

## THE THEOLOGICAL LEGACY OF THE REVEREND DOCTOR *BYANG HENRY KATO*

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*The tragic and untimely death of Rev. Dr. Byango Kato, the evangelical spokesman in the 1970s, has not diminished his influence on the churches in Africa. His voice continues to be heard through his publications which are still read today as through the graduate schools founded through him.*

*This article by Rev. Professor Yusufu Turaki was an address given on December 2, 2000 as part of the thanksgiving commemoration for the life of Dr. Kato, held in Jos, Nigeria, on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his death.*

*Though Dr. Kato was a Nigerian from West Africa, he was a man of God with whom we all identified. He was concerned with some of the same theological issues which concern AJET and Scott Theological College. When preparations for Scott graduation were being made in 1975 our graduation speaker suddenly sent his apologies. Though extremely busy and weary in body, Dr. Kato agreed to speak at the Scott graduation the latter part of November. Just two weeks later the Lord called him home when he drowned on the south coast of Kenya while on holiday. Though dead, he continues to speak to us all.*

In considering the theological legacy of the Reverend Doctor Byang Henry Kato, I wish to reflect on Byang Kato first as a Christian theologian, and then more briefly on him as a Christian leader, and as a Christian.

### BYANG KATO AS A THEOLOGIAN

Byang Kato was shaped by several distinguished theological institutions: ECWA Theological Seminary Igbaja, London Bible College, and Dallas Theological Seminary. Throughout his

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educational career he was a brilliant student and was always at the top of his class. He became the finest theological mind that the evangelicals in Africa had, and the first champion of evangelical theology and of the evangelical cause in Africa. Opponents revered and feared him, while colleagues revered and envied him. His grasp of African theological issues and his forceful presentation of his arguments singled him out. He was never afraid of standing alone, and spoke with a prophetic voice for the continent. Kato's death in a tragic drowning accident in 1975 on the Mombasa coast in Kenya was a severe blow to the Church in Africa and indeed in the world, but God used it to honour His name. Kato was a theological leader with a vision and with an agenda for evangelicals in Africa. Let me attempt to outline something of his theological legacy.

#### **Questions on Salvation and the Uniqueness of Christ**

The question of salvation in Jesus Christ became quite prominent on the African continent in the 1960s and early 1970s. The influential works of Bolaji Idowu and John Mbiti and others on the one hand, and those of Byang Kato and Tokunboh Adeyemo on the other hand, generated theological debates on the question of salvation in African traditional religions and the uniqueness of Christ for salvation. Similar debates still rage on. For example, Kwame Bediako's writings on African Christianity are significant and shed more light for our understanding of the nature and the agenda of African Theology. He has clearly defined the meaning, contours, trends and patterns of African Theology which have been very helpful for our understanding of Kato's theological legacy. The primary objective of Kato's Theological Corpus vis-à-vis that of his opponents was to develop a biblical foundation for proclaiming Jesus as the only valid, authentic and unique Saviour of the whole world and Mediator between God and man.

This discussion was particularly interesting to African theological scholars. The discussions were always dominated by the questions of "salvation" and "intermediaries" in African traditional religions, and how to relate the Gospel of Christ to the African traditional religious worldview. The crucial theological issue is the fact that the Christian concept of salvation in Jesus Christ is

paralleled in African traditional religions. In the African traditional religions God has important "intermediaries" or "mediators" between Himself and man, as it is the case with Jesus in Christianity. If indeed God has instituted a valid means of salvation and appropriate intermediaries within the African traditional religions, as is suggested, then the logical conclusion is that "Africans have no need of the Christian offer of salvation and mediatorship in Jesus Christ". I have personally met an African scholar who, having considered these theological issues, had decided to become a "priest" of the African traditional religions. The dominant presence of the African traditional religions and their powerful religious worldview have ever posed great challenges to the presentation of the Gospel of Christ and the rooting of Christianity in Africa. African theological scholars are divided in both their methodologies and their interpretations of what constitutes Africa's traditional religions and how the Gospel of Christ should be presented in Africa. Kato's Theological Corpus addressed this very issue.

