15 *Distinguished church leader essay*

Healing a strained relationship between African Independent Churches and western Mission-founded Churches in Ghana (1967–2017) – the role of Good News Theological Seminary, Accra, Ghana

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Introduction

African Independent Churches (AICs) have been defined as ‘congregations and or denominations planted, led, administered, supported, propagated, motivated and funded by Africans for the purpose of proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ and worshipping the Triune God in the context and worldview of Africa and Africans’ (Oduro 2007, 17). Ghana is noted to have recorded the emergence of the first African Independent Church in Africa, south of the Sahara, in 1862 (Opoku 1990, 12–21). In Ghana, they are popularly known and called Spiritual Churches. C. G. Baëta (2004, 1) elucidates on the term ‘Spiritual Churches’:

In Ghana, however, the leaders of these bodies, on the whole, appear to dislike the designation of ‘separatist churches’ and much prefer to be known as ‘spiritual churches’. What is meant is doubtless more correctly described as ‘spiritist’ than as ‘spiritual’, but common usage has adopted the latter adjective. In this context the word ‘spiritual’ has a very special connotation which must be explained. It is intended to signify that, in their worship, the groups concerned engage in various activities which (by their own assertion) are either meant to invoke the Holy Spirit of God, or are to be interpreted as signs of his descent upon the worshippers.

The first three decades of the twentieth century recorded the appearance of precursors of AICs such as the movements led by William Wade Harris and his disciples and admirers which included Grace Tanne, John Nackabah, Kojo Mornor and John Kojoe Baidoe (Debrunner 1967, 269–275). Some AICs were established during that period; most of their leaders were excommunicated from western Mission-founded Churches, while others left them quietly. How the existing churches initially perceived and reacted to the AICs – which was a new breed of Christianity – strained the relationship between the AICs and the

Mission Churches. How some leaders of the mission used the Good News Training Institute, a theological seminary founded for the training of AICs, to heal the wounded relationship is the focus of this essay.

The relationship between the AICs and western Mission-founded Churches in Ghana

The prominence of the AICs came to the fore from the 1950s. The causes of their growth and popularity have been observed by two scholars. According to Opoku

To a large extent, the occurrence of the independent churches is an attempt by African Christians to find 'a place to feel at home', not only in terms of worship but also in the whole expression of religion. In the independent churches one sees an attempt to Africanise Christianity, and in this exercise there is evidence of a fusion of elements of both traditional culture and Christianity, which removes the feeling of strangeness many an African feels at the missionary-led churches.... These new religious movements can be seen as attempts to create or establish 'new societies', which may be substitute for the old life, but which at least provide fellowship, security, and some sanctions and guidance for living in modern Africa.

(1990, 20)

To James Anquandah, 'independency is really an extension of orthodoxy, the result of orthodox failure to test the spirit of gifted members of their flock and to utilize these gifts to edify the church' (1990, 24).

Concerning the growth and influence of the AICs, David Beckmann, who wrote about Eden Revival Church, a Ghanaian African Independent Church, notes, '[b]y 1970 there were at least 100 such churches in Accra, and about 200 others scattered throughout the country. Probably 300,000 or 400,000 Ghanaians have firmly committed themselves to Independent Churches, and at least twice as many again have in some way been influenced by the movement' (1975, 11). Hudson and Mertens, Roman Catholic researchers, comment on growth of the AICs in Accra in the 1970s:

In a town like Accra the number of such places of worship may well be close to a thousand. This estimate is based on the known addresses of 2–300 Spiritual Churches in Accra, many of which have several churches. With an average of 40–50 attendants, the total may reach 50,000, which is probably more than or as much as that of the established Churches combined.

(n.d., 260)

Leaders and members of the Mission Churches became perturbed about the growth and popularity of the AICs when their members left in droves to become members of these new movements. Some of the prominent members of the Mission Churches patronised their ministries surreptitiously, as stated by Anquandah:

Before the independent churches began expanding and gaining recognition, many people including members of the older churches flocked to independency, often under cover of darkness, in Nicodemus fashion, seeking solutions to their problems. Since the attainment of political independence in Ghana, independency has grown out of its prayer-group and temporary nature and assumed fully-fledged church status.

