
Early Beginnings of the Educational Activities of the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) Church in Ashanti at Agona Township, Ghana, 1914 – 1932: Prospects and Challenges

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Abstract

This paper examines the early educational endeavours of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (SDA) in Ashanti Region of Ghana from 1914 to 1932. In particular, it focuses on the pivotal role played by the church in its formative period in Ghana towards the accelerated development of a key traditional township in Ashanti namely Agona and its environs. It further looks at the teething challenges that confronted the educational activities of the church. Utilizing historical and analytical review of both primary and secondary documentary evidence as well as some interview sessions with key figures of the church and of the Agona township, the authors examine briefly the introduction of the SDA Mission in Agona, Ashanti and discusses in some detail, the Agona-State and SDA Church relations. It further examines the aspects of education promoted in and around Agona and the challenges of the early educational endeavours of the mission. The study revealed, inter alia, that the establishment of cordial relationship between the pioneer missionaries of the church and the Agona traditional council facilitated the promotion of holistic education in the form of socio-economic, moral and intellectual advancement of the people. The main challenge however was inadequate funding and lack of adequate trained teachers.

Key words: Seventh-day Adventist Mission, Agricultural/farming education, Industrial/technical education, Character-training and Religious education.

1. 1 Background to the study

It is generally agreed that the circulation of the Seventh-day Adventist's literature in the form of pamphlets and tracts explaining the doctrines and beliefs of the church along the coast of modern Ghana from the United States of America in the 1880s constituted the most original means of introducing the Adventist faith in Ghana. (Newfield & Neuffer, 1976, p. 512).

It is on record that first missionaries of the Church namely Edward L. Sanford and Karl G. Rudolf arrived at the Coast of modern Ghana in February 1894 and with the support of a leading local convert namely Francis Dolphijn, the missionaries tried, even though not too successful in establishing and popularizing the Adventist doctrines in some coastal communities in modern Ghana, notably Apam, Cape Coast, Sekondi, Axim and Kikam (Newfield, & Neuffer, 1976; & Debrunner, 1967).

It is noteworthy that for nearly two decades after its introduction, the activities of the Church in modern Ghana were confined to the coastal stretch and it was not until the year 1913 that the need to spread the activities of the Church into the interior part of the country especially in Ashanti was strongly felt (Newfield & Neuffer, 1976).

It was around this time too that the West African Mission of the church was being re-organised into three separate fields of Sierra Leone/Liberia, Colonial Ghana (Gold Coast) and Nigeria (Newfield & Neuffer, 1976). It therefore meant that the Adventist mission in colonial Ghana, was going to enjoy some measure of autonomy and hence the urgent need for intensive missionary activities throughout the country.

The desire to expand the Church's missionary activities into the interior parts of the country was contained in a letter written by a celebrated pioneer missionary of the church to Ashanti, W.H Lewis to the then Colonial Secretary resident in Accra in 1914. In this letter, Lewis indicated the desire of the Seventh-day Adventist Mission, "to open a head station and operate in colonial Ghana (Gold Coast) independent of Sierra Leone Mission" and specifically requested for a place "either North-East or South East of Coomasie [Kumasi] and if there [was] any unoccupied territory in Ashanti". (PRAAD, Arg 1/13/4,1914). Significantly, in assigning reasons for the place of choice, in the same letter, Lewis mentioned the Church's keen interest in "industrial education" and good fertile farming soil".

Eventually, Lewis and his family of four and some few local converts set off from Sekondi in October 1914 to Kumasi, the capital of Ashanti. Debrunner (1967) has acknowledged the earlier activities of the Seventhday Adventist Church at both Cape Coast and Sekondi but admits that "the proper expansion [of the church] took place only after 1914" (p. 239). It is significant that during this time, Kumasi, the traditional capital of the Ashanti Kingdom had largely been subdued by the British colonial administration and was in a state of interregnum following the deportation of Prempeh I to the Seychelles in 1896 and the Yaa Asantewaa War of 1900 (Webster & Boahen, 1980). Even though these defeats suffered by the Ashanti kingdom had brought some level of tranquillity "distrust for Christianity as the religion of the conqueror persisted in Ashanti till 1920 (Debrunner, 1967, p.239).

It was against this background that Lewis and his entourage entered Kumasi, the Ashanti regional capital. It was possible that Lewis and his people enjoyed their stay in Ashanti, at the initial stages, because of the protection derived from the British colonial administration. For Lewis had already sought for permission before entering the region as indicated in his letter referred to earlier. In addition, there was no indication that the Wesleyan and the Basel Missions, who were already there, posed a threat to the survival of the Adventist Mission in the region.

