

THE ROLE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN
THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF GHANA

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Introduction: Subject matter

For the purpose of this paper, I consider the Presbyterian Church as a continuation of the Basel Mission. It is well known, that the Scottish Mission took over the Presbyterian Mission in 1918 when the Government of the Gold Coast arrested and deported the Basel Missionaries in 1917, and that the Scottish or Presbyterian Mission became the Presbyterian Church in 1926 (Brokensha, 1966:25; Debrunner, 1967:294). It was the Basel Mission, rather than the Presbyterian Church, which played a significant role in laying the foundations of structural changes in the economy of the Gold Coast in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Bauer has defined structural economic change in the Gold Coast as the:

process which transformed the economy of the Gold Coast from a traditional economy based on subsistence production and the collection of naturally occurring products into one dominated by a cash crop which has become a major staple of international commerce.¹

The cash crop was cocoa and, as will be seen, the Basel Mission was instrumental in bringing it to the Gold Coast.

I define 'economic development' in this context as quantitative and qualitative changes in the material means of life, owing to corresponding changes in the management of natural resources, including land, and to the acquisition of new skills and tools. I shall suggest that certain sets of

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activities of the Basel Mission, particularly in south-eastern Gold Coast, promoted changes in the use of natural resources and the acquisition of new skills and tools, which were necessary for changes in the material means, as well as improvements in the quality, of life of the south-eastern peoples of Ghana among whom the missions established themselves.

The sets of activities included (i) agricultural experiments and the introduction of new crops, including cocoa; (ii) infra-structural developments, such as in housing and communications; (iii) the introduction of new skills and tools and (iv) changes in life style. But before describing these sets of activities, and showing their relationship to the changing economy, I must, firstly, sketch the history of Basel Missions in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and also say a few words about the characteristics of the missionaries that could be presumed to have a bearing on economic development. Secondly, I consider it necessary that I sketch the economic conditions of south-eastern Gold Coast as the framework within which the changes I shall outline occurred. The sketch will facilitate an appreciation of the impact of the missionary economic activities.

i. The nineteenth century Basel Mission²

The story of the Basel Missions in south-eastern Ghana begins in the late eighteenth century with Paul Erdmann Isert, a Danish physician and botanist. Isert first visited Akwapim in 1788, and returned to Akropong in July 1789 to found an 'utopian colony'. The colony did not survive Isert's early death in January, 1790.

Although his stay in Akwapim was short, Isert's work bore fruit in influencing others to come to Akwapim. Among those influenced was Andreas Riis, generally regarded as the founder of the Basel Mission on the Gold Coast. In 1832 Riis joined the Basel Mission which had been established in 1829 at the Danish settlement at Christianborg. The Europeans generally felt that the coast was unhealthy for whites, and were on the look out for suitable location for the missions. Riis visited Akropong, the site of Isert's

work, on 25th January, 1835, finally settled there on March 9th, 1835, and worked there till his death in 1845. He visited Kumasi in 1839-40 but the visit bore no apparent 'fruit'. In 1842-43, he went on recruitment tour to the West Indies, in the belief that blacks would stand the climate better than whites. He was able to bring to Akropong six West Indian married couples and three bachelors. Of these the best known was John Rochester who, together with David Asante, an Akwapim, succeeded George Widmann at the Larteh mission in 1847. By the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Basel Mission had spread from the Christianborg centre to Akropong, Aburi, Larteh and further east to Krobo Odumase, Anum, Ada Foah and Keta.

It is significant that the Basel missionaries were Calvinists or Protestants, imbued with the sense of calling, or devotion to one's chosen duty. 'Devotion' was not an emotional, but a rational matter, implying a systematic application of the most efficient means to rationally determined ends. In the early days of capitalism, members of the Protestant sects are said to have distinguished themselves by their rational pursuit of wealth which, when acquired, was a sign of "grace" or acceptance in the sight of God. The rational pursuit of wealth precluded prodigality or ostentation in one's lifestyle, and thrived on frugality which Puritanism enjoined upon its practitioners. It is the rational or methodical attitude to one's work, coupled with the ascetic manner of life, embodied in the Protestant ethic, which distinguished the Protestant entrepreneur and gave him an advantage over Catholic and other non-Protestant entrepreneurs (Weber, 1930).

