



## Public Theology, the Church and Youth Development in Ghana

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### ABSTRACT

The article is an examination of theological insights that Public Theology provides for the development of young people in Ghana. The article argued that the church is strategically positioned to make significant responses to contemporary challenges confronting youth development through its Public Theology. The study affirmed that the churches provide spiritual guidance, Christian education, entrepreneurship programmes, support systems and youth-focused ministries which help the youth to develop a sense of purpose and a strong moral compass such as integrity, compassion and social responsibility. The young people however face the challenge of unemployment, moral decadence, social neglect, relationships and the effects of corruption. The study recommends that through its theological resources, the church must play a vital role in youth development by paying attention to the socialization processes of the youth at home, church and school. Moreover, attention must be paid to mentoring which facilitates the process of discovering the right persons for leadership, entrepreneurship, social transformation and advocacy for young people to be empowered to make significant contributions to church growth and nation building.

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### Publication History

Received 13<sup>th</sup> May, 2023  
Accepted 6<sup>th</sup> September, 2023  
Published online:  
13<sup>th</sup> October, 2023

**Keywords:** *African Christianity, Public Theology, Youth Development*

### INTRODUCTION

The church plays a significant role in youth development in Ghana. Ghana is known for its religious diversity, with Christianity being the dominant religion. Churches run youth ministries and programmes that are aimed at empowering and nurturing the younger generation. They provide spiritual guidance, Christian education, retreats, camps, prayer services and youth-focused activities teaching young people about their faith and encouraging them to develop personal relationships with God. The church instills moral teachings in young people, helping them to develop a sense of purpose and a strong moral compass such as integrity, compassion and social responsibility. Asiedu-Akrofi considers the church's role in youth development as offering a spiritual foundation that helps young people develop values, ethics, emotional strength, sense of responsibility and encourages them to make positive choices in their lives.<sup>1</sup>

Churches in Ghana operate educational programmes and provide scholarships for underprivileged youth. They establish schools and vocational training centres that offer quality education and equip young people with practical skills for employment. Noel Smith has noted that the educational programmes of the church equip young people with practical skills for employment and entrepreneurship.<sup>2</sup> Some of the churches operate schools and educational programmes, particularly in rural areas where access to quality education is limited. These schools offer academic instruction, promote literacy and contribute to the overall educational development of young people. They further offer career guidance and entrepreneurship programmes to help young people make informed decisions about their future.

<sup>1</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Lady Queene Asiedu-Akrofi on Moral Formation of Young People in Schools December 5, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Noel Smith, *The Presbytery Church of Ghana 1835-1960* (Accra: Ghana Universities Press, 1966).

The churches moreover provide mentorship and counselling services for the youth. In the estimation of Tony Oteng Gyasi, the churches provide mentorship, training and resources to help the youth explore different career paths and develop skills for entrepreneurship.<sup>3</sup> These initiatives contribute to reducing illiteracy rates and empowering young individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for their personal and professional growth. Experienced church leaders and volunteers serve as mentors, guiding young people through various challenges they may face. They offer advice, support and a safe space for young individuals to discuss their concerns, seek guidance and receive pastoral care.

The church facilitates youth empowerment and leadership development by providing opportunities for young people to take leadership roles within the church community. They may be involved in youth committees, choirs, drama groups and organizing events. These responsibilities help young people develop essential leadership skills, self-confidence and a sense of responsibility, preparing them for leadership roles within and outside the church. The churches further organize various community engagement programmes and social activities for the youth. Such events promote teamwork, leadership skills and social interaction among young people, fostering a sense of belonging and community.

Young people get the opportunity to seek guidance from experienced leaders and receive support in areas such as career choices, relationships, personal development and dealing with challenges. The pastoral care and support services for young people by the churches address their emotional, psychological and social needs according to Afful-Broni.<sup>4</sup> They offer guidance on personal and family issues, relationships and challenges faced by the youth, helping them to navigate through various life situations.

