

# SEEING GOD THROUGH AFRICAN MINDS

A DISCUSSION OF KWAME BEDIAKO'S CHRISTOLOGY  
AND CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN CULTURE

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## DECLARATION

I, The Rt. Rev'd Titus K. A. Pratt, hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own research work. Except for Literature and References which have been fully acknowledged it is the result of my own research work and not the reproduction, in part or in whole, of any work previously presented to the Department for the award of a degree.

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The Rt. Rev'd Titus K. A. Pratt

.....

Prof. Elizabeth Amoah

(Supervisor)



## DEDICATION

To my wife Anna Irene and our quartet, Charles, Grace Longdon, Gladys and Anna-Irene.

The Faculty, MA (Religions) Sandwich 2007/08

My Ministerial Team at Dansoman Circuit who held the fort during my numerous absence



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

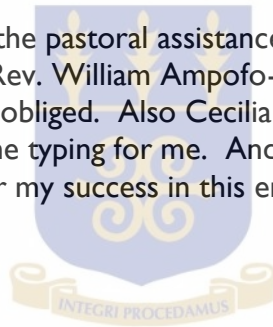
According to Professor Cephas N. Omenyo, scholarship is a collaborative enterprise. I totally agree with him because I have personally experienced this. The following persons encouraged and supported me to study for the Masters Degree in Religions:

The Rev. Dr. Martha Frederiks of the Netherlands, my ministerial colleague for several fruitful years of service in The Gambia as mission partners with the Methodist Church The Gambia, The Rev. Prof. Elom Dovlo who readily agreed to guide and supervise my work when I approached him at the eleventh hour and Prof. Elizabeth Amoah who supervised the completion of this Dissertation. Mrs. Gillian Bediako, the widow of the late Rev. Prof. Kwame Bediako (whose work in Christianity and African Culture greatly inspired me to write this Dissertation) who warmly welcomed me to her office at Akropong-Akwapim. She graciously offered me the assistance I required.

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## THE ABSTRACT

Africa had been referred to as the Dark Continent for several reasons prior to the era of expeditions which opened the continent up. European Anthropologists formulated several ideas about the continent and its peoples; most of which were derogatory, describing the African in the primitive stage as uncivilized backward and lacking any sense of decency.

Before the advent of Missionary activities Africa was awash with Traditional Religious activities which the Missionaries found unacceptable and unworthy. Current African intellectuals have, since the 1950, made attempts to redeem Africa's natural glories and to place Africa on the international scene by making worthy contributions in all spheres of academic endeavours.

Kwame Bediako's position on the indigenization of Christology in Africa with his references to other primal religions make his position remarkably authentic and convincing. His Christology identifies the essential areas in the African beliefs that are identical to western ideas; for example Odwira and its significances in line with the atoning blood of Jesus Christ in western thoughts; the blood of the Sacrificial Lamb which is shed to pacify and cleanse the African of all misdeeds is identified with the blood of Christ, the Sacrificial Lamb of God in Christian theology.

Bediako's work is one of the several attempts in the area of religion and its comparative study. This is the inspiration behind this Dissertation.

## CHAPTER I

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### I.1 General Introduction

Africa has suffered unduly over the centuries since the expeditions which opened the continent up to the outside world. Political institutions and social structures were systematically dismantled. This situation affected religious beliefs and practices as well. It has become imperative for African Scholars to investigate different areas of our existence particularly the religions to ascertain:-

- (a) where an African practice could be revived
- (b) whether there had been forms of religious beliefs and practices that can still be adapted alongside Christianity
- (c) whether African Traditional Religion had nothing at all to contribute towards the introduction of Christianity in Africa
- (d) that the introduction of Western Christianity in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century has resuscitated the challenges that confronted the spread of Christianity

#### I.2 Statement of Problem

Since the New Testament times, the encounter of Christianity with other Religious faiths has always created difficulty for the recipients of the former.

From the Gospels through the Acts of The Apostles the encounter with Judaism portrayed Jesus as a heretic who was introducing a belief that was undermining and disrupting the religious status quo.

In The Acts of the Apostles and the Pauline epistles, encounter with Greek Philosophy, Culture and Religious beliefs were the main challenges encountered. How could a people with an established religious belief that goes back several centuries readily supplant that faith with a professed “superior belief”: a new belief that ridicules the established faith and makes cultural practices as well meaningless?

In its encounter with African religious practices, Christianity has created a great deal of instability among the people of Africa, a people who are endemically and incorrigibly religious, pragmatic in their practices and historically authentic in outlook. For example the African world-view and that of the Western Missionaries are poles apart, running parallel to each other. This is a problem that will persist. A classical illustration is Chinua Achebe’s celebrated novel, *Things Fall Apart*. The arrival of Western Civilization dismantled the existing African community united under a common social-political structure with a common religious belief. Africans found it difficult to understand the Western approach to religion creating an identity crisis for them. How could the African then accommodate this new religion and where would he place Jesus Christ? This is the question that Kwame Bediako is attempting to answer.

### **I.3 Aims and Objectives**

The aims and objectives are meant for further discussion of Bediako's raised issues on Christology and Africanisation of Christianity and to identify how they share common grounds with Western Christianity. It is also my aim to offer some helpful suggestions.

Furthermore I will discuss how some selected Ghanaian Theologians, eg Baeta and Dickson equally see the need to contribute their quota to the discussion that the missionary activities to some extent, denied the African the capability to contextualize the Christian faith. The discussion will also look at Kwame Bediako's contribution to the evolvement of such assistance in respect of African contribution towards the Africanisation of Christianity.

### **I.4 Methodology**

Kwame Bediako has to his credit a good number of publications and students he taught. There are sources of material that I have made contact with for the information required for this Study.

#### **a. Primary Source**

I held discussions with his widow at Akwapim Akropong to gather his bio-data and to gain some insight into his paramount interest and concern. Some of his students also obliged and through our discussion and interviews discovered Bediako's passion, that of seeing Christ from the view point of an African and with African concepts, establish our contribution to Christian Theology.

**b. Secondary Source**

The main source has been Bediako's books and articles primarily:

- i. Bediako, Kwame, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective* (Accra; Asempa Publishers, 1990)
- ii. Bediako, Kwame., *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience* (Glasgow: Bell and Bain Ltd., 2000)
- iii. Bediako, Kwame., *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (Edinburgh: Orbis Books: University Press, 1995) pp89-252.
- iv. Bediako, Kwame, *Theology and Identity: The impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa.* (Oxford Regnum Books, 1992) pp.225-386. (Selected chapters)
- v. Baeta, C.G. *Prophetism in Ghana: A study of some 'Spiritual' Churches in Ghana*, Achimota, Accra, SCM Press, 204, 1962).
- vi. Dickson, Kwesi A, *Uncompleted Mission: Christianity and Exclusivism*, (Mary Knoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991)pp110-145
- vii. K. Dickson and P. Ellingworth, (eds), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, (London: Lutterworth Press, (1969) pp16,24,46
- viii. Benezet Bujo and Juvenal I. Maya, (eds), *African Theology: The Contribution of the Pioneers*, Vol.2, (Paulines Publications Africa, 2006) pp93-119.
- ix. Pobe, John S. (ed.) *Exploring Afro-Christology* (Frankfurt, Peter Lang, (1991) pp155
- x. Stinton, Diane B., *Jesus of Africa: Voices of Contemporary African Christology*, (New York: Orbis Books, Mary Knoll, 2006)

Other sources will include Baeta's Prophetism in Ghana, Dickson's Uncompleted Mission, Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs by Dickson and Ellingworth, African Theology – The contribution of the Pioneers, vol.2, eds. Benezet Bujo and J.I. Muya: Jesus of Africa – Voices of Contemporary African Christology by Diane B. Stinton and Exploring Afro-Christology, ed. J.S. Pobee.

### **I.5 The Scope of the Study**

The Scope of this study is therefore limited to Bediako's opinion on African Christianity and his Christology.

### **I.6 Research Questions**

The following questions will be used as guide to the Study:-

- i. How can the traditional African accommodate the Christian concept of the life and work of Jesus Christ in his or her religious beliefs?
- ii. The African's world-view runs parallel to the European world-view. Is it possible to harmonise these two different concepts?
- iii. Are there any convergent zones where African Christianity and Western Christianity can adequately co-habit?
- iv. Can the African recognize Jesus Christ as:
  - a. The Son of God?
  - b. Divine?
  - c. An ancestor?
- v. Can the African be truly Christian?

## **I.7 Significance of Study**

With the aforesaid problems in view, I initially wish to argue that the Study is necessary and it can be done to assist the current Ghanaian Christian public to see Christianity in a more meaningful way. To the non-African, it could give an insight into the African approach to the subject and its contribution to the Study of Christian theology from the point of view of the African.

Secondly the importance in doing Christian theology the African way should be influenced by the culture and the philosophy of the indigenous African. This system would be totally devoid of the western Cultural influences.

It aims at serving a required need, that is, for the acceptance of the diverse approach to Theological issues.

Thirdly, the study aims at encouraging further research into other denied areas in the African's Culture where the foreign thought and practice have either disrupted or destroyed. Such practices or beliefs could be adopted into contemporary African Christian thinking.

Lastly, the necessity of this Study lies in the rather robust and aggressive nature of related foreign opinions which often claim superiority and usually causing the extinction of some indigenous beliefs and practices. Such beliefs and practices may be refurbished with some foreign ideas.

### ***In Summary***

- a. This study is meant to serve a very useful need of placing the African Christian Theologian on the same intellectual pedestal with counterparts in the West.
- b. To create an avenue for others to research into other areas of importance that will require an African approach.
- c. The purpose is to empower the African reader to understand and accept him/herself as one with the ability to do things and be able to make intellectually credible contributions on the world scene. This has been achieved on several fronts within intellectual disciplines. Within the confines of religious belief, much remains to be done to give Christianity its fitting place within African Religious concepts.

## **I.8 Literature Review**

### ***a. Jesus In African Culture (A Ghanaian Perspective)***

In this booklet Kwame Bediako argues that Africa's oldest religious beliefs serve as fertile grounds for the spread of the Christian gospel. The negative perceptions of the Missionary approach had in itself, positive catalysts for the introduction of the Christian faith.

