

Kodwo Ankrah: The Church in Africa and My Participation in its Work

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I bring you warm greetings from warm Africa.

Ever since our sister Sarah Hall Goodwin broached the idea of sharing a portion of my experiences as a Christian with you, I have struggled to isolate a few items, that I hope will be of interest to you.

First our association with Sarah began in the late 50's at The Hartford Theological Seminary in Connecticut. At that institution I met my wife, Maxine who was more closely related to Sarah because they were in the same dorm.

The second factor to bear in mind is the place of the church in my life and in Africa. Ever since I became aware of the essence of Christian Faith, my attitude to human relationships and the place of God in those relationships has drastically changed. All Human beings are the same in the sight of God.

Sarah, in inviting me to fellowship with you , stressed the point that the nature of your fellowship is not the same as other ordinary Christian denominations whatever that means in religious parlance. Since arriving in this country a month ago , I have tried to inform myself of your fellowship and I will continue to do so until I understand its meaning and goals.

However the little I have learnt gives me the impression that I might like it if I were living in DC.

69 years ago I was born at Anomakee, in the Central Province of Ghana, into a community , steeped both in the traditional African Religion on the one hand and in the Christian teaching of the two major Christian denominations, Roman Catholic and Methodist on the other hand.

Since my mother was a Roman Catholic, I had to attend the Roman Catholic Primary School for 3 years . I was born into Religion.

After 3 years, my father decided that all his 5 of us children would attend a Muslin school. I became aware that there were other ways of worshiping the same God. After 3 years in a Catholic school and 3 years in a Muslim school I was to spend the next 4 years in a Methodist school. I was confirmed in that church.

During those years in order to improve my English, I started collecting penpals. I was corresponding with nearly 100 people. It was because of my writing that in 1954 I came to the United States. A young woman I had been writing to showed the letters to her mother and her mother began a campaign to bring me to the United States for training. In 1954 I enrolled in Goshen College a liberal arts college run by the Mennonites. This institution was a blessing, a challenge and a privilege. It was at that college that my understanding of the Christian Faith blossomed and matured. The Anabaptist view of Christianity and its practices reminded me of the traditional Religions of Africa, and in particular the religious practices in my home town.

At Hartford Seminary, I had the chance to study and compare Faiths and Religions of the World. Christian Faith for me is unique in that it requires me to follow and practice the sayings and teachings of One Person-Christ who has seen God

Himself. The lifestyle of one who makes no distinction among people.

Over the 30 years I have been engaged in Church activities, I have learned three lessons:

Lesson 1: God never leaves His People alone.

He cares for all his children where ever they may be. God loves all human beings and provides for them to survive in their environments. As an environment becomes inhospitable, human beings make attempts to move to somewhere else. Material goods, in relation to the particular needs of a people are always assured. As I live and grow. I become convinced anyone who considers himself or herself a human being, must know that there are others who are equally human regardless of their status in the human community. This awareness implies that human beings like ourselves, have needs, desires, anxieties and hopes that have to be met just as any other human beings may want and need. Therefore, any obstacles placed in the of and human beings develop to the fullest as God meant it is an act of sin. We are one in God, and therefore, one in Christ.

Lesson 2: Religiosity is not enough.

To become engaged in religious rituals and practices is not enough. Such activities tend to be acts to please ones self and ego. Providing welfare, relief and assistance to people who are deprived of opportunities to develop their own God-given potentials and talents is like loving ones child to death. It is suffocation. Provision of welfare , relief and any form of assistance indicate that a particular society isn't caring enough for the development of the entire society. It is this neglect that makes me doubt some aspects of Christianity. Christians have enough to go around, if they are willing to share.

Lesson 3: Christian Faith is not understood by many Christians.

Gandhi once said, "I love you Christ, but I do not like your Christian because they are unlike Christ."

The Institutional Church as represented by the myriad of denominations, have become religious tribes and nations, each trying to meet the needs of their own specific members regardless of the need of other human beings around them. Christ lived his message. The prayer of Christ that "all may be one," is neglected because it asks too much of us. The Christian Faith is more than engaging the church in transforming society. The real transformation of society takes place when Christians begin to live like Christ-sacrificially. My duty and responsibility therefore is to be a Christian – one who believes in the loving kindness of God, and who has enlightened me to enlighten others – with all my resources. How this is being done is my daily task. Salvation for me is the Incarnation – Christ coming, his life, his death and resurrection, his mission.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, send us your Holy Spirit
so that we may perfectly love you
and faithfully follow you today and always
In the Name and Sprit of Our Lord
Jesus Christ.

Amen.