

Inter-religious Dialogue for Holistic Development in Ghana: The Role of the Christian Council of Ghana



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ABSTRACT

The need for appreciable inter-religious relations in the increasingly religiously pluralistic world cannot be over-emphasized. This need is even more felt in the various countries where constitutional frameworks have entrenched clauses on individual rights to choice of religion. Going over and above its Christian unity mandate, the Christian Council of Ghana has embarked on an ambitious journey to promote inter-religious encounters. The article, through information obtained from one-on-one interviews of prominent Church leaders and the cross-section of members of the Christian Council of Ghana as well as the critical assessment of the conference and archival materials of the Council, examines the critical role of the Christian Council of Ghana in the promotion of inter-religious dialogue in Ghana. It argues that the Council has developed a relevant inclusive and communal theological position for the inter-religious dialogue for the member churches and individuals. The article, further, argues that critical activities and programmes championed by the Department for Interfaith and Ecumenic Relations of the Christian Council of Ghana in collaboration with the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the Muslim leadership and other stakeholders in the area of peacebuilding and conflict resolution, good governance, and social development have taken inter-religious dialogue to a highly appreciable heights in Ghana. The paper contributes significantly to the available information on the promotion of interreligious dialogue in Ghana.

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INTRODUCTION

The Christian Council of Ghana (CCG), though an ecumenical body, has taken keen interest in inter-religious dialogue in the country. It has embarked on various programmes and activities to promote dialogue with other religious traditions. The CCG considers interreligious dialogue as a means to a necessary end, which is peaceful co-existence for collective human and social development. The CCG is an ecumenical body that started with some five churches of Protestant denominations. These churches came together and inaugurated the Council on 30th October 1929. The five Churches are the Methodist Church, the Presbyterian Church, the Anglican Church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, and the AME Zion Church. It is important to note that CCG's ecumenical formation is linked to the 19th and 20th centuries of ecumenism. Various international conferences, such as the World

Missionary Conference in 1910 which discussed common concerns on the need for collaboration among Christian Churches also contributed to the formation of the Council in Ghana.¹

Although the CCG does not represent all Christians in Ghana, it works in collaboration with other ecumenical partners and other faith-based Organizations for the promotion of its agenda. In this regard, the CCG works together with its ecumenical partners in Ghana, namely, the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC), Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC), and the National Association of Charismatic Churches (NACC). Also, the CCG works closely with the Muslim Community in Ghana. Here, the Offices of the National Chief Imam and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission play a very significant role. These partnerships of intra and inter-religious engagements are not only aimed at promoting peaceful co-existence but also presenting a united religious front in matters of national interest.²

Through one-on-one interviews of prominent Church leaders and the cross-section of members of the CCG as well as the critical assessment of the conference and archival materials of activities and programs of the Council, this paper examines the various ways through which this objective of the CCG to promote inter-religious dialogue is carried out. First, the paper examines the theological underpinnings of the interreligious dialogue of the member churches of the CCG. Second, it presents arguments that the critical activities championed by the Department for Interfaith and Ecumenism of the CCG in the area of Interfaith-Dialogue and Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution, Interfaith-Dialogue and Good Governance, Interfaith-Dialogue and Social Development have, significantly, helped promote peace and security in the country.

The CCG: Ecumenical and Dialogical

Having been established on 30th October 1929 and incorporated on 2nd May, 1951, the CCG was registered on 29th June, 2011 under the Companies Act of 1963 (Act 179) as a fellowship of Churches agreeing to witness together in fellowship and render service to the people of Ghana and to the glory of God.³ For such a giant move towards Christian Unity, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Accra, Dominic Andoh, noted in his address to the annual meeting of the Council in 1985, that the ecumenical formation of the CCG has served as “a major factor in helping to promote dialogue among the Churches.⁴ Dialogue has intensified, especially between the Roman Catholic Church and the member Churches of the CCG whenever the socio-economic and political situation in the country has been bedeviled by life-threatening problems and difficulties.”⁵

Currently, the membership of the CCG consists of twenty-nine Churches and two Christian Organizations of protestant confessionary.⁶ To deepen the presence of the CCG in the regions, there is the formation of Regional Branches headed by Regional Chairpersons.⁷ Also, the Council functions through its organs of Annual General Meeting, Executive Council, Executive Committee, General Secretariat, Standing Committees, Meetings of Heads of Member Churches, and Regional, District, and Local Branches of the Council.⁸ At the grassroots, the Local Council of Churches (LCCs) has served important roles in helping Christians of different denominations follow a shared agenda. Here,

¹ Melaine A. May, “The Unity We Seek, the Unity We Share,” in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. John Briggs (Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 2004), 67.

² Christian Council of Ghana, *Celebrating 90 Years of Mobilization the Church for National Transformation*, vol. 3 (Accra: The Interfaith and Ecumenical Relations Department of CCG: Christian Council of Ghana, 2019), 13.

³ The Constitution of the Christian Council of Ghana, 5.

⁴ Archbishop Dominic Andoh, Keynote address, 1985.

⁵ Asante D. Dartey, *Glimpses of Ideas and Vision: An Ecumenical Perspective* (Accra: Graphic Publication Unit, 2004), 13.

