

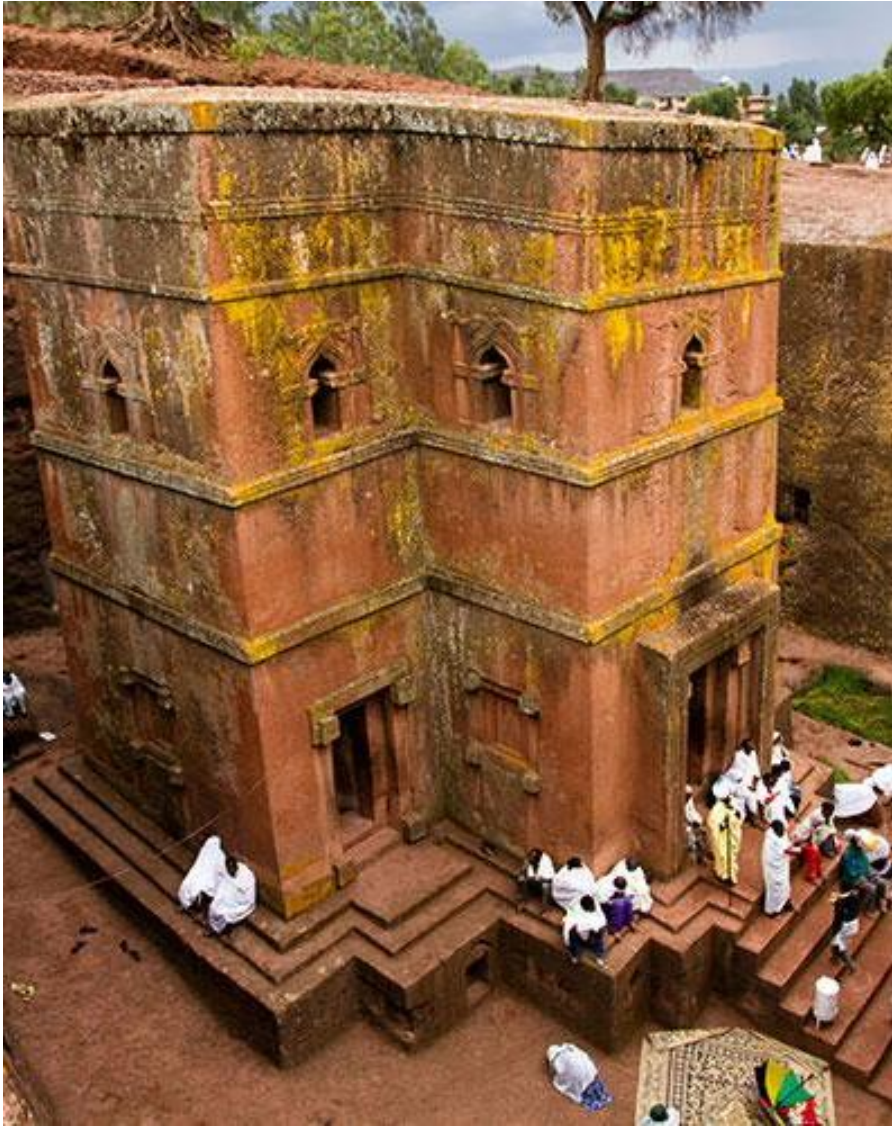
Theological Education Association OF SOUTHERN AFRICA

TEASA Consultation 2023 Workshop 1

**How is African Theology different from or equal to Western Theology?
Dr Jacob Igba (Given Collen, Research Assistant)**

Content

1. Bible reflection
2. The quest for a definitive African theology: the agenda approaches
3. Western theology: Key trajectories and agenda-shaping moments
4. What then is the task of theology?
5. African theology & Western theology : Convergence and divergence
6. Discussions/Questions/Comments
7. Conclusion



