

Joseph Boakye Danquah (1895-1965):
The First African Theologian and Pan Africanist

By

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Abstract

The research that is culminating into this paper was undertaken to explore the way three West African theological educators were influenced by Joseph Boakye Danquah, himself not a Christian theologian, but a Pan Africanist, in their theological presuppositions. These three theological educators are Harry Sawyerr (Sierra Leone), Bolaji Idowu (Nigeria), and Kwesi Dickson (Ghana). Danquah's significance lies in helping the reader not only to understand but also to appreciate the possibility of an African theologian and a Pan Africanist informing and inspiring the theology of church theologians. In this they provided intellectual reflections on a range of issues—the doctrine of God, ancestorhood, clan relations, the belief in things African, the important place of mother tongue in theology, culture, and financial independence among others. To describe Danquah as the first African theologian is not out of place, then influencing pioneer Christian theologians.

Introduction

Joseph Boakye Danquah one of the early twentieth century West African intellectuals made an enviable contribution in the cultural, political and religious landscape of the sub region enhancing the legacy of African empowerment of an earlier period. Formal education was responsible for that as it provided the intellectual background for the continuing search for the African intellectual framework. The establishment of schools was in the right direction for education and religious instruction intended to lead to a modern and strong African society, with a good economy and strong local church in response to the spiritual needs of the people to take after what pertained in the Sierra Leone colony.¹ Formal education was structured in such a way as to improve upon the African's perception of life, to be one's self rather than imitate the European, making selfhood and identity the key words of the period. It is interesting to observe that West Africans were encouraged by the intellectuals of the period to wear and eat what was

indigenous to them, and behave as Africans. As these were the teachings of the 19th century intellectuals, they would be carried to their logical conclusions in the 20th century.

Joseph Boakye Danquah's relevance and role as a Pan Africanist whose advocacy no less instilled ideas of selfhood and identity into the theologians to come after him were commendable. Danquah could therefore be said to have prepared the ground for a smooth take off of African theology when it did come. J. B. Danquah developed the theory that the people of the Gold Coast were the descendants of the ancient Ghana Empire of the middle ages. It is not surprising that the name *Ghana* actually owes its name to his scholarly work.² He was a member of the committee that drew a new constitution for the Gold Coast, which was a stepping stone to independence.

In this article, I wish to trace Danquah's contribution as a pan Africanist, a cultural person, the first African theologian of rare standing, in order to show how his thoughts were brought to bear on the later pioneer West African theologians.

Danquah's background

Danquah bore the full name Joseph Kwame Kyeretwie Boakye Danquah. He was born on December 21, 1895 to Mr. Christian Emmanuel Yaw Boakye Danquah (formally known as Yaw Boakye), and Madam Lydia Okom Korantemaa.³ Danquah's father was a convert from African traditional religion to Christianity, who later became an evangelist of the Basel Mission Society, not only in Akyem Abuakwa, but also in Okwahu in the Eastern Region of the Gold Coast, now Ghana. J. B. Danquah (as he was later known and called), was educated at Basel Mission Schools, and at the instance of his elder brother, he travelled to Britain to read Law, where he qualified in 1926. He returned to the Gold Coast in 1927, the year James Kwegyir Aggrey died. How significant, and yet how coincidental that Danquah returned home that time to continue the works of Aggrey, though he refused to replace Aggrey at Achimota School. He chose rather to practice law.⁴ J. B. Danquah, brought up in the teachings of the Christian faith, did not miss out on the cultural aspects of the Akan tradition. He had a fair share of the Akan traditional precepts and Christian principles.

Danquah's contribution

Kwame Bediako, in the J. B. Danquah Memorial Lectures delivered under the auspices of the Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences (GAAS) in 2004 noted how indebted African intellectuals are to J. B. Danquah,⁵ not least African Christian theology that sought the transformation of society through theological engagement.⁶ J. B. Danquah's versatility in the expression of ideas is shown in his engagement of religion and culture. Bediako cites Prof. Kwabong on Danquah as follows:

Few Ghanaians have ranged so widely, so deeply, or so boldly, in their scholarship; few were so cosmopolitan or so interested in foreign ways and ideas, yet few were so steeped in, or proud of, their African culture...⁷

Prof. Kofi A. Busia's tribute of Danquah was also insightful. Busia wrote:

At a time when the ambition of many Africans who had had the advantage of higher education was to master the culture of the West, Dr. Danquah turned to the study of his own people, and became a pioneer in search of Africa's cultural heritage.⁸

Thus J. B. Danquah stood out as a unique 20th century West African pioneer who researched into African culture by applying the tools so acquired during his studies in the West. Culture was as important for Danquah as it had been for his predecessors, the West African intellectuals of the previous century, as the valid intellectual vehicle of expression of selfhood and identity. The African cultural heritage, for Danquah was only different but not inferior to the European way of life.⁹ Danquah believed that Africa had her own cultural contributions to make to the world to allow for a global participation in the scheme of things. As a critic of his culture and some of its practices, some of Danquah's writings advocated the abolition of certain unsavoury African cultural practices like aspects of widowhood rites, to make way for change and progress.¹⁰

Greatness, according to Danquah, was enshrined in one's culture – a subject he (Danquah) lamented was not taught in schools¹¹, as the schools' curriculum was patterned after those of the West. Kwame Bediako's interpretation of Danquah views culture as being "rooted in the collective psyche of a people and acts as the motor that generates and sets forth their best insights into life and their finest values".¹² That J. B. Danquah was, by that, advocating the study of African Traditional Religion in the schools of his day was a clear indication of someone who had Africa at heart. The reason being that since culture is enshrined in the religious beliefs of the African, Danquah could rightly be thought of as advancing arguments towards the formal study of African Traditional Religion. In that vein, Danquah preceded the 20th century West African intellectuals who could rightly be described as standing on Danquah's shoulders in their

advocacy of the place of the study of the cultural and religious beliefs and practices of the African. Of course that was in line with his insight regarding the centrality of Transcendence as the integrating centre in human thought and action.¹³ Certainly, Danquah was a pioneer theological thinker.