Youth ministries that focus on providing spiritual, moral and social support to young people have therefore been established by the churches in various congregations for the purpose of the empowerment and development of young people. The churches often provide platforms for young individuals to showcase and develop their talents. They organize talent shows, music and drama performances and sports activities that allow youth to explore their creative and athletic abilities. These opportunities not only promote personal growth but also foster a sense of teamwork, discipline and healthy competition. Youth development however is confronted with contemporary challenges that call on the attention of the church to consider broader participation in matters of the socialization processes, mentoring and entrepreneurship. Thus in its qualitative form, the study gathered available information through a library search. The study moreover identified and interviewed certain individuals with insights into youth empowerment, socialization process, education, leadership and entrepreneurship to gather insights into the contemporary challenges of youth development and how the church must provide the needed support systems for youth ministry.

### **Jesus and Young People**

The focus of Jesus' ministry was the proclamation of the Kingdom of God which people were called to enter through repentance and believe in Christ Jesus as the Messiah Mk 1:15. He began his ministry by calling people, mostly young men to himself. Each Gospel writer emphasises aspects of Jesus' first calling of these young men to himself. Mark states simply that "as Jesus walked besides the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 'Come, follow me' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men.' At once they left their nets and followed him."

When he had gone a little further, he saw James, son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. Without delay, he called them, and they left their father Zebedee and followed him Mk. 1: 16-20. Luke places the episode in the context of the young men having worked hard all night and caught no fish, but in obedience to the words of Jesus, they let down their nets and had a large number of fish. The young men who were called left whatever they were doing and followed Jesus. It shows that Jesus was a great leader, for he was able to influence others to willingly follow him. Jesus had the capacity to inspire enough confidence in the young people for them to put their trust in him to the point of risking all they had to follow him. This is what leadership is all about, the ability to influence others.

The encounter between Jesus and the first young men indicates that young people are looking for someone to lead them and when they find the person(s) who inspires their confidence and trust they will follow that person. Jesus however, did something more to these young men than making them followers. Jesus turned the young men, who had no formal education, none of them was a professional clergy and without much social influence, into great leaders. To put it simply, Jesus turned followers into leaders. Whenever Jesus calls people

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<sup>3</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Dr Tony Oteng Gyasi Young People, Unemployment and Entrepreneurship January 9, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Rev Fr. Prof. Anthony Afful-Broni on Moral Formation of Young People in Academic Institutions September 23, 2021.

to follow him, he is able to see the potential in them and what they could become when their hidden talents are fully developed. For instance, when Andrew introduced Peter to Jesus, 'Jesus looked at him and said, 'you are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas'. In other words, Simon would become someone greater than he was before he was called to follow Jesus. He would become a solid leader like a rock. In sum, Jesus' attitude towards people, including young men and women is to call them to follow him and then turn them into helpful leaders. He transforms them from the inside out and gives them back their self-respect and dignity.

### **The Bible and Youth in Leadership**

Both the Old and the New Testaments have a lot to say about young people, especially youth in leadership positions. An example is Joseph who became the Prime Minister at a youthful age. Joshua was called to succeed Moses when he was young, he led the people of Israel across the Jordan, conquered the enemies on the land and established the nation of Israel on the promised land and lived till his old age. Samuel was a young man when God called him to be the prophet-judge of Israel. Saul the King of Israel was 'an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites-a head taller than any of the others' 1 Sam 9:2. David the youngest of the sons of Jesse was anointed king of Israel by Samuel and later became the greatest of all the kings of Israel.

The proverbial wise king Solomon was appointed king of Israel when he was young and inexperienced. Jeremiah, one of the greatest of the prophets was called to speak to the nations to destroy and rebuild when he was a young person. He intensely and faithfully served the Lord for forty years. Esther was a young woman who played a leading role in the liberation of her people. Jesus himself was a young man when he began his ministry and called to himself young men who became his disciples. The first Christian martyr Stephen was a young man and when he was being stoned to death the persecutors laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul who later became Paul. He mentored two young people, Timothy and Titus into leadership. Among the Gospel writers was a young man called Mark.

These young people from the Old and the New Testaments clearly indicate that the Bible has a place for young people when it comes to leadership. They were not expected to wait until they were old enough to lead. They were not being prepared for future leadership. Rather they were called to serve their present age, with all their powers engaged to do the Master's will. God called them to serve their present age, the here and now. He did not despise their youth. This truism is significant because in the biblical age, like in contemporary times, the youth were not highly regarded as wise and capable of good leadership. Paul advised young Timothy that they should not allow anyone to despise them because they are young rather they should set an example in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity 1 Timothy 4:12.