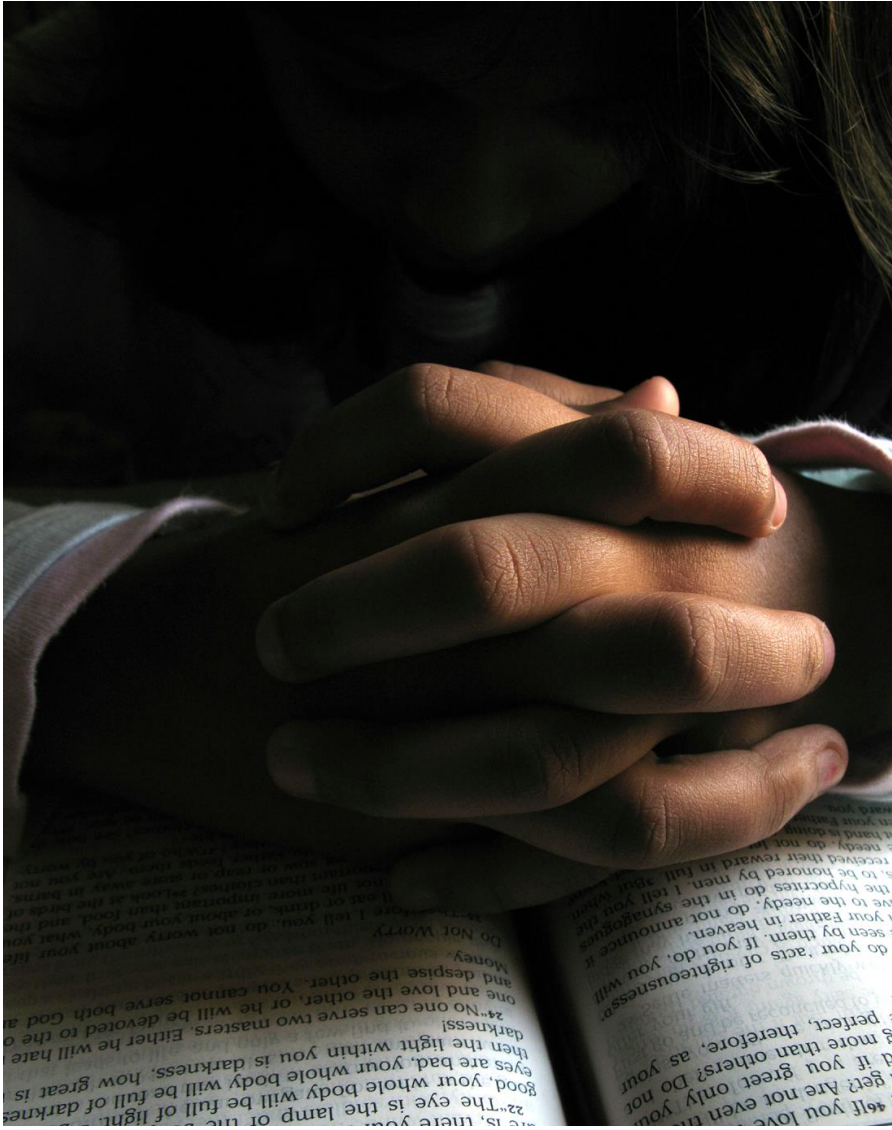
- A. Bible reflection: The Gospel transplanted into Africa. Acts 8:26-40**
- **The Ethiopian Eunuch: Converted from Law based religion (Gentile convert to Judaism?) to the Gospel of Christ**
 - **The true Gospel taken by an African into Africa (Not a white man's religion)**
 - **11/12 Century rock hewn churches as evidence**

A. Bible reflection: The Gospel transplanted into Africa. Acts 8:26-40

- I. The vital place of the ministry of Theological Educators as a calling in Africa

- II. The vital place of the ministry of Theological Educators as facilitators of learning/understanding in Africa

- III. Right knowledge/understanding>right thinking>right belief>leads to right action ultimately leading to a just society.



- **B. The quest for a definitive African theology: the agenda and methodological approaches**

...If Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like...? (Taylor, 1963:16)

