June, 2023

Published online 21st June,
2023

Keywords: *Public Theology, African Christianity, National Transformation, Ghana*

INTRODUCTION

Public Theology and national transformation are important concepts for the church in Ghana, as they provide a framework for understanding the role of the church in promoting social and economic development in the country. At its core, Public Theology is concerned with how Christian beliefs and values intersect with issues of public life and social transformation.¹ By engaging in Public Theology, the church in Ghana is better positioned to help shape the national discourse around issues related to social, economic, and political development. Sebastian Kim and Karel August have pointed out the

¹ Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, "Doing Public Theology in African Christianity: A Reflection on Communiqués by Churches in Ghana," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 7, no. 11 (November 15, 2021): 190–200, <https://doi.org/10.38159/erats.20217111>.

fact that Public Theology plays a vital role in promoting national transformation by providing a framework for the church to engage with issues related to social and economic transformation.²

The role of Public Theology in national transformation in Ghana is to help shape a vision for a just and equitable society, and to guide the church's engagement with the broader society to achieve that vision. By providing moral leadership, promoting social justice, encouraging public participation, fostering interfaith dialogue, responding to ethnocentrism, and advocating for the marginalized, Public Theology is properly positioned to promote and contribute to national transformation in Ghana.

The church, through the construction of sound Public Theology, provides moral leadership on issues of national significance. This involves speaking out on issues related to social justice, human rights, good governance, and advocating for policies and practices that promote the common good.³ Moreover, Public theology encourages the active participation of Christians in civic life, including politics, civil society, and community development. By doing so, it promotes a culture of democratic participation and accountability. Public theology promotes ethical values such as integrity, honesty, and fairness in public life. It can therefore help to combat corruption and promote good governance, which are critical for sustainable development. The role of Public Theology in national transformation includes the facilitation of dialogue and engagement between different sectors of society, including government, civil society, and the private sector. Eventually, it fosters cooperation and collaboration towards common goals, supports efforts towards social transformation, including poverty reduction, gender equality, promotes a more just and equitable society, and environmental sustainability.

A major characteristic of Public Theology is its ability to provide a platform for the church to advocate for change on issues related to national transformation. By speaking truth to power and engaging with policymakers and other stakeholders, the church helps to advance policies and programmes that promote social and economic development.⁴ Public Theology provides a moral compass for individuals and communities, helping to guide them towards behaviours and actions that promote social and economic development.

This study is of the position that the church has a key role to play in the transformation of the contemporary socio-economic challenges that confront the nation like ethnocentrism, political instability, unemployment, etc. The church's role in social transformation is identified in its close articulation of a vision of the common good and the values that underpin it and fosters a sense of shared purpose and direction. The church must further facilitate dialogue and engagement between different sectors of society, including government, civil society, and the private sector, cooperation, and collaboration towards common goals. The facilitation must be pursued through the mobilization of Christian communities around issues related to national transformation by enhancing its moral authority, ecumenical relationships, and legacy. The church's Public Theology it is underscored, must remain the catalyst and driving force in the church's national transformation efforts.

METHODOLOGY

The study which is a qualitative approach used both library research and interviews in the gathering of information. Due to the limitation of publication of materials specifically on the Ghanaian context, the study gave greater attention to interviews with selected academics and practitioners with related operations on the subject of the contributions of the church in national transformation.

² Sebastian Kim, *Theology in the Public Sphere: Public Theology as a Catalyst for Open Debate* (London: SCM Press Ltd, 2013); Karel Thomas August, *The Quest for Being Public Church: The South African Challenge to the Moravian Church in Context (1737-2004)* (Moravian Printing Works, 2005).

³ Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, "Christian Advocacy Ministry in African Christianity: The Nature, Prospects and Challenges in Ghana," *Journal of Mother-Tongue Biblical Hermeneutics and Theology* 3, no. 4 (November 5, 2021): 57–67, <https://doi.org/10.38159/motbit.2021351>.

⁴ Opuni-Frimpong, "Christian Advocacy Ministry in African Christianity: The Nature, Prospects and Challenges in Ghana," 57-67.

The Church and National Development

The church has played critical roles in the establishment and development of the nation. According to the various studies on Ghanaian churches by various scholars of theology, from the pre-independence era, the church has provided basic social services particularly, health and education, to the remotest corners of the country and at the pre-school, basic and secondary levels. The church has established institutions of training, such as in nursing and health-relation services, teacher education, and agriculture, technical and vocational skills.⁵ Peter Schweizer has opined that the churches have stimulated research and learning which has benefited the nation in the areas of literacy and language development and supported commerce, trade, and industry.⁶ The provision of hospitality facilities, which for several years offered the main and decent premises for events, is a major characteristic of the church. Esther Ofei-Aboagye in an interview observed that the church in Ghana has used its moral weight to educate, comment, intervene, and advocate issues for the good of the country.⁷

Since the beginning of Christianity in Ghana, many attempts have been made to transform the society for good. The efforts can be seen in the building of schools, hospitals, provision of water, and other social amenities by various members of the assembly of believers. In the past, the church has been influenced in helping various communities to make a living, cope and adapt to various life circumstances. Tremendous interventions have also been made to propagate the gospel, leading to the establishment of various churches around the country.

