



Research Article

Christian or Secular School: Examining the Stated Identity of Methodist University College Ghana (MUCG)

ABSTRACT

It has been argued that, Christian Universities or Christian higher institutions are not the ones that merely recognize a historic connection to a church, denomination or Christianity. They are also not institutions that are members of religious associations of colleges and universities due to their historical connections but that do not identify their religious identity as influencing their mission or as being central to their institutional identity. This paper has sought to examine the Methodist University College Ghana (MUCG) to find out if its Christian identity is as stated or it is simply assumed. The paper employs the qualitative case study approach in analysing MUCG's stated identity as expressed in its core values, vision and mission statements, from the perspective of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU). The findings do not indicate that MUCG's identity as clearly and emphatically stated in its philosophy as Christian. It has therefore not been able to express it adequately in its core values, vision and mission statements. It is therefore recommended that if MUCG really intends to be classified as a Christian Institution, then there is the need for a complete review of its stated philosophy from which every institution's identity, core values and mission are derived. This paper contributes to knowledge in the identity of Christian Educational institutions.

Keywords: Philosophy, Identity, Mission, Vision, Methodist University College Ghana

INTRODUCTION

The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) defines a Christian school by its mission and identity, which should be the education of students from a Christian perspective and developing them in the image of God.² Vaden³ corroborates this definition and the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU) affirms Christian Philosophy as being the basic ingredient in the definition of any institution as Christian.⁴ An examination of the stated identities of a number of Christian designated institutions has however revealed that a number of institutions so designated have been because of the likely assumption of some well-intended, religious stakeholders. Their assumption that an institution established by a church, a Christian body, organization or an individual Christian implies the institution is Christian is a likely basis for many others. In my interactions with stakeholders of a number of these institutions, especially the Church-founded ones, they are often very confident and strongly affirm the institutions as Christian. This notion, which is seemingly an anomaly, is the motivation for this paper.

Vaden, among other scholars in the field of Christian Education has established that, it takes more than just being

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² Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI), *How to Start an Urban Christian School*, (2001). https://www.acsi.org/Documents/Urban/USS_HTSAUCS-smaller%20version.pdf, 20-25.

³ Brett Vaden, *What makes a Christian School Christian*, Accessed: April 03, 2019 <https://classicallatin.org/exordium/what-makes-a-christian-school-christian/>

⁴ CCCU, *What is Christian Higher Education*. Accessed: September, 2018. <https://www.cccu.org/about/#heading-what-is-christian-higher-4>

founded or being aligned to a Christian founder, association or even a church to be classified as a Christian institution.⁵ A proper understanding of what a Christian school really is according to the accepted technical definition is therefore very critical in determining the actual status of a number of schools which are classified as Christian institutions.

This paper seeks to examine some documented definitions of the identity of the Methodist University College Ghana (MUCG) as stated in its statutes and other official documents as against some of those expressed by some important stakeholders of the institution to ascertain its appropriate designation as to whether it is indeed a Christian institution or a Christian-founded institution.

A CHRISTIAN SCHOOL

An institution classified as Christian is assumed to be owned by a Christian or affiliated to a Christian body or church. However, according to Vaden, it takes more than a name and association or ownership to make an educational institution Christian school or institution Christian.⁶ The question then comes up as to what a Christian school or institution really is?

Various Christian institutional documents give various definitions of what a Christian school is. Dayton Christian School in its 2018 Parent-Teacher Revised Handbook traces the foundations of Christian schools in America to the beginnings of the founding of the state.⁷ The document records that most of the schools were started by churches and the teachers were mostly Christian. In these schools, young people were taught to read so that primarily, they would be able to read and understand the Bible. All other subjects that were taught were done to project the workings of God through all those disciplines. History was about how God has worked through the ages, science was about God's wonderful creation, even mathematical illustrations and examples were taken from the Bible or the religious life of the people.⁸ In effect, the reference point of knowledge was the Bible and faith was integrated into their learning.⁹