J. B. Danquah as a religious thinker – the first African Theologian

Danquah was a religious person. Bediako cites Dr. C. A. Akrofi's description of him:

Dr. Danquah was deeply religious and lived his religion. Though he never made much fuss about it, he seemed to have firm convictions about man's origin and his destiny. His religion was practical. It was shown in his love for his Creator and his fellow man.¹⁴

The Creator, according to Danquah, was both transcendent and immanent thus establishing the centrality of God in human thought, life and action. It was possible that such a view about the Creator informed Danquah's interpersonal relations, to the effect that if the Creator was also immanent, then one's love for his neighbour must be real too. That profoundly affected his intellectual life and career, as it was closely linked with his deep African cultural consciousness.¹⁵ According to Bediako, that further helped Danquah to function in a vastly different intellectual universe¹⁶, in relation to the influence of the European Enlightenment on his work.

Bediako noted that Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God*, first published in 1944, made Dr. Danquah the first African theologian of the 20th century¹⁷, the first significant African intellectual to recognise that there was a body of religious wisdom, knowledge and experience in African tradition that could be assembled and presented in an organised manner and described as a 'theology'.¹⁸ Harry Sawyerr who read *The Akan Doctrine of God* at least twenty times in three years, testifies to this and said that when Danquah wrote of God as head of the human Family and, therefore, as Ancestor, Danquah had a point.¹⁹

Danquah's belief in the centrality of God was encapsulated in his claim thus: 'Ns m Nyinaa ne Nyame'.²⁰

Onyankopôn domankoma. The 'Greater Nyame' is domankoma; that is to say domankoma is inclusive of the Greater Nyame... Since God is not three persons or three ideas, but suggests to the Akan mind a threefold idea or notion, it follows that

domankoma must have personality, ensuring a unity which is many, manifold, plentiful, abundant, copious.

It is this identification of copiousness with a theistic God, with God Nyankop n, that arouses the most lively association of contraries in the contemplative mind. The solution... can only be found in the maxim 3680, the least of all the maxims: Ns m nyinaa ne Nyame, 'God is the justification (End-cause) of all things.' If God is all things or all the Thing, then God, Nyankop n, who is the End, must find his Cause in the all-embracing, all-pervasive, copious and inclusive domankoma. All the Thing is domankoma. All of All (of all things) must find their justification in him. God Nyankop n is not outside of domankoma, or he could not be at all... We cannot serve God and Mammon, but also we cannot serve God Nyankop n without serving God domankoma, for God Nyankop n is not without God domankoma. Nyakop n domankoma, God, the copious, interminable, all-inclusive is God the personal religiously Supreme God.²¹

Certainly Danquah intended to theologise here although with some difficulty. While on the one hand, God is presented as a triad, on the other he presents God in names as if they were three different persons. Bediako rightly pointed out the complexities and the complications this offers as a result of which Danquah's view on this could not be sustained.²² But these notwithstanding, Danquah's attempt at an Akan theology cannot be overemphasized. For him, God is Supreme. This, Bediako sees as Danquah's contribution to the idea of the centrality of Transcendence, of God, hence Danquah's use of the maxim, 'Nsâm Nyinaa ne Nyame'. God is the end cause of all things. Everything points to him. Behind him there is no other. This, later positively impacted his academic and religious life.

For Danquah, the Christian religion was African religion too. He wrote in response to Westermann, then Director of the International Institute in Berlin, who set the term 'Christian religion' over against 'African religion', thus:

It did not seem to occur to him [Westermann] that the Christian religion had been, even before Rome became officially Christian, an African religion as well. The tendency for certain Europeans to think of Christianity as a European product is greatly to be regretted.²³

Thus according to Danquah, Christianity was also an African experience. It was not foreign to Africa. Danquah held that the coming of the Christian faith ‘to Africa was a fulfilment of the African’s own experience of God’²⁴, intimating that Africa looked up to that era. For him, Ghana, and for that matter Africa, did not need less of Christianity. It needed more, as, ‘this nation, above all, must attain the civilisation of a Christian people if she is to be capable of fitting herself for her role’.²⁵

For Danquah, Christianity, the harbinger of peace, was the best of religions,²⁶ because he believed that Christ came for all people.²⁷ Christianity for him was:

...the doctrine of a civilisation of love, of peace, of each individual’s personal importance in the eyes of God.²⁸

By this, Danquah, having underscored the universality of Christianity, which in his estimation was a cross-cultural religion, Christianity, according to him could not be the preserve of Europe.²⁹ In line with the above, Danquah’s belief that the African culture was not alien to Christianity, made him advocate toleration and understanding of each religion for the other. These views of Danquah once again are very much akin to Wilmot Blyden’s of the 19th century who in his *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, used a similar argument to suggest Africa’s uniqueness in the preservation of Christianity, an indication that Danquah read Blyden.