In the Introduction Bediako advanced the following points to favour the negative side of the Missionary Work which should not be over exaggerated:-

- i. That gospel was adequately communicated with regards to the vitality of the contemporary Christian community.
- ii. African Theological thinkers have made their marked contribution in theological debates claiming a share in the inheritance of the Gospel as their predecessor Paul proclaimed it. Their contribution has further established the fact, that the African has not been introduced to any new God, rather they point to the same God within our traditions of the past; bringing 'to fulfillment all the highest religious and cultural aspirations of our heritage' cutting across all envisaged hindrances to Christian understanding and confidence in African Churches.
- iii. The encounter of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and the Christian Faith which degraded the former to a primitive status. But recent developments have shown that the spread of the Christian faith has been phenomenal in areas with primal religious systems to which ATR belongs. Areas identified include:
  - The Mediterranean lands of the early Christian centuries
  - Ancient Northern European lands
  - Black Africa
  - Asia
  - South America and Oceania

This is an indication, he argues, that there exists an indisputable affinity between Christianity and primal faiths, a crucial factor in the rapid spread of Christianity.

With regards to Christ and spiritual powers Bediako quotes Mbiti that the African Independent Churches have developed authentic African Christian Theology exhibiting the characteristic African understanding of Christ that He is Supreme.

- i. Christ is Superior over all spiritual rulers and authorities particularly over malevolent forces. He is the powerful protector.
- ii. He is God, a Holy Spirit with the ability to do all things and with the might to save and protect.
- iii. As an ancestor He does not qualify in the traditional sense which denied Him real status of an ancestor yet He remains Supreme over them.
- iv. He has a Universal significance cutting across all situations though remaining ethnically Jew.

Believers in Him, despite their ethnic peculiarity can claim equal benefits of the promise made to Abraham. All possess both natural and adoptive past links with the Abrahamic era.

- v. Christ the Mediator/Ancestor is the bridge between God and the African making Him Supreme over all, both the living-dead and the living.

In summary, Bediako in this booklet poses the question, "How may we understand more fully this Jesus who, in fact, relates to us most meaningfully and most profoundly in our clan, family, tribe and nation? The most compelling answer to this question, he believes, lies in doing theology in our native languages, the most appropriate medium to communicate the Christian faith. This is possible because according to him Christianity is most translatable and

versatile in nature but lacking a 'sacred' language. This makes it accommodating in all cultures and adopting the various vernaculars in its spread particularly in Africa where Bediako believes we hear God speak to us in our own language through the various vernacular translations.

His use of the Odwira in illustrating Heb. 1:3 conspicuously makes the argument in favour of the inculturation of Christianity indispensable and comprehensively necessary.

#### **b. Jesus in Africa**

##### ***(The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience)***

Kwame Bediako in this book identifies Jesus' place and role within the African context, in our history and experience. In taking a cursory glance through the book I wish to dwell on the following areas for review purposes as they vividly argue favourably in favour of the title.

Firstly in the introduction H. Visser and Gillian Bediako clearly state in support of K. Bediako that God speaks into the African context in African idioms and that it is through the vernacular that the African comes to a clearer understanding of God's communication with the African. This African peculiarity further enriches the Universal Christian thought.

From his bio-data we gather an impressive picture of K. Bediako as a person, his convictions and contribution towards the development of theology in the African context and his overwhelming Christian experience which lead to his conversion to Christianity.

A development or a contributive factor that might have motivated his argument has been the shift of the centre of gravity of world Christianity from the North to the South in which Africa plays a significant role.

The issues that concerned him most were the training of people to undertake the task of translating the gospel into the thought pattern of the recipients. He was equally convinced that the result of the interaction between the Gospel and African culture should have a world-wide significance. This book comprises a collection of Bediako's articles grouped into:

- a. The experience of Jesus in Africa
- b. Theology and Culture
- c. The role Africa plays in the history of Christianity

In the first collection Bediako illustrates his argument with Madam Afua Kuma's prayers of her experience of Jesus with typical native African expressions and unique African symbolism and imagery. This is 'grassroots Theology' which indicates that the Christian faith is not uniquely Western but authentically Universal. Christ's Incarnation, His Crucifixion and the Eucharist are celebrated world-wide with diverse liturgies and languages.

The second grouping, Theology and Culture, is Bediako's principal concern. Africa has had its own concepts of God prior to the advent of the Missionaries. The chapter/section touches on the resurgence of the African religious heritage and Bediako believes that the pre-Christian memories underline the identity of African Christians in the present.

Culture, he claims, may lead people to faith in Christ. In his fifth chapter, he sees similarity in the second century Christian Fathers' attempts to inculturate Christianity with the prevailing encounter between African culture and Christianity. Further to that, he stresses again the use of the mother-tongue in doing meaningful theology.

Thirdly on Africa and the history of Christianity. The 20<sup>th</sup> Century saw a phenomenal growth of Christian missionary activity in Africa. In the perception that Africa had nothing to offer towards the spread of the gospel is refuted by Bediako. He argues that it was Africans of primal religious background who caused the growth of Christianity on the African continent, especially Sub-Saharan Africa. Christianity has played a remarkable role in the total development of Africa during the pre and post independent eras.

The significance of these articles is to stimulate a reflection on these developments and to encourage effective Christian participation and witnessing in Africa, the main players being Africans themselves.

Throughout the book, Bediako stressed the point that the African's contributions are as relevant as what had been achieved in the West.

The African's socio-religious past requires a thorough investigation and appreciation as having contributed immensely towards the spread of the Christian gospel in the resurgence of our authentic religious past, a past with strong affinity to Christian beliefs in a supreme Deity. Africa's position in world Christianity is phenomenal in both numerical and contributive factors. Generally, Jesus has become relevant to our cultures and is identified within our concepts and beliefs.

Bediako's quotation of Revelation 7:9-10 to illustrate Christianity's Universality makes quite clear his effective argument in favour of the relevance of African Christianity enabling African theological students and scholars to have resourceful materials for further study and as buttresses to our claims and projections.

### c. Christianity In Africa

#### *(The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion)*

In this book, Kwame Bediako examines the intellectual legacy of Edward Wilmot Blyden who challenged the suitability of Western Christianity for Africa. Blyden believed in African Christian initiative and actually went ahead to implement his conviction and initiated an African church in Nigeria.

Bediako further discusses the Afrikania Movement of the late Osofo Komfo Kwabena Damuah, formerly a Roman Catholic Priest. He explores the inevitability of the contemporary African experience in the future nature of Christian Theological debate and its impact on the African religious scene. Afrikania was a bold attempt to initiate something African, neither Christian nor Islam.

In answering the question “Is Christianity suited to the African?” Kwame Bediako argues in the affirmative that it is and remains an unavoidable fact and factor quoting Christian Baeta in support of his claim. Mbiti is also cited as a voice that believed that it is suited to the African. The problem has been finding a sound intellectual footing for it with African credentials with the view to eventually achieving Africanizing our Christian experience, a daunting task that should be accomplished.

The first part of the book raises questions with suggested answers and signs of hope in which the dilemma would be intellectually resolved.

In the second part of the book, Bediako discusses raised issues from the post-Missionary era; an era which required new approach to the question of Christianity becoming identifiably African.

The third section looks at the function of the Christian gospel in the African setting, seeing the continent as the cradle for the Christian gospel in its identification with Africa in all its nuances; an era in which African Christian scholars can interpret the gospel in a manner that no Westerner can do. Africa will no longer be marginalized especially in the field of scholarship, and as Bediako emphasizes, specifically (in) Christian and religious scholarship. This had been envisioned over three decades ago. The most identifiable Christian bodies that have initiated authentic African contribution are the Independent and African Initiated Churches characteristically in modern circumstances. Bediako agrees with this. Christianity in its futuristic sense in Africa becomes a non-Western religion with a true universal faith with the primal African factor being a necessary ingredient. This unique nature will depend on divine intervention.

Bediako's discussion of the subject matter in his books eloquently defends the African stance.

#### **d. *Theology and Identity***

(The Impact of culture upon Christian thought in the second century and modern Africa)

In this Book, Kwame Bediako treats a corpus of issues touching on Christianity and other faiths in association with cultural inter-connection and their impact on each other. The most relevant chapter to our discussion is Chapter Eight Section IV on page 328, titled 'What the Gospel brought was Jesus Christ': Theology as Christology.

He dilates on the opinion of Mbiti stating that Christology has been central to Mbiti's theological career. He found Jesus Christ as the sole contributive factor to every theological debate because it validates every theology. Mbiti further argues that Christianity is the sole essence of Theology. It is in the unique personality of Jesus Christ that we discover the true source of fulfillment, providing meaning and standard of living requisite for humankind. To Mbiti, the Christian faith holds the greatest and only potentialities of meeting the individual and communal challenges of modern Africa. It was from the African Independent Churches beliefs that Mbiti derived his opinion on Christology.

The development of the doctrines of the Independent Churches did not include Western ideas but rather as the African saw and felt Christ as a redeemer and a protector from the various spiritual problems which besieged the African. In practical sense, it is as Mbiti sees the Christian faith as a way of life and not as a

religion. Christ did not form a religious movement, he claims, but rather taught a way of life dependent on His Incarnation; a revelation of a transcendent truth bringing humankind into an eternal relationship with God, the Father and Maker of all things. This is a Gospel (good news) which Africa needs. To Mbiti, Jesus came to make humankind totally religious and dependent on His Lordship with unbroken links with the Creator. The Christian faith answers to the whole African existence. Christ's incarnation established the mysterious and inseparable union between God and man.

The African had been in readiness to receive a transposition into the Gospel to enable Christ's recognition in our culture as Lord and King. This is a situation which will not be too alien to the African, who hitherto had been intrinsically religious. The culture then adequately accommodates the gospel as the latter also indwells the African. Jesus then becomes domiciled in Africa and is identified as an indigene, an idea described as an elevated Christological perspective.

Kwame Bediako's trend of discussion on this subject explains further his understanding of the significance of Jesus' life and work within the context of African religious thinking and also makes it clearer to follow his argument.

**e. *Uncompleted Mission – Christianity and Exclusivism – K.B. Dickson***

Dickson expresses his fascination of the seeming contradiction in the Church's Mission, ie, calling persons to transform their beliefs and conform to the call to

faith in Christ. Yet the Church seems not to countenance change within itself. He further states in the preface to his book that the Church overlooked the consequent distortion of the convert's humanity. Notwithstanding that the Church's Mission remains the same, a call to faith in Christ as it is epitomized in the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19f.).

Within the African context the Church has kept itself exclusive from the Cultural Society in which it finds itself. It has kept its distance from the local cultural reality as a result of its ignorance of the content of the culture. The cultural practices were abolished outright and in their place, Western Culture was put as a prerequisite to becoming a Christian. The vacuum created by this approach still persists. Hence, Dickson's 'Uncompleted Mission' of the Church. The foreign characteristics of Christian Theology and the lack of African symbolisms for the interpretation of the Christian message to the African created the problem we are grappling with. The church must be seen to be inclusive and not exclusive and distanced from the local culture.