Since the rise of African Theology in the late 1950s, the contentious issue of the possible "plurality" in the means of salvation and mediatorship between God and man has dominated African theological discourse. The theological question is whether our African Christian understanding of African traditional religions calls into question our Christian belief that Jesus is the only valid, authentic, unique and universal Saviour and Mediator between God and man. If it does, then the African traditional religions have succeeded in evangelising Christianity to believe and accept their claims to be equally valid with Christianity, and hence Christianity need no longer evangelise African traditional religions or present the Gospel of Christ to them. "What is the place of Jesus Christ within the context of African traditional religions?" "How has Jesus the Messiah been treated by African scholars and theologians?" These questions are in themselves missiological questions to which Christianity in Africa must provide concrete answers, or else Christianity stands in danger of being evangelised by African traditional religions. The acceptance of Jesus varies in Africa, from mild acceptance to total rejection. In extreme cases some African

theological scholars are of the opinion that Christianity must abandon its biblical and historical claims that salvation is found only in the unique Christ, and must accept the plurality of the means of salvation, which are also found sufficiently in other religions. These are the theological issues which Kato sought to address, especially in his doctoral dissertation, published as *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*. Kato states,

The stage is well set for universalism in Africa. Universalism means the belief that all men will eventually be saved whether they believe in Christ or not. Therefore, it is absolutely essential that a serious study be undertaken to reveal the trends already taking shape. (Kato, *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*, 1975, p. 11).

Kato defined his theological agenda in the following words,

The primary purpose of this book is to sound an alarm and warn Christians on both sides of the argument concerning the dangers of universalism. These dangers are theological pitfalls indeed. To forewarn is to forearm. The noble desire to indigenize Christianity in Africa must not be forsaken. An indigenous theology is a necessity. But must one betray Scriptural principles of God and His dealings with man at the altar of any regional theology? Should human sympathy and rationalism override what is clearly taught in the Scriptures? Many voices in Africa and outside the continent are answering these questions in the affirmative. Their number is increasing rapidly. That is why I wish here to alert Christians to these pertinent dangers (Kato, *op. cit.*, p. 16).

The pertinent dangers referred to by Kato are related to the wider ongoing debates elsewhere in the world about religious pluralism and the question of salvation within the non-Christian religions of the world. Serious questions have been raised about the possibility of salvation outside the Church of Jesus Christ. Our African experience is only a part of this universal debate whether Jesus Christ and the Bible are uniquely valid for all.

The debates on salvation and the intermediaries in African traditional religions, and on religious pluralism in general, have raised serious doubts on Christian commitment to the biblical and the historical fact that in "Jesus Christ, through his life, death,

resurrection and coming again, salvation has been made available to all humankind" (Gnanakan 1992:21). It is this commitment to biblical truth, apostolic teachings and the historic witness of the church that Kato wanted to restate and emphasise.

In the first place, our Lord Himself made some categorical statements about His message of salvation within the context of Jewish monotheism and the plural religions and cultures of the Roman Empire. Secondly, God through His Holy Spirit moved the apostles to proclaim and write about the uniqueness of Jesus the Messiah as the universal Saviour and Mediator in the midst of Jewish monotheism and the plural religions and cultures of the Greco-Roman world. Christianity today can still make the same categorical claims about Jesus as the Lord and Saviour of the whole world, based on this biblical, apostolic and the historical testimony of the church.

The above debates have somewhat weakened our commitment, and have diverted our attention to new "beliefs" which are non-Christian and which also seek "justification in philosophy rather than theology" and "demand that we surrender our claims to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ" (Gnanakan 1992:160,125).

#### **Questions on the Presentation of Christ in Africa**

The second important set of issues that Kato addressed concerned the presentation of Jesus Christ to the non-Christian religions and cultures especially in Africa. Kato addressed the question how the Gospel of Christ and the uniqueness of Christ relate to the African traditional religions and cultures. He devoted much space to this issue in his two books: *African Cultural Revolution and the Christian Faith* and *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*. The approaches and methodologies of African scholars differ quite remarkably. The question that needs to be raised is: "What theology and/or methodology can adequately relate the Gospel of Christ and the uniqueness of Christ to the African traditional religions and culture? How is Jesus understood by Africans who have only the prior understanding of the pre-Christian African traditional religious worldview?"

It is important to note that African religious worldview permits belief in many spirit beings. Implicit in this African religious system is acceptance that other religious systems or persons may be equally valid or even more so. Here we are dealing with a worldview which is "accommodative" and is capable of "domesticating" ideas and objects. Christian proclamation of Jesus the Messiah must be done in such a way that the entire African worldview and its culture and religion are addressed by biblical teachings. The Gospel of Christ addresses the totality of our Africanness. It is by this process that transformation and transvaluation of our religious worldview takes effect within the African context. The true meaning of Jesus being the one Mediator between God and man must be founded upon the biblical, apostolic and the historical testimony of the church. Our approach to these theological issues should be based on how Jesus Christ in biblical, apostolic and the historical witness addresses, confronts and transforms the world of religions and cultures. Kato's theological method sought to do exactly that in his two books just mentioned.