⁶ The following are the Churches that constitute the CCG: the Ghana Baptist Convention, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Methodist Church Ghana, Evangelical Presbyterian Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church, Salvation Army Church, Evangelical Church of Ghana, Greek Orthodox Church, Nigritian Episcopal Church, Anglican Diocese of Accra, Grace Communion International, Legon Interdenominational Church, Teshie/Nungua United Church, Atomic Hills United Church, Tema Joint Church, Ghana Evangelical Convention, Young Men Christian Association, Young Women Christian Association, The Luke Society Inc., Accra Ridge Church, Ghana Police Church, Trinity United Church, Christ Evangelical Mission, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Restoration Christian Church, African Methodist Episcopal Church, The Mennonites Church, Free Methodist Church. The two affiliated non-ecclesiastical organizations also include the National Council of Ghana YMCA (Young Men's Christian Association) and YWCA (Young Women's Christian Associations)

⁷ Christian Council of Ghana, *Celebrating 90 Years of Mobilization the Church for National Transformation*, 11.

⁸ The Constitution of the Christian Council of Ghana, 14.

Churches in the localities join in activities to support their geographical areas. Through the activities of the LCCs, annual themes of the CCG are reflected upon and celebrated jointly. This is to promote mutual understanding and appreciation of the unique principles and structures of others.⁹ The leadership of CCG includes the National Chairman, Vice Chairman, General Secretary, and Honorary Treasurer. They come together to form the executive body of the CCG. There is also the Executive Committee made up of the heads of Churches and some non-ordained professionals who are appointed for their expertise in areas of education, security, law, and theology and interreligious dialogue.¹⁰

In the Preamble of the CCG's constitution, the mandate is clearly stated in two main points. First, it sets out to ensure the maintenance and enforcement of ministerial integrity and discipline of the leadership of member Churches and organizations. Second, as an ecumenical organization of Christian Churches, the CCG aims to promote fellowship, justice, peace, equity, human dignity, the integrity of creation, unity, and reconciliation in Ghana.¹¹ In these two objectives, the CCG is committed to strengthening and supporting member Churches and Organizations to improve and expand the scope of their influence, witness, and service to humanity, and to do this in the spirit of ecumenism. The objectives are pointers to the fact that the CCG members are committed to the development not only of Christians but also of all citizens of Ghana. All members of the CCG are bound by this common and fundamental document, namely, the Constitution of the CCG.¹²

Theological Framework for Interfaith Dialogue

Christianity is a religious tradition that is often described in exclusivist terms as being the only religion capable of offering salvation to its membership. Some verses of the Bible have clear exclusivist tendencies which present Christianity as the only means to salvation. In the New Testament, we find fundamental verses which emphasize that Jesus Christ and so Christianity is the one way capable of bringing salvation to humanity. Thus, we read in John 3:16-18: "God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life." Belief in Jesus is depicted as necessary for salvation and so belief in Him is negotiable. In addition, John 14:6 declares Jesus as the only way to the Father: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. If you know me, then you will also know my Father." Thus, it is emphatic in this verse that salvation is only attained through Jesus. Various Christian Theologians and biblical experts have described Christianity as the only way to salvation in accordance with these fundamental biblical verses.¹³ The exclusivist theology calls for an urgent need for evangelization in line with the Great Commission (Mt 28:16-20). By virtue of the urgent need for evangelisation Christianity has become a world religious tradition.

Though the CCG is an ecumenical body which believes and loudly professes Jesus as the only way to salvation, it also acknowledges the need to work together with other religious bodies for peaceful co-existence and communal development.¹⁴ The theological framework of the CCG for interreligious dialogue which is consistent with Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa is based on communal theology. This communal theological framework is dialogical in nature which seeks to enable faithful and responsible witness to the Gospel in an interfaith environment of Muslims and Christians and to promote good neighborliness, constructive engagement, and peaceful coexistence.¹⁵ The theological position is grounded on two main contextual issues.¹⁶ First, the Council

⁹ Christian Council of Ghana, "Mobilizing the Church for National Transformation," *Christian Home Week Series* (Accra: Christian Council of Ghana, 2017), 36.

¹⁰ The Constitution of the Christian Council of Ghana, 6

¹¹ The Constitution of the Christian Council of Ghana, 5.

¹² The Last Constitution of the Council was adopted on the 21st day of April, 2010. The last amendment took place on the 13th day of April 2016. John S. Pobee, *Skenosis: Christian Faith in an African Context* (Gweru: Mambo Press, 1992), 68.

¹³ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of the Word of God (Part 1-2)*, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1957), 301; Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002); Paul F. Knitter, *Towards a Protestant Theology of Religions: A Case Study of Paul Althaus and Contemporary Attitudes* (Marburg, Germany: N.G. Elwert, 1974), 20-36.

¹⁴ John Azumah, "Muslim-Christian Relations in Ghana: Too Much Meat Does Not Spoil the Soup," *Current Dialogue* 36 (2000): 5-9.

¹⁵ Jane Ellingwood, "The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA): An Evolutionary Perspective.," *Muslim World* 98, no. 1 (2008), 74.