### **Public Theology and Youth Development in Ghana**

The integration of Public Theology into youth development initiatives in Ghana facilitates the process of young people becoming equipped with a strong ethical foundation, a sense of social responsibility, critical thinking skills and a commitment to nation building. This holistic approach to youth development contributes to a more inclusive, just, and sustainable society in Ghana. It provides a platform for young people in Ghana to explore the intersection of their religious beliefs and values with societal issues. It empowers them to become agents of change, advocates for justice, and active participants in shaping their communities and nation. Kwame Gyekye affirms that by integrating faith and cultural values into youth development initiatives, the nation fosters a generation of socially conscious, morally grounded and productive young leaders.<sup>5</sup>

Public Theology is a branch of theology that seeks to explore the role of faith in public life and the engagement of religious communities with social, cultural and political issues. It refers to the application of theological principles and values to the public sphere. It involves the engagement of Christian beliefs, values and principles with broader public life. Public Theology and youth development in Ghana are interconnected in various ways. The interconnection plays a crucial role in shaping the perspectives and actions of young people. It further plays a crucial role in youth development by promoting character formation, moral guidance, social justice, community development and active citizenship.<sup>6</sup>

Theological perspectives provide a framework for young people to integrate their Christian beliefs and values with their engagement in society, leading to holistic youth development and contributing to the betterment of society as a whole. It plays a vital role in youth development by promoting social justice, community development, interfaith cooperation, empowerment and social entrepreneurship. The promotion of the functions of Public Theology in youth development is pursued through various platforms such as educational

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<sup>5</sup> Kwame Gyekye, *African Cultural Values* (Accra: Sankofa Publishing Company, 1996).

<sup>6</sup> Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, *Indigenous Knowledge and Christian Missions: Perspective of Akan Leadership Formation on Christian Leadership Development* (Accra: SonLife Press, 2012).

institutions, Christian organizations, youth forums and community gatherings. It provides young people with theological frameworks and practical tools to engage with public issues and actively contribute to the development of their communities and nation.

### **Theological Insights and Contemporary Youth Challenges**

Public Theology provides theological insights that are needed for youth development, empowerment and entrepreneurship. Among them are the socialization process, mentoring, the teaching ministry, and holistic formation.

#### ***Young People as Wealth***

Young people are the most dynamic force of humanity as well as the most productive in every sense of the word. This is demonstrated in terms of physical strength, sports and athletics, labour forces, intellectual creativity and ingenuity, curiosity and spiritual motivation. They are surely the very future of any human society and therefore of the church as well. Young people are gifts from God. According to the Psalmist, they are a heritage from the Lord. In fact, because they are potential wealth, they are to be treasured, like arrows in a quiver. No wonder Mary and Joseph treasured their child Jesus so much that they could not afford to lose him, and left alone leave him alone in Jerusalem, even with the teachers of the law. They risked everything and braved the dangers of the Judean desert (do not forget the story of the man who fell among robbers on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho in Lk. 10:29-37) in order to find him after three days of walking and searching, full of fears and anxiety. Indeed, they really loved him.

Young people are lovely and must be loved. Not only did Jesus's parents love him, but he also loved young people as is recorded in the bible "and Jesus looking upon him (the rich young man) loved him" Mk 10:21. Jesus loved him for what he is, youthful and exuberant, he loved him for having kept all the commandments from his youth, he loved him for his very genuine desire to aspire to excellence and to inherit eternal life. Christians are called upon to love young people for all they are and for all their genuine desires and aspirations. Young people are the wealth of the church and society. They are endowed with great potential in terms of vital energies, talents and intelligence, drive and curiosity, desires and aspirations to excellence. Their neglect reduces the worth of the church and the larger society.

#### ***Youth Empowerment and Development***

Theological insights facilitate critical thinking and intellectual engagement among the youth. It emphasizes the importance of education as a means of personal and societal development. According to Afful-Broni, the church facilitates educational programmes, workshops and seminars that empower young people with knowledge and critical thinking skills, enabling them to analyse social issues, make informed decisions and contribute to the development of the nation.<sup>7</sup> Public Theology emphasizes the importance of intellectual engagement and critical thinking. It encourages young people to explore and understand complex social, political and economic issues. Through Public Theology, young people are motivated to pursue education, engage in intellectual debates and contribute their ideas and perspectives to societal discussions.

