



# Kwame Bediako, Promoter of African Christian Thought

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## Abstract

Kwame Bediako (1945–2008) was an influential African Christian theologian. Bediako's theological achievements have received a fair amount of scrutiny, but his work as an organizer, promoter, developer, and sustainer of Christian thinking is arguably at least as valuable as his ideas. This article surveys the scope of what Kwame Bediako achieved as a Christian intellectual entrepreneur, it examines how he did it, and it explains why such work is so important. This essay traces the development of the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, and Culture, the formation of networks and resourcing initiatives for Christian thought in Africa and beyond, and Bediako's methods as an intellectual agent. The strategic importance of these efforts is enormous. Bediako's achievements should challenge others to do their part to strengthen the infrastructure of Christian thought, in Africa and worldwide.

## Résumé

Kwame Bediako (1945–2008) est un théologien chrétien africain influent. Les réalisations théologiques de Bediako ont fait l'objet d'un examen approfondi, mais son travail d'organisateur, de promoteur, de développeur et de soutien de la pensée chrétienne est sans doute au moins aussi précieux que ses idées. Cet article étudie l'étendue des réalisations de Kwame Bediako en tant qu'entrepreneur intellectuel chrétien, examine la manière dont il y est parvenu et explique pourquoi ce travail est si important. Cet essai retrace le développement de l'Institut Akrofi-Christaller de Théologie, de Mission et de Culture, la formation de réseaux et d'initiatives de ressources pour la pensée chrétienne en Afrique et au-delà, ainsi que les méthodes de Bediako en tant qu'agent intellectuel. L'importance stratégique de ces efforts est énorme. Les réalisations de Bediako devraient inciter d'autres personnes à faire leur part pour renforcer l'infrastructure de la pensée chrétienne, en Afrique et dans le monde.

### **Resumo**

Kwame Bediako (1945–2008) foi um influente teólogo cristão africano. As realizações teológicas de Bediako têm sido objeto de um exame minucioso, mas o seu trabalho como organizador, promotor, originador e sustentador do pensamento cristão é, sem dúvida, pelo menos tão valioso como as suas ideias. Este artigo analisa o âmbito do que Kwame Bediako alcançou como empresário intelectual cristão e examina como o fez e explica por que razão esse trabalho é tão importante. Este ensaio traça o desenvolvimento do Instituto Akrofi-Christaller de Teologia, Missão e Cultura, a formação de redes e iniciativas de recursos para o pensamento cristão em África e fora da África, e os métodos de Bediako como agente intelectual. A importância estratégica destes esforços é enorme. As realizações de Bediako devem desafiar outros a fazer a sua parte para reforçar a infraestrutura do pensamento cristão, em África e no mundo inteiro.

### **Keywords**

Kwame Bediako, Gillian M. Bediako, African theology, institutional development, intellectual promotion, fund-raising, African theological education, African theological publishing

### **Mots-clés**

Kwame Bediako, Gillian M. Bediako, théologie africaine, développement institutionnel, promotion intellectuelle, collecte de fonds, enseignement théologique africain, édition théologique africaine

### **Palavras-chave**

Kwame Bediako, Gillian M. Bediako, teologia africana, desenvolvimento institucional, promoção intelectual, angariação de fundos, educação teológica africana, publicação teológica africana

In the summer of 1974, Kwame Bediako (1945–2008), a Ghanaian scholar who was enrolled at the London Bible College (LBC), came home very excited after attending the Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization. As a student delegate, Bediako had met some dynamic Christian mission theologians from around the world, and he heard them rock the Lausanne conference with critiques of the evangelical missionary establishment that rode upon western cultural assumptions and world power, ignored patterns of injustice and oppression in the world, and presented the Gospel primarily in terms of personal salvation. As a result, the conference-issued *Lausanne Covenant* (1975) proclaimed that the gospel message also implied “a message of judgment upon every form of alienation, oppression, and discrimination,” and urged Christians “to denounce evil and injustice wherever they exist.” “The salvation we claim,”

the Covenant added, “should be transforming us in the totality of our personal and social responsibilities.”<sup>1</sup>

Bediako, a promising young intellectual who had earned a doctorate in African literature in French from the University of Bordeaux, was energized by this surprising turn at Lausanne and by the Global South “radical evangelicals” who influenced it.<sup>2</sup> He, in turn, seemed to have made an impression on conference planners, because he was invited thereafter to participate in several follow-on consultations and to write a good half-dozen articles.<sup>3</sup>

Yet what Bediako did right after Lausanne speaks volumes about his subsequent career. He and his wife and fellow theologian, Gillian M. (Mary) Bediako, drew up plans for “A Centre for Mission Research in Ghana.” The Bediakos felt called to Christian scholarship, and they saw the need for a new kind of agency — a gospel and culture study center — for pursuing and sustaining that vocation.<sup>4</sup> Starting up a study center is not the first aim of most scholars, but at Lausanne, Bediako and his new-found friends saw the power of the western evangelical mission industry, and they sought the means to sustain an alternative vision.