¹⁶ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Islamic Spirituality: Foundations," in *Christian-Muslim Encounters*, ed. Yvonne Yazbeck Haddad and Wadi Zaidan Haddad (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2013), 461-462.

is a Christian and also a Ghanaian body. Its membership consists of Ghanaians from every ethnic group. Ethnic groups in Ghana espouse indigenous values which are an essential foundation upon which the nation, Ghana was established in 1957.¹⁷ Customs and indigenous values of the various ethnic groups place a premium on the larger community and consider its interest supreme. Consequently, the indigenous society expects various societal groups, including religious groups, to embark on activities that ultimately gear towards advancing the course of the larger society.¹⁸ In other words, the concerns and well-being of the larger community must be essential components of the activities of the individual members or groups of the society. This indigenous concept of community underpins the interreligious engagement initiatives of the CCG. Second, Ghana is a pluralistic religious country which has adopted a largely secular constitution. Its 1992 constitution has entrenched provision which permits freedom of religion. The CCG recognises the need to acknowledge each religious tradition as a team player and as a partner and is ready to collaborate with them for the continual survival, security, and progress of the nation.¹⁹

The Council's communal position as one of its missionary strategies is reinforced by the renowned professor of Comparative Study of Religions at the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London, John R. Hinnels. In his many reflections on a religious plurality of nations and the new growth in religion, Hinnels asserts that, "in countries where there is substantial religious pluralism, interfaith activity has become an important missionary endeavor."²⁰ Hinnels goes further to recommend further research into the religious engagements and programs of interreligious dialogue to ascertain the impact of such encounters in such societies. For Hinnels, although there are many benefits in developing active communication between religious groups, there may be challenges and prospects which are not yet identified. Rev. Seamus Finn, of the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) in New York, has also commended the CCG for the inter-religious dialogue initiative. He acknowledges that engagement with the socio-religious context is also critical for efficient missionary endeavors. Finn concludes in relation to interreligious engagement that "The more a company is able to integrate a good, solid, social and environmental and governance policy into their model of business, then they will be around a lot longer."²¹ Thus, Finn indicates that organizations such as the CCG need to engage their environment or context as a social responsibility to remain relevant. The CCG is on the right path as it sets up modalities to engage the social context in which various religious traditions have a significant stake.

Laurie Beth Jones in his book *Teach Your Team to Fish: Using Ancient Wisdom for Inspired Teamwork* highlights the importance of dialogue as a tool for missionary work in the contemporary world. He contends that Jesus elevated dialogue in his encounters with people of various cultural religious and social backgrounds.²² This is evident in Jesus' spontaneous questioning and use of parables to teach certain key principles of life. An example is Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman at the well (Jn 4:1-30, 39-42). Here, Jesus engages in dialogue with the woman and elevates their conversation to a more personal level (from the issue of water to a marital issue). As the Samaritan woman admits she has no husband, Jesus again moves from a simple civilized conversation into a big picture, which is more philosophical and theological. This was when Jesus delved further to elevate the subject from water in a well to the eternal water that springs from God to a person. Jesus uses dialogue to change the woman's life, from a shame-filled woman to a bold recruiter as she ran and got her friends.²³

¹⁷ F.K. Buah, *A History of Ghana, Revised and Updated* (Malaysia: Macmillan, 1998), 56.

¹⁸ David Owusu-Ansah and Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Religious Pluralism and Interfaith Coexistence: Ecumenicalism in the Context of Traditional Modes of Tolerance," *Legon Journal of the Humanities* 30, no. 2 (December 31, 2019): 1–3, <https://doi.org/10.4314/ljh.v30i2.1>.

¹⁹ Azumah, "Muslim-Christian Relations in Ghana: Too Much Meat Does Not Spoil the Soup," 28.

²⁰ John R. Hinnels, *A New Handbook of Living Religions*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997), 57.

²¹ Religion & Ethics, "Faith Groups and Corporate Social Responsibility," *Religion & Ethics News Weekly*, January 8, 2016, <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/2016/01/08/january-8-2016-faith-groups-and-corporate-social-responsibility/28562/>.

²² Laurie Beth Jones, *Teach Your Team to Fish: Using Ancient Wisdom for Inspired Teamwork*, Kindle Edition (New York: Currency, 2011), 67.

²³ Jones, *Teach Your Team to Fish: Using Ancient Wisdom for Inspired Teamwork*, 20.

Department for Interfaith and Ecumenical Relations

In pursuance of its missionary objectives, the CCG set up a committee in 1992 to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of the work of the Council. As part of its reforms, the committee recommended that efforts be made to increase the awareness and knowledge of the Council to Ghanaians and to provide resources for research on Christianity, ecumenism and the general society. The recommendations of the committee also highlighted the need to prioritize the promotion of interreligious dialogue and engagement in the country.²⁴ As a result, the committee recommended the special initiative to resource the Department for Interfaith and Ecumenical Relations of the Council and to champion its mandate. In view of the ecumenical mandate of the CCG, contemporary ecumenists such as J. S. Pobee have emphasized the crucial role of interreligious dialogue and contend that the unity of the Church cannot be the ultimate goal of ecumenism or the ecumenical movement. For Pobee, the unity is meant to equip the Church to be a more efficient and viable agent for “uniting everything in heaven and on earth.”²⁵ In this sense, issues relating to economics, politics, and interreligious relations are also matters of faith.

