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*The Bible and Theological Education
in Africa
(in honour of
Professor Emeritus Kwesi A. Dickson)*

Journal of Akrofi-Christaller Institute of Theology, Mission and Culture
Akropong-Akuapem, Ghana

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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 *Adinkra* cloth, that is, cloth stamped with *Adinkra* symbols, is usually worn at funerals as a way of bidding farewell to the deceased.

The Bible and Theological Education in Africa

(In honour of Professor Emeritus
Kwesi A. Dickson)

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Themes of future issues:

Vol. 11, No. 1 (June 2008)
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Vol. 11, No. 2 (December 2008)
Methodology in Gospel and Culture Research



Guest Editorial

On 25 June 2008, I received a telephone call from Professor Gillian Mary Bediako, editor of the *Journal of African Christian Thought*, asking if I would write the Guest Editorial for the issue (Vol. 10, No. 2, December 2007) devoted to the memory of Professor Emeritus Kwesi A. Dickson. The late Professor Kwame Bediako was to have written the Guest Editorial, but was not able to do so before he was called home to be at rest with the triune God.

Although this issue of *JACT* is devoted to the memory of Professor Dickson, in writing this Guest Editorial, I wish to extend that recognition to Professor Kwame Bediako as well. For their thought and work meet at many points and enrich our understanding of African Christianity. As I reflect on their lives and their work, and especially on the volume of essays in this issue, I would like to draw attention to four areas, which provide, in fact, the main reasons that I was moved to accept this invitation.

First, I accepted to write this Guest Editorial because it offers me an opportunity to pay tribute to these two great Christian gentlemen whose friendship my family had the privilege to share in and enjoy. They both loved Christ deeply, the Source and Provider of life in all its abundance, and they radiated that love and the joy that accompanies it in all their relationships. In my own faith journey in academic work and leadership in the church, I have benefited tremendously from the scholarship of these two great minds of Africa. I have drawn much inspiration from their writings. Their insights into African life and thought and their ability to allow their knowledge of the cultures and the peoples of Africa to inform their understanding and interpretation of the Bible will remain one of their lasting legacies to African Christianity and the international Christian community. The collection of essays in this issue of *JACT* by eminent African theologians merely serves to confirm my convictions about them.

The second reason is that these two African Christian theologians and churchmen in their different spheres of Christian witness offered exemplary Christian leadership in humility and with distinction. They were more willing to serve than to be served, in both their pastoral and academic engagements. When they each stressed the importance of the mother tongue in our understanding and interpretation of Scripture, and, indeed, committed themselves to the study of the Bible in the mother tongue, they did so with the conviction that they were servants of Christ rendering service to the church of Christ. It is significant that all who have contributed articles in this issue have acknowledged the unique place that Professor Dickson gave to the mother tongue in doing theology and his extensive use of cultural insights as a vehicle of biblical understanding in his teaching and preaching. Kwame Bediako's life and work was also devoted to this engagement.

The third area I wish to highlight is the importance that the two African theologians placed on the Bible as the word of God transmitted through human words. Both scholars believed that the Bible is the authoritative revealed word of God to humanity, which needs to be received with respect, translated into the mother tongue and interpreted, so that all may comprehend God's plan and purpose for the world. As an outcome of this conviction, these two African theologians affirmed the Bible as essential for African Christian theologising. For them, the Bible, properly understood, serves as the basis for faith and moral absolutes.

Holding and maintaining such a high view of Scripture derived from their belief that the Scriptures are a key factor in church growth, both in numbers and in depth of faith. In other words, the major reason for the growth of the church in Africa, which has led to the shift of the centre of gravity of Christianity to the South, is the central place that African Christians give to the Bible. Both Dickson and Bediako believed and preached this truth. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu's article makes this point clearly and forcefully:

If Christianity is growing in Africa, it is partly because in African pulpits and homes, the Bible has found 'refuge' as the authoritative word of God, not simply in terms of contents but also in terms of its place as sacred material that must be handled with reverence and awe. For the Bible to be rightly interpreted, it needs to be approached first and foremost as sacred material, with its contents understood as the source of revelation from a living God.¹

My fourth reason for agreeing to write the Guest Editorial in memory of Professor Dickson is that neither Dickson nor Bediako ever engaged in the study of the Bible and African life and thought merely as an academic exercise. Both had incisive minds and innovative capabilities, and they used these gifts as tools because they believed that proper understanding and appropriation of Christian truth must lead to transformation of human life, culture and the entire environment, including social, political, economic and spiritual life. African Christian theology must therefore seek to answer the deep questions that confront Africans in their daily life and work. Christian theology must be transformational in content and in power or it ceases to be Christian theology. Abraham Akropong's essay, 'The Challenges of Theological Education in Ghana', captures this truth, when he writes,

The principles of transformation theology that can link personal transformation to social transformation should be at the heart of theological education in Ghana. Such a principle of theological education will be able to direct the mission of the church to embrace the totality of the human experience in its broken forms and at crisis points in our society.²