Christianity, for Danquah, was not only a religion. It was also a civilisation. He wrote:

If there is a better civilisation than that of peace and goodwill, and that of loving God with all one’s might and loving one’s neighbour as one’s self, and of treating each individual as important as every other individual, each man a full citizen, each man a voter, each man a “political party”, each man saving his own soul, then let us go for it – for that other civilisation.³⁰

African traditional religion, for him was the old experience of which Christianity was the new revelation. It is also worthy of note that for Danquah “...the Spirit of God was abroad, even in the Akan of the Gold Coast”³¹ by which he meant that in Akan religion there was the

presumption of the one God of the whole earth whom the Akan also worship. This monotheistic idea would later become a strong point for African theologians.

Therefore there is no question of conflict between the two religions: Christianity and African Traditional Religion, if the subject is approached to the effect that it is God whom mankind wishes to know and to understand. It concerns one's full knowledge of the true God of theology.³² (God's) *Nyame's* position is not shared with any other. He is wholly other unlike the ancestors. As the creator of all things this God is the same for both Christians and the believers in African traditional religion. Later theologians like Bolaji Idowu will pick on this and develop it further for Yoruba concept of the Supreme Being.

Danquah saw in the Ghanaian quest for excellence a hint of a religious life acceptable to God. Danquah consequently wrote:

On the basis of the ideal given by Gaddiel Acquah, 'A thing of dishonour ill-becomes the Ghanaian, I pointed out that if there was divine pride, man's possibility of divine nobility was our Ghanaian version and that it accorded the Ghanaian tradition and race a religious value, a value akin to God. This was many years ago, but I have not found occasion to alter this earlier estimation of our Ghanaian nature and character – a nature that aims at what is honourable and spurns disgrace'.³³

It is apposite to quote Bediako to appreciate how theological Danquah was as he treated the above subject. Bediako wrote:

Danquah and the Akan people therefore had in their hands the evidence of the vision of greatness on which they could now build a 'great future, a great way of life'. That this insight is a theological one is confirmed by his reference to Christaller's description of Akan wisdom as containing 'sparks of truth' as the evidence that 'the Spirit of God is abroad, even in the Akan of the Gold Coast'.³⁴

In an address to the Labadi Young People's Guild on 29th August 1962, among other things, Danquah wrote:

...You see, this idea of independence or nationhood is not merely a question of achieving the political kingdom and stopping there. If nationhood or independence is to be completely fulfilled there are several other kingdoms to be achieved by specific endeavour and specific talent. There is the kingdom of scholarship, or of science, or of literature... There is also the kingdom of righteousness.³⁵

That, among the notion of kingdoms, Danquah listed the kingdom of righteousness, was itself a strong point for his religiousness. The realisation that, that did not come easy, was a good index to understand how deep his thoughts were. Righteousness is not easily acquired. The kingdom ruled by the Transcendent God, demands the exercise of a specific talent and endeavour in order to be part of it.

Danquah had then become the first of theologians for Africa. It was left for the later generations of theologians to develop his thought more clearly. Andrew Walls described Danquah as the first African theologian, and Sawyerr, the first African Christian theologian. In order to understand Danquah, Sawyerr claimed to have read Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God* twenty times in three years. Danquah's book *The Akan Doctrine of God* stood out as one of the earliest written works on African traditional culture which attempted a re-reading of the African way of life. His importance was in unearthing Africa's contribution to theology. Danquah's writings greatly influenced Harry Sawyerr's theological thought. Not only would Sawyerr be a *student* of Danquah, others like E. Bolaji Idowu and Kwesi A. Dickson would also be impacted significantly. We now turn to how Danquah influenced these three West African pioneer theologians from Sierra Leone, Nigeria and Ghana

The Significance of Danquah for Sawyerr, Idowu, and Dickson

Danquah might rightly be seen as the towering figure behind the three West African pioneer theologians of the 20th century: Harry Sawyerr, E. Bolaji Idowu, and Kwesi A. Dickson. As a philosopher and a theologian, Danquah's impact on these theologians was immense. In his PhD thesis not one reference was made to Africa, but upon completion, Danquah took to discussions and works on his own culture.³⁶ Danquah had won the John Stuart Mill prize in Philosophy in the University of London for his PhD thesis on the subject "Moral End as Moral Excellence" a topic which has nothing on African traditional culture and practice. Interestingly however, it was Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God* that became the major application of his ideas relating to African religious life and tradition. It could also be said for the three pioneer theologians of West Africa, with the possible exception of Idowu who wrote his PhD on Yoruba Traditional Religion, that both Sawyerr and Dickson were biblical scholars, and yet most of their later writings were on African culture and religion and how they dialogue with Christianity. I shall attempt in this half of the article to show how Danquah's influence over Sawyerr, Idowu and Dickson is evident in their writings.