The work of the committee resulted in setting up of The Department for Interfaith and Ecumenical Relations (DIER) as the main arm of CCG. The activities and programmes adopted by the DIER sum up the essence of the Council. Consequently, all attempts to resource the Department meant resourcing the Council. The name of the Department does not only depict the association between Interfaith Relations and Ecumenical Relations but also indicates that both are of equal importance to the Council. By this office, the Council points out that evangelization of people involves two main aspects: (1) the institutional aspect and the non-institutional aspect. These two aspects are two sides of the same coin of evangelization. The institutional element seeks to promote unity among the Christian fraternity. In the ecumenical context, the CCG deals with people of different Christian denominations within Christendom to ensure intra-Christian unity. The non-institutional element seeks to promote unity for the sake of the larger society for peaceful co-existence of religious bodies. In this aspect, the Department for Interfaith and Ecumenical Relations (DIER) works closely with people of other faiths, seeking the interest of humanity and all people irrespective of religious backgrounds. For instance, the DIER usually does a lot of work with the Office of the National Chief Imam of Ghana. The Director of the Interfaith and Ecumenical Relations Department of the CCG, Rev. Opoku Baffuor shares his experience concerning the beautiful relationship that exists between his Department and that of the National Chief Imam’s office.²⁶ Opoku Baffuor pointed out that, this good relationship between the leadership of the religious bodies does not taint his identity as a staunch Christian. In this regard, James Anquandah holds that no major religious organization in Ghana can afford to employ a self-centered approach to life.²⁷ Furtherance to the above, the DIER has been able to sustain the local branch of the council of churches in the localities.²⁸ In some parts of Ghana, particularly the Brong Ahafo Region, Muslims are part of the local council of Churches since the local council of churches not only meets to discuss issues pertaining to Christianity but also matters of the general society. Here, the DIER first identifies local communication links to bring together churches and Muslim groups and people of other faiths for societal progress.²⁹

The Department for Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations is not only involved with formal dialogue in Ghana, at which it organizes experts at a round table and discusses pertinent theological issues and cooperation to address pertinent social issues.³⁰ It also organizes programmes to enhance dialogue of life in which people of different religious backgrounds are encouraged to live together in

²⁴ James Anquandah, *Agenda Extraordinaire: 80 Years of the Christian Council of Ghana 1929- 2009* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 2009), 40.

²⁵ John Samuel Pobee, “Ecumenical Formation in the Service of a Renewed Church,” *The Ecumenical Review* 53, no. 3 (2001): 319.

²⁶ Interview with the Director of Interfaith and Ecumenical Relations Department of the CCG, Rev. Abraham Opoku-Baffuor on 17th March 2019.

²⁷ Anquandah, *Agenda Extraordinaire: 80 Years of the Christian Council of Ghana 1929- 2009*, 67.

²⁸ What is the composite of the local council of Churches in Ghana?

²⁹ Adnan Aslan, *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr* (Routledge, 2013), 115-116.

³⁰ Johnson A Mbillah, “African Churches and Interfaith Relations: Food for Thought,” *PROCMURA Occasional Paper* 1, no. 1 (2004), 6.

the community and acknowledge each other as one people, brought up together.³¹ For instance, at school, Christian and Muslim students are encouraged to learn together in the same classrooms and play together as classmates. As adults, Christians and Muslims learn to live as neighbours in the same compound and work together in the same company and under the same working conditions. At these various levels in their lives, Christians and Muslims encounter and engage in dialogue with each other. Living and growing together as colleagues at these various levels deals with suspicion and enmity.³²

Interfaith Dialogue for Peacebuilding and Conflict Resolution

The CCG believes that proper spiritual growth is often dependent on peace of mind and a peaceful environment. The Council expresses a deep concern about the maintenance of peace among all sections of the community. One of the areas of promotion of peace is the promotion of interreligious dialogue. Cooperation with members of other religions is critical to the resolution of tensions and conflicts in the society.³³ The Council has considered in its deliberations and activities, indigenous Ghanaian communal values as critical aspects of its interreligious engagements for the promotion of security and peace. In view of this, Johnson Mbillah, a former director general of PROCMURA, has noted that interreligious dialogue offers Christians and Muslims the platform to explore the possibility of using indigenous African values of religious pluralism and tolerance as corrective measures for religious conflicts on the African continent.³⁴ In spite of the enormous benefits of indigenous beliefs and values to socio-religious progress, Dr. Jane Ellingwood, an ordained minister of the United Church of Christ (UCC), in her paper “The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA): An Evolutionary Perspective” has wonder whether Africans resorting to their indigenous cultural values and their common African heritage for answers for the promotion of peaceful co-existence would not undermine the significance of their conversion to Christianity and Islam.³⁵ In this connection, George Ayittey, Professor of Economics at the American University, of Washington, holds that “Successful societies are those that have internal mechanisms to resolve conflicts.”³⁶ For Ayittey, it is incumbent on Ghanaians to resolve their differences because a civilized and God-fearing people must ensure that conflicts and disputes do not extend beyond their borders. For this challenging task, the CCG collaborates with the leadership of other religious traditions to draw on the rich indigenous and religious methods for conflict prevention and resolution.³⁷

