

# **Speaking Truth to Power: Ghanaian Methodists' Public Witness 1960-2000.**

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In post-independence Africa, the Christian churches, particularly the mainline churches, have wielded great influence in the African state. This has occurred when the abuses and failures of African government have become more evident. According to political scientist Richard Joseph, the churches in Africa emerged as “the only tolerated countervailing power to that of the state in many countries” (Joseph 1993, 232). The churches’ role was facilitated primarily by the Africanization of the clergy and their serving as providers of basic social services. In addition, the fact that African countries experienced totalitarian regimes meant that the Christian churches were, for the most part, a refuge for civil society, zones of associational liberty, and had the singular privilege of speaking to people across “tribal lines, class distinctions, racial groups, political ideology, and international boundaries” (Joseph 1993, 238). As zones of liberty, they became repositories of the very idea itself of the entitlement to freedoms of conscience, association, assembly, and expression. The very multiplicity of denominations is an expression of societal pluralism.

The euphoria of independence in 1957 gave way to political instability through military interventions in the 1960s and 1970s, and then the experience of the economic debacle of the 1980s. In the 1990s, in an ironic twist of fate, the collapse of communism was accompanied by a dramatic escalation of the crisis of governance and democratization in Africa. Africa seems never to attract headline attention except in its diseases and wars, corruption and death. To witness to truth in such an environment is a very challenging calling.

MCG has distinguished itself not only in the fields of education and health-care delivery but also in the socio-political world of Ghana’s tortuous political life. This was evident even in the decades prior to the gaining of autonomy in 1961.

### **MCG’s Political Voice Prior to Independence**

As Boafo states, “the mission of the Methodist Church, Ghana, from the time of the missionaries, has been the Wesleyan objective to spread scriptural holiness throughout the land by the proclamation, demonstration, and teaching of the message of salvation in Christ. Its message is holistic, affecting body, mind and soul, and addressing the needs of humankind.” (1999, 130) In this regard, Boafo contends, “MCG has established itself as a strong force for spiritual and socio-political reform in Ghana, a true reflection of the Wesleyan tradition. Generally the church did not divorce itself from the socio-political and economic concerns of Ghanaians” (Boafo 1999, 130). The examples of such action span the pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence eras in Ghanaian politics. According to John S. Pobee,

The Methodists produced some of the earliest newspapers which were committed to the defense of oppressed Africans, e.g. *The Christian Messenger and Examiner* (Cape Coast), produced by Rev. T. B. Freeman and Rev. H. Wharton in 1839; *The Christian Reporter: The Gold Coast Methodist*, edited interestingly by two Europeans, Rev. W. T. Coppin and Rev. W. M. Cannell, and which demanded African representatives on the Legislative Council; *The Gold Coast Methodist Times*, the editor of which was at one stage Rev. S. R. B. Solomon, who to indicate his Africanness, changed his name to Rev.

S. R. B. Attoh-Ahumah. (Pobee 1991, 57)

Using the medium of the church newspaper *Gold Coast Methodist Times*, editor Samuel Richard Brew Attoh-Ahumah fought the imposition of the 1897 Lands Bill, which was designed to vest lands in the British Crown. Attoh-Ahumah argued, “Our silence on matters political, so far as they traverse the fundamental principles of the Christian faith, will only synchronize with our absence from the editorial chair which position, of course, we occupy on sufferance” (Dickson 1991, 137–38). Such courageous advocacy is a worthy example of the role of Ghanaian Christians, especially Methodists, in the political evolution of their nation-state. The Methodist always seeks a public witness. The historian David Kimble recognizes this fact when he writes,

The nationalist movement could hardly have got underway had it not been for was through the liberation of the individual. E. W. Smith has summed up very well the revolutionary impact of the Christian teaching on African society, especially of the idea that every man is responsible to God for his own actions. The missionary, he points out, seeks individuals’ conviction and conversion: for an African to respond means breaking in some degree from his group—an act which he has never before contemplated the possibility of doing. The preaching of moral autonomy of the person, of his right and duty to act according to Christian conscience, was one of the factors that led to the questioning of the authority of the chief under the older order. It was only a matter of time before this in turn led to a questioning of European authority and its moral basis.<sup>1</sup> (Kimble 1963, 166)

Clearly the churches of Ghana played a critical role in the nationalism movement before the days of political independence. The challenge was to bring a prophetic witness to the public after political independence. With its mission of public engagement and tradition of political concern, the MCG attempted to meet the challenge.<sup>2</sup>

Ghanaian theologian John S. Pobee summarizes the role that the Christian churches in Africa should play in national political life: “The New Testament is united in counseling submission to the State,” says Pobee. “Such submission may take the form of paying taxes, direct or indirect,

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<sup>1</sup> There are similar sentiments expressed by other African nationalists all over the continent. The Zimbabwean Ndabaningi Sithole wrote: “The Christian church has created in Africa . . . a strong Christian consciousness that transcends the usual barriers of race and color, and this Christian consciousness is based on the love of God and the love of our fellow men. It is based on a strong sense of human justice. The story of African nationalism would be incomplete if this Christian awareness was ignored, since it is this awareness that is an integral part of the creativeness of African nationalism. . . . The Christian faith may be regarded in one sense as its spiritual father and in another as its guardian angel, whether or not the Church recognizes these roles.” He concludes, “The Christian Church by sending religious, educational, and industrial missionaries to Africa broadened the outlook of many an African. It provided opportunities for many Africans to develop their latent qualities; it has discouraged tribal hatred and encouraged universal brotherhood instead. Incidentally, tribalism was also discouraged by African nationalism when it emerged so that, in this respect, the Christian Church paved the way of the universalism—that is, the non-tribalness—inherent in the African nationalism that was to come. The present enlightened political leadership would be next to impossible but for the Christian Church that spread literacy to many parts of Africa” (Sithole 1977, 88–89, 94). In Ghana, for instance, the CPP used the Christian hymn “Lead, Kindly Light” as part of its political musical tradition. The party later adopted a hostile stance towards the mainline Christian churches.

<sup>2</sup> Ghana’s rather fluctuating post-independence political history has been aptly likened to a swinging pendulum. Nkrumah’s socialist regime was replaced by moderate army officers, followed by Western-oriented democracy, followed by a spell of military dictatorship. In 1979 Rawlings appeared on the scene, first as a revolutionary; then after a brief constitutional government, Flight Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings assumed power again, first as a military ruler and then as the first president of the Fourth Republic (Pellow and Chazan 1986).

praying for the state, especially that it may direct the affairs of the state in all godliness and righteousness, and in general supporting every measure of the State which makes for order as against chaos in society.” Pobee further elaborates that such submission is urged for two reasons, namely, that the government is appointed by God (whether recognized or not), and that its mandate for governance is to be exercised under God. Furthermore, it is tasked by God to be a “bulwark against anarchy and through that bring peace, harmony, and security to the society.” Finally, if the government fails in such a task, it is the calling of the church to “declare itself against particular anarchistic acts.” Pobee concedes, “The problem is the delicate balance between submission and resistance” (1974, 113).

Theologians in Africa have traditionally analyzed the engagement of African churches in national political issues along one of two lines, cultural or political. Sub-Saharan African theologians have been charged with being preoccupied with issues of the cultural interpretation of Christianity; those from southern Africa have been portrayed as focused on issues of the political ramifications of the gospel in a part of the world where inequality was widely related to race. Most analyses run along the line posed by Desmond Tutu in his article “Black Theology/African Theology: Soul Mates or Antagonists?” (1975; Young 1986). Current literature tries to show the inherent complementarity between the two foci of theology in Africa. One of Ghana’s theologians, Emmanuel Martey, brings these themes together in the title of his book, *African Theology: Inculturation and Liberation* (1996).