While a lot has been achieved by the various churches, a lot more ought to be done to enable the people to appreciate how the various churches can be mobilized for a more impactful transformation of Ghana. Aboagye has argued that there is a need to mobilize the Christian communities and their resources for national transformation if the churches seek to play any meaningful role in the numerous developmental challenges.⁸ The critical questions that arise include what more the church can do with its structures and resources to support mobilization for national development. How can the body of Christ remain useful in the process of national development? Or has the church outlived its usefulness and therefore its place as a major influencer for national transformation? What does the church have that can be deployed and in what ways can it support the wave of change?

The church has been recognised as a key active participant and partner in Ghana's national development, embracing those who may not necessarily adopt Christian beliefs and values.⁹ The critical question is what must the church do differently (beyond or unlike before) and with which partners, in order to expedite the desired national character and circumstances moving forward? The skylines of most human settlements in Ghana are dotted with churches which serve very strategic functions including being used as shelters in emergencies, meeting places, study centres, and a location for mobilizing communities for various purposes. This perception of the church is rather limited because in more generic terms; it is more than the limited physical structures.

Derived from its Greek word *ecclesia*, the church refers to a group of people or a gathering of believers. In biblical terms, church means a group of people (Act 19:41). The children of God (Acts 7:38), or the body of Christ (Eph. 1:22, 5:25, 32). It can refer to a group of believers of Christ who are bound together by their common beliefs in Jesus Christ. The church is the body of Christ with defined organs working together to promote Jesus Christ and not just simply the physical structures in which such believers meet.

⁵ Hans Werner Debrunner, *A History of Christianity in Ghana* (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 1967); Noel Smith, *The Presbytery Church of Ghana 1835-1960* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1966); James Anquandah, *Agenda Extraordinaire: 80 Years of the Christian Council of Ghana, 1929-2009* (Accra: Asempra Publishers, 2009).

⁶ Peter A Schweizer, *Survivors on the Gold Coast: The Basel Missionaries in Colonial Ghana* (Smartline Pub., 2000).

⁷ Excerpts of an Interview with Dr. Esther Ofei-Aboagye on Setting National Priorities September 17, 2020.

⁸ Excerpts of an Interview with Dr. Esther Ofei-Aboagye.

⁹ Debrunner, *History of Christianity in Ghana*.

As a representation of Christ, the church has an important role to play within the socio-economic environment. In emulating the lifestyle of Christ, the church is to demonstrate hope, righteousness, and faith and be agents of transformation.¹⁰ Evidently, Jesus made tremendous transformation during his earthly ministry. He set the oppressed free, healed the sick, and preached the message of hope and repentance in order to turn people from darkness into his marvellous light. It is in view of the foregoing that it is usually argued that the church can mobilize its resources for national development and transformation. Aboagyee has further argued that for the church to accomplish its mandate, it must be able to build its human resources potential, transform their hearts and minds and mobilize them for social change and economic progress in their communities.¹¹ The church is properly positioned for significant contribution to national development. The available prospects for the role of the church as a key partner in national transformation must therefore be adequately enhanced for more targeted national development outcomes.

The Bible and Mobilization for Social Transformation

Transformation is bringing about a complete change in the appearance of something or someone, especially so that the thing or person is improved. In both the Old and New Testaments there are many instances where individuals or groups of persons come together, mobilize all the necessary resources, and used them to completely transform human beings and their situations for the better. Usually, these are done in fulfilment of God's promise for a nation or nations. For instance, when the Lord sent Israel into exile in Babylon during the time of Jeremiah, the Lord told them that they would be in exile for seventy years, and after that, he promised to bring them back to Israel, as declared in Jeremiah 29:10-11. This is what the Lord says: "When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will come to you and fulfil my gracious promise to bring you back to this place. For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Each of the three books in the Old Testament, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther, has an important and specific role to play in the fulfilment of this promise from the Lord God Almighty. These three books have a common message when it comes to the process of mobilizing and transforming a nation or nations; namely, that there is an absolute need for both divine and human cooperation and activity in realizing the expected goals of national transformation. In these books, women and men, lay persons, and priests are seen being used by God in the process of national transformation.

Historically, the events in the Book of Esther happened when Israel had been in exile for about thirty-five years in Babylon. That is after thirty-five years in exile God began the move to mobilize human, spiritual, and other resources in fulfilment of his prophetic message sent through Jeremiah regarding the future of Israel. Through the providence of God, Esther, a young Jewish lady became Queen of Persia. She mobilised national fasting and prayer and other resources that played significant roles in the final liberation of the Jews. In Nehemiah 2:6 Esther is the Queen sitting beside King Artaxerxes, as the wife of the king. Her presence with the king certainly had a great positive influence on the king in favour of Israel, when Nehemiah requested and was provided with all the resources that were needed for the national transformation of Israel (Neh 2: 1-10).