In the 2004 Annual Report of the CCG, the Council expressed a great concern that, since the Ghanaian community is heterogeneous in religion and ethnicity, an appropriate strategy for dealing with societal problems is required. In particular, the CCG identified the critical role of indigenous Ghanaian inter-faith approach. As a result, the 2007 Annual Report of the CCG featured the Council’s efforts to deepen or strengthen ecumenical relations among Christians and people of other faiths to sensitize Ghanaians about the need for peace. Furthermore, a 5-day training of trainers’ educational workshop for some selected Local Council of Churches located in Islamic-dominated communities across the country was undertaken in 2008.³⁸

To strengthen its influence further in inter-religious relations, the CCG regularly organizes inter-faith awareness programs for eminent personalities for intervention, mediation and reconciliation between people, including Christians and Muslims.³⁹ In 2016, the CCG collaborated with the leadership of other religious traditions to regularly meet with the presidential candidates before, during, and after the election 2016 was critical for the success of the elections. In the same year, the

³¹ Mbillah, “African Churches and Interfaith Relations: Food for Thought,” 6.

³² Anquandah, *Agenda Extraordinaire: 80 Years of the Christian Council of Ghana 1929- 2009*, 30.

³³ Johnson A Mbillah, “Inter-Faith Relations and the Quest for Peace in Africa,” *Encounter (Nairobi, Kenya)*, no. 1 (2002): 4; Johnson A. Mbillah, “Towards Peace and Reconciliation Between Christians and Muslims in Africa: The PROCMURA Initiative,” *Journal of the Henry Martyn Institute: Papers from the Consultation on Reconciliation* 21, no. 2 (2001): 53.

³⁴ Ellingwood, “The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA): An Evolutionary Perspective,” 90.

³⁵ Ellingwood, “The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA): An Evolutionary Perspective,” 89.

³⁶ Asante D. Dartey and Vesta Nyarko-Mensah, *The Church, Ethnicity and Democracy: 1994 Mid-Year Seminar Report* (Accra: Christian Council of Ghana, 1994), 19.

³⁷ Dartey and Nyarko-Mensah, *The Church, Ethnicity and Democracy: 1994 Mid-Year Seminar Report*, 19.

³⁸ The 2007 Annual Report of the CCG. 20

³⁹ Richard Asante, “Ethnicity, Religion, and Conflict in Ghana: The Roots of Ga Nativism,” *Ghana Studies* 14, no. 1 (2011): 81–131.

Council went further to engage in sensitization programs with pastors, indigenous leaders, Muslim leaders, statesmen, and women at the regional and district levels for the promotion of peace in the localities.⁴⁰ The Council also organized the “Thousand Voices” musical show at the country’s National Theatre to calm the tense religious and political atmosphere and call for peace. In addition, the Council organized interfaith peace walks in some regions such as Volta, Ashanti, Northern, and Greater Accra for inter-faith awareness for peaceful co-existence of Christians and Muslims. In Tamale, together with the Denmark Ambassador, Her Excellency Tove Degnbol, the Council organized Christian and Muslim youth to walk on the street of Tamale calling for peace in the nation. In another program organized by CCG and the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) on the theme: “The Church’s Political Role in Nation Building and Election 2016” Tove Degnbol acknowledged the positive contribution of religious tolerance in Ghana and “expressed the hope that such mutual understanding would contribute to a peaceful election.” Also, the CCG encouraged Pastors and Imams during electioneering periods to preach relevant sermons that promote peace in the nation. In relation to this the head pastor of the Bethel Methodist Church at Ofinso in the Asante Region, Pastor Nicholas Ofei noted that “The Council also offered us materials, flyers and t-shirts inscribed with peace messages with the aim of preaching peace.”⁴¹ In 2020, the CCG through its Northern Sector office set up the project “Promoting Peace through Inter-Faith Dialogue in Northern Ghana.” The project according to Rev Dina Odro-Wiafi “...specifically brought Christian and Muslim groups together for discussions on various avenues for peace and security.”⁴² In 2022 the Northern sector manager of the project, Emmanuel Sumani Alhassan, called on journalists to “write stories which will support the project in its quest to promote religious tolerance” and cooperation in the sector.⁴³

Within the localities, The CCG, through its Local Council of Churches, organizes periodic peace matches and arranges regular visits to both Muslim Abudu and Andani Gates of the Royal family. To a Muslim Mamuna Salifu, such marches and regular visits “...helped significantly in the resolution of the conflict in the largely Muslim Yendi community” following the death of the king.⁴⁴ This gesture won the confidence and respect of the Muslims and the leadership of Yendi to the extent that during the burial ceremony of the Yendi King, Ya-Na, the Local Council of Churches was invited to feature on the programme. We observed that the vibrant Local Council of Churches in the Yendi Municipality and satellite villages which engages with local Muslim folks has become a shining example of authentic Christian ecumenism as an instrument of healing for an ailing society characterized by inter-ethnic strife, civil, political and spiritual divisions.

Interfaith-Dialogue for Good Governance

Religious people and groups have a long history of civic engagement in Ghana’s political life.⁴⁵⁴⁶ The role of the church in politics has been debated since Ghana attained independence from the British. Many are those who have wondered whether it is right for Christians and Muslims to engage in active politics. In relation to this, Rev. Dr. Opuni-Frimpong, a former general secretary of the CCG, noted that, for some Christians in Ghana, politics “is a no-go area perhaps due to the insults, bribery, corruption and the exploitation of wealth that have characterized the profession.”⁴⁷ Unfortunately, this wrong perception of politics has taken over the real meaning of politics which is leadership and management of the resources of the nation for the betterment of the citizenry.