African scholars differ in terms of what they are looking for in their comparative study of Christianity and the African traditional religions. Some look for similarities or dissimilarities, commonalities, continuity or discontinuity. The underlying theological quest is for us to formulate a theology of religions which will deal with our world context and the "need to discover all that the Bible is saying" about world religions and cultures (Gnanakan, 1992:222,223; Kato, *African Cultural Revolution, and Theological Pitfalls*).

It is important that we consider the real issues at stake in this discussion. The New Testament presented Jesus as the Lord and Saviour of the whole world. Is this New Testament presentation still relevant today in the world of many religions and cultures? The apostolic and Christian traditions have historically proclaimed Jesus as the Lord and Saviour of the whole world. Throughout the centuries this presentation of Jesus has been subjected to severe criticism by the non-Christian religions and cultures. Today the notion of religious pluralism is raising serious questions regarding Christian evangelism and its presentation of the Gospel of Jesus the

Messiah. Plurality of religions and cultures means that none is unique or superior, that all are equal. On this account, conversion is a violation of the principle of pluralism or equality of all. When conversion does take place, it means that certain religious absolutes are deemed higher or superior to others which in the religion of pluralism is wrong. Kato foresaw this trend in his warnings against the theological dangers of incipient universalism.

The reaction of the non-Christian world is to relativise Christianity and make it at par with other religions. Thus, Christianity as a religion is still under the domain of the human religious commonality, and it should be treated as such. But from our understanding of the New Testament, and the apostolic and Christian traditions, it is Jesus who is the object of proclamation. It is the person of Jesus Christ, and not religion or culture, that is being presented, if Christianity is to be faithful to the mission and message of its Lord. It is true that in some cases Jesus Christ has been proclaimed as secondary to "culture" or "nationality" or "theology". It is this "cultural Christianity" that is being rightly attacked and criticised. Biblical Christianity does not proclaim culture or nationality but "Jesus Christ crucified". People do not have to abandon or change religion or culture as a prerequisite to belief in Jesus Christ. Instead, the religious and cultural people are invited to come to faith in Jesus from the platform of their religious and cultural backgrounds. A Jew, a Muslim, an African, a Buddhist or a Hindu does not need first to cease being a religious or cultural person before becoming a follower of Jesus the Messiah. Jesus calls people to become His followers from different religions, cultures and backgrounds. Jesus calls us from our religions and cultures to follow Him as both Lord and Saviour. In the biblical presentation of salvation the primary focus is not change of religion or culture or "religious conversion", but turning to believe in Jesus. Conversion to "Christianity" is not even called for, but rather belief in Christ and Him alone. Christianity is a religious or cultural manifestation of this belief in Jesus Christ. Christianity is a "material" culture which grows out of the consequence of faith in Jesus. This religious outfit, this "Cultural Christianity", may or may not conform to the norms, mission and message of its Lord and of biblical teachings. It

is rather the person of Jesus Christ that confronts an individual or a community and makes claims on that person or community. Faith in Jesus then has great impact upon culture, religious worldview and society.

Jesus the Messiah must not be clothed with one's particular religious or cultural garment to exclude all others, which might in fact disguise Him and make Him be of a particular religion or culture, and as a result not acceptable to others. If Jesus is the Lord and Saviour of the whole world, then He cannot be made to be of a particular religion or culture. Jesus is not only the Lord and Saviour of Christians, but also of Jews, Muslims, Africans, Hindus, Buddhists and indeed of the whole world. Christians have a biblical and historical basis for making this profound statement to the whole world.

A principal obstacle to Christian proclamation of Jesus to the whole world has been due to its elaborate religious and cultural paraphernalia which keeps off others or which disfigures Jesus before others, and as a result makes Him unwanted. This is what Christianity must deal with in the face of criticism and rejection from the world of religions and cultures. Jesus is the Lord and Saviour of all world religions and cultures and no religion or culture should keep one from embracing Him. Theologising takes effect at the moment of belief in Jesus Christ. And this theologising takes place within the context of religions and cultures. The new faith in Jesus, the Word of God, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit all provide help in the process of theologising and living out the new Christian faith. Anyone who has read in depth the two books of Kato mentioned above would immediately recognise that Kato's theology of culture and religions has a primary goal of leading people to saving faith in Jesus Christ. This objective was never made secondary by Kato, but primary.