Kwame Bediako went on to become a widely influential Christian intellectual leader, whom Andrew Walls (1928–2021) deemed to be “the outstanding African theologian of his generation.”<sup>5</sup> Much has been written already to assess Bediako’s theological achievements, and some of that conversation also addresses his and Mary’s creation of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology (ACMC), in Akropong, Ghana.<sup>6</sup> But Kwame Bediako’s work as an organizer, promoter,

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<sup>1</sup> “The Lausanne Covenant,” 4–5. On the overall impact of Lausanne ’74, see Brian Stanley, “Lausanne 1974: The Challenge from the Majority World to Northern-Hemisphere Evangelicalism.”

<sup>2</sup> Among those that Bediako met and heard at Lausanne were C. Rene Padilla (1932–2021) of Argentina, Samuel Escobar (b. 1934) of Peru, Orlando Costas (1941–1987) from Puerto Rico, David Gitari (1937–2013) from Kenya, and Vinay Samuel (b. 1942) from India.

<sup>3</sup> Bediako participated in two of the Lausanne movement’s ensuing consultations: on gospel and culture in Willowbank, Bermuda, in January 1978; and on world evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand, in June of 1980. Among his early pieces in this field, see Bediako, “The Willowbank Consultation Jan 1978—A Personal Reflection,” and “The Missionary Inheritance.”

<sup>4</sup> Kwame Bediako and Mary Bediako, *Ebenezer, This is how far the Lord has helped us: Reflections on the Institutional Itinerary of Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research & Applied Theology, 1974–2005*, 5.

<sup>5</sup> Andrew F. Walls, “Kwame Bediako and Christian Scholarship in Africa,” 192.

<sup>6</sup> Tim Hartman, *Kwame Bediako: African Theology for a World Christianity*, is a helpful recent summary of Bediako’s work which also recounts others’ assessments of it. See also Sara J. Fretheim, *Kwame Bediako and African Christian Scholarship: Emerging Religious Discourse in Twentieth Century Ghana*.

developer, and sustainer of Christian thinking went far beyond Akropong, and it is arguably at least as valuable as his ideas. This essay will survey the scope of what Kwame Bediako achieved as a Christian intellectual entrepreneur, it will examine how he did it, and it will explain why such work is so important.

## **I. What Bediako Achieved**

Before we start, it might be helpful for those who are not familiar with Bediako's contributions as a theologian to have a summary.

### ***Scholarship***

Kwame Bediako was a very creative thinker and a prolific writer and speaker. His international publications included two major treatises on African Christianity<sup>7</sup> and a collection of essays on Jesus Christ in an African context.<sup>8</sup> He also produced several collections of public lectures that were published locally, and he wrote 90 chapters and articles that were published in African, European, North American and Asian books and journals.<sup>9</sup> Bediako delivered the Duff Lectures at the University of Edinburgh, the Henry Martyn Lectures at Cambridge University, and the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary. Throughout his career he spoke at universities and conferences across Europe, Africa, North America, and Asia. This international work was important to Bediako. Says Walls, "He did perhaps more than anyone else to persuade mainstream Western theologians . . . that African theology was not an exotic minority specialization but an essential component in a developing global Christian discourse."<sup>10</sup>

Bediako's abiding quest as a scholar was to answer the question of identity: what did it mean to be Christian and African? Embedded in that question was a concern to answer the critics, especially in Africa, who said that Christianity was an alien and fundamentally alienating imposition on Africans. But as Bediako argued in both of his major works, *Theology and Identity* and *Christianity in Africa*, Christianity has become deeply embedded in Africa, and thus it is becoming, once again, a non-Western religion. His argument was based on Andrew Walls' and Lamin Sanneh's idea that Christianity was eminently translatable and was making itself at home in

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<sup>7</sup> *Theology and Identity: The Impact of Culture upon Christian Thought in the Second Century and Modern Africa* (1992) and *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion* (1995).

<sup>8</sup> *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (2004).

<sup>9</sup> "Chronological Listing of Kwame Bediako's Writings," in Hartman, *Kwame Bediako*, 153–161.

<sup>10</sup> Walls, "Kwame Bediako," 192.

cultures worldwide,<sup>11</sup> and he cited some dramatic grassroots expressions of the African-rooted Christianity that he encountered in Ghana.<sup>12</sup>

Especially after they returned to Ghana, the Bediakos engaged in “mother-tongue” theologizing, which meant conducting biblical and theological studies in local languages to yield new insights into how Christian faith and practice translated into local cultures. This work underscored another concept that the Bediakos had first encountered at the University of Aberdeen with Andrew Walls and Harold Turner: that the primal spirituality of indigenous peoples forms the spiritual undercarriage for all religion, not least for Christianity.