(1990, 25)

Commenting on the eight-point findings of a Commission set up by E. M. L. Odjidja, ex-moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, on why Spiritual Churches grew rapidly in Ghana during the 1970s, L. S. G. Agyemfra states, 'whether the established churches [i.e. the mission churches] like it or not their adherents desert them to worship in churches which satisfy their spiritual demands' (n.d., 28). Regarding the defection of Roman Catholic members to the AICs, Hudson and Mertens conclude that, 'Spiritual Churches draw an increasing number of Catholics, among them educated and young people' (n.d., 40). As a result, many leaders and members of the Mission Churches accused the AICs as 'sheep stealers'; i.e. churches who take delight in proselytising members of other churches rather than reaching out to the unreached.

The Mission Churches, therefore, adopted many strategies to discourage their members from becoming members of or patronising the activities of the Independent Churches. Prominent among the strategies were that of sarcasms and insults. Their spiritual emphasis earned them the pejorative name 'Spiritual Churches'. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, who uses the Akan translation of the Independent Churches, *Sunsum sore*, i.e. Spiritual Churches, notes

It is worth pointing out here, however, that the exaggerated portrayal of the *Sunsum sorè* as a societal menace has been reinforced through television drama and local Ghanaian films. This has not helped their cause. In such TV shows and films, the prophets are always depicted as faking spiritual possession and divine communication through which they dupe and cheat unsuspecting clients.

(2005, 93)

Some Mission Church leaders insulted African Independent Church pastors indiscriminately and openly by calling them 'religious crooks and swindlers who are only out to cheat not only the individuals but also the Government and the nation' (Assimeng 1989, 132). From a Roman Catholic perspective, a parish priest called African Independent Church leaders tricksters and deceivers (Hudson and Mertens n.d., 25). Consequently, many Christians did not consider these new churches genuinely Christian. When the National Liberation Council, a military government, invited C. K. Wovenu, leader of the Apostles Revelation Society, an African Independent Church, to preach during the rededication of Christiansborg Castle, which was then the seat of government in 1966, the Christian Council of Ghana protested vehemently because

'the Christian Council did not consider Woveni a true representative of the Church' (Pobee 1991, 93). To most people, AICs worship centres were perceived as Christo-demonic worship centres; places where demons were worshipped under the pretext of worshipping Christ (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005, 175). The perception of the Roman Catholics was not different from the Protestant Churches. 'It has been stated already that the Catholic clergy and the Catholic community in general have a rather negative attitude towards the Spiritual Churches' (Hudsen and Mertens n.d., 36). As a result, when the Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches began emphasising the ministry of delivering people from demonic entanglements, those who have ever attended a Spiritual Church were automatically perceived as candidates of deliverance from demons (Asamoah-Gyadu 2005, 175). Asamoah-Gyadu captures the image of the AICs in Ghana in the 1970s thus:

The negative image is evidenced by certain ludicrous epithets that these churches have attracted. Many commonly refer to them as 'pray-for-me', 'kill the light' ... 'holy water' or *abo-nsamu* (hand-clapping), all in a bid to portray Sunsum sorè Christianity as contrived and their prophets as fraudulent, or religious impostors who indulge in false prophecy, fortune-telling, lying visions and exploitative divination.

(2005, 94)

The AICs, on the other hand, reacted by calling the Mission Churches 'churches without the Spirit of God'. The testimonies of some Mission Church members who defected to join the Independent Churches stressed the perception that the former were places where the Spirit of God was fast asleep.

In the Methodist church there was no healing, our dreams were never explained or interpreted, we never had [prophetic] messages. Nothing was done to heal us of our diseases and no word at all was said about the future. There was nothing spiritual about the Methodist Church.

(Wyllie 1980, 128)

AICs disdained churches that did not emphasise prayer, fasting, exorcism, healing, seeing of visions and prophetic utterances. 'They [i.e. the AICs] sometimes preach vehemently against the older Churches [i.e. the mission churches] and accuse them of lack of faith and of the Spirit' (Hudsen and Mertens n.d., 35). In fact, the hatred of the AICs towards the Mission Churches precluded them from having any ecumenical contact with them (Hudsen and Mertens n.d., 35).

The AICs boasted about the spiritual power they exhibited. This can be inferred from the statement of Prophet Jehu Appiah of the Musama Disco Christo Church when he said, 'politically, we are the harmless; economically, we are feeble; socially, we are downtrodden; but spiritually, we are more than giants' (Wyllie 1980, 105). Such was the nature of the relationship between the AICs and other Christian communities during the first two decades following the independence of Ghana.