In considering the relationship of Christianity to the early development of cocoa in the Akwapim district, Brokensha states that:

Christians, in their specific roles as Christians, did not play a leading part in the development of cocoa. The pioneers included both Christians and non-Christians, and it would be idle to look for any sort of 'Protestant ethic' in the development of the cocoa industry. (Brokensha, 1966: 17)

But it seems to me that the point about the 'Protestant ethic' relates not to entry into the cocoa industry. As he himself points out, (1966:36) the people of Larteh, with whom he was mainly concerned, had become used to trading enterprises for four centuries before cocoa arrived among them. The fruitful point to pursue concerns the relative success of the Akwapim Christians, as entrepreneurs, as compared with non-Christians. Were the Christians, generally, more successful in the pursuit of wealth than non-Christians and what were the factors of their success? Was it possible, for example, that the Christians were more frugal than others, and to what extent was this frugality reflected in the areas of social life, that demanded more than ordinary expenditure, such as the occasions of the rites of passage, birth, marriage and death?

This seems to me a worthwhile hypothesis that can be tested in such a small, homogeneous area as Akwapim. It appears to me likely that the early Christian converts were influenced in their outlook and mode of life by the Basel missionaries who, like other missionaries in Africa, insisted that their converts should imitate their style of life (Ajayi, 1965). Again, it is likely that the missionaries prevented the converts from participation in the rites of traditional religion which presented obstacles to the accumulation of wealth. Such ritualistic obstacles included prohibitions on work on farms on certain days and the expensive demands of traditional deities for mmusu yie, pacificatory, supplicatory and purificatory rites, sheep, goats and fowls. This line of enquiry should reveal a positive relationship of presbyterianism to economic development.

ii. The Akwapim economy in the nineteenth century

An estimate of the impact of the Basel Mission on the economy of Ghana must be preceded by a reconstruction of the main features of the Akwapim economy in the nineteenth century. By 'economy' I mean the production and distribution of goods and services in a given area. But there is no material

for a detailed reconstruction of the economy and one is bound to resort to generalities about the Akwapim economy which was not unlike the economies of the coastal forest zone of the Gold Coast.

Economies may be broadly divided into market and non-market economies. A market economy is one in which men's livelihood depends on money exchange, so that all the factors of production, land, capital and labour, are for sale. A man has to sell something in order to subsist and the market, through cash transactions, structures productive activities. A non-market economy is the reverse of this: men produce for their own use, and not for exchange and the factors of production have no market.

The latter type of economy has been called a 'subsistence economy', a generic term which has embraced the economies of hunters and gatherers, pastoralists and agriculturists spread in communities over Africa and Asia. Sahlins, (1972: 1-39) has shown that a subsistence economy need not mean a 'starvation economy' but that it has the characteristic of under-use of natural resources and labour (Sahlins, 1972: 41-74), from the observer's point of view. Underdevelopment follows precisely from this under-employment of natural resources and labour, which puts a low ceiling on growth in the material means of life.

The Akwapim economy, like the economies of the Akan peoples of central and southern Ghana, had passed the stage of subsistence economy: the development of chiefship had led to intensification of production and since 1482 there had been trade with the Europeans which had stimulated productive efforts. In the years following the British formal abolition of the slave trade in 1807, the people of Akwapim, like others in southern Gold Coast, had substituted trade in palm oil and kernels for the trade in men. In the middle of the century, they took to rubber collection and the sale of cotton. Production for use was shot through with production for exchange in order to acquire European clothing, tools and drinks, and money in the form of cowries had penetrated the economy.

Nonetheless, production for use was the dominant feature of what was becoming a peasant economy. Economic organization was based on the household whose productive activities were mainly oriented towards own use rather than for exchange. There was little differentiation beyond the sexual division of labour and most people were in farming. The material means of life, in the form of food, shelter and clothing, were not much altered at the time of arrival of the missionaries. In what follows I shall suggest the various ways in which missionary activities contributed towards the change of the Akwapim non-market to market, economy.

iii. Agricultural experiments and the introduction of cocoa

Missionaries in Africa, whether Protestant or Catholic, were expected not only to preach the Gospel but also to promote industry among their converts. It was believed that in order to turn Africans from the temptations of the Slave Trade, the Gospel must be accompanied by the plough (Ajayi, 1965: 17); and it was urged upon missionaries to teach Africans new skills in agriculture, in addition to commerce. The Devil, it was said, found something for idle hands to do.