According to John Pobee, the church in Ghana is a “force with which to reckon.” Given the precarious political history of Ghana in the period under review, 1961–2001, when there were four constitutionally elected governments and five military regimes,<sup>3</sup> the role of the church has been pivotal in preserving human rights and serving as a bulwark against the oppression of the ordinary citizen. Pobee asserts:

For all the negative things that have been said about the church in Africa, she stands in Africa a force with which to reckon. Partly because of her contribution to the social services, especially in the areas of education and health, the impact of the churches goes deeper and more widely than the statistics would suggest. Through their work in the social services, a strong Christian conscience about the worth of the individual was formed and generally, the Christian ethic became deeply implanted in Ghana. In addition to the avowed Christians, a sizeable proportion of the population represented “diffused Christianity” which was a useful asset to the Church. For it meant that there were several people in all walks of life who, even if they were not avowed Christians, were neither against the Church. It meant that there was a fund of goodwill towards the Church and

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<sup>3</sup> 1951–66, Kwame Nkrumah, CPP; elected president of First Republic, 1960; 1966–69, Emmanuel Kwasi Kotoka and Akwasi A. Afrifa lead coup d’etat, and establish NLC (National Liberation Council); Kotoka assassinated in failed coup; Afrifa takes over, then honors election of Busia; 1969–72, Kofi Abrefa Busia elected Prime Minister of Second Republic, Aug. 22, 1969; 1972–75, I. Kutu Acheampong, NRC (National Redemption Council), assumes control in coup d’etat, January 13, 1972, constitution suspended; 1975–78, Kutu Acheampong, SMC (Supreme Military Council), continues as head of government, followed in 1978–79 by Fred Akuffo (also SMC); 1979 Jerry John Rawlings (a Marxist), AFRC (Armed Forces Revolutionary Council), takes power (for four months only); Acheampong and Akuffo executed; then Rawlings hands over to Limann; 1979–81, Hilla Limann, PNP (Peoples National Party; revival of Nkrumah’s CPP), elected president of Third Republic; 1981–92, Rawlings, PNDC (Provisional National Defense Council) resumes power; June 1982, three judges abducted and murdered; June 1989, Religious Bodies (Registration) Law 221 promulgated (mainline churches resist); elections return Rawlings to power as president of the Fourth Republic; in Nov.–Dec. 1996 he wins another four years; 2000–, John Kuffuor, NPP (National Patriotic Party), elected president.

Christianity, on the capital of which the Church could count. The combination of the avowed Christians and the diffused Christianity meant that Christianity and the Christian Churches were heavy weights with which to reckon in Ghanaian national life. (Pobee 1991a, 14–15)

Given the goodwill that Ghanaian Christianity enjoyed, church leaders were able to operate in this unstable political atmosphere. Their political engagement was never without cost as governments sought to divide their ranks and develop counter poles of religious support. The witness of Ghanaian churches in the political arena is made more complex by the fact that in Ghanaian traditional thought authority is vested in a chief who is as much a political as a religious leader. Kofi Abrefa Busia (later prime minister of Ghana) in his studies on the chieftaincy institution wrote that: “Chieftaincy in Ashanti is a sacred office. This has been shown by the rites of the chief’s enstoolment and by his part in ceremonies. As long as he sits upon the stool of the ancestors, his person is sacred. As the successor of the ancestors he performed various rites for the welfare of the people... If he abused his power, he was divested of it by having his special connexion with his ancestors, established on his enstoolment, severed”<sup>4</sup> (Busia 1968, 36–37; Sarpong 1971).

Ghanaian traditional authority is therefore on the axis of a “double pivot”—that of a political and a religious leader. “By thus reckoning the authority of living rulers to be that of ancestors,” Bediako argues, “African tradition appeared to make every challenge to political authority an attack upon the sacral authority of ancestors on whose goodwill and favor the community’s continuance and prosperity are held to depend” (Bediako 2000, 111). Bediako further elaborates that Christ by his cross desacralized all worldly power and “relativizes its inherent tendency in a fallen universe to absolutize itself. . . . However, if Christianity desacralizes, it does not de-spiritualize. The African world continues a spiritual world; what changes is the configuration of forces. The human environment remains the same, but the answers to its puzzles are different” (Bediako 2000, 104).

In any case, the traditional conception of power did not augur well for interventions by a group such as MCG, endeavoring to speak for those without an official outlet for their concerns. And yet, the Christian church in Ghana has never wavered in its calling to remind temporal authorities of the limits of their political power. In almost all cases of political engagement, the mainline Christian churches of Ghana, generally through the ecumenical Christian Council of Ghana (CCG),<sup>5</sup> have acted in concert with the Catholic Bishops Conference (CBC) and its Catholic

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<sup>4</sup> The stool is the traditional symbol of authority. It symbolizes group solidarity, embodies the spirit of ancestors, and signifies their presence. The stool represents the continuity between the living and the dead. Chiefs are therefore said to be ‘enstooled’ or ‘destooled.’ Unlike southern and eastern societies in Ghana, Togo, and Nigeria where the stool is used, in the northern parts of Togo, Nigeria, Benin, and Ghana an animal skin is sometimes used as the symbol of the chief or king, and the skin represents the throne or stool. The most important aspect of Ashanti chieftaincy was undoubtedly the religious one. “An Ashanti chief filled a sacral role . . . [His stool] represented the community, their solidarity, their permanence, their continuity. The chief was the link between the living and the dead, and his highest role was when he officiated in their public religious rites, which gave expression to the community values. He then acted as the representative of the community . . . The sacred aspect of the chief’s role was a powerful sanction of his authority” (Busia, 1967, 26).

<sup>5</sup> The CCG was founded on October 30, 1929, by the AME Zion, The English Church Mission (Anglican, later the Church of the Province of West Africa), Ewe (later Evangelical Presbyterian Church-Bremen Mission), Presbyterian Church of Ghana-Basel Mission, and Wesleyan Methodist Church. In 1932 the Salvation Army joined and during the 1950s and 1960s the following churches also joined the CCG: African Methodist Episcopal, Baptist Church, Society of Friends, Mennonites, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, and Evangelical Lutheran Church. The Young Men’s Christian Association and the Young Women’s Christian Association are associate members. The first non-mainline

Secretariat, thus unifying the voice of the Christian churches.

In the mid-twentieth century in Ghana, the Christian churches were a formidable presence.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, they were perceived as appendages of colonialism that needed radical reform. In 1944 Ako Adjei, a classmate of Kwame Nkrumah at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania and the person who later persuaded the United Gold Coast Convention to appoint Nkrumah as its general secretary, wrote, “Spiritual or religious missions constitute one of the several agencies through which . . . a group of people or nation has been able to dominate another. Today many Africans look upon the Christian church as nothing more than an agent of European and American imperialism in Africa” (Ako-Adjei 1944, 190). Doubtless, since this was written at the height of the nationalist struggle, such an outlook is rather dated.

### **The Christian Churches and the Nkrumah Government**

One of the earliest attempts in the second period of the Nkrumah government (1961–1966) to wrest power from the mission-related churches was to take control of education in the country, a role that had fallen to the local churches because of the pioneering work of missionaries in education. The government was keen to assume control of the educational system in Ghana because Nkrumah considered that the Christian church, given its conservative stance, was an inappropriate body to be forming the mental and social capabilities of Ghanaian youth (Haynes 1996, 115).

Control of the education of the youth became a battleground for the mind and hearts of the next generation. In the 1951 Accelerated Development Plan for Education, Nkrumah’s government offered to pay 40 percent of the salaries of teachers through the local authorities, and it threatened to deny assistance to any school established by a religious organization unless the governing body at the local level approved. The churches’ swift and uncompromising rejection ensured that the existing schools continued to enjoy the benefits of the central government while agreeing to submit any new educational ventures to these new measures (Pobee 1976, 123–24).