The other obstacle for Christian proclamation of Jesus the Messiah is the lack of commitment to the cardinal teachings of the Bible, the apostles and the historical testimony of the church on the uniqueness of Jesus. Liberal theological studies of African traditional religions, Western secular and pluralist theologies, and the call of the non-Christian religions that Christianity should drop



its claims of the unique Christ for salvation, have all combined to divert the attention of Christianity from its primary task of proclaiming Jesus Christ to the whole world. Dr Ken Gnanakan of India echoes the charges of Kato, but in a different way. He states,

The shift of emphasis from absolutes to relatives, from 'classicist' to historical consciousness and the resulting openness to other beliefs has brought radical changes in the attitudes of many to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in relation to other religions. The shift from exclusivism gradually on to inclusivism and now to pluralism is a shift from a commitment to the particular revelation in Jesus Christ to the universal revelation of God everywhere. And with this transfer of confidence, Christians have had to grapple afresh with some dominant theological themes that hitherto had been taken for granted (Gnanakan 1992:150).

Historically, the presentation of Jesus Christ has been rejected because of fear of conversion and apostasy. Another religion has arisen and for this reason threatens all others. The instinct for religious and cultural survival brings about competition, rivalry, opposition and fears. Religious pride and status also engender opposition to change. Furthermore, the fear of the consequences resulting from religious and cultural change generate opposition.

In the contemporary setting, this subject raises additional concerns with conversion and imperialism. The loss of religious and cultural freedom resulting from imperialism and colonialism has been the main reason for opposition, especially in Africa. The fear of domination and imposition of religions and cultures upon others have greatly influenced modern thinking and Christian missions. After the age of imperialism and colonialism, we are now in the age of independence and equality of all peoples, cultures and religions and "globalisation". Conversion to other religions or cultures is like reverting back into colonialism. The modern gospel which is being preached is the equality of all peoples, religions and cultures. The modern world is thought to have come of age, and has therefore assumed its status as a "pluralist world". The world is becoming "democratised" and the gospel of religious pluralism is the "in-thing". Western religious pluralism is not just philosophy or theology but also essentially ideological. This is a "Western

agenda" driven primarily by a concern to correct the Western triumphalistic attitude to mission, and the solution offered by Western pluralists is itself "a product of modern, Western rationalisation". "Pluralists are modernists who think that autonomy is the highest good" (Gnanakan 1992:119,120). It is precisely this issue that led Kato to declare that "Christianity is not the White man's religion" (Kato, African Cultural Revolution).

Secularism and modernity have dealt a death blow to "god-talk" and religion. The scientific worldview has replaced the religious worldview. Religious language has lost its salt and has become meaningless in a scientific and secular world. Thus this subject is, to my understanding, a major critical theological issue that should receive much attention in our day, especially in Africa. African scholars have spent too much time and resources in the areas of cultural and religious studies and too little in biblical theology, Christian doctrines and church history. Good theological and historical studies as they relate to the essentials of biblical Christianity are lacking. Much attention has been given to the comparative studies of religions and cultures and very little to the development and formulation of biblical theology of African religions and cultures. The result is that the theological findings and interpretations lack adequate biblical rootage and Christian critical evaluation.

These were the challenges that Kato took up very seriously and especially the theological challenge of the uniqueness of Jesus for salvation in Africa and the need for developing a biblical theology of African traditional religions and cultures. He emphasised more than anything else the centrality of the Bible as an indispensable tool for doing theology in Africa. His major concern was to protect the absoluteness of the revelation of Jesus Christ as revealed in the Bible from the ravages of universalism and liberal theology.

#### **Kato's Theological Corpus**

Kato devoted his short life to addressing these theological issues in Africa until his death in December 1975, and in particular the major theological issue of *incipient universalism*. There is a need today to elaborate this very important theological issue. The

common theological premise of this perspective is universal grace without Jesus, that salvation can be obtained outside of Christ and the church. Kato challenged such views in his doctoral dissertation in 1973, which was published in 1975 by Evangel Publishing House in Kenya as *Theological Pitfalls in Africa*.