Nehemiah was an excellent combination of a good manager and a leader. As a leader, he had a vision for the reconstruction of the broken walls of Jerusalem Nehemiah 1:6, as well as the transformation of the life of the people in Israel (Neh 7:13). As a manager he realised that he was called to efficiently and effectively plan, organize, direct and control the affairs in order to realise the vision. Throughout the book of Nehemiah, it is realised that Nehemiah had a clear sense of purpose: working within the providence of God, and therefore putting his whole being into whatever he did. At the same time, he totally depended on God in the process of mobilizing human and other resources in the transformation of the nation Israel.

¹⁰ Excerpts of an Interview with Rev Prof Emmanuel Asante on Religion, Peace and Security in Ghana October 21, 2019.

¹¹ Excerpts of an Interview with Esther Ofei-Aboagyee.

Socio-Economic Challenges

The quest for national transformation demands a purposive rise above all forms and facets of life that retard the growth and prosperity of a nation. In excerpts from an interview with Sam Okudzeto, he made the observation that national transformation demands a profoundly patriotic inward renewal of every citizen, which must have genuine and lasting positive effects on the society.¹² The Bible calls it the renewal of minds Romans 12:2. In practice, it is a behavioural and attitudinal orientation that reforms individuals and national character. National transformation, therefore, raises the spiritual and moral tenor of the actions and conduct of individual citizens and national institutions. It is a determined turnaround that effectively uplifts and progressively promotes the development of the nation and the well-being of all citizens.

Aboagye in her interview noted that, for the church to successfully mobilise towards national transformation, it must identify and understand the issues surrounding the forms and facets of national life that need to be transformed. The church must target these issues strategically and build the capacities of its members to tackle them.¹³ The church must set measurable goals to focus on social change. This would mean that the church would build on the essential spiritual foundations of preaching the word, prayer and teaching, to design problem-solving projects, monitor their implementation and evaluate their success and sustenance. Several issues that retard the prosperity and well-being of the nation need to be transformed. These are issues which the church, various governments, professional bodies, traditional authorities, civic organizations, the media and ordinary citizens have expressed concern for over the years. The socio-economic challenges that demand transformation according to Kwasi Kwafo Adarkwa are ‘attitudinal, systemic and institutional.’¹⁴

Ethnocentrism and Democratic Culture

Ethnicity is the collective consciousness of a group from the point of view of their origin, culture, history, language and how they relate to each other. According to Emmanuel Asante ‘ethnicity refers to a people’s collective consciousness of who and what they are, their social identity, common memories, interests, etc.’¹⁵ The history of the origins of an ethnic group, its beliefs, and its remembrances are important to that ethnic group because they symbolise a people’s closeness to one another.

We all belong to particular ethnic groups, and we have no choice in deciding to which group we want to belong. We were all born into particular ethnic groups. The sense of identity that ethnicity gives may be essential for involvement in social, religious, and political institutions. In short, ethnicity has strong potential for good.”

Aboagye-Mensah has however indicated that ethnicity is potentially dangerous, especially when it becomes a yardstick for measuring everything and everybody outside our particular group. He stated in his interview with the author “When it comes to this state, then, one is not speaking of ethnicity as such, but ethnocentrism what most Ghanaians refer to as tribalism.”¹⁶ He further noted that “ethnocentrism is an intellectual, emotional and cultural attitude of a particular group of people who regard other belief systems as false, inferior or immoral as compared to their own cultural identity, values, symbols, and ideologies, almost to the point of worshipping them. They feel proud of themselves and their systems while regarding other people with contempt, scorn, and bitter hatred. For

¹² Excerpts of an Interview with Lawyer Sam Okudzeto, National Interest February 13 & 20, 2020.

¹³ Excerpts of a conversation with Most Rev Charles G. Palmer-Buckle. Re-Building Post Social Distancing Societies Part I April 4, & May 15, 2020.

¹⁴ Excerpts of an Interview with Prof Kwasi Kwafo Adarkwa Strategic Planning and National Development March 5&9, 2020.

¹⁵ Excerpts of an Interview with Emmanuel Asante.

¹⁶ Excerpts of an Interview with Most Rev Dr Kwasi Aboagye Mensah on New Year, New Opportunities, Fresh Challenges January 1, 2020.

such a group, virtue consists in killing, plundering, and enslaving those considered outsiders. In many cases, religion is used to support these negative convictions.”¹⁷

Ethnocentrists are inward-looking and dangerously parochial in attitude. The only crop of human beings that are considered important are those from their particular ethnic group. People outside their ethnic groups are expendable. Ethnocentrism seriously affects a person’s value judgement, for those who suffer from it, in most cases, exaggerate and intensify everything in their own ethnic group which differentiates them from others.