On the Gold Coast, the Methodists, under Rev. T.B. Freeman, and the Basel Mission engaged in agricultural experiments, creating model farms around their missions for imitation by their congregations. The Methodist mission had cash crop - coffee and cotton - plantations at Lominase and Abura in the Central Region in 1841; in 1842 they also purchased a coffee and cotton plantation called 'Napoleon' near Cape Coast from the firm of F. Swanzy and renamed it Brulah (Debrunner, 1967: 130).

The Basel Mission agricultural experiments began after the arrival of the West Indian missionaries in Akropong in 1842-43, and advanced pari passu through south-eastern Gold Coast with the establishment of the mission in the different towns. Thus by the 1870's the Mission has cotton plantations at Akropong, Abokobi near Accra, Krobo Odumase, at Ipong on the Volta river and Anum.

Secondly, such crops as coco-yam, cocoa and the mango tree, were new introductions, which spread later through the Gold Coast and Ashanti. Of these the most important was cocoa which has since the end of the last century, shaped the economy of Ghana. The Basel Mission's first experiments in cocoa growing at Akropong, with cocoa pods imported from Surinam in 1859 were not very successful. In 1866 only a single tree had remained in their plantation with yields which were distributed to the Mission's farms at Aburi, Mampong and Krobo Odumase (Dickson, 1971: 165-166).

Today, Tetteh Quarshie is regarded as the founder of the cocoa industry. But it ought to be recalled that before he went to Fernando Po, he had learnt of the potential value of cocoa from the Basel Mission, and, that it was due to his training as Goldsmith by the Mission that he secured his job in Fernando Po (Debrunner 1967: 139). Therefore, the contribution of the Basel Mission to the development of the cocoa industry is, in the first instance, twofold: it drew the attention of the people to the potential value of cocoa, made it clear that the soil and climate were suitable for it, and also trained the migrant Tetteh Quarshie who brought cocoa from the Seychelles Islands.

Mission training contributed to the development of cocoa in another way: Persons educated in the Mission schools acted as secretaries of the Akwapim land purchasing companies (Brckensha 1966: 17) which, Polly Hill insists, contributed more than small-scale individual farmers for the growth of the cocoa industry.³

The early effect of cocoa industry on the economy of the Gold Coast need only be briefly stated. The development of cocoa entailed more intensive use of all the factors of production land, capital and labour, and hastened the monetization of life. It led to an increase in the purchase and leasing of land, hastened the process of capital accumulation and stimulated labour migration. Far more than the production and sale of palm oil and rubber, the production and sale of cocoa was responsible for substantial changes in

the material means of life and improvements in the quality of life at first on the Akwapim ridge, and later throughout the country.

Thirdly, the Mission, through the Basel Mission Trading Factory, which it established in 1855, traded in agricultural products, so that the members of the congregation who grew cotton and coffee, or produced palm oil and kernels at Akropong, Larteh, Abokobi, Christiansborg, Krobo Odumase, Kpong and Anum found a ready market for their products.

One cannot state in any precise fashion the effect of the agricultural experiments, cocoa production and trading in cash crops on the peoples of the neighbourhoods of the missions. But there is no doubt that they intensified the induction of the people into the market economy and stimulated labour specialization.

iv. Innovations in infra-structure

Quantitative and qualitative improvements in the material means of life advance with improvements in communications which enlarge social contacts and widen the area for market exchange. The major changes in communications in this country occurred after the establishment of colonial administration which built 'administrative' to connect regional headquarters and trade roads to link district headquarters to the regional headquarters in the first half of this century. These replaced the bush tracks which had served for roads. But the Basel Mission made a beginning in road making and introduced other means of portage than human beings before the end of the century. In the 1860's, it began the construction of a road to link Christiansborg, the Akwapim ridge and the Krobo area (Debrunner, 1967:132). Members of the mission tried horses, mules, and asses for portage. Though their efforts were nullified by the tsetse in the closed forests which, in the absence of veterinary services, preyed upon the pack animals, (Brokensha 1966:21) the demonstration effect was salutary.

Infra-structural developments included changes in house building. Riis was famed as Osiadan, house builder (Brokensha, op.cit. 187). The Basel Missionaries built the first stone house at Akropong in 1846, and by the end of the century the Akwapim ridge saw many fine stone houses, modelled on the architecture of the missionaries. It may also be presumed that in both the separate christian quarters and the non-christian parts of the towns in which the Mission houses were situated, attempts were made to imitate, not only the missions' architectural models but also the furnishing of the rooms. Later, money from cocoa production was to enable the pioneers in the cocoa industry to erect stately mansions which have been called 'monuments' to the golden pod (Brokensha, 1966: passim). The early mission houses became centres of diffusion of architectural models. The urge to build such houses acted as incentives for the search for wealth.

v. The introduction of new skills and tools

Economic development is both facilitated and measured by quantitative and qualitative changes in skills: men and women acquire different skills and pursue different occupations. This development either precedes or follows migration to centres of demand for different kinds of skills. It indicates the emergence of a labour market, and therefore considerable monetization of the material means of life, and hence significant structural changes in the economy (Szereszewski, 1965:59).