Christian faith values contribute to the personal development and well-being of young people. As noted by Asiedu Akrofi they provide the framework for understanding their identity, purpose and meaning in life, which are essential aspects of youth development. It encourages young people to develop a holistic approach to their lives, integrating their spiritual beliefs and practices with other aspects such as education, career, relationships and mental health. It recognizes the potential of young people as leaders and change-makers.<sup>8</sup> Through youth-focused programs, public theologians are able to help young individuals develop their talents, enhance their leadership skills and cultivate a sense of purpose and responsibility towards society.

Public Theology also contributes to youth development by promoting empowerment and social entrepreneurship among young people. Amo Tobin has opined that the church's role in youth development provides opportunities for young people to develop their skills and talents through social innovation and entrepreneurship. It encourages young people to use their faith and social values to identify and address social issues in their communities, promoting a sense of agency and self-determination.<sup>9</sup> The church empowers young people to take on leadership responsibilities within the church community. The Presbyterian Church of Ghana for instance creates opportunities for young people to be represented, participate in decision-making processes

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<sup>7</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Rev Fr. Prof. Anthony Afful-Broni.

<sup>8</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Lady Queene Asiedu-Akrofi.

<sup>9</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Dr. Samuel Amo Tobbin Entrepreneurship and Philanthropism September 19, 2019.

and serve in various ministries.<sup>10</sup> By entrusting them with leadership roles, the church encourages young people to discover and develop their leadership potential.

### ***Teaching the Youth***

The Gospel narratives make it clear that teaching was an essential element in Jesus's attitude toward the young men he called to be with him. He imparted a body of knowledge to them. He taught them who God is, about the kingdom of God, and how to enter it and continue as a living member of God's family. He taught them how to share the life of the kingdom with those who are outside it. Thus, he expected them to act on the knowledge they had received from him. He also demonstrated in his life and actions the lessons he taught them. For instance, he showed them total dependence on God, the willingness and delight to do God's will. His food was to do the will of his Father who sent him as he told the young men who worked with him.

He was not interested in self-advertising and headline-grabbing. He was compassionate towards the social outcasts and optimistic about life. He demonstrated all these qualities in his own life and challenged the young men who were his disciples to imitate him. They were mandated to bring new people into the kingdom and to continue the teaching ministry. In other words, the teaching ministry is to remain a permanent feature of the people of the kingdom. They were to make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything he had commanded them Matt 28: 19-20. Churches must therefore develop relevant teaching programmes which are biblically based for the youth in order to maintain the young men and women in the church. The young people must have a strong desire to study the Word of God which will make them loyal followers of Jesus Christ.

### ***Mentoring the Youth***

Mentoring was a process that Jesus used in preparing the disciples for leadership. Mentoring is a process whereby a person in a leadership position (the mentor) sees leadership potential in a still-to-be-developed person (the mentee) and is able to promote or otherwise significantly influence the mentee toward the realization of their potential. Jesus was a great mentor. He saw greatness in the life of the young men who were with him. He tolerated their slowness in understanding the teachings of the kingdom and he knew that it would take time and energy for them to develop to their full potential.

Mentoring requires the meeting of lives. Jesus invested not only his time but his life in the disciples. He risked his life in order to make them fully developed leaders for the kingdom. He worked with them, ate with them and involved them in ministry. He stayed close to them for the whole three years when he was actively involved in the work of his Father. He also provided all the spiritual and material resources that the disciples needed to grow into maturity. If Jesus had not had a mentoring attitude toward the disciples, he would have given up on them in the first few months that he called them.

In the Bible, it was not only Jesus that mentored people. Joshua had Moses as his mentor. He went with Joshua to the tent of meeting to pray several times Exodus 33:7-11. By the time Moses died, he had prepared young Joshua to take over from him as a wise leader Deut. 34:9. Barnabas was a great mentor, who mentored both Paul and John Mark. Without his mentoring abilities, the church would have lost these two great leaders of the church. Mentoring remains an important aspect of preparing young people for leadership in the church. If the church desires to maintain vibrant young people with a mature sense of leadership, then it would have to rediscover the ministry of mentoring. Without proper mentoring, all the potential in young people will remain hidden and eventually die in them.

