

# The Church and Ghana's Drive Towards Democratic Consolidation and Maturity

Van Gyampo RE\*

Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, Ghana

## Abstract

Generally, the Church has played a critical role in Ghana's drive towards democratic maturity. The Christian Council of Ghana, one of the foremost and well respected umbrella Christian Church Organizations makes a positive contribution to Ghana's democratic consolidation process. As part of a broader civil society, the Christian Council, in spite of its financial challenges, has played a democracy-supporting role of fighting authoritarianism and contributing to the nurturing of democracy in Ghana when it was attained. So, what is the Christian Council of Ghana's mission? What specific role has the Council played in fighting authoritarian regimes since independence? How has the Council contributed to democratic nurturing, maturity and consolidation in Ghana? These are the critical issues that the paper seeks to address using a qualitative research approach that largely thrives on secondary sources of information and views gleaned from interviews with persons associated with the Christian Council.

**Keywords:** The Church; Christian council; Ghana; Democratic consolidation; Maturity; Authoritarianism; Civil society

## Introduction

Ghanaians are regarded as notoriously "churchical" and church activities are organized and attended by many Ghanaians almost every day of the week. A survey conducted by the Ghana Evangelism Committee on religions in Ghana in 2008 show that 62% of Ghanaians are church-goers. The church therefore has a huge presence in Ghana, solving the spiritual, physical and socio-economic needs of its members. The annals of Ghana's political history attest to the fact that the church has also played a pivotal role in governance and democratic consolidation. At the minimum, "the bulk of state or government officials and personnel has been, and are, Christians, whether it is in democratic political regimes or military regimes" [1]. Beyond this, the church has since independence been directly or indirectly connected with Ghana's democratization process and contributed immensely towards the nation's drive towards democratic maturity.

However, there seem to be little or no literature on the church's role towards democratic consolidation and maturity in Ghana. Indeed, in discussing Ghana's democracy, scholars have generally focused on the role of elections, political parties, and civil society. For instance, Ayei [2], Jonah [3], Anebo [4], Frimpong [5], Gyimah-Boadi [6], Jeffries [7] and Bofo-Arthur [8] have all discussed the role of elections in consolidating Ghana's democratic gains. They have highlighted the significant achievements, innovations, prospects and challenges in the conduct of elections in Ghana. Other scholars including Debrah [9], Ninsin [10]; Bofo-Arthur [11]; Ahwoi [12]; and Jonah [13] have also highlighted the role of political parties in democratic consolidation in Ghana. The role of civil society in democratic consolidation in Ghana and indeed Africa as a whole have also been explored by leading scholars including Diamond [14], Gyimah-Boadi [6]; Bratton [15]; Hutchful [16]; Whitfield [17] and Jumah [18].

It is therefore conceded that some path-breaking studies have been conducted on Ghana's democracy and attempts to consolidate it. However these studies have largely been limited to the role of elections civil society as a whole, and political parties. Some studies have also been done on the church in Ghana and Africa as a whole as the works of Hastings [19]; Heward-Mills [20]; Opuni-Frimpong [21]; Gifford [22]; Larbi [23]; Okyerefo [24] etc. clearly shows. But these studies have only focused on the evolution and ecumenical role of the church;

ethics and leadership in the church; and the various groupings in the body of Christ such as Orthodoxism, Catholicism, Charismatic and Pentecostalism. In other words, these studies have only focused on the "spiritual" aspects of the church and neglected the role of the church in the "public sphere" Habermas [25]. Although much work has been done on civil society, it is argued that given the huge presence of the church in Ghana as part of civil society, any study that lumps the church as part of a broader civil society would be unable to illuminate its invaluable and specific contributions to Ghana's drive towards democratic consolidation and maturity. The works on civil society and democratic consolidation does not highlight the specific role of the church. However, among the gamut of associations that constitutes civil society in Ghana, i.e., the media, trade unions, student unions, professional bodies, etc., the church plays a leading role because its membership cuts across all the associations that constitute civil society in Ghana. This study is therefore driven by the fact that even though the church as an agent of civil society has a huge presence in the Ghanaian political space, its specific role and contribution towards the nation's democratic consolidation seem not to have been much researched. It must be noted that churches can aid and undermine democratic consolidation. This is often characterized in terms of the religious pluralism of a state - more religiously diverse states have a more difficult time maintaining peace and stability [26]. The opposite pole would be religiously homogeneous states where there are fewer competing values and fewer opportunities for grievances to undermine fledgling institutions. Ghana appears to be overwhelmingly Christian. This contributes fewer deep divides and position the church as a peaceful credible democracy-supporting body (ibid). The study therefore attempts to fill the literature lacuna. It argues that the church in Ghana has contributed immensely towards democratic maturity and consolidation in Ghana by facilitating transitions from autocratic regimes to democratic regimes and playing