Bediako had his critics, especially those who thought that he focused too little on the pressing social and economic struggles of Africans and on what Christianity had to say to politics and the state.<sup>13</sup> Even so, said an eminent Ghanaian theologian, “Kwame Bediako has left us an impressive legacy in Christian scholarship and helped to redefine Africa’s place in the scheme of the God.”<sup>14</sup>

### “*New Wineskins*”

That intellectual and spiritual legacy would be plenty for most Christian thinkers, but from the very start of his calling as a theologian, Bediako felt compelled to do more. It seemed clear to him early on that the new and robustly African approaches to Christian theology he was advocating needed a freshly crafted institutional framework to nurture and sustain them. That was a common feeling that he caught from the other “Third-World” evangelical theologians he met at Lausanne. It was propelled by the strong reaction they had to the western evangelical values and vision that they encountered.<sup>15</sup> Bediako’s own contribution to this conversation was a hard-hitting critique of western “institutional Evangelicalism” as a sort of missions-industrial complex, and a call to “unhinge the word ‘Evangelicals’ from its usual institutional posts.”<sup>16</sup> The

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith*, chapter 3, “The Translation Principle in Christian History,” 26–42; and Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message: The Missionary Impact on Culture*.

<sup>12</sup> Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, chapter 4, “How Is It that We Hear in Our Own Languages the Wonders of God? Christianity as Africa’s Religion,” 59–74.

<sup>13</sup> Two important critics were Emmanuel Katongole: see his *A Future for Africa: Critical Essays in Christian Social Imagination*, 155–162; and Tinyiko Maluleke: see his “In Search of ‘The True Character of African Christian Identity’: A Review of the Theology of Kwame Bediako.”

<sup>14</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, “Bediako of Africa: A Late 20th Century Outstanding Theologian and Teacher,” 15.

<sup>15</sup> One of this group’s most important early publications put these critiques front and center: see *Proclaiming Christ in Christ’s Way: Studies in Integral Evangelism*.

<sup>16</sup> Bediako, “World Evangelisation, Institutional Evangelicalism and the Future of Christian World Missions,” 52–68; 67 (quotation).

new wine of this group's radical evangelicalism, they were convinced, would need new wineskins to carry it.<sup>17</sup>

### ***Akrofi-Christaller Institute***

Over the ensuing decade following Lausanne, the Bediakos kept revising their memorandum on a center for mission research. They showed their vision to trusted mentors and partners, such as Prof. Walls at Aberdeen and to the Rev. S. K. Aboa, a minister in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG). Aboa was a biblical scholar and translator, a church diplomat, and the former principal of the Presbyterian teacher training college in Akropong, a small town northeast of Accra.<sup>18</sup> Aboa endorsed the Bediakos' idea of a center to PCG officials, and it was approved by the denomination in 1985, with Kwame and Mary as its founding staff. Two years later the Centre formally opened. It was chartered as the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology (ACMC), and it was given the old Basel Mission buildings in Akropong to use.<sup>19</sup>

The Bediakos set out with Rev. Aboa's help to collect materials for a research library and archives and to develop a variety of programs to train and form Christian workers.<sup>20</sup> They served agencies of the PCG, and others as well, such as Women Aglow and the Full-Gospel Businessmen. They conducted Bible studies (in mother-tongue languages), weekend retreats and conferences, and intensive training programs for lay leaders, newly ordained pastors, and PCG missionaries. These "in-service" trainings and retreats became regular features of the ACMC's work.<sup>21</sup>

Meanwhile, the Bediakos and their board members raised funds to develop facilities. The old Basel Mission buildings were beautifully restored in 1992. Four years later, ACMC had a new student hostel and then in 1998 a dining hall. Major funders of these projects included the international mission agencies of the Dutch and German sister churches of the PCG.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Gillian Mary Bediako, "New Wine in New Wineskins': Kwame Bediako as Visionary Institution Builder."

<sup>18</sup> Akropong is a royal seat, housing the palace of the regional king and his council. It became a center for the Basel Mission and the location for its seminary and teacher training college.

<sup>19</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 9–12.

<sup>20</sup> Evidently, Rev. Aboa had already been collecting fugitive materials documenting the history of Christianity — and Christian scholarship — among the Akan people. The Bediakos' dream of a center to engage such work thus was deeply attractive to him. Video interview of Mary Bediako with the author, 30 April 2021.

<sup>21</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 13–14.

<sup>22</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 15, 19.

The ACMC staff grew as the activities multiplied. Some remarkable young teacher-scholars began their careers there, notably Eric Anum,<sup>23</sup> who went on to lead the Organization of African Instituted Churches in Nairobi and then took a teaching post in religion at the University of Cape Coast. Cephas Omenyo<sup>24</sup> went from ACMC to become a professor and then dean at the University of Ghana; and John Azumah, who taught at ACMC,<sup>25</sup> went on to Columbia Theological Seminary in the U.S. and then came back to head the Lamin Sanneh Institute at the University of Ghana. And for more than a decade, the Bediakos were also working at Andrew Walls' study center at the University of Edinburgh for several months each year, where Kwame was Duff Lecturer from 1987-1993 and then a lecturer in theology for Walls' African Christianity project until 1999. These were tremendously busy and productive times for the ACMC as it grew in facilities, staff, programs, and library resources, with ongoing support from the German and Dutch sister churches and from two American charities: the Stewardship Foundation and the Pew Charitable Trusts.<sup>26</sup>