### **The Socialization Process**

Ministry is about translating the new life possibilities in Christ into concrete inter-human structures that create, sustain and promote life, which also criticise those aspects of human existence that devalue life. The youthful stage is a station in life where one prepares and is prepared by society for adulthood. Youth ministry then is a creation of those structures and institutions that will help the youth prepare adequately to enter society and contribute their quotas. As a Christian community, the imperative is not peripheral to witness. It is at the centre, because Christianity is about creation, recreation and transformation of the life of individuals and communities in accordance with God's will for human beings revealed in Jesus Christ.

The preparation of young people for adulthood depends on both personal aspects of the preparation and an objective social preparation aspect. Asiedu Akrofi has pointed out that the lack of adequate moral and spiritual foundation leads to wrong and negative choices that deprive young people of wholesome adult life.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Constitution of Presbyterian Church of Ghana (Accra: Waterville Publishing House, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Lady Queene Asiedu-Akrofi.

The personal aspect of preparation must deal with the choices that one makes i.e., moral, spiritual, social, choice of friends, leisure, etc. The objective and social aspects of the preparation are the structures and institutions that societies create for the socialization of their youth i.e., schools, family life, religion, entertainment, fashion, media, peer influence, training of all kinds, etc. These aspects of preparation are syntactically related and they do complement each other to the extent that crises in one affect the other.

Formal education has in modern times become the most important means of socialization of the individual in terms of providing the technical skills and requisite knowledge for efficient performance in the socialization process for the youth. The internal aspect of the preparation of the youth must deal with the family, the community and the church as a medium through which certain moral and spiritual values are inculcated in the youth which it's hoped would allow the youth to make the right choices. As indicated by Afful-Broni when there is a crisis in these nurturing institutions then it means the preparation of the youth will also be in crisis. Furthermore, crises in either the social institution for preparing the youth or the nurturing institution for preparing the youth affect each other and their impact on the preparation process becomes negative.<sup>12</sup>

The signs of contemporary times, unfortunately, indicate serious crises in both public socialization institutions as well as nurturing institutions. The crises in these preparation institutions have affected the socialization process of many youths. The large dropout rates in schools, the large army of homeless youth, numerous jobless youths, teenage pregnancy, the increasingly terrifying drug culture, etc., shows that the youth of today are in serious crisis. This means that the youth ministry of any church must address these issues at all levels of socialization.

### ***Holistic Formation***

Education and formation of young people must deliberately target the entirety of the human person to guarantee comprehensive formation as cautioned by Tveit.<sup>13</sup> Educational values, curriculum development, agents and praxis that seek to be holistic therefore must focus on the mind, the hand and the heart. When people are trained, especially children and it is not ensured that young people are holistically educated it is possible to train only the mind and not necessarily the hand and the heart. If education does not affect the heart of young people, they end up using the intelligence acquired in schools to cleverly find a way of enriching themselves at the expense of the nation.

Moral and spiritual values must be paramount in any educational system for education without moral and spiritual values education will produce intelligent criminals. Morality has a role to play in the formation of the human person. Those in educational management must consider that aspect of training people in moral uprightness. The major agencies of holistic formation have remained the family, church/religion, family, schools and the larger society.

### ***The Home and the Socialization Process***

The Scriptures say that train up the child the way they should go and when they grow up they will not depart from it. This parental task can be seen in a positive sense. Parents can as well teach their children immoral behaviours which equally will stay with the children. There are parents who in an effort to want their children to pass their examinations for instance will be willing to pay money to some examination officials to have leaked examination questions or to influence the marking of examination papers and results.<sup>14</sup> Such a child has learnt from the parents that it is possible to get your life through such corrupt practices. It can remain a lifestyle for a child. If acquired certificates do not match with knowledge and experience, the task on the ground will definitely prove employed staff wrong.

There is a role that morality and virtue consciousness play in the life of any human being in any part of the world. There is something called tough love. If a child asks for something and you have it, you don't necessarily have to give it to the child all the time. It is better to let a child who has not studied experience the consequence of not studying. If they have to fail and write the papers again, they will learn a better lesson. Parents must be disciplined themselves and teach their children to be disciplined. You do not show love by providing everything and anything because your children think they want them. Parents must learn to raise children the way they should go so that when they grow, they will not depart from it.

Charity begins at home and therefore the family unit must always be the beginning of the formation of young people. When a child is born, he has the family as the immediate society. The parents are the people who

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<sup>12</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Rev Fr. Prof. Anthony Afful-Broni.