\*Corresponding author: Van Gyampo RE, Department of Political Science, University of Ghana, Ghana, Tel: 233-244-277-275; E-mail: [revgyampo@ug.edu.gh](mailto:revgyampo@ug.edu.gh)

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invaluable roles in nurturing and improving democratic quality. The study therefore undertakes a historical review of regimes in Ghana since independence, highlighting and critically examining the specific role and contribution of the church towards Ghana's democratic consolidation and maturity. The church in this study would refer to the Christian Council of Ghana, one of Ghana's foremost orthodox and much respected Christian Organizations formed as far back as 1929. The study is purely qualitative and thrives on information from library research as well as personal interviews with the General Secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana who is in charge of the day-to-day administration of the Council. The subsequent sections of this paper discuss democratic consolidation as a conceptual taxonomy for the study; the formation and vision of the Christian Council; the activities of the Christian Council towards democratic consolidation; and a final concluding note. Democratic Consolidation Democratic consolidation connotes a stable and persistent democracy and democratic principles that does not suffer a threat of relapse. This view is in harmony with Larry Diamond's position when he argued that "consolidation is most usefully construed as the process of achieving broad and deep legitimation, such that all significant political actors, at both the elite and mass levels, believe that the democratic regime is the most right and appropriate for the society, better than any other realistic alternative they can imagine" [27]. For consolidation to occur, democracy must become "the only game in town" behaviorally, attitudinally, and constitutionally as posited by Linz and Stepan [28].

Generally, there is no fixed time frame for democratic consolidation and this stems from the fact that democracy is a process and requires constant engineering in light of the challenges that may confront the nation in question [8]. The minimalist conception of democratic consolidation and maturity emphasizes the conduct of elections as the key and major element. Joseph Schumpeter for instance has noted that "the democratic method is that institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote" [29]. In other words for Schumpeter, the doctrine of democracy is only about the competition of leaders for votes. Other scholars who subscribe to the minimalist view of democratic consolidation include [30]. The works of these scholars suggests that even the quality of elections do not necessarily matter, rather what matters is the frequency or number of elections conducted. Indeed, Lindberg argued that "repeated elections—regardless of their relative freeness or fairness—have a positive impact on human freedom and democratic values" [30]. This view of democracy has however been described as implausible, both descriptively and prescriptively [31]. It has been argued that competitive election is a necessary, but not sufficient condition for democratic consolidation. Therefore, for scholars like Mackie and Lumumba-Kasongo [31,32], any adequate definition of democratic consolidation must make reference to the common will, the common good and other values including equal socio-economic and political opportunities for the citizenry. As aptly indicated by Wlzel and Inglehart [33], holding elections alone will not accomplish the task of consolidating a democracy and neither will the passage of legislations that guarantee political rights be enough to do same. Larry Diamond [34] argues that democracy is consolidated when individual and group liberties are respected, well protected, and there exist autonomous spheres of civil society and private life, insulated from state control. For him, liberal democracy is instrumental to freedom in three different ways. First, free and fair elections inherently require certain political rights of expression, organization and opposition, and these fundamental political rights are unlikely to exist in isolation. Secondly, democracy is said to be a key concept for the maximization of opportunities for self-determination:

that is for persons to live under laws of their own choosing. And finally, democracy facilitates moral autonomy, the ability of each individual citizen to make normative choices and thus be, at the most profound level, self-governing. A consolidated democracy makes government more responsive to a wider range of citizens and this stems from the fact that the greater the opportunities for expressing, organizing, and representing political preferences, the greater the number and variety of preferences and interests that are likely to be represented in policy making [35]. Consequently, in democracies, particularly ones with institutionalized representative processes, groups have the right to freely express themselves on any given issue and leaders must be responsive in dealing with the concerns of the people so expressed (ibid). Again, minorities have the political scope to mobilize and to win response within the democratic process [34]. On the basis of the liberal conceptualization of democratic consolidation, particularly in the area of group activities in the political space and freedom of expression, the question is whether Ghana has created enough space for groups like the Christian Council to thrive, operate and freely express themselves on given issues of national importance. How tolerant and receptive have regimes been towards the Christian Council and how have their views expressed on national issues been treated? Ghana's drive towards democratic consolidation and maturity is also be contingent on the extent to which civil society and identifiable groups like the Christian Council of Ghana are respected, tolerated and allowed to contribute to shape the democratic and political landscape of the country. As Diamond [34] argues democratic consolidation also requires the effective functioning of civil society in supporting democracy within a body politic. According to him, the democracy supports functions of civil society are two-fold. First, they play a crucial role in ensuring a transition from an authoritarian rule to at least an electoral democratic rule. Secondly, they strive to deepen democracy once it is established through capacity building of key democracy actors like political parties; create platform for consensus building among political elites; play a watchdog role and offer constructive criticisms to keep governments on their toes and thereby provide a basis for the limitation of state power; supplement the role of political parties by offering political education on tolerance, compromise, moderation, respect for dissenting views; arouse political consciousness of the citizenry and stimulate political participation (ibid). Generally, a healthy democracy is founded on a plurality of organized social groups through which citizens learn the arts of associating together, practicing the procedures of democratic governance, and expressing group interests to policy makers. It is thus through these civic organizations that people participate in politics and development. In effect, civil society groups like the Christian Council of Ghana provides networks of communication among citizens, and between citizens and the state and these impacts positively on democratic consolidation [36]. How influential civil society groups are and the extent to which they are listened to by political elites and allowed to complement the role of the state as argued by Bratton [36] is a critical yardstick in measuring their effectiveness as well as the extent to which a democracy may be said to have been consolidated and matured. Although civil society may not be able to solve the problems they raise, they can set a public agenda and steer formal political systems in directions set by fair deliberation in a manner that enhances democratic consolidation [37]. The Christian Council of Ghana is an important civil society group whose activities are not confined to religion and salvation. It is also an important stakeholder in Ghana's quest for democratic maturity and consolidation. What is the vision of this august body and how has its activities contributed to democratic consolidation in Ghana? The subsequent sections would answer these questions.

## Background

The Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) was established in 1929 to serve as an ecumenical organization that brings together member churches in an attempt to help offer some solutions to the spiritual, political and socio-economic challenges that confronts the church in Ghana [38,39]. The CCG's mission includes:

- Strengthening the capacity of member churches to contribute to achieving justice, unity, reconciliation and integrity of creation among various sectors of the Ghanaian society.
- Providing a forum for joint action on issues of common interest.
- Contributing to the development of a peaceful, just and equitable society in Ghana where there would be an increased realization of socio-economic and political rights of disadvantaged people including women and children in Ghana (ibid).

In seeking to achieve its mission, the CCG is guided by the Holy Bible. The Council also seeks to engage with governments and policy makers on critical socio-economic and governance issues in a manner that is expected to make regimes more accountable to the ordinary people. In all matters of national interest, the Council is required to remain politically neutral [1,38]. The list of churches that constitute the CCG are the Methodist Church, Ghana, Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Ghana Baptist Convention, Salvation Army Church, Religious Society of Friends, the Orthodox Church, Ghana Mennonite Church, Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Ghana, Evangelical Lutheran Church of Ghana, Evangelical Church of Ghana, Eden Revival Church International, Christian Methodist Episcopal Church, Christ Evangelical Mission, African Methodist Episcopal Church and African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church [38,39]. Even though the Catholic Church is not a member of the CCG "one of the most remarkable and existing manifestations of the ecumenical movement on the Ghanaian scene in recent times is the joint fellowship of the Catholic Bishops' Conference and the member churches of the Christian Council of Ghana" [1]. With such fellowship, the CCG has over the years worked together with the Catholic Bishops' Conference on several socio-cultural, economic and political issues in Ghana (ibid).