Nkrumah swept to power on the currents of nationalism that had been initiated by the Ghanaian intelligentsia starting as far back at the days of the Fante Confederacy<sup>7</sup> and the West African Aborigines Rights Protection Society.<sup>8</sup> These nationalist groups were composed of Ghanaian elite who were all trained in Christian institutions (mainly Methodist); some held high positions in their separate churches. While the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC), arguably the early to mid-twentieth century successor organization to these movements, had advocated for self-government, the Nkrumah brand of nationalism added an urgent imperative: self-government *now*.

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church to be admitted was F’Eden Church in 1970. (See Pobee 1991, 50.)

During the years under review, 1961–2000, the following MCG presidents served as chairmen of the CCG: F. C. F. Grant (1963–65), T. W. Koomson, (1968–69), C. K. Yamoah, (1975–76), C. A. Pratt (1979), S. B. Essamuah (1984), J. S. A. Stephens (1988), and K. A. Dickson (1991–1993). The following served as general secretaries: Peter K. Dagadu (1952–58), W. G. M. Brandful (1965–76), and Rev. Dr. Robert Aboagye-Mensah (1998–2003). For a biographical treatment of Peter Dagadu, see Peter Barker (1983).

<sup>6</sup> In 1948 there were 641,427 Christians in Ghana distributed as follows: Colony 18.5%, Ashanti 13.7%, Togoland 20.5%, and Upper Region 3.6% (Williamson 1965, 11). In 1966, 42.8% of the population claimed to be Christians (Pobee 1976, 122).

<sup>7</sup> Fante chiefs wanting to defend themselves against the Asante and certain Europeans, specifically the Dutch, who had great political and economic power, established the Fante Confederacy in 1863. The confederacy was also established because of the declining interest of the British in protecting coastal tribes against Asante invasion. The confederacy also recognized that the abolition of slavery meant that there needed to be an economic replacement. Its stated objectives were to promote friendly relations among the Fante, improve the country at large, and improve agriculture, education, and the mining industry (Ward 1967, 251–64; Hayford 1903, 327).

<sup>8</sup> Primarily established by chiefs and the middle-class merchants and intelligentsia as a nationalist body (Ward 1967, 357).

When Nkrumah therefore withdrew from the UGCC, he benefited from a mass movement that had been originally led and nurtured by an intelligentsia that had been educated in mission schools. Nkrumah adopted the political ideology of socialism.<sup>9</sup> Whether this was an actual system of government that Nkrumah passionately believed in, or whether it was merely a convenient way to express his anti-Westernism, is a subject that has occupied analysts for some time.<sup>10</sup> In any case, Nkrumah promoted socialist policies that had baneful consequences for a country with such a large and active Christian population.

One of the earliest incidents in which the churches stood up to the government's desire to concentrate absolute powers was its stance against the Preventive Detention Act of July 18, 1958. By that law, the government gave itself the power to detain, without trial or charge, anyone considered dangerous to the security of Ghana for up to five years without a right of appeal to the courts. The CCG sent a representation to Nkrumah and Attorney General Geoffrey Bing on two different occasions, arguing that natural justice required that "any accused person should be given an opportunity to defend himself face to face with his accusers" (Pobee 1991, 60).

When their appeals failed to turn the tide of authoritarianism in Ghana, the Christian churches appointed two of its leaders, Francis C. F. Grant, president of MCG, and E. N. Odjidja, moderator of the Presbyterian Church, to visit detainees and report on their plight. Even though the churches failed in their attempts to stop human rights abuses, MCG, acting in concert with CCG, did not fail in providing pastoral oversight to the voiceless and the falsely accused.<sup>11</sup>

Perhaps the most far-reaching aspect of Nkrumah's dictatorial tendencies was the quasi-deification and institutionalization of Kwame Nkrumah himself. Religious language was rampantly utilized in comparing Nkrumah to the founders and leaders of the great religions of the world.<sup>12</sup> Religious texts were recast in symbolism that depicted the central salvific role of Nkrumah in the liberation of Ghana from colonial power. The Lord's Prayer, the Apostles Creed, and Christian hymnody were all employed to show the divine origin and being of Kwame Nkrumah. One outstanding example is that of the statue of Nkrumah which adorned the Parliament Building in

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<sup>9</sup> There is considerable literature on the evolution of this political ideology over the years. I have found B. D. G. Folson (1977) very useful in delineating the various strands of ideologies within Nkrumah's party apparatus. Folson quotes Nkrumah's foremost political opponent, Dr. J. B. Danquah, as responding in derision when asked whether Nkrumah was a communist: "No, he knows nothing about communism. He calls himself a Marxist socialist, but he has not read even ten pages of Karl Marx." Folson refers to Basil Davidson, *Black Star: A View of the Life and Times of Kwame Nkrumah* and to Robin McKown, *Nkrumah: A Biography* as two sympathetic treatments that give little credence to Nkrumah's assertion that he was a socialist.

<sup>10</sup> Pobee considers Nkrumah to have been a thoroughbred socialist who only acquiesced to Western demands and expectations of "colonial overlords," and so spoke of democracy (Pobee 1976, 125). Pellow and Chazan argue that "as an ideology, Nkrumahism was inconsistent: it drew haphazardly from Marxism and Leninism, from Fabian socialism and British libertarianism, from a mystification of the African past, and from a variety of Christian sources. Far removed from Ghanaian realities, it became an abstract vision which could not provide the concrete guidelines needed to help Ghana overcome the economic and political difficulties it confronted at the outset of independence" (Pellow and Chazan 1986, 42).

<sup>11</sup> The Anglican Bishop Reginald Roseveare, then chairman of the CCG, epitomized the church's condemnation of the Young Pioneers. When he railed against its godless nature, Nkrumah deported him but ultimately acquiesced to the enormous pressure from the Christian community and invited him back into the country. See Obiri-Addo 1997 and Pobee 1991a, where Pobee cites Nkrumah's capitulation as indicating that the churches in Ghana were "heavy weights with which to reckon."

<sup>12</sup> An example may be seen in an editorial of the Nkrumah party paper, the *Evening News*, February 4, 1960, which states, "All day, all night, we are reinforced in our belief that the whole phenomena of Nkrumah's emergence is second to none in the history of the world's Messiahs from Buddha and Muhammed to Christ." Ten years earlier the Beatitudes had been parodied in the same paper (Dickson 1991, 139).

Accra. It bore the inscription, “Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added to you.” While Dickson sees this favorably as “an acknowledgement of the church’s role in the development of the people’s consciousness,” he warns, “it does suggest a sacralisation of nationalism which could have the effect of giving the Christian faith a less than authentic character” (Dickson 1991, 142).

Pobee contends that the CCG was misguided in its protests of these parodies and acts of the Nkrumah government. “Being a parody of a dominical saying does not make it blasphemous or idolatrous. . . . [CCG’s objection] is an error of judgement” (Pobee 1976, 130). Nkrumah turned his birthplace into a shrine of pilgrimage and appropriated several honorifics<sup>13</sup> reserved for chiefs in the Ghanaian cultural system, even to the extent of allowing himself to be proclaimed as a chief in a part of the country where he had no blood connection.

But, according to Bediako, Nkrumah “became an ancestor-ruler in the old sacral sense” (Bediako 1995, 242). By integrating in himself the powers and privileges of altar and throne, Nkrumah ensured that all opposition to his rule would be construed in the Ghanaian context as inimical to the well being of the society as a whole. In another sense he had twisted the understanding of the derivative power of all earthly power to suit his political ambitions.

