

Title

Interview Most Reverend Archbishop Justice O. Akrofi, Anglican Archbishop of Accra and West Africa

Creator

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Description

Purpose of interview was to have conversation about the role of the Anglican Church of Ghana in the provision of secular education as well as to investigate the methods adopted by the Church for inter-denominational tolerance. The pictures taken to correspond to the interview show a Church that is very well endowed and also very committed to the provision of public education.

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Tuesday 19 July 2005, Interview with The Most Rev. Archbishop Justice O. Akrofi
Location: Accra Diocese of the Anglican Church
Topic of Interview is with regards to religious Tolerance in Ghana (Muslim-Christian Relations).

Q. Would you please introduce yourselves for me so I can get everything right for the record?

A. Most Rev. Justice O Akrofi as Anglican Bishop of Accra, and Archbishop and Primate of the Province of West Africa. I am glad to meet you Professor David Owusu-Ansah. I was teaching with you at the Adisadel College [Cape Coast] in the 1970s, and I don't think that I will pass without calling you prof. I am glad we have met again in person for me to verify that you were the same person I know.

Q. As you in your current position, would you please give me a good view as to what the responsibilities of your office are?

A. Yes, of course, to become an Archbishop, you must also be a Bishop, so I am the Bishop of Accra. Just a year ago I was elected to become the Archbishop of the Church of the Province of West Africa. Therefore I am responsible to the Bishops in their Dioceses in the Gambia, the Sierra Leone (2 Bishops at Freetown and Po), in Liberia, in Guinea, and in Cameroon; and the in Ghana there are 8 Bishops. So I am responsible to those dioceses and I travel to visit to see and [discuss] with those dioceses about the progress of the Church. can move ahead in those countries.

Q. Let me pick on the last part--when you say "the church moves ahead" what does it entail?

A. For example as you know there has been a lot of troubles in Liberia and Sierra Leone with the [civil] war that went on for years. So you go there and see how the church is [surviving] within those situations and also to see how the churches outside that kind of environment can encouraged and help our brothers who are in that situation.

Q. So then the church will have to do volunteer work and rehabilitation in case of that nature?

A. Certainly so. I mean every Diocese is an autonomous Diocese so they have their ways and means of getting money from outside their Diocese but then as a family as a Province we also have to come together and help when any part of us is in a bad situation.

Q. Would the Archbishop of West Africa [considering the situations in] Liberia and Sierra Leone be involved in building schools and hospitals?

A. First and foremost we can pray that we can have the courage and resources. And if of course there is the need for us to sources other funds from elsewhere we will be [then able to help them]. Invariably, the Bishops of these areas know where to go and look for funds.

Q. Now, let me bring it down one step then to the Bishops. In Ghana, you indicated that there are about 8 Bishops. [You], as Bishop of Accra what would be your responsibilities in the functions of the Church and everything that the church does?

A. Well, as Bishop of Accra, as any other Bishop [such as] of Kumase, cape Coast or Sekondi, you see to the growth of the Church. For example, when I became Bishop about 9 years ago, there were about 35 priests or clergymen in the church in Accra. As we sit here right now, there are about 75 of us in Accra alone. Because the church has grown. I came to realize that we have churches--smaller churches which are not growing because clergymen have not been able to visit them [regularly]. So the Lord gave me the idea of what we call "non-stipendiary clergymen" or worker priests. They are professional themselves like you the professor, or accountants, so they are able to be on their own and when they are ordained, on Sundays, they are able to go to these smaller congregations--every Sunday and even on weekdays--as opposed to these [smaller churches being attached to bigger churches and the priest serves the bigger ones and] not being able to visit the [smaller ones] or visit only once a month etc. [This new arrangement] has led to the growth of the church because of the growth of priests and this is very encouraging to go to these smaller congregations where you know there had been no growth for 50 years, and all of a sudden there is growth.