From their base in Kumasi, Lewis and his colleagues undertook a vigorous search for a suitable place for the Church's mission station. Eventually, the township of Agona, about forty kilometers, north-east of Kumasi was found to be suitable for the establishment of a permanent mission station. Thus, the Agona township became the cradle as well as a fertile place for the implementation for the educational policies of the Seventh-Day church in Ashanti.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Like other Christian missionary bodies, the SDA church right after its inception in modern Ghana recognized that the provision of formal education could serve as a veritable tool of evangelism and socio-economic development in the country. The mission therefore quickly put its educational programmes in place at Agona Ashanti, the first national headquarters of the church in 1914 (PRAAD.Arg.1/13/4).

It appears, however, that not much is known about the educational endeavours of the church especially at the early beginnings. In addition, much of the educational activities of the church have not been properly and systematically documented particularly from 1914 to 1932. Scholarly works dealing with the missionaries and educational development in Ghana largely fail to give an effective treatment to the educational activities of the church. Foster (1965) writes quite extensively on the Basel and the Wesleyan missions. McWilliam and Kwamena-Poh (1975) do not mention at all the activities of the SDA church. Debrunner's (1967) information about the church generally seems to be inadequate and that a meaningful evaluation of the church's educational activities cannot be based on it. Thus, numerous unanswered questions about the educational activities of the SDA still remain.

1.3 Objectives guiding the study

The primary objectives of the study are to establish:

- a. the historical background of Agona Ashanti and the context within which the SDA church was introduced in the township
- b. the critical factors which facilitated the establishment of the SDA Church's mission headquarters of Agona;
- c. aspects of education promoted by the SDA Church at Agona Ashanti and its effects on the locality; and the
- d. the initial challenges faced by the SDA Church at Agona Ashanti.

2.0 Research Methodology

The study employs qualitative research design and largely utilizes the descriptive/historical research design. It was primarily an analytical study of relevant archival materials (both primary and secondary) available on the subject matter. Personal interviews

were also conducted. The selection of the interviewees was based on their profound knowledge of the early SDA educational activities at Agona-Ashanti. Some of them could even provide an eye-witness account regarding the introduction of the S.D.A Church at Agona-Ashanti. A total number of four persons were interviewed. Data was analyzed thematically in line with the objectives of the study.

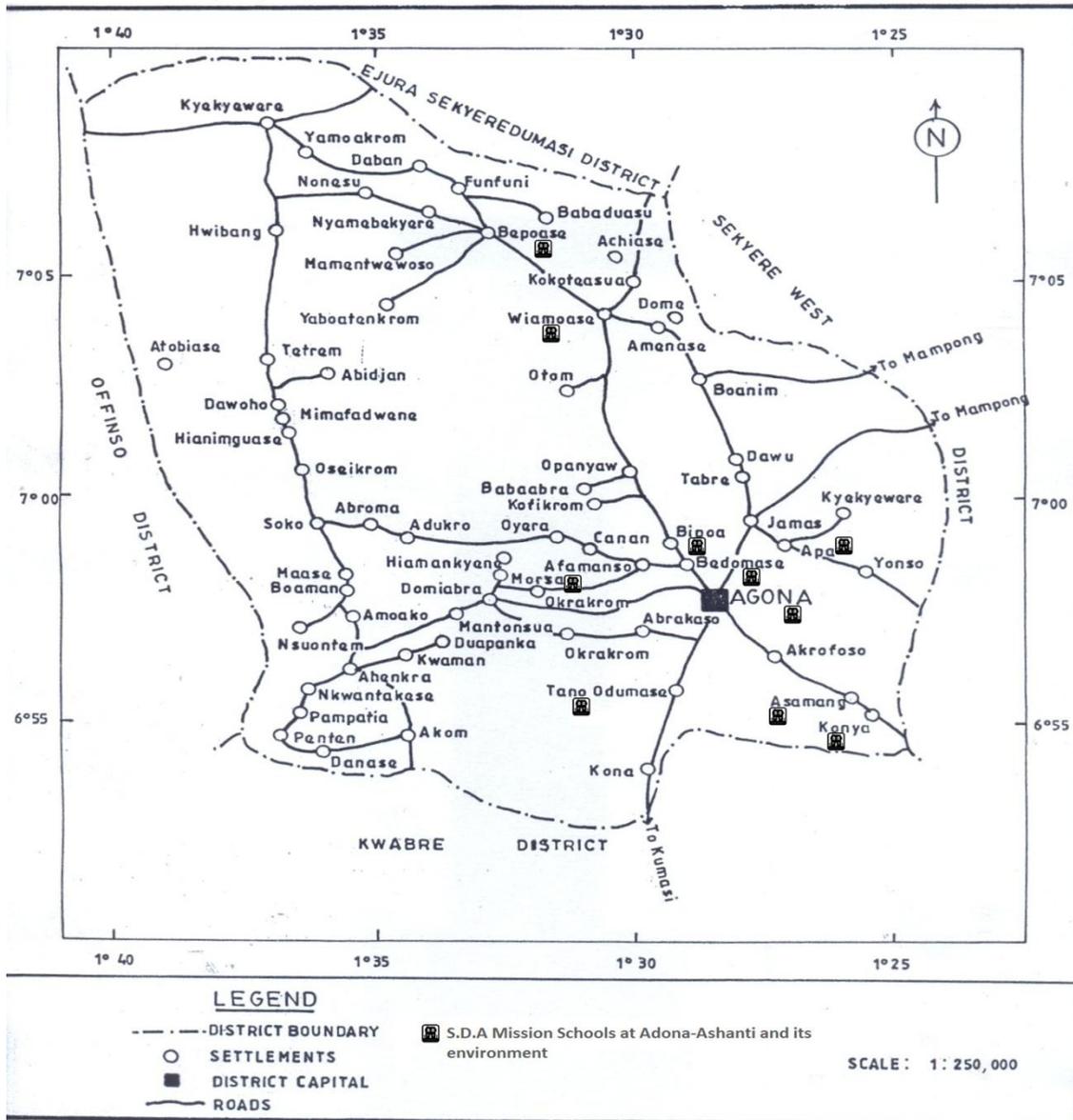
3.0 A Brief History and Background of the Agona Township