In 1995, Kwame was invited to lecture for the theology faculty of the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN) in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. The theology faculty was impressed with Bediako and sought to hire him. He countered with the idea of collaborative M.Th. and Ph.D. programs that would engage students in alternate semesters at UKZN and at ACMC. The idea was approved, and the program began in 1998 and continued through 2004, with the Bediakos lecturing in UKZN several months each year. Under the new South African regime, however, the theological program at UKZN was being de-emphasized in favor of studying religion on a more secular basis. ACMC leaders therefore decided to go it alone. Ministry of Education officials in Ghana encouraged them to seek "specialist university" status to offer their own postgraduate degrees. This new status began in 2006, with a name change as well as a university charter, for the Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission, and Culture (ACI).<sup>27</sup>

ACI had gained university status, but according to many who visited or studied there, it operated by a different institutional vision, more like that of *ashrams*, small and disciplined communities of scholars who lead a life of study and piety.<sup>28</sup> Bediako encouraged his colleagues to do their work collaboratively with high mutual trust and helpfulness. ACI was to be a place of spiritual formation as well as intellectual development. The "research fellows" who

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<sup>23</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 13–14.

<sup>24</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 14.

<sup>25</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 28.

<sup>26</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 18–21.

<sup>27</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 22–26; video interview of Mary Bediako by the author, 14 February 2022.

<sup>28</sup> Andrew Walls, "Of Ivory Towers and Ashrams: Some Reflections on Theological Scholarship in Africa: Guest Editorial."

taught at ACI and the master's and doctoral fellows joined staff at all levels for Bible study and worship (much of it in the Twi language) every morning. In their formal studies, the scholars explored the piety and practice of ordinary believers to understand how the gospel entered vernacular speech and practice.<sup>29</sup> Said the Bediakos, these grassroots "concerns and struggles of the church . . . were providing the essential resource and raw materials for the reflection, writing and action emerging from the Centre."<sup>30</sup>

Despite some hard times initially and fluctuating levels of financial support, the ACI has grown since Kwame Bediako's death in 2008. It is not a large institution, but it is intently focused on research and writing in ways that most African theological seminaries are not, and it maintains its service to grassroots Christian programs. Having survived the passing of its founder, ACI's next challenge will be another succession, as some of its longest serving academics and administrators, including Mary Bediako, are now retiring. Much of its recent faculty development has been based on a grow-your-own staffing plan, but as the ACI seeks to influence African realms of theology more broadly and offer its unique approach to the wider Christian world, that pattern might need to change.

ACI looms so large among Kwame Bediako's accomplishments as a theological entrepreneur that one might be tempted to rest our case on this achievement alone. But there is more to see.

### ***INFEMIT***

One of the most exciting aspects of the Lausanne Congress for Kwame, Mary recalls, was finding so many kindred spirits there. At that meeting and in ensuing Lausanne consultations, Kwame saw a "new reality" being formed that he wanted to be a part of. He was learning that "individual vision was not enough . . . brilliant individuals come and go." If Christian thought and mission needed some "radical reshaping," then their movement to do that needed networks and institutions.<sup>31</sup> In the wake of Lausanne, Bediako and several others of the "radical discipleship" group participated in the Consultation on Gospel and Culture in Willowbank, Bermuda in January 1978, and then in the June 1980 Consultation on World Evangelization in Pattaya, Thailand. They came away dismayed that those meetings reasserted pragmatic and narrowly instrumental "church growth" mission strategies and reaffirmed the primacy of evangelization. These moves relegated justice and social transformation to the

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<sup>29</sup> The best exposition of the aims and daily life at ACI is in Fretheim, *Kwame Bediako and African Christian Scholarship*, chapter 6, "Reading the Akrofi-Christaller Institute as Text: Bediako's Magnum Opus," 148–190. Fretheim enrolled as a student at ACI, so she writes this chapter as a participant observer.

<sup>30</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 16.

<sup>31</sup> M. Bediako, "New Wine in New Wineskins," 17.



status of potential “effects” of the Gospel rather than being integral to the Gospel.<sup>32</sup>

This group decided to form their own network and develop their own mission theology. They held their first international conference on Christology in Bangkok in 1982,<sup>33</sup> and in 1983 the group, led by Chris Sugden and Vinay Samuel, established the Oxford Centre for Mission Studies (OCMS). Its agenda included conferences and seminars on holistic mission theology. By 1996 OCMS was offering non-residential postgraduate degree programs. In 1984 the group founded a journal, *Transformation*, and in 1987 they added Regnum Books. That year they also incorporated as the International Fellowship of Evangelical Mission Theologians (INFEMIT).<sup>34</sup> The creative duo of Samuel and Sugden led these pioneering efforts. Yet INFEMIT was in effect a worldwide alliance of regional networks, most notably the Latin American Theological Fraternity, led by René Padilla (1932–2021) and Samuel Escobar (b. 1934). Kwame Bediako was a party to all these initiatives of INFEMIT, which he served as a board member. He also published with Regnum books, wrote articles for *Transformation*, lectured at OCMS, and helped to lead INFEMIT conferences.<sup>35</sup> INFEMIT was not Bediako’s only international network, but it was an abiding one for him, and an inspiration for the network that he developed for Africa.