## Activities

In line with its mission, the CCG has undertaken several activities that have bridged the gap between policy makers, governments and the ordinary Ghanaians as well as shaped the political development of Ghana. Most of these activities started when Ghana attained independence and are discussed below:

### The Convention people's party (CPP) regime

In an attempt to silence the opposition and to maintain its hold on power after Ghana's independence in 1957, Kwame Nkrumah, the leader of the CPP introduced the Preventive Detention Act (PDA) in 1958. The PDA empowered the government to hold some citizens, particularly suspected political enemies in detention for long periods, up to five years, without trial [40,41]. However, in 1960, two years after the passage and implementation of the PDA, the CCG petitioned Kwame Nkrumah, to express concern over the in-human treatment and human rights abuses being perpetrated on Ghanaians by the selective implementation of the PDA. The CCG pleaded with Kwame Nkrumah to grant freedom to all those who were detained in prison as a result of the application of the PDA. Again, the CCG requested a meeting with the Prime Minister to discuss pertinent issues relating to human

rights in Ghana. However, the CCG could only bark without biting. Its activities never influenced the Nkrumah regime, perhaps as a result of the fact that the regime was not fully democratic. Indeed, on the CCG's request for a meeting with Nkrumah, the latter refused to meet the former citing his heavy pressure of public business as an excuse [1]. Also, in response to the concerns expressed on the application of the PDA, Nkrumah wrote to the CCG as follows:

I am satisfied that my party and my government have taken their stand in this matter from a realistic point and I am unable to advise them to shift their ground. I think that if the Christian Council and the churches want the Preventive Detention Act to be withdrawn, it should be their duty first of all to take positive steps to remove the causes which led to the passing of the Act. I cannot see that you and your colleagues have any right at all, moral or otherwise, to intervene in this matter.

### The National Redemption Council (NRC) and the Supreme Military Council (SMC)

The CCG was silent and not heard during the regime of the National Liberation Council that toppled the Nkrumah government and the Progress Party regime that won the 1969 elections. However during the NRC and SMC military regimes, the CCG publicly appealed for the release of former Progress Party officials who had been jailed. But typical of undemocratic regimes, these appeals were ignored. In an attempt to consolidate the reign of the military, the SMC regime under the leadership of General I.K Acheampong introduced a proposal for Union Government in 1978 [42]. This was a kind of political administration to be headed by the military, police and civilians. Those who supported the idea were encouraged to do so but those who opposed it, such as the People's Movement for Freedom and Justice, the Ghana Bar Association and the National Union of Ghana Students were forbidden and brutally assaulted when they campaigned against the idea (ibid). Indeed, some of their leaders were arrested and detained [40]. In response, the CCG wrote to the leadership of the SMC expressing grave concern about the abuse of freedom of expression associated with Union Government campaign. This was also ignored and the wanton abuse of free speech continued until the idea was defeated in a referendum (ibid).

### The Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC)

The SMC regime was overthrown on June 4, 1979, by a group of soldiers in a bloody coup, led by Jerry John Rawlings. The AFRC was then established as the governing authority of the country. It undertook a "house cleaning" exercise to rid the country off corruption and other negative practices and acts of politicians, traders, etc. that sabotaged the economy [42]. In the process, human rights were egregiously violated and several lives were lost [40]. The CCG swiftly responded to this move on the 12th of June 1979 when it teamed up with the National Catholic Secretariat to issue a joint memorandum to the AFRC as follows: We regret that there has been so much violence in what we believed was intended to be a bloodless takeover. We understand that the national house-cleaning should be seen as only a part of the serious political and economic problems that need to be tackled. We are glad to learn that it is the intention of the Armed Forces not to cling to power; and we hope that the AFRC would make a public commitment on a firm date for return to constitutional rule, because such a commitment is necessary to win for us the international sympathy without which our efforts at rebuilding our shattered economy will be virtually impossible. However, between June 16 and 25, the AFRC went ahead to execute seven members of the NRC and SMC and an eighth person who was a former Head of State under the National Liberation Council

regime. The CCG again sent a memorandum to the leadership of the AFRC on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1979 as follows: We are all painfully aware of the mismanagement and corruption which has rendered our dear country nearly bankrupt. We also believe that those who are responsible for this sorry state of affairs should be severely punished. But we do not believe that the death penalty, especially after secret trials, is the only, or even, the most effective punishment that can be administered to those who are found to be guilty.