In summary Dickson uses the sacrificial symbolism to project Christ as the sacrificial victim which qualifies Jesus as an ancestor. According to him Jesus becomes the greatest ancestor, a symbolism which is readily acceptable to the African whose theology is read in the light of religious traditions. To him the Cross of Christ symbolically represents the stool of the ancestor, a symbol of immortality. Just as Christ shed His blood for our purification, so is blood used to purify the ancestral stools. The consequence is beneficial to the entire

community as Christ's death brought redemption to the entire world. His is unique in the sense that it is non-negotiable. Preaching God as creator, omnipotent, etc. was not difficult to be understood by the African. God has been seen in His different attributes and names since primal times. The problems was that Jesus Christ could not fit into the African's thinking.

**f. *Jesus in Africa – Voice of Contemporary African Christology – Diane B. Stinton***

Diane Stinton has admirably articulated the views of contemporary African Christian Theologians whose writings are quite current. The most interesting thing about the book is the different symbolisms used by the writers as each wrote in context of his/her environment.

For this study, those scholars whose works appeal to us and are included in Stinton's book are Prof. Emeritus J.S. Pobee and Prof. Kwame Bediako. Stinton's work is exploratory, divided into Latent Christologies (1950s – 1980s) and Emergent Christology (1980s to the present). She traces the different backgrounds to the emergent African Christologies and on the basis of that she proceeds to discuss issues regarding sources and the different methodologies used. Two other equally relevant parts that follow those mentioned earlier touch on the Models and Significance of African Christologies. Christology in Africa, as projected in the book, has diverse backgrounds and significance due to the differences and the contexts in which it is done. Though diverse Christologies, they project the same subject, Jesus Christ with His universal

significance and uniqueness. This has actually created room for Jesus as Christ in the African thinking and life.

### **Critical Comments**

On the whole I see these attempts as approaches in the right direction but as far as Christianity is concerned its beginnings are endemically foreign. Most of Christ's teachings in Parables were derived from Jewish background and basic to his teaching was the Jewish religion, a religion far remote in nature and content from the African. To attempt at finding similarities and to even claim that Christianity can be African may be far-fetched.

I affirm that St. Augustine of Hippo and his contemporaries, who influenced Christianity at its formative stages were African. Alexandria was the centre of Christian Thinking for well over a thousand years. Yet the cultural influences which characterized their thinking were alien to Africa South of the Sahara.

Perhaps the safest approach can be adopting the western approach and finding their similarities in the African (South of the Sahara) beliefs.

The authors of my selected books have faithfully dealt with the subject satisfactorily. But in my opinion a total break with African Traditional Religions to adopt western Christianity by Africans will safely settle the matter rather than attempting to find similarities or claiming that the indigenous practices are, in themselves, authentic and may be regarded as similar in content to the western ideas.

## 1.9 The Structure

The following constitute the arrangements or the structure of the dissertation in chapters. The First is the introduction comprising the General Introduction, Statement of Problem, aims and Objectives, Methodology, Scope of the Study, Research Questions, significance of Study and Literature Review.

In the Second chapter I will discuss Christianity and African Culture. Some of the (Ghanaian) contributors to be discussed are the following:-

- a. C.G. Baeta
- b. K.A. Dickson
- c. J.S. Pobee

The Third Chapter will deal with Kwame Bediako's Works in the area of contextualization of Christianity especially his beliefs and how he drew on the works of early Ghanaian Theologians.

In the fourth Chapter, I will discuss Kwame Bediako's Christology.

The final chapter will constitute the conclusion to the Study with research findings recommendations.

## CHAPTER 2

### SOME GHANAIAN CONTRIBUTORS

#### Introduction

The African continent consisted of indigenous States and Kingdoms until European countries scrambled for overseas territories in Africa and elsewhere. This development created the present demarcations and different countries. The impact of European culture and belief was phenomenal affecting all spheres of African life. Of late African scholars have made several attempts to salvage what can be revived and amended of the African world-view and Religion is one such discipline that has achieved remarkable feats. Among the Ghanaian pace setters are:

- a. The late Rev. Prof. (Emeritus) C.G. Baeta
- b. The late Rev. Prof. (Emeritus) K.A. Dickson
- c. The Rev. Canon Prof. (Emeritus) J.S. Pobee

Their contributions will constitute the second chapter of this study

The chapter will look at the contribution of the above named scholars within the context of Christianity and African culture. They remain pioneers who researched into possible areas worth redeeming.

## **C.G. BAETA AND HIS CONTRIBUTION**

The Rev. Prof. Emeritus C. G. Baeta was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1908. His academic excellence had several facets. He was an authority in the Ewe language and was an examiner in that language for the London Matriculation and Cambridge School Certificate Examination. He was also an Examiner in the then Gold Coast Teacher's Efficiency Bar Examinations and worked as an Ewe announcer for the Accra Radio ZOY during the Vichy crisis in Trans Volta Togoland.

He was appointed the principal of the Ewe Presbyterian Church Theological College at Ho in 1945/46, served as the Synod clerk in 1946 and was elected Member of the Legislative Council for the Eastern Province of the Gold Coast.

Rev. Prof. Baeta was later appointed Senior Lecturer in Theology, University College of The Gold Coast, Legon becoming the Head and Professor of the Department for the Study of Religions. That period of service at the University was his finest; rising through the ranks and serving with distinction until his retirement in 1971.

He obtained his PHD degree from the University of London and received several awards from overseas Universities namely:

D.D. (Tokyo), Japan

LLD (Hope), British Columbia, Canada

D Theol (Humboldt) Berlin, Germany

Th D. (Debracen) Hungary

D.Litt. (Legon), Ghana

His duties at Legon included, The Protestant Chaplain, Master, Legon Hall, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Pro-Vice Chancellor. His external appointments took him to the Union Theological Seminary, New York, U.S.A.; Selly Oak Colleges, Birmingham, UK, and Ruhr University in Bochum, Germany, where he taught in German.

He was a Fellow of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences over which he presided for two consecutive years, in 1991 – 1992. He chaired the International Mission Council, seeing its transformation into the World Council of Churches in 1961. He was recipient of the OBE, UK National Award and the Grand Medal (Civil Division) of Ghana. He was the first to receive the Emeritus Title from the University of Ghana, Legon at his retirement.

Among his numerous publications is his book titled, “Prophetism in Ghana” which still remains a reference book for students of African Christianity and its related subjects, first published in 1962 with a reprint in 2004.

In the new Foreword to Prof. Baeta’s book “Prophetism in Ghana” Rev. Prof K. Asamoah-Gyadu of Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon states that as a pace setter in this field of study, Baeta and his works will remain important reference points for all who are engaged in this field of study and are seeking an understanding of Christian religious innovation in Africa. Baeta recognized that the Spiritual Churches in their belief and practices made Christianity credible to the African. The mixture of the African Traditional religious practices and beliefs in the cloak of Christianity produced profound results for the African in the quest for Salvation.

*The Search for practical Salvation, which he identified as a source of attraction into the spiritual churches lives on in the modern manifestation of these churches* <sup>1</sup>

Touching on his commentary on I Thessalonians 1:9, Baeta in his “Prophetism in Ghana” considered the members of the spiritual churches as representing the Thessalonians who despised their traditional resources of supernatural succor in order that help may be sought from God. To Baeta this was the greatest conversion experience. He wrote:

*The Spiritual Churches indeed have a very strong conviction that at long last the passage had been made from error to truth, from the wrong path to the right one, from darkness to light; and that, because this is so, the new-found resource of helpful power cannot fail* <sup>2</sup>

The idea that Baeta’s thoughts remain indelible and resilient is seen in what Asamoah-Gyadu quotes that Baeta foresaw in the Spiritual Churches what he described as a prodigious struggle to prove the reality of spiritual things in general and the Biblical promises in particular.

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1. C.G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana: A study of some ‘Spiritual’ Churches* (London: SCM 1962) px
  2. C.G. Baeta, *Prophetism in Ghana*, px

Prof. Baeta's work further provides indicators in the appreciation of the Spirituality of the Spiritual Churches; the same works offer a fuller understanding of Modern Charismatic Christianity. The bottom line in this regard remains the African's attempt to offer credible input into Christianity and Christian Theology from the view point of the African with concepts, beliefs and content purely African and African bred. Despite the very authentic African nature of Symbolisms and outlook characterizing the African Independent Churches (AICs), Baeta still believed in the Christian orientation of the Spiritual Churches. Their claim to the authenticity of the Old Testament to which they ascribe the source of their pneumatic authority may have convinced Baeta to believing in their general debate on Christian orientation. He would also argue that their contribution towards Africanisation of Christianity does not only lie in their adherence to the contextualization process but also due to their strict adherence to high moral standards. His prophetic insight in their Study creates the awareness for succeeding generations of African (if not Ghanaian) Christian Theological Students for further research. He died on 29<sup>th</sup> December 1994, a devoted Christian gentleman and a distinguished scholar.

### **K.A. Dickson**

Another of the pace-setters in this field of study was the late Rev. Prof. Emeritus K. A. Dickson who also after distinguishing himself as the Head and Professor of the Department for the Study of Religions, Legon, served as Director of the Institute of African Studies in the University of Ghana, Legon. Kwesi Abotsia Dickson, a Ghanaian from Winneba was born to The Rev. and Mrs. A.B. Dickson on the 7<sup>th</sup> of July 1929, at Saltpond.

He was the second of four siblings and the first of three boys. He attended Methodist Primary Schools at Winneba and Cape Coast. The benefit of being educated at Mfantshipim, the best school of his day, coupled with his Christian upbringing greatly influenced what he later became in life. Having completed Mfantshipim School with excellence, Dickson received seminary training for the Methodist ordained ministry at Trinity College, Kumasi in 1951.

A year later, with permission of the Church, he commenced his undergraduate studies at the University College of The Gold Coast (now University of Ghana) and obtained the London Bachelor of Divinity (B.D.) degree with First Class in June 1956. For his post-graduate, he studied at Mansfield College, Oxford University, where he specialized in Old Testament for the Bachelor of Letters (B.Litt.) degree in 1959 with thesis topic: *Sacrificial Ritual and Divine Forgiveness in the Psalter*. He proceeded to the University of Chicago, USA as African Universities Exchange Fellow.

As an academic and a churchman, Dickson was well known globally in theological circles as an esteemed contributor to the African Christian theological debate. He held several positions in church and para Church organizations. He served on the Faith and Order Committee of the World Council of Churches. He was the first chairman of the West African Association of Theological Institutions and also the President of the Ghana Theological Association. He also served on the World Methodist Council Team in dialogue with the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. He was also a member of the World Methodist Executive Council.

He became the Vice-President of the All Africa Conference of Churches, a body he also headed as its President from 1997, succeeding the renowned South African theologian and Archbishop, The Most Rev. Desmond Tutu. Before this position, Dickson, for seven years, was President of Conference of The Methodist Church Ghana from August 1990. In 1969, Dickson became a Fellow of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, and he twice served as its President.

