

Journal
of
African
Christian
Thought



**Vol. 1. No. 1
June 1998**

*The Church in the African State
towards the twenty-first century*

Journal of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre
for Mission Research and Applied Theology, Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana

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is a publication of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology, P.O. Box 76, Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana. Tel/Fax: +233-27-556718 E-mail: akrofi@africaonline.com.gh

It is published bi-annually, in June and December. ISSN: 0855-3262

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€24,000 for one year; €46,000 for two years; €66,000 for three years, postpaid.

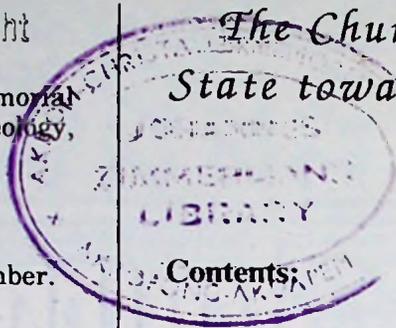
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The cover design is based on Adinkra symbols, which are found in West Africa, especially in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana. Each symbol has a distinctive proverbial or religious meaning. Adinkra means "farewell" and so Adinkra cloth, that is cloth stamped with Adinkra symbols, is usually worn at funerals, as a way of bidding farewell to the deceased.



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Editorial

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the maiden issue of the *Journal of African Christian Thought*. The journal is a new Initiative of the Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre for Mission Research and Applied Theology, a post-graduate institution established by the Presbyterian Church of Ghana in 1987. The objective was to enhance and undergird the reflection and action of the wider Christian community through the development of documentary and oral resources, research facilities and post-graduate study, and the provision of training programmes for pastors and lay leaders of churches to equip them for more effective mission in the African context.

Akrofi-Christaller Centre participates in a variety of networks across Africa, networks of persons engaged in mission, and of institutions that train for Christian ministry in Africa. The Centre was in 1997 selected as a pace-setting institution by the African Theological Initiative (ATI), a programme established with support from the Pew Charitable Trusts to assist capacity-building in key theological institutions across the African continent. Criteria that mark institutions as pace-setting for the ATI include striving for a positive and enduring impact on the church and society in Africa, encouraging research relevant to curriculum development and the needs of the broader African church community, having a region- or continent-wide impact, and contributing to the development of other theological institutions in its region and in Africa as a whole. The *Journal of African Christian Thought*, established through ATI assistance, will provide a forum for the theological reflection and interaction generated through the ATI and other African networks and will, it is hoped, make a vital contribution to the dissemination of African Christian thought, both scholarly and practical, throughout Africa and further afield. This becomes an important task, given the new religious and theological issues generated by the resurgence of Christian faith in its new heartlands in the South, especially Africa.

Another of the networks with which Akrofi-Christaller Centre is associated, is the African Theological Fellowship (ATF). The ATF is a network of African Christian theologians, mission practitioners and Christian intellectuals of evangelical persuasion, committed to serving the Churches in Africa and the nations of which they are a part, through excellence in research and Christian scholarship. It is committed to rigorous intellectual engagement with the socio-political, cultural and religious realities of the African context, and seeks, through concerted effort, to apply the fruits of Christian learning in the life of the Christian community and beyond.

The ATF shows its commitment to Africa by encouraging its members to live and work in the African context, and to develop the intellectual and spiritual tools to engage with African realities. As an academic network, the ATF is committed to interacting with African religious, intellectual and socio-cultural currents of thought, in order to strengthen the capacity of the Christian community to address these with the Christian Gospel. The

ATF seeks consciously to be a fellowship across boundaries, whether denominational, linguistic or cultural.

As a means to achieving its objectives of relating the Christian Gospel to the socio-political realities of Africa, the ATF initiated in 1995 a study process on "The Church in the African State towards the 21st century" in three sub-regions, West, East and Southern Africa. Sub-regional feeder conferences were held, in preparation for a major continental gathering that took place at Akrofi-Christaller Centre in September 1997.

The present issue of the Journal contains many of the papers that were presented at that conference. The strength of the conference lay in the breadth and vigour of the interaction that the papers provoked, and the stimulation that resulted from exposure to the challenges to Christian engagement posed by other African contexts. These cannot be captured here, but the papers themselves constitute an up-to-date response to African realities and an assessment of the Church's impact in nation-building and the establishment of civil society by persons themselves committed to the process. They also reveal the unity in diversity that is characteristic of Africa, in terms of shared concerns, the realisation of the key role the Church can play in promoting democratic ideals and processes, and a general consensus that the demographic profile of Christianity on the continent needs to be translated into a major force for social and moral transformation.

The scope of the treatment of the theme was also significant, in reflecting the multifaceted issues inherent in the Church's presence and participation in African states. It was also a tangible outworking of the concern of the ATF to address social issues from a perspective as broad and deep as possible, taking into consideration biblical, historical, theological and sociological factors and taking seriously also the place and role of women as key figures in the African Church. The Conference Statement highlights the salient points of consensus reached during this stimulating conference.

The participation of Andrew F. Walls, founding Director of the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World, University of Edinburgh, and his Keynote Address, were indicative of the ATF concern to interpret the African Christian story as an integral part of the twenty centuries of Christian history and to understand Africa's contribution to world Christianity.

This found its counterpart in the closing address in which Kwame Bediako highlighted the ascetic and deeply spiritual nature of earliest African Christianity, and suggested that the way to a similar Christian impact in the social and political transformation of modern Africa, the way to the discipling of the nations, may be through a rediscovery of the dedicated life, forged in the interface of mother-tongue Scriptures with African cultural and socio-political realities.