This memorandum did not change anything and the wanton abuse of rights continued. With the support of the National Union of Ghana Students (NUGS) who urged the regime to "let the blood flow" soldiers took the laws into their own hands and sometimes settled personal scores with their enemies under the cloak of the revolution [41,42].

### The Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC)

The AFRC regime handed over power to the People's National Party headed by Dr. Hilla Limann after he had won the 1979 elections. However on 31<sup>st</sup> December, 1981, Flight Lt. Rawlings overthrew President Limann's PNP government in a military coup and installed in its place the PNDC. The PNDC sought to crush the enemies of the revolution in a manner that undermined human rights, peace and created doubts in the economic future of Ghana. Indeed, there were numerous kidnappings and killings, wanton confiscation of properties without enquiry, administration crude justice through tribunals, detention without trials, increasing economic hardships, closing down of factories, scarcity of basic consumer goods that compelled many Ghanaians to form long queues to buy basic consumables like a tin of milk, and the imposition of curfews which resulted in low productivity of factories and work places [42]. As a result of these challenges, the CCG issued a memorandum which was signed by all member churches calling for an immediate handing over of power from the PNDC to a government of national reconciliation comprising opinion leaders, professionals and other identifiable groups to salvage the economy and bring discipline, law and order to the country as well as prepare the country for a popularly-elected government [39]. However, Rawlings rejected the call to hand over power and ruled the country for 11 years. During the period, the wanton human rights abuses continued and those who openly challenged and critiqued the regime were repressed. Those who feared for their lives lived under a culture of silence [42].

### Democratic dispensation and elections

Towards the 1992 Elections, around 1988, the CCG, undertook an initiative that radically departs from its usual petitions and writing of letters to officialdom. Following the initiation of the process to return Ghana to a democratic rule, CCG organized political education programmes to sensitize Ghanaians about their role in the process and the need to seize the opportunity to ensure that the nation is returned to constitutional democracy. Through workshops, symposia and retreats, members of the CCG as well as the ordinary Ghanaian citizenry were conscientized and offered some civic education about the need for them to actively take part in the democratic process through voting. Given its role in socializing Ghanaians into the democratization process, the CCG was also invited to serve on the constituent assembly that was established by the PNDC regime and tasked to draft Ghana's 1992 Constitution [16,39]. The 1992 Constitution was approved in a referendum and the first election was held and won by the sitting head of state, Ft. Lt. Rawlings, the candidate of the National Democratic Congress. However, the key opposition parties, the New Patriotic Party, People's Heritage Party, People's National Convention and the National Independence Party claimed the results of the 1992 elections

were rigged and hence boycotted the parliamentary elections [39]. This created tension and some acts of violence but to prevent the situation from deteriorating, the CCG summoned a meeting on 16th November, 1992 with the opposition parties and prevailed on them to remain calm and restrain their supporters. The CCG convened another meeting between the leadership of the National Democratic Congress, the Interim National Electoral Commission and the opposition but the meeting ended in a deadlock [1,16]. Following this, the CCG issued a memorandum proposing a kind of power sharing between the National Democratic Congress and the opposition as a solution to the deadlock. However, both the ruling government and opposition rejected this proposal [43,44].

### The 1996 elections

To ensure that the bitter lessons and controversies that saddled the 1992 elections are not repeated, the CCG again undertook an outreach and educational programme to sensitize its members and indeed a cross-section of the Ghanaian citizenry on their democratic rights to fully participate in the electoral processes and to eschew apathy. Indeed, in November 1993, the CCG organized a workshop in Sunyani, the Brong Ahafo Regional capital of Ghana to discuss the role of the church in the promotion of democratic culture. At that workshop the need to prepare educational materials that would equip the church and its members with information regarding the elements that make for democratic culture and good governance were also discussed [24]. Again, in 1995, the CCG organized a workshop in Koforidua, the Eastern Regional capital of Ghana to train church leaders on how they could play a meaningful role as ambassadors of democracy. This led to the establishment of the Forum of Religious Bodies around August 1996, for the purpose of observing and monitoring the impending General Elections in December 1996 to ensure that they deliver peaceful and acceptable results [39]. In this regard, it collaborated with local election observers, particularly the Network of Domestic Election Observers (NEDIO) in training 1,500 local observers throughout the Ghana and also carried out civic education programmes for its various members in preparation towards the December 1996 elections [41,44]. On polling day, the 1,500 trained observers were deployed to 193 out of the 200 constituencies to monitor the elections. In their report, they declared the elections free and fair with the ruling National Democratic Congress winning by 57.87% (ibid).