In the estimation of Aboagye-Mensah ethnocentrism even does affect the way and manner some Christians vote both in the church and in national elections. For ethnocentric persons, the only criterion for electing a person to any office is whether the person comes from their particular ethnic group. Whether the person has the qualities and capabilities for the office is totally out of the question.¹⁸ Ethnocentrism distorts the sense of judgement of people. Ethnicity gives a sense of blessing and it is very important and provides a stable environment in a strange land. According to Asante, despite the good aspects of ethnicity, when it becomes the only yardstick for every decision making then it becomes ethnocentrism and a dangerous attitude that must attract social transformation.¹⁹

There is the need to rise above religious and indeed ethnic disharmony to be bonded as a nation of patriotic citizens who bring together their varied cultural gifts to enrich the nation. A God-fearing people must ensure that conflicts and disputes do not extend beyond their borders. There is a need to develop ways to nip conflicts in the bud before they run into something else. The rich traditional and religious methods of conflict prevention and resolution have major roles to play. Asante further opined that tact, understanding, honest diplomacy, and non-partisanship are some of the tools needed for this challenging task of ethnocentrism facing the nation.²⁰ As indicated by Okudzeto, the history of Ghana is replete with inter-tribal marriages among ethnic groups. The educational system since independence has provided the opportunity for ethnic interactions which have the potential to make the people appreciate themselves as one people. It is important therefore that the people consider themselves first and foremost as Ghanaians before looking at their ethnic communities.²¹

The creation story and the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ have immense political and religious implications for the effort to develop a democratic culture in Ghana. Democratic culture cannot be created if people only define their identity mainly on the basis of their particular ethnic groups. In any case, so far as the biblical account of creation is concerned mankind’s true identity and unity is grounded in God and not just in ethnicity. It is unfortunate that in this country and other parts of the world, politicians use ethnicity as the basis for ruling a nation. Asante insists that some governments in power deliberately gather around them people of the same ethnic group to exploit the nation.²² This attitude has the potential to create tensions, and in most cases lead to the destruction of human lives. Ethnocentrism can never be the basis of establishing strong democratic culture. It must be noted that political or religious appointment primarily based on ethnic identity is a mark of the loss of the common humanity of mankind. The Ghanaian democratic culture it has been observed is gradually giving in to ethnocentrism, a challenge that demands transformation.

The Church and Ethnocentrism

The challenge of ethnocentrism is the church’s challenge too. There are many Christians who define their unity in terms of their particular ethnic group and not their unity in God. The carnage witnessed among Christians from different ethnic groups in Ghana, and the horrible scenes about the carnage in a country like Rwanda which is mostly Catholic have demonstrated that for some Christians the ethnic

¹⁷ Excerpts of an Interview with Aboagye Mensah.

¹⁸ Excerpts of an Interview with Aboagye Mensah.

¹⁹ Excerpts of an Interview with Emmanuel Asante.

²⁰ Excerpts of an Interview with Emmanuel Asante.

²¹ Excerpts of an Interview with Sam Okudzeto.

²² Excerpts of an Interview with Emmanuel Asante.

blood is thicker than the baptismal water. In Aboagye-Mensah's view, the essential humanity of a people is lost if they define their identity in terms of ethnic group and not in terms of their national identity and their image in God.²³

This does not mean that it is wrong to belong to a particular ethnic group and identity in order to live in harmony as human beings. What is being stressed here is that ethnicity is not the essence of what it means to be truly human and people of God. It is therefore not helpful to use that as a basis for creating church life and democratic culture. The existing unity as a people is found in God Ephesians 2:11-22. In Christ Jesus a new single humanity has been created: therefore, both Jews and Gentiles have been reconciled to God and to one another. Members of the society should thus no longer live as enemies but as people belonging to one family of God. So then there is no need for divisions. In union with Christ Jesus and through the work of the Holy Spirit, God expects the church to be a community where all ethnic groups meet, recognise and accept each other as of equal dignity.

The church confesses Jesus Christ as Lord of all, it must stand firm therefore between the different ethnic groups and have the unyielding ethnic feelings dissolved in its unity with Christ. This is not a message that the church proclaims only to the political community. The church itself is under the obligation to live out what it preaches to the world if it wants its missionary witness to be credible and authentic. Through the Spirit, the church is given a new vision of unity in Christ which is capable of transforming the relationship between diverse ethnic groups in the socio-political and ecclesiastical realms.

Interfaith Harmony

Religious conflict is a major challenge facing the world today. Lives and properties are being lost every day to religious conflicts. Interfaith harmony is essential to resist forces of division that spread misunderstanding and mistrust, especially among people of different religions. Interfaith harmony is a very important issue in the life of every nation. In an interview with Most Rev. Palmer-Buckle, he insisted that no meaningful development can ever take place in Ghana when people of different faiths live in acrimony.²⁴ He stated "There cannot be a society without interfaith cohesion, because our society is made up of varied people with varied beliefs and cultural values. Ghana has witnessed a series of religious tensions. These tensions have led to the destruction of several properties and the loss of lives. Innocent children and socio-economic activities have hugely been affected as a result of religious clashes in the past."²⁵

Ghana is touted to be one of the most peaceful nations in Africa. Over the years, it has become a shining example to other African countries, and the world at large when it comes to how people of different faiths can relate and live with each other peacefully. The feat has been possible because of the continued efforts by the Christian Council of Ghana and other religious bodies in the country to engage in various forms of activities to promote peaceful coexistence.

There have been some pockets of tension among Christians and Muslims in some parts of the country. These pockets of tensions which have become a source of concern have led to the destruction of properties, and sometimes the loss of lives. Some of these clashes have also happened as a result of chieftaincy disputes among people from the same communities. It is important not to limit interfaith relations to only religious groups. Leaders from the chieftaincy institutions must be considered very important stakeholders in the promotion of interfaith harmony. The church must show much interest in the activities of the traditional leadership institution for the purpose of national cohesion.²⁶ Visible participation in the activities of the churches is very important for the efforts toward cohesion.