The township of Agona is one of the oldest human settlements in the Ashanti Kingdom situated on the north-eastern part of Kumasi, about forty kilometres away. It served as the capital of Afigya Sekyere District which has now been rezoned and renamed as Afigya Sekyere South District (see map below). It rapidly expanded in size due mainly to the influx of government employees (public servants) and other category of workers. As usual, its status as the head of the area's traditional council coupled with its economic and political importance made it the most frequently visited town in the whole district.

The fourth king, the legendary Okomfo Anokye was a contemporary of the famous Ashanti King, Nana Osei Tutu I (Rattray, 1929). Even though most historians including Ward (1958) seem to support the tradition that Okomfo Anokye was a native of Awukugua in Akwapim, they do not dispute Rattray's view that Anokye was born and stayed in Agona Ashanti for the greater part of his life (Ward, 1958). As a result of the important role Okomfo Anokye played in the founding of the Ashanti Kingdom during the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, he has been described by Francis Fuller, former colonial chief Commissioner of Asahnti as "Cardinal Wolsey of Ashanti" (Rattray, 1929). He was the chief priest, constitutional expert and military strategist of King Osei Tutu I. (Boahen, 1966; Strides & Ifeka, 1977). Tradition has it that he conjured the golden stool of the Ashanti from the sky through magical ingenuity, as a symbol of unity and an embodiment of the souls of all Ashanti people (Sarpong, 1972). As a result of these lofty contributions by Okomfo Anokye, the Agona township came to occupy a very important position in the Ashanti Kingdom.

Considering the political and religious roles played by Okomfo Anokye in particular, and the prestige this had gained for the Agona township, one would have thought that any new religious practice especially Christianity which had already been noted for its wholesale condemnation of virtually all traditional practices would have been vehemently opposed at Agona. Furthermore, the general skepticism regarding Western civilization and formal education in Ashanti was a potential threat to the establishment of a good relationship between Agona state and the Seventh-day Adventist Church at this time. Again the bitter memories of the widespread destruction of Kumasi, the capital of Ashanti in 1874 and its eventual annexation in 1901 following the Yaa Asantewaa War by the British colonial administration (Buah, 1980) was likely to arouse hostile sentiments and opposition towards Europeans and other white men and whatever they stood for in a typical Ashanti township like Agona. This historical background notwithstanding, Lewis and his people were enthusiastically welcomed at Agona and a land was freely given to him for the mission building and a school by the chief Nana Kwame Boakye (Interview with Opanin Yaw Amponsah of Aduana family of Agona, Agona Ashanti. 4th April 2002).

MAP OF AFIGYA SEKYERE DISTRICT SHOWING AGONA-ASHANTI



SOURCE: Town and Country Planning Unit, Afigya Sekyere District, Agona-Ashanti.

3.1 Critical factors that accounted for the peaceful settlement and establishment of the first S.D.A mission's headquarters at Agona Ashanti.

Three critical factors were generally responsible for the success story of the SDA mission at Agona Ashanti. These were the diplomacy, tact and affable nature of the Agona Ashanti Chief, Nana Kwame Boakye; the personal qualities of the pioneer missionary, H.W Lewis and the general change of perception about Western formal education and its eventual acceptance by the people of Ashanti.

