



# INAUGURAL LECTURE



## Rev. Fr. Professor Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo

*B.A. (University of Ghana), MPhil & DPhil (University of Vienna, Austria),  
PGCE (University of Cambridge, UK), QTS (Department of Education, England)*

*Former Head, Department of Sociology  
Former Dean, School of Arts*

### *Topic:*

The Autobiographical Self as an Object for  
Sociological Enquiry

Date: Thursday, July 25, 2024

Time: 5.00 p.m.

Venue: Great Hall



## **VISION**

Our vision is to become a  
“world-class research-intensive University.”

## **MISSION**

Our Mission is to create an enabling environment that makes University of Ghana increasingly relevant to national and global development through cutting-edge research as well as high quality teaching and learning.

## **VALUES**

### **Integrity**

We will demand the highest standard of ourselves to earn the trust of others.

### **Commitment**

We will be committed to knowledge generation that positively impacts the lives of those within and outside our University community.

### **Respect**

We will provide others with a world-class experience that demonstrates our value for the diversity and contributions of the members of our community.

### **Loyalty**

We will demonstrate a strong resolve to give back selflessly to our University.





## **Inaugural Lecture**

by

**Rev. Fr. Professor Michael Perry  
Kweku Okyerefo**

**Topic:**

The Autobiographical Self as an Object for Sociological  
Enquiry

**Chairperson:**

Professor Nana Aba Appiah Amfo  
Vice-Chancellor

## **ORDER OF PROCEEDINGS**

- 4.30 p.m.
- Arrival/Seating of Guests
  - Procession
  - Welcome Remarks/  
Introduction of Chairperson:  
Mrs. Emelia N.K. Agyei-Mensah,  
Registrar
  - Chairperson's Opening Remarks/  
Introduction of Lecturer:  
Professor Nana Aba Appiah Amfo  
Vice-Chancellor
  - Appellation
  - Inaugural Lecture:  
Rev. Fr. Professor Michael Perry  
Kweku Okyerefo
  - Interlude
  - Presentations
  - Chairperson's Closing Remarks:  
Professor Nana Aba Appiah Amfo  
Vice-Chancellor
  - University Anthem
  - Recession
  - Reception

## ABSTRACT

(Auto)biographies are not accidental products; instead, they are shaped by the social world which gives birth to them. Societies inherently impact an individual's life by means of their very social structures, which are themselves created through the interaction of social actors within and across a society's history. In other words, the constant symbiotic interaction between social structures and social actors is an ongoing dynamic that can be observed and explained within historical and contemporary events. Consequently, the different social worlds in which an individual grows up and lives impact that individual's life course.

In this inaugural lecture, I examine this concept of the interaction between the individual's life course and the social world further, drawing on my experiences of teaching and researching in different societies. I examine an example of autobiography intertwined with social structure which shapes academic life and discipline, through socially constructed networks. I argue that social worlds shape the social actor regardless of society, lending credence to the necessity for biographical and oral history, or "narrative" approaches to sociological discourse across societies. I rely on different facets of my life to reflect on my many years of engagement in teaching and researching sociological material and of my inner longing to unravel the eternal interconnectedness between the personal and the social.

My goal is to achieve at least three things in this Inaugural Lecture: First, to convince you that autobiographies or biographies and social structures intertwine, as my own life illustrates. This makes the biographical method in

sociology a useful platform, where structural and individual circumstances coincide to nurture social actors. Second, and flowing from the first, the biographical method can make Sociology a discipline tenable in all societies and cultures. Third, to inspire you, especially young people aspiring to read Sociology, that the discipline arouses one's curiosity to understand oneself in relation to society. The individual develops an appreciation for the constant symbiotic interaction between social structures and social actors in an ongoing dynamic, that can be observed and explained within historical and contemporary events. In short, I aim to engender an awakening of your 'social imaginations' about the sociological endeavour that is true of our society, and any society for that matter.

I draw on my life course and research corpus to depict how stories/narratives/biographies are central to critical and 'decolonial' research methods. Rather than deploying the time-worn approach of 'decolonizing' knowledge, which continues to define and denigrate a peoples knowledge production with reference to a single historical event and process that subjugate them, their thought process can be understood by interrogating their biography as impacted by their space, place and time. More explicitly in this context, biography serves as a mirror to envision African Social Thought to nurture a critical 'African emancipatory sociological imagination'. The centrality of creativity and relationality in African and Indigenous Social Thought gives prominence to an African emancipatory imagination.