The Dayton Handbook states further that as government took over the establishment of public schools over time, most of the teachers were still Christians, and they often taught God's Word, as well as the other subjects until the employment of non-Christian teachers to teach in the public schools, which they argue, shifted emphasis on the Bible and biblical principles to Humanism¹⁰ which began to dominate the educational system in America.¹¹ This brought the recognition of the fact that what their children were being taught in the public schools was the opposite of what they were trying to teach them at home. These concerned parents began starting Christian schools, in which their children would receive an education where Jesus Christ is proclaimed as Lord in all areas of life and all subjects in the curriculum taught from a Christian and biblical worldview.¹² A Christian school therefore, from the Dayton Christian School's perspective, is an institution which places emphasis on the Bible and biblical principles and seeks to impact the lives of its students in line with their religious beliefs.

According to Willowdale, a Christian school is like any other school where teaching and learning takes place. The difference however is that as Christian, it is a place where Christian love and concern are interwoven with the task of learning.¹³ Willowdale advances further that, resources and gifts in a Christian school are regarded as given by God to be used in service and leadership and that it should be a place where Christian principles are integrated into all courses.¹⁴ Willowdale Christian school strongly advocates that the Christian school must be "a community of faith, a place where students and teachers speak freely about God and His greatness... God's words are spoken in the classroom of a Christian school."¹⁵ Willowdale concludes:

His voice is also heard on the playground, in the hallways, in the Principal's office, in the boardroom, and in the community to which the school witnesses. In even the smallest aspect of the Christian school, it is obvious that it is an institution that nurtures students in their faith, equipping them to eventually pass along God's truths to succeeding generations.¹⁶

For Willowdale School therefore, a Christian school is not merely demonstrated in name and in literature but practically

⁵ Vaden, *What makes a Christian School Christian*.

⁶ Ibid..

⁷ Dayton Christian School, *Parent-Student Handbook Revised*, (2018). Accessed: September 12, 2018. <https://30lx324b9sdj3re6rq3raiif-wpengine.netdna-ssl.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/2019-2020-Parent-Student-Handbook.pdf>. 6

⁸ Dayton Christian School, *Parent-Student Handbook*, 6

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ According to the Kienel et al, Humanism is a man-made attempt to elevate man above God. It is based on the principle that people's spiritual and emotional needs can be satisfied without following a god or religion. See Paul A. Kienel, Ollie E. Gibbs & Sharon R. Berry eds, *Philosophy of Christian School Education*. (Colorado: ACSI, 1998)

¹¹ Dayton Christian School, *Parent-Student Handbook*, 6

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Willowdale Christian School, *Parent Handbook (Policies & Guidelines)*, 2013 – 2014. Accessed: April 03, 2019, <https://www.willowdalechristianschool.org/wpdm-package/parent-handbook/>. 6.

¹⁴ Willowdale Christian School, *Parent Handbook*. 6.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

demonstrated from its philosophy and policies as well as in practical implementation from management to students and even to succeeding generations

The Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) also defines a Christian school as one that has as its mission the education of people from a Christian perspective derived from shared biblical values mutually held by churches and Christian families, teaching biblical truth as centred in the Lord Jesus and applicable in all areas of life.¹⁷ It further states that it is important that a Christian school, so called, presents this Christian point of view and this must be exemplified by a dedicated, professional faculty and the evidence must be seen in all facets of learning and growth.

The association is of the conviction that when this dynamic reaches fruition, it should produce students who know how to learn, live, and work as faithful citizens of the kingdom of God.¹⁸ It is therefore understandable for Kienel to propose that, it is essential to understand the fundamental principles of what makes Christian education truly Christian.¹⁹ Kienel suggests that to properly understand what Christian education is which directly relates to a Christian educational institution, one needs to interrogate its distinctive characteristics, how the Christian philosophy of education translates to the classroom, the curriculum, student activities and future careers.²⁰

No matter how passionate one feels about the designation of an institution and how loudly it is expressed, the fact remains that Christian institutions have certain standard tenets that define their identities. These must be strongly embedded in the institution's philosophy of education and its identity which is normally expressed in its vision and mission statements and core values. The question this paper tries to find an answer to is: Is MUCG a Christian school by the documented definition of its identity or it is a Church-founded secular School?

METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research methodology was used for this study. John W. Creswell has indicated that a qualitative research seeks to explore and understand the meaning individual stakeholders and institutions ascribe to a social or human problem.²¹ This has been further elaborated on by William L. Neuman who has indicated that, it has to do with interpretative issues that originate in religious and literary studies of textual material, in which in-depth inquiry into text and relating its parts to the whole can reveal deeper meanings.²² A lot of textual as well as literary materials are employed in this case. Qualitative research is also said to be an attempt to find answers to how individuals or people or even institutions are affected by events that go on around them.²³

Data was collected through the gathering, study and analysis of relevant documents available in hard prints and through online sources. Some interviews were also conducted with some relevant personalities who were discriminatively sampled to corroborate or otherwise some stated information. These personalities are those who have been associated with MUCG from its earliest beginnings. The data was then analysed with the Association of Christian Schools International's (ACSI) and the Council for Christian Colleges and Universities' (CCCU's) criterion. By this model, a Christian school is defined as a school:

- Having a clear Christian Philosophy of education.
- Having a mission to educate people from a Christian perspective derived from shared biblical values mutually held by churches and Christian families, teaching biblical truth as centred in the Lord Jesus and applicable in all areas of life.
- Presenting this Christian point of view as exemplified by a dedicated, professional faculty and evidenced in all facets of learning and growth. CCCU insists that their professors pursue academic excellence because they are committed to God as the author of truth.

Among these institutions are Council for Christian Colleges and Universities (CCCU),²⁴ and Willowdale School²⁵ among others as indicated in this work.

HISTORY OF MUCG

The Wesleyan Mission Society arrived in Ghana in 1835.²⁶ Since then, the Methodist Church has been involved in the provision and development of high quality education at the basic, senior secondary and teacher training levels. Despite

¹⁷ ACSI, *How to Start an Urban Christian School*. 20-22.

¹⁸ Ibid., 20-25.

¹⁹ Paul A. Kienel, Ollie E. Gibbs & Sharon R. Berry eds, *Philosophy of Christian School Education*. Colorado: ACSI (1998)

²⁰ Kienel, et al, eds, *Philosophy of Christian School Education*.

²¹ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd Edition. (Los Angeles: Sage Publications Inc, 2009).

²² W. L. Neuman. *Social Research Methods, Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, (Boston: Pearson. 2004), 87.

²³ Leicester University Research course document on The Nature of Qualitative Research, Accessed March 12, 2019, https://www.le.ac.uk/oerresources/lill/fdmvco/module9/page_21.htm

²⁴ CCCU, *What is Christian Higher Education*, 4.

²⁵ Willowdale Christian School, *Parent Handbook*. 6.

²⁶ Margaret Gannon, "The Basel Mission Trading Company and British Colonial Policy in the Gold Coast, 1918–1928," *The Journal of African History* 24, 4 (1983): 503–515.

the existence of six public universities in the 1990s, considerable concerns were expressed about the inadequacy of the institutional facilities in the universities to cater for qualified candidates to avail themselves of the opportunity for tertiary education. The Methodist Church Ghana was convinced that with her unique record and experience in the provision of education at the basic, secondary and teacher education levels, it could make a contribution to the solution of the problems of offering education at all levels.²⁷

The Church therefore decided at its 36th Annual Conference held in Cape Coast in 1997 to establish a Methodist University College. After due preparations and processes, the Methodist University College Ghana (MUCG) was granted interim accreditation for two years by the National Accreditation Board in August 2000.²⁸ Its application for affiliation to the University of Ghana was subsequently approved in October 2002.²⁹ MUCG started academic work in October, 2000. The first batch of students reported for lectures in November, 2000.³⁰ Currently, MUCG has three campuses. The main campus at Dansoman in Accra and two satellite campuses located at Tema and Wenchi.³¹