Mensah (2002) a retired pastor of the SDA Church, Ghana and first Ghanaian President of the Ghana Mission posited that Nana Boakye was a powerful and a fair-minded chief who commanded authority and respect. He readily and warmly received Lewis and his people because he was very much aware that the presence of a “Whiteman” and his family in his town was bound to enhance the dignity of the town and increase his own popularity especially when he was informed that the national headquarters of the mission was to be established there ((Interview with Opanin Yaw Amponsah of Aduana family of Agona, Agona Ashanti. 4th April 2002). Most significantly, the type of Christianity brought by Lewis and his people identified Saturday as a special day of worship and this attracted Nana Boakye so much (being a Saturday-born, called Kwame) that he adopted the Seventh-day Adventist Church as his own and frequently attended church services on Saturday with Lewis and his people. It is also noteworthy that, among the Akans in general and Ashanti in particular, Saturday was (is) considered as a special day of God. Owusu-Mensa (1990) has argued that the Akan people of Ghana and the Ashanti, in particular, were worshiping God prior to the advent of the Europeans, and Saturday was a revered day belonging to God. It was a day of communion with God and on this day, ritual cleansing and other purification rites were performed. As a result, God was and is still considered as a Saturday-born and is often referred to as “Onyamee Kwaame”. In 1968, Dr. J.B Danquah, a foremost Ghanaian scholar emphasized that the traditional Akan people of Ghana believed that “all men (were) issue of the progenitor, the ultimate ancestor and creative, Nana whose day is Saturday” (p. 29). This general traditional thinking was also likely to have facilitated Nana Boakye’s patronage of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The position of Nana acted as a ‘magnet’ drawing large numbers of his subjects to the Adventist faith.

It is significant that the Basel Mission had just established a mission station at Agona prior to the arrival of the Adventist mission (Debrunner, 1967) but due mainly to this royal patronage, the Seventh-day Adventist church became the most dominant missionary establishment at Agona. Debrunner (1967, p. 310) has also explained the warm reception and the popularity of the Seventh-day Adventist Church over the Basel Mission at Agona in this way: “there was a rivalry between the chiefs of Ashanti Mampong and Ashanti Agona. In both places, the Basel mission maintained outstations at the beginning of the war” (1914). He continues that “nevertheless, however, the Agona Chief felt neglected and a palaver ensued leading to the withdrawal of the Basel Mission agent (from Agona) and the Seventh-day Adventists were warmly welcomed by the Agona Chief and people”. The Agona chief’s feeling of neglect as pointed out by Debrunner was due likely to the large concentration of Basel Missionary activities at Mampong as against Agona which had only an agent of the mission who might possibly be a locally-trained church worker. On the other hand, Agona became the focus of Seventh-day Adventist Mission’s activities serving as a national headquarters, with a resident European missionary and family.

The second factor to be considered is the devotion and personal qualities of Lewis (the first pioneer missionary to Agona). In spite of possible problems of acclimatization, communication barriers and other initial obstacles, Lewis is on record to have exhibited a remarkably high sense of duty and dynamism. Indeed, in tracing the development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Ghana and Ashanti Region in particular, his name stands tall among all missionaries of the Church who ever worked in this country. In a kind of a testimonial letter written about him by Arthur J. Philbrick, Acting Chief Commissioner, Western Province Sekondee (Sekondi) to the then Colonial Secretary in Accra, on June 29, 1916, it was stated among other things that: “Mr. Lewis is trustworthy and above the average of European Missionary (PRAAD.ARG.1/13/4. Gold Coast Mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Letter, 29 June, 1916. p.3).

This confidential report tells much about Lewis’ ingenuity and resourcefulness and more so, his readiness to put his services at the disposal of the people of Agona and its environs, particularly, in terms of provision of Western formal education. This, no doubt, won for him the admiration and support of the chief and his people, and contributed immensely towards the success of the Seventh-day Adventist missionary endeavours in the Agona community.

The last factor to be considered is the gradual change of perception among the people about Western formal education. Throughout the early stages of missionary activities in the country, the Ashanti kingdom was known to have resisted Western formal education. Scholars like Bartels (1965) and Odamten (1978) have in one way or the other described the initial persistent refusal of the Ashanti kings to allow Western formal education in their territories. Describing the attitude of the Ashanti King of 1841, Bartels (1965, pp. 51 – 52) quoted Freeman, a pioneer Wesleyan missionary as saying that “about the school for young people... Kwaku Duah was no longer sure. His chiefs were skeptical. They suspected that a school and the new ways would produce a rift between the old and the young”. Agbodeka (1971, p.196) has also pointed out that, “the Asante [Ashanti] did not like the establishment of schools ... because they felt that through schools, British influence would be established”. In addition, the missionaries’ attack and condemnation of certain traditional religious practices deepened the resistance to Western formal education. In most cases, commoners (those not of royal descent) and domestic slaves were those normally allowed to go to school (Interview with Opanin John Oti: A veteran leader of the Ntonso S.D.A Church, 16th February, 2002). By the beginning of the twentieth century however, things started to change to the extent that the Basel missionaries were eventually given

permission in 1896 to open a mission station in Kumasi (Hildebrandt, 1962). Due to the high demand for schools in Ashanti, seventeen primary schools had already been established by 1914 in the region by the Basel Mission (Hildebrandt, 1962; McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975).