The role played by the CCG in collaborating with other churches and civil society in educating people about their rights and training them as election observers subsequently became the model for the pursuant elections of 2000, 2004 and 2008[1]. The Christian Council and the Catholic Bishops Conference pooled resources for organizing electoral education among congregations and member churches and for training thousands of personnel to observe the 2000 and 2004 elections (ibid). Both elections which were won by the New Patriotic Party were pronounced by the local observers and international community to have been free and fair [41]. During the 2008 elections, although a coalition of civil society groups was formed to work with the religious bodies, much of activities relating to training people as election observers and preparing the ordinary people to brace themselves for the impending elections fell on the shoulders of Christian Council [1]. The CCG received a Toyota Land Cruiser and 120,000 Euros as support from the German Protestant Churches Development Service, to facilitate work on voter education, election monitoring and dissemination of information on the electoral process to the general Ghanaian public (ibid). With this support, the CCG was able to design innovative programmes including training of trainers' workshop to equip church leaders and other volunteers with the skills of voter education so they

can also train other people [39]. In addition to its election observation programme, other innovations introduced by the CCG were: The Signature Campaign - to collect as many signatures as possible from Ghanaian citizens countrywide who would undeservedly pledge their commitment to non-violent participation in a free, fair and transparent election on 7th December 2008 so as to foster stability, growth and development of Ghana. Some 85,000 signatures and thumbprints were thus collected from across Ghana.

- Peace Messages on Radio and Television – to formulate and broadcast a documentary that called on citizens to uphold peace before, during and after the 2008 elections.
- Sending Mobile Phone Text Messages – to appeal to Ghanaians to refrain from acts that can undermine the nation's peace and tranquillity.
- National Prayers and Fasting in collaboration with the Office of the President– to ask for peaceful elections in Ghana.
- Forum for the Presidential Aspirants- to present them with one platform to dialogue among themselves on critical issues of national importance; engage in a healthy contest of ideas; as well as elicit their commitment to peace before, during and after the 2008 elections.
- Constant Press statements – to remind all Ghanaians of the need to exercise their civil roles and responsibilities in the elections and to uphold peace.

The 2008 elections failed to produce a clear winner in the first round. None of the two leading parties, the New Patriotic Party and National Democratic Congress could secure the required fifty percent plus one vote to be declared a winner. A run-off election was therefore held for the presidential aspirants of the two parties on 28th December 2008. Prior to the run-off, the political temperature of the country had been heightened and tensed. To douse the flames of danger that threatened to erupt in view of the tension, the CCG in collaboration with other religious bodies and eminent persons from civil society held a number of meetings with the leadership of the two main parties to broker peace and prevent violence before, during and after the run-off [39]. Some of the eminent people who were met include the out-going President, John Kufuor, the flag bearer of the New Patriotic Party, Nana Akufo Addo, the flag bearer of the National Democratic Congress, Prof John Atta Mills, as well as the national chairmen of the two contending parties (ibid). This intervention contributed to a peaceful run-off and subsequent transfer of power from the ruling New Patriotic Party to the opposition National Democratic Congress without violence and disruption of the nation's electoral processes and peace (ibid). Again, in fulfilment of its democracy support role, the CCG, during the 2012 General Elections, deployed over 600 election observers to violence-prone regions and flashpoints in the Ashanti, Volta, Eastern, Northern and Greater Accra regions. Even though the CCG and other allied civil society groups as well as foreign observer missions had declared the elections free and fair, a number of irregularities that characterized the elections became the bases for a court action initiated by the opposition New Patriotic Party. The opposition rejected the declaration of John Mahama of the NDC as the elected president and prayed the Supreme Court to annul the election results. This ushered the country into an eight month period of legal battle characterized by tension and pockets of violence. In response, the CCG through various press releases, radio and television programmes called for calm among Ghanaians. They also appealed to the leadership of the two main parties to accept the verdict of the Supreme Court and not to seek a review. The sustained calls for