The turn of events

Edwin and Irene Weaver, a Mennonite missionary couple, were posted to Uyo in Eastern Nigeria to serve some Independent Churches who requested missionary directives from the Mennonite Mission Board in the USA. When they arrived in Nigeria in 1959, they bumped into antagonism between the Independent Churches and western Mission Churches but they sought collaboration from the leadership of Eastern Nigeria Christian Council and the African Independent Church leaders to quell the hostility among the Nigerian Christians (Weaver and Weaver 1970, 9–115). The Weavers had to be evacuated from Nigeria in 1967 to the USA during the Nigerian civil war (1967–1970). Two years later the Weavers returned to West Africa via Freetown, Sierra Leone, where Apostle E. A. Adejobi, Primate of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), an African Independent Church founded in Nigeria (Turner 1967, 2–207; 1967, 2–369), met them, apparently, to persuade them to establish a theological seminary in Lagos to train leaders of his church. Though the intention of the Primate did not become a reality, he recommended the Weavers to all Aladura (i.e. praying people) congregations along the coast of West Africa (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 8–12). Edwin and Irene Weaver finally decided to settle in Ghana. The arrival in Ghana of Edwin and Irene Weaver marked the founding of the Good News Theological Seminary in Accra, Ghana, then known as Good News Bible Classes. It was later known as Good News Training Institute in 1971 and Good News Theological College and Seminary in 1996. Edwin and Irene, aided by Archdeacon Solomon Krow of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), brought together

About twenty-five leaders of the various church organisations, patrons and matrons, prophets and prophetesses, seers and seeresses, laymen of all kinds, and most important, both Bishop Krow and Mrs. Krow, enrolled.

(Weaver and Weaver 1975, 20)

They replicated the founding of a bible school in Uyo by beginning a Bible study programme known as 'Good News Bible Classes' at the choir loft of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), popularly known as 'Nima Temple' at Nima, a suburb of Accra which is predominantly inhabited by Muslims. The students met on Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m. The first lecturers were Mennonite expatriates in Ghana – Edwin and Irene Weaver, and Willard and Alice Roth. Later, 14 church leaders representing 10 AICs who formed the Accra Leaders Fellowship rented a room in the Accra Community Centre to study the Bible. The primary goal of the Bible classes was to provide a forum for training Ghanaian leaders and members of the Independent Churches in biblical and ministerial matters since prior to the efforts of Edwin and Irene Weaver, they had no theological institution to offer such systematic training.

Strategies of healing the strained relations between the AICs and western Mission-founded Churches

Edwin and Irene Weaver, the Mennonite missionaries, were concerned about the deep fracture in the relationship between the AICs and other Christian communities in Ghana. Describing the nature of the relationship as 'deep-rooted antagonism' (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 77), the Weavers decided to redefine the purpose of theological education. To the Weavers, theological education is not just to enhance the knowledge of the learners about God, the church and theology as it was the norm in most theological institutions; it is also to ensure peace and cohesion among learners and teachers in a pragmatic Christian manner. Theological education is not just teaching learners about the dynamics of peacemaking and encouraging them to undertake trips to observe peacemaking efforts at places where there are socio-religious conflicts. Theological education, to the Weavers, must be a tool of ensuring practical peacemaking in factional societies. Knowing that 'dialogue and understanding has to begin with the leaders of the mission-founded churches if progress is to be made in reconciliation between the indigenous and mission churches' (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 13), the Weavers devised a three-way strategic approach to the problem with the aim of healing the estranged relationship. The outline of the strategy was

to contact and develop personal relationships with indigenous churches and their leaders; to do the same with mission-founded churches and their leaders; [and] to encourage dialogue and understanding between the mission-founded and indigenous churches themselves.

(Weaver and Weaver 1975, 77)

Edwin and Irene admitted the enormity of the estrangement by stating that 'attempting to relate to both groups was risky. We were under suspicion by both sides, always vulnerable to misunderstanding' (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 77). In spite of this sinister perception they continued to bring peace between the AICs and the Mission Churches.