Even though he concedes that Nkrumah did nothing to stop these acts of personality cult, Pobee shows dissatisfaction with the Christian churches, saying that they were not distinguishing between “the *esse* of Christianity and what was an *accident* of history” (Pobee 1976, 142; emphasis in the original). Pobee argues that the Christian churches took an unenlightened view of African tradition and failed to give moral leadership. The Ghanaian Methodist Kwesi Dickson offers a corrective analysis, in my opinion, when he writes, “That such compositions constituted an assault upon Christianity must be recognized. . . . Parodying religious language with a view to highlighting what is politically desirable could have the effect of devaluing religious sentiment” (Dickson 1991, 140). By highlighting motives, Dickson engaged the debate at the core. Obiri-Addo, I think, is incorrect when he states, “Dickson misses the overall context of Nkrumah’s political leadership, particularly Nkrumah’s quest to reorder Ghana’s political culture through a synthesis of what is good in all available traditions, including Christianity” (Obiri-Addo 1997, 119). Nowhere in history can one say that a reordering of political culture through deification of its leaders has produced a salutary advantage for the ordinary citizen. The tale of woe that follows when a megalomaniac tyrant uses religious language and sentiment to enforce his self-delusion is every human-rights activist’s nightmare.

Dickson argues, “Nkrumah emerged at a time when the Christian Churches in Ghana were tied in their theology and ethos, to the founding Churches in Europe and America.” On matters of socio-political and economic substance the CCG was virtually silent at its 1955 Conference (Dickson 1991, 149). Therefore without a locally developed and sufficiently clear understanding of the nexus binding religion and life, the church is prone to play a merely reactionary role instead of “working to create such public opinion as would make it difficult for such excesses as were objected

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<sup>13</sup> Eight of such honorifics are provided by Pobee and underlined by Dickson as well: *Asomdweehene*—Prince of Peace, *Osagyefo*—one who saves in battle, *Oyeadeeyie*—one who rights wrongs, *Kasapreko*—one who speaks once and for all, *Kukuroduron*—brave or valiant one, *Osuodumgya*—water that extinguishes fire, *Abrofusuro*—the one who instills fear in Europeans. Akan-speaking Christians in referring to God in extempore prayers regularly use all the honorifics except the last one. Pobee is also right in reminding us that these honorifics are also used in referring to the Akan chiefs, but he fails to show that given the religious role of the chiefs these honorifics are not applied to their persons but to their office, a distinction that the Nkrumah party refused to make (Pobee 1976, 136; Dickson 1991, 145).

to, to be perpetrated” (Dickson 1995, 261).

Dickson sees the church’s interventions in the Nkrumah era as a failure. His criticism is three-fold: Because the church was limited to an “inherited theology,” it was not adequately aware of the socio-political climate of Ghana; the membership was not kept informed of the leaders’ protestations on its behalf; and the church failed to create the conditions necessary to discourage the excesses of the regime (Dickson 1995, 261).<sup>14</sup> In my view, Dickson’s critique is unnecessarily severe. Yes, certainly Ghanaians had received the gospel from the West, yet in the process they had appropriated it to their needs. Whatever the limitations of its theology, the Christian church was a heavyweight in Ghanaian society.<sup>15</sup> It is from the ranks of the churches that nationalism was spawned and colonialism terminated. When nationalist African governments took over from the colonial administration, they did not want to entertain any opposition, and therefore any organization that had a national character, even if it was apolitical, was considered an enemy of the state. Thus it should not be surprising that the churches “failed to create the conditions” for countering Nkrumah’s excesses. The complexity of the situation lies in the fact that, although the MCG and the other historic churches had given the philosophical and practical motivation for self-government, the Nkrumah regime—with its blatant communist leanings, whether deep-seated or merely perceived—was not their first choice to replace the colonial masters. In such an atmosphere, whatever the historic churches did or said was interpreted as part of that neo-colonial conspiracy aimed at undermining the sovereignty of the new state. The church deserves commendation for speaking up as much as it did. Even secular analysts admit, “Nkrumah became a cult figure, a deity, and the sole decision maker in Ghana” (Pellow and Chazan 1986, 41). Offering prophetic witness in such an environment is dangerous if not outright impossible.

For the Christian an example is set in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and supremely through his Cross. In Kwame Bediako’s memorable words, worth repeating, “By his Cross, Jesus desacralized all worldly power, relativizing its inherent tendency, in a fallen universe, to absolutize itself. . . . The Cross desacralizes *all* the powers, institutions and structures that rule human existence and history—family, nation, social class, race, law, politics, economy, religion, culture, tradition, custom, ancestors—stripping them all of any pretensions to ultimacy” (Bediako 1995a: 245; emphasis original).

### **The MCG and the National Liberation Council Government**

On February 24, 1966, Nkrumah was overthrown in a coup d’etat led by Lt. Col. Emmanuel Kwasi Kotoka and Major Akwasi A. Afrifa. (The public jubilation that followed somewhat justifies the leaders’ self-designation as the National Liberation Council.) Barely a year later, an attempt was made to overthrow the NLC. On April 16 and 17, 1967, a military unit based in the eastern Ghanaian city of Ho entered Accra and took over the Broadcasting House. Kotoka, the leader of the coup against Nkrumah, was badly wounded and died on April 18. The mutineers were overpowered by

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<sup>14</sup> The Christian churches in Ghana mounted a very broad-based civic education program in 1988, organizing lectures, symposia, and seminars on the democratization process. (See Bo afo 1999, 233.)

<sup>15</sup> David Kimble states, “The training for leadership given to African ministers . . . may be regarded as a positive stimulus to the development of the nationalist movement. . . . Church organizations did not take a definite part in nationalist agitation, but prominent members were often outspoken on political issues. Most educated Africans were the product of Missions Schools, and accepted their teaching as a guide to the new, western ways of life, and a background to political thinking” (Kimble 1963, 161).



NLC loyalists, then tried in a military tribunal and sentenced to death by firing squad. With the strong support of MCG as expressed in the 1967 Annual Conference agenda, CCG responded to the public executions of Lt. Samuel Arthur and Lt. Moses Yeboah as follows:

The Council was deeply exercised by the subject of the holding of executions in public following the insurrection of April 17. While not questioning the rightness of the verdicts and sentences passed, the Executive [of the CCG] agreed with the view that holding the executions in public encouraged crude demonstrations of hatred and excited morbid curiosity in the on-lookers and in the public at large. Although no attempt whatever was made by any form of public address system to work upon the emotions of the crowd in any way, nevertheless in the event the behaviour of part of the crowd as reported in the local press could by any standard of judgment be of no credit to Ghana and its people. In view of the possibility of other executions, the Executive duly addressed a letter to the National Liberation Council in which these views were made known. The National Liberation Council most promptly replied giving the assurance that no future public executions were contemplated. (Minutes 1967, 100)

In this intervention, CCG seems to agree with the government's decision to execute those who had used military means to overthrow it. Furthermore, the prompt response that the NLC gave to CCG's letter showed a remarkable degree of respect by the government toward the church, a respect that has often been lacking in Ghana's church-state relations.

### **MCG and the Busia Government**

In 1969 the NLC conducted democratic elections, and Kofi Abrefa Busia was chosen as prime minister of the next government.<sup>16</sup> In his inaugural speech Busia stated, "We think the yardstick by which our success or failure should be judged must be the condition of the human being himself. We must judge our progress by the quality of the individual, by his knowledge, his skills, his behaviour as a member of society, the standards of living he is able to enjoy and by the degree of co-operation, harmony and brotherliness in our community life as a nation... Our goal is to enable every man and woman in our country to live a life of dignity in freedom" (Okyere 2000, 214).<sup>17</sup>

Before assuming political office, Busia had already distinguished himself as an intellectual. In that regard, Colin B. Essamuah records, "Methodist Puritanism permeated . . . his writings and the piety of his personal faith shone throughout his simple exposition of issues, no doubt due to his position as a Local Preacher. . . The effectual vehicles of his scholastic expression were his affiliation to tradition, both intellectual and customary, and his deep Christian faith" (Essamuah 1982, 10–11).

With one of its own distinguished members coming into the prime minister's office, MCG

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<sup>16</sup> Busia was born July 11, 1913, to the royal house of Wenchi. In his youth, he was raised and received his education in the home of Methodist missionaries, the Rev. and Mrs. William Whittle. He passed through Mfantsipim and Wesley College and served the University of Ghana in several capacities before plunging into politics. Whittle officiated at his funeral in Oxford, Sept. 5, 1978.