It is important that I attempt to summarise the writings and addresses of Kato as represented by his bibliography. His *Theological Corpus* was characterised by the following themes and concerns:

1. Kato proclaimed the unique Christ for salvation of the whole world, against: a) the liberal Western theologians who promote the idea of universalism of salvation without Christ; and b) the liberal African theologians who domesticate Jesus Christ into an African worldview (religions and cultures), and also advocate that salvation comparable to that in Christianity can be found in the African traditional religions.
2. Kato advocated a biblical theology and worldview as the prolegomena to the study of religions and cultures.
3. Kato rejected the cultural imperialism and missionary paternalism of Western Christianity in Africa.
4. Kato promoted the study of African culture, religions and philosophy as prerequisites for: a) the formulation of a biblically-based theology and worldview from African perspectives as a means of addressing and evaluating African religions and cultures; and b) the development of a sound, evangelical theological education for training African theologians, pastors and church leaders.
5. Kato also articulated concern about:
  - a. African cultural and religious revivals that seem to negate the Gospel of Christ;
  - b. African nationalist protest against Christianity as the "white man's religion";
  - c. the lack of sound biblical and theological understanding in general among the majority of African Christians;

- d. the influence of African religions and cultures over African Christianity, which has resulted in syncretism and spiritism.

Kato's theological agenda can be summarised in his own *Ten Point Proposal*:

1. Adhere to the basic presuppositions of historic Christianity.
2. Express Christianity in a truly African context, allowing it to judge African culture and never allowing the culture to take precedence over Christianity.
3. Concentrate effort in training men in the Scriptures, employing the original languages to facilitate their ability in exegeting the Word of God. In-depth knowledge rather than mere superficial mechanics in the ministry should be the primary concern.
4. Carefully study African traditional religions as well as other religions, but only secondarily to the inductive study of God's Word. The New Testament writers and the early church evangelists did not consider it worthwhile to spend too much of their energy in the study of non-Christian religions. All non-Christians belong to one and the same group—unsaved. The sinful nature needs no study analysis as its outworking is clearly manifested in daily life.
5. Launch an aggressive programme of evangelism and missions to prevent a fall into the error of the doctrinal strife of third-century Christianity in North Africa (at the expense of evangelism).
6. Consolidate organisational structures based on doctrinal agreements. Fraternal relationship such as is being shaped by the Association of Evangelicals of Africa and Madagascar (AEAM), is strongly urged. The gregarious nature of the African calls for a fellowship so much needed; yet it does not need to be an organic union, neither does it need to be a unity at any cost.
7. Carefully and accurately delineate and concisely express terms of theology as a necessary safeguard against syncretism and universalism.
8. Carefully present apologetics towards unbiblical systems that are creeping into the church. This calls for more leadership training.
9. Show concern in social action, but bear in mind at all times that the primary goal of the church is the presentation of personal salvation. As individuals are converted, they become instruments of revolutionising the society for good. The church is not a department of

social welfare for the government. It is a body of individuals called out to prepare the world for the second coming of Christ.

10. Following the steps of the New Testament Church, Christians in Africa should be prepared to say, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21). Africa needs her Polycarps, Athanasiuses, and Martin Luthers, ready to contend for the faith at any cost. The Lord of the church who has commanded Bible-believing Christians to "contend earnestly for the faith" (Jude 3), has also said, "Yes, I am coming quickly" (Rev. 22:20). May we give the reverberating response, "Amen, Come Lord Jesus" (Kato, *Theological Pitfall*, p. 181-184).

Kato approached his subject in contention with two fronts, namely, (1) Western liberal theologians and (2) African liberal theologians, whose theological methodologies, interpretations and conclusions could lead to the rejection of the uniqueness of Jesus. The fallacy of some African theologians which Kato challenged was their assertion that salvation is not the exclusive reserve for Christianity, but that there is the possibility of finding salvation outside of Jesus Christ. Thus is affirmed the universality of salvation and the possibility of finding salvation in the African traditional religions. The theology of African "intermediaries" asserts that God had mediators between Himself and the Africans, thus affirming the plurality of salvation. The unique Christ for salvation makes no sense here. It is this very theological implication for biblical interpretations in Africa that Kato sought to address. The views of Kato on this subject were firm, assertive, direct, and biblically authoritative. He saw himself leading a crusade against what most African theologians had accepted to promote on the continent of Africa. He saw the dangers of heresy, syncretism, spiritism and weak biblical theology on the continent of Africa.

Looking back at the African theological scene of the past 25 years, Kato was right. Our study and veneration of African traditional religions has succeeded somewhat in making Christianity a mission field for the evangelistic campaigns of the non-Christian religions. In Africa today we have a theology of

African traditional religions, but without a biblical orthodoxy. Kato was concerned about the unorthodox theology in African Theology.

