

**STATEMENT MADE BY ALEXANDER KODWO KOM ABBAN IN
COMMEMORATION OF THE 125TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ACCRA ARCHDIOCESE
OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND TO CELEBRATE THE UNIVERSAL CATHOLIC
CHURCH FOR ITS SOCIAL RESPONSES TO THE GOSPEL**

Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for your indulgence in granting me the opportunity to make this statement in commemoration of the 125th anniversary of the Accra Archdiocese of the Catholic Church and to use this occasion to celebrate the Catholic Church in Ghana, and indeed, the universal Catholic Church on its social response to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Mr. Speaker, on Sunday 25th November 2018, the Catholic Archdiocese of Accra climaxed the year-long celebration of its 125th anniversary of the birth of the church in the archdiocese with the celebration of the Holy Mass. The colourful ceremony which was held at the Independence Square was attended by a multitude of Catholics of all walks of life. The occasion was also graced with the presence of His Excellency, Nana Addo Dankwa Akufo-Addo, the President of the Republic of Ghana and the Commander-in-Chief of the Ghana Armed Forces.

Mr. Speaker, history has it that the seed of the Catholic faith was first planted in Accra on 31st January 1893 with the arrival of Rev. Fathers Otto Hilberer and Eugene Raess, the early missionaries of the church in Accra, thirteen years after the Catholic Church had re-bounced in Elmina in 1880. The two priests were joined by eight others for the spread of the gospel in Accra. Unfortunately, in 1894, a devastating yellow fever epidemic swept through the coastal towns of Ghana, then Gold Coast, and dealt a great blow to both the local people and the missionary priests. In all 7 out of 10 missionary Fathers died as a result of this epidemic, and consequently, for about 30 years, Accra was to remain without a resident priest. (Source – Official website of the Catholic Archdiocese of Accra)

Mr. Speaker, church services in Accra in the early days were initially held in rented houses. The mother Church of the Archdiocese of Accra is the Sacred Heart Church, once a cocoa shed which was re-modelled and dedicated by Bishop Hauger on 23 May, 1925. The solemn High Mass celebrated on that day was the first ever in Accra. Over the years, the church has grown in steady strides from being a small community of faith, to a parish, to a diocese and then to a metropolitan archdiocese with its suffragan dioceses. The Accra Archdiocese of the Catholic Church now has about 170 parishes divided into 6 deaneries. The Archdiocese has also given birth to two episcopal ordinaries – the Koforidua Diocese and the Donkorkrom Vicariate.

Permit me, Mr. Speaker, to salute the Catholic Archdiocese of Accra for achieving this mile-stone and to thank the early missionaries, priests and lay faithful whose sacrifices have brought the Church this far.

Mr. Speaker, as we celebrate the church, I would like to crave your indulgence to highlight the Catholic Church's social response to the gospel and how this is vividly displayed or manifested in Ghana and to recommend to the other faith-based or religious organisations to emulate the Catholic Church in the provision of social services to the people to whom they preach the gospel. Mr. Speaker, in highlighting the Church's social response to the gospel in Ghana, I cannot do it any better than to

borrow the words of the President, who in expressing his gratitude to the church on the 125th Anniversary celebration was quoted on that occasion as saying that:

“... Indeed, the Catholic Church has built many of the institutions of our country, and is on record to be the one single institution, outside of Government, that has built so many healthcare facilities such as hospitals and clinics, in Ghana. We treasure very much this partnership between State and Church, and I pray for God’s continuing blessings on this Church.”

Mr. Speaker, apart from the health facilities alluded to in the President’s speech, the Catholic Church in Ghana is also second to Government in the provision of educational facilities in the country. It is almost certain that in every community where the Catholic Church is present, one is likely to find a Catholic Basic School for the primary education of the inhabitants of those communities. Besides the basic schools, the church can also boast of a number of very good secondary schools in Ghana. Mention can be made of schools like St. Augustine’s College, Cape Coast; Holy Child School, Cape Coast; St. Peters School, Nkwatia; St. Rose’s School, Akwatia; Pope John’s Seminary, Koforidua; St. James Seminary, Sunyani and Opoku Ware School, Kumasi. Indeed, of the ten best schools in the 2018 Senior High School rankings, seven are Catholic Schools. Through this, the church has contributed immensely to the production of the human capital needs of the country. We thank the Catholic Church.