<sup>17</sup> These and other sentiments revealed the heart of the man, a great scholar of sociology and a devout Methodist. The policies that the Busia administration put in place, especially with regard to its setting up of the Ministry of Social and Rural Development (the first of its kind in Ghana), were to serve as blueprints for subsequent regimes that sought to improve the lot of Ghanaians. Elsewhere Okyere notes, "Under [Busia's] administration, no one was arbitrarily arrested or detained on any spurious reasons or tortured under any pretext. There was freedom of the press, association, religion and speech" (Okyere 2000, 218).

stood to have great influence.<sup>18</sup> Busia's political ideology was thoroughly suffused by his Christian convictions as evidenced by his foreign policy:

It was his firm conviction that international relations should be based on the acceptance of two established facts: first, that all races are equally human, and second, that human cultures do not and cannot divide people because all people are capable of learning and mastering any culture to which they are given sufficient exposure and opportunity to learn. . . He had been born into a royal family, raised by European missionaries who taught him the virtues of Christian humility and the ability to stand up to persecution with patient endurance. He was also taught to forgive and forget past wrongs. . . . One other quality, which he acquired from his missionary benefactors, and which stayed with him throughout his political leadership was prayer. His personal associates bear witness to the fact that every meeting or business at which Busia was present began with prayers. Even as Prime Minister, he would 'go upstairs' to say his prayers at anytime he was confronted with a difficult problem." (Danso-Boafo 1996, 131–32)

On the other hand, the American commentator Richard Wright remarks, "My personal impression was that Dr. Busia was not and could never be a politician, that he lacked that innate brutality of force and drive that makes a mass leader. He was too analytical, too reflective to even want to get down into the muck of life and organize them. I sensed too that maybe certain moral scruples would inhibit him acting" (Wright 1953, 90). This reflection is shared by another commentator who says, "The customary and intellectual attachment to tradition and his deep Methodist Puritanism, made it appear that the turbulent arena of politics was not his forte" (Essamuah 1982, 46).

Given the Methodist roots of the Busia government, the inclusion of J. W. Abruquah, headmaster of the prime minister's alma mater, Mfantsipim, in the "Apollo 568" episode was surprising.<sup>19</sup> On February 21, 1970, Busia's government dismissed 568 civil servants, including Abruquah, for corruption, inefficiency, and ineptitude. Abruquah's dismissal prompted a ground swell of protest and petition from the students, staff, board, and old boys of Mfantsipim. Eventually, the school board, led by T. Wallace Koomson, MCG president, met with the prime minister on March 7, 1970, to express its dismay. The prime minister refused to rescind his decision or divulge the reasons behind it. However, he promised to consider Mr. Abruquah for reposting (Boahen 1996, 452–456). Many analysts consider this mass dismissal as one of the factors that eventually distanced this government from the people, the underlying reason being that in a country such as Ghana, with such a network of extended family support, three or four times the number of those who were dismissed lost their breadwinner as a result of this action. Essamuah records that in the Apollo 568 incident, "An examination of the facts. . . suggest[s] that Busia's deep Christian convictions and concern for the underprivileged reduced the projected 8-9,000 civil servants to be dismissed to 568" (Essamuah 1982, 36).

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<sup>18</sup> Adu Boahen's words on the composition of this government by Mfantsipim-trained people bears repeating here: "It was during the civilian regime of the second Republic, that followed the short military interlude in September 1969, that the School made its greatest contribution to the political life of this country. At that time, not only the Prime Minister, K. A. Busia, and his two deputies, J. Kwesi Lamptey and William Ofori-Atta, but also the Leader of the Opposition, Madjitey, and his deputy, B. K. Agama, were all Old Boys of *Kwabotwe* [Mfantsipim]" (Boahen 1996, 492). On another intriguing point, Robert Aboagye-Mensah remarks that we have yet to assess "the missiological significance of a Methodist soldier, Akwasi A. Afrifa, who overthrows a dictatorial government and at the end hands over to a Methodist civilian, Kofi Abrefa Busia" (Jan 19, 2000, interview).

<sup>19</sup> The 'Apollo 568' political episode took place at the time of the Apollo space flight.

This incident shows that MCG could not assume that having a Methodist overseeing the country meant that it could understand, let alone agree with, all the policies of the government. The Busia government was brought to an end by Colonel (later General) I. K. Acheampong in a coup d'état on January 13, 1972.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Christian Churches and the Acheampong Government**

By calling his governing body the National Redemption Council, General Acheampong, like Nkrumah before him, sought to use religious terminology in engaging political issues. According to Pobee, during Acheampong's government, "The Christian Council of Ghana and the National Catholic Secretariat were superseded by the fringe groups of Christianity. This was so characteristic of General Acheampong's term that it could be suggested that the General felt more comfortable with the fringe groups than with the historic churches because the former addressed themselves to his psyche, his superstition, and somewhat base religion. And of course, the historic churches were not exactly [supportive] of the General because of their long standing critical attitude and their generally more sophisticated views on national issues" (Pobee 1987, 50–51). This statement is especially noteworthy in light of the fact that Acheampong considered himself a Roman Catholic.<sup>21</sup>

Four examples of Acheampong's catering to religious minority and fringe groups are recounted here. As early as 1959, the government and the CCG had cooperated in matters of formal national religious ceremonies and commemorations. Instead of following this time-tested procedure, Acheampong used leaders and organizations of new religious movements such as the Philadelphia Mission of Africa, led by the Rev. Abraham de Love, to organize a national week of repentance and other celebrations of national import.<sup>22</sup>

Another example is seen in Acheampong's response to demands for a return to civilian constitutional rule. He advocated a form of union government, which gained the support of various religious groups but which aroused resistance in the historic churches. The Unigov concept called for equal representation by civilians (mainly the student and professional bodies), soldiers, and the police. At a February 1978 press conference Alhaji Ramadan Ibrahim, secretary of the Islamic religious community, indicated the Muslim chiefs' support.<sup>23</sup> Ibrahim expressed the belief that,

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<sup>20</sup> Okyere states, "It could be judged from later developments that the coup was staged to serve the selfish interests of the conspirators as the cut in the defence budget for the military was not cited as having sufficiently affected the operations of the Ghana Army. More importantly, the fact that [Acheampong] is believed to have stated that he started planning the coup only six (6) months after Busia had assumed office is an indication that he tried to rationalize an unjustifiable act" (Okyere 2000, 222).

<sup>21</sup> Ghana's population at this time was divided into the following religious categories: African traditional 21.61 percent, Christian 52.65 percent, Muslims 13.92 percent. Those who registered no religion or other religions totaled 11.82 percent.

<sup>22</sup> Among de Love's credentials was the fact that he was the head of relatively unknown organizations such as the Christian Brotherhood Council, the National Union of Christian Youth, Christian Association of Businessmen, and Pioneer of the Christian Youth Jamboree (Pobee 1987, 50).

<sup>23</sup> Pobee lists seven as follows: Alhaji Salihu Maikankan, adviser to Muslim chiefs in Ghana and chairman of the National Mosque Building Committee; Alhaji Amida Perigrino Briamah, chief of the Yoruba Muslim community; Ibrahim Dagomba, chief of the Dagomba community; Alhaji Alhasan Chokosi, chief of the Chokosi community; Alhaji Shamoï Gimailah, chief of the Wangara community; Alhaji Ali Bawa Kadri English, chief of the Hausa community; Alhaji Salifu Mahama, chief of the Gonja community; Alhaji Barimah Shadow, chief of the Nupe community. (1987, 51–52)

unlike party politics that divide the nation, Unigov sought to govern by a consensual process and thereby had the greater possibility of uniting Ghanaians. The chiefs declared, “We overwhelmingly embrace the proposed Union Government which is in line with the basic principles of the Islamic concept that all men are equal and united” (Pobee 1987, 52). Of course, one cannot maintain that Islam, though a minority religion in Ghana, can be ignored. But by deliberately courting Islamic leaders and various sectarian fringe groups, and giving them political platforms to show their agreement with government policies, Acheampong blatantly used religious bodies for political advantage—to the disadvantage of mainline churches.