- **Setting the Agenda: 3 Key voices**

John S Mbiti

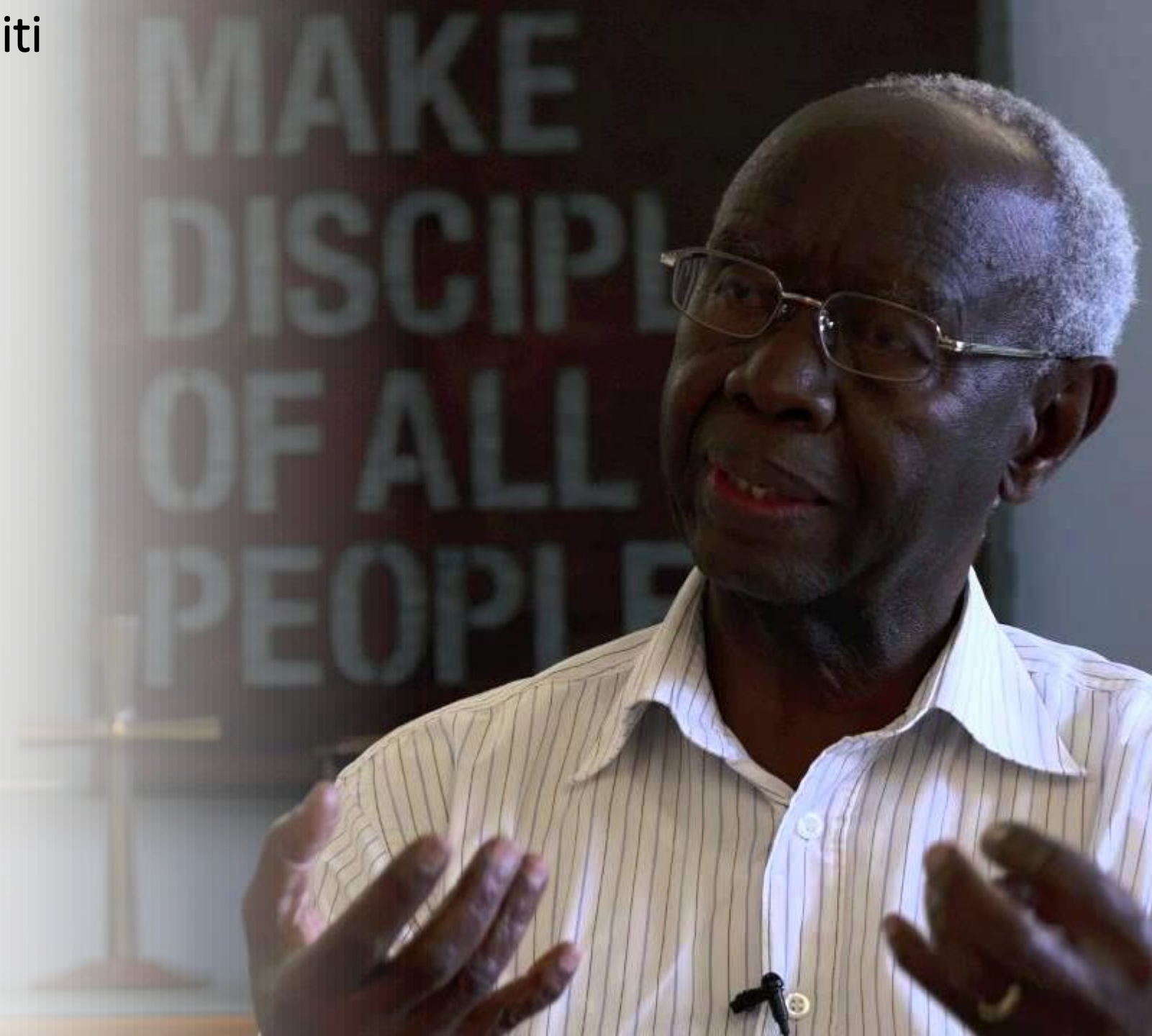
Byang Kato

Kwame Bediako



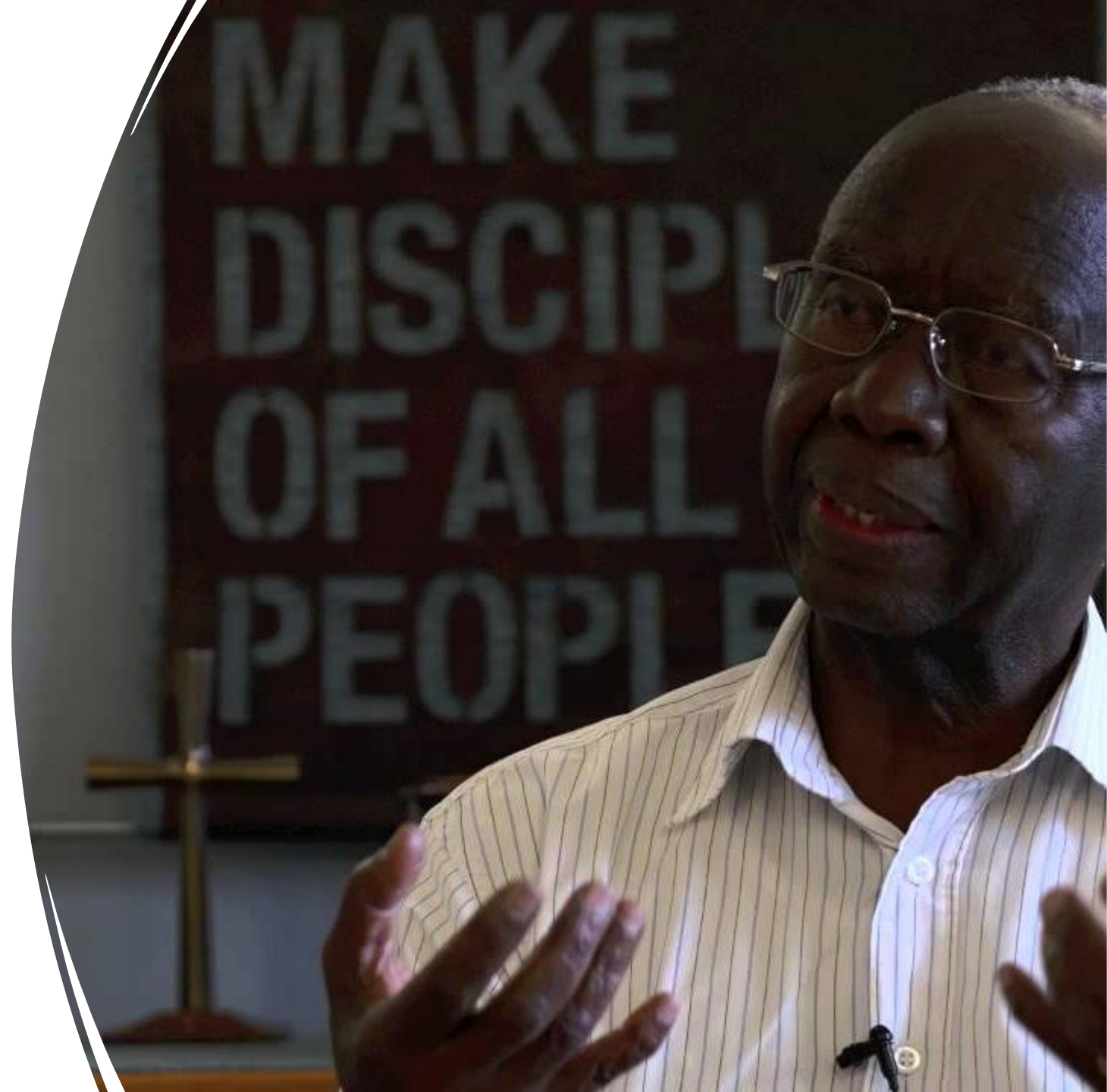
Setting the Agenda: J S. Mbiti (1931–2019)