Implementing the strategies

The three-way strategic plan was implemented through many forms, even after the Weavers left Ghana to return to the USA for good. The implementation took the following forms: *publication in a monthly magazine*. The Weavers influenced the editor of the *Christian Messenger*, a monthly magazine of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, to publish a series of articles entitled 'Introducing the Spiritual Churches' (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 83). The articles threw more light on some doctrines, liturgies and the uniqueness of the AICs. *Convincing some church leaders and synods of Mission Churches*. Edwin and Irene were invited to the synods of some Mission Churches to speak on the relevance of the spiritual churches. The Methodist Church, for instance, allowed the Weavers to

meet a special study committee to work on a framework of relating healthily with the AICs (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 83). *Making arrangements for Mission Church leaders to teach at some AICs.*

When the then secretary of the Methodist Church, Rev. I. K. A. Thompson, heard about the Good News Bible Class, he expressed a desire to teach the class, so an arrangement was made for him to teach series of biblical topics at the Holy Church of the Lord (Ghana), an African Independent Church (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 87). Prior to that, students of the Trinity College, now Trinity Theological Seminary, were assigned to teach Sunday school classes at some AICs worship centres (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 42–45). The seminary has kept a close relationship with Trinity Theological Seminary since then.

Inter-church dialogue/conversations

Two inter-church meetings – on 29 November 1969 and 7 September 1970 – were held at the University of Ghana on the theme ‘Avenues of Cooperation between Indigenous Churches and the Historical Churches in Ghana’. The former, which was attended by about fifteen persons from the university, was chaired by Professor Kofi Asare Opoku (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 89). Leaders of the AICs, the Mission Churches and scholars of the department for the study of religions at the University of Ghana, Legon, met quarterly from 1971 to 1973 to dialogue on their common beliefs, ethos and differences. The nature of the conversation was that it was a forum, a setting, a meeting place for dialogue providing the opportunity for churches to learn and know one another (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 92). The maiden dialogue, which was attended by sixty persons representing the Pentecostal Association [an ecumenical group of the AICs], Christian Council of Ghana [an ecumenical body of Protestant Mission Churches], as well as both established and independent Spiritual Churches (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 90) was held on 25 May 1971 at the Accra Community Centre. The purpose of the meeting was ‘to give opportunity for leaders of all churches to become better acquainted with one another and to provide a neutral setting for discussion and dialogue on subjects of common concern’ (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 90). Prof. C. G. Baëta of the University of Ghana, who was also a pastor of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, a scholar of religion and a researcher on AICs, chaired the maiden inter-church dialogue/conversation. He clarified the aim of the meeting thus: ‘This is not a matter of anyone joining another, but simply an opportunity to get together informally to exhort and encourage one another’ (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 90). In his concluding remarks, Prof. Baëta stated

We have done a lot of important work this morning. We have shown one another that we do not want to live in isolation, but whatever our differences, we desire to know one another better. Although we are engaged in a common task, we affirm that the task has many forms and one person or one body dare never monopolise God’s mission in the world.

(Weaver and Weaver 1975, 92)

The second inter-church conversation was held in 1972, by which time the Weavers had left Ghana. Themes discussed in all the conversations between 1971 and 1973, according to the Weavers' recording of concerns and questions asked by leaders of both the AICs and Mission Churches, might have included: reconciling Independent Church leaders and the Mission Churches from which they were expelled, having a better understanding between churches, pulling down walls of prejudice that divide churches, reconciling AICs which were at loggerheads within their ranks, establishing theological training for AICs leaders and members, having a better way of administering churches, acceptance of AICs for what they are and their own understanding of Christianity (Weaver and Weaver 1975, 80–84). In all, seven conversations were held every quarter within the period 1971–1973.

Continuation of the healing process in a post-Weaver era

Asking lecturers from the Mission Churches to teach at the seminary. Administrators of Good News Training Institute, the bible school that was established in 1971 and now called Good News Theological Seminary in Accra, continued the process of healing the strained relationship after the departure of Edwin and Irene Weaver from Ghana in 1971. The establishment of the seminary was a collaborative effort by leaders of the Christian Council of Ghana, a few observers from the Catholic Church and leaders of AICs. Nine churches initially sponsored the seminary. The AICs were Faith Brotherhood Praying Circle, Sacred Miracles Clinic Fellowship, The Church of the Lord (Ghana), Divine Healing Church of Christ, Eden Revival Church, Twer Nyame (Divine Fellowship), Church of the Messiah and Church of Bethel. The non-African Independent Church was the Lutheran Church of Ghana. Many lecturers from the Mission Churches were asked to teach on a part-time basis at the Good News Theological Seminary, after its formal inauguration on 6 November 1971. The lecturers inter alia came from the Methodist Church of Ghana, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, the Roman Catholic Church, the Anglican Church, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, the Lutheran Church, the Mennonite Church and the Baptist Church. One of the early lecturers was Ephraim Amu, a Presbyterian Church of Ghana musician, poet and nationalist par excellence (Agyeman 1988, 11–188; Laryea 2012, 8–412). The first AIC pastor to become a board chairperson of the seminary was Bishop Isaac Wontumi, leader of the Church of Melchizedek.