MUCG'S DOCUMENTED IDENTITY

On its official website, it has been captured that the Methodist University College Ghana is a private tertiary institution which admits students of any race, colour, national and ethnic origin to all the programmes, activities, rights and privileges made available to students of the school. It does not discriminate on the basis of race, colour, national and ethnic origin in admissions policies, athletic and other school administered programmes. Methodist University College Ghana does not have any political affiliations in Ghana or abroad and works with all interested parties in achieving its educational mission of Morality, Excellence and Service.³²

There is no clearly articulated Christian identity in its mission and vision statement except that it is implied in the mention of “all-round development of students among others, spiritually on the basis of Christian principles in its mission and in promoting and developing spirituality” among others within the Ghanaian society as part of its vision.³³ It is however documented in its first decade history that, as a church institution, the MUCG aims at instilling the love for hard work and dignity of labour in its students.³⁴ MUCG also encourages students to yield their lives wholly to God such that their lives will “reflect Christian principles, values and ethics.”³⁵ These are reiterated in its Ethics Policy which emphasizes its Christian-related identity and requires staff to do everything possible for the spiritual, moral and social development of all members of the MUCG Community.³⁶

It is stated clearly that MUCG is a church institution. This is totally different from being a Christian Institution. A church institution can simply be interpreted as an institution belonging to a church. Questioned as to why MUCG does not state emphatically that it is a Christian institution in its mission and vision statements, Edusa-Eyison, a major stakeholder and former Vice Principal of MUCG, responded that the institution can fully be classified as a Christian institution and not just any private institution because of its foundation on the Methodist Church Ghana even if not specifically stated.³⁷

In an interview with Emmanuel Asante, also a major stakeholder and former Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana, he was however of the view that by the definition of a Christian Institution vis-à-vis its philosophy, MUCG cannot be said to be a Christian institution but can be said to be a secular institution established and run by a church.³⁸ This view is shared by Yalley, a Methodist Minister and a lecturer at MUCG.³⁹

Mission and Vision

As documented in its catalogue, MUCG has as its mission:

To impart knowledge and skills in disciplines relevant to national development within the context of general global development, and at the same time an all-round development of the student mentally, physically and spiritually on the basis of Christian principles and its vision is to promote and develop academic excellence, spirituality, morality and

²⁷ Casely B. Essamuah, *Genuinely Ghanaian: A History of the Methodist Church in Ghana, 1961-2000*, (Trenton: African World Press, 2010), 2.

²⁸ Richard Foli, E. K. Marfo, J. M. Y. Edusa-Eyison, *A History of The Methodist University College Ghana The First Ten Years (2000-2010)*, (Accra: MUCG & Trust Publishers, 2010), 99.

²⁹ Foli, Marfo, Edusa-Eyison, *A History of The Methodist University College*, 99.

³⁰ Methodist University College website January 13, 2018, <http://www.mucg.edu.gh/aboutus/mucg-history.html>

³¹ MUCG Catalogue, Accessed: May 03, 2018. <https://mucg.edu.gh/about-us/>

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Foli et al, *A History of The Methodist University College Ghana*, 5-6

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ MUCG Catalogue.

³⁷ Interview with Rt Rev Prof. J. M. Y. Edusa-Eyison in His office at Christ the King Methodist Church, Accra, November 30, 2019

³⁸ Interview with Most Rev Professor Emmanuel Asante, former Presiding Bishop of the Methodist Church Ghana on January 1st, 2020 at his residence in Kumasi, Ghana and former Chairman of the University College Council.

³⁹ Interaction with Very Rev Dr Ebenezer Yalley, MUCG on February 10, 2020 at his office.

service within the Ghanaian society.⁴⁰

These have consistently been maintained and been referred to in various congregation addresses of various Principals⁴¹ and in its first decade history document.⁴²

MUCG, A CHRISTIAN INSTITUTION OR A CHURCH-FOUNDED SECULAR INSTITUTION?

MUCG's Christian Identity

First among the issues that classifies an institution as Christian according to the ACSI and CCCU's model is a clearly documented Christian identity derived from a Christian Philosophy of education.⁴³ MUCG does not state in its self-definition and identity clearly that it is a Christian institution. MacCullough argues that Christian educator's philosophy of education serves as a guide to educational practices and as a tool to evaluate and develop practices that are coherent and consistent with a Christian worldview.⁴⁴ ACSI therefore proposes that a Christian Institution clearly documents its Christian philosophy of education which then defines its identity.

