

MISSIOLOGICAL SOCIETY OF GHANA

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE PRESIDENT ON THE OCCASION OF THE INAUGURATION OF THE SOCIETY

(Rev. Prof. David N.A. Kpobi)

The Chairperson for the occasion (*Prof. Gillian Mary Bediako*),
Distinguished Guest of Honour (*Her Excellency Mrs Matilda Amissah-Arthur*)
The Keynote Speaker (*Most Rev. Prof. Emmanuel Asante*)
The President of Trinity Theological Seminary (*Rev. Prof. J.O.Y Mante*)
Other distinguished invited guests.
Members of the Missiological Society of Ghana
Ladies & Gentlemen.

We have all been drawn here today by our commitment to the mission which our Lord Jesus Christ inaugurated by his presence on earth and which he left to us to continue. All of us here have said “yes” to this mission in many different ways and our presence here is another affirmation that we are willing to be counted among the labourers of the Lord’s vineyard.

Since the day of Pentecost, God has been sending human beings all over the earth to carry out his mission; many methods have been employed, many theories propounded, many strategies tried and many success stories recorded. Many challenges, frustrations and disappointments have also been recorded. But we have not stopped because we cannot stop, and we cannot stop because it is not our mission. We will continue until the Lord of the harvest brings an end to it all.

It is therefore not surprising that organisations and bodies dedicated to the promotion of Christian mission abound in all parts of the world, and our country is no exception. Such organisations have often concentrated on either engaging directly in evangelisation or facilitating it by providing services and means for it to happen. What has not received equal attention (particularly in our part of the world) are organisations that devote themselves to study and intellectual pursuits in the interest of the Church’s mission; in other words, a body that provides intellectual and reflective accompaniment to our practice of mission.

Building on the Past

The history of mission in our country has consistently revealed certain issues and challenges that have remained unresolved for decades often because they have not received any proper scientific study that could help address them. Sometimes a collaborative and interdisciplinary research into a missiological issue is all that is required to propose workable and acceptable approaches or solutions. This has become particularly imperative for our time and our nation in view of the current plurality of mission approaches, objectives and strategies. If the one objective of the Christian Church in Ghana is to bring the saving knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ to bear on all areas of our national life, then there can be little doubt that this objective will be greatly enhanced through the ready availability of reference material in the form of research findings on

various topics of Christian mission. This is where a missiological society that provides such services among others, becomes a crucial component of our missionary enterprise.

We are aware that such a proposition is by no means new. Mission societies have existed since the late 18th and early 19th centuries. These were often established outside the main structures of the Church in Europe with one basic objective – the evangelisation of Africa and Asia which had been neglected in previous centuries. Quite a number of them were indirect offshoots of the Pietist movement which had great appeal among the Protestant churches of Germany, The Netherlands, Switzerland and other parts of Central Europe. Many of our older churches in Ghana are products of this movement whose focus was conversion through interpersonal contact. At the time, the intellectual support for these mission societies was provided by the theological faculties of the Universities of Europe as well as training schools or seminaries established for the purpose.

In the 19th century, missiology became a specialised area of study as the missionaries on the field in Africa and Asia encountered various new situations. Missiology thus developed as a discipline devoted to the study of all aspects of the Church's mission. The findings of missiologists were sometimes developed into theories that were tested on the mission field. The two groups (those devoted to academic study and those working directly on the field) thereby collaborated to propel mission to greater heights, and both were understood to be missionaries in the proper sense of the word. One enduring example in our part of the world was the Basel Mission in the 19th century which dispatched not only preachers and evangelists to the Gold Coast, but also linguists, anthropologists and medical personnel whose main assignment was to study, research and publish as an accompaniment to the greater evangelisation objective of the mission.

Missiological societies, as distinct from mission societies, emerged in the 20th century as associations of intellectuals reflecting, discussing and writing on issues of concern to the work of mission. Sometimes missiological societies tended to be distant from the practical operators on the field since some of them devoted all their time to academic research and writing. Fortunately, today, many missiological societies have diversified their approaches and attitudes, making room for interaction between parish ministers, church leaders, academics and para-church agencies with a common objective to promote the business of the kingdom. This is the type of society that the Missiological Society of Ghana intends to become and we invite all interested Christians to be part of this new and exciting adventure in mission in Ghana.

About a year ago when a small group of us started meeting to deliberate on this idea, we agreed to build an open society with a special focus on research and publication which is also a forum for practical mission engagement. The constitution which we produced therefore states among other things that the main objectives of the MSG shall be:

- (a) to promote the scholarly study of systematic, biblical, historical and practical issues relating to Christian mission and inter-cultural theology
- (b) to disseminate information concerning mission among mission practitioners and related fields of study

The MSG also intends to organize international conferences of missiologists and inter-cultural theologians as a means to encourage and facilitate research and stimulate publications that promote our objectives.

We have therefore already started the process for producing our first international journal as soon as possible.

Logo and Motto

In pursuit of these objectives, and with a focus on remaining relevant to the African environment within which we operate, we have chosen a logo which is an open Bible with an adaptation of the *adinkra* symbol known as *Mpata po*, a traditional symbol of reconciliation, peacemaking and pacification. In our view, this symbol amply describes the work of mission which is an effort to heal the broken relationship between God and humanity through the blood of our Saviour Jesus Christ. The other aspect of our objective is captured by the motto: *Christian Witness, Scholarship and Transformation*.

Beyond Ghana

It is important to mention that we consider our inauguration today as a first step in our desire to establish a West African sub-regional missiological society. We believe that such a step is desirable because the issues that confront Christian mission in West Africa are so strikingly similar. Through a West African Missiological Society (WAMS) we can offer opportunity for scholars and other mission practitioners in the sub-region to research, publish and disseminate vital information for mutual benefit.

For example: Churches in West Africa without exception stand to benefit from any research that offers guidance and direction on positive engagement with Islam and African Traditional Religion. Again, Christian mission across West Africa is no doubt grappling with the adulteration of the Gospel by the introduction of unacceptable self-serving theologies and practices. These must no doubt be subjected to critical study.

Finally, I wish to acknowledge the encouragement and assistance of numerous persons which has enabled us to inaugurate the MSG today. We are grateful to the President of the Trinity Theological Seminary who has graciously offered us a place to hold our meetings and for the MSG to be based here at the Seminary until we are able to procure our own premises.

We are also highly appreciative of the support of Her Excellency Mrs Matilda Amissah-Arthur who agreed to be our Guest of Honour at very short notice. In appreciation of her support, we are pleased to offer to Her Excellency the position of Honorary Patron of the MSG and will be honoured to have her attend our conferences whenever her schedule permits.

Madam Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that we have started something good and with the leading of the Holy Spirit, we cannot fail. On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Society, I thank all of you all for being part of this inauguration ceremony and I thank you also for your attention. May God's blessing be on us all.