

Speech by Rev. Prof. Thomas A. Oduro, President of Good News Theological Seminary, Accra during the Golden Jubilee Celebration of the Seminary on 6th Nov. 2021

**The Good News Story: a collaborative achievement.
(1971-2021)**

GREETINGS:

Rev. Chairman, Guest Speaker, eye-witnesses of the founding of the seminary, beloved Traditional Chiefs, invited guests, students, staff, and lecturers of the seminary – past and present –

On behalf of the staff, lecturers, and students, past and present, I warmly welcome you to the celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Good News Theological Seminary. We are deeply grateful to the Almighty God for how far God has brought us. This celebration will not be complete if we do not share a part of the journey with you. The Lord has been merciful and gracious to us.

BRIEF BACKGROUND HISTORY:

The establishment of the Good News Training Institute (now, Good News Theological Seminary) in Accra, Ghana was a culmination of many incidental events in the 1960s in West Africa. The most important event was the phenomenal growth of African Independent Churches (AICs) in Africa, particularly West Africa. This heightened the curiosity of scholars, missiologists, and researchers to find the causes of the popularity, growth, and challenges of AICs. Dr. Harold W. Turner and Dr. Andrew Walls were some Western scholars who pivoted the study of the AICs in Nigeria and Sierra Leone.

In the early 1960s, some AICs in Southeastern Nigeria invited the Mennonite Board of Missions to work with them to enhance their theological education. The Biafran civil war in eastern Nigeria (1966-1969), however, disrupted the AIC/MBM interaction. Edwin and Irene Weaver were among the MBM missionaries evacuated from Nigeria. On the advice of Turner, Primate Adeleke Adejobi, then the head of the Church of the Lord (Aladura), invited the MBM to establish a seminary for his church in Nigeria. It was in Freetown, Sierra Leone where Ed and Irene Weaver came into contact with the Church of the Lord

(Aladura) but due to the unfavorable social conditions in Nigeria, Primate Adejobi recommended the Weavers to Apostle E. A. Ofose, head of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) in Ghana.

The Weavers began a Bible study at the choir loft of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) at Nima, a suburb of Accra, where Archdeacon Solomon Krow was the head Pastor. The Good News Bible was the version that was used so the Bible Class was named *Good News Bible Classes*. Prophet Mills, an AIC leader and brother-in-law of Krow, introduced the Weavers to many AIC leaders, who were not necessarily of the Aladura stock. They grouped themselves into what became known as the *Leaders' Fellowship*. More Good News Classes were opened at many AIC worship centers in Accra. The classes were taught by Western missionary and Ghanaian scholars, church leaders, and some students of the Trinity College, a seminary for Protestant churches in Ghana, now known as Trinity Theological Seminary. The Leaders' Fellowship was ecumenical. A dialogue between the AICs and the mainline churches known as *Inter-church conversations* was facilitated by the Weavers and other Ghanaian Church leaders. It was patronised by the Christian Council of Ghana and the AICs.

In early 1971 a decision to turn the various Good News Bible Classes into an evening part-time theological institute was taken and implemented. The school was called the Good News Training Institute. Prof. James Anquandah, K. B. Ellis, and Willard Roth were appointed to administer the school, which was opened at the YMCA, Accra, on 4th October 1971 but was formally inaugurated on 6th Nov. 1971.

ACHIEVEMENTS:

Rev. Chairman and all honorable friends gathered here, the seminary has chalked some exponential exploits in African Christianity, particularly, among the African Independent Churches. The relationship between the AICs and the western mission-founded churches in Africa was porous, particularly during the emergence and popularity of the AICs; it was fraught with distrust, insults, insinuations, persecutions, disregard of religious experiences, and charges of 'sheep stealing'. There was also mistrust among the AICs. The

reconciliation of the AICs and the western mission-founded churches in Ghana, with the Mennonite couple as peacemakers, has been a great achievement, talk less about fostering unity among the AICs themselves. Historically, Mennonites and Lutherans were not in a good relationship with each other, for centuries so the fact that Mennonites and Lutherans worked peacefully to found this school is also an achievement.

The Good News Training Institute began training students at Certificate levels but now the curricular has been expanded and raised to offer Theological Education by Extension (TEE), Diploma in Pastoral Ministry, and Bachelor of Theology programmes. The seminary runs other basic theological education for all levels of students, even for those who are illiterate in their mother tongues. Many alumni of the seminary who, under normal circumstances were not academically qualified to enroll in Bible Colleges and Seminaries were given the privilege to enroll at Good News Theological Seminary.

In 2008 the then National Accreditation Board (NAB), granted institutional accreditation to the Seminary. The Diploma in Pastoral Ministry and the Bachelor of Theology programmes are also accredited.

As a result, more than one thousand alumni minister effectively in diverse aspects of ministries. Some of them are church musicians, evangelists, missionaries, adults or children Sunday school teachers, counsellors, administrators of educational/theological institutions, historians, historiographers, teachers of secular institutions, theological scholars and authors, etc.

The founders of the seminary primarily targeted only leaders and members of AICs to be educated at the Seminary but for the past 25 years, students from all spectrums of Christianity have received theological education from the seminary. Again, the primary target of students were leaders and members of AICs in Ghana but students from Ethiopia, South Sudan, Liberia, Nigeria, Zambia, Republic of Benin, and the Republic of Togo have enrolled and benefitted from the education offered at the Seminary.