### ***African Theological Fellowship***

Beginning with his student days at the London Bible College and then at the University of Aberdeen, Bediako built relationships with like-minded African peers. One of his most important early contacts was David Gitari (1937–2013), an Anglican priest from Kenya who eventually became archbishop. The two men got to know each other during the Lausanne Congress and ensuing consultations, and together they participated in the founding of INFEMIT in

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<sup>32</sup> Bediako, “World Evangelization,” 53–64. See also C. René Padilla, “Evangelism and Social Responsibility from Wheaton ’66 to Wheaton ’83;” and Chris Sugden, “Evangelicals and Wholistic Evangelism,” 29–51.

<sup>33</sup> See the resulting volume, *Sharing Jesus in the Two Thirds World: Evangelical Christologies*, edited by Chris Sugden and Vinay Samuel; and see Bediako’s chapter, “Biblical Christologies in the Context of African Traditional Religion,” 81–121.

<sup>34</sup> Al Tizon, *Transformation after Lausanne: Radical Evangelical Mission in Local-Global Perspective*, 71–97.

<sup>35</sup> One memorable role he played was as a co-drafter of a declaration, “Freedom and Justice in Church-State Relations,” which was ratified by the participants of an INFEMIT conference held in Osijek, Croatia, in April 1991. It was a delicate balancing act, since the newly added Eastern European delegates at the conference wanted nothing to do with Marxist thinking, while the Latin American delegates were keen to critique Western capitalism. See “The Declaration of Osijek, ‘Freedom and Justice in Church State Relationships.’” For a brief assessment of the meeting, see Ward and Laurel Gasque, “‘Third World’ Theologians Meet.”

1987, with Gitari becoming its board chair. Even before that, however, at an INFEMIT consultation in Tlayacapan, Mexico in 1984, the African Theological Fellowship (ATF) was formed with Gitari as its chair and Bediako as its general secretary.<sup>36</sup>

The ATF developed around three regional centers. St. Andrew's College of Theology and Development, founded by David Gitari, was in Kabare, Kenya; the Evangelical Theological House of Studies (ETHOS), which was affiliated with the theology faculty of the University of KwaZulu Natal in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. It was led by Anthony Balcomb. In western Africa, ACOM was the regional center. ATF's conferencing, publications, and mentoring began to quicken in the 1990s as the network received funding from the Pew Charitable Trusts. In 1995, Francophone Africa added leaders and institutions to the network, and with the ATF's blessing, ACOM began to develop master's and doctoral degree programs conjointly with the University of KwaZulu Natal. The ATF was now running at full steam with regular conferences, themed collaborative studies, a newsletter, and over 90 African mission scholar pastors and theologians on its mailing list. Gitari remained the chair, but ACOM was the administrative center.<sup>37</sup>

### ***African Theological Initiative***

One of Kwame Bediako's early contacts in African theology was Tite Tiénou (b. 1949), a Bible institute director from Burkina Faso. They met at the Lausanne sponsored "Willowbank" conference in early 1978. By the early 1990s, Tiénou, with a planning grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts, was developing a program to strengthen theological scholarship and education in Africa. When he convened a planning meeting in London in 1991, he made sure that Kwame Bediako was there. Pew made a grant of \$2 million for the African Theological Initiative (ATI), and Tiénou, now the founding dean of a new postgraduate theological school in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, directed the ATI and named Bediako to chair its advisory and selection committee. When Tiénou and his family had to flee Côte d'Ivoire in 1997 during a wave of anti-foreign violence, Bediako took over as the ATI's director. Until its funding expired in 2002, the ATI made dozens of grants for Ph.D. support, sabbatical research and writing projects, library expansion, conferences, continuing education, and other capacity building projects. It was a bold program, Tiénou recalled, that was run by Africans, for Africans, and on African terms.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> "Introducing the ATF," *ATF Bulletin* no. 1 (October 1995): 1.

<sup>37</sup> "Introducing the ATF," Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 19–20, 22.

<sup>38</sup> Tite Tiénou, "Church and Theological Education: Legacies of the African Theological Initiative; Tenth Kwame Bediako Memorial Lecture, 13 June 2018."

### ***Publishing Initiatives***

One of the components of the Pew-funded project to strengthen the ATF was the development of publishing. In 1995, ACMC opened an editorial office for a new imprint of INFEMIT's Regnum Books: Regnum Africa, and Mary Bediako became the editor.<sup>39</sup> Regnum Africa has developed its portfolio at a slow pace, but it continues. ACMC's adventure with journal publishing began in 1998. With startup funding from the ATI, ACMC established the *Journal of African Christian Thought* (JACT). The ATI provided a natural constituency, and so did the ATF. The first issue published selected papers from the summary conference of a multi-year ATF study program, "The Church in the African State: Towards the 21<sup>st</sup> Century."<sup>40</sup> African theological and religious studies programs have created many journals through the years, but most have not survived. JACT is now a quarter-century old. Its circulation is not large, but it is indexed by several global databases.