⁴⁰ The Former General Secretary of CCG, Rev. David Dartey has expressed concern that, “Africa must cultivate and sustain a hard core of respectable men of open integrity, Elder Statesmen of wisdom and experience who will enhance the ability to deal with differences more effectively.”

⁴¹ Pastor Nicholas Ofei interviewed on 13th May, 2019.

⁴² Rev Dina Odro-Wiafi, interviewed on 4th June, 2019.

⁴³ Ghana News Agency, “Christian Council Engages Journalists on Peace Project,” Ghana Web, December 30, 2022, <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/Christian-Council-engages-journalists-on-peace-project-1687943>.

⁴⁴ Mamuna Salifu, interview on 6th June, 2019.

⁴⁵ Samuel John Pobee, “Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa” in *Journal of theology for Southern Africa*, Vol. 83, (1993), 14-26.

⁴⁶ John Samuel Pobee, “Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 83 (1993): 14–26.

⁴⁷ Rev. Dr. Opuni-Frimpong, a former general secretary of the CCG, interviewed on 23rd February, 2019.

Responding to this misunderstanding and misgivings about politics, CCG published a document entitled “The Church’s Political Role in Nation Building” in 2016. The goal of publishing this document was to educate the Churches and the Mosques on their responsibilities toward political leadership, good governance and the political system of the nation.⁴⁸ In this document, the CCG encouraged its membership and those of other religious traditions to actively get involved in the running of the country. To this, Rev. Opoku Baffuor contends that “Everybody, Christian or Muslim or even a non-believer, is a political being who is already involved in politics.”⁴⁹ He noted further that it is not even an issue of whether Christians or Muslims, Imams or Pastors can be involved in politics. He continued that “Once politics is about the distribution and utilization of resources, everybody is already involved in it.” Christians and Muslims are encouraged to engage in active politics, even partisan ones with their religious principles in mind with the view of bringing progress in the sense of what Leonardo Boff describes as the “society's ability to steer itself by taking compass bearings on its basic stock of meanings and values, which ultimately, one way or another, always involve religion.”⁵⁰

However, the CCG does not encourage the leadership of the religious bodies to be partisan in their politics. This means that one can contribute to the political life of the state outside partisan politics.⁵¹ For instance, the General Secretary of the CCG cannot openly declare his support for any of the two political parties in Ghana (the New Patriotic Party or the National Democratic Congress). His loyalty is to the state and to whoever is given the political mandate to rule at a particular time.⁵² This means that in the Church or in the Mosques the pastor or the Imam should not openly declare his political or partisan affiliations, since the membership may belong to any of the political groups.⁵³

However, the leadership of the religious bodies must be concerned about the accountability of political leadership. The leadership must be concerned about policies of governments concerning religious liberty, security and national cohesion.⁵⁴ It is in view of the accountability of political leadership that the CCG has been actively involved in the governance of the nation since independence, demanding accountability from political leadership. Rev. Opoku Baffuor revealed “one of the reasons for the formation of the CCG was to develop a common platform to ensure that good governance is promoted for the citizenry.”⁵⁵ He noted further that this watchdog role of CCG in holding the government accountable does not often take place in the public domain. For example, the CCG meets the President of the nation regularly for various deliberations at the state house, the Jubilee House. The role of the CCG in the quest for good governance and independence before 1957 cannot be overemphasized. History of the CCG reveals that four of the six leading members (often referred to as the ‘Bix Six’) in the struggle for independence of Ghana were all active members of the CCG. Furthermore, during the regimes of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah and the military of post-independence, the Council contributed to the fight against oppression and the call to bring back the nation under multi-party democratic rule.⁵⁶

There are a series of programmes and activities that evidence the CCG’s involvement in the politics and governance of the country. During the 2004 Presidential and Parliamentary elections, the CCG demonstrated the Christian community’s contribution to ensuring the free, peaceful and acceptable election of national leaders. The CCG in this period, collaborated with the Local Council of Churches and the Ecumenical Youth Associations to train election observers with special attention to conflict-prone communities such as Muslim majority Bawku, Bimbila, Yendi, Tamale, Binduru,

⁴⁸ Christian Council of Ghana, “The Church’s Political Role in Nation Building,” *Christian Home Week Series* (Accra: Christian Council of Ghana, 2016).

⁴⁹ Rev. Opoku Baffuor was interviewed on 17th March 2019.

⁵⁰ Leonardo Boff, *Church: Charism and Power. Liberation Theology and the Institutional Church* (London: SCM, 1985), 27.

⁵¹ Godwin Akweitech Allotey, “Discrimination of Muslim Students: Christian Council Calls for Consensus,” Citi 97.3 fm, February 22, 2015, <https://citifmonline.com/2015/02/discrimination-of-muslim-students-christian-council-calls-for-consensus/#sthash.ushtcIEi.dpuf>.

⁵² Allotey, “Discrimination of Muslim Students: Christian Council Calls for Consensus.”