The fallacy of some Western theologians is their assertion of the universality of God's grace, which means that salvation can be found outside of Jesus Christ. It can be found "cosmically" (universally) through the "Cosmic Christ", not necessarily the historical Christ. The two fallacies originated from the conception of the "universality of grace" which Kato termed "incipient universalism". This theological view was relatively new on the continent of Africa, hence his use of the term "incipient".

This "universal grace", according to Western emphasis, is located not in "religions" per se, but it is cosmic, embracing the entire humanity. Jesus Christ in this conception is not necessarily the cause of this "universal grace", but God alone, the Creator. This universal grace is within the reach of individuals without Jesus Christ. Its basis is God, who is the Father of all humanity. God alone can mediate this universal grace, through His universal Spirit or through His "Cosmic Christ", who is not necessarily the historical Christ. Kato believed that this belief in "universal grace" did not originate from Africa but from the West, and it was just beginning to take root in Africa through some African scholars of the African traditional religions.

In the case of African scholars, the emphasis on "universal grace" is focused on its location within the African traditional religions, not necessarily in individuals, as is the case with Western universalism, which stresses not religions or cultures but the entire humanity. This "universal grace" in African emphasis is not only found in Jewish religion, but in others as well, particularly the African traditional religions. Jesus Christ in this conception is not necessarily the cause of this "universal grace" but God alone, who is the Father of not only humanity in general (individuals) but also of the religions and cultures of the world. On this issue, Ken Gnanakan asked: "But the question is to do with the availability of salvation directly through this grace and without the explicit work of Jesus Christ" (Gnanakan, 1992:210). He then answered his question as follows,

This grace is not available in religions because of their status as religions, but because of people to whom God wants to make his grace available. Wherever people are present God's grace must also be present, particularly if grace is of God demonstrated despite sin. But this grace is not operative through religion, but wholly through Jesus Christ, towards whom God's grace must point" (Gnanakan, 1992:210).

The question of Jesus the Messiah being the only mediator of this "universal grace" is at the heart of Kato's theological discourse.

Going beyond the debate of the possibility of salvation outside Jesus Christ is the current emphasis on "Gospel and Culture". The focus is on the study of religion or culture and how the Gospel relates to both religion and culture. A host of questions have been raised in this area, such as questions of relevance, translation, inculturation, contextualisation, indigenisation, Africanisation and Christianisation. This area does not deal with the questions of "salvation" per se, but the translatability of the Gospel of Christ. The Gospel has to be made intelligible both by expression and communication in a given cultural context. Critics of Kato fault him in this area, that his attitude, style and application of the Gospel of Christ to the African traditional religions and cultures was "Biblicist", that he advocated discontinuity between Christianity and the African traditional religions and cultures, and that his framework did not allow for "culturally rooted questions" (Bediako 1992:386-425).

For Kato, the primary tool for doing theology is the Holy Bible. The Holy Bible addresses and challenges the African traditional religions and cultures with its claims. However, Kato did propose a methodology of relating the Gospel of Christ to African religions and cultures as stated above. One can only fault his methodology if one is prepared to fault it for being "Biblical Theology", and for deriving from a "tradition" which was not of the popular "liberal tradition" but was rather the "evangelical tradition". He dared to provide an alternative method of doing theology in Africa (Biblical Theology), quite contrary to the Idowus and the Mbitis; and he also dared to challenge the "liberal tendencies" of African Theology. It is to be regretted that the young Kato did not live long enough to take up the secondary theological task which he proposed, and

which since his death become dominant in African theological discourse and research, namely the question of the "Gospel and Culture", which Kwame Bediako and others have now taken up and so much developed.

There is a new but subtle challenge to Christianity as posed by the non-Christian religions and cultures. This new challenge can be understood if we understand the state of post-missionary Christianity in Africa. We wish to state emphatically that the challenge of the non-Christian religions and cultures to Christianity in Africa is real and powerful. We have become accustomed to the belief that Christian missions in the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries brought the Gospel of Christ to Africa, thus making Africa a mission field. The products of missionary Christianity still believe that their major task today is the same as that of the missionaries, taking the Gospel of Christ to the non-Christian religions and cultures. This is true to some extent, but the mission field has changed. Those in the mission field who have accepted the Gospel of Christ have in turn become a vast mission field to the evangelising forces of the non-Christian religions and cultures. Just a few decades ago, Christianity targeted the non-Christian religions and cultures as their mission field. But the reverse is the case today. Christians and Christianity today have become a fertile mission field to the evangelistic activities of the non-Christian religions and cultures. The powerful gospel of the non-Christian religions is something which Christianity must have to contend with today. The non-Christian cultures, worldviews and ideas have assumed very powerful and influential positions within our modern society. Kato left us as a prophet some 25 years ago and he foresaw these and gave us warning.