The lecture underscores the interplay between autobiography and social structure. It argues that the social world, created by social actors, shapes the social actor, thereby making the

(auto)biographical approach to sociological discourse an important global sociological enquiry.

Drawing on the autobiographical self, this conceptual lecture reflects on how the personal life course is shaped by the social world, thereby impacting later years of teaching and researching sociological materials inspired by what nurtures the autobiographical development.

The (auto)biographical approach, thus, emanates from a creative sociological imagination that situates the individual's personal history within society's public issues, thereby blurring a binary that is central to the very sociological endeavour. The fact that the biographical and the structural are inherently connected in a continuously and eternally dynamic symbiosis is thus laid bare.



**Rev. Fr. Professor Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo**

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## PROFILE

Reverend Professor Michael Perry Kweku Okyerefo was born at Likpe Kukurantumi to Mr. Edmund Kwame Okyerefo, a Teacher & Education Officer and Margaret Akosua Okyerefo, a Trader (both of blessed memory, who hailed from Likpe Agbozome). Since his father was transferred to several places during his career, Professor Okyerefo changed schools frequently. His primary school education was at Lolobi Ashiambi R.C. Primary School; Sefwi Wiawso R.C. Primary School and L. A. Primary School. He attended middle school forms 1 and 2 at Likpe Mate R.C. Middle School and Jasikan Training College Demonstration School respectively, from where he gained admission to St. Mary's Seminary Secondary School, Lolobi, where he obtained his GCE Ordinary Level Certificate in 1984 and, thence, to Bishop Herman College, where he obtained his GCE Advanced Level Certificate in 1986.

He entered St. Mary's due to his desire to pursue a path to the Roman Catholic Priesthood, hence his choice to begin in a minor seminary. He entered the St. Peter's Regional Seminary at Pedu, Cape Coast, in 1986, to pursue a two-year Philosophy and four-year Theology course, while studying simultaneously as an external student for a Bachelor's degree from the University of Ghana. He graduated with a B.A. Hons. (Study of Religions with Sociology), Second Class Upper Division, in September 1991, and completed his theological studies in 1992, receiving the Overall Best Student Award. He was ordained Catholic Priest in July of that year for the then Diocese of Keta-Ho. His was part of the pioneering class at Peter's Regional Seminary to take the B.A. degree from Legon.

In August 1992, he was appointed to Dzodze-Penyi Secondary School as Chaplain and Tutor only for the appointment to be changed within three weeks, wherefore he was sent to teach at the Kadjebi-Asato Secondary School, undertaking his National Service at the same time. He taught Logic in the Sixth Form and Religious Knowledge in forms Four and Five. While teaching, he served as Assistant Priest at the Blessed Heart of Mary Parish, Kadjebi.

In October 1994, Professor Okyerefo gained admission to the University of Vienna with a full Scholarship from the Austrian Bishops Conference to reside in Thomakolleg and read for his postgraduate degrees. Having successfully passed the German Language examination after six months, he enrolled at the University of Vienna in May 1995 to begin his studies that Summer Semester. Professor Okyerefo graduated with M.Phil. (Philosophy) in July 1997 and D.Phil. (Sociology) in December 1999. Poised on pursuing a teaching career, he entered the University of Cambridge, UK, in 2000 where he obtained a Post Graduate Certificate in Education (Secondary Religious Studies) in July 2001 and a Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), Department for Education and Skills, England, in August 2001.

He returned to Ghana in December 2001 and was appointed by Bishop Francis A. K. Lodonu in 2002 to conduct a survey in the Diocese of Ho, in aid of designing a Pastoral Strategy for the Diocese. He resided in Bishop Herman College, Kpando, while carrying out this assignment.