The Basel Mission contributed to the development of different skills through their formal educational institutions and artisan workshops. The Mission's attempt at formal education began at Christiansborg on 27th November, 1843, and at Akropong at the end of 1844. Subjects taught in English were reading, writing, Biblical history and singing. The pupils also worked on the mission farms; and in 1847 twelve girls at Akropong were learning needlework. On 3rd July, 1848 the Mission opened a seminary at Akropong, which as the rules laid down by the missionary field conference for seminaries put it, was to ^{train} teachers and catechists. In 1869 the Mission

schools were categorized as follows:

- i. Infant schools (kindergarten Aburi and Akropong.)
- ii. Primary day schools (3 classes): Larteh, Mamfe, Tutu, Abokobi, Odumase, Sra, Kibi, Kukurentumi, Aburi, (boys only) and Akropong (girls only).
- iii. Primary boarding schools (6 classes): Akropong for boys, Aburi girls.
- iv. Middle boys' schools: Christiansborg and Akropong (4 years).
- v. Seminary: Akropong (3 years). (Debrunner, 1967:147-151).

In addition to schools, the Mission also established workshops at Christiansborg for training artisans: carpenters, masons, blacksmiths, shoe-makers, potters and hat-makers. In 1857-1859 they brought two master carpenters, specialists in house-building and furniture-making, a master chariot-maker, blacksmith, mason, shoe-maker, potter and hat-maker, (Ibid:137).

Those educated in the schools found jobs as pastors, teachers or catechists at the mission or clerks at government and commercial establishments. The workshops turned out skilled men, sawyers, coopers, masons, carpenters, ironsmiths, gunsmiths, organ repairers, shoe-makers and tailors who found occupation within the changing economy of Ghana (Brokensha, 1966:17; Debrunner, 1967:29).

The acquisition of new skills entailed the acquisition of the necessary tools, and increase in the technical equipment of the skilled craftsman.

vi. New styles of life

Finally, as Ajayi, (op. cit.) has it, the missionaries aimed at influencing, not only the spiritual outlook, but also the manners and customs of their converts. Manners and customs included such external things as mode of dress, and the furnishing of houses. I have already suggested (section iv.)

that missionary architecture and furnishing influenced, first, the Salems or Christian quarters and, second, non-Christian sections of the towns in which the missions were located.

It appears to me reasonable to suppose that the early Christians took the lead before non-Christians in the acquisition of dress and items of foreign material culture which served as indications of their new way of life. Smith (1966) has stated that the modern elite, as distinct from the traditional elite, had its origin in Christianity which was inseparable in the early days from formal education. Members of the elite were distinguished by their style of life, which was modelled on the life of the missionaries. The link between the change in life-style and economic development is that the need to acquire the material symbols of christian or elite status, like the need to pay taxes in the early colonial period, acted as incentives for intensifying productive efforts, in farming, trading or as paid labour.

Summary

The Basel Mission contributed to the development of the economy of the Gold Coast in the following ways. By means of its experimental farms, it demonstrated the potentiality of the soil for a greater variety of crops. In showing that cocoa would grow in Ghana, it prepared the ground for the development of the cocoa industry which has, since the turn of the century, dominated the economic development of this country. The Mission produced educated and skilled men who were necessary for the developing economy of the Gold Coast, and helped in the process of labour specialization which is a feature of a market economy. The Mission offered a model of life the imitation of which spurred the neighbours to greater productive efforts. In all these areas the Mission made lasting contributions to the change from a non-market to a market economy.

Conclusion

Based as it is only on secondary materials this paper has been necessarily sketchy. But I hope I have suggested the lines on which a future enquiry into the subject might be pursued.

Notes

1. P. Bauer

Preface to R. Szereszewski, 1965.

2.

This section is based entirely on
Brokensha, (1966), Smith (1966) and
Debrunner, (1967).

3.

See Polly Hill (1963; 1970).

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