⁵³ Tarek Mitri, *Dialogue Between Christians and Muslims Today*, ed. Michael Ipgrave, *The Road Ahead: A Christian-Muslim Dialogue* (London: Church House Publishing, 2002), 108.

⁵⁴ Mbillah, “Towards Peace and Reconciliation Between Christians and Muslims in Africa: The PROCMURA Initiative,” 53.

⁵⁵ Rev. Opoku Baffuor was interviewed on 17th March 2019.

⁵⁶ Pobe, “Religion and Politics in Sub-Saharan Africa,” 14.

Garu, Pusiga and Salaga.⁵⁷ Also, during the 2012 election, the CCG in collaboration with the office of the National Chief Imam organized Peace Walks and Fun Games between Christian and Muslim youth. This was to demonstrate to the general public that, all are one people in one nation.⁵⁸ On the occasion of Ghana's 25 years of the fourth republic (7th January, 2018), President Nana Akufo-Addo gave recognition and credit to religious bodies, such as the CCG for their commitment to interreligious dialogue which has played a critical role in helping to preserve the security and stability of the nation.

Moreover, the CCG also collaborates with Civil Society Organizations for a common and strong voice on issues of national interest.⁵⁹ The Council works closely with the Institute of Economic Affairs (IEA) and the Institute for Democratic Governance (IDEG) during elections to educate citizens about the need to contribute to democratic reforms in the country.⁶⁰ On democratic reforms, the CCG together with its partners, including the leadership of the various Muslim communities, demands strict accountability from people in the governance of the nation.⁶¹ For instance, when the issue of Referendum came up in 2019 for election of District Chief Executives and Municipal Chief Executives, the Council and its religious partners embarked on various campaigns to educate the populace. During this period, the major opposition party (National Democratic Congress) visited the Council and its partners to explain why they were not interested in the Referendum.

Interfaith-Dialogue for Social Development

There is a great expectation from the religious bodies in the country that they should be strong against all forms of injustice and vices such as favoritism, unequal distribution of national resources, tribalism, discrimination, etc.⁶² In line with this expectation, most of CCG's interventions in interreligious dialogue have been mobilizing all religious bodies for the formation of a common platform which will be the voice of the voiceless and vulnerable in society.⁶³

Thus, the Council, in collaboration with other religious organizations in the country, has embarked on advocacy for the effective implementation of the Children's Act on Child Panels for abused children and their parents to seek redress and have access to justice. In relation to the Children's Act Programmes, the Department of the CCG in 2018 rescued about 192 children who were sent to the fishing areas for child labor, and supported their education and livelihood.⁶⁴

In addition to advocacy programs the CCG has for decades been involved in primary healthcare delivery as part of its social responsibility, especially to the poor.⁶⁵ Apart from the various hospitals and clinics established and funded by CCG member churches scattered across the country in 2004, the CCG in collaboration with Muslim groups in the Northern sector of Ghana commenced an anti-HIV/AIDS programme in the Muslim majority districts of Northern Ghana.⁶⁶ These districts are West Gonja, Bole, Tolon, Kumbugu, Zabzugu/ Tatala, Tamale and East Mamprusi. The focus of this programme was to build District HIV/AIDS coalitions, including Local Council of Churches, Muslim Social Groups, school clubs, Non-Governmental Organizations, District Health Teams, District Assemblies and the Social Welfare Department.⁶⁷ This program aimed at reducing prevalent rates, stigma and discrimination and also to promote awareness of the pandemic.⁶⁸

⁵⁷ The 2004 Annual Report of the CCG, 20.

⁵⁸ "Celebrating 90 years of Mobilization the Church for National Transformation." 13.

⁵⁹ Cosmas Ebo Sarbah, "Religion, State, and Constitution in Ghana: Disputed Realms of Neutrality," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 58, no. 3 (2023): 398.

⁶⁰ The 2004 Annual Report of the CCG, 48.

⁶¹ When the government wants to change an entrenched position in the constitution everybody must be part of it. It must not be based on political lines.

⁶² Allotey, "Discrimination of Muslim Students: Christian Council Calls for Consensus."

⁶³ Allotey, "Discrimination of Muslim Students: Christian Council Calls for Consensus."

⁶⁴ Anquandah, *Agenda Extraordinaire: 80 Years of the Christian Council of Ghana 1929- 2009I*, 153.

⁶⁵ Anquandah, *Agenda Extraordinaire: 80 Years of the Christian Council of Ghana 1929- 2009*, 153.

⁶⁶ Marian Efe Ansah, "We'll Sanction Heads of Institutions Infringing on Rights of Muslims – Mahama," Citi 97.3 fm, February 26, 2015, <https://citifmonline.com/2015/02/well-sanction-heads-of-institutions-infringing-on-rights-of-muslims-mahama/#sthash.Ga0M6XKr.dpuf>.

⁶⁷ Buah, *A History of Ghana, Revised and Updated*, 100.

⁶⁸ The 2004 Annual Report of the CCG, 44-45.