²³ Excerpts of an Interview with Aboagye-Mensah.

²⁴ Excerpts of an Interview with Most Rev Charles G. Palmer-Buckle on Re-Building Post Social Distancing Societies April 4, & May 15, 2020.

²⁵ Excerpts of an Interview with Most Rev Charles G. Palmer-Buckle.

²⁶ Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, *Indigenous Knowledge and Christian Missions*, (SonLife Press, 2012).

The church must always be guided by the teachings of the Scriptures as stated in Romans 12:18, 'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.' This must remain the motivating factor in the promotion of interfaith harmony. Unless people learn how to live together, work together, and walk together in harmony and peace, they will drift apart and destroy themselves and others simply because they believe differently. The churches and other stakeholders may need to pursue programmes to participate fully in the exercise to ensure harmony and peaceful co-existence among all people of faith. Ecumenical relations have been fostered at the local levels. It is gratifying to note the way and manner in which the ecumenical bodies have worked with the Ahmadiya Mission and the Muslim Community on some national issues, such as the monitoring of elections and education for the promotion of peace. Sheik Aremeyaw admitted that such co-operations have had a positive impact on the nation.²⁷ The national transformation efforts must pay attention to religious conflicts and interfaith faith dialogue.

Fallen Standards of Morality

Fallen standards of morality lead to nation-wrecking issues such as pervasive indiscipline, domestic violence, corruption, etc. These abound at all levels of society. A daily example of indiscipline is the motor riders whose habits defy all traffic rules and regulations. Emile Short has observed that corruption still wears its worn garland with pride and is assumed to be part and parcel of our national life.²⁸ Yet its effects leave deep scars on individuals, institutions and our national character so does domestic violence.

The Domestic Violence Unit of the Ghana Police Service works tirelessly towards curbing such incidents. However, in doing so, the Unit exposes the depths of the existing moral depravity, which calls for more radical preventive actions than punitive ones. More so, if violence can be so easily perpetuated at the domestic level, then the danger of public and community violence is always lurking behind the scenes. The area of morals and ethics, therefore, calls for transformation. Without character transformation, there would be a lack of moral will to do what is good and right as patriotic Ghanaians.

Education, Unemployment and Health Challenges

The quality of education in Ghana has been the subject of many queries. Tony Oteng-Gyasi has called for a transformation that improves the quality of education to produce citizens equipped to tackle the developmental problems of the nation.²⁹ Students must be imbued with the desire to make an impact in their chosen careers. Education must not only consist in having knowledge of all kinds of literature and skills but must also bestow the gift of having dreams to realize national goals (Daniel 1:7). Teachers must mentor and impart positive attitudes. According to Lady Queene Asiedu-Akrofi, the teaching profession must be cleansed of teachers who are always late, absent, sex predators, stagnant in knowledge, and inclined to the stupor of alcoholic drinks. There is also the issue of implementing the various educational policies of the nation successfully, synchronizing the various levels of education (primary, secondary, and tertiary), and providing the institutional environment for purposeful education.³⁰ Problems of education and literacy generate debilitating effects on national life and must be identified and transformed.

Unemployment, especially youth unemployment can be partially linked to issues of education. Many young people seek unavailable jobs. Many drop out of school along the line and do not constitute an employable skilled workforce. Some go through successfully but their skills do not match the requirements of employers. Others have what it takes to get a job, but the jobs are few due to economic

²⁷ Excerpts of an Interview with Sheikh Aremeyaw Shaibu on Islam and Love for Country March 26, 2020.

²⁸ Excerpts of an Interview with Justice Emile Short on Transparency and Public Accountability November 7, 2019.

²⁹ Excerpts of an Interview with Dr. Tony Oteng Gyasi on Young People, Unemployment and Entrepreneurship January 9, 2020.

³⁰ Excerpts of an Interview with Lady Queene Asiedu-Akrofi on Moral Formation of Young People in Schools December 5, 2019.

and other reasons. Beyond unemployment, there are issues related to work habits and ethics that call for attitudinal change in Ghanaian workers, especially those in the public service. Time management in particular is a bane of personal discipline and productivity in Ghana.

Health issues abound in Ghana. An example is the high maternal and infant mortality rates. Whereas some of the factors behind the health challenges may be due to literacy, others relate to the lack of medical care and facilities. In an interview with Charles Ansah, he observed the abuse and misuse of medication as a medical challenge that confronts the nation due to a lack of discipline to follow medical instructions.³¹ Another major health issue is poor sanitation in the various communities. The resultant medical crises such as the regular spread of cholera and resultant death are due to bad habits and behaviours first and foremost. Relevant institutions do not seem to have found a way to provide effective waste disposal systems.

There is currently a high rate of armed robbery as well as the growing menace of bribery and corruption at all levels in society; and the abuse of innocent children. Ghanaians are witnessing an increase in ethnic and cultural tensions. They are alerted to the growing unemployment in the nation that has slowly driven many to experience a very well-defined two-class society, where few have become richer and many have become poverty-stricken and disenfranchised from the wealth of the land.