The reasons for the demand for Western formal education during this period are not far-fetched. Odamtten (1978, p.64) has observed that, "it seems that generally Christianity was acceptable to many (Ghanaians) because of the opportunity towards the improvement of social and economic standards it offered". Since Christianity and Western formal education were hand-in-hand, the latter was accepted in the same vein.

The people of Ashanti, particularly, the Agona townfolk, like their counterparts in other parts of the country, had by this time become very much aware of the advantages of Western formal education. This largely explains the warm reception given to Lewis and his colleagues at Agona. By 1916, Lewis and his colleagues, with the support of Nana Kwame Boakye and his people, had put up a mission house and a school (PRAAD. ARG.1/13/4. 29th June, 1916) and from all indications it was obvious the Seventh-day Adventist Church had been firmly rooted in the Agona township.

3.2 The Establishment of the Agona SDA Infant/Senior School

It is significant that Governor Rodger's emphasis on agricultural and technical education in 1909 (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975) as the most ideal educational programmes for the country were emphasized by the Seventh-day Adventist Missionary of Agona Ashanti, when in 1914, Lewis was seeking for permission from the colonial government to reside in Ashanti, he made it clear that farming activities and industrial education were going to be the focus of the Seven-day Adventist Missionary activities in Ashanti (PRAAD. ARG.1/13/4. p.3). As a result, the Agona SDA elementary school he established in 1915 promoted these types of education and by the 1920s, the school was progressing steadily. It was unfortunate that, it was around this period 1917 that Lewis and his family had to leave for home due to a motor accident in which he was involved (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopaedia, 1976). However, the arrival of other missionaries like T. Baker and L.F Langford ensured the continued survival of the Agona SDA School, which by the time became the centre of the church's educational activities in Ashanti (Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia, 1976).

Available information indicates that by 1929/30 academic year, the total average enrolment in the Agona SDA School was seventy-two (72) with ten teachers. In all, there were eight classes for both the Junior and the Senior departments of the school (The old Log Book of Agona SDA Infant/Senior School, 30 August 1931. P.40). Most of the teachers were not certificated and to enable them upgrade their skills in teaching, an arrangement was put in place for them to receive tutorials from Frank L. Stokes, an European resident teacher of the school who doubled as the missionary for the Church. Apart from upgrading their teaching skills, the teachers were, at the same time being prepared to write the then Teacher Certificate Examination which was organized by the Colonial Government in Kumasi (the Old Log Book of Agona SDA, Infant/Senior School. 30th August 1931. pp.1-2). What were remarkable at this time were the educational policies of Gordon Guggisberg and their impact on the Agona School. Available records indicate that throughout the era of Guggisberg, the church did not receive any financial assistance from government for their educational programmes. The missionary and educational activities of the Church were solely funded by the headquarters of the church in America and contributions by local members. It was not until 1930; some sixteen years after the establishment of the Agona SDA School was made an "Assisted school" by the government. (PRAAD. ARG.1/13/11 1931). The Asamang SDA school also received the same status in 1934. Consequently, the Seventh-day Adventist Church received some amount of monies, 324.13.00 and 162.00 and 162.6.6 pounds, as "salaries" and "grants" on African salaries respectively (PRAAD. ARG.1/13/11. Summary of Grants to Primary and Secondary Schools. 1930 Grand Totals).

It is significant that around this period, the Agona SDA School was steadily progressing, and to a large extent, the aspects of education it promoted were in line with most of the educational principles of Guggisberg in 1925. For example, promotion of welfare and industries of localities such as agriculture, basketry, for useful citizenship and community development, systematic and effective character-training and religious education (MacWilliam and Kwamena Poh, 1975) were all implemented by the Agona school. As a result, the school received various favourable comments from government agents responsible for education in Ashanti. In 1933, these impressive comments from the Provincial Inspector of schools in Ashanti, Mr W. R. Allen, about the school were given as:

The school is making undoubted progress from year to year and promises to play an increasingly important part in the life of immediate neighbourhood in the future. In this endeavour, the resident missionary is doing his utmost to contribute.
(Quoted from: the Old Log Book of Agona SDA Mission Inspection Reports 1933, pp. 146-147).

The comment that the “school promises to play an increasingly important part in the life of the immediate neighbourhood” as noted above sounded more prophetic as the later educational efforts of the church and the pivotal role the school played confirmed this. Apart from giving literacy to many people in the Agona community, the educational programmes that the school engaged in, as noted above, played a significant role in the general development of the community.