- Originally from Kenya and educated at the University of Cambridge
- Ecumenical Anglican
- Richard Gehman (1987: 54) says any study on “African Christian theology is incomplete without careful consideration of John Mbiti”.



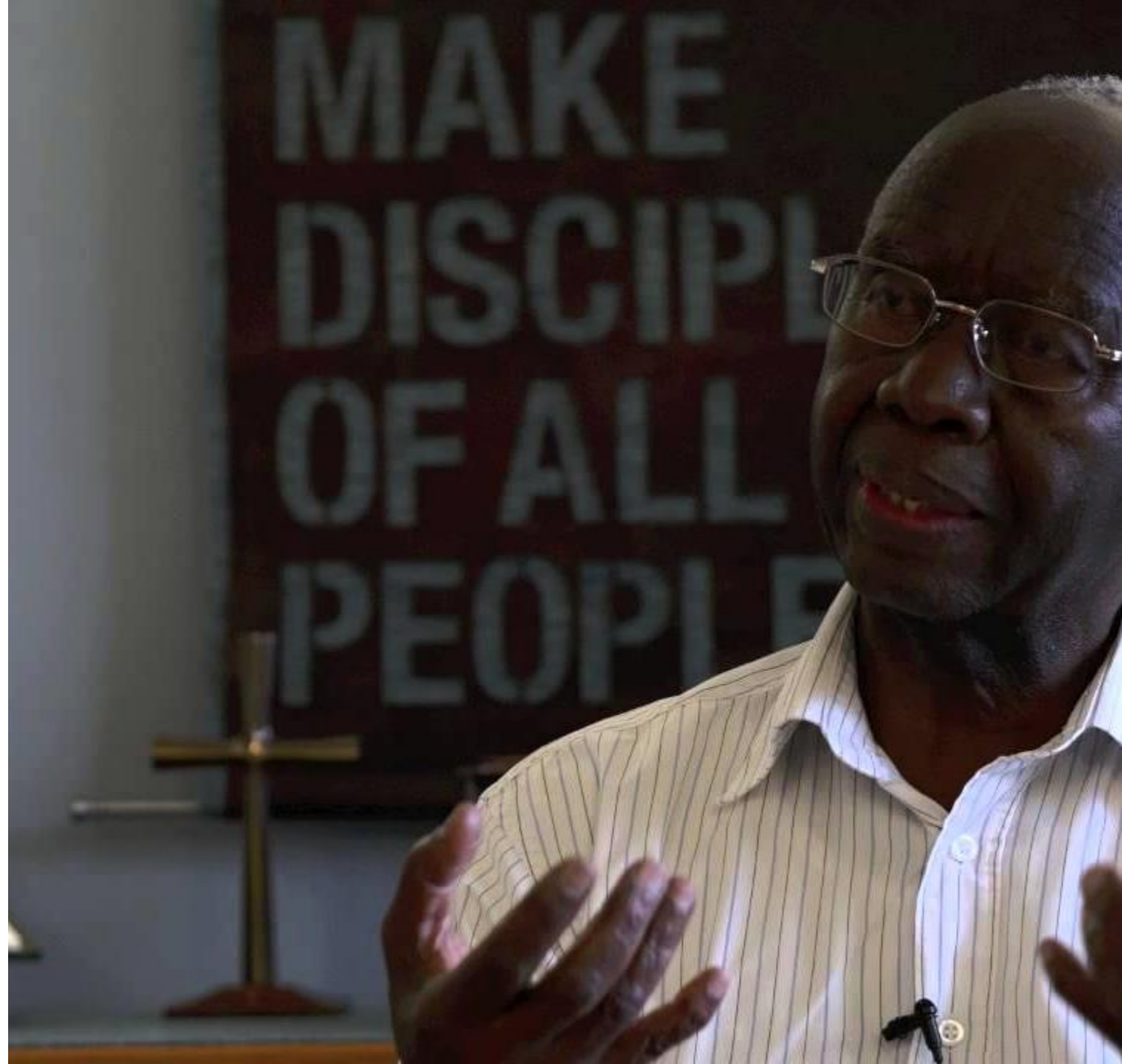
Mbiti's major Concern:

- What is this Christianity like in Africa?
- Mbiti (1969: 233-234) observes that mission Christianity in Africa has remained superficial being only concerned with:
 - a set of rules to be observed
 - promises to be expected in the next world
 - rhythmless hymns to be sung
 - rituals to be followed and a few other outward things.