<sup>13</sup> Olav Fykse Tveit, *The Role of Religion in Sustainable Development and Peace*. (Berlin : World Council of Churches February 17-18, 2016).

<sup>14</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Lady Queene Asiedu-Akrofi.

are supposed to instill core values of respect, how to relate to each other and how to show gratitude for the services people provide to the child. If such formation is done properly before even the child enters formal education the child is equipped with basic moral foundations. When they go to school with such a moral foundation, be it primary, secondary, or tertiary they are ready to build on it. Much as emphasis must be placed on excellent academics in schools, there is a need to keep the balance of core values that are embedded in the rules and regulations in the school curriculum and the total educational environment. Parents and teachers who are condoning and conniving to poison these young innocent children must know that they have lost it as the custodian of these children. The onus is on parents to give their children the proper moral foundation. When they go to the schools, the teachers build on the solid foundation already built and the nation will be the great beneficiary.

The family unit is the most crucial part of society so if children are going to do well, the family and parents have a crucial role to play. Most of the time some people want to get rich quickly through any dubious means without acquiring training and moral principles. Societies do not develop properly with encroached and embedded moral decadence. When children are trained at a younger age and they are moved persistently up the moral ladder, the current moral decadence will be curbed. The lack of this has led to the high rate of indiscipline that has permeated the body politics of society and almost all other sectors. Children must first and foremost learn accountability and other social values from home.

### **The Church and Youth Formation**

The church has always been an institution for the cultivation of moral and spiritual values that create the conditions for individuals and citizens to perform their civic and public duties properly. Virtues like honesty, dedication, hard work, decency and loyalty which build a nation are all supposed to be provided by the church as its moral and spiritual contribution to nation-building and development. Peter Schweizer has noted that the proverbial 'Presbyterian Discipline' represents the contribution of the mainline churches to nation-building as a nurturing institution.<sup>15</sup>

The church no longer controls the schools through which these values were cultivated in the youth. Unfortunately, the idea of Christianity as the source of nurturing public values for nation-building is being replaced by a view of Christianity as essentially a spiritual formula for quick solutions for dealing with everyday life issues. This trend in popular Christianity is not helping the church to see its contribution to public morality as part of its mission to society. When the church fails to cultivate the required public virtues in the youth, then it has failed in its moral vocation and its spiritual contribution to nation-building and development. The near-death of social ministry in popular Christianity does not help youth to be adequately prepared for adulthood by society to bring public virtues to national life.

### **Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation**

Interfaith dialogue and cooperation are essential for youth development. In a religiously diverse country like Ghana, interfaith engagement is crucial for fostering mutual understanding, respect and collaboration. Young people must be motivated to engage in dialogue, build relationships and work together on common societal issues, transcending religious boundaries and fostering social cohesion. This fosters peaceful coexistence among the youth, enabling them to work together for common goals and address societal challenges.

Christian faith perspectives facilitate interfaith cooperation by encouraging dialogue and collaboration among different religious communities. This cooperation promotes tolerance, understanding and harmony among young people of different faiths, which is essential for the development of a harmonious society.

### **Christian Advocacy**

Public Theology often inspires young people to engage in advocacy for social change. It encourages them to raise their voices against injustice, inequality and various forms of social ills. Through Christian faith perspectives, the youth are able to explore how their faith calls them to address issues such as poverty, corruption, gender inequality, environmental degradation and more. This empowers them to become active agents of change within their communities. It encourages young people to be actively engaged in addressing social injustices and advocating for positive change. It emphasizes the importance of equality, human rights and the dignity of all individuals. Through it, young people are empowered to challenge societal norms that perpetuate injustice and work towards creating a more just and inclusive society.

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<sup>15</sup> Peter A. Schweizer, *Survivors on the Gold Coast*. (Accra: Smartline Publishing, 2000).

It advocates for social justice and equity for young people. It calls for policies that promote youth participation in decision-making processes and the protection of their rights. Through various public forums, theological institutions and leaders have raised awareness of social injustices and systemic issues that affect the youth, such as poverty, unemployment and lack of access to education and healthcare. It equips them with the theological tools to analyse and address issues such as poverty, inequality, corruption and human rights violations. Through Public Theology, young people are inspired to work towards a more just and equitable society, contributing to their personal and societal development.

