

DR. KWAME BEDIAKO

Outstanding Ghanaian Missiologist

Odoba Walton

It is an honour to write briefly on Dr. Manasseh Kwame Dakwa Bediako, an outstanding African theologian and missiologist as well as the founder and late rector of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute for Theology, Mission, and Culture, (ACI) in Akropong, Ghana.

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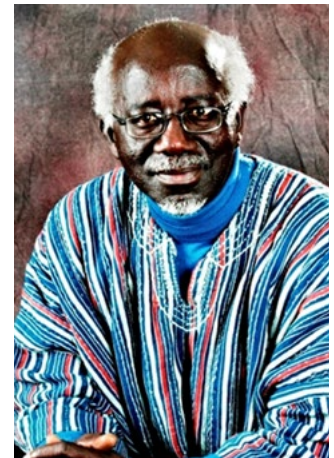
Just before the COVID-19 lockdown early this year, I had the privilege of enrolling at the ACI to study Holistic Mission and Development as a Master of Arts in Mission and Theology Option.

Before this opportunity, there was little I knew about this school. I had not come to a full appreciation of it though a close relative was on the faculty. This was probably because of my inadequate information about the school and its small campus making it appear ‘un-inviting’. On the contrary, I got to realize that was a blinkered view. The knowledge and experience Akrofi-Christaller gives is beyond one’s expectation and invigoratingly life transforming.

This I would contribute largely to the good foundation set for the establishment of this remarkable institution by its founding rector, Dr. Manasseh Kwame Dakwa Bediako, known simply as Kwame Bediako. I came to realize that as the brain behind Christian scholarship in African theology in Akrofi-Christaller, Kwame Bediako’s insights on African Christianity and culture is enriching and edifying. He brings into perspective the need to appre-

ciate our diverse and rich cultural background and to build our Christian heritage from such non-negotiable end.

Bediako establishes that we end up building in the air when we cut off our cultural roots or foundations. Though some portions of our cultures may be corrupted due to the fall of man, our task as ‘missioners’^[1] is to redeem cultures. He establishes that the Great Commission in Matthew 28:19-



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20, is mainly about the discipling of the nations and thus explains the Gospel (good news) as the transformation that Christ brings to us and our cultures. The Gospel should relate to human nature at its very core, and to human existence in its totality, in all its dimensions—historical, social, cultural, economic, political, as well as personal.^[2] This, as one of the main ideas Bediako propagates, was my greatest highlight. He strived to make Africans confident about both their Christian and African identity.

Born on July 7, 1945, Kwame Bediako was the son of a police inspector and the grandson of a Presbyterian catechist and evangelist. Though his parents came from the Central Region, he grew up in Accra, at the Police Training Depot. His first schooling was in Ga and not in his mother tongue,

1 Churches, mission agencies and Christian bodies

2 Kwame Bediako, “What is the Gospel?”, Asempa Jubilee Lectures, 27-29 September 2005, Christ the King Hall, Accra, p.7.

Twi, but was fluent in both. As an outstanding pupil, he was able to gain Senior High education at Mfantshipim School, Cape Coast, which was one of the best schools established by the British Methodist missions. Kwame received an excellent education there, and left Mfantshipim as its head prefect and in 1965 entered the University of Ghana. Here, he developed as an eloquent orator and debater, he could easily make a mark in politics. He also attained academic excellence in French that won him a scholarship for graduate studies in France and the promise of an academic career. During this time he was a confirmed atheist under French influence, apparently deaf to the pleas of Christian classmates.

In France he gained master's and doctoral degrees at the University of Bordeaux, choosing African francophone literature as his area of research. During his time in France, he underwent a radical Christian conversion right under his shower—so radical that at one stage he thought of abandoning his studies for active evangelism. Thankfully, he was persuaded otherwise; the time was coming when he would recognize scholarship itself as a missionary vocation. His new life brought him new associates—above all, a fellow student of French, from England, who joined him in a mission to migrant Arab children. His evangelism pursuits made him pursue a bachelor's degree in Theology at the London Bible College in London. He met Gillian Mary around this same time and in 1973 they were married, forming a wonderful partnership that was rich intellectually and spiritually. They came back to Ghana, to teach for two years at the Christian Service College in Kumasi. With family links rebuilt with the Presbyterian Church he was accepted for ordination in that church.

Kwame's evangelical convictions and credentials were manifest, but he wrestled with issues that were not at the front of most evangelical minds, or on the agenda of most evangelical institutions during his time. Could Africans become fully Christian only by embracing the mind-set of Western Christians and rejecting all the things that made them distinctively African?

It was such concerns that brought the Bediakos back to academic study, and Kwame to a second doctorate in the Department of Religious Studies

at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. With such astounding academic credentials Bediako now had, he strongly declined all invitations from the Western institutions. In Ghana, he could readily have returned to the university world or he could have become a well sought-after minister. But he had a unique call to theological scholarship that neither universities nor seminaries were yet able to bring to the fore.

The outcome was the Akrofi-Christaller Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology, later called the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, and Culture. Its establishment and development aim at promoting scholarship rooted in Christian mission. The focus of the scholarship of the institute was on Africa—its religious, cultural, social, and linguistic realities, and the history, life, and thought of its Christians. The preparatory courses in the master's degree program explored the principles underlying the interaction of Gospel and Culture, the worldviews of primal societies, theology in Africa, Christian history as mission history among others. As a post-graduate Mission and Theology institute, it continues to train many well-equipped workers for the Kingdom. His departure following a serious illness, on June 10, 2008, is a great loss to the body of Christ especially in Africa, nevertheless he invested in many and left a rich legacy.

Professor Andrew Walls describes Kwame Bediako as “an outstanding African theologian of his generation; a distinguished academic.” May his legacy live on!!!^[3]

Odoba Walton is a former student of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute for Theology, Mission, and Culture, (ACI). She currently serves at the Operations & Partnership Development Officer of OneWay Africa.



³ Culled from Dictionary of African Christian Biography, 'Kwame Bediako', accessed on 28th November, 2020, <https://dacb.org/stories/ghana/bediako-kwame/>