As a career educator, he devoted most of his life to teaching in the University of Ghana, in the Department for Study of Religions, where he served as its head on more than one occasion. From 1980-1987 he was Director, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana Legon. In 1988, while on Sabbatical in the University of Swaziland, he was designated President of the Methodist Conference and in 1990 his designation was confirmed and subsequently inducted into office as the seventh President of Conference. In 1993, he was made Emeritus Professor by the University of Ghana, Legon. Dickson was a theologian who brought his exceptional theological ideas to bear on the church and theological education drawing attention to the fact that the relevance of theology was contingent on its ability to address the particularities of a people's distinctive cultural circumstances. As a pioneer in African Christian theology, he emphasized the role of culture in that enterprise, hence his advocacy for contextual theology through relevant curriculum. In pursuance of the above, Dickson felt that ministerial training should reflect this need, and believed that Africans must worship as Africans for which he was an ardent advocate.

He was also concerned about the foundational role of the Bible as well as an appropriate translation of scripture for a better Christian teaching. It was in the light of this that he advocated a thorough study of the mother tongue as a means through which scripture could be owned by the African Christian. He was the chairperson of the new liturgy for the Methodist Church, a duty he performed excellently by introducing into the Ghanaian Methodist worship service ideas of our culture that may help us better appreciate the Christian faith. He had shown concern for the appropriateness of church music, preaching, prayers, the liturgy in general and Church and State matters.

The church acknowledged his immense contribution to academia and his distinguished career as a University Don. He had more than a dozen publication of books to his credit. This is aside numerous chapters in books and other articles in many journals. Such is the man who effectively combined academic work with church practice so much so that it was difficult to make a distinction between the two.

### **Dickson's Contribution**

Dickson believed that dialogue between religions was key to doing Christian theology in Africa. With the multiplicity of religions in Africa and the infiltration of other faiths from outside (Eastern Oriental religions and Western Christianity) peaceful co-existence seems to be the most preferred approach. This could only be obtained through dialogue. He however believed that Western Christian theologians must have benefitted from other religious concepts to enrich their thoughts.

From his book *Uncompleted Mission*<sup>3</sup> Dickson held the view that doing Theology in Africa would require acceptance of other concepts as possible ways of God's self revelation to humankind. This could imply, as Dr. J.B. Danquah believed, that before the advent of the Western Christian Concept of God, the African already knew God and worshipped Him. Against this background, doing Christian Theology in Africa would require the African Theologian to use the African Concepts and understanding of the Religions to guide his comprehension in the adoption of the Western Christian input. Therefore from Dickson's stance, Western Christian thoughts could be adopted within the African concepts where either party would receive due recognition and respect. Of course the basic Christian concepts of the Trinity cannot be compromised. It is the epicenter of our Christian dogma. To quote him:

*.....there is the need for the working out of a Christian theology that suits the African situation, a theology which would give recognition to the centrality of Christ and at the same time express a genuine African apprehension of the Christian faith advocating for the study of the primal African Traditional Religions*<sup>4</sup>

In his article Edusa-Eyison<sup>5</sup> states that the same issue had been raised earlier by Baeta that "the totality of the human race was included in the redemption plan of God.

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3. Kwesi A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission: Christianity And Exclusivism* (Mary Knoll, New York; Orbis Books, 1991) pp 110-123
  4. Kwesi A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission: Christianity and Exclusivism* (Mary Knoll), p110-123
  5. J.M. Edusa-Eyison, The Bible is Dialogue with African Life and Thought and the Role of the Mother-tongue: The contribution of Kwesi Dickson to a New Creative style of Theology, *Journal of African Thought*, vol. 10, No.2 (2007), p10-11,13

*Through Christ and that in view of this stance  
Baeta disagreed with the exponents of exclusivism  
and introduced a new paradigm of inclusivism  
or the idea of continuity*<sup>6</sup>

Dickson further states that

*The African approach to the Bible cannot but  
take account of the fact (that) there is much  
in common between the religio-cultural background  
of the bible and African life and thought*<sup>7</sup>

Suggesting that such an approach would easily slot an African based faith adequately into the Christian faith and vice versa eg. the Nyamedua, (the three-forked stand/altar on which rests the calabash for pouring libation to Onyankopong) suggests a convergence to accommodate the doctrine of the Trinity in Christian theology into the African (Ghanaian) sacrificial concept and our affinity to the Supreme Being.

The study of the scriptures must be done in relation to the African situation and critically scrutinized before drawing valid conclusions. To make the Christian faith acceptable to the traditional African, there is the paramount need to domesticate it and make it speak directly to the recipient. This approach has been adopted since the inception of the faith into human existence.

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6. Kwasi A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission*; pp .32-133  
New York: Orbis Books, (1991) pp. 110-123

7. Kwasi A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission*, pp.110 – 123

Both Baeta and Dickson advocated strongly for the incorporation of African Culture in doing Christian theology which would be adaptable to the African situation.

Was he then, influenced by Baeta's position? Dickson's "Uncompleted Mission" bears such marks. God has a universal significance which makes Him the God of the African and others elsewhere. In the book *"Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs"*, Dickson and Ellingworth uncompromisingly argue that:

*We believe that the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Creator of heaven and earth, Lord of history, has been dealing with mankind at all times and in all parts of the world.*<sup>8</sup>

It is with this conviction that we study the rich heritage of our African peoples and we have evidence that they know Him and worship Him.<sup>9</sup>

On the subject of Christology, the primary concern of this Case Study, Dickson agreed that the Cross and its New Testament significance ought to be related to the African concept of death. This thought cradles within the concept of sacrifice in both ways. Christ's death was sacrificial. He died to atone for our sins.

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8. K.A. Dickson, *Uncompleted Mission*: pp. 132 – 133

9. K.A. Dickson & Ellingworth, (eds) *Biblical Revelation & African Beliefs*, p.16

In the African context, sacrifices are made to appease and to reconcile. He wove his position on this subject around the death of Christ as being sacrificial which posed no difficulty to the African to comprehend.

That the African had a traditional concept of God cannot be disputed; the place of Jesus Christ as the Saviour was the problem area. Where to place Him and His functions remain highly debatable. Is He an ancestor? Does He meet the qualifications required to be regarded as an ancestor? His place and role automatically introduce into the African religions' conceptualization a new thought that requires total acceptance, recognition and adoption. To understand Christ, Dickson argues that the pre-Christian faith remains indispensable.

The Eucharist in which we commemorate the sacrificial death of Christ and share a common meal is concomitant to sharing the mutton or beef of a sacrificed sheep or cow by a people in the African Tradition. This signified the sharing in the life of the victim enhancing the unity which binds the participants into a unit. The African communal life system in itself serves as a natural basis to the practice. Therefore Christ, as a sacrificial lamb, who is to be shared in a common meal, is wholesome to the African. Interestingly, though seemingly accurate, Dickson saw the Cross as the physical representation of Christ's immortality in the same way as the stools of ancestors serve within the Ghanaian traditional concept, equating Christ to the ancestor.

Of course Christ's ancestral position is superior to the African concept. That Christ was the sacrificial lamb offered for the atonement of sins is very welcome to the African who recognizes the integral role of sacrifice and the pouring of blood as indispensable in religious rituals. Our perception of God has a universal significance and no one people can claim a sole knowledge of Him. Consequently the Africans contribution to Christian Theology cannot be denigrated. Both Baeta and Dickson have served not only as role models to subsequent African theologians but also they and several others in the Sub-Saharan Region have laid the foundation for the latter day Scholars to build upon. Their endeavours have given the Christian faith its needed acceptance within the African religious landscape and in addition as data to prop Kwame Bediako's contribution.

Dickson believed that this approach to African Christianity would easily find room for the acceptance of Christian concepts in the perception of the African. For example the Nyamedua (the three-forked stand/altar) on which rests the calabash for pouring libation to Onyankopong finds its contact point in the doctrine of the Trinity and the African concept of sacrifice. Sacrifice in the African concept may not be offered directly to the supreme Being but to him through lesser deities.

### **J.S. Pobee**

The Rev. Canon Prof (Emeritus) J.S. Pobee was born on 9<sup>th</sup> July, 1937. His academic education started at the then University College of the Gold Coast (a college of the University of London, (1957-1961) and was awarded Honours Degree in Divinity. He continued with his studies at Selwyn College, University of Cambridge in England

(1961 – 1966), specializing in New Testament – Tripos Part III. His research Thesis Topic was Martyrological Aspects of St. Paul's Theology. He thereafter enrolled into Westcott House (1963 – 1964), Cambridge, England and trained for the Anglican Priesthood.

To further his competence in the study of Theology he did a year's course in German at the Goethe Institute, Passau in Germany in 1964. He joined the University of Ghana as a Lecturer in the Department of Study of Religions and was appointed Senior Lecturer in 1972, becoming an Associate Professor in 1977. From 1976 to 1980, he was Associate Director, Humanities Programme and Population Dynamics Programme at Legon. He was appointed Head of Department, Study of Religions from 1978 to 1983, Dean, Faculty of Arts (Legon) 1979 – 1983 and appointed a Full Professor in 1981. Prof. Pobee was also Fellow and Scholar-in-Residence at the Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research, St. John's University, Collegeville, Minnesota, USA.

### **Academic Awards**

Prof. Pobee won several Academic Awards and Prizes between 1960 and 1989. Some of the several Awards include the Cochrane Prize, London 1960; S.P.C.K. Prize for theology 1961; Goethe Institute Prize 1964 and 1965 the Appleton Prize, Selwyn College, Cambridge England.

In 1983, Prof. Pobee was elected a Member of Deutsche Gesellschaft Für Missionswissenschaft, and in 1988 elected Member, Board of Scholars of The Life

and Peace Institute, Uppsalla, Sweden. From 1985 to 1988 he was the Vice President, International Association of Mission Studies and became the Associate President from 1988 to 1992. He delivered Lectures to reputable gatherings on several occasions few of which are Dr. Thomas Mar Athanasius, Suffragan, Metropolitan Memorial Lectures 1988; Hale Lecturer at Seabury Western Seminary, Evanston in 1988 and Annual Students' Lectureship on Mission for 1989/90 Princeton Theological Seminary, Princeton, New Jersey in 1989. Most of these were carried out under the auspices of the World Council of Churches.

### **Teaching Experience**

His teaching experience span over more than three decades starting as a part-time Tutor in New Testament Studies at Selwyn and Magdalene Colleges both in Cambridge, through the University of Ghana from 1963 to 2000 when he retired as Professor Emeritus.

### **Guest Lecturer**

He lectured in Universities/Seminaries in the USA, United Kingdom, The Caribbean, Europe, Latin America and Africa between 1975 and 1992.