Political Issues

Some political issues still abound in spite of the rich and enviable experiences of the Fourth Republic. Efforts must be made to transform the tension-packed and fear-ridden nature of election years. There is a need to tame the verbal violence within and between political parties. Ghanaian politics must transform the tinderbox of jobless ‘foot soldiers’ that are a menace both to their own parties and other parties. How can these ‘professional’ grassroots politicians be engaged in regular jobs to reduce livelihood dependence on the political fortunes of their individual political parties?

The Church’s Prospects and Capacity for Transformation

The church may think it does not have the resources and capacity to address these complex social issues, but according to Ofei-Aboagye, it does. Apart from its inexhaustible storehouse of God’s blessings, it has the highest human resources capital in Ghana, highly educated and skilled to research and handle these issues.³² The church’s problem-solving capacity is immense when resources are pulled together. Research, technical reports, and publications abound on these issues. The church can identify its members who are experts and bring them together to study the socio-economic challenges and plan the process towards practical transformation. What the church needs to do is to mobilise its capacity by soliciting expertise and mobilizing these human resources, as it does with its various guilds. According to Adarkwa, the church must re-orient and enthuse its church members especially those who are experts in their various fields and all Ghanaians towards social change.³³

The issues to be tackled are numerous and complex. They must be prioritized and each must be studied to ascertain the realities underpinning them (whether attitudinal or systemic) in order to effectively transform them. The causes of these issues must be assessed and worked upon with appropriate solutions to transform the nation. For Adarkwa to work in tandem with other relevant institutions, the church must then prepare and execute short, medium, and long-term solutions to these problems.³⁴

³¹ Excerpts of an Interview with Rev Prof Charles Ansah on Abuse and Misuse of Medication April 29, 2021.

³² Excerpts of an Interview with Esther Ofei-Aboagye.

³³ Excerpts of an Interview with Kwasi Kwafu Adarkwa.

³⁴ Excerpts of an Interview with Kwasi Kwafu Adarkwa.

Structures and Mobilization

A major resource available to the church is the church's structures and capacity for visioning. The church through its human structures and organs, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit and in obedience to God's word, has worked to transform itself. The ways in which the church operates, worships, communicates, presents itself, and engages partners have changed over the past years of nationhood. The denominations have used retreats, workshops, dialogues, team-building events, reflections, external facilitation, and mediation amongst others, to manage change, schisms, and disagreements and have come out reformed, renewed, and strengthened. These mechanisms for problem-solving and charting new courses can be applied to national transformation and what must be done differently.

The structures of the church are both tangible and intangible. Tangible structures include physically constructed entities or buildings i.e., chapels, manses, schools, health facilities, community halls, and conference facilities among others. Intangible structures would refer to the ways in which processes are linked together or arranged. From this perspective, structures could be social i.e., the relationships between people, departments, organisations, and the good practices and lessons learned about the organisation. Social structures refer to patterns of relationships; how systems are organized and how practices and customs order or guide human behaviours. The arising lessons for mobilization for national development include what works in order to bring out the best in positions, offices, and professionals, and how hierarchies, networks, teams, and matrix arrangements can be used to bring the best out of people. Structures can refer to systems, working arrangements, frameworks, or following a plan or an agenda. Structures are relevant to the concept of mobilization for transformation.

Mobilization involves organising and marshalling available resources in pursuit of common objectives. These resources could be financial, intellectual, institutional, social purposes or resolve, technological or other forms as shall be required. For Ofei-Aboagye it is mobilization that makes the people capable of movement and action. To demobilize or immobilize renders the entity unable to be productive or achieve results. As a military concept, it is an act of preparation to wage war in the Ghanaian case or slow down development. Ofei-Aboagye further opined that the elements of mobilization include systematic organization, communication, strategic movement and deployment of resources, and the availability of appropriate reserves to fall on.³⁵

Interest Groups and Generational Organizations

The different denominations in Ghana operate a variety of organizational structures where the roles of the ordained and the laity are outlined, which have stood the test of time. There are lessons for decentralization and subsidiary from the different churches, some of which are unitary, devolved or connected, or independent but with a recognised coordinating mechanism with clear responsibilities.

Within denominations, congregations are organised into groups and bodies that provide mechanisms for conducting church businesses, meeting the needs of members, and exacting members' responsibility to the church. Under the supervision of clergy, governing structures are established, providing roles for lay leadership. These include sessions, leaders councils, leaders meetings, and governance councils. Others are the Generational Groups, through which different genders and groups are encouraged to experience Christ from their realities and circumstances. Older persons are organised in several congregations. There are service groups through which members' skills and contributions are put at the disposal of the church. Apart from their congregational presence, these groups are often organised vertically, in all congregations, nationwide, and vertically across local, sub-national, and national levels. This provides a formidable mechanism for communication and organization for action, which can be mobilised for national transformation. There are other key interest groups that provide prospects for mobilization. Ofei-Aboagye points to the fact that conferences of ministers, ministers' spouses, etc. for instance, have a shared experience and occupy strategic but underutilized facilities for mobilization in the church, directly and indirectly.³⁶

³⁵ Excerpts of an Interview with Esther Ofei-Aboagye.