Mr. Speaker, the Catholic Church believes that the well-being of the human person does not only rest on being fed with the gospel; the church’s approach to the gospel has always been dictated in its belief in three key principles – *sanctitas* (sanctity or holiness); *sanitas* (health or strength) and *scientia* (knowledge). As stated in the Vatican Council II document entitled *Sacrosanctum Concilium* the church fathers acknowledge that the church is divine yet human; and in response to its humanness, the church preaches the gospel to the heart of its faithful to make them holy; it provides education to train their minds to make them responsible citizens and leaders of society; and it provides health education and facilities to keep the faithful healthy. The church also provides relief services to alleviate the suffering of the poor. This is just an aspect of how the church responds to the invitation of Christ to see him in those he himself wished to be identified with and whom he described in Matthew 25:35-37 as follows:

*I was hungry and you gave me food
I was thirsty and you gave me drink
I was a stranger and you welcomed me
I was naked and you clothed me
I was sick and you visited me
I was in prison and you came to me*

It is therefore not surprising that we have many Catholics in very responsible positions in the country; and even for those elites and leaders who are not Catholics, many of them may have received some kind of education from Catholic basic or secondary schools.

Mr. Speaker, permit me to be a little personal here as a living proof or manifestation of the Catholic Church’s social response to the gospel. I was born to very poor parents in Gomoa Dawuramong and had the benefit of Catholic education at the local Roman Catholic School in the same community. By the village standard, I would describe

myself as a very intelligent student. I was introduced to church activities early in my life and started reading the lectionary in my village Catholic Church when I was in Class Five. In 1988, when I was in Form Three, I sat for and successfully passed the Common Entrance Examination but my poor parents could not afford the fees to take me to secondary school. So I resigned myself to the reality that my education would come to an abrupt end after writing the Middle School Leaving Certificate Examination the following year, much against my burning desire to have secondary education.

Mr. Speaker, thus it was when in Form Four, our village school was blessed with the visit of the Vocations Director of the Archdiocese of Cape Coast. He came to preach vocations and to invite students who were willing to enter the seminary to prepare themselves for the holy orders. My Headmistress submitted my name to the priest. I was later invited to write the entrance examination to the St. Teresa's Minor Seminary, Amisano. In 1989, I was admitted to the seminary. Soon thereafter the seminary authorities realised that I was struggling to have the basic needs and to pay my school fees, which at that time was very cheap in comparison with school fees in the public secondary schools. Unknown to me, the Rector of the seminary wrote to my Parish Priest and asked him to secure a benefactor for me as a matter of utmost urgency. He succeeded in that exercise but alas, the benefactor turned out to be my distant uncle. He took up the challenge, and that is how I had my 'O' and 'A' Level certificates. Mr. Speaker, this is how I had secondary education. I then entered the Major Seminary at Sowutuom. It was at this stage that I had a change of mind. I left the seminary and went to the University of Ghana. I state with emphasis that but for the Catholic Church, I may never have had secondary education!!!

Mr. Speaker, even at the university, the Catholic Church did not give up on me after I had abandoned the seminary training. The irony however was that my distant uncle refused to continue taking care of me for having left the seminary. With the active support of His Eminence Peter Cardinal Kodwo Appiah Turkson, the then Archbishop of Cape Coast, I had very saintly Catholic beneficiaries who agreed to give me shelter and pay for my school fees to become a lawyer. Now here I am as the elected representative of the good people of Gomoa West. I have got to this stage because the Catholic Church gave me the opportunity. I invite the House in joining me to say "Ayekoo" to the Catholic Church.

Mr. Speaker, whilst thanking the Catholic Church for its contribution to development of the country, it is also necessary to acknowledge that some of the other faith-based organisations are trying their best to contribute to the development of the country. Mention can be made of the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church. I salute them for their efforts but I believe they can do more.

Mr. Speaker, I also believe that this is an opportune time to proffer some advice to all other churches and faith-based organisations to emulate the example of the Catholic Church in partnering the state in developing the country. It is not uncommon to see many churches springing up in many communities. However it appears that their core apostolate is to preach the gospel to feed the heart of their followers; their efforts at feeding the minds of their followers with secular education and scientific knowledge appears to be very minimal. Other churches have grown over the years but the common sight is the display of vulgar opulence by the Pastors, Prophets, General Overseers and Founders, as the case may be, at expense of their poor followers; and

even for those who have set up educational facilities, it appears, their main focus is to generate profit from the setting up of these institutions.

Mr. Speaker, I seek your indulgence to advise respectfully that all churches should be guided by the advice given to the early church in James 2:1-12 that the faith we have in Jesus Christ must be demonstrated in the gestures of good works to his people on earth. It must not be left to the individual members of the churches. The churches must not restrict their activities to only preaching the gospel. They must look at the social and economic well-being of their members too. That is the practical way to live the gospel. The way to do that is to partner the state to bring development and relief to the citizenry. The Catholic Church has shown the way over the years. I salute the church; the other churches must follow suit.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker for the opportunity.

