

# ALHASSAN & CECILIA AKWAKA

## Pioneer Urban Missionaries

**W**e stand in awe of the Grace and Goodness of God as we celebrate the story of an unlikely pair who became world changers in their own right.

Unlikely because, they share a similar background and story of God, using weak things to defeat the strong and creating something out of nothing.

*“For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? the weak things to confound the wise” (1 Corinthians 1:19-20).*

So let us delve a bit into their early lives. They were born ten years apart in the then Northern Territories of the Gold Coast. Cecilia Ayaaba was born on 21<sup>st</sup> July 1955 at Denugu in the Bawku area of Garu district.

Her parents Mr Ayaaba and Madam Mary Ayaaba were idol worshippers and she was expected to follow in those footsteps, however, God had a plan for Cecilia's life. A gospel campaign came to her village and she gave her life to Christ whereas the parents remained idol worshippers until much later. The pastor wanting to take her away from the idol influence negotiated with her parents to allow her to stay at the mission house. There she grew and developed in her walk with God. She stayed serving in the church faithfully until one day the love of her life surfaced.

Reverend Alhassan Akwaka was born on August 21<sup>st</sup> 1945 in the Bawku suburb of Nayoko in the then Northern Territories of the Gold to Mr Akwaka Akonga a farmer and merchant and heir to the Nayoko skin. His mother, Madam Aseda Damata was a farmer and petty trader.

His father a prince of the Nayoko skin was adept at problem solving and was the Chief's preferred emissary on conflict resolution assignments. He

was also a wealthy merchant trading between the surrounding towns and villages. Mr Akonga and Madam Aseda had a good life except that they had lost their children under mysterious circumstances.

Being adherents of African traditional religion and Islam, they sort help from the fetish and after a while the little Alhassan was born.

The unexpected demise of her grandfather, the Chief and family patriarch brought intense competition and jealousy within the larger family most of whom had multiple wives and were determined that Akwaka Akonga who was hand-picked by the Chief would not inherit the chieftaincy. They ganged up against Akwaka Akonga and he died mysteriously.

Alhassan was only 12 years old when his father died and that brought untold hardship to the family. With no support to pursue formal education, he was compelled to seek his fortunes in the south, Kumasi to be precise.

In Kumasi he found work as house help with expats working for CFAO. He made himself useful to the extent that his boss was willing to take him along when he was reassigned to Tamale.

Tamale would mark a turning point in young Alhassan's life. One evening on a night out with friends, they came across a preacher preaching in the open air near the cinema in town. While his friends moved on, Alhassan heard a voice telling him to listen to the man, an American missionary who was preaching for Tamale Central Assemblies of God.

He obeyed and responded to the altar call to give his life to Christ.

Alhassan submerged himself totally into his new found faith and Lord, driven in no small measure by the grim pictures some members of his family painted about the consequences of abandoning the family gods. At this point his life was marked by intense prayers and fasting.

His boss's assignment in Tamale came to an end but he recommended him to Mr Robert Anderson, Country manager of Pan American Airlines (PANAM) who was based in Accra.

Mr Anderson became a great mentor and father figure to Alhassan and took a keen interest in his welfare. He engaged the services of a British lady who taught at the Ghana International School to offer lessons in reading, writing and arithmetic.

Alhassan applied himself to this endeavor with characteristic commitment. In no time at all, he could read and write with fair fluency.

In Accra he came under the pastorship of Rev Joseph Gyan Fosu of Evangel Assemblies of God. He was a very active and useful member of the church but he wasn't fulfilled. He felt something was amiss. As he went before God in prayer, he began developing a heavy burden for souls but the strange thing was that he was having this burden for a specific group of souls. As he prayed he felt more and more burdened for souls from the Northern part of Ghana. He was led to Romans 9:1-3 and he knew there was a specific task he needed to accomplish.