MUCG has however stated in its mission and vision statement that it "seeks to develop students mentally, physically and spiritually on the basis of Christian principles."⁴⁵ This can however be executed by any institution. It could therefore be understood that MUCG seeks to execute this vision and mission as a private tertiary institution and not necessarily as a Christian institution.

MUCG's Christian Content of Curriculum

Secondly, having stated a clear Christian identity through its philosophy of education, a Christian school has a mission to educate people from a Christian perspective derived from shared biblical values mutually held by churches and Christian families, teaching biblical truth as centred in the Lord Jesus and applicable in all areas of life.⁴⁶ This implies a Christian Philosophy of Education which integrates faith in learning and a strong Christian content of the curriculum. The Christian school education being unique and having a unique perspective, Clark proposes that the curriculum and the administration must be controlled by the Christian view of man.⁴⁷ Berry, in line with this uniqueness is of the view that the Christian school curriculum must have content which can be summarized in two basic facts; firstly, that God is the supreme authority over the universe and secondly that, God has chosen to reveal himself in General Revelation such as in creation and in Special Revelation such as his Word.⁴⁸

MUCG's Christian content of its curriculum from the beginning was quite extensive. There was Introduction to Religious Studies and Christian Ethics as two separate University College required courses for all students who enrolled in any course run by MUCG. These have however been combined into one course; Religious and Christian Ethics, reducing the combined credits for the two for economic reasons.⁴⁹ This still gives its curriculum some Christian content but the proportion to the secular courses is woefully inadequate to make any significant Christian impact in so far as the role of the curriculum is concerned.

MUCG's Christian Faculty

The third of ACSI's prescriptions indicates that a Christian School presents a Christian point of view as exemplified by a dedicated, Christian professional faculty and evidenced in all facets of learning and growth.⁵⁰ This makes the recruitment of Christian faculty very important. Much as it may not be easy admitting only Christians, a critical mass of the total faculty strength could be considered.

Adventist institutions, for instance, insist on this for the reason that "Institutions may frame the syllabus as they please but, if the teachers are sceptical, they shall teach only scepticism to our pupils, if fools only folly, if vulgar only vulgarity, if saints sanctity, if heroes heroism."⁵¹ Education is only the most fully conscious of the channels whereby

⁴⁰ MUCG Catalogue.

⁴¹ Principal's Address at the Sixteenth (16th) Congregation Held at the Dansoman Campus on Saturday, November 24th 2018. *MUCG News*. Accessed: August 09, 2019. <http://www.mucg.edu.gh/newsevents/16cs.html> See also the 15th Congregation Address by the Principal Held at the Dansoman Campus on Saturday, March 24th 2018. *MUCG News*. Accessed: August 09, 2019. <http://www.mucg.edu.gh/newsevents/2017-18-7.html>

⁴² Foli et al, *A History of The Methodist University College Ghana*, 5.

⁴³ ACSI, *How to Start an Urban Christian School*. 20-22.

⁴⁴ Martha E. MacCullough, *By Design: Developing a Philosophy of Education Informed by a Christian Worldview*. (Cairn: Cairn University, 2013).

⁴⁵ MUCG Catalogue.

⁴⁶ ACSI, *How to Start an Urban Christian School*. 20-22.

⁴⁷ Gordon H. Clark. "A Christian Philosophy of Education I" *The Trinity Review*, May, June 1988. Accessed: June 26, 2019. <http://www.trinityfoundation.org/journal.php?id=93>

⁴⁸ Sharon R. Berry, *Contents of Curriculum*. In Paul A. Kienel, Ollie E. Gibbs & Sharon R. Berry, eds, *Philosophy of Christian School Education*. (Colorado Springs: ACSI, 1998), 293-335

⁴⁹ MUCG, *Handbook for Undergraduate Students*, 2016. Appendix II, 58. See also Principal's Address at the Sixteenth (16th) Congregation Held at the Dansoman Campus On Saturday, November 24th 2018. *MUCG News*. Accessed: August 09, 2019. <http://www.mucg.edu.gh/newsevents/16cs.html>

⁵⁰ ACSI, *How to Start an Urban Christian School*. 20-22.