3.3 Aspects of Education Promoted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church at Agona-Ashanti Agricultural/Farming Education

In the first place, agricultural and industrial education constituted the pivot of the Agona school curriculum. In 1931, for example, J.H Fielding, who was then the General Manager of the Adventist mission’s schools, insisted on intensive agricultural activities in the school. This was primarily aimed at producing more food to feed the boarding pupils to sell the surplus for the running of the school. In 1938, an impressive account of the Agona schools (Agona SDA Mission Infant/Senior School) agricultural/farming activities was given by Fielding. He noted that “gardening is receiving the serious attention of the school.” He continued by further reminding the teachers in the school of the urgent need to attach all seriousness to the general agricultural programmes in the school. He noted that:

Teachers are reminded that practical Agriculture is a regular class subject and that they [teachers] are therefore expected to be present to teach and supervise the pupils at times set down in the school time table. In view of the fact that some are failing in this respect, the management has decided that in future in fine of one shilling will be imposed for each absence except in cases of definite sickness.

(Quoted from: the Old Log Book of Agona SDA Mission Infant/Senior School– Inspection Reports 1930, pp. 115).

Long before the issuance of this warning and reminder, the agricultural activities of the school had been highly recommended by the Provincial Inspector of schools in Ashanti in 1930. His observations in the following words are very instructive:

The crops are the healthiest in the district and there should be very little expenditure this year on school messing. A valuable object lesson on how to manage ground to the best advantage has been put before the pupils. Deep and thorough cultivation has yielded such good results that the farmers in the vicinity attribute it to medicine. No artificial manures have been used.

(Quoted from: the Old Log Book of Agona SDA Mission Infant/Senior School– Inspection Reports 1930, pp. 146-147).

3.4 Industrial/Technical Education

Records available indicate that technical education also in the form of carpentry, basketry, raffia work, clay modelling and mat-weaving was also given attention by the Agona SDA School. For example, a workshop was put up at the inception of the school where rudimentary lessons in carpentry were taught to the students. Agona being a forest area where wood abounded, the teaching of carpentry skills was most appropriate. In 1933, for example, W.R. Allen, the Provincial Inspector of Ashanti schools wrote in one of his inspection reports of the Agona school that in addition to gardening, carpentry is taught to Standard V–VIII by a young teacher trained at Mampong Middle Boarding Trade School (the Old Log Book of Agona SDA Mission Infant/Senior School – Inspection Reports 1930, pp. 115).

On an optimistic note, he intimated that “an excellent collection of new tools were supplied this year and progress should become more apparent.” It is significant that this aspect of education promoted by the school was commended by the Inspector of education. One of the major objectives of education during the 1920s was the inculcation of technical/vocational skills into the pupils/students in order to make them productive and contribute positively towards the socio-economic development of their localities. Both the Phelps-Stokes Report of the 1920s and Governor Gordon Guggisberg’s educational programmes for colonial Ghana within the same period (McWilliam and Kwamwina-Poh,1975) stressed on the importance of the acquisition of technical/vocational skills by the locals in all their educative processes. Thus, for the school to have promoted this type of education was, in a way, a portrayal of its commitment to national agenda, which was largely in consonance with the educational ideals of the SDA church.

3.5 Character-Training and Religious Education

Another area of the Agona SDA School curriculum worth emphasizing is moral/character-training. This type of training forms an integral part of the general educational principles of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (Africa-Indian Ocean Division, 1988, p. 15.) In strict compliance with this policy, the schools established by the Church at this time concentrated on moral education through various religious activities. The pupils were impressed upon to recognize and imbibe the worthwhile values of honesty, obedience, and respect for God. Regular church services, morning devotions and religious instructions were some of the common features of the school at Agona. In a report about the School in November, 1930, the Inspector of schools in Ashanti, A. Clarke made the following observation about the school:

Although the work of the Senior School is by no means all that can be desired, the moral tone and the discipline of the school is so very good, that assistance may be recommended in the confident expectation that the school work will see a great improvement in the near future.
Quoted from: The Old Log Book of Agona S.D.A Mission Infant/Senior School– Inspection Report, 25 November, 1930. P. 58).

Again, in 1936, another favourable comment on the general discipline of the school was given: “discipline is good, as regard the day pupils and the board alike and there are signs of improvement in the general standing of the school in relation to other Ashanti schools. If this tendency continues, it may be possible to recommend an increase of grant. (Quoted from: The Old Log Book of Agona S.D.A Mission Infant/Senior School-Inspection Reports 1936, pp. 236).

The general effect of the moral training and vigorous religious instructions in the Agona SDA school was the promotion of the evangelistic and activities in the neighbouring villages of Bedomasi and Afamaso and later Sekyedumasi, by some of the Adventist teachers and their pupils (The Old Log Book of Agona S.D.A Mission Infant/Senior School – Inspection Reports 1936, pp. 316). These evangelistic activities were largely in consonance with the SDA Churches’ philosophy of education that education secures to the successful student his passport from the preparatory school of earth to the higher grade, the school above in heaven (White, 1903).