Joseph Boakye Danquah, a Ghanaian philosopher, statesman and an intellectual may probably be called the first African theologian of modern times.³⁷ Certainly he was not a church theologian. That designation most probably belonged to Sawyerr who influenced Danquah.³⁸ How significant that it was the influence of the first African theologian that would make possible the book of the first church theologian in West Africa! While Idowu also made references to Danquah's ideas in his works, Kwesi Dickson wrote the Introduction to Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God*.³⁹

One medium that Danquah employed in *The Akan Doctrine of God* – the use of African intellectual categories – was clearly what must have impressed Sawyerr, Idowu and Dickson. But that could not have materialised had the pioneer theologians themselves not exhibited a certain

level of commitment and love for things African. It could be said without doubt that the African-ness of Sawyerr, Idowu and Dickson was responsible for their use of African idioms and categories for doing African Christian theology. Critically it was precisely because they were Christians that was why they used African categories and cultural idioms for a better appreciation of things that were African, because Christian theology for them was impossible in Africa if Africans ignored the cultural realities of the continent. Sawyerr for instance believed that the Christian God was both versatile and ubiquitous.⁴⁰ For Idowu, one might argue that since he believed that God had not left Himself without a witness,⁴¹ that witnessing, to be relevant, ought to be expressed in categories acceptable and understandable to the recipients, hence the use of African mediums in communicating the message.

Danquah's Ideas

How Danquah impacted the theological ideas of Sawyerr, Idowu and Dickson would best be appreciated by looking, first at Danquah's ideas. Danquah's idea regarding the doctrine of God as the Great Ancestor, with all the other (human) ancestors as mediators is interesting. The doctrine further held that God is the Father of all diverse men of one blood⁴², and Danquah believed that position was still applicable to West Africa especially the Akan. He wrote:

This statement of doctrine is based on facts available to Westermann from a study in South Africa. Readers of Rattray will be aware that the names *Mukuru*, *Unkulunkulu*, *Muzimu*, *Modimo*, and *Mulungu* have their equivalents in the Akan *Nyame*, *Nyankop n* and *Nana*.⁴³

Danquah's use of Akan names like *Nyame*, *Nyankop n* and *Nana* for God was insightful. *Nyame* according to Danquah meant the *Shining One*. *Nana* meant *Grandfather*. Based on the ascribed names, God is then the ancestor of the first Akan with all younger generations as His grandchildren. He is the Final Ancestor, the Creator. Danquah further said that this *Nyame* lives in the social group and operates as the beneficent ancestor through his representative, the head or chief of the family. He is the *opanyin* or elder who, living in the manner of *Nyame* qualifies to be called *Nana*.⁴⁴

For Danquah, *Nana* was probably derived from *e-na*, mother, and grandmother, literally meaning begetter, root, seed, and producer.⁴⁵ The father of the family is *Nana*. *Nana* does not only postulate omnipotence. It also stands for wisdom, the elderly, and the repository of the customs and traditions of the people. *Nana* then is broader in meaning which ought to be understood as a functional term. For Danquah, humanity was viewed as one family with God as the Great

Ancestor, an idea with biblical implications. Although brought up in a Christian home, Danquah was not using Christian categories to arrive at something he believed could be best explained from the African point of view. God, the Creator of the Universe and owner of all things thereof is also African.

God is also Father. Here, Danquah presented a triad – Father-Ancestor-Creator. “Akan knowledge of God teaches that he is the Great Ancestor. He is a true high God and manlike ancestor of the first man.” Unlike God, human ancestors do not live forever; they die and are honoured and deified for having lived in the dignity of the Great Ancestor. ‘The Great Ancestor is the great father, and all men of the blood of the ancestor are of Him, and are of one blood with all other men created of His blood and breath.’ He went on to say that ‘human life is one continuous blood, from the originating blood of the Great Source of that blood. The continuance of that blood in the continuance of the community [sic] is the greatest single factor of existence’.⁴⁶ Danquah sounded patriarchal but this ought not to be taken as his pattern of thought. He simply reflected the language of his time. Consequently Danquah argued in favour of the abandonment in Africa of all preconceived ideas regarding religion by urging that Africa be allowed to make her contribution to the understanding of faith. For that to be possible, Danquah suggested that the problem be tackled from within. Since religion for him was a personal fact, a religious God must be living and not both dead and living⁴⁷ as he must be real to his worshippers. Danquah postulated:

...for the Akan, the central fact of life is not death, but life, the means whereby the blood of an ancestor, the spark of the race, is generated for a descendant, bearer and vehicle of the spark.⁴⁸

The ancestor though dead, is still alive by virtue of his blood that continues to flow in his/her offspring. Danquah believed that in this translation from father to ancestor, dying is incidental, for the ancestor would have been ancestor whether he died or not. As *Nana*, ancestors have been worshipped⁴⁹ as *opanyin* before their translation. In that case, the Supreme Deity appears as a *person*, an ancestor very much like man. But he is Creator who is father as well as father’s father, the creator of the father and source of the spark. It is in Him that the family completes its genealogy, - for in him is found ancestor, father and son.⁵⁰ The presupposition is not farfetched. The God of the Akan is not a recent invention by courtesy of European missionary enterprise. He is not a new God. Rather, God had been known since time immemorial by Africans and so they must be allowed to express faith in Him as best fits their understanding and perception.