Is Christianity aware of this change of religious roles? Is Christianity still thinking of reaching the "heathens", "pagans", "unreached", "unbelievers"? Is Christianity still thinking of crossing the seas to reach the heathen lands? The present reality is that the gospel of the non-Christian religions and cultures has invaded the domain of Christianity. The Christian territory has become polluted and saturated with the gospel of the non-Christian religions and cultures. Christianity today is at the receiving end.



Christianity is being vigorously evangelised by the non-Christian religions and cultures.

The gospels of modernity, universalism, pluralism, secularism, humanism and African spiritualism and tradition, Islam and other non-Christian religions have finally succeeded in turning the tables and taking a stand to evangelise Christianity. The challenge of the non-Christian religions today is felt in its rejection of the unique Christ for salvation and in its evangelistic fervour to weaken and silence the Christian Gospel.

Christianity steeped in its tradition sends out people as missionaries to reach the unreached, but non-Christian religions send out ideas, cultures, worldviews and social, political and economic institutions to reach, convert and entangle Christians. The non-Christian religions beam their gospel through satellites, radio, television, internet, political, economic and social theories, and models of modernisation and development. Modernity as a non-Christian religion and culture is real and has affected the Christian presentation of the Gospel of Christ.

The world of multi-religions, multi-cultures, multi-values and multi-truth-claims has all along throughout history questioned, challenged and even objected to the exclusiveness of the Christian presentation of the unique Christ. As already pointed out, what has been viewed as objectionable and questionable is the Christian confession of the uniqueness of Christ for salvation. Furthermore, the Christian faith in its commitment to evangelise the whole world for Christ has always been viewed with great suspicion. Christianity has been accused of being arrogant, intolerant, insensitive and without having a spirit of "live and let live", accommodation or compromise. On account of this, the non-Christian religions and cultures have always put forth many reasons and obstacles as to why they cannot accept the Christian presentation of the unique Christ and the Christian absolute truth claims of Jesus the Messiah as the only Lord and Saviour of the whole world.

Furthermore, the study of world religions and cultures by secular social scientists in our day has approached Christianity as one among many world religions and cultures. To them Christianity and biblical truths can be subjected to the test of rational and

logical philosophy and empirical sciences. The chief end is to define and reinterpret Christianity and all its truth claims—and its Lord and Saviour—within the context of plural religions, cultures and social values. Within this world context of universalism, pluralism, secularism, relativism, scienticism, humanism and spiritism, Christianity and its Lord and Saviour can neither be unique nor absolute in their truth claims. Furthermore, they assume that there can be no exclusive presentation of the unique Christ to the world of religions and cultures. In its place the secular social scientists and non-Christian religions believe in the presentation of a new gospel of mutuality, respect, acceptance, accommodation and equality of all religions and cultures. It is just this non-Christian "gospel" which is so adversely affecting our presentation and proclamation that Kato in his *Theological Corpus* sought to address.

#### **BYANG KATO AS A LEADER AND A CHRISTIAN**

No one doubts the fact that Byang Kato was indeed a great theologian. It is equally true that he was a great Christian and a great Christian leader. He was a man of vision, of mission and of dreams. No one questioned his ability to lead, as he was divinely favoured to assume leadership anywhere within Christian circles. He was born a leader and a prophet, and throughout his short life he demonstrated such qualities. Also the impact of Kato's personal life upon individuals still remains his most enduring legacy. This aspect, which can only be mentioned here, deserves to be given attention and highlighted in another forum.

#### **Kato's Leadership in AEAM and WEF**

Space does not permit me to consider in any detail Kato's role as a Christian leader in the Association of Evangelicals of Africa (AEA—formerly AEAM) and the World Evangelical Fellowship (WEF). Kato spent less than three years as the General Secretary of AEAM, but his impact on the Evangelicals and the Christian ecumenics in Africa has been phenomenal and enduring. His primary focus was theological education and training at a higher

level. He proposed the founding of the Bangui Evangelical School of Theology (BEST) for francophone Africa, and the Nairobi Evangelical School of Theology (NEGST) for anglophone Africa. He also believed in strengthening the church through Christian education and production of church materials. He was a strong believer in the unity of Evangelicals in Africa. Kato was a vocal Christian apologist, the defender of the Christian faith in Africa in many venues. His writings and conference speeches reflected his passion for Christian orthodoxy. I would have loved to say more in this area, especially about his international role as a world Christian leader. At the time of his death he was the vice-president of the World Evangelical Fellowship, and chair of its Theological Commission. Kato's impact upon the lives of Christians worldwide has remained an enduring legacy.