Rev. Chairman, and all honorable guests gathered here,

In 2014 the seminary developed an extensive extra-curricular programme including sensitizing our catchment communities on diseases like HIV and AIDS as well as Hepatitis. A more permanent programme spanning over 100 communities is sited in the Ziope Traditional Area, in the Volta region. The purpose of the activities is to equip learners with technical- vocational skills as well as advocacy and counselling sessions for vulnerable women, youth, etc. These include kente weaving, making of liquid soap, body creams, shampoo, tye and dye, etc. Fifty (50) acres of land have been leased by the seminary for agricultural production and for the local farmers to be taught some new and improved skills of farming tended to alleviate poverty and hunger, thus enhancing quality economic lifestyles. These are done with the help of Agric Extension Officers. The seminary has constructed a Gari processing centre, and two other training centres. In addition, the seminary is nursing sixty-four (64) acres of palm trees to be distributed among the communities for youth and women. Five (5) dams have been dug to ensure all-year access to water for farming. The skills development programme is not limited to Christians; learners include Muslims and Traditional religions. A certificate in pastoral training for Christians is ongoing and offered to ministers and leaders of churches. The purpose is to make the learners transformational agents. In recognition of the life-changing effects of the programme, the Ziope Traditional Council conferred on the President of the seminary and the Coordinator of the programme, who is also a staff of the seminary, honorary titles of Torgbui Dunenyo I and Mama Dunenyo I – (Chief and Queen of Development) - respectively. The Chiefs and Queen mothers of the Ziope Traditional Council with their cultural troupe have come here to participate in the Golden Jubilee in appreciation of the life-changing programmes in the area. Torgbuiwo, Mamawo, mia wiezor.

CHALLENGES

Rev. Chairman and all honorable friends gathered here,

The fifty years journey of the seminary like all good-intentioned projects has recorded many challenges notwithstanding. The major initial challenge was getting a permanent campus. From the Choir loft of the Church of the Lord (Aladura) Nima Temple, the Good

News Bible Classes were located at many places and worship centres of churches but when the Bible Classes were joined to become an evening Bible school, the training institute was located at the premises of the Young Men Christian Association (YMCA), in Accra. It was later relocated at many places, including a garage of the residence of one of the Directors at Kaneshie. Though I am not one of the pioneering officers of the seminary, from what I have heard and know about the various locations of the seminary, this campus, which was purchased in 1996, is the twelfth location of the seminary.

The second major challenge which is ongoing is financing the seminary. Although overseas partners of the seminary have supported in many and varied ways, for which we are extremely grateful, leaders and members of the African Independent Churches, for whom the seminary has been primarily founded, have themselves not been in a good financial shape, thus, raising funds from them is difficult. Albeit a few of them (the AICs) have been using their scarce resources to support the seminary.

The third and final challenge is that of the low intake of students. The trend in African Christianity whereby some Pastors tend to undergo a quick-fix theological education that lacks quality poses a great threat to a sustainable qualitative theological education in African Christianity. That trend is having a great toll on the intake of students by seminaries worth their salt, including the Good News Theological Seminary. To counteract the trend, the administrators of the seminary developed the curriculum to include non-academic students who are being equipped with life-enhancing skills. The seminary is committed to offering quality theological education to those who have been called to minister in the vineyard of God despite the trend.

SOME FUTURE PROJECTIONS

Rev. Chairman, Guest Speaker, eye-witnesses of the founding of the seminary, beloved Traditional Chiefs, invited guests, students, staff, and lecturers of the seminary – past and present

In the next fifty years, the Seminary will embark and work relentlessly to become a pastoral and theological hub for all leaders and members of African Independent Churches and non-

AIC members in Africa and beyond. The Seminary's vision is to become a seminary that offers post-graduate degrees. The Seminary hopes to be a research and publishing centre of African Independent Churches, worldwide. The Seminary will pray to God and work relentlessly to develop a strong financial base while undertaking income-generating projects to self-finance the activities of the seminary. The Seminary will pray to God and work relentlessly to use all forms of technological pedagogies to reach out to students worldwide, a seminary where learners would be taught both physically and virtually.

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I want to take this opportunity to express the gratitude of the founders and current administrators of the seminary to the overseas partners of the seminary. The land on which the campus is located and all the physical structures on it are the results of the support of the partners. The Good News Theological Seminary has received varied and immense support from the overseas partners in the form of missionary administrators, lecturers, librarians, books to stock the library, providing working tools, educational scholarships for student and staff development, technical and professional advice, salary supplements, seminars, and conference leaders, funding extra-curricular programmes and many other kinds of support. We are very grateful to all the overseas partners for their immense generosity. The Partnership continues – There is a book published only last week. It is titled *Unless a Grain of Wheat: A Story of Friendship Between African Independent Churches and North American Mennonites*. Please grab a copy. It is only GHC 50 cedis.

I also want to express the gratitude of the staff and students to the African Independent Churches who supplemented the western support and the AICs who are supporting the seminary with enthusiasm.

CONCLUSION

Lastly, Rev. Chairman, Guest Speaker, eye-witnesses of the founding of the seminary, beloved Traditional Chiefs, invited guests, students, staff, and lecturers of the seminary – past and present.

Someone may ask, “Why are we here?” (1) We have met here today to take a retrospective view of what God has done for humanity through the Good News Theological Seminary. (2) We are here to celebrate God’s goodness towards us all. (3) We have met here to raise funds to further the work of training men and women to obey the Great Commission.

We need not forget, however, the willingness of people who devoted their lives and resources to plant and nurture the seed of theological education in 1971.

I humbly request that we all rise and observe a minute’s silence in honour of the departed people who are with the LORD.

May we continue to walk in the steps of the trailblazers and the pioneers.

TO GOD BE THE GLORY. AMEN.