Professor Okyerefo was appointed Lecturer in the Department of Sociology, University of Ghana, in September 2002, was promoted Senior Lecturer in January 2011, Associate Professor in May 2015 and Professor in February 2020. He was Deputy

Head, Centre for Gender Studies & Advocacy, from 2010 to 2012; Head, Department of Sociology, from 2015 to 2018 and Dean, School of Arts, from 2018 to 2021. He has served on several Boards and Committees of the University over the years and held several international visiting scholar positions and research affiliations. These include Visiting Professor, Chair for Critical Studies in Higher Education Transformation, Nelson Mandela University, South Africa, 2019 – present; Visiting Professor, School of Sociological and Anthropological Studies, University of Ottawa, Canada, 2021 – 2022; Visiting Lecturer, Department of English & Department of Sociology, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen, Germany, 2014 and Visiting Lecturer, Department of Social Work, University of Applied Sciences, St. Pölten, Austria, 2013 – 2019.

Among the fellowships and awards Professor Okyerefo has received are Research Fellow, Pius Parsch Institut, Klosterneuburg, Austria, 2010 – present; Carnegie African Diaspora Fellowship Programme (CADFP), 2021 – 2022; External Research Fellow, University of Vienna Global African Diaspora Studies (GADS) Research Platform, 2015 - 2018; a paid Sabbatical Research, Klosterneuburg Abbey, Austria, 2013 – 2015; Visiting Fellowship on Religion and Public Culture at the University of Cambridge, 2007 – 2008; Member, Wolfson College, University of Cambridge, 2007 – present; Member, Homerton College, University of Cambridge, 2000 – present; Financial Support for Doctoral Studies, Catholic Archdiocese of Vienna, 1997 – 1999; Masters' Degree Scholarship, Austrian Catholic Bishops' Conference, 1995 – 1997 and Overall Best Student Award, St. Peter's Regional Seminary, Cape Coast, Ghana, 1992.

Other grants which he has been part of are NYU-UG Research Integrity Training Programme Grant, 2018 - 2023, a

partnership between the University of Ghana (UG) and NYU, leading to the establishment of a Bioethics Programme to provide Master's degrees in Bioethics at UG School of Public Health; CODESRIA Grant on African Diaspora Support to African Universities programme, 2015 – 2019 and University of Ghana Office of Research, Innovation and Development (ORID) Grant, on Assessment of non-prescription drugs use among Ghanaian HIV-positive persons on antiretroviral therapy (ART): a pilot study, 2013 – 2015.

The most notable Research Network to which Professor Okyerefo belongs is ACUSAfrica, Advancing Critical University Studies Across Africa Network, of which he is a Founding & Steering Committee Member since 2019. This Network foregrounds scholarship for advancing Critical University Studies across Africa, in dialogue with scholarship from across the global South and excluded North, in order to find 'other' ways to study universities which are capable of thinking which embody plural forms of emancipatory higher education imaginations and futures.

Professor Okyerefo is an elected Executive Committee Member of the International Sociological Association (ISA), 2023-2027, was a Board Member of Research Committee 22, Sociology of Religion, International Sociological Association (ISA), 2018 –2023; and belongs to the Global Qualitative Sociology Network as a Founding Member since 2022; the network seeks to advance innovations in sociological theory based on transregional analysis and qualitative research in the social worlds of the global South.

A trained Sociologist with varied research interests, Professor Okyerefo's research centres on two general areas of sociological inquiry: cultural sociology and sociology of

religion. He has contributed substantially to the scholarly literature in these areas. Generally, his work is theoretically grounded in mainstream Sociology, employing a variety of sociological methods to skillfully inform his empirical analyses about religion in the context of human capital formation in Ghana and among Ghanaians in the Diaspora. His other works include the sociological analysis of African Literature as a basis for understanding African Societies. Professor Okyerefo's work is steeped in Global Sociology with an emphasis on migration; the nexus of religion and a host of socio-economic, political and health processes in contemporary Ghana; African Social Thought and conceptual categories and critical studies on the African university. While a Sociologist by training, he also applies anthropological skills with an emphasis on fieldwork in his research, as these are skills he refined during his fully paid Fellowship on Religion and Public Culture at the University of Cambridge from October 2007 to March 2008.

His current research projects span three main areas. First, African Social Thought as expressed in exploring critical conceptual categories among the Bakple, a Guan group in Ghana. The second is planned to flow from it and expand the first to involve three additional Guan groups (Bal of Santrokofi as well as Mawu of Akpafu and Lolobi) to investigate how space, place and time impact biography, with an import for global sociology in Africa. The third project is on how the African University can facilitate an African emancipatory imagination.