*"I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart. For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh" (Romans 9:1-3).*

Evangel Assemblies of God Church at the time conducted services in English with interpretation in Ga and Twi. This meant that a substantial part of the congregation who were Nigeriens, Malians, Burkinabes, as well as emigrants from northern Ghana like himself were largely ignored. Increasingly he felt indebted to these people groups to help them better understand and worship God. He was sad at what could be described as an Acts 6 situation where a constituency of the church were neglected.

*And in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations. Acts 6:1.*

Unlike in the Acts scenario, God had prepared his servant to stop any murmuring from arising. Convinced that he had heard from God, he courageously approached his pastor, Rev. Joseph Gyan Fosu and shared his vision with him. Rev.

Gyan Fosu agreed to his request and allowed for a separate meeting for the northern people's group including the other West African nationals under the auspices of Evangel church.

This is how Rev. Alhassan Akwaka was launched into ministry which was ministry at the deep end - Urban, Cross-cultural and Inter-cultural Missions, boom! With no experience, no formal education or theological training. God had birthed such important ministry in his life.

With the green light from his pastor all was set to go until he encountered an unexpected resistance. This was similar to Moses' experience with the Israelites in Egypt;

*And he said, Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? Exodus 2:14a.*

The Nigeriens, Malians, and Burkinabes insisted that he either spoke French or Moore otherwise they would have nothing to do with him, phew!

Here he displayed real courage and carried on with the northern Ghana people group while taking language lessons in Moore from a Mossi prince. That probably was a Midian moment for him as his 'Miriam' would surface in the midst of that.

Other pastors in the north heard of his work, and invited him to visit the north to speak and lo and behold the host pastor was the mentor of the young Cecilia who would become his sweetheart. Cecilia Ayaaba had been preserved in the house of the pastor for this special moment.

They both had huge passion for missions when they met and therefore it was a natural match. She would support him with her porridge (kooko) sales and also help with the Kokomba and Bimoba language groups.

They started seeking out the whereabouts of their Northern brothers and sisters as well as the other nationals and preached to them.

The determined Rev Akwaka quickly developed proficiency in the Moore language and could read the Moore bible. With that his ministry took on an international dimension.

As time went on he sensed a growing desire to go to bible school so he could be of better help to his people. But he had to make a difficult choice to leave his job and go to bible school with no guarantee of

income and a young family. By this time, he had a new boss as Mr Anderson being an ex-military man had been called to Vietnam to help with the deployment of US forces. His new boss Mr Bull was not exactly friendly as Mr Anderson.

One Christmas day, Mr Bull demanded he stayed home and not go church as he was expecting guests. Being the lay preacher that he was he could not imagine missing church, so he declined the request. Mr Bull literally told him to choose between his church and job and he chose church and that was how God made a way for him to go to bible school.

The song on his heart would have been more like Jim Reeves'

*I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold I'd rather  
be his than have riches untold*

*I'd rather have Jesus than houses or land*

*Yes I'd rather be led by his nail pierced hands*

*Than to be the king of a best domain and beheld  
in sins dread sway*

*I'd rather have Jesus than anything this world  
affords today*

*I'd rather have Jesus than worldly applause I'd  
rather be faithful to his dear cause*

*I'd rather have Jesus than world wide things I'd  
rather be true to his holy name*

*Than to be the king.*

Again there was a hurdle to overcome. The Missionary instructors at the Bible school were sceptical he could cope with the rigours of Bible school work due to his limited formal education.

At this juncture once again God showed up on his behalf and sent an Aaron to him in the person of Dr J.J. Achiriga of blessed memory to attest to his ability to cope with the demands of bible school education.

After graduating from Northern Ghana Bible Institute in Kumbungu, he returned to Accra and his ministry took on a new dimension.

He approached the leadership of Evangel Church this time to allow the fellowship to become autonomus so they could focus on reaching Northern emigrants and it was granted.