In recent times, the CCG has expressed concerns about the fallen standards of formal education in Ghana.⁶⁹ This has to do with the poor-quality standards and declining moral and spiritual nurturing in Mission Schools. In response to the challenge, the CCG, the Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ghana, as well as the Office of the National Chief Imam, put together a technical team in 2015 to review the partnership between the government and the Missions on the management of schools founded by religious organizations in Ghana.⁷⁰ Since 2015, the interfaith technical team has been undertaking regular engagements with the General Managers and Regional Managers of the various Religious Educational Units to ascertain their concerns regarding the partnership agreement with the Government.⁷¹ As a result of such engagements the following three recommendations have been made: 1) that the mission schools' partnership with the government on the management of the Mission Schools must be strengthened, and calls on the government to respect that partnership, 2) that CCG builds non-partnership basic schools and manages them without any inputs and/control from the government, 3) the CCG asks for a total takeover of Mission Senior High Schools from government and completely manages them. On November 20, 2017, the religious bodies led by the CCG presented a signed document to the Minister of Education as the official paper of the Missions on the management of Mission Schools in Ghana. The minister at the time, assured the religious leaders of the cabinet's preparedness to address the concerns raised.⁷²

Furthermore, it is worth noting that majority of Mission Schools in Ghana belong to member Churches of the CCG. In a Press Release titled "Return Mission Schools to Churches," the CCG brings to the fore these mission schools (taken over by the state after the passage of the 1961 Educational Act) which it believes must be given back to them to run.⁷³ Some of the schools are Mfantshipim School, Cape Coast- Methodist Church; Wesley Girls Senior High School, Cape Coast- Methodist Church; Aburi Girls Senior High School- Presbyterian Church; Presbyterian Boys Senior High School, Legon; Prempeh College, Kumasi- Methodist/ Presbyterian; St. Monica's Senior High and Training College, Ashanti Mampong- Anglican; Bimbilla College of Education- E.P Church; and Presbyterian College of Education, Akuapem. As a policy, the CCG ensures that these schools are accessible to all Ghanaians irrespective of religious backgrounds.⁷⁴

However, the issue of the religious rights of students in CCG's own public schools has been raised. Recently, the Headmistress of the Wesley Girls High School disallowed Muslim girls from observing the obligatory Ramadan fasting on the school compound.⁷⁵ A statement from the leadership of the Methodist Church, Ghana seemed to support the position of the Head of the school and the Board Chairman. In reference to the position of the church, Hajj Abdel-Manan Abdel-Rahman, President of the Coalition of Muslim Organizations, Ghana (COMOG) on 4th May 2021 called on the leadership of the Methodist Church, Ghana to respect the Constitution and promote religious tolerance and accede to the unilateral directive on the issue by Ghana Education Service. In this particular case, the GES did not show consistency in their policy towards the public mission schools. It issued a directive to the Head of the school to allow the students to fast and pray. This goes contrary to the GES policy of traditionally allowing public mission schools to keep to their unique practices and students would have to attend the schools by parental choice.

⁶⁹ Obrempong Yaw Ampofo, "[Photos] Muslims in Western Region Demonstrate over Discrimination," Citi 97.3 fm, 2015, <https://citifmonline.com/2015/02/photos-muslims-in-western-region-demonstrate-over-discrimination/#sthash.OgmSWrjk.dpuf>.

⁷⁰ Cosmas Ebo Sarbah, "Religious Rights in the State Regulated Mission Schools in Ghana," in *Religion and Sustainable Development: Ghanaian Perspectives*, ed. George Ossom-Batsa, Niccolleta Gatti, and Rabiatsu Deinyo Ammah (Vatican City: Urbaniana University Press, 2018), 45.

⁷¹ Sarbah, "Religious Rights in the State Regulated Mission Schools in Ghana," 45.

⁷² CCG's Annual Report, 2004, 17-19

⁷³ Maurice Garnier and Mark Schafer, "Educational Model and Expansion of Enrollments in Sub-Saharan Africa," *Sociology of Education* 79, no. 2 (2006): 153-76, 154.

⁷⁴ Garnier and Schafer, "Educational Model and Expansion of Enrollments in Sub-Saharan Africa," 154.

⁷⁵ Sarbah, "Religious Rights in the State Regulated Mission Schools in Ghana," 45.

CONCLUSION

Although the CCG does not represent all Christians in Ghana it works in collaboration with other ecumenical partners and other faith-based Organizations for the promotion of its agenda. In this regard, the CCG works together with its Ecumenical partners in Ghana, namely, the GCBC, GPCC, NACC. Also, the CCG works closely with the leadership of the Muslim Community in Ghana. Here, the Office of the National Chief Imam and the Ahmadiyya Muslim Mission plays a very significant role. These partnerships of intra and interreligious engagements are aimed at presenting a united religious front in matters of national interest.

This paper has attempted to examine the programmes and activities of the CCG in relation to interreligious dialogue. The Council does not see interreligious dialogue as an end in itself but as a means to peace and security in the country. When the various religious bodies collaborate and develop a common platform for peace and good governance, Ghana is better for it. It is commendable that an ecumenical body of this stature, the Council has taken a keen interest in inter-religious dialogue in the country. This paper has also discussed the theological foundation that drives the interreligious dialogue of the member churches of the CCG. It is identified that the communal interest of the society is paramount for the continual survival of the larger society. Thus, the CCG collaborates with members of other religious bodies for peacebuilding and conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue and good governance, and social development.

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