At the University of Ghana, Professor Okyerefo has taught several courses, supervised over 70 B.A. theses, 34 MA/MPhil theses and 10 PhD theses. He made significant efforts over the tenure of his career to engage and involve students in his

research to mentor them and support their academic research and career development. He worked with colleagues from the University of Vienna and UIT, the Arctic University of Norway to develop Erasmus Exchange Programmes for both Students and Faculty mobility, and the University of Ottawa and University of Douala, Cameroon, to build an International Research Training Group (IRTG) involving graduate students in the three institutions. He has served as External Examiner for the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Nelson Mandela University and the University of Johannesburg, all in South Africa.

Professor Okyerefo has written one book and co-authored a second one; he has published 10 book chapters, 31 Journal articles, 2 encyclopedia entries, 5 refereed conference papers, 2 book-reviews and co-edited a university-wide mandatory course book titled Critical Thinking and Practical Reasoning.

Professor Okyerefo developed, together with Professor Steve Tonah and Dr. James Dzisah, both from the Department of Sociology, Diocesan Strategic Plans for two Catholic Dioceses in Ghana, the Catholic Diocese of Ho and the Catholic Diocese of Keta-Akatsi.

He has served on the editorial board of the Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies and, as a reviewer for many academic journals, including Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies; SAGE Open; PentecoStudies – An Interdisciplinary Journal for Research on the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements; The Journal of Men's Studies; Online International Journal of Arts and Humanities; Religions; Ghana Social Science Journal; and Journal of Science and Technology, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi.

His scientific publications have appeared in journals such as Historical Social Research; Afroglobe - Recherche et Débat sur L'Afrique-Monde, 1(1) - L'Université du Québec à Montréal; Religions; Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora; Etnološka tribina: Journal of Croatian Ethnological Society; Journal of Health, Population and Nutrition; Frontiers in Public Health; Diaspora & Returns in Fiction: African Literature Today; Health Sociology Review; Ghana Studies; Contemporary Journal of African Studies; The Journal of the Sociology and Theory of Religion (JSTR); Ghana Social Science Journal; and Journal of Africana Religions.

Professor Okyerefo has attended and presented papers at numerous international conferences; he is, therefore, known in his field. He is the Chairman of Council, St. Francis College of Education, Hohoe, since 2016 and Founder and Executive Director, The Monsignor Rudolph Johnson Apietu Memorial Foundation, since 2006.

He is a Roman Catholic Priest of the Catholic Diocese of Ho and is one of the Chaplains of Saint Thomas Aquinas Catholic Chaplaincy, University of Ghana. He loves reading novels and travelling.

# UNIVERSITY ANTHEM



Hail University of Ghana  
The nation's hope and glory  
The place that bears the star of peace  
That bids us all to do our best  
Let the great Tower of learning  
Inspire both young and old  
May we proceed in unity to uphold the public cause.

//: Arise, arise O Legon  
Defend the cause of freedom  
Proceed in truth and integrity to make  
Our nation proud: //

We ask for strength and wisdom  
As we climb the hill of learning  
May we excel in what'er we do  
As we prepare to face the world  
With a mind ready at all times  
And a conscience quick to feel  
May we proceed in unity to uphold the public cause.

//: Arise, arise O Legon  
Defend the cause of freedom  
Proceed in truth and integrity to make  
our nation proud ://

***(Emeritus Prof. J. H. Kwabena Nketia)***  
***(1921-2019)***



# UPCOMING EVENTS

July 29, 2024  
9:00 a.m.

- Opening Ceremony for 10th Anniversary and 8th Research Conference of WACCBIP  
**Venue:** Cedi Conference Centre

July 29, 2024  
3:00 p.m.

- Retirees' Send-off Party  
**Venue:** Great Hall

July 31, 2024  
3:00 p.m.

- Outdooring of New Musical Instruments for the Department of Music  
**Venue:** Great Hall

July 31, 2024  
6:00 p.m.

- Commissioning of Refurbished Fountain  
**Venue:** Main Entrance of the University