### ***Special Projects***

As Kwame Bediako's notoriety as a theologian grew, his speaking circuits afforded him increasing opportunities to engage in projects, personally or via the ACMC. Here are just a few examples. In early 1993, as Bediako was in Edinburgh fulfilling his annual lecturing duties, he was able to enroll the ACMC library in Prof. Walls' Pew-funded African Christianity Project's "Library Resource Development Scheme." Bediako then spoke at the Hendrik Kraemer Institute in the Netherlands, where he also enrolled the ACMC in a library development scheme. He also became an adviser of projects that ACMC did not house. In June he was in the U.S. for an advisory board meeting for the Mission Research Development Project. Then in November he was in Nairobi, serving as a theological consultant at a World Vision Africa Directors' Conference.<sup>41</sup> Reports in the early 2000s show continuing international travel and speaking. In 2001 Bediako spoke at meetings of both the Wycliffe Bible Translators and the United Bible Societies and conversed with their leaders about how ACMC might serve their needs to train and equip new translators.<sup>42</sup> ACMC and the Bediako household thus were continually abuzz with new opportunities to serve.

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<sup>39</sup> Kwame Bediako, "Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre Report for 1995," 300; Bediako, "Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre Report — 1996," 328. These annual reports were presented to the annual synods of Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG).

<sup>40</sup> "Editorial," *Journal of African Christian Thought* 1:1 (June 1998), 1.

<sup>41</sup> Bediako, "Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology Report for 1993 to Synod," 235.

<sup>42</sup> Bediako, "Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research & Applied Theology Report for 2001 to the 2nd General Assembly – 2002," 377.

## II. How Bediako Did It

### Networking and Friend-making

Being a scholar can be a lonely business, especially in text-driven fields like theology and the humanities. Research and writing projects take long hours alone at a desk or in a library. People who excel at such work do learn to communicate with others and disseminate their discoveries. Yet these fields seem to attract introverts who tend to treat networking, promotion, and advocacy as secondary skills, not as primary ones.

Kwame Bediako was not made like that. From his earliest days as a scholar, he was someone who could stir things up and get things moving. He was named head prefect of his secondary school in his final year. At the university he was politically active and vocal, at one point publishing a four-page newspaper.<sup>43</sup> After his dramatic conversion while a graduate student at Bordeaux, he caught the attention of campus missionaries. After enrolling in LBC, he met the general secretary of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, Chua Wee Hian (b. 1939), who nominated him as a student delegate to the Lausanne Congress in 1974. The following year while at LBC, he and John Howell, an Australian student, organized a missions conference and invited Andrew Walls to come and give a talk. Walls spoke about the rise of Christianity in Africa, and he argued that it was becoming the new Christian heartland. For Bediako that thought was life-changing, and it led him three years later to apply to Walls for doctoral study in Aberdeen.<sup>44</sup>

Bediako's time in Aberdeen brought him into the Christian intellectual ferment there that engaged Walls, African church historian Adrian Hastings (1929–2001), Gambian Islamist Lamin Sanneh (1942–2019), and Harold W. Turner (1911–2002), a religion scholar from New Zealand. Aberdeen was the seedbed of the three main ideas that Bediako pursued: Christians' search for cultural identity, the Gospel's radical translatability, and the generative power of primal religions. But for Bediako, Aberdeen—and his annual lectureships at Edinburgh afterward—also introduced him to the networks of British and European mission theology, including mission study centers in Germany, the Netherlands, and Norway. The Rev. S. K. Aboa, a church diplomat for the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, who first met Bediako in Aberdeen, also introduced Bediako to the PCG's missions-minded friends in European sister churches. And among the Bediakos' student friends at Aberdeen were Tim and Kerry Dearborn, who traversed American and Canadian networks of “world

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<sup>43</sup> Asamoah-Gyadu, “Bediako of Africa,” 10–11; Walls, “Kwame Bediako,” 188–189; Bernhard Dinkelaker, *How Is Jesus Christ Lord? Reading Kwame Bediako from a Postcolonial and Intercontextual Perspective*, 126–127.

<sup>44</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 5–6.

Christian” evangelicals. Bediako eagerly engaged these opportunities to learn, but at the same time he was broadening his networks.<sup>45</sup>

One prime illustration of Kwame Bediako’s networking prowess comes from the founding of the ACMC. Bediako was summoned by PCG leaders in 1984 to become pastor of the Ridge Church, an ecumenical Protestant congregation in Accra. Ridge Church had been the parish home of expatriates in Accra for business, educational or diplomatic service. By the time Bediako arrived, it had also become a church full of influential Ghanaians. From Ridge Church’s parishioners and from their networks of friends, Bediako put together a very influential board of trustees for his new venture. The board chair was Dr. Emmanuel Evans-Anfom (1919–2021), a distinguished physician who had been Ghana’s commissioner of health and the vice-chancellor of the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology. S. K. Aboa was the vice-chair, and another board member and its main legal adviser, Yeboa Aboa, was the founder and director of the Ghana Stock Exchange. When the ACMC made its inaugural public appearance in 1986, the ceremony took place in the British Council Hall in Accra, with speeches from the ambassadors of Switzerland, Germany, and Great Britain. Representatives came from both the Akrofi and the Christaller families, the general secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana was there, and so was Prof. Kwesi Dickson (1929–2005), the most distinguished theologian at the University of Ghana. Oseadeeyo Addo Dankwa III, regional king of Akropong-Akuapem, also attended.<sup>46</sup> Recall that this new Centre being celebrated so grandly had only two employees—Kwame and Mary. These dignitaries came to honor essentially what was the compelling vision behind this little ‘Mom & Pop shop.’ Without a doubt, Kwame knew how to network and to win friends, and he continued to exercise that gift throughout his ministry.