Another churchman given prominence during Acheampong’s regime was the Rev. Brother Charles Yeboah Korie, founder and head of Eden Church, the only church at the time to belong both to CCG and the Pentecostal Association of Ghana. Acheampong ordered that this church be featured at least once a month on the government radio. Korie was also named to serve on the National Charter Committee to implement the General Charter of Redemption in Ghana.<sup>24</sup> Once when a delegation of the CCG, including Korie, met the government to express concern about the violent political atmosphere, and especially the victimization of the opponents of Unigov, Korie spoke passionately against the churches’ stance and in favor of Acheampong’s government.

The fourth example involves Elizabeth Clare Prophet, the “Mother Prophet” of Summit Lighthouse of the Keepers of the Flame Fraternity, based in Southern California. This is a syncretistic religion combining elements of Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, Platonism, and Zoroastrianism. The Ghanaian *Weekly Mirror* of January 27, 1978, described it as “a fellowship of ascended Masters including Lord Jesus the Christ, Lord Buddha, Lord Krishna, Muhammed and Confucius.” Fr. Patrick Ryan of the University of Ghana aptly described it as “a veritable Makola of the world’s religious traditions”<sup>25</sup> (Pobee 1987, 55). According to *Ghanaian Times*, January 17, 1978, Elizabeth Prophet, in a public lecture, “redefined and expounded the cardinal Christian doctrine of the Trinity in terms of the Unigov: Unigov was to be accepted because it demonstrated the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The armed forces represent God the Father; the professional bodies and the students represent the Son; the workers of Ghana represent the Holy Spirit. She even discovered ‘a fourth person of the Trinity’ in the Mother representing the women of Ghana” (Pobee 1987, 57). The Ghana Bar Association expressed its dissatisfaction with this blatant attempt to mobilize spiritual language and sentiment in favour of a divisive political ideology:

It is rather remarkable that at a time when Ghana is caught in a constitutional trauma, at a time when highly qualified and knowledgeable citizens of Ghana are denied the facilities and the freedom to discuss the issues and educate their countrymen, that an American citizen alien to our political, cultural and economic background, should appear on the scene to propagate the concept of Union Government not only as a political solution to our problems but as an institution ordained by Almighty God. Her so-called expert knowledge coincides with General Acheampong’s own dictum. . . . In its desperation the government of the S. M. C. [Supreme Military Council] has considered it worthwhile not to limit the discussion of Union Government within the confines of intellectual common

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<sup>24</sup> The Charter of Redemption featured seven tenets: 1) One Nation, One People, One Destiny; 2) Total manpower development and deployment; 3) Revolutionary discipline; 4) Self-Reliance; 5) Service to the People; 6) Patriotism and International Brotherhood; 7) Mobilization of the Spiritual, Intellectual and Will Power of the People.

<sup>25</sup> Makola is the biggest market in Ghana’s capital Accra, where practically anything can be procured.

sense and objective appreciation but to launch out into the undefined misty and speculative fields of religion, occultism and mysticism. The aim whereof is to stupefy the gullible intellectually and becloud their vision. (Pobee 1987, 57)

In a February 14, 1978, statement, the CCG stated:

The Christian council wishes to express its disagreement with the religious and constitutional opinion of Mrs. Clare Prophet. . . . She was ill-advised to make a statement about Christian belief which has no basis in the Bible and in the tradition. . . . We deplore that whereas the place of the army and the police in any future government is a controversial issue, Mrs. Clare Prophet took the opportunity to claim on behalf of soldiers and police, among others, a “divine right” no less, to participate in government. The Christian Council wishes to declare that no individual or section of the public has any divine right or other right to participate in government except by the choice of the electorate freely expressed through the ballot box. (Pobee 1987, 58)

But the church’s work was not limited to countering governmental excesses. In what is called “their finest hour” (Pobee 1987, 59), Pobee identified the churches as being the “credible reconciler of warring factions in society as evidenced by their mediatory role in the clash between the professionals and the Government (June 17, 1977; July 4, 1977; July 14, 1977), the Nurses and the Government (April 13, 1978; April 21, 1978), the students and the Government (cf. Letters of June 2, 1977; June 6, 1977, June 10, 1977). They established themselves as the voice of the voiceless, pleading the cause of political detainees and in the process earning the wrath of General Acheampong” (Pobee 1987, 59).

In a March 15, 1978, memorandum the CCG and the (CBC) informed the public of the arbitrary detention of K. Addai-Mensah, national secretary of the Ghana Bar Association. The memorandum expressed dissatisfaction with the uneven playing field made available for campaigning for and against the union government concept. Those on the government side were able to promote their cause, while those of the opposition were intimidated and threatened. In the discussion that followed, the government gave assurances of resolving the issue. But in actual fact, nothing changed. It was as if the churches’ intervention had fallen on deaf ears.

### **MCG and the Akuffo Government**

On July 5, 1978, a radio announcement revealed that Acheampong had been retired from the army and General Fred Akuffo was the new head of state. Acheampong was accused of running a one-man show. Akuffo immediately released those who had been imprisoned because of their opposition to Unigov and disbanded the satellite organizations that formed the basis of Acheampong’s support. However, Akuffo’s government did not bring Acheampong to trial as was demanded by the vast majority of Ghanaians. Instead, after he was charged with acts of corruption and abuse of power, Acheampong was stripped of his military honors and confined to his hometown of Traboum in the Ashanti region (Ocuaye 180, 111–32).

The churches continued their campaign to encourage the military regime to hand over power to a civilian constitutional government. When Akuffo placed a number of qualified civilians in charge of the economy, the churches had hopes that a genuine attempt was being made to return the country to a healthy state. But the events of June 4, 1979, determined otherwise.

### **The Christian Churches and the Rawlings Government**

The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), headed by Jerry Rawlings,<sup>26</sup> came into office via a coup d'état on June 4, 1979, with three aims: eradication of all vestiges of corruption, malfeasance, ineptness, and exploitation; restoring of public accountability and awakening of Ghanaians to their rights and duties; and implementation of the return of civilian rule (Pellow and Chazan 1986, 60).<sup>27</sup> However, since the government was already on the path to a return to civilian constitutional regime, the AFRC's time in office was a relatively short one.<sup>28</sup>

As a first step, former head of state I. K. Acheampong and former government official Major General E. K. Utuka were executed on June 16, 1979. Ten days later, after a hastily assembled revolutionary trial, the death sentence was passed on Akuffo, Major General R. E. A. Kotei, Air Vice Marshall George Yaw Boakye, Rear Admiral J. K. Amedume, Colonel R. J. A. Felli, and Lt. General Afrifa (head of state in 1969). All except Afrifa were leading military officers in the previous government. With the public's unhappiness over the military interventions that had derailed the democratic process and exacerbated the country's economic woes, it is not surprising that these executions were seen as "cathartic bloodletting" (Gifford 1998, 59). But the mainline churches were not happy with the spectacle of public executions, and they had the courage to say so. In a June 26, 1979, paper entitled "Memorandum on Revolutionary Courts and Summary Executions in Ghana," the CCG and CBC wrote,

We are all painfully aware of the mismanagement and corruption, which had rendered our dear country really bankrupt. We also believe that those who are responsible for this sorry state of affairs should be severely punished but we do not believe that the death penalty, especially after secret trials, is the only or even the most effective punishment that can be administered to those who are guilty. In the present situation, when tempers are high, certain citizens and groups may advise the AFRC to adopt unorthodox methods and short cuts in punishing offenders. Such reaction is only normal but matters of life and death deserve to be handled dispassionately and not based on emotions. (Boafo 1999, 224)

This outcry from the more established bodies tempered the mood of the country, which had been greatly inflamed by the students' cries for more blood to flow. The ensuing years saw a gradual deterioration in the state of law and order in the country. The Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) set up an alternative system of justice. Peoples' and Workers' Defense Committees loomed over all aspects of Ghanaian life. Many people were threatened, beaten, or

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<sup>26</sup> Jerry John Rawlings has occupied a large space in Ghana's political history. He came to power as a Marxist revolutionary on June 4, 1979, handed over power after a four-month period, and then returned to power on Dec. 31, 1981. In Nov.–Dec. 1992, he won presidential elections and his party, the National Democratic Congress (NDC), won parliamentary elections. In 1996, he won reelection for his last term. In Nov.–Dec. 2000 his party lost power to John Kuffuor and his National Patriotic Party (NPP).