⁵¹ Lisa M. Beardsley, "The Purpose and Function of the Adventist Accrediting Association." *The Journal of Adventist Education*, (April/May 2008): 15-19.

each generation influences the next and nothing which was not in the teachers can flow from them into the pupils.⁵² To the Adventists therefore, Beardsley sums up that “it is not just the policies, historical roots, buildings, required chapel attendance, or the vegetarian food that make Adventist education Adventist. Rather, it becomes a reality through the day-by-day mentoring of committed church members who share their faith and not just their passion for a particular area of study.”⁵³

As indicated in MUCG’s policy on hiring and recruitment, it is based primarily on academic and or professional qualification without any faith factor. Acquah indicates that faith is not a strict requirement for appointment, but staff and even students are made aware of the fact that the institution is faith-based and they are required to attend the religious programmes. There is however no strict system of ensuring compliance.⁵⁴ Edusa-Eyison adds that even though staff and even students in spite of the fact that they accept being recruited or admitted into a Christian faith-based institution and are required to project the Christian philosophical principles, a number of them do not comply with the Christian principles and insisting on compliance could have legal implications.⁵⁵

Edusa-Eyison and Acquah agreed in their views that not making the faith factor a strict and documented condition for recruitment could be a reason for this challenge of non-compliance but insisting on that could also result in other challenges such as not having the right calibre of qualified staff.⁵⁶ To Edusa-Eyison, other institutions have a way of recruiting qualified people from their own denominational or faith background which to a large extent enhances compliance to their faith distinctive but was not sure if they could do same for MUCG.⁵⁷

Another reason for MUCG not being too strict on enforcement is because Ghana is a secular state that allows freedom of worship so Edusa-Eyison argues that the religious rights of people must not be infringed upon.⁵⁸ With these, it makes insistence on compliance to MUCG’s Christian philosophical principles a bit difficult. Edusa-Eyison wonders if documenting them and making them a requirement at recruitment could not help.⁵⁹

From the discussion, it can hardly be accepted that MUCG is a Christian institution by the defined analytical framework of this paper. For some of its stakeholders to strongly perceive it to be a Christian Institution is understandable because that is what is expected of a church affiliated school. From the technical dynamics however, the definition is different. MUCG does not emphatically define itself as a Christian institution with a Christian Philosophy of Education but as a Private Tertiary Institution.⁶⁰ This makes it difficult to adequately express its Christian identity in its vision and mission as well as in its core values. It does not also present adequate Christian content in its curriculum and does not insist on a Christian commitment in its faculty policy which makes it difficult to enforce compliance to participation in religious programmes.

CONCLUSION

In line with the ACSI and CCCU’s criteria and in agreement with Asante and Yalley, it can be concluded that MUCG cannot convincingly be described as a Christian School but at best, as a Church affiliated secular institution. Its lack of a clearly stated Christian Philosophy makes it very difficult to define its Christian identity in spite of the efforts of the founding church and its genuinely desirous Christian stakeholders.

Its association with the Methodist Church Ghana gives it a Christian appearance in name and perception but in principle, the church’s intended Christian involvement is considered as purely devotional and optional. It is highly improbable for a strict enforcement of involvement of both staff and students in any of the Christian identity retention programmes because the philosophy regulating its policies and identity are just like any other secular institution.

⁵² Beardsley, “The Purpose and Function of the Adventist Accrediting Association.” 15-19.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Interview with Acquah.

⁵⁵ Interview with Rt Rev Prof. J. M. Y. Edusa-Eyison.

⁵⁶ Interview with Rt Rev Prof. J. M. Y. Edusa-Eyison and Acquah.

⁵⁷ Interview with Rt Rev Prof. J. M. Y. Edusa-Eyison.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ MUCG Catalogue.

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