³⁶ Excerpts of an Interview with Esther Ofei-Aboagye.

Membership and Transformation

The people of God in their numbers and diversity are a strength that can be considered. Where the Holy Spirit manifests his power in the variety of talents, experiences, and capacities, he enriches and adds value to these resources. If the people are mobilised, they would provide a critical mass with the ethics and orientation to transform such negative behaviour as indiscipline, domestic violence, falling standards of morality, corruption, and insanitary practices.

Transformation is strategically changing for the better. It goes beyond a single, lateral step to a quantum leap forward. It involves taking what is available, reforming, and refreshing it by combining it with new elements and innovation from elsewhere. It can also mean changing the ways of applying, combining, and organising the elements and resources that are available to bring about the required and more effective changes. It is about the purposeful improvement of lives.

Ecumenical Bodies and Relationships

The church consists of different congregations, faith entities, and bodies. Congregations are made up of various groups and individuals. These bodies are also made up of interest groups and definable categories. The diverse elements within the body of Christ present a strength that needs to be harnessed through effective coordination. The existing structures can be identified and harnessed at the national, denominational, and congregational levels.

At the national level, there are Ecumenical bodies such as the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG), the Catholic Bishops Conference, the National Association of Charismatic and Christian Churches (NACCC), and the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC). These bodies have provided a framework through which Christian denominations with common philosophies have communicated, shared information, exercised moral suasion over their members, conducted mediation, conferred recognition, and generally maintained standards. The faith bodies have recognised the potential they have for influencing policy and disseminating information relevant to national development and acted accordingly according to the General Secretary's report to the 2017 Annual General Meeting of the Christian Council of Ghana.³⁷

At the sub-national level, there is the Local Council of Churches (LCC) which has served important roles in helping Christians of different denominations follow a shared agenda. Annual themes are reflected upon jointly. Churches in the localities join together in activities to support their geographical areas and through the activities of the LCCs; the different denominations are visited by others. This has promoted mutual understanding and appreciation of the principles of others.³⁸ The modes of coordination of independent denominations and entities provide the churches with prospects that could be used to strengthen good governance and national transformation. There are also para-church organizations of Christian professionals and business persons which are useful for mobilizing resources and capabilities, networking, advocacy, and information dissemination.

The ecumenical bodies have sought to promote inter-faith cooperation and understanding not only in resolving conflicts, which are inevitable in human societies but also to ensure that the loving-kindness of the God Christians worship and adore, expresses his grace in meeting human needs as they become manifest in human society. Many are those who have benefited from the social services and educational programmes of the ecumenical bodies. The Christian Home Week, the Family Planning and Counselling services as well as the training of family educators all have enriched many lives, couples, and families. As a result of the numerous programmes organised for awareness creation in the Christian community on women and children issues, there are now many women in leadership positions both within the church and the outside community.³⁹

³⁷ The Report of the General Secretary to the 2017 Annual General Meeting of the CCG.

³⁸ The Report of the General Secretary to the 2017 Annual General Meeting of the CCG.

³⁹ The Report of the General Secretary to the 2017 Annual General Meeting of the CCG.

The Ecumenical Bodies and National Transformation

The churches have not allowed their diverse doctrinal differences to prevent them from having fellowship and witnessing to the nation. They have placed their human, material, and spiritual resources at the service of the Church in Ghana and the impacts have been tremendous. The churches moving into the future must be more determined to share their resources in order to have a stronger ecumenical relationship that will be able to fulfil the aspirations of the churches in the nation.

The ecumenical bodies in Ghana have scored commendable milestones over the years. It is an undeniable fact, that they have effectively undertaken their prophetic roles without fear or favour as indicated by Anquandah.⁴⁰ They have been pillars for the weak to lean on. Its leadership and unifying roles cannot be gainsaid. Its effective ecumenical roles in the church, national and international circles with the All African Conference of Churches, the World Council of Churches, other fraternal organizations, and non-governmental bodies are worth mentioning. According to Ofei-Aboagye the cordial relations between church and state which, among other things have enabled congregations to enjoy the freedom of worship and association must be maintained and cherished as a major prospect for its national transformation goals.⁴¹

The major roles of the ecumenical bodies have been in strengthening and supporting member churches to improve and expand the scope of their witness and service within the worldwide ecumenical fellowship. The ecumenical bodies supporting the activities of its member churches act according to the teachings of Jesus Christ. In this regard, they design, mobilize resources and implement programmes and projects reflective of the interest of their member churches and the broader society.

The ecumenical bodies have played significant roles in the socio-economic, political, and spiritual development of the nation. Their ability to build bridges and reconcile opposing factions bear witness to what the churches can achieve when they work together. The important role of the ecumenical bodies in the life of the nation will continue to be sought after now and for a long time to come. People live in a period that is witnessing many social vices. There is a general call for stability and order in the social fabric. Many who are fitful in temper and hasty for quick returns eagerly look to the ecumenical bodies for some meaningful leadership and guidance. The ecumenical bodies must therefore live up to their reputation as the conscience of the people in bringing to the attention of the people the will of God for the nation Ghana.