### **Work Experience**

He served on University Boards in Ghana between 1968 and 1974. He also served on Boards and Councils of the Anglican Church in Ghana, Ecumenical Boards and Committees, Theological Educational Boards and edited several Articles and Books. He served on several National and International Educational Committees, was an

examiner for the West African Examinations Council, attended numerous Conferences at which he either delivered papers, chaired sessions or served on Planning Committees.

### **Writings**

His writings run into volumes including Books, Articles and Papers. He has to his credit about twenty-four (24) self-authored books, edited twenty-three (23) works and contributed about one hundred and twenty-three (123) chapters in books. His published articles in Journals number one hundred and seventeen (117) and has reviewed several books and articles.

### **OTHER CONTRIBUTORS**

Some other scholars who share in the debate act as buttresses to Kwame Bediako's stance, that Christ has been known in Africa before the advent of Western Missionaries. Some of such Scholars have had interactions with Kwame Bediako and have contributed towards the formation of his argument. According to Andrew Walls, Christian Missionary activity was all about the discipling of Nations and not the multiplicity of the church. He goes on to say that the process for this venture aimed at penetrating cultures and ways of thought by the Christian message.

The Good news that Jesus is Lord was to be brought to bear on each encountered culture. He further argues that it is impossible to accept a new idea which runs parallel with one already in existence. If it should be adopted then, as it happened in the Igboland and Northumbria, the new idea must possess a dynamism which

enables it to slot into the status quo; it must seek for a radical religious adjustment and change. On the contrary the receiving primal society may be in danger of disintegration. The only solution(s) lie(s) in a means to accommodate the invading foreign ideas. Africa has been with burdensome and potentially dangerous situations with the acceptance of Christianity. The era created ambiguities which created confusion and disruption in societies which, hitherto, had been peaceful in all aspects of human existence. <sup>10</sup>

If the familiar moral sanctions were being abandoned, what then are or were the set to replace them? Such pre-Christian set of rules had strong religious affinity with a local deity who underwrote the sanctions. Such sanctions had attendant penalties to discipline defaulters. To abandon or replace such sanctions required courage and strong affirmation of faith in a superior deity. <sup>11</sup>

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10. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History; Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, (Orbis Books Mary Knoll, New Yorke, 1996) p 85

11. Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History*, p 91

God, as the native primal African saw him, still remains our heritage void of any foreign contamination.<sup>12</sup>

That God exists is not a far-fetched concept beyond the African's comprehension. God has personal vernacular names in all African Societies. This is the import of this Study. In our attempts to identify Africa's indigenous contributions, several approaches have been made and one such approach is discussed by J. Osei-Bonsu in his *The Inculturation of Christianity in Africa*.<sup>13</sup>

The Biblical symbolism used in the discussion is the incarnation of Christ. Since Christianity spans across all ethnic settings it should adapt itself to cultures of the areas it is introduced. To quote him he argues that just as Christ assumed the human condition with all its characteristics except sin (Heb 4:15), so also Christianity must seek to assume and use all the cultural elements of the various peoples except those elements that are found to be incompatible with Christianity. God speaks to people through their experiences as in the Jewish Culture God spoke to them in their circumstances in relationship with Him.

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12. S.K. Odamtten, *The Missionary Factor in Ghana's Development up to the 1880s*, (Waterville Publishing House, Accra, 1978) pp 197 – 198

13. J. Osei-Bonsu, *The Inculturation of Christianity in Africa, Antedotes: and Guidelines from the New Testament and The Early Church* (Frankfurt, Peter Lang, 2005) pp 1-21

The Old Testament concepts and symbolisms explained in the Forward to Bishop Osei-Bonsu's book, *The Inculturation of Christianity in Africa*, that the exercise is the attempt by Africans to understand the Christian faith within their own peculiar cultural concepts in their world-wide significance. To understand better the nature of God and His relevance to the African, He should best be seen within the natural environment in which the African finds him/herself. This will eventually enable the African to make it part of his/her ethos.<sup>14</sup>

This process of inculturation should then adopt the existing symbolisms and concepts that are already native to the people. There is still the difficulty of equating what is existing to what is being introduced. The difficulty lies with the religious practices where there are bound to be eliminations and substitutions. A satisfactory conclusion will enable us to see God in the concepts of the African and not from the angle of the Westerner. The African then accepts Christianity as his/hers because it will meet the daily requirements and sustain his/her faith in the Supreme Being through Jesus, the only mediator.

In conclusion Kwame Bediako had nursed the deep conviction that God has been in Africa before the advent of the Western Christian Missionaries. Finding Christ a place in the already existing native concepts was the challenge. Pointing others to Africa's proper place was his passion and this formed a firm basis for his contribution towards African Christian Scholarship.<sup>15</sup>

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14. J. Osei-Bonsu, *The Inculturation of Christianity in Africa*, p*x*

15. Andrew F. Walls, *Bediako and Christian scholarship in Africa*, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, vol.3, No.4 (October 2008) p.188

## CHAPTER 3

### BEDIAKO ON CHRISTIANITY AND AFRICAN CULTURE

Kwame Bediako until his death in 2007 was the Rector of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology at Akropong-Akwapim, now Akrofi-Christaller Institute for Theology, Mission and Culture. He was a Presbyterian Ordained Minister and a renowned Christian Theologian. He was born in 1945 and was educated at Mfanstipim School, Cape Coast. He studied French in the University of Ghana, Legon. He received a scholarship to study in the University of Bordeaux for his post-graduate degree in Modern French Literature and African Literature in French. He gained his PH.D degree in 1973.

Bediako, although had a Presbyterian background was not a committed Christian and kept away from Christian meetings. His conversion happened in 1970 while in Bordeaux, France, in a dramatic but compelling manner likened to Saul's conversion en route to Damascus. The reality of Christ was impressed upon him while taking a shower with an irresistible force. A serious study of the scriptures then followed. His life was completely transformed to that of a committed Christian, a faith he confidently professed on his return home to Ghana in 1976.

This led him to study Theology first at the London Bible College and later at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland, UK. His contact and lasting friendship with his mentor Andrew Walls who was his tutor in Missiology and Church history germinated at that period.

He completed his doctoral thesis in 1983 later published and titled *“Theology and Identity”*. The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa (1992).

In 1983 he was appointed the Presbyterian Resident Chaplain of the Ridge Church in Accra. Latent in him was the desire to set up a centre for the study of the relations between Gospel and Culture in Africa. This led to the establishment of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture at Akropong-Akwapim in 1986. The Institute at Akropong gained a post-graduate status. It has gained International recognition as a result of Bediako’s resilience. He was made an Honorary Professor in the University of Natal, South Africa.

His over-riding passion had always been to give Christianity an African ethos with an international recognition. Bediako met and married his wife Gillian, an English lady in 1973. She survived him and is still engaged in the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture programmes at Akropong-Akwapim. He had to his credit numerous publications. He believed that the Christian faith is an authentic African experience illustrated by the Prayers and Songs of Praise by Madam Afua Kuma in her *Jesus of the Deep Forest*. She was an illiterate traditional birth attendant who expressed her experience of Jesus in typical Akan Symbolism. His quest for an authentic African Christianity led Bediako to research for symbolisms that can clearly communicate the African ideas of the Christian faith. What sort of a Christ would we end up with if not seen and known in the African context? It has been his major

concern to investigate into Taylor's question, "If Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like?"

Bediako was however convinced that God communicates to the African through African Symbolism. He set out to answer the question Taylor posed which would transcend natural identity assuming a Universal significance hence he says, "That the African theology emerges to edify not only the African Church but the Church world-wide".<sup>16</sup>

To make Jesus meaningful to the African required an African approach communicated in the language and symbolism of the African. He must therefore look like the African. As the centre of gravity of world Christianity has shifted in Africa's favour, a Jesus who responds to the African contexts was the required Jesus to give substance to the African Christian faith. All along much work had not been done in this area although the idea had been latent in the primal religions.<sup>17</sup>

In his book, *Jesus in Africa – The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*, Kwame Bediako categorized his approach firstly as "The African Experience of Jesus", secondly the encounter between *Theology and Culture* and lastly *Africa and the History of Christianity*.

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16. H. Visser & Gillian Bediako in the Introduction to *Jesus in Africa: The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*, p*x*

17. K. Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective*, pp 6-7

Bediako further sub-divided the categories stated earlier thus: Under African experience of Jesus the following sub-divisions are given: *Cry Jesus! Christian Theology and Presence in Modern Africa*, Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian perspective; How is Jesus Christ Lord? Evangelical Christian apologetics amid African religious pluralism. Under the second category *Theology and Culture*, the following sub-divisions are given: *Understanding African Theology in this 20<sup>th</sup> Century*; *Africa and the Fathers*; *the relevance of early Hellenistic Theology for modern African Theology* and *One song in many toques*

The final category, *Africa and the History of Christianity* is sub-titled *the primal imagination and the Opportunity for a new Theological idiom*; *Christian religion and African social norms: Authority, desacralisation and democracy*; *Towards a new understanding of Christian history in the post-missionary era*. All these categories with the sub-sections were separately published and have been collated and edited for publication in his *Jesus in Africa, The Christian Gospel in African History and Experience*.

He tackled the question from the three approaches, *The African experience of Jesus*, *Theology and Culture* and *Africa and the History of Christianity* to answer the question that Christianity can be Africanised and indeed it had been identified with Africa since its beginning. Christ can therefore be seen as an African as a result of our experience of Christ.

Bediako himself contends that God communicates to us in our idioms and symbolism.<sup>18</sup>

It is worth mentioning that his conviction developed from his personal experience of Christ.<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly, when the Christian faith meant little to him, Bediako, after his pursuance of higher academic laurels, attributed all his successes to Christ, whom he neither knew nor believed in earlier. Greater achievements were yet to follow during which his conviction would be brought to fruition that the Christian faith has a universal significance and is adaptable to all human situations. His response to the Christian appeal was seen within the context of his African identity. In the book – *Jesus in Africa* compiled by Hans Visser and Gillian Bediako, we are told that the fact that Christ is the truth, the integrating principle of life as well as the key to true intellectual coherence was impressed upon him with irresistible force. Paul was confronted by the same truth en route to Damascus, an experience which transformed him into a champion par excellence of the Christian faith throughout the then known world. Bediako's conviction motivated him to start a crusade to buttress what others had already started in working out the African's Christian theology unaided. Similarly Christ met and transformed a Ghanaian unbeliever, Kwame Bediako, to be a theological scholar with an international reputation.