peace by the CCG and civil society groups, particularly the Institute of Economic Affairs, Centre for Democratic Development, National Peace Council, etc. during the Election Petition process drummed home the need for the nation's peace and stability to be safeguarded. Hence it was not surprising that after the Supreme Court's final ruling on the matter on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2013, there was calm. It was also not surprising that even though the flag bearer of the opposition party disagreed with the ruling, he nevertheless accepted it in the interest of peace.

After the political tension had normalized the CCG joined forces with other allied bodies in calling for electoral reform in the wake of the anomalies that were unearthed by the 2012 elections in order to sanitize Ghana's electoral process and remove suspicion as well as promote transparency. These calls compelled the Electoral Commission to set up and inaugurate a nine-member Electoral Reforms Committee to review proposals for electoral reform submitted to the Electoral Commission and oversee the implementation of the proposals.

### Analysis/Discussion

From the foregone discussions, the CCG has played an invaluable role in Ghana's drive towards democratic maturity and consolidation. In their article on "Support for Democracy in Africa: Intrinsic or Instrumental?" Bratton and Mattes [15] argued that there is intrinsic support for democracy in Ghana despite economic and other setbacks to the system of government. The CCG is one body that has contributed to this support. It has been able to exist autonomously and maintained its image as a respected group within Ghana's body politic. As Diamond [34] argued, one of the key indices for democracy consolidation is the extent to which groups are able to function independently from the state and command respect in their activities as intermediaries between the state and the governed. Even though the CCG was to a large extent not listened to in the periods prior to the inception of Ghana's Fourth Republic in 1992, it nevertheless asserted its right to freely express itself on political matters without being gagged and feeling intimidated. It condemned acts of violence, human rights abuse and other undemocratic measures. It played a role as part of civil society in Ghana towards the return of the country to a constitutional democratic rule in 1992 by serving as one of the pressure groups that advocated for a return to multi-party democracy as well as serving on the constituent assembly that drafted the 1992 Constitution. It must be noted that the role of the CCG around the period of dictatorships and military rule was confined to issuing press statements and memoranda. This is because the political space was not too open to tolerate other proactive interventions. Again, the role of the CCG could not be much felt during the democratic regimes of Busia and Limann largely because these regimes were short-lived. Indeed, before they could fully settle in, they were toppled by the military.

Upon the return of Ghana to a constitutional democratic rule in 1992, the role of the CCG moved beyond mere talk to democracy supporting activities. As argued by Diamond [27], democratic consolidation also requires the effective functioning of civil society in supporting democracy within a body politic in two main ways. First, civil society plays a crucial role in ensuring a transition from an authoritarian rule to at least an electoral democratic rule. Secondly, they strive to deepen democracy once it is established through capacity building of key democracy actors like political parties; creating platform for consensus building among political elites; playing a watchdog role and offering constructive criticisms, keeping governments on their toes and thereby providing a basis for the limitation of state power; supplementing the role of political parties by offering political education on tolerance, compromise, moderation,