#### **Kato's Leadership in ECWA**

Kato was the General Secretary of the Evangelical Church of West Africa (ECWA) from 1967 to 1970. For the three years he spent in office, he brought vision, a sense of mission, and administrative and leadership skills to ECWA. His priority was theological, pastoral and leadership training of the nationals. He came at the time when SIM was gradually handing-over the mission responsibility to the nationals. His greatest burden was how to train and groom the nationals to take-over from the missionaries. What consumed his heart was the lack of adequately trained theologians and pastors for ECWA. His singular message to young and potential ECWA people was the necessity of higher theological and secular training. He was very forceful and persuasive in asking young people to aspire for higher education. In this particular area he did not get along well with some SIM missionaries and some ECWA leaders who were suspicious of higher education.

In spite of the difficulties in persuading SIM and ECWA of the need for higher education and quality leadership training, he was never daunted. Within SIM and ECWA, Kato was often revered, but feared by some and envied by some as well. His personality, vision and mission set him apart from his peers. He could see beyond his contemporaries, and indeed seemed as a man who came

before his time. Some misunderstood him on account of this. Here was a man who loved his Mission, his Church and his people, and sought to do everything to help them develop and succeed, but had to suffer the frustration of being misunderstood by some.

Kato's legacy as a leader in ECWA is always remembered as one who believed in training and grooming the next generation of leaders. He groomed many younger leaders for the Church. He had a habit of hand-picking younger people for leadership training and encouraged any to higher education. Kato was always interested in people, especially their well-being and progress in life. Many in ECWA can testify to the fact that Kato had personally encouraged them in one way or another.

The legacy of Kato gives a general sad note to the fact that when God raises a visionary leader for a people, at times such persons do not live long and at times the very ones who are to benefit are the first to forget the prophetic vision in preference for the status quo.

#### **Kato as a Christian**

One outstanding aspect of the enduring legacy of Kato's life is the fact that no one ever met Kato without being impacted by his life or at least forming a clear impression about him. Certainly above all Kato was a dedicated Christian. His faith in the Lord Jesus Christ was non-negotiable. He was never shaken nor did he fear any opposition to his faith. He was never ashamed of his Lord anywhere and he shared his faith everywhere. His faith was very transparent in that one could not meet him without knowing about his faith. Kato was an evangelist and he believed strongly in personal evangelism. Kato was also devout. He had a very high view of Scriptures and he studied the Bible regularly. For him the Bible was authoritative over the whole of life and everything in life was captive to the Word of God. His primary tool for doing theology was the Bible; he never made the Bible secondary in his theological tools. May God grant us the wisdom, grace and enablement to profit from his example.

#### **CONCLUSION**

I may perhaps best conclude by posing the question: what lessons can we learn from Kato's legacy? If we are right in capturing the theological heartbeat of Kato, permit me to suggest the following guidelines, arising from Kato's theological legacy, for the ongoing presentation and proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ:

1. Be committed to the presentation of the unique Christ to the non-Christian religions and cultures.
2. Reaffirm the historic, apostolic proclamation of the Lordship, authority, power and supremacy of Jesus Christ over the whole world.
3. Uphold a biblical and theological basis for the uniqueness of Christ, and for the biblical concept of salvation.
4. Work out the theological and ethical implications of the Christian confession of the universal Lordship, authority, power and supremacy of Christ in the world.
5. Develop a method and a strategy for relating the Gospel of Salvation in Christ to the non-Christian religions and cultures.
6. Define clearly the status of the unique Christ and His Gospel of Salvation within the context of world religions and cultures.
7. Encourage a strong missionary commitment to the proclamation of the unique Christ to the whole world as its Lord, Saviour and Mediator.
8. Establish a biblical theology of world religions and cultures, and ascertain the degree of continuity or discontinuity of such with the cardinal claims of the unique Christ over these non-Christian religions and cultures.
9. Defend and promote Christian biblical orthodoxy against internal heresies and non-Christian doctrines and truth claims.

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