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18. Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa, The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, pp.60 – 70

19. Kwame Bediako, *Jesus in Africa, The Christian Gospel in African History*, pp.vii – viii

Bediako's personal experience was enough to convince him that Christ is a universal savior.<sup>20</sup> He saved Saul in the first Christian century and Bediako almost two thousand years later. Christ's significance spans across time and can affect or influence all everywhere. Bediako, I guess, believed that his mission was to contribute towards the debate of making the faith "native" to Africa with African academic theological contributions. His contribution to the Christological debate was based on his personal and contextual experience as an African and his contribution has become integral to the Christological debate from the standpoint of an African academic. The Jesus of history, he believed, is the incarnation of the Nyame or *Nyankopong* of the Akans of Ghana. He is the same God known to Abraham and also as preached by the Church since its inception. Andrew Walls, who for years remained his mentor and friend, described him as a world Christian who led many to Africa's place in contemporary world-wide Christian discourse. His Christology was firmly based on his personal experience, a conviction of Christ's universal importance. Bediako's conviction of the necessity of communicating our thoughts about God in the vernacular symbols was so much intense that he affirmed what Dr. J.B. Danquah has written decades ago that "Christianity is the fulfillment of the religious conception of our people. Long before Christianity, we can be certain that God had Himself been His own witness. He had given evidence of his existence and his goodness to lead the development of a high religion in the Ghanaian society.

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20. Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa* p.11

He therefore believed, as Danquah before him, that Christianity has been an African experience (i.e. the concept of a God that Christianity later popularized).<sup>21</sup>

Danquah had also written that Christianity had been in Africa years before Rome and it had even become an African Religion. There was therefore no such thing as “Christian Religion” over and against “African Religion”<sup>22</sup>.

Bediako also stated in his Danquah Memorial Lectures: (*February 2004, Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences*) that it is the thought pattern and general cultural world-view of a people that determine that identity. The ability to make an intelligible contribution through effective communication would by and large depend on one’s natural tendencies and convictions. One such approach is the vernacular (mother-tongue) ways of communicating our thought and philosophical beliefs. What the Western Missionaries had done was “a reinvention of the Wheel”. Africa knows God. Christianity gave that earlier knowledge a personal link with God through faith in Christ and this paradigm effected the indigenization of the Christian faith. Hence Christ is seen as our savior as seen by all others.

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21. Kwame Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language; An appreciation of the Intellectual Legacy of Dr. J.B. Danquah*, (J.B. Danquah Memorial Lectures Series 37, 2004), p16

22. *Ibid*, p16

Dickson and Ellingworth, in their book *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs* quote from three Roman Catholic documents of different periods what the church's aim had been with regards to Evangelization. In the first instance from the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith, 1659, was the directive issued by Apostolic Vicars for Foreign Missions working in China thus:

*Do not show any zeal, and do not for any motive try to persuade those people to change their rites, customs and habits unless they are most openly opposed to religion and words.*<sup>23</sup>

The missionary was therefore expected to study the cultural practices and know the beliefs of the African for effective and productive dialogue with the African. This approach would have enhanced satisfactory transmission of the gospel.

In the light of the above quotation, the transmission and communication of the gospel would be effectively done in the native language of the people who receive it because it is a message destined for every nation, *a way of life which people can and should live while remaining authentic citizens of their own nations.*

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23. Dickson & Ellingworth (eds), *Biblical Revelation and African Beliefs*, pp.32-34

This maxim does not deny the recipients any naturally endowed possession and identity. They rather accommodate the faith within their divinely endowed symbolisms and ideals. They further refer to the Dogmatic Constitution in the Church a product of the Second Vatican Council which published that *since the Kingdom of Christ is not of this world (John 18:36) the church or people of God in establishing that Kingdom take nothing away from the temporal welfare of any people.* The church should rather incorporate any wholesome cultural practices of those they evangelize and consecrate them.

In conclusion this discussion confirms Bediako's belief that Christ can be seen and known within the African context, hence his Christological stance which we shall see in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### BEDIAKO'S CHRISTOLOGICAL DEBATE

Christology is the word or teaching about Christ.<sup>24</sup> It is God's revelation to the world through Christ as He is encountered or experienced in the life of a person. In the case of Bediako, his Christology was formed out of a personal and contextual experience. This teaching about Christ is one's articulation and portrayal of Christ as He confronts people or as Christ is experienced by persons. This is done by persons who encounter Jesus from their being and as they are. The uniqueness of the experience and the habit of the one articulating the word show differences and varying emphasis.<sup>25</sup>

Bediako offered new insights in response to the Christological problems. The problem Africans encountered was as a result of the Missionary negative attitude towards African religions which has had equally negative impact on the present understanding of Jesus Christ.<sup>26</sup> Further, Bediako argues that the missionary misapprehension of the gospel is their failure to appreciate adequately the fundamental and primary Universality of the gospel of Christ.

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24. J.S. Pobee (ed) *Exploring Afro-Christology*, (1992), p.9

25. Ibid. p10-11, 19-20 and 119-123

26. K. Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective* pp.6-9

The relevance of the gospel has a universal significance and as Christ can be and is encountered anywhere with the resultant effect as Bediako went through, Paul encountered the same experience en route to Damascus and by Cleopas and his companion en route to Emmaus, then Jesus Christ is the Saviour of all people. If he converted Paul and changed him from being a persecutor to a champion of the faith and touched him, Bediako, an African in Bordeaux at the time when Bediako was almost an atheist and transformed him into a devout Christian theologian, then Christ is undisputably a Universal Saviour.<sup>27</sup> As a personal Saviour, Bediako believed that Jesus granted him a vision which he executed. He who believed that the encounter with Jesus offers hope (I Cor. 15:19) beyond this life to the faithful. Bediako sees this personal experience which takes place within a given context; hence born out a personal and contextual experience encountered anywhere in the world. It is not restricted to any one place but occurs everywhere and at all times. He attached great importance to this experience in context because it vividly illustrates the Universality of Christ and His saving power. Bediako's greatest desire was to make Christ known within the African context free from foreign symbolism.

Bediako saw the shift of the centre of gravity to the South as Christianity's home coming. He strongly believed that God deals directly with the African, a fact which cannot be disputed and he went on to argue that one of the helpful ways of developing this thought is to read and listen to the Word of God in our own vernacular.<sup>28</sup>

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27. Diane B. Stinton, *Jesus of Africa*, p.11

28. K. Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective*, pp43-46

Bediako did not doubt the uniqueness of Western Christology. But, that the African's reception and articulation of the Christian faith was restricted only to European models, and that Christ cannot therefore inhabit the African's Spiritual Universe was not accepted to Bediako. He advocated for confidence in African Christologies and that through faith in Christ, African believers now share in all the promises made to the Jewish fore-fathers. The good news then becomes our story.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore accepting Jesus as 'Saviour' means a conscious effort is to be made to make room for Him. Bediako's Christological point of departure is located in his interpretation of the gospel in the Akan traditional religion. He proposed that since the ancestral spirits are central to the Akan heritage, we can identify Jesus with the ancestors; that, Jesus is the only real and true ancestor and source of life for all mankind. He further argued that Jesus transcends all the lineage ancestors.<sup>30</sup> Bediako also refers to Jesus as our Elder Brother, who has shared in our African experience in every respect, except in our sin and alienation from God. He goes further to propose that being our Elder Brother, who has shared in our African experience in every respect, except in our sin and alienation from God. He goes further to propose that being our Elder Brother domiciled in Heaven, He has automatically assumed the role of mediator for us over and above the ancestral spirits because they (the spirits) themselves need redemption.<sup>31</sup>

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29. *Ibid.* pp.14-16

30. *Ibid.* p.12

31. *Ibid* pp.17, 38-42

Concerning the sacrificial death of Jesus, Bediako referred to it as the ultimate 'Odwira' because Jesus entered the Holy Place once for all by His own blood having obtained eternal redemption.

The more perfect sacrifice of Christ which possesses eternal significance and value has replaced the primal practices which were repeated annually.<sup>32</sup> His mediation made possible by the ultimate 'Odwira' nullifies all other priestly mediations.<sup>33</sup>

Bediako saw in Afua Kuma's expression of the Christian faith a unique Christological presentation of Jesus as depicted in her Prayers and Praises of Jesus. The trend is typical of the African Praises and exaltation to traditional rulers. In its adaptation by Madam Afua Kuma, the imagery in the vernacular referring to the traditional rulers is given a theological touch. In its reference to Jesus the attributes are figuratively derived from those referred to either traditional rulers or the ancient militia captains who led their forces during tribal wars. For example, Afua Kuma's terminologies in reference to Jesus as the Redeemer and Deliverer who delivers His people from all manner of troubles. She refers to Jesus as a *wonder worker* who carries water in a basket for travelers to quench their thirst. He also performs several marvelous deeds for the benefit of His devotees.

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32. K. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, p.70-71

33. K. Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture; A Ghanaian Perspective*, p.37

Jesus is also referred to as *Tutugyagu*, the fearless one who renders venomous snakes useless. Christ is also referred to by Madam Afua Kuma as *Adubasapon*, the Almighty one who has conquered death and rendered it powerless. Bediako further presented Jesus as the Liberator, the all-pervasive Lord both among the ancestors and reigning kings. The African world-view makes this easy to comprehend. The inter-relationship between the spiritual and the physical is visibly pronounced all over Africa.

## **Conclusion**

Bediako's use of Mbiti<sup>34</sup> is as a result of the latter's approach to the subject. He considered the eschatological message of the gospel as an aspect of Christological theology. Christ remains the central theme which validates all theological matters. Christian theology is in itself Christology because its interpretation is derived from Jesus Christ, His life and work which set the moral and ethical standards for mankind.

By this understanding the African is able to surmount the dilemmas and challenges of this life. The remarkable thing about Mbiti, though, is that despite his opinion on the subject of Christology, he has not made any significant publication on it. His views are derived from his writing and on the subject. Bediako finds this rather useful because Mbiti, to him, provides the evidence of African contribution to the subject from the so called Independent Churches, where thorough African thoughts and practices are evident; beliefs that are independent of foreign ideas and characteristics.

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34. K. Bediako, *Theology And Identity*, p.303-334

His infusion of the African ideas are equally significant and appealed, I believe, immensely to Bediako. This must have attracted him to Mbiti. Despite the fact that Mbiti has not been explicit on the subject, its implication in Mbiti's other works has been identified and highlighted by Bediako who also sees the centrality of Christ indispensable in Christian theology.<sup>35</sup>

The essence of the gospel is to present Jesus as the common denominator to both Christianity and faiths which encounter Christianity, seeing Christianity as a revealed way of life. Mbiti believes that the essence of the Gospel (and Bediako, with regards to his personal encounter with the truth also affirms this) brought to humanity an intimate relationship with God the Father; a relationship which Paul discusses in the subject of reconciliation in his second letter to the Corinthians 5;11-21 and Romans 8, 15-17. On the African scene therefore, Christ answers to the whole of the African's existence, the scene that He permeates the entire African life. The intricate relationship between the African and his/her connection to the spiritual world prepared him/her to receive Jesus as a saving redeeming and protecting factor in the African's daily life. Its significance would survive the grave justifying the devotee for inclusion in the realm of the ancestors.