### **The Educational System and Socialization Process**

Education may have different typologies, strategies and philosophies. However, according to Afful-Broni education that would be beneficial to the nation must be student-centred education.<sup>16</sup> The banking system of education for example, where the teacher is the embodiment of all the knowledge and so the students are to go there as if they are “tabula rasa” as if they do not have any knowledge and so they are supposed to go there and be like the ignorant attentive listeners to expect those who have all the knowledge to fill their empty minds does not offer much as pointed out by Paolo Freire.<sup>17</sup> There may be some value to that, but anybody who espouses that and emphasizes that is creating a major problem for the education delivery process.

The teacher has to know a lot more than the students on some specific subjects, but the teacher is not the only owner of the knowledge. Afful-Broni opined that the teacher is not the only one who knows something, even at the kindergarten level, the children have some experiences. They have some knowledge and interest. They have some experiences with the way they perceive and understand realities around them. The teacher or the facilitator has to bear first and foremost in mind that it is the student who has to be at the centre of the education delivery process.<sup>18</sup> Education has to be student-centre because it is about empowering this individual, who has come with some knowledge, and some experience and who needs to be affirmed, empowered, and helped to add on to what they know. The teacher, who goes into the classroom, has to leave the classroom with certain ideas and certain facts that they had or thought they had altered, improved, added on, some removed, some deleted and this will make education transformative. This is the education that will work, education that matters. The interest, experiences, expectations, anxieties and weaknesses of students must be taken into consideration in the educational system.

That is how agents of education can reach out to the level of the student and lift them up, empower them, and make them responsible citizens. Whiles doing that, the educational system must end up touching their minds, hearts, and their hands so that once they are graduated, they are able to use the knowledge acquired creatively and effectively. They will be working from their hearts and they will be using their hands in whatever they do as educated people from whichever level they are able to attain.

### **Youth Entrepreneurship**

There has been increasing recognition of the importance of entrepreneurship as a means of promoting economic development and reducing unemployment and poverty among the youth. The youth entrepreneurship programmes typically focus on developing practical skills, such as business planning, marketing and financial management for young people. It also provides access to financing, mentorship and networking opportunities. Entrepreneur instinct includes how to find the money for start-ups. In an interview with Tony Oteng Gyasi, he stated, “If you are a young person desiring to go to entrepreneurship you should have someone who will be willing to loan you money. Because you don’t have any experience and track record the banks will be reluctant in giving you loans. Remember that the money at the bank is somebody’s savings and the banks do not want to lose that money. The bank will not give money to somebody who has no track record, who has no experience, who hasn’t managed one thousand cedis before and yet wants a hundred thousand cedis that will not be very prudent on the part of a bank.”<sup>19</sup>

He added “The way start-ups get money is through family and friends, people whom you know, people for some reason have known you as a child growing up, your parents, your siblings, your uncles, your nephews who think that this brother of ours has entrepreneur instinct and he wants to do something so let’s help him so let’s invest in you. They will give you the very first money. As a start-up you must start small, there is no point that you have just left school and you want to start a business and you need ten million cedis before you start because you do not know how to manage ten million cedis. You start with something small. If it is from selling

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<sup>16</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Rev Fr. Prof. Anthony Afful-Broni.

<sup>17</sup> Paolo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Publishing, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Rev Fr. Prof. Anthony Afful-Broni.

<sup>19</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Dr Tony Oteng Gyasi.

a sachet of water or even washing cars, you start with something small which your own people who know you, who trust you, people who know your character can afford to say that if a person wants to start selling water, if I give him my five hundred Ghana cedis I know he will pay me back and out of that you can start your business. You may want to produce mineral water, but you will start by selling some first. Eventually, when you have established a track record, you can raise the money and buy the machines and go into production.”<sup>20</sup>

### **Youth Unemployment: Albatross on Our Neck or Opportunity for Industrialization**

Young people are the worth of the nation, but of late young people are being challenged with some of the contemporary issues including unemployment. This is not only a Ghanaian challenge. The issue of unemployment is a global challenge but Christians must be able to discern how to turn the challenges into opportunities. Every generation comes with its own challenges, so it is not surprising that there are challenges now, but out of some of these challenges arise opportunities. People at different times have risen to the challenge not just working for themselves in the private sector but also going into manufacturing. It may appear to be some challenges, but challenges come with every generation and true entrepreneurs find ways to do what they must do despite these challenges. So young people of today need not despair and give up and think that there was some rosy past that it was easier to do things, it has never been that way.