<sup>27</sup> See Adjei 1994 for a revelation of the extent of human rights abuses during the 1980s.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Aboagye-Mensah reports (1991, 89) that during the 1979 elections to usher in the Third Republic, the former political party of Kofi A. Busia "had a sharp disagreement which split the party into two—the United National Convention (UNC) led by William Ofori-Atta (a devout evangelical, popularly known as Paa Willie), and the Popular Front Party (PFP) under the leadership of Victor Owusu. The CCG and the Catholic Secretariat urged the two parties to come together against Dr. Hilla Limann, candidate of the PNP (PNP—Peoples National Party was the new name for Nkrumah's Convention People's Party)." Aboagye-Mensah fails to note the factional character of this initiative on behalf of the churches. It reflected the CCG and Catholic Secretariat's intellectual and ideological predilection for the liberal democratic ideals espoused and practiced by what in Ghana is known as the Danquah-Busia faction.

even secretly done away with.

In these dreadful times, verbal opposition to the government was gradually silenced. *Christian Messenger* (March 1982) reports that the Rev. Samuel B. Essamuah, president of MCG, submitted a personal paper to a Provisional National Defense Committee (PNDC) member, the Rev. Dr. Vincent Damuah, in which he called for the disbandment of the People's Defense Committees and Workers Defense Committees because these quasi-political units had attracted the power-hungry. The PNDC was called upon to lift the curfew imposed on the country and withdraw soldiers from the streets, as their presence was intimidating people from going about their legitimate business. It is fair to conjecture that but for such interventions, private and public, there would have been worse breaches of human rights during the early days of the PNDC.

In his now famous 1988 J. B. Danquah Memorial Lectures, Albert Adu Boahen contested Rawlings's characterization of Ghanaians as passive: "I am afraid I do not agree with Rawlings's explanation of passivity of Ghanaians. We have not protested or staged riots not because we trust the PNDC but because we fear the PNDC! We are afraid of being detained, liquidated or dragged before the CVC [Citizens' Vetting Committee] and NIC [National Investigations Committee] or being subjected to all forms of molestation. And in any case have Ghanaians not been protesting at all, as the head of state thinks? They have been but in a very subtle and quiet way—hence the culture of silence" (Nugent 1995, 163). This erudite historian in seeking to explain the silence of Ghanaians in the face of political and physical intimidation, suppression of rights, and a general atmosphere of living in a "cocoon of fear" resorted to the Bible (Amos 5:13 NIV) for an apt quotation: "Therefore the prudent man keeps quiet in such times, for the times are evil" (Boafo 1999, 225).

In October and November of 1990 the country as a whole debated the subject of democracy. Sunday, October 25, was designated the beginning of a week of prayer for the nation. CCG and CBC organized seminars across the length and breadth of Ghana.<sup>29</sup> In a December memorandum submitted to the government, CCG summarized its role as follows: "The Christian Council is aware that the Church in Ghana has a prophetic role to play, in witnessing to the truth in all matters affecting the welfare of our people, and a sacred responsibility to create a suitable climate for reconciliation and thereby promote understanding and forgiveness. It is in this way that bitter revenge may be avoided, and a calm and peaceful return to a Constitutional Democracy ensured, for the spiritual and moral well-being, and the material prosperity, of the Sovereign People of Ghana" (Ninson, 1996, 32).

Over the last several years the church has addressed memoranda to particular sectors of government. In a June 17, 1992, paper, CCG and CBC encouraged the interim electoral commission to implement certain key policies desired by the people, as evidenced by their overwhelmingly positive vote in favour of the draft constitution on April 28, 1992. In the words of the memorandum, "The conception that should give birth to the Fourth republic took place on that day. What is required now is to ensure that the gestation period is not unduly disrupted, so that a healthy baby can be born to all of us" (Ninson 1996, 162–63).

Dickson recalls the atmosphere surrounding the election that returned Rawlings to power in January 1992, an atmosphere pervaded by memories of abductions and extrajudicial executions under

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<sup>29</sup> Publications from such meetings included "The Catholic Church and Ghana's Search for a New Democratic System" (February 20, 1991) and *The Nation, the Church and Democracy* (Accra, Christian Council, 1992). The latter came out of the July 23–24, 1991, seminar.

Rawlings's PNDC government.<sup>30</sup> "The nervous anxiety was due to several causes, one of which was the rekindled dissatisfaction with the government during whose time there had been several executions, among the executed being former heads of state, and the abduction and murder of three judges and a retired army officer. The three judges were known to have given judgments not favorable to an earlier military government, the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), headed by Rawlings, now chairman of the PNDC. . . . [Adding to the tension] was the suspicion that Rawlings might enter the race for [presidential] office in a new democratic government" (Dickson 1995, 263). As a matter of fact, that is precisely what Rawlings did. In the event Rawlings won, though the opposition contested the validity of the election.

In a joint memorandum entitled "From the Heads of the Member Churches of the Christian Council of Ghana and the Catholic Bishops' Conference on the 'Report on the Evolving Democratic Process,'" the churches asked the government to do four things: publish the government white paper on the report; set up an independent electoral body, with adequate resources, to supervise all elections; lift the ban on political parties; and take steps to generate the right atmosphere for healthy political activity in the country. Such steps, said the memorandum, should include the repeal of certain laws, particularly those dealing with executions for political reasons; the release of all political prisoners and detainees; and the granting of unconditional amnesty for all political exiles (Dickson 1995, 265).

As Dickson notes, the government had come to look upon the churches as "being somewhat obstreperous" (Dickson, 265). In June 1989 the PNDC government announced Law 221, Religious Bodies (Registration) Law, which stipulated that all religious bodies must apply to the National Commission for Culture for approval. The PNDC's decisions on approval or rejection were to be final, with no recourse for consideration in the courts of the land.<sup>31</sup> Paul Nugent calls this "the greatest mistake of the Rawlings regime [because the mainline churches] were particularly well organized and wielded an influence over substantial sections of the population" (Nugent 1996, 187).<sup>32</sup> In the wake of meetings between CCG, CBC, and the government, in October 1989 the churches submitted a "pastoral letter" to the government, stating, "In its present form, [the Religious Bodies (Registration) Law] constitutes an infringement on the fundamental rights of the freedom of worship. For this reason, we are of the view that our churches would be surrendering both for our present membership and for future generations, a fundamental and inalienable right, if we registered in accordance with the Law. . . . We cannot in conscience register under PNDC Law 221 as it stands" (Nugent 1996, 189). However, the government took no remedial action. Finally, in August 1992, in anticipation of forthcoming elections, the churches submitted the following memorandum

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<sup>30</sup> The victims were justices Cecilia Koranteng-Addo, K. A. Agyepong, F. P. Sarkodee, and Major (Rtd.) Sam Acquah. They were abducted on the night of June 30, 1982, and their bodies were later found on a military property.