I think to a greater extent, Bediako has satisfactorily justified Christ's role as equally significant to the African in His person and work as the savior of humankind.

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35. *Ibid.*, p.303-334

I may also add that, Christianity being regarded as an African faith, is not far-fetched. It appeals to the African as much as it does to the non-African. Therefore, Bediako answers the question *who do you say I am?* as follows:

That Jesus is the saviour of all people. Jesus had saved Saul centuries earlier enroute to Damascus and in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century the same Jesus saved him, Bediako an African, in France. His saving power has universal significance and cuts across cultures, races and boundaries. Bediako boldly claims that He (Jesus) has become our *Odwira* and is identified with us in all ways.<sup>36</sup> He is a personal savior who also offers hope beyond this life to the faithful, the one through whom the world was made.

Bediako maintained throughout his argument that Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God to the world, relevant to individuals, communities and nations. The centrality of mission is our understanding of the person and work of Jesus Christ. This includes every aspect of His significance and uniqueness through to the Parousia, ie, His second coming. This belief is based on Bediako's personal and contextual experience as an African Christian Scholar. His perception of Jesus Christ within the African Context has left a lasting impact on African Christology and will require constant references to his works.<sup>37</sup>

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36. K. Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture; A Ghanaian Perspective*, p.13-20

37. J. Kwabena., Asamoah-Gyedu, 'Who Do You Say That I Am?' Revisiting Kwame Bediako's Responses To An Eternal Christological Question: *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 12, No.2 (December 2009) p.11

The extent to which his argument has brought the African dimension to the subject of Christology is further given an indelible mark by the inclusion of the translation of the Christian gospel into the vernacular(s) and cultural forms; eloquently arguing that *“the God of the Bible turned out to be the God whose name has been hallowed in vernacular usage for generations in Africa, so Onyame or Onyankopon of the Akans of Ghana is the same God who was incarnate in our Lord Jesus Christ”*.<sup>38</sup> We can therefore identify Him with our time as our eternal contemporary .<sup>39</sup>

Bediako stands out in this discussion as a result of his *ability to treat Jesus Christ as Universally, existentially eschatological and relevant for Africa*. His scholarly handling of the idea that Christ is intrinsically identified within African concepts as an Ancestor, a Universal Saviour, buttresses Andrew Walls’ assertion that Africa has emerged as a leading stake-holder in God’s mission agenda. Walls is believed to have said in the 1970’s that

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38. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyedu, ‘Who Do You Say That I Am?’ Revisiting Kwame Bediako’s Responses To An Eternal Christological Question: *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 12, No.2 (December 2009) p.11

39. Ibid., p.11

*What happens within African churches in the next generation will determine the whole shape of church history for centuries to come; what sort of theology is most characteristic of the Christianity of the twenty-first century may well depend on what has happened in the minds of African Christians in the interim .<sup>40</sup>*

In his contribution Bediako stated that Africa will emerge as an important trail-blazer of Christianity in the twenty-first century. Christianity has steadily lost its impact on the western societies while in Africa Church planting and multiplication of existing ones are on the ascendency. African Evangelists are beginning to invade European countries where African churches are establishing branches in Europe and North America.

Bediako further argued that the failure of the Missionaries to distinguish between western culture and Christianity made Christ appear to be foreign and a stranger to the spiritual universe of the African. Jesus Christ cannot be a stranger to our heritage because he is a Universal Saviour with existential relevance for Africa.

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40. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyedu, 'Who Do You Say That I Am?' Revisiting Kwame Bediako's Responses To An Eternal Christological Question: *Journal of African Christian Thought*, Vol. 12, No.2 (December 2009) p.13

He further suggests that the encounter between St. Paul and the Greeks (Acts 17,16-32) is an indication of Christ's Universal relevance with Africa inclusive. Paul also preached on the Universality of Christ and its relevance to all cultures. (Col. 1.15ff; Eph. 1.10ff). His final decision to take the Gospel to the gentiles also confirms the Universal significance of Jesus Christ (Acts 14, 15ff; 17; 22ff).

Deliberating on Bediako's approach Prof. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu of Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, in his Kwame Bediako Memorial Lecture 2009, stated that Bediako in his earlier essay on *Jesus in African Culture* thought that the negative side of Missionary history in Africa should not be exaggerated by citing three (3) reasons:

- i. The gospel was communicated, however inadequate; the vitality of African Christian Communities is sufficient proof of this.
- ii. The gospel is one of inclusiveness into which Africa can adequately slot as the gentiles did in the first century of the Christian faith. Just as the Hellenistic world gained access to salvation so can the African world.
- iii. Christianity has had interaction with the Primal African religious practices at the very inception of the Christian faith than several others.

The place and role of the vernacular in doing theology in Africa and the translation of the gospel into the vernacular further assisted in the growth of the church in Africa. The mother-tongue made the gospel message accessible to Africans, a process which in itself led to the affirmation of culture and offered Jesus Christ a smooth access into the African Religious world *to be discovered there by faith*, not invented by theology. The vernacular communicated God adequately to all who use it, he stresses. <sup>41</sup>

This greatly influenced his personal encounter with Jesus Christ, whom he would understand only within his African context and could better and comprehensively be communicated in the vernacular. The authenticity of the event convinced him that God encounters the believer in his context using symbolisms that are indigenous to the believer.

In his early essay on Christology, Bediako pointed out that the African view of Christ must meet the needs of the African in search of Salvation through faith in Christ. The translation of the Scriptures into the mother-tongue therefore becomes a necessary exercise. Others before Bediako, including J Vincent Taylor, had argued for the need to understand Jesus Christ contextually, which according to Bediako, must be made to answer particular or specific questions.

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41. K. Bediako, *Jesus in African Culture: A Ghanaian Perspective*, p.13-20

Due to his perseverance, Bediako chartered new directions for African Christian theology and added value to Christian theology as a whole. He believed that Christianity is the most adaptable of all religions. It is interesting to note that Bediako referred to Christ's incarnation as a *translation* consequently the scriptures must be contextually translated leading to his claim that Christianity is the most adaptable religious faith.

Christianity in its encounter with Africa's religious past appropriated elements which prepared it to be accommodated into the primal African religious practices. The inadequacy in Africa's credible participation in the Christological debate termed the *Christological crisis* was due to past (before the 1950s) lack of adequate information. Kwame Bediako and others, through whose minds we are seeing God in the African perspective, have laboured to fill that void. He has successfully contributed to a distinctively African experience of Jesus Christ. By arguing strongly for the translated Scriptures into the vernaculars and designing and teaching courses in African spirituality, he has contributed immensely towards the revival of Africa's place in the history of Christian Missions

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### Introduction

This study has been most interesting in the sense that Bediako's scholarly exploits into Christian Theology from the African stand-point does not only display his eloquence and command of the subject but also presents a convincing answer that Africa's contribution had been latent since the inception of Christianity. Religion with its beginning, going back into antiquity has gathered layers of sediments. This condition makes it extremely difficult to justify certain practices which have remained since pre-historic times. Practices in the African Traditional Religion which pre-date Christianity cannot be justifiably said to have positively prepared the African to receive Jesus Christ as the expected Saviour/Christ. This concluding Chapter answers the question: Can the African be truly Christian? According to Bediako the answer is in the affirmative. He and other African Theologians some of whom are mentioned in this study eloquently demonstrate that.

#### The African Tradition

The African Religious Tradition has never been in anticipation of a redeemer as Judeo-Christian thoughts upheld. Judaism anticipated and still awaits the promised Messiah. Christians believe He has come in the person of Jesus of Nazareth and we look to His second coming. The African Traditional Religion has developed multiple systems with similarities all over the continent. There are also very different systems unique to tribal

or cultural areas that throughout the ages have been purely traditional and been parallel to Christianity. Any encounter with Christianity has created disruptions and fragmentation. A great deal of instability has been experienced where converts to Christianity, during the missionary era, were separated from their fold. Some suffered persecution and death, while others were driven away from their communities.

Their new communities were named “Salem” and were founded around the mission areas. Such mishaps were as a result of the incompatibility of the two faiths.

The only solution has been:

- i. Replacing the old religious practices with the new, discarding the former all together as happened in several areas. Most educated Africans no longer worship ancestors; neither do they participate in traditional religious rituals.
- ii. Some have held on to the African Traditional and Religious Practices. They fall into either the literate or the illiterate category. However the majority have abandoned the African Traditional and Religious Practices altogether.
- iii. Compromising on the basis of accepting, to some extent, the new and remaining faithful secretly to the former. This is rampant among the so called literate; among them are politicians and some contemporary Independent African Churches.

In most so called Christian homes, family deities were still venerated as well as local ones in addition to adopting Christian way of life and occasionally participating in some Christian feasts and activities.

## **Education and Growth of Urban Areas**

Formal education caused rapid shift from the traditional to the new. As more and more Africans became educated, links with traditional forms and practices gradually began to sever. It was more 'civilized' to adopt the western style than to remain traditional. A logical consequence was the urban drift from the rural areas where lack of amenities made life difficult for the educated. Urban growth was built on industrial and economic patterns which also created job opportunities for the educated who migrated to job centers away from traditional influences which made it easier for some to cease venerating ancestors and local gods and adopted the Western and Christian beliefs and practices.

It was not only the religious practices that were affected; the social life was also affected. For example, in marriage practices the arranged system began to fade away with increase in mixed (tribal) marriages which were hitherto uncommon. On the whole, there has never been any indication within the religious practices and belief where an indication was made concerning a universally acclaimed Messiah within African Traditional Religion which could be referred to Jesus of Nazareth making it easier for the African to readily accept or believe. What African Christian theologians have managed to do so far is to Christianise certain African practices, giving them Christian impressions. Bediako, for example, treating 'Odwira' as being synonymous to the sacrificial death of Christ (letter to the Hebrews Christology). The difference here is that 'Odwira' is repeated whilst Christ's is not. Our findings further show that the African world-view has remained intact and has rather promoted Christianity as a result of our belief in the supernatural and its direct and constant involvement in our life.

The two world-views remain endemically apart and cannot be harmonized. to introduce a religion to the African is not as difficult as to replace his practices and beliefs with another. The resilience of the African's faith has in a way sustained him/her despite the dismantling of the traditional faith. The acceptance of the Christian faith has resuscitated his/her faith in the supernatural in a more profound manner.