Consequently, in all the places in the neighbourhood of Agona such as Asamang, Kofiase, Ntonso, Afamaso, Briporo (Ahinsan), Mampong, Sekyedumasi, Akrofonso that were reached by these dedicated Adventist teachers and pupils, primary schools of the Mission were established there. (Compiled from the Old Transfer Register of the Agona SDA Mission Infant Senior School) The Agona SDA School became a model for them, in terms of curricula, discipline and general management. Teachers were occasionally transferred from Agona to these places to ensure uniformity and consistency. For example, in 1932, G.M Erzuah, a teacher at the Agona School was transferred to Ntonso, a neighbouring town to manage a primary school which had just been established there. In all these evangelistic activities, missionaries like J.J. Hyde, F.L Stokes, H.K Munson and Jesse Clifford were very instrumental as they provided supervision and general directives. (Newfield, & Neuffer, 1976). It is significant that this educational objective of moral and religious training of the church was in line with one of the traditional principles Guggisberg found most appropriate for the country by the time – character training and religious teaching.

3.6 Academic/Literary Education

Academically, the performance of the Agona SDA School in particular was not below expectation. By the 1930’s, the School had reached Standard VII and it is on record that pupils who completed Standard III in the other newly established schools of the church in the community, like Ntonso and Bipoah SDA Mission Primary schools, who were still interested in pursuing their education to Standard VII had to travel to Agona for the Senior School Education. Even though available records do not give specific academic records of the Agona school, it is gratifying to note that the various inspection reports recorded in the Old Agona SDA Mission Infant/Senior School Log Book (1932 – 1940) indicate that the academic standard of the school was by no means below average. What might have possibly prevented the school from achieving an outstanding academic performance was the lack of more qualified teachers on the staff. (The Old Log Book of Agona SDA Mission Infant/Senior School. pp. 146 – 147). Most of the teachers, even though devoted to duty were not well trained. In most cases, affiliation to the Adventist church and an ability to read and write were the main qualifications for the post of a teacher in the School. In addition, the mission occasionally employed the products of the Mampong-Ashanti Trade School, who were in most cases not certificated. (The Old Log Book of Agona SDA Mission Infant/Senior School. pp 114). The teachers only took advantage of the tutorials given by the few qualified teachers on the staff, most of whom were Europeans.

In spite of this teething problem, in 1937, the headmaster of the school took eleven pupils including girls from the senior department to Mampong Ashanti to participate in the Coronation Essay Competition at St. Monica's Convent under the auspices of the then District Commissioner of Mampong, Mr. Brian-Smith (The Old Log Book of Agona SDA Mission Infant/Senior School. Pp 146 – 147). This, among other things, indicates the official recognition that the school enjoyed at the time in Ashanti. In addition, it is recorded that in 1931, two boys of the school, S.K Owia and J M Asante were interviewed by the inspector of Ashanti schools with a view to put their names forward as candidates for the Achimota School. Following the interview, one of the boys, J. M Asante was asked to present himself in Kumasi for the purpose of meeting a representative of the Achimota School for admission procedures (The Old Log Book of Agona SDA Mission Infant/Senior School, Pp 43 – 44).

3.7 Challenges to the educational efforts of the Seventh-day Adventist Mission at Agona and the Way Forward

The policy of the SDA Mission in Ashanti to establish primary schools in all areas of its evangelistic activities turned out to constitute a major challenge to the educational efforts of the Mission during this period. Even though, not much information is available on these schools, mentioned above, in terms of enrolment, classification and accommodation, it is very certain, in the light of available records in the Agona School that the schools grappled with the acute shortage of teachers. As a solution, the few “experienced” teachers at Agona were frequently sent to some of these newly-established schools to ensure their continued survival. This practice, needless to say, affected the progress of the Agona School drastically and this attracted a sharp criticism from the then Provincial Inspector of Ashanti Schools, M.F Wordworth in 1935. He wrote in one of his reports that:

The staff consists of five teachers none of whom are trained and one of whom uncertified. In addition to the fact that the school is infringing rule 45, the present staff is quite unequal to the situation and teaching is deplorable. It is impossible to foresee any hope of improvement, until at least one of the newly trained teachers is employed who can show the remainder of the staff how to better itself.

Quoted from: The Old Log Book of Agona S.D.A Mission Infant/Senior School– Inspection Report, 1935, p. 184).

In retrospection, the Inspector of the Schools described the present state of the school as appalling and intimated that:

The school has in the past had as many as seven (7) teachers but the mission has opened and is still opening small bush schools in many places and teachers have been drawn off for this purpose. It is feared that the mission has adopted quantity rather than quality as its educational aim. It is recommended that no further schools of this mission be considered for assistance until the standards of the existing schools have been improved.

Quoted from: The Old Log Book of Agona S.D.A Mission Infant/Senior School– Inspection Report, 25 November, 1935. p. 184).