Q. When the church grows does the schools that the church sponsor [increases the Church's role in education and in return increases] the growth of the Church? how has that [growth] increases the Church's role in the support of education? [historically we know that the church in Ghana has been very active in support of education]-

A. Yes! The growth [of the church as a reflection of number of schools the church sponsors has not been at the same rate] has not been as much as we would have expected. But schools do spring up because of the church's growth. We know that if a school is attached to a church, then most likely the church has a future. In the past it was a must. But these days, as you know, there are teachers from other [religious] denominations teaching in other denominations and discipline is not the same. You and I know that in our time [students were expected] to go to Church on Sundays and account for it on Monday at school. But today, this is not so. So we are trying to do that [now] weekly and the Bishops are asking that every Wednesday [students in the Anglican schools] go to Mass for them to be taught the doctrine. There are problems of maintenance of the schools has not been very easy, and now it is left to the churches and therefore the Anglican Church has to take care of the schools within the precincts of the Churches. Sometimes we get lay people some of the making comments such as "oh my children are no longer going to this school so why should I contribute for its upkeep?" I will say that it is a religious obligation. It is the church's school and we must maintain the standard. What I am saying is that it has not been easy to keep the schools not at the same level as we know the schools some 20 or 30 years ago.

Q. So the church schools came under the state system but the churches still must support them in a way. Is this right?

A. Yes, for over the years, we have been fighting [the government] to return the schools to the churches and government after government will say that "okay if that is what you want we will give you back but you have to pay the salaries of the teachers." But what are they talking about. What money do you use to pay for the teachers? We just want to have control, to bring the old discipline back. Now the first thing [compromise move] the government has done is that now [students] don't have to wear a common uniform. Remember in the past, you could identify a student from a Methodist school, Anglican pupil [just to the uniform]. Now the government says we can go back to do that. So right from this [past] September, we are beginning to go back to the old uniforms used to be worn by different schools for identification and that to me is in the right direction. People will eventually get use to this.

Q. When [if] it does get there and the Churches get back control of the schools would it come a time that the church would say yes we need the state to continue paying the salaries of teachers but a least we would like the Headmaster of each of our schools to be selected by the Education Units which the church controls?

A. Yes, I think we have not had problems in terms of heading our schools. It is replenishing with teachers. And the Anglicans have not done very well because you can go to an Anglican school and only the Head is an Anglican and [the rest of the teachers] are from other denominations. But I don't think the churches are going to take over the schools because no denomination can afford to pay the teachers so that will be a condition which we are going to stick to before we take over the schools from the government.

Q. I came earlier for the appointment and I decided to walk about the compound here before. I saw a Junior secondary School (JSS) [right on this compound] which is an Anglican School, I suppose. Then there is a very big church--a Cathedral of the Most Trinity, and I talked to one of the students who says that she is in the senior secondary school that is also right on this premise. Who built them and who therefore maintains them? I know the teachers are coming from the State?

A. This is a good question but we do not have the most ideal situation. The JSS [part of the compound] is an old school (yes, it is solid building). It was build by an old Bishop, a revered Bishop called Angloby from a wealth English home and sometimes you think he spoiled the Church. He provided everything. He will go back to England and come [back] with shipload of all the items. In fact, he did not encourage people giving to the church. So that school is there and it has trained a lot of students. The former Speaker of the Assembly [Parliament] Mr. Peter Ala Adjetey, for example, was a product. This SSS (Senior Secondary School) was started by the Cathedral Church of the Most Holy Trinity (the Church itself) as a private institution. because they realized that their children and some of them could not get admission to Adisadel College [the main Anglican Secondary School of the country] or Mfansipem School [The main Methodist Secondary School for Boys], so some of the congregation thought that there has to be something to absorb those students so they built this as a Day School. Our pain is the fact they did not have a bigger vision [because they wanted to have a structure that will address the problem of the few students]. So it was built around the church and when they realized the school has grown, the look for land away from her to make it a bigger school, but it was late. By that time the government had absorbed the school into the Ghana education system. So the government said that "the school has been fulfilling a need in the community around here." In fact, until recently, there was a shed inform of the school where people came to sit under at night and studied. So the government said, if you move the school out, it will not serve the community. People cannot not go to [travel all the way out of town to Achimota--miles away from here] where are these people going to go? Most of them cannot afford to go to any school but a Day School [where they do not pay for Boarding fees]. That is why the school is still here with about 500 plus students in the senior secondary school [alone] and then in the junior secondary school we have about 100 students who come here.

Q. So the school is built by the Church and the government absorbed it. At what point and under what condition does a Government of Ghana absorbs your school?