<sup>31</sup> The PNDC's intent in promulgating the law was to prevent a situation in which misguided people could wreck havoc in Ghanaian society through religious institutions. It may have been aimed in particular at certain little-known religious bodies that had been implicated in possibly treasonable acts. In a meeting with PNDC representative Daniel Francis Annan, requested by the CCG and CBC, the churches were assured that the new law sought to regulate rather than control the activities of religious bodies. In response, the CCG and CBC argued that they already had in place provisions to ensure that they lived by the laws of Ghana, and furthermore, they did not want to be lumped together with new religious movements, some of which had proved to be a disguise for immoral practices.

<sup>32</sup> Later, in his treatment of this episode, Nugent modifies his assessment somewhat when he acknowledges that the churches and professional bodies, despite their steady barrage of criticism, were unable to mount a direct challenge to the Rawlings regime. However, the fact remains that the church's role constituted an internal opposition, and when this was supplemented by pressure from the Western world, Rawlings was ultimately forced, reluctantly, to agree to multi-party politics. (Nugent 1996:270)



to the government:

We do not question the right or the duty of government to check any activity, which goes against public decency and morality, promotes the financial exploitation of believers, endangers public peace or compromises national unity and honor. We would however like to affirm that government should, in all matters relating to freedom of worship, reflect restraint in the measures it takes. Where the due process of the law can be used to check misdemeanors and subversion of good order, it would appear to be always better to resort to the courts than to direct political or governmental intervention. . . . Further, the law pronounced recently tends to place in the hands of the government a tool by which the activities of all religious bodies and especially churches can easily be controlled. (Dickson 1995, 266)

The law was repealed following Rawlings's inauguration as president of the Fourth Republic, January 7, 1992. Bofo states that the churches' actions leading up to the 1992 election "became catalytic for more agitation that led to the return to Constitutional rule in 1992" (Bofo 1999, 226).

After the 1992 elections — the second round of which the opposition boycotted and refused to take their seats in parliament because of allegations of fraud — CCG and CBC attempted to mediate to resolve the issue. Even though their intervention did not completely reverse the government's stance, the political leaders expressed their appreciation for the role of the churches. CCG and CBC, however, refused to participate in the national thanksgiving service called for by the Rawlings government. This was to indicate their sympathies with the opposition, which charged that the elections amounted to a stolen verdict. In the vacuum created by the withdrawal of the opposition, the government turned favorably to the leaders of such new religious movements as Christian Action Faith Ministries, led by Duncan Williams. As Paul Gifford states, analysis shows "that the mainline churches studiously avoided sycophancy; it was Duncan Williams who did not" (Gifford 1998, 87).

A welcome development during the earlier years of the Rawlings era was the promulgation of the Intestate Succession Law, which concerned the property of the deceased. This law repealed Section 48 of the marriage ordinance and gave a specific portion of the estate of the intestate to the surviving spouse. PNDC Law 111 (1985) identified unambiguously what should belong to deceased children and surviving spouse. For instance, members of the extended family could not take the family's house and household chattels from the widow and children; to do so was an offence punishable by fine and imprisonment. MCG was among the parties that advocated such clarity, especially in light of the predominantly matrilineal system of succession among the Akan.

Mainline churches of Ghana, though members of the World Council of Churches, are more reflective of mainstream evangelical churches than their counterparts in the West. A number of the documents prepared by the working committees of these churches have been robust and effective in bringing a Christian witness to Ghanaian society. In Ghana's situation, not unlike several other African countries, the church has been one of the few national institutions that could be trusted by the people. The church's faithful presence in the midst of decaying social and political structures offered spiritual hope, and, on a more pragmatic level, a sense of the universality and solidarity of the Christian witness. MCG, as seen in the vignettes that have been recounted here, has stood as a testimony against tyranny and an active player in participatory democracy.

Mission churches, such as the MCG witnessed in an environment where they played a unique role as proto-democratic modernizing structures. The Methodists whose evangelical revival and public witness spared England the horrors of the French Revolution in these contexts acted as

preservers of the social order amidst the political upheaval and abuse of human rights.

### **MCG Members in the Employ of the Government**

MCG, in concert with other Ghanaian churches, has frequently attempted to confront the government of the day on issues of power and human rights. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that the government has often been able to capitalize on the services of church-trained personnel to help deflect the critique of religious leaders. From the days of Nkrumah, some of the government's allies have been Methodist ministers. They have served in parliament, filled government positions at the ministerial and ambassadorial levels, and headed questionable political movements such as the Young Pioneers in the Nkrumah era. Understandably, some figures in MCG circles were "looked upon with suspicion and as traitors to the Christian cause" (Pobee 1976, 143).

### **Conclusion**

Kwame Nkrumah was a champion for self-rule. "We prefer self-government [with risk] than servitude in tranquility [for] it is far better to be free to govern, to misgovern yourself, than to be governed by anybody else" (Pobee 1976, 130).<sup>33</sup> The Ghanaian Methodist leadership, however, sought autonomy for different reasons. Summarized by President Grant, autonomy was to enable Ghanaian Methodists to be better Christians, to own the vision and mission of the church, and to spread scriptural holiness in Ghana. In doing this, they planted churches, established schools and hospitals, and gave an enduring, prophetic witness in the political arena during the years of decline and decay.

The 1982–1983 prayer manual of the Methodist Church Overseas Division of the British Conference, *Going and Coming*, states, "Ghana has come through a political revolution aimed at releasing the nation from the grip of a corrupt elite. The economy is prostrate, national self-respect low, confidence almost gone. But the churches are crowded. In sound scriptural tradition and as a true priest, the Methodist Church President, the Rev. S. B. Essamuah, takes upon himself the sins of the nation and confesses them to God" (p. 9). The evangelistic and socio-political mission of the Methodist Church, Ghana, can only be comprehensively evaluated as it spans the entire spectrum of prayer and protest, all done as part of the holistic ministry of the church. That mission has seldom been better expressed than in this prayer of one of its presidents:

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<sup>33</sup> Adu Boahen argues in *African Perspectives on Colonialism* that in assessing the nature and significance of the legacy of colonialism, "the debit side far outweighs the credit side. Indeed, my charge against colonialism is not that it did not do anything for Africa, but that it did so little and that little so accidentally and indirectly; not that the economy of Africa under colonialism did not grow but that it grew more to the advantage of the colonial powers and the expatriate owners and shareholders of the companies operating in Africa than to the Africans; not that improvements did not take place in the lives of the African peoples, but that such improvements were so limited and largely confined to the urban areas; not that education was not provided but that what was provided was so inadequate and so irrelevant to the needs of the African themselves; not that there were no upward social mobility but that such a relatively small number of Africans did get to the top. In short, given the opportunities, the resources, and the power and influence of the colonial rulers, they could and should have done far more than they did for Africa. And it is for this failure that the colonial era will go down in history as a period of wasted opportunities, of ruthless exploitation of the resources of Africa, and on the balance of the underdevelopment and humiliation of the peoples of Africa" (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1987).

*Lord Almighty, we adore you. God of present, past and future, you who created us earth-born beings still hold us safe in your everlasting arms. With shame we confess we have refused to listen to your bidding, our carelessness has encouraged our moral decay, we have allowed our fundamental rights to be eroded. We confess the misdeeds of our national life. Forgive our corruption, our incompetence, and our mismanagement; in deep repentance and faith, we turn to you, O God. Yet we thank you for the rapid expansion we see in your church, spiritual revival in so many of its parts, the palpable upsurge of the life of worship traceably hidden in the living God! Thank you for the sacred music that comes from the people's own life and tradition that consecrates the people's devotion. And raise up from among your people, we pray, political leaders of fidelity and skill, clear-thinking men and women of courage and grace, honest, impartial, dedicated leaders in Church and State. So, Lord, bless and save our nation.*

—Samuel B. Essamuah, MCG president, 1979–1984

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