Danquah was subsequently led to say that the Akan religion was the worship of the race which discovered its unity in consequence of the one blood that transfused in all members of the race – that, they were made of one blood, were of the race of God, the supreme Creator and final Ancestor. But since God has no limitations in terms of boundaries, his race embraces all.⁵¹

Since blood among the matrilineal Akans of Ghana is that element in man which makes him a member of his mother's family; and since that same element is the seat of life, according to Akan belief, the use of *blood* for God is indicative of a possible formation of a community by God the Great Ancestor. *Blood* then acquires a metaphorical meaning. It is common knowledge that God is spirit and hence cannot possess properties that belong to humanity such as having blood as His driving force. Blood in this context for Danquah is more than physical life. It becomes symbolic of a certain human sharing of immortality. It stands for *Soul, Spirit* and *Mind* of God. Thus, it is God's Spirit, the soul of God in man. This is what makes man a child of God by the possession of His characteristics. But why must Danquah use the word *blood* instead of *spirit*? The impression one gets is that, since he used the word ancestor for God, who has a continuous link with generations both dead and alive, as well as those yet to be born, in human terms that which best explains the connectedness between God and man is both *blood* and *spirit*. The Akan belief that a child inherits *blood* from the mother and *spirit* from the father establishes the fatherhood of God through the spirit rather than the blood. Among the Akans, it is the *kra* (soul), which identifies a person as a child of God by virtue of possessing life, as it also cements the relations within the community of the family of God. It is so because one is only a child of God if he possesses His spirit, which makes him like God, as it is among the Akans where sonship and relations are based on blood affinity to a putative ancestor. Since God gives His "blood", (in this case His 'Spirit') to humanity, there is always a projection of Himself in humanity, thus keeping a long line of descendants to His credit which in effect qualifies Him to be called an *ancestor, opanyin*, (elder) or *chief*.

It is interesting to note how these explanations fit so well into the Christian concept of God as the First Cause, the prime Mover. Danquah thus provided a way through which African cultural realities and apprehensions could be categorized for appreciating certain Christian concepts. In 1944 when Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God* was published, it was not a *Christian* theologian crying out of the wilderness, but an *African* theologian whose works provided the bedrock for future African theological enterprise. Sawyerr read Danquah and underscored the importance of the Presence in the life of the African, and how the Supreme Presence should be understood. For Sawyerr, the universal nature of the Presence allowed the use of cultural categories as media through which that Presence might be properly and relevantly appreciated. In that way, the quest for relevance for Sawyerr came to centre on using African cultural idioms and perceptions to interpret Christian ideas.

When Sawyerr wrote his account of God in West African tradition, titled *God – Creator or Ancestor?*,⁵² it became clear that his debt to Danquah was considerable. According to Sawyerr, Danquah's argument on the subject was an attempt to contextualise the concept of God. It was an attempt at a new reading of man's knowledge about God. Sawyerr's quest then implied a shortfall in what has been inherited. Therefore, for Sawyerr just repeating the inherited dogma was not enough. New dimensions needed to be added to one's perception of God; and Danquah's contribution opened a new window on the concept of God's divinity, which provided leads for further, and fuller Christian theology in Africa. It is significant to note the influence of Danquah on Sawyerr, and how elsewhere Sawyerr would also use the title 'ancestor' also for God.

However, on that subject, both Idowu and Dickson had difficulty with Danquah's assertion that "God is *ancestor*". For Dickson that was the case because *Nyame* was not spoken of as a deified ancestor. *Nyame*'s position is not shared with any other. He is the creator of all things. He is wholly other, unlike the ancestors.⁵³ However, for Idowu the

Akan knowledge of God (*Nyame*) teaches that He is the Great Ancestor. He is a true high God and manlike ancestor of the first man. As such ancestor He deserves to be worshipped in the visible ancestral head, the good chief of the community.⁵⁴

Idowu could not visualise God as the great ancestor, father of Adam and grandfather of Cain and Abel. Consequently, he pleaded that no one read into any particular word more than it actually meant. Ancestor for him (Idowu) meant a human ancestor. Idowu did not subscribe to *Ancestor* as term for God since for him there were many words from which one could choose a suitable one for a description of God rather than overload a particular word with a lot of meaning.⁵⁵ For Danquah God is ancestor in consequence of being ancient. He is Chief, and Father, and so ancestors too are.⁵⁶

In the forward to Prof. Kwame Bediako's Danquah Memorial Lectures, Dickson showed how Danquah meant much to him for instance.⁵⁷ Danquah believed in a body of teaching in Africa which came to be called theology. Dickson had wished that all Danquah's works had survived the fire which once swept his house, and also his imprisonment in order for others to have appreciated him better. Some of such works were *The Ghanaian Calendar* and *The Ghana Doctrine of Man*.⁵⁸

On the theology of God Danquah anticipated Idowu when he affirmed the point more strongly that the Akan religious doctrine knew only one God⁵⁹, a point that Idowu strongly accepted and confirmed. In his opening remarks to the *Akan Doctrine of God*, published in 1944, Danquah wrote:

The Akan doctrine of God is the doctrine of an Akan type of God. The true God is not of several kinds, but he can be known under several degrees or colours, for each people has a name for God, and in the name is to be found that quality or colour in God which most appeals to their racial mind.⁶⁰