Employing Mission Church lecturers to teach alongside those from the AICs at the seminary has become a normative practice. The purpose has been to allow the lecturers and the students to know more about one another and their denominations for mutual respect and recognition. The AICs felt a sense of acceptance into the Christian community when Mission Church leaders occasionally worshipped with them, preached at their functions and spoke about the need to register at the seminary. It was at such worship setting of the Church of the Lord (Brotherhood), Accra, in 1980 when the writer of this chapter, after listening to Ms Erma Grove, a Mennonite missionary speaking about the

seminary, enrolled as a student of the seminary. The ecumenical setting of the seminary has become a solution to the suspicion, allegations and marginalisation of AICs and a great cause of deeper fraternity.

In 1983 the board of the seminary headed by Rev. Dr. Sam Prempeh, a Presbyterian and then the Principal of Trinity College, decided to train some AIC alumni of Good News Training Institute to become lecturers of the seminary. Rev. Ezekiel Nartey of the Church of Melchizedek and the writer were selected to further their education at Christian Service College in Kumasi. Their admission in the college in 1984 was considered as a great feat since they were the first members of Independent Churches to be enrolled in the prestigious evangelical college since its establishment in 1974. The healing process continued at the college as a result of interacting and studying with students and lecturers from the mission churches and Pentecostal/Charismatic Churches.

Administering the seminary by AICs and Mission Churches

The Board of Governors/Governing Council of the seminary has been composed of both leaders of the AICs and the Mission Churches – in line with the process of healing their soured relationship. The Steering Committee of the nascent seminary in 1970 were James R. Anquandah (then an AIC member), Kwesi B. Ellis (then a Methodist minister) and W. E. Roth (a Mennonite missionary). Some prominent board chairpersons have been Prof. C. G. Baëta of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Rev. Dr Samuel Prempeh of the Presbyterian Church and Rev. Dr Asante-Antwi of the Methodist Church, and Mr James Amoah, a Baptist. Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Martey, the immediate past moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, was, prior to his elevation to the position of a moderator, the Chairman of the Academic Committee of the seminary. Principals/presidents of the seminary used to be appointed from the Mennonite Board of Missions and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) from the inception of the seminary in 1971 to 1992 when the writer, an AIC member, was appointed to be the first AIC president of the seminary. Chairing the highest decision-making body of the seminary has given the different churches the opportunity to continue the process of healing the strained relationship, find solutions to the challenges and heartbreaks while ensuring the seminary's growth.

Writing of AICs' histories and biographies of their leaders

The Academic Board of the seminary during the 1990s realised that one of the key factors of the soured relationship between the AICs and other Christian communities in Ghana has been either the partial knowledge or lack of knowledge of the history, doctrines and liturgies of the Independent Churches. Therefore, as an academic policy, students are mandated to write the history of an AIC before they are graduated. The *Journal of African Christian Thought*, vol. 3, no. 2, December 2000 published some of these histories. There are dozens of histories yet to be published.

Sustainable development programmes

The present administration of the seminary, headed by the writer, in continuing to heal the vestiges of broken relationship between the different church families in Ghana, decided to use a socioeconomic method to bring together members of different denominational backgrounds while being equipped with skills to earn a decent living. Helena Mananu-Hooper, one of the lecturers of the seminary who is an AIC pastor, was supported by the ELCA to further her education in theology, evangelism and development at the Wartburg Theological Seminary in Dubuque, IA, USA. ELCA supported the seminary to establish a Skills Development Training Centre at Ziope in the Volta Region of Ghana in 2015. Another centre was established at Wudzedeke also in the Volta Region in 2017. The two centres, which serve 58 communities in the Agotime-Ziope District, were chosen because of the polarity of relationship among the churches, the low-income level of the inhabitants and the willingness of the traditional rulers to work closely with the seminary. The purpose, therefore, is to empower the participants to reduce abysmal poverty levels and promote ecumenical relationship. Participants are from AICs, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Presbyterian Church, Assemblies of God, some Apostolic Churches, the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Global Evangelical Church. Some of the participants come from nearby towns in the Republic of Togo; others are Muslims. The two centres are managed by select groups of participants from the various churches and the Muslims.