The theological agenda set by Mbiti:

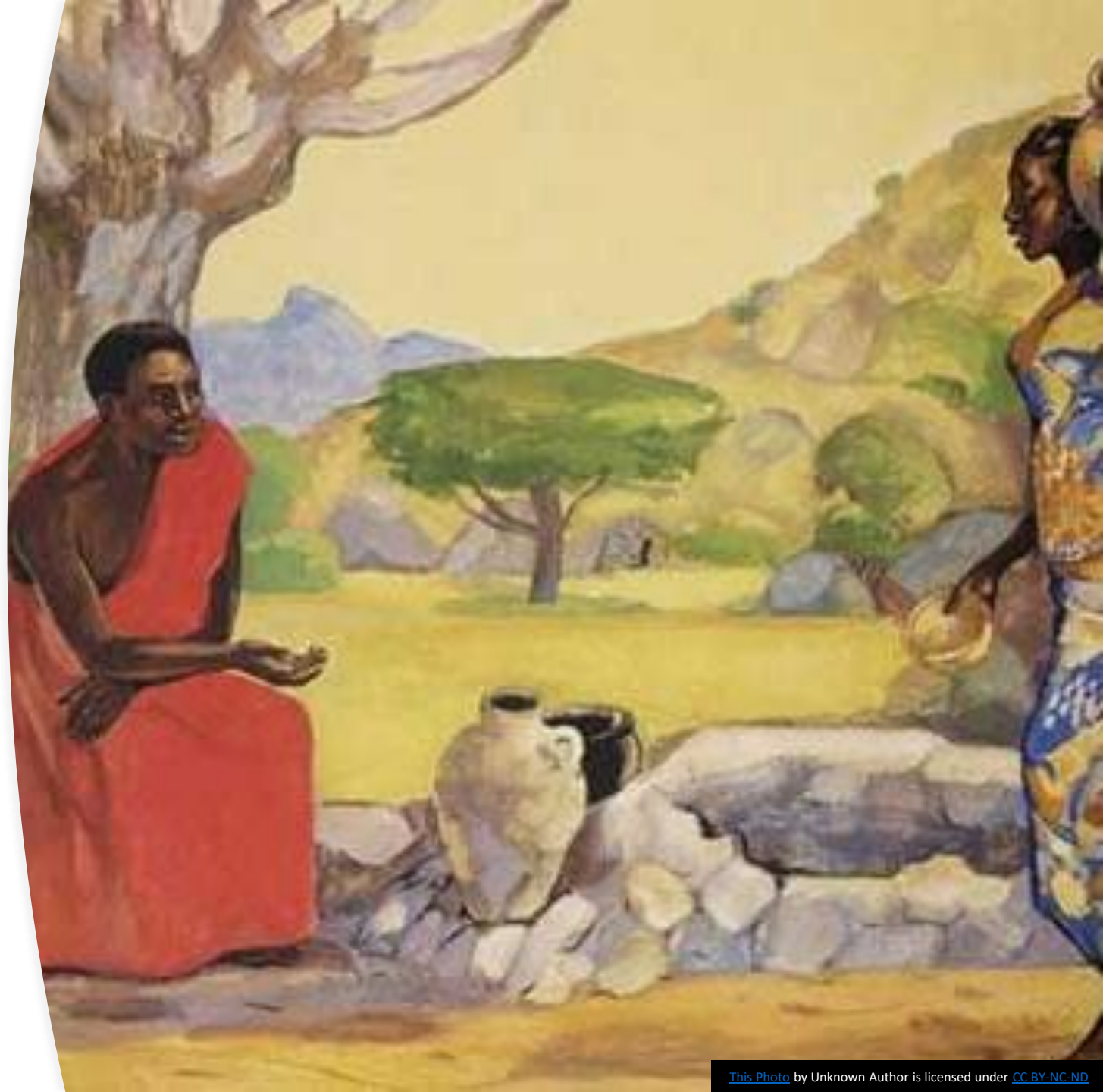
- bringing the Gospel to encounter African religious heritage and social reality and in the process close the religious vacuum created by the abandonment of ATR at conversion.
- In Mbiti's view therefore, sources for African theology include ATR, the AIC, major Christian Traditions, and the Bible.
 - How this can be done in practice while remaining faithful to the scripture has remained the major challenge to Mbiti's theology
- How does the authority of Scripture feature in Mbiti's approaches?



• *If Christ were to appear as the answer to the questions that Africans are asking, what would he look like...?* (Taylor, 1963:16)

• Setting the Agenda:
3 Key voices

- **John S Mbiti**
- **Byang Kato**
- **Kwame Bediako**



Setting the Agenda: Byang Kato (1936-1975)

- **'The Father of African Evangelical theology'**
- A dissenting voice



Byang Kato



- Nigerian. Born June 23, 1936 and died on December 19, 1975 (39)
- Belonged to the Evangelical Churches of West Africa* (ECWA)
- First African General Secretary of the Association of Evangelicals in Africa
- Studied at London Bible College, UK, BD, and Dallas Theological Seminary, USA, MST, and DTh degrees.