United Assemblies of God Church was birthed with a focus on reaching out to people of Northern descent in the Accra metropolis. This approach to ministry was a first as it was not common therefore

he faced a lot of opposition even from within the denominational setting to abandon the idea as it wasn't viable.

Determined to obey God, Rev. Akwaka sought for land at Ofankor and started subsistence farming to support himself and ministry for years and years as United Church struggled financially.

## Ministry Impact

His calm and humble persona has meant that he never sought the spot light and even now still wants to be in the background. He was once described by a close pal in this way; "some great men are best likened to the hidden iron rods in a buildings foundation. Rev Akwaka is a hidden steel pillar but part of a great foundation".

It is from such quiet places that God has worked wonders with his life and ministry. From a classroom in Adabraka for 30 years to a beautiful multi – purpose facility edifice at Achimota mile 7. To God be the Glory.

Rev Akwaka has been involved directly and indirectly with the establishment of many Assemblies of God churches in the Accra area. As his manner is, he always wants things to be on the quiet.

Rev Akwaka always pastored the United Assemblies of God Church, but reached out beyond its four walls.

He held outreaches and crusades in Nima, Maamobi, Zongo, Kokomba market, Dome, Nii Boi Town, Agbogbloshie, to mention a few in the early days. His focus was always to invest in and build kingdom people. Many ministers and ministries have been born as a result of his ministry.

From his meagre resources and with no foreign assistance, he developed innovative and creative ways to make United Church a bastion of missions to the north.

His strategic location in Accra made him a succour to many ministers in northern Ghana whom he relentlessly hosted and assisted. He made it possible for many ministers from northern Ghana to experience life and ministry in Accra, among them the Former General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God, Ghana Rev Dr S.B. Asore of blessed memory.

His wisdom and counsel is much sought after and is a source of guidance and mentorship to many young ministers who take inspiration from him.

Rev Alhassan Akwaka also collaborated with Mr Ross Campbell for the Northern Outreach Project by making available personnel from United Church to facilitate work among northern people groups in Accra. The Project had an immense impact on missions in Ghana and Rev Akwaka and other leaders from Northern Ghana based in the South made that happen to God's Glory. At Christmas time, many churches organized "Operation Go Back Home" outreaches to their traditional homelands up North.

Rev Akwaka was a pioneer of radio ministry in the 1980's preaching on GBC radio<sup>1</sup>. That ministry reached far and wide across Ghana and set a mark for reaching the northern people groups via radio.

Today thanks to the faithfulness of God, United AG can count a whole raft of Christian professionals who are contributing their quota to the development of the Assemblies of God Ghana and the nation.

After 52 years in ministry Reverend Akwaka's ministry touched almost all the people groups of Northern Ghana. In his pursuit of Urban and cross-cultural missions, he has acquired the ability to

communicate the gospel very fluently in the Hausa, Kusaal, Mamprusi, Frafra, Moore and Twi languages.

Mrs Akwaka is fluent, in Konkomba, Nanung, Hausa, Kusaal, Dagbani, Bimoba and Gurune.

Reverend Akwaka has held a lot of leadership positions in Assemblies of God, Ghana including Zonal Chairman, Modality committee member and District pastor for Adabraka from 1995 to 2008.

It was during his term of office as district pastor that Evangel Assemblies of God experienced the crisis that threatened to tear it away from the fold of Assemblies of God. Rev Akwaka worked assiduously with the then executive presbytery of the Assemblies of God to keep Assemblies of God Ghana from being divested of Evangel Church and to return the assembly to normalcy.

Rev Alhassan and Mrs Cecilia Akwaka are blessed with six children and five grandchildren. A number of their children are in fulltime ministry serving the Lord also in cross-cultural missions. Rev Alhassan and Mrs Cecilia Akwaka continue to serve the Lord faithfully to this day and their passion for the gospel and for lost souls continues to burn and their impact and mentoring of the next generation continues unabated.