Danquah had no doubt in his mind that God could not be more than one. God is unity, and the Akans are monotheists, a position that could be taken for most parts of Africa. The Akan names for God were then only a means by which the people apprehended and continued to apprehend Him. It did not make the God Africans know different from the God of the West. The different names for God among Africans were only a testimony of the people's variegated experiences of Him. Therefore God might be called a particular name that might imply the giver of rain, since that was one of His qualities. This idea was brought home forcefully to Idowu when he pointed out that *Olódùmarè* cannot be different from the God and Lord of Jesus Christ. He has the same attributes of the God of the Bible. He is unchanging, permanent, reliable, He is Head in heaven and on earth. He shares His attributes with no one.⁶¹ Idowu wrote:

Thus to argue or suggest that God in African thought is other than God, who is 'the Lord...the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth' is patent nonsense. ...Incompleteness or distortion in the picture of God is a universal fact which should not be palmed on Africa by means of academic shrewdness.⁶¹

Thus it could not be said of God to exhibit a partial love towards a part of His creation to the disadvantage of others. Rather God revealed Himself differently but relevantly and appropriately to His creation, mindful of the context, of the different people, each race apprehending the revelation according to its capability. Again, Danquah was the inspirer for Dickson's own reflections on God, a subject that Dickson later built on and critiques Danquah on. In his 'Introduction' to J. B. Danquah's *The Akan Doctrine of God*, Dickson stressed that the uncertainty surrounding the use of etymology to help offer a better understanding of the meanings of God's names should be taken seriously. For Dickson, the idea of God as the creator of the universe was not contested. God is known as Nyame and not as *Y hmi* or *Yaamie* derived from *y* - [to make], and *emi* [me]. So the name meant *he created me*.⁶³ Dickson, like Danquah therefore rejected the derivation of *Nyame* from He-who-gives-satisfaction as etymologically wrong.⁶⁴

But Dickson also disagreed with Danquah's alternate suggestions for the name of God and what it could mean. Dickson removed all ideas of possible rivalries between God and the other gods who, according to Danquah were in competition with God for supremacy. According to Danquah, God was consequently triumphant over the other gods, hence the name *Nyankop n* (the Greater Nyame) as against *Nyame*. Dickson saw this as only a conjecture by Danquah. Dickson's position actually makes God the only God, the Creator who exists, underscoring that He does not have to wrestle his supremacy out of any other deity making Dickson firm in his Christian conviction regarding the doctrine of God. God is not *primus inter pares* with other deities. He is their originator. It is in the light of this that Dickson did not agree with Danquah's designation of God as the Great Ancestor, since according to Dickson, *Nyame* was not spoken of as a deified ancestor. *Nyame's* position was not shared with any other being. He is wholly other unlike the ancestors. He is the creator of all things.

The use of the mother tongue

Danquah promoted Ghanaian culture, philosophy, religion and the study of Ghanaian languages. He hoped that with time the Twi language would emerge as the national language of the country. To Danquah, the translation of the scriptures into the mother tongues of Africa served as the catalyst for the acceptance of the Christian faith on the continent,⁶⁵ which in his estimation was the greatest contribution of the Church to the spread of Christianity.⁶⁶ He believed, not until people had experienced God on a personal level would they appreciate the faith individually. No wonder Danquah advocated the urgent study of the vernaculars of Africa for Christianity to be owned by Africans. The languages, to him were the base for the religion and culture of a people. Thus to him, Africa's unique contribution to civilisation would be her religion and culture, and in spite of the industrial revolution, Africa's unique role would be needed by the world as no nation is an island unto itself.

Consequently, Danquah was committed to using the Akan language in his intellectual discussions. He had a special liking for the Akan proverbs which he considered as repositories of Akan wisdom, knowledge, insight, science, theology and philosophy.⁶⁷ The novelty in Danquah's use of the Akan language in his intellectual discourse was Danquah's ability to work *from* the meanings – explicit or implicit – of the Akan idioms and expressions, *into* the elucidation of his ideas in English.⁶⁸ Bediako believed the Twi (mother tongue of Danquah) did not disappear. Rather it “*abides as the controlling centre of thought*”.⁶⁹ J. B. Danquah's life and thought suggested to the younger generation the role the use of the mother tongue could play in intellectual discourses as African intellectuals attempt to show a relevance of their scholarship to their people. J. B. Danquah advocated vernacular languages in education.

Bediako cited a case of Danquah's own recollection of his father's role in society as a preacher of the gospel, as a result of becoming literate in the Twi language, a kind of *religious liberation* which informed Danquah's own intellectual liberation.⁷⁰ The mastery of the mother tongue was therefore a necessary vehicle for imparting knowledge so acquired to others. Thus for Danquah no mother tongue is inferior to another as they all become valid carriers and vehicles of intellectual discourse and scholarship at the highest levels.⁷¹

He insisted on the study of African languages which he saw as one of the most accomplished and finest on earth. He wrote:

In regard to mathematics...the Akan language, among many of the great languages of the world, stands out prominent as possessing what is called the decimal system of enumeration, that is to say, it counts from one to ten without looking back... The Akan counts from eleven through the 'teens' to 20 without looking back. Akan mathematics has names for hundred *ha*, and for thousand, *apem*, and for million, *opepem* and for millions of millions, *opepepem*, et cetera, and they have specific names for a great many fractions, evidence that the people in an early age must have dealt with large groups of commercial figures and numbers.⁷²

J. B. Danquah was a good reflection of what he intended Africans to be. Unlike some who after the acquisition of Western education turned their back on Africa, Danquah did the opposite. He sought to research into the African past in order to unearth her contributions for the achievements of humankind. That was one way selfhood and identity could be secured for Africa. He loved Africa and died for her. J. B. Danquah intimated in letters he wrote from prison that his vocation after his release from prison would have been, among other things, to research into the social and cultural life of the church and state.⁷³