Activities at the centres include running of seminars and workshop on topics such as the church and investments, empowerment of women and men, particularly widows and widowers, and church growth and leadership. Another activity is about agricultural development. The seminary has purchased a 20-acre demonstration farm at Ziope. Maize, tomatoes, pepper, cassava, potatoes and other seed crops are planted with the guidance of agricultural extension officers. Farmers at the centres are taught proper and new ways of planting seeds that yield great harvests. In addition, high-yielding seeds and fertilisers are distributed to farmers to plant on their individual farms. Another activity is the hiring of wellington boots, spraying machines and other tools of farming to the farmers. The fifth activity is the training of some of the participants in the weaving of kente, batik and tie-dye. Lastly, the seminary has opened an Information and Communication Technology (ICT) Centre for the youth and schoolchildren at Ziope. The proximity of the ICT Centre has saved users the hazard of travelling 31 kilometres to Ho, the regional capital, to have access to the internet. Besides, the users know that the centre belongs to the ecumenical body of the villages.

The results

The results of the wound-healing ministry of the Good News Theological Seminary have been phenomenal. The most prominent has been a degree of respectability and mutual recognition of the former 'warring' factions. The AICs

have realised that they are not the epitome of spirituality and spiritual power. They have imbibed the western style of administering churches, sermon preparation and delivery and systematic ways of studying the Bible. The AICs have benefited from the immense theological and ministerial knowledge and expertise of the Mission Churches and other Christian communities. As a result, some of their alumni furthered their studies to postgraduate levels in tertiary institutions both in Ghana and abroad – five out of the ten lecturers of the seminary, including the writer, are scholars of AICs with graduate and postgraduate degrees. AICs' choirs are invited to participate in the annual choral music competitions on TV3 dubbed 'Celebrations'. The Choir of Apostles Revelation Society (ARS), Ashaiman congregation participated in the 2015 version of the TV3 choral competition. African Independent Church leaders have been included in the planning and participation of national events such as National Day of Prayer. At the academic level, Mission Church tertiary institutions such as the Trinity Theological Seminary and the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture periodically invites the writer to review and or grade Master of Theology dissertations written by students of the respective Mission Church institutions of higher learning. The writer has also been invited to jointly write a book with Mission Church scholars (King *et al.* 2008; Oduro *et al.* 2008).

The Mission Churches, on the other hand, have also realised that God can use any person or group of persons in many ways irrespective of the person or the group of persons' low education or lower social status. Leaders and members of the Mission Churches have benefited from the spiritual gifts of the AICs. Unlike the previous times when some of their members sneaked to receive prayers or to find solutions to their spiritual challenges, these days they patronise the spiritual services of the Independent Churches openly. There has been an upsurge of 'spiritual renewals' in the Mission Churches. Sanctioning members who 'flirt' with the AICs has now become a thing of the past. They have appreciated the introduction of some important elements to African Christianity by the AICs. Such elements, such as clapping of hands, dancing, beating of drums, congregational prayers, healing, lively worship have all been integrated to their corpus ministries. As a result, they have regained some of their members who joined the AICs while enjoying lively African worship. Most Christians have had the privilege of knowing and understanding the ministries and doctrines of the AICs. There is now more talk about the need for contextualisation in the Mission Churches.

When participants of the Skills Development Project meet, they forget about their denominational linkages and their doctrinal differences; they concentrate on learning new skills to improve their standard of living. The more often they meet the more their denominational shades fade into oblivion. They see one another first as fellow human beings created in the *imago Dei* before realising their denominational colouration. At the pavilions at Ziope and Wudzedeki I saw the learners happily doing their assignments and during break singing together. During graduation ceremonies the chiefs, elders of outlying villages,

pastors and Imams all congregate at the graduation ground to sing and dance joyfully. It was a great joy to witness the first graduation ceremony of those who learned the skills of weaving kente and doing tie-dye on 5 August 2017 at Ziope. The joy demonstrated by the 51 graduating students cut across tribal, social, denominational, religious, national, cultural and ethnic barriers. The culminating fact is that theological education, when properly defined and used, heals wounds and reconciles people of all ages and denominations in a pragmatic manner.

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