### **Protection, Guidance and Success**

The above mentioned are hall-marks in the belief and religious practice of the African. Devotion to a deity was underpinned by the deity's ability to ensure progress and stability in the society. Individuals require protection from malevolent spirits, eg witchcraft etc, and would constantly offer sacrifices to the deity for the required protection. Guidance and success are also paramount in the African's quest for stability and progress and would revere any deity that would meet such requirements.

Baeta in his *Prophetism in Ghana* states that with the supply of these requirements by the spiritual churches through faith in Christ, the African could switch allegiance from the traditional belief/practice to Christianity. The solution is provided in Christianity to satisfy his/her curiosity. The role and place of the ancestors is significant in our traditional life. Their worship was widespread but with the introduction of Christianity, the belief has lost its impact on majority of educated Africans.

## Use of the Vernacular

One essential factor worth mentioning is that as Christianity took upon itself an African identity, an immediate rapport was created replacing western missionary influence. This was made possible by the introduction of the vernacular into our worship and with the translation of the Scriptures into the vernaculars. Jesus became apparently an African, feeding the poor, healing the infirm and accomplishing numerous feasts. He took the place of the 'Abosom' and religious shrines. He is now apprehended directly by the African and not through any western mediums; he confronts the African with the truth in life, transcends the ordinary and transforms the familiar. Consequently, a place is formed for Him in our concepts making the Christian faith truly African. Bediako affirms that our ability to respond to the gospel clarion call (acceptance of Jesus as Lord) as Africans is a crucial landmark, which indicates that the contextualization of Christianity had been accomplished

*If hearers of the word in their own language may then be presumed to respond in their own terms, this is another way of saying that, it is not others' but their own questions which they would bring to the bible, taking from it what they would consider to be its answers to their questions.<sup>42</sup>*

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42. Clifton Clarke, In Our Mother Tongue: Vernacular Hermeneutics within African Initiated Christianity in Ghana, *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, Vol. xv, No.2, (2005), p62.

The contribution by the Africans with the use of the vernacular has given Christian hermeneutics and Biblical interpretation a unique nature, purely African and truly comprehensible. Its uniqueness emerges from the fact that ordinary people without any technically acquired knowledge developed the system. Clarke in his article (see footnote 22 above) refers to them as 'Ordinary' people re-reading the Bible through the eyes of local people, providing fresh insight to the studying of hermeneutics in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Therefore Bediako argues for the development of indigenous Christian Theologies considering the rich linguistic heritage of Africa and other emerging areas in the Third-World. J.S. Pobee,<sup>43</sup> another exponent confirms this, that a theological reflection in the vernacular is the ideal thing; a theology not encased in the language and methodology in the European medium. This can foster adequate account of the apprehension of Christ as the living roots of the church.<sup>44</sup>

Efua Kuma heard the word of God preached and taught in the vernacular in the oral matrix which opened up the access within her to encapsulate the true African expression of a religious experience. Culturally, drumming, dancing and singing form part of our religious expression. In the contemporary liturgy such free expression and full participation at worship satisfies the African desire which is natural within us. It is celebration of our faith in Christ.

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43. K. Bediako, *Christianity in Africa, The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, p.72

44. Africa's answer to the question whether a foreign ideology can adequately meet our demands is as mentioned above. According to Kwame Bediako, we require an African *approach and interpretation, encased* in indigenous language and methodology. A theological reflection on Christ in the vernacular can create a genuine African awareness.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **Introduction**

Religion is a very sensitive subject. Its requirements demand total devotion and surrender to the faith. It has down the ages controlled a whole people with authority over life and death. Religious leaders in ancient times held in addition, political and social positions and their life was sanctioned by the tenets of the faith.

Another characteristic has been its uniqueness as it was the preserve of a people. Its adoption by others outside its confines required integration through marriage or political subjugation. Christianity and Islam, for example, spread through military campaigns and forced the vanquished to either choose the faith or death. Modern civilization has checked that trend and curtailed the influence of religion on and in national issues. It now stands mainly separated from national governance, remaining an individual affair except in Islamic countries. Even Roman Catholicism has since the Medieval period lost some degree of its authority which had religious basis and biases. It is now severed from that traditional basis. Right and wrong are seen to be relative depending on the situation. Religion dictates the pace but does not set the Socio-Political standard.

### **Kwame Bediako's Legacy**

With the study of Kwame Bediako and his contribution to Christian theology, one can follow the development of religion, the formation of religious doctrines and their impact on the life of people. The most interesting and remarkable part is arguing for the credibility and adaptability of Christianity universally.

This leads us to suggest some recommendations as to the extent to which African Christianity can indeed be seen to be complimenting the traditional African belief, making

it thoroughly integrated into our natural religious identity. Religion should not be seen to be conclusive in itself but that it can adopt and also include in itself useful borrowed tenets that can make it progressive and dynamic.

We further recommend mutual respect and recognition among religions since each has a duty of a sensitive nature to perform. That Christ should remain credible universally, as Bediako contends, Christianity should make inroads into other faiths, identify commonalities for eventual integration.

To make Christianity universally acceptable, it should shed off its adopted Western identities and truly permeate all cultures for acceptance and relevance. One approach is the finding and words of Bediako and the other African and Ghanaian scholars he used. In addition to his own stance, he has been able to develop an arrangement which appeals to the Cultured, offering the African the right and access to make such relevant submissions that Christianity can claim an African identity.

The recommended medium of expression in doing African theology should be in the vernacular symbolism. The scope for its circulation may be drastically restricted, yet for the intended consumer, its purpose will be achieved. As scholars learn other languages for academic purposes, so would the vernacular gradually gain currency within the academic world. The recommendation requires positive consideration. Our culture, inseparable from African Traditional Religions (A.T.R.) needs to be reformed and incorporated into African Christianity.

In Kwame Bediako's Danquah Memorial Lectures, he quotes Dr. K.A. Busia from his tribute to Danquah at a memorial service in London in 1965, that after Danquah had

obtained his Ph.D from the University of London, instead of Danquah mastering in the culture of the West, he turned to the study of his own people and became a pioneer in the search for Africa's cultural heritage. From this, we deduce the recommendation that African intellectuals are to focus on the development of the African cultural renaissance in cultivating a unique African personality with a reputable position in world affairs, both culturally and intellectually. I would like to re-iterate that Kwame Bediako's passion was towards this accomplishment. To a respectable degree, he achieved that for posterity to build on.

It is certain that there is no valid alternative to *Jesus Christ*. So Africans should seek for how we can fully understand Jesus Christ, who relates to us most meaningfully and most profoundly. The most effective tool required is the mother-tongue. Paul in his defense as to whether he was truly an apostle responded among others and said the *Lord spoke to me in Hebrew*. So it is the vernacular which creates the required response to the Gospel. Christianity's translatability makes it the most accommodating in all cultural contexts without compromising its essential ethos, that is the centrality of Jesus Christ as the bedrock of the Christian faith. Consequently there are different African Christologies as Diane Stinton eloquently articulates in her book *Jesus of Africa*.

Bediako in stating vividly that Christianity has become the religion of the vernacular<sup>45</sup> and remains still the Word of God suggests that the most recommended approach to the faith lies in the context in which it is found. Christ's redeeming power still remains effective in all human situations.

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45. Kwame Bediako, *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, p.72

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I held interviews and discussions with the following persons:

- i. Mrs. Prof. Gillian Bediako – K. Bediako’s widow – on 23<sup>rd</sup> September, 2008
- ii. The Very Rev. Dr. J.M.Y. Edusa-Eyison of Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon – on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2008 and 25<sup>th</sup> June, 2009
- iii. The Very Rev. Prof. J.K. Asamoah-Gyadu of Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon – on 17<sup>th</sup> September, 2008
- iv. The Rev. Canon Prof. (Emeritus) J.S. Pobee – on 25<sup>th</sup> November, 2009, 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> December, 2009

## QUESTIONNAIRE

### Preamble

I am a Methodist Minister in my Thirtieth (30<sup>th</sup>) year (2008) in active Ministry. Since the completion of my Seminary Training much work has been done in the area of African Christian Thinking contributing to World Christian debates and intellectual exercise. I have developed keen interest in this and do wish to do some reading of African Contemporary Theologians, especially with regards to doing Christian Theology in The African Context. The late Rev'd Prof. Kwame Bediako's Works ignited in me that desire resulting in the choice of this subject for my Dissertation.

I am aware of some academic work already done on his Works and on him as a person. I am also aware of your contact with him for sometime hence my humble appeal to you for a discussion on him and his Works and also for you to answer some questions to guide me in my work.

### A. Your Personal Data

a. Gender: Male  Female  b. Age: 30-40 , 41-50 , 51-  
60

b. For how long did you associate with Rev'd Prof. K. Bediako  
5-10 yrs.  ; 10-20 yrs.  ; 20-30 yrs.  ; 30 + yrs.

### B. Rev'd Prof. Kwame Bediako's Personal Date

- i. Before he became such an exponent on African Christianity what was he?:
  1. Was his background steep in Christianity at that time?
  2. Please tell me how his migration into Christianity occurred?
  3. Did this phenomenal shift affect him emotionally?
  4. You may have had something to do with his religious experience; how effective was that?

**C. His Works**

1. Why was he so passionate about the restoration of the Primal African beliefs?
2. If you were asked to assess his work what would be your assessment? Would his reputation survive his demise?
3. With his demise, how effective do you think his name and contribution would be?
4. How, in your opinion do you think he is held by other African Christians Scholars?
5. In the Western Christian thought the doctrine of salvation is paramount, i.e. the death of Christ being corporate in significance to the salvation of the world. How do you think the Traditional African can adequately accommodate this issue in his/her beliefs?

**D. The African World-View**

**1. Is it possible to harmonize the Western and African World-Views?**

**2. Can there be any convergent Zone where the Western and African World-Views can converge?**

**3. To what extent do you agree with the following:**

a. That Christianity has its origins in Africa

1. Partially  2. Basically  3. Incorrect  4. Neutral

b. That primal religions influenced the development of Christian Doctrines in Africa

1. Correct  2. Incorrect  3. Neutral  4.

Somehow

c. African Christianity needs not depend on Western ideas for recognition

1. Agree  2. Disagree  3. Neutral  4. Partially

agree

4. Jesus Christ can be recognized by the African as

1. An African  2. An Ancestor  3. Son of God  4. A Jew

5. How would you describe Rev'd Prof. Kwame Bediako?

6. The African can be truly Christian

1. Strongly agree  2. Agree  3. Disagree  4. Neutral

**E. General and Open Ended Questions**

- a. Do you have any objections to Bediako's Christology?
- b. How do you see him, as merely academic and speculative or realistic and honest?
- c. Are there any other areas in Christian Theology, other than Bediako's Christology, that require similar attention as Bediako so eloquently display in his Christology? What is your position on this?
- d. Do you have any useful recommendations to offer?