- Grew up in strong ATR context:
Dedicated him to a local deity and participated in the rituals.
- Converted at age of 12 amid objections from his father
- Because of a short life – Kato's theological writings are rather few



- Major Concerns:
- Theological discourse on the burning questions of salvation and uniqueness of Christ, that dominated the 1960s and 1970s.
- Global move towards universalism raised the question: “Is salvation found only in Christ (and in Christianity only)?”
- There was also the challenge of the recognition of other intermediaries between God and humanity, which promoted syncretism.



Byang

- Theological agenda set by Kato:
- Opposition to universalism
- Contextualization of Christ in Africa
- Attitude towards ATR: Radical discontinuity



- Method:
- Formulation of a Christian theology for Africa
- Call for a strong missionary focused evangelical movement
- Prioritization of higher theological education and quality leadership training among evangelicals.
- Led the formation of a theological accrediting agency (ACTEA)
- His famed war-cry was: *“Let African Christians be Christian Africans!”*

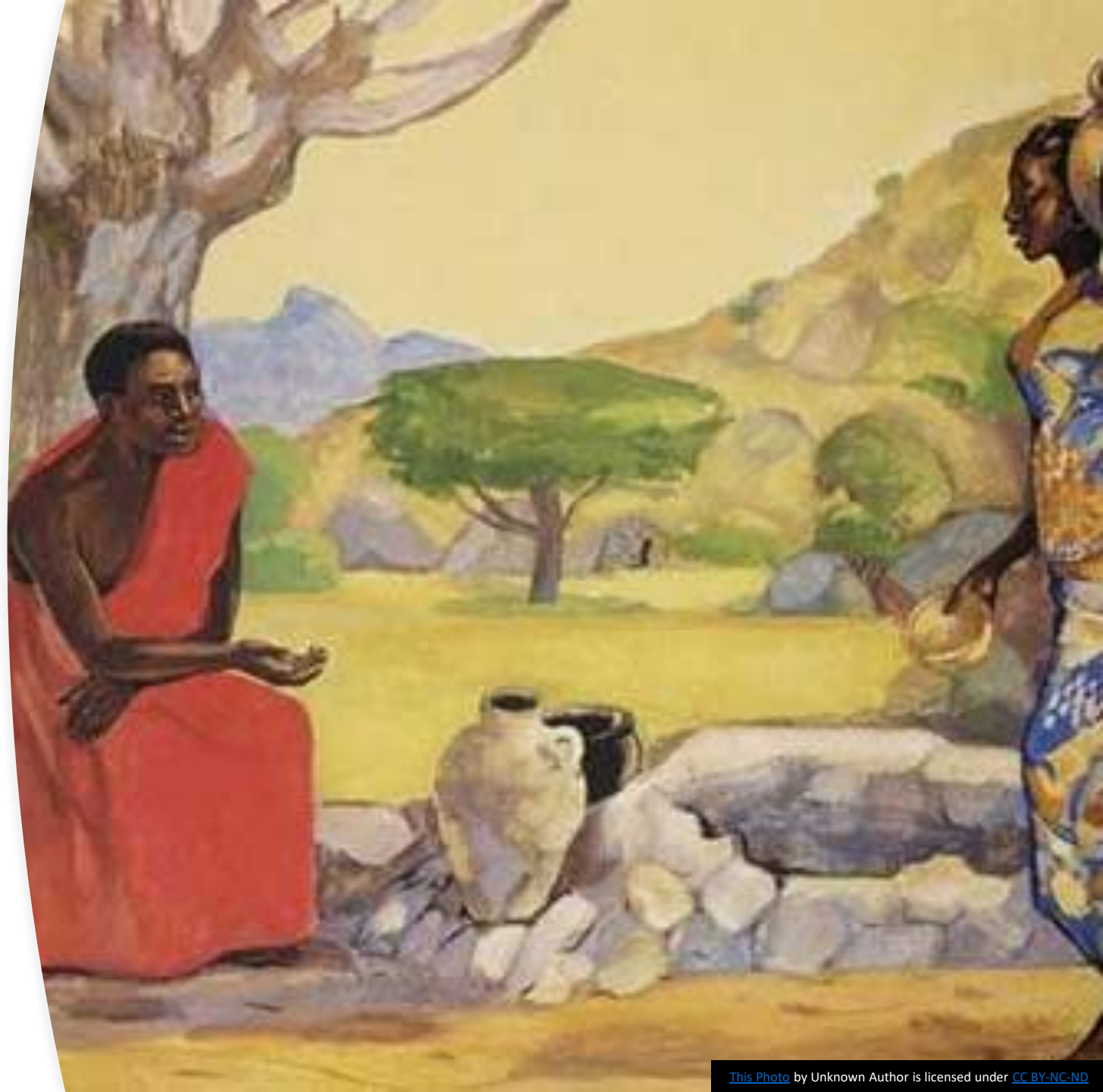


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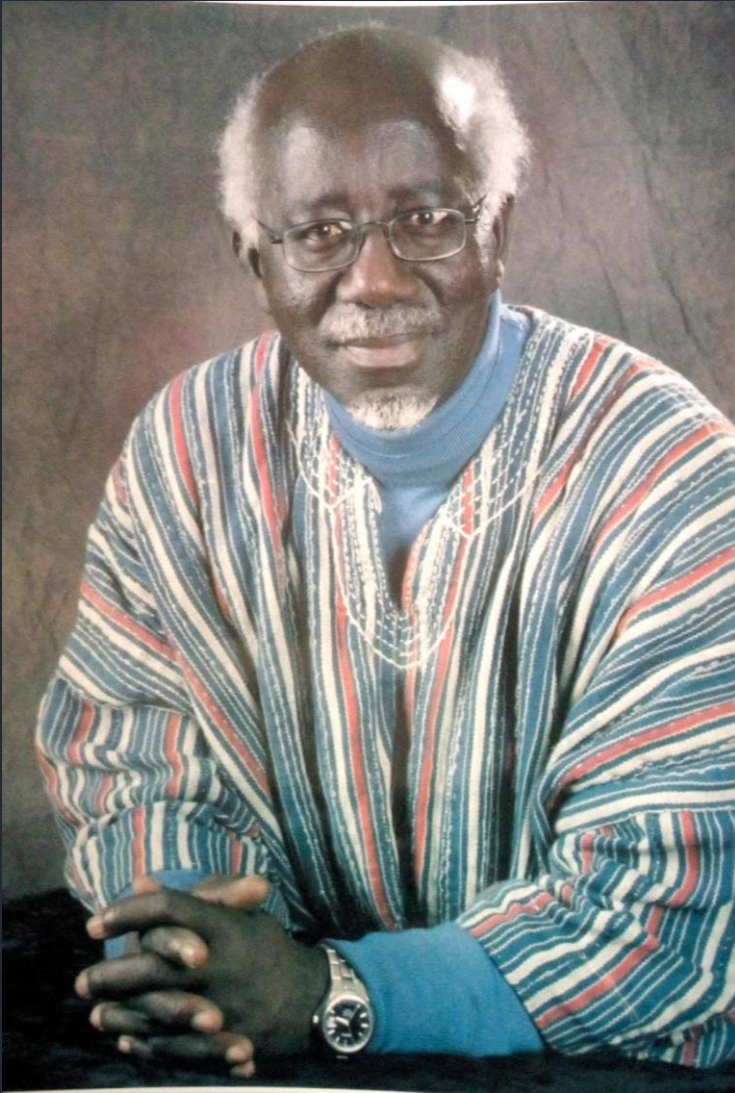
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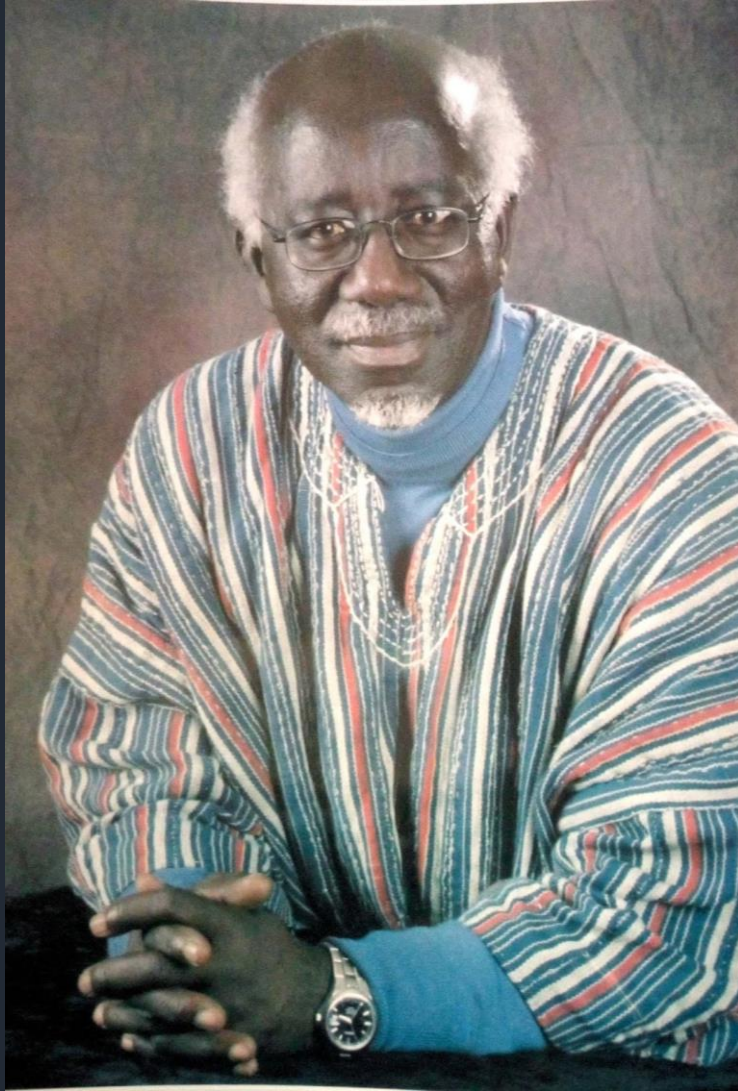