According to Oteng Gyasi, “There is no way a huge national population can be an albatross and a challenge if we know what to do with it. China and India have national populations of over a billion people. If the numbers are not albatrosses on them and they are able to manage their numbers, Ghana with a population of 30 million people must rather learn to manage it effectively. The very people that are considered economic challenges also constitute the market to which you will sell your goods. If you make ice cream, you would want a market of thirty million people more than a market of ten million people.”<sup>21</sup>

In an interview with Amo Tobin, he also stated “We should rather consider our youth population as an opportunity. The question is how do we turn a population of unemployed youth into purchasing power market that can demand things, that is where manufacturing comes in.”<sup>22</sup> Tobin has noted that “we cannot have people in our country and yet everything we use and sell in the country is imported from outside the country for whatever reasons. You should aim to produce as much of your needs in your country. If your primary consideration as a nation is that if you make it locally, will it be more expensive than if we import it, it will not work because, at our stage of development, there is nothing you can start to make in Ghana today which somebody somewhere will not be prepared to sell to you, cheaper than how you can make it yourself. Does it mean we should import everything and leave our people unemployed that is the critical question we need to ask ourselves.”<sup>23</sup>

He continued further “We use our government money to import everything. Let us come out with policies to encourage the consumption of made-in-Ghana goods. It is not just for only rice; let us look at ways in which we can use our own government expenditure to get our economy growing. We need to be able to stand up and fashion policies that will make use of our people. Our people are our greatest resource. We say that but we don’t act as if they are, we don’t empower them, we don’t give them advantages, we need to sit down and think about how to do these things for the development of the nation.”<sup>24</sup>

### **Skills Development**

As part of any national development strategy, one needs to have skills development because for example, if a contractor needs to lay tiles, he/she will look for the person who will lay the tiles best rather than starting out with a person who is a tribesman. The intention here is to get the best service. The education system especially vocational training institutions are to ensure that they are training people who have the skill set required for the various industries. If it is layers of tiles that are required, how many tiles layers are being trained and how well are they being trained? such that if a contractor needs a mason or a carpenter they will not go outside the country, for example, to Benin or Togo and bring one in if they can find one in Ghana equally skillful. The national development agenda must be a complete whole.

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<sup>20</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Dr Tony Oteng Gyasi.

<sup>21</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Dr Tony Oteng Gyasi.

<sup>22</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Dr. Samuel Amo Tobbin.

<sup>23</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Dr. Samuel Amo Tobbin.

<sup>24</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Dr. Samuel Amo Tobbin.

## Management and Supervision

The attitude of any worker at any level, even at the managerial level is the function of the person who oversees or manages him or her. It is the job of the manager to bring out the best in a worker. A lot of the time when people talk about poor worker attitude, what they do not realise is that it is the function of the management and it is an indication of inadequate or poor management. The same workers in a nation that local employers complain about, a multinational company takes these same workers and they work with them and the story is different. They re-train, work with them and are happy that Ghanaians are good workers. These same workers go outside Ghana and the system in which they operate brings out the best in them. Oteng Gyasi insists that “it is the job of management to bring out the best in workers but not to go and look at workers as some angels who have come from heaven and they will deliver whether you have to train them or not, whether you have cultured them or not, whether you have made them to understand work, the way you want them to work or not. The worker attitude depends on the management which controls them.”<sup>25</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The church is strategically positioned to make significant responses to contemporary challenges confronting youth development through its Public Theology. The churches provide spiritual guidance, Christian education, entrepreneurship programmes, support systems and youth-focused ministries which help the youth to develop a sense of purpose and strong moral compasses such as integrity, compassion and social responsibility. The young people however face the challenge of unemployment, moral decadence, social neglect, relationships and the effects of corruption. The study recommends that through its theological resources, the church must play a vital role in youth development by paying attention to the socialization processes of the youth at home, church and school. Moreover, attention must be paid to mentoring which facilitates the discovery of the right person for leadership, entrepreneurship, social transformation and advocacy for the young people to be empowered to make significant contributions to church growth nation building.

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<sup>25</sup> Excerpts of an interview with Dr. Tony Oteng Gyasi.