Culture

J. B. Danquah, like the West African intellectuals of the 19th century before him, saw a certain affinity between the Sumerian, Akkadian, and Hebrew as creators of civilization. That he silhouetted against the Akans and posited that they compared favourably with the civilizations of earlier cultures. If that was anything to go by, then in Danquah's thought, the Akans were also civilized. That was again reminiscent of Blyden's argument that Blacks are not inferior to Whites, they are only different. Danquah wrote:

In fact, some of the discoveries I have made in the course of my research about the Akan in particular, and the people of Ghana in general, are so astonishing that it has become difficult during the last ten years or so to get English or American publishers to look twice at any of my manuscripts and muster courage to publish it. Until we get our own publishing houses and our own financing foundations, it may be difficult to put across to the world results of research which are likely to destroy the false pictures which some learned people in the past formed about people and our land.⁷⁴

Later theologians of the 20th century like Kwesi Dickson took after Danquah regarding how Africans should be financially sound if they were to be received on the same wavelength by the West. Subsequently, Dickson founded the Donewell Insurance Company for the Methodist Church Ghana when he served the church as its President, in a bid to secure financial independence.

Conclusion

Danquah argued that within Africa there was something that was good, and must not be left untapped for growth. There is no wonder then that after his studies in London, Danquah came home and tried to show relevance with his studies which had nothing to do with Africa, an indication that Africans must reconnect in a significant way. He linked the ancient Ghana Empire to the present day Ghana and suggested its name, thus bringing in ancient brilliance to bear on the modern. It could strongly be argued that Blyden's dream of Africa being only different but not inferior to Europe is funnelled through Danquah, which would be followed up by the 20th century pioneer West African theologians. In a nut shell, the significance of Danquah was also the significance for the quest of relevance.

Danquah was like Aggrey in another direction. He put forward ideas which theologians would address later. Almost all African theologians would be indebted to Danquah. By his contribution, Danquah provided some of the building blocks of African intellectual contribution to link African scholarship with African resources. Danquah was therefore a pivotal figure who saw in himself the kind of relevance by which he opened the way for others to follow. Danquah easily served as the binding element both before and after this time.

Danquah's influence on Sawyerr, Idowu and Dickson had been substantial. Sawyerr agreed with Danquah on the validity and relevance of the cultural insights of Africa for African theology. In effect Sawyerr found in Danquah a bridge between traditional African religious ideas and Christianity. What Sawyerr found in Danquah was therefore more than a philosophical postulate

of God as ancestor. Instead, it was an intellectual validation of Sawyerr's own quest for a larger and an African framework within which to place his Christian encounter with God.

Therefore Danquah could rightly be said to have prepared the African intellectual arena for the succeeding generation of Church theologians. Thus Sawyerr, building upon the cultural foundations, and intellectual and philosophical insights of Danquah, brought Christian theology into living encounter with the culture of Africa. Danquah's own words were apt here. He wrote among others:

Now that the Scriptures are going into the lives of the people, we need have no doubt that the marriage of African culture with Christianity will be a permanent one, a marriage to enrich the humaniques [sic] of our African heritage and civilisation- to make our African religion and our African culture one and at home together – a humanique, [sic] beneficent civilisation, not only for Africa but for mankind altogether.⁷⁵

Danquah's influence on Idowu is evident for example in Idowu's contribution on God as One, and not many. This was a point that Danquah had affirmed in his *Akan Doctrine of God*, published in 1944.⁷⁶ Danquah then had no difficulty with the monotheistic nature of Deity as far as the Akan was concerned. For Kwesi Dickson, Danquah's influence in the area of mother tongue usage and the place of African traditional religion in doing Christian theology cannot be overemphasised. Dickson later showed this Danquah influence in his (Dickson's) treatment of the doctrine of God which he elucidated with insights from mother tongue.

Notes

¹ Robert July, *The Origins of Modern African Thought; Its development in West Africa during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries*, Faber and Faber, 24 Russell Square, London, 1968, p. 180.

² Joseph Boakye Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, (Accra, Ghana Universities Press, 1997). Cf. L. H. Ofose-Appiah, *Life and Times of Joseph Boakye Danquah*, Waterville Publishing House, Presbyterian Book Depot Ltd, Accra, 1974, pp. 51-53.

³Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. xvii.

⁴Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. xviii.