### ***Linkages and Partnerships***

Building personal relationships via networking is a very valuable tool for endeavors, but if these personal relationships are going to be productive in any sustained way, an important second step is to see them blossom into longer-term inter-institutional commitments. We see these kinds of relationships developing frequently in Kwame Bediako’s career. ATF and INFEMIT are classic cases of longer-term partnerships that started with the cadre of “radical discipleship” mission theologians that first met via the Lausanne movement and took on lasting institutional form.

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<sup>45</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 7; Video interview of Mary Bediako with the author, 30 April 2021.

<sup>46</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 10; Bediako, “Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology Report to Presbyterian Church of Ghana Synod, August 1987,” 144.

The partnership between ACMC and the theology faculty of UKZN is another. It began with ATF and the friendship between the Bediakos and Anthony Balcomb and Moss Nthla of ETHOS, and other radical evangelicals in South Africa. When Balcomb and Nthla heard that Bediako had been talking with INFEMIT leaders about collaborating with OCMS in England, they encouraged him to think about a program that was fully based in Africa. As we have seen, a partnership with UKZN emerged, it lasted for seven years, and it enabled ACMC to establish postgraduate degree programs.<sup>47</sup>

Another long-term and mutually beneficial set of partnerships came out of ACMC's relationship with a cluster of mission-and-renewal oriented agencies among Lutherans in southern Germany. The main bodies were the Association of Churches and Mission of Southwest Germany (EMS), and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Wuerttemberg, both in Stuttgart; and the Wornersberger Anker, a community within the Wuerttemberg Church specializing in spiritual renewal, discipleship training and leadership development. Rev. Aboa and Andrew Walls introduced Bediako to these German evangelicals. They were deeply impressed with him and the ACMC vision, and over a decade they supported several important projects: a new Toyota SUV, the renovation of Basel House and the Akropong Seminary facilities, desktop computing, and a new student hostel and dining hall. Support for these and other projects also came from Dutch Protestant church agencies, notably the Hendrik Kraemer Institute and the Board of Missions.<sup>48</sup>

Perhaps the most striking feature of these relationships was that they were reciprocal. Bediako was convinced that what he had learned as a theologian about Christianity in Africa was powerfully instructive for all Christians, not just for Africans, and he was not shy about sharing his discoveries with others. Africans need not always be beggars, he insisted. They have so much to offer.<sup>49</sup> Therefore he spoke at gatherings of European church groups almost every year, and several times their leaders commissioned the ACMC to conduct gospel-and-culture seminars, either for European guests or for networks of sister churches throughout Africa.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 22–25.

<sup>48</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 10–11, 14–15.

<sup>49</sup> See, e.g., Bediako, *Christianity in Africa*, chapter 14, “The Place of Africa in a Changing World: The Christian Factor,” 252–267; and Bediako, “A New Era in Christian History—African Christianity as Representative Christianity: Some Implications for Theological Education and Scholarship,” *Journal of African Christian Thought* 9:1 (June 2006): 3–12.

<sup>50</sup> Bediako, “Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology Report for 1989 to PCG Synod, August 1990,” 188; Bediako, “Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre Report for 1992,” 313–314; Bediako, “Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre Report —1996,” 329; Bediako, “Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research & Applied Theology Report for 1999,” 188. See also Hans Visser, “The Influence of Kwame Bediako in the Netherlands,” 95–96.

### ***Fund-Raising***

This offer of mutual benefit was one of the keystones of Bediako's achievements as a fund-raiser. Even as a startup organization in the late 1980s, Kwame and Mary readily gave of themselves to potential partners and funders. Kwame lectured regularly at home and abroad to many Christian groups, and Mary organized and crafted many of the materials that were used in the events that the ACMC hosted. As the ACMC's staff and capabilities grew, they could offer even more programs and services. The promise that many more good things would happen because of funding for projects or facilities was a critical ingredient of proposals from the ACMC. Being faithful (and proficient) during their early days in "small things," as Mary Bediako put it, gave assurances to ACMC's prospective funding partners that they would succeed with the next step in project scale or complexity.<sup>51</sup>

Another critical aspect of Kwame Bediako's achievements as a fund-raiser was his success right at home in Ghana. International funding agencies have seen endeavors in lower-income nations that are built on foreign funds eventually collapse once the donor interest wanes. The ACMC, however, relied on a network of Ghanaian Christian professionals and businesspeople. For the first seven or eight years, the PCG donated facilities and paid salaries, but beyond that startup funding, ACMC found the ways and means to support its activities. Ghana is not a high-income nation, but its networks of Christian businesspeople and professionals have resources to offer, and ACMC did not let external funding drive away local support. The Bediakos' initial contacts with people of means and influence via Ridge Church spread out from there along the networks of evangelical parachurch ministries, such as the Full Gospel Businessmen, and to this day, ACI regularly holds fundraising events.<sup>52</sup>