Kwame Bediako: Ghanaian



- **Born July 7, 1945 and died in June 2008**
- **One of the most influential African theologians and pastors of the late 20th century.**
- **Educated in Ghana for his BA, and then moved to France, at University of Bordeaux for his Masters and Doctoral degrees in French, with particular focus on French African Literature.**
- **Converted to Christianity whilst in France**

Kwame Bediako: Ghanaian



- **Studied at London School of Theology and then to Aberdeen for PhD under the supervision of Professor Andrew Walls.**
- **Ordained in the Presbyterian Church of Ghana**
- **Founded and led the Akrofi-Christaller institute for Mission and Applied Theology**
- **Wrote highly rated academic works. Taught at various universities as a visiting lecturer, honorary professor at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, fellowship in the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences etc.**

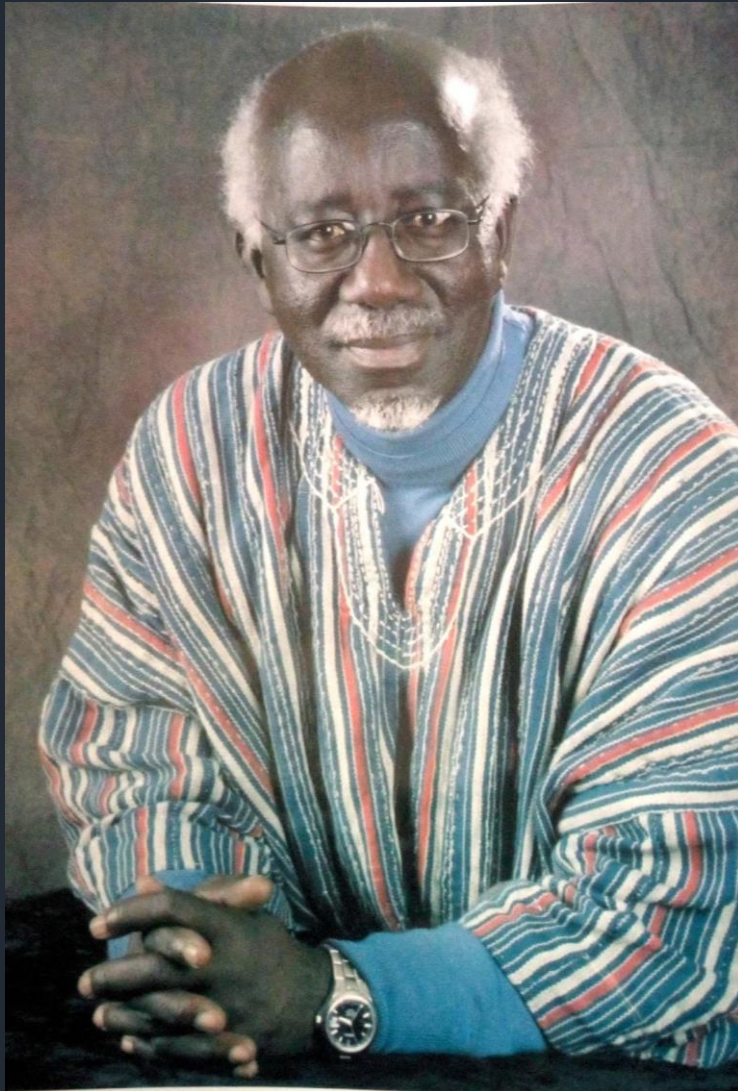
Kwame Bediako: Ghanaian

Major Concerns

- The problem of European and foreignness of Christianity in Africa
 - Largely due to the dismissal of the value of ATR by the early missionaries
- Dispute that Africans had no valid knowledge and experience of God before the arrival of Christianity in Africa
- Tension between holding the Bible as the final authority that de-sacralises all other forms of revelations and the validity and limitations of ATR

Bediako's place in the African Theology Movement

- A critical evangelical who subscribes to the legitimacy of African primal religions and the Authority of the Scripture.
Is such a position possible?



C. Western theology: Key trajectories and agenda-shaping moments

Setting the Agenda:

- i. The Patristic Period,
- ii. The Middle Ages and the Renaissance,
- iii. The Reformation and Post-Reformation Periods,
- iv. Modern Period to the Present Day

What then is the task of theology?

1. Theology must be biblical, taking the canonical Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments as the primary source.
2. Theology must be systematic. That is, it should draw on the entire Bible rather than utilizing individual texts in isolation from others
3. Theology need to relate to the issues of general culture and learning.
4. Theology must also be contemporary. While it treats timeless issues, it must use language, concepts, and thought forms that make some sense in the context of the present time.
5. Finally, theology need to have practical relevance for application

. Discussions

- . (Discussion 1)
- . African theology & Western theology : Convergence and divergence
 - . How is ACT like WT
 - . How does it differ
- . Discussion 2)
 - . How should theology be contextual (or not)?
 - . Are there unique issues that need to be addressed by African theology?



Conclusion :

a. While all theology may be contextual at least in application (or not), the essence of all theologies must remain Biblically grounded and in touch with Biblical orthodoxy as the rallying point of all Theological reflection.

b. The need for theology on a reformational foundation

b. Closing thoughts, questions or comments