The above criticisms raise some fundamental issues worth considering. In the first place, the “small bush schools” referred to were those at Kofiase, Ntonso, Afamanaso, Briporo (Ahinsan) and others.

Notwithstanding the fact that the report was not a pleasing one, especially to the SDA mission, it could be said that it was a fair assessment. This is because, such transfers of teachers from the Agona school was bound to affect the smooth academic progress of the school, no matter the level of devotion of the remaining teachers. As indicated earlier on, by 1935, only two schools, Agona and Asamang, of the Mission in Ashanti were receiving government's financial assistance. The government, through the then Education Department, was therefore interested in the steady progress of these schools. As a result, anything that tended to impede the smooth development of these schools was a big worry to it. It is however significant to note that, even though the criteria used by Inspector Wordworth to describe the other schools of the Church in the Agona locality as “bush schools” are not specifically given, there is no doubt that he was referring to their low-quality in terms of teaching facilities, enrolment and quality tuition. It would be recalled that between 1925 and 1927, Guggisberg, in his educational reforms, used the same terminology to describe some 150 schools in the country, which were considered to be low quality and made persistent attempts to close them down despite opposition. (McWilliam & Kwamena-Poh, 1975).

What is puzzling is why the Seventh-day Adventist Mission continued to open more of the so-called “bush schools” in the face of shortage of teachers and other related problems. Secondly, in analyzing these pertinent issues, it is important to take into proper consideration the fundamental objectives of the missions in establishing the schools. Virtually all the missionary bodies in the country, at the early stages of their educational enterprises, concentrated their efforts in soul-winning activities. Indeed, the schools they established were first and foremost seen by them as fertile areas of evangelism. The Seventh-day Adventist mission was not an exception to this “school-evangelisation” phenomenon. It thought that, even if the schools were poorly staffed but could help in winning souls and offer some industrial education (farming activities) it was better to operate them than to close them. Whatever the case, the mission admitted the anomaly and two “experienced” teachers were transferred from Ntonso and Bekwai SDA schools to augment teaching at the Agona school in 1936 (The Old Log Book of Agona SDA Mission Infant/Senior School, p.189). But the intractable problem of inadequate teaching personnel in the mission’s educational endeavours still remained insoluble. It would be recalled that in his letter, Arthur Philbrick, the Acting Chief Commissioner, Western Province, stated among other things, that, it was through the financial resources received by Lewis from the Church’s headquarters in America, that the schools at Agona and Asamang were established in 1915. However, it became a policy, as time went on, of the worldwide church that the local members who were the direct beneficiaries of the schools should contribute to the upkeep of the schools by providing funds for the training of teachers and other logistics.

Thus it was the firm expectation of many that the problem of inadequate teaching personnel, in particular, would be tackled urgently to ensure an uninterrupted educational effort of the Seventh-day Adventist Mission in Ashanti. Teacher-training was therefore one of the key educational programmes the Mission embarked upon, when its headquarters eventually moved from Agona to Bekwai in the early 1930s.

4.0 Conclusions

The Seventh-day Adventist church’s educational activities in Agona township and its environs from 1915 onwards, as seen from the above, could be said to be the veritable launch pad for the entire educational effort of the mission nationwide. Given the degree of success the Agona “experiment” achieved, one would not be wrong to assert that it was Agona that mapped out clearly, amidst challenges, the future educational philosophies of the church, as far as its subsequent educational provision and practice in modern Ghana was concerned. Whilst the achievements possibly motivated the leadership of the church to expand its educational activities, it was also anticipated that the emanating challenges would serve as an eye-opener to provide propitious solutions whenever such challenges cropped up.

It is worth reiterating that the cordial relationship that developed between the people of Agona-Ashanti and their leaders on one hand, and the Adventist missionaries on the other hand, largely fertilized the ground for the latter to promote evangelistic and educational activities. Using the Agona SDA Mission Infant/Senior School established in 1915 as the hub of its educational and missionary activities, the church established more basic schools in the locality, concentrating on religious and moral education as well as “practical agriculture” as the missionaries put it. By the end of 1932, when the headquarters of the Mission was moved to Bekwai Ashanti, the SDA Church and its educational activities had been firmly established at Agona and its environs with a large membership, as it enjoyed royal patronage.

It is often said that education is the key to rapid socio-economic development and there is no doubt that the early provision of formal education by the SDA mission from 1914 at Agona paved the way for the enhancement of human lives there particular the provision of literacy, technical, agricultural and moral education laid the solid foundation of socio-economic development, of the Agona township.

What however remained a major challenge to the smooth operation of the SDA mission at Agona was the lack of adequately trained teachers for the number of schools the Mission had established in the area. It was therefore anticipated that the training of teachers was going to be one of the church’s major pre-occupation in their future educational endeavours.

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