

Greetings from Ghana #20
With Time Comes Knowledge
10/31/22

A while back I made a reference to the church a couple doors down from my house and how on Sunday morning you can hear (quite clearly) their music with out-of-tune singers, drums, beginner trumpet, and piano. One Sunday morning a friend of mine was listening to them and he said he recognized the tune. I chided him but began to listen more intently.

It was on a weekend in September that I heard a song I knew. It was as if I suddenly saw divisions in the different sound sources and understood; the music is their way of praying. The members of this congregation do not sing hymns as I am accustomed. There is a main instrument to play the hymn and everyone else kinda follows along as joyously as they can while making an attempt to follow the melody. I now understand what I once thought of as a cacophony.

I did run into something I had not thought of before a week ago when I was walking on Sunday morning. . . a church that adds in audience applause through a soundtrack. I wonder if the folks inside the walls know. . .

I complained about the cost of milk being about \$8 a gallon for the cheap brands and \$10 - \$12 for the upper brands. The only reference I had for value was my shopping memories. One morning I remembered, the cost of our milk is heavily subsidized. Theirs is not. Our milk is predominantly freshly bottled. What you get here comes in an aseptic box with a six month shelf life. It is not that the milk here is expensive. It is more that U.S. milk is cheap.

Coffee is another matter. I am still working on that one (and trying to learn to like Nescafe').

As far as galamsey, the illegal mining that is destroying the environment. . . the company that is owned by a national government minister was told when the military would be raiding the national forest, their area they were in illegally. They were told to take their machines with them. The army showed up and burned the temporary camp to the ground. Other similar raids were conducted. The results made the news. A regional municipal bureaucrat was identified as being complicit. And the national government issued what they said would curb the illegal mining. They required all operators to have their excavators licensed earlier this month.

Inflation has been between 35% and 50% per month for several months. In 2017, when the current president took office, the Cedis was 3.74 to the dollar. When I got here the Cedis was 5.9 to the dollar. This past month it hit 14 Cedis to the dollar.

Eighty members of parliament in a bipartisan move sent a letter to the president calling the finance minister and his assistant grossly incompetent and demanding the president fire them. They said if he did not they would refuse to do any business and shut down parliament. The president called a meeting of the parliament members and expressed his strong desire to have an additional meeting so that their concerns could be clarified and efforts made to rectify their needs. He ended his message by reminding them that his cousin, the finance minister, was in the process of negotiating a deal with the World Bank. And according to the finance advisory board, owned by his cousin and whose job it is to advise the finance minister, if he were to lose his job due to gross incompetence it would cause problems with the loan deal currently in progress.

So the Members of Parliament agreed to let him do one last deal before he was let go. The president has promised that after this deal for millions in funding from the IMF, his tenure will be evaluated and an appropriate resolution will be made. And that should be able to be initiated in January.

A watchdog group has said the current loan application before the IMF (International Monetary Fund) contains inaccuracies and lies. Separately, the World Bank has just sent a letter saying the finance minister is ten months behind in sending his documentation and report on how the last loan was expended.

The president has spent the past couple weeks touring projects his government is doing; new traffic interchanges, new schools and government buildings, and a National Christian Cathedral. And cheering on the progress his group's been accomplishing. This is accompanied by sycophantic supporters saying things like, "If the (political opposition) was in charge things would be worse. You'd be selling children in the streets!" "We should be grateful for his leadership during our teething period."

The president held a TV conference last night to say that "he has heard the concerns" and that "together we will need to trim things down and bear with it as the government corrects the economy." He quietly added that things should be eased up around 2025. He accepted no responsibility for the situation. He offered nothing concrete as a solution. He had 12 points to recovery with the majority being things about starting a subcommittee to discuss variables in the market that once identified would benefit the country.

He said that the vice-president and the finance minister as well as himself were all willing to take a 30% pay cut this year. He was asked to disclose the pay and benefits for the members of his presidential cabinet that he has hired since he took office. He said that was personal information and he was not required to release his staff's personal information. One of the lower level ministers who had been critical of him asked why the four security guards that had assigned to him had been canceled when the president has 200 security guards just for him. One reporter asked if the president had considered not chartering a private jet again at 21,000 cedis an hour to fly to Europe to ask for money. He answered neither.

The president has assured everyone that "We are all in this together." And made sure to thank his fellow countrymen for their support as his administration tackles this national concern.

In an unfortunate related news item, transportation van fares went up another 15% on the 30th. It was the fourth such increase (a couple have been higher) in the past 6 months. A man, discovering the two cedis increase in fare, objected so strongly the passenger van driver returned to the bus terminal to eject him. A fight ensued between the passenger and the mate (conductor) of the van. Witnesses reported the passenger in his early 30's was hit upside the head unawares, stumbled, fell to the curb and struck his head. He was pronounced dead at the scene.

The government is trying to encourage people to sell their dollars and convert them back into Cedis. They cite that the exchange rate has lowered to "13 Cedis to the dollar" as a sign of the market turning, while goods like cooking oils, eggs, and staples like pasta go up by half taking any credence from the official statement of better days. People are very tense watching their currency plummet. Despite how we might think of it, many people here are just scraping by to begin with. Inflation to where the currency has depreciated about 60% in sixteen months is enough to have people on edge.

Including one young man who unfortunately lost his life over a raise of 15 cents to his fare.