A. Well, the private person [who owns the school] has to apply and say look I cannot afford any longer, but this is serving the nation and so take it up. The government will come and inspect the school before it takes it up. You know years ago, we used to have [what was known as Government] "Assisted Secondary Schools" and [fully funded government secondary schools] but today if you are absorbed, you become equal to the "assisted secondary school." But naturally within this [class of absorbed schools] there are categories. The Achimotas, the Adisadels, and Mfansipims [top tier schools may be treated differently].

Q. What does it mean to be "Assisted" but not fully?

A. It means you are assisted by the government "fully" you have the staff paid for by the government, they provide textbooks by the government, they provide equipments for the Lab, and they give the school bus or means of transport. These are the basic things, but we now depend on the alumna to supplement such as library books, and we expect old students to support their schools.

Q. Does the government provide building faculties?

A. Yes they do. They provide maintenance and if they know that the school has grown and there is need to expand, they provide staff bungalows [housing].

Q. Do they do this at the SSS level?

A. Yes.

Q. How about the JSS level?

A. No. They can do it for the JSS from what they call the Common Fund this is a parliamentary my find funding to help a school within his/her constituency.

Q. This is where my interest is coming because I have talked to some of the Muslim school proprietors that have become part of the Islamic Education Unit [of the Ghana Education Service]. These schools are mostly in the primary and the JSS level. How does the Anglican Church provides for their JSS and primary schools?

A. It is tough. [Typically] the primary schools and the JSS would have been developed by a Parish. Say, if you go to St. Bernabas Anglican Church they have a primary school and a JSS. So they as Parish, is responsible for the maintenance of the schools and they encourage parents to contribute so much to help to maintain the facilities of the schools.

Q. Doesn't the Bishop's Office contribute to the Parish?

A. Very little as far as education is concerned. Because the Bishop's Office depends totally on the Parishes in the form of [the Parishes] paying what we call assessments. About 90 percent of the Bishop's [funding come from the Parishes] in the form of assessments given from the Parishes to be paid to the central fund. For example if there is a project for about 20 million for the Diocese to run, we share that amount among the Parishes to pay. Also usually the Bishop may travel to old friends [of the church to raise money for the church] and the Bishop can go around helping other projects.

Q. This is a point well clarified, so the Muslim community will have to support their own schools?

A. Yes!

Q. Let me go to about question here. I talked to the Christian Council of Ghana (GCC) yesterday and I would like to know how does the Ghana Anglican Church fit into the Christian Council of Ghana?

A. What did you hear from them? The Anglican Church has been a founding member of the Christian Council of Ghana. Bishop Angloby, I am told initiated it [the Council] and he was the first chairman of the GCC. But of late we have not been involved [with the Christian Council] but we hope that with the passage of time, our differences will be cleared.

Q. I suspect you do not want to talk about [the nature] of the difference.

A. I think we are coming to a solution to this so...

Q. From your point of view, what is the function of a Christian Council provides? I do know that the Catholics have a Secretariat and therefore not part of the [Christian Council of Ghana].

A. Well, when we talk about Religious Tolerance that is where it begins. Once a year the Catholic Secretariat, Members of the Christian Council will come together. At the moment there are about 22 Roman Catholic Bishops. And all the heads of the Christian Council churches will come together to discuss issues affecting the mission one of which will be religious tolerance. So when I go abroad this and people will ask, "don't you have Muslims? and I will say, yes we do." "But we don't hear anything about conflict and how do you go about it? [they will ask]. So I will say this that sometimes within [any given] year, Muslims and Christians will come together and talk for the common good of the nation. For example if there is [National] Independent Anniversary Religious service will come together and do it. The Muslims will have [such a service] on Friday, and the Christians will have their on Sunday and pray for the nation. So we talk, and we share, and if there is a problem facing the nation we come tougher and with one voice address it.

Q. Have Muslims consulted the Churches when they experience difficulties such as funding for their schools, or problems within the Muslim community? We know that traditionally [people in Ghana] can go to their neighbors and say I am having difficulties please take a look at it for me. Have the Muslims done this in the past?