### ***Vision-casting***

No one who was acquainted with Kwame Bediako can avoid mentioning his personal qualities, and certainly his charm and persuasiveness mattered in his developmental work. He was not a large man, but he had a large and warm personality, and he projected what he cared about in very dramatic and compelling ways. He loved to teach, preach, and talk, and he was artful at it, using his voice and body as instruments. His presentations were like musical compositions in their thematic and rhythmic progression, and they certainly were stirring.<sup>53</sup> Even so, Bediako's delivery was doubly powerful because he had

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<sup>51</sup> Bediako and Bediako, *Ebenezer*, 15–16.

<sup>52</sup> Video conversation, the author with Prof. Benhardt Quarshie, ACI rector, 23 September 2023. Quarshie informed the author that he was headed off the next day to a fund-raising event sponsored by a cluster of local churches.

<sup>53</sup> See, e.g., Asamoah-Gyadu "Bediako of Africa," 9–10; Watson Omulokoli, "Kwame Bediako, A Deeply Christian Scholar, and the Implications of His Example," 82–83;

a compelling vision to project: the center of the Christian faith has shifted. Africa is the new Christian heartland. The quality of Christian thinking and practice now increasingly depend on what might arise in Africa. And Bediako saw in African Christianity such potential depth, power, and integrity that it could bless and enliven Christianity worldwide.

Yet he also saw a theological crisis in Africa. The continent was experiencing “the proliferation of Bible schools” with “models and methods imported wholesale from elsewhere” which “appear not to connect with the redeeming, transforming activity of the Living God in the African setting.” African Christianity sat at a crossroads, he believed, so he had set about “recapturing the central place of theological reflection and insight...for the nurture of Christian lives and minds and for the equipping of the people of God and the transformation of society.”<sup>54</sup> And what African Christian thinkers were rediscovering about the cultural translation of the gospel and the spiritual underpinnings of primal religious consciousness was that these were pearls of great price for the church worldwide. In the West, Bediako insisted, such insights have been “neglected and unused in theological education and Christian scholarship.”<sup>55</sup> So the quest was to see the very best of Christian thinking and teaching arise in Africa, shape the faith there, and then guide the whole Christian world. That was the heart of Bediako’s vision, and he delivered it with great eloquence for audiences close to home and around the world. His organizing, institution-and-network building and his friend-and-fund-raising all rode on this mighty challenge.

### **III. Why It Matters**

Given Kwame Bediako’s intellectual prowess and originality, most Christian thinkers who encounter him want to lean into his teaching and scholarship. It is deeply valuable thinking, and Christian scholars who engage it will profit from it. But near the end of his life, Bediako insisted that his own theologizing wasn’t his most important calling. He believed that “the practice of Christian scholarship is the nurture of a living community of scholars and much less the nurture of one’s individual career.”<sup>56</sup> He spent his career nurturing scholars, both at Akropong and around the world, and he made it his business to build and support the basic undercarriage for this community of scholars. Bediako was an organizer, a promoter, and a builder who worked long, hard,

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and see especially “Kwame Bediako: His Life and Legacy,” a video documentary produced by James Ault.

<sup>54</sup> Bediako, “The African Renaissance and Theological Reconstruction: The Challenge of the Twenty-first Century,” 29.

<sup>55</sup> Bediako, “‘Why Has the Summer Ended and We are not Saved?’” 5.

<sup>56</sup> Kwame Bediako, “Andrew F. Walls as Mentor,” 9.



and effectively to strengthen the infrastructure for Christian scholarship, in Africa and beyond.

According to Mary Bediako, Kwame “often lamented that Africa has never lacked brilliant individuals but has had few enabling institutions in which such individuals might find space to develop and flourish.”<sup>57</sup> And indeed, the African Christian scholarly enterprise is still thin and fragile compared to its counterparts elsewhere in the world.<sup>58</sup> Starting up more Bible schools for Africa was not the solution. Too many of them were running on imported ideas and practices, and very few were developing the foundations for original African scholarship: well-educated and creative faculty members, funding for research and writing, library and archival development, associational networks, conferences and seminars, and journal and book publishing. African Christian thinking needs this equipage. Kwame Bediako saw the need and by God’s grace, he went after it. Africa needs more theological entrepreneurs. Who will answer the call?

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<sup>57</sup> Gillian Mary Bediako, “Reflections on the Scholarship of Kwame Bediako and its Importance for African Theology,” 21. I hope that it has been clear throughout this essay that it is impossible to think of Kwame Bediako’s work without seeing his creative and industrious partner, Gillian Mary Bediako, by his side, co-laboring for the same ends.

<sup>58</sup> See, e.g., Chammah Kaunda, “Checking Out the Future: A Perspective from African Theological Education.” Kaunda analyzes the implications for Africa of the Global Survey on Theological Education, sponsored by the World Council of Churches and conducted between 2011 and 2013.

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