respect for dissenting views, arousing political consciousness of the citizenry and stimulating political participation. The activities of CCG have not only promoted democratic consolidation at the minimalist level. Indeed, through the various activities of voter education, constructive criticisms, election monitoring and observation etc., the CCG has supported the maturation and consolidation process of Ghana's democracy. Through their election observation reports, they have helped and continue to help improve the quality of elections in Ghana. Through their public utterances, public education and press statements, they have kept governments on their toes, protected the rights of the ordinary citizenry as well as offered political education to Ghanaians on their rights, responsibilities and the need for them to refrain from acts that could undermine the nation's democratic progress and peace. By working with other civil society groups, media and religious bodies, they have contributed to the promotion of a peace, culture of tolerance as well as politics of accommodation in Ghana. They have been able to contribute to the calming of political tension before, during and after election. Consequently, the fear of democratic relapse is gradually becoming a thing of the past in the psyche of many Ghanaians. As Diamond argued, democracy is also consolidated when there is a stable and persistent democracy and democratic principles that does not suffer a threat of relapse. Last but not the least, through their Presidential Forum; they have been able to promote accountability and issues-based politics. Indeed, bringing all the aspirants together to be quizzed on what each of them stands for regarding different policy issues is a critical accountability tool. Again, the forum certainly shifts the focus of electioneering campaign from politics of insults and mudslinging to the discussion of "bread and butter" issues of concern to many Ghanaians. The CCG was able to survive all the years during military rule and dictatorships when civil society in Ghana was generally constrained in its activities because of the respect it commands as a religious body and the fact that the leadership of the various military regimes and dictators also belonged to member churches that constituted the Council [1,19]. Indeed in a highly religious country like Ghana, the position of the church and organizations like the CCG are held paramount. This confers a certain degree of autonomy from the state to credible religious organizations such as the CCG [44]. In this regard, even though the Council has been critical of certain regimes and political dictators, state power has not been used to crash it. At most, the criticisms of the Council have been ignored by the regimes that find such criticisms unpalatable [43]. It must also be noted that the CCG was able to re-assert itself after the 1992 elections, when despite the democratic transition, civil society in Ghana was still generally controlled and/or co-opted by the incumbent government because until recently, many church leaders in Ghana have sought to play their role in shaping the nation's democratic and governance landscape outside the confines of the corridors of political power [39]. Indeed, the CCG has largely been pre-occupied by its ecumenical responsibilities. Its leaders have therefore not been interested in pursuing frontal and active partisan politics. This has given them the leverage in playing their role also as referees in Ghana's drive towards democratic maturity. The role of the CCG in Ghana's drive towards democratic maturity is unique. In other African jurisdictions like Nigeria, South Africa, Botswana, individual churches are consulted or visited by political leaders on political matters and sometimes some of these church leaders make their voices known on national issues publicly. What is lacking in these other jurisdictions is a lack of credible organizations that brings the churches together as one formidable and respected body such as the CCG [1,39]. It must however be noted that the CCG has not attained its full role in shaping Ghana's drive towards democratic maturity. Given its zeal and fervour, the Council could do

more. But the critical question for many years, has been where and how to source funds for its activities? The CCG relies heavily on funding from its member churches. However the incomes generated from this source have over the decades been woefully inadequate. Indeed, the financial contributions to the CCG by its member churches has been only 3% of its annual budget while some 10% accrues from income generated from renting of the CCG's spare office spaces [1,39]. There have been attempts to seek financial assistance from external sources for their programmes but these have not always yielded positive results. Even though overseas partners of the CCG have sometimes intervened to assist the Council with funding, "it is important for the Council to also devise a means to generate internal funds that are more reliable so that no foreigner dictates what must be done by the Council in its role as an independent civil society group" [39]. Unfortunately, the CCG has not yet achieved the needed financial autonomy it requires to prosecute its mandate more forcefully (ibid). Nevertheless, the CCG continue to do its best in shaping democracy in Ghana and this is a shining example for other organizations and state institutions that have no reliable sources of resources or suffer from severe paucity of funding and financial suffocation. As indicated by Rev Kwabena Opuni-Frimpong, "the resources may not be available, yet you must still be committed to your mandate" [45,46].

## Conclusion

The CCG has over the years grown in its strength, visibility and role towards democratic consolidation and maturity in Ghana. It has played a democracy supporting role of helping the process of Ghana's transition from authoritarianism to electoral democratic rule. On attainment of democracy, the CCG has also played a role of contributing to its (democracy) nurturing. Indeed, the CCG has demonstrated much commitment and mental fortitude in its effort to shape Ghana's democracy in spite of its financial challenges. As it continue to play its role not only as a religious body but also as a key civil society actor working in collaboration with other pro-democracy forces, it is plausible to imagine that Ghana's drive and prospects towards democratic maturity and consolidation are high. Democracy would in the near future become "the only game in town" behaviourally, attitudinally, and constitutionally as posited by Linz and Stepan [47] and the role of civil society groups like the CCG would always be associated with the attainment of this goal.

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