The work of the ecumenical bodies has come to be considered very useful. It is therefore right and proper that the churches lend their whole-hearted support to them by generous donations, and offering of expertise and time, to the noble work of the various ecumenical bodies. The country has benefitted tremendously from the invaluable services rendered by the Christian Council of Ghana through its practical witnessing of social services, education, Christian marriage and family life, industrial chaplaincy, and inter-faith relations among others.⁴²

According to Anquandah, the ecumenical bodies became the voice for the unheard voices in the 1980s in Ghana.⁴³ Through its determination to speak boldly on socio-economic and political matters affecting the nation, it gave courage to some of its leaders to stride where others feared to tread. During the transition from military dictatorship to parliamentary democracy in 1992, the ecumenical bodies pursued political and social justice on behalf of Ghanaians. Looking back over so much of that history, it seems that these achievements are small in comparison to the various challenges facing God's church in Ghana. Nevertheless, inspiration and instruction can be drawn from the Word of God and the founding fathers and mothers whose faith, labour, and toil gave birth to and nurtured the various Christian bodies to their present state.

⁴⁰ Anquandah, *Agenda Extraordinaire: 80 Years of the Christian Council of Ghana, 1929-2009*.

⁴¹ Excerpts of an Interview with Esther Ofei-Aboagye.

⁴² Opuni-Frimpong, "Doing Public Theology in African Christianity: A Reflection on Communiqués by Churches in Ghana."

⁴³ Anquandah, *Agenda Extraordinaire: 80 Years of the Christian Council of Ghana, 1929-2009*.

The relationship among members of the Christian Council of Ghana is not merely fraternal. It gives a sense of one family. The member churches have related in ways that have given credibility to Christian leadership in Ghana. In many ways and on many issues, especially on issues affecting the country, they have spoken with one voice, defending the church's prophetic authority and uncompromisingly pursuing the dictates of their Christian convictions. Ecumenical movement and for that matter, its instruments are not just about projects, caring for refugees, writing communiqués to government about public issues. At the bottom of these occupations are the intentions, desires, and commitments to obey the will of God that nothing in all creation shall be separated from the love of God that all shall be drawn into and included in the one world created by God. In other words, spirituality i.e., obedience to the will of God, is the dynamo of ecumenism. Commitment is not an option. It is the calling of each and every church.

Documentation, Legacy and Communication

Some of the churches have consistently been present in Ghana for about two centuries and over. Records have been kept. Letters, official communication, journals, sermons, minutes of various bodies, transactions, training manuals, registers, baptismal and death certifications, and countless other documents present considerable resources. The formats could provide insights into organizing information. The contents provide history, a record of ways of doing things, what the precedents have been, and evidence of past practices. Though technology may have changed, the principles of communication and the values of the church have not.

The church has a history that provides a legacy and lessons. Legacies are handed down from one set of people to their successors. Legacies may be tangible items of value including property or an intangible heritage such as a name or a brand. Fortunately, the church in Ghana has both. Various denominations have acquired landed properties as well as business and commercial interests. These legacies provide resources to sustain the church and must be invested in to sustain them. The intangible heritage of the name and reputation of the church; the heroes and heroines, the culture, and the values of the church can inspire the Ghanaian population. If the church is to contribute to internal as well as national transformation, it must guard their inheritance well. There are potential gains to be made if these positive attributes are properly documented, preserved, and disseminated widely. The church must use the advances in communication technology to its advantage. The church must also recognise the need to revisit its lessons learned over the years and the role it has played in national and sub-national development.

Moral Authority

Beyond the general exhortations on responsible living, specific national problems can be tackled with biblical references to support actions on them. The church by its placement, membership, and associations has access to key Ghanaian figures. This provides a great opportunity for influencing society through moral suasion as they participate constantly for moral and spiritual formation. The leadership of the church must not only shy away from engaging influential persons both formally and informally on issues of urgency.

The church has not been consistent or urgent in its commentary on public life. Too many voices have sought to play it safe, using the excuse that the church should not get involved in politics. However, there are issues in national development that impede the fullness of life that Christians expect. To borrow from Paul, 'the church needs to 'preach'. The church needs to be 'instant in season and out of season... with all long-suffering and doctrine' (2 Timothy 4: 2). The Bible is rich with doctrine and the church's structures are resilient enough to contribute to national transformation. The church has tended to follow other civil society entities, rather than lead the charge. Sometimes, the efforts have been too little, too late, in spite of the fact that the church has the structures and the moral authority for the purpose of social change.

CONCLUSION

The role of Public Theology in national transformation in Ghana is to help shape a vision for a just and equitable society and to guide the church's engagement with the broader society to achieve that vision. By providing moral leadership, promoting social justice, encouraging public participation, fostering interfaith dialogue, and advocating for the marginalized, Public Theology promotes national transformation in Ghana. It further provides moral leadership, encourages civic engagement, promotes ethical values, facilitates dialogue, and supports social transformation. It is also a major factor shaping the national discourse around issues of public importance and promotes a more just and equitable society. The church also has a strong foundation of ecumenical relationships, legacy, and structures for the mobilization of its members, social engagement, and sound spirituality to build upon. By leveraging these strengths and exploring new opportunities, the church is well-positioned to play a crucial role in promoting social and economic transformation in Ghana.

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