- ⁵ Kwame Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language: An Appreciation of the Intellectual Legacy of Dr. J. B. Danquah* (JB Danquah Memorial Lectures Series 37, 2004, 2-4 February 2004) Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2004. p. viii-ix.
- ⁶ Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. x-xi.
- ⁷ Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. ix.
- ⁸ K. A. Busia, 'The goal he sought to reach always eluded him' in H. K. Akyeampong (ed.), *The Undying Memories of a Gallant Man*, p. 8, cited in Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. 10.
- ⁹ This argument is reminiscent to Edward W. Blyden's argument from the previous century.
- ¹⁰ Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. 18.
- ¹¹ Boakye Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 279.
- ¹² Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. 24.
- ¹³ Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. 27.
- ¹⁴ Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. 6.
- ¹⁵ Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. 7.
- ¹⁶ Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. 8.
- ¹⁷ The point was first made by A. F. Walls in his appreciation of Harry Sawyerr. See Parratt, John. (ed.) *The Practice of Presence. Shorter Writings of Harry Sawyerr*. W. B. Eerdmans. 1996.
- ¹⁸ Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. 5.
- ¹⁹ Harry Sawyerr, *God: Ancestor or Creator?* (London, Longman 1970), p. x. cf. John Parratt (ed.), *The Practice of Presence, Shorter Writings of Harry Sawyerr*, (William Eerdmans, 1996), p. xiv.
- ²⁰ (All wisdom is from God)
- ²¹ J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God – A Fragment of Gold Coast Ethics and Religion* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1944. The book was reprinted by Frank Cass & Co Ltd, London, 1968, with a new introduction by Kwesi A. Dickson.) pp. 63-64.
- ²² Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. 3.

- ²³ Danquah, *Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 10, fn.1.cited in Bediako, 'Religion, Culture and Language, p. 8.
- ²⁴ Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 308.
- ²⁵ Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 310.
- ²⁶ Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, pp. 310 & 312.
- ²⁷ Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 317.
- ²⁸ Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 310.
- ²⁹ Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 312.
- ³⁰ Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 318.
- ³¹ Joseph Boakye Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 187
- ³² Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 318.
- ³³ Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 283-284.
- ³⁴ Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, p. 35.
- ³⁵ J. B. Danquah, 'Cultural elements in Ghana' in *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p.306
- ³⁶ Joseph Boakye Danquah, *The Moral End As Moral Excellence*, An unpublished PH.D Thesis. 1943.
- ³⁷ Parratt (ed.), *The Practice of Presence*, p. xiv.

Sawyerr was trained in Durham with its High Church Anglicanism from where he graduated as a New Testament scholar. It is against such a background that we are to understand his Christian calling and responsibility.

For John Baur, Sawyerr was the elder among African theologians. (John Baur, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa: An African Church History*, (Paulines Publications Africa 1998), p. 441.

- ³⁸ See especially Harry Sawyerr's *Creative Evangelism: Towards a new Christian Encounter with Africa*, (Lutterworth Press 1968)
- ³⁹ Kwesi A. Dickson, 'Introduction', in J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, Frank Cass & Co Ltd. 1968.
- ⁴⁰ Sawyer, *Creative Evangelism*: See chapter 2.

⁴¹E. Bolaji Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba Belief*, (London, Longmans, 1962), p. 31.

⁴² Joseph Boakye Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, (Lutterworth Press, London and Redhill, 1944), p. 19.

⁴³ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 20.

Danquah refers to Dietrich Westermann, *Africa and Christianity*, (Oxford University Press, 1937).

⁴⁴Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, pp. 21, 22.

⁴⁵Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 22.

⁴⁶Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, pp. 27-28.

⁴⁷Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 167.

⁴⁸Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 168

⁴⁹ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 168.

⁵⁰ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 168.

⁵¹ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 169.

⁵² Published in 1970 by Longman

⁵³Dickson, 'Introduction' in J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. xix.

⁵⁴E. Bolaji Idowu, *African Traditional Religion: A Definition*, (Trowbridge and Esher. 1978), [First published in 1973 by SCM Press], p. 180.

⁵⁵ Unfortunately, however, Idowu could not provide one himself.

⁵⁶ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 168.

⁵⁷ Kwame Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language* (JB Danquah Memorial Lectures Series 37, 2004, 2-4 February 2004) Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2004, pp. v-vi.

⁵⁸Bediako, *Religion, Culture and Language*, pp. v-vi.

⁵⁹ Joseph Boakye Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, (Lutterworth Press, London and Redhill, 1944), p.39. Cf. Idowu, *African Traditional Religion. A Definition*, p, 146.

- ⁶⁰ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p.1.
- ⁶¹ Idowu, *Olódùmarè: God in Yoruba Belief*, p. 33.
- ⁶² Idowu, *African Traditional Religion, A Definition*, p. 69. cf. p. 61.
- ⁶³ Dickson, 'Introduction', in J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. xii.
- ⁶⁴ Dickson, 'Introduction', in J. B. Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. xii.
- ⁶⁵ Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 308.
- ⁶⁶ Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 317.
- ⁶⁷ Bediako, 'Danquah's use of the Mother tongue in intellectual discourse and its relevance in our time' (JB Danquah Memorial Lectures 3) Accra: Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, 2004.p. 1.
- ⁶⁸ Bediako, 'Danquah's use of the Mother tongue in intellectual discourse and its relevance in our time'. pp. 1-2.
- ⁶⁹ Bediako, 'Danquah's use of the Mother tongue in intellectual discourse and its relevance in our time' p. 2.
- ⁷⁰ Bediako, 'Danquah's use of the Mother tongue in intellectual discourse and its relevance in our time' p. 4.
- ⁷¹ Bediako, 'Danquah's use of the Mother tongue in intellectual discourse and its relevance in our time' p. 5.
- ⁷² Bediako, 'Danquah's 'Conception of culture and its place in the Renewal and Enhancement of Society' p. 9.
- ⁷³ Bediako, 'Religion, Culture and Language, p. 3.
- ⁷⁴ Boakye Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, p. 295.
- ⁷⁵ Joseph Boakye Danquah, *The Ghanaian Establishment*, (Ghana Universities Press, Accra, 1997), p. 319.
- ⁷⁶ Danquah, *The Akan Doctrine of God*, p. 39.