A. If they do it will be at the Christian Council at the Head Quarters level. This will be with the General Secretary and if the General Secretary finds it necessary to bring the Heads of Churches together he will do so.

Q. So it is also possible that the Christian Council will see something happening in the Muslim community and bring their attention to it.

A. Certainly. I remember a few year back--about 4 to 5 years ago, there was a crusade by a [Christian] denomination in Kumase and the preacher said something about the Muslim

religion and I think the crusade [took place] at a Muslim community and they got infuriated and fights. But within few days sanity had prevailed because there was openness and we talk about it. So it does happen. Even in the Northern [part of the country where Islam is strongest it happens that reconciliation take place]. Next time you do this I will refer you to our [Anglican] Bishop of Tamale-Bishop Emmanuel Arongo.

Q. I know that Rev Dr. Mbila (Presbyterian Minister at Osu) and there is also Rev Dr. Samwini (a Methodist Minister at Sunyani now at the Christian Council of Ghana). Both of them had certain designation which I thought was interesting. They were from the North. Samwini was a Muslim who converted to Christianity, and his research work was on Christian-Muslim relations. And of course, within their church, they had a department that does that kind of mission work in terms of working on Christian-Muslim relations. [That is] working on how to carry the Christian mission to Muslims without offending them. Does the Anglican Church of Ghana have any person who works on Christian-Muslim relations?

A. Rt. Bishop Emanuel Arongo! Because he is in the thick of things [located in the Muslim part of the country] so it is natural for him to do it so he is in charge So he can advise the Church on these issues. We meet as an Anglican Church of Ghana and the heads, the Bishops and the Chancellors and their lawyers and a selected lay person meet twice a year--in May and in November-- and we meet and if there is a problem that is brought to fore then we discuss it so we can move the Church forward.

Q. What will be a typical problem the Rt. Rev Bishop Arongo, for example, in the past has brought forth regarding Anglican conflict relations with Muslims.

A. You know in the North, there have been times when Christians and Muslims have had difference. So there have been fights. He will talk to us about what has happened and tell us what one can do to help the affected people, be them Christians or Muslims. [For example] on refugee problems. He is in charge of refugee issues, immigrant and refugees issues [that is] if there is fighting in neighboring countries and refugees come [to the Northern part of the country]. This is not a matter of Bishop Arongo's situation but rather what the Anglican Church can do. So he reports to us and we put together what we can do to help him to minister to the [affected] people in the name of the Anglican Church of Ghana.

Q. So the Churches then have been pro-active in these issues [of conflict resolution, and on immigration and refugee issues]. Proactive in the sense of anticipating these issues and putting some structures in place to deal with them.

A. Oh yes, and I must say that we [the Anglicans] are late in going in [this direction of involvement]. The Catholics are very good at it. They have right from day one structure in place for people to be helped. We have just started--not more than ten years ago.

Q. My last question. I believe that in the Anglican Church, even here in Accra at the Bishop's Office, you have the [Manager of the] Anglican Education Unit. Does he report to you or to the Ghana Education Service?

A. To both. In the first place, in all the denominations we have the General Manager of School who is in charge of all the [denominational schools] throughout the nation. Then we have Regional Manager--Anglican Church Regional Manager for Accra, Anglican Church Regional Manager for Central Region, and Anglican Church regional Manager for Western Region etc. They all report to the General Manager. And each Regional Manager reports to the Bishops of the Region. What we call "Local managers" are the priests like Osu St, Bernabas there is a priest in charge of the Church so he is the local manager for the schools in his parish. And within the diocese like Accra we have Board of Education to which the regional manager reports. And they see to the implementation of ideas and how to move the schools within the Diocese forward. And so, Regional Manager may not report directly to me, he reports to the Board and they feel me; and I feed the Church of the concerns of the schools. And the General Manager also reports to the Ministry of Education. In fact, the [Managers of Schools within the Ministry of Education] have a [Conference of Managers of Educational Units] or (CMEU)--including the Catholic General Manager, Anglican General Manager, Muslims general manager etc they come and if they have common concerns, they report to the Ministry of Education.

Q. And I believe that that can also be an avenue for inter-religious relations.

A. Yes, they meet and talk about problems they are having in their individual denominational [schools] and how they can approach it for solutions.

END. I thank you very much for this interview.