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Interview of Dr. Emmanuel Evans-Anfom

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Interview of Dr. Emmanuel Evans-Anfom

By Dr. Esther Acolatse

Conducted in Ghana between December 2018 and January 2019

Dr. Emmanuel Evans-Anfom is a renowned surgeon and a noted educational leader in Ghana, having served as Vice Chancellor of the University of Science and Technology, and Chairman, National Education Commission in Ghana.

Can you share something of your family background, childhood, education?

I was born on October 7, 1919, at the Evans Family House on High Street, Accra, to William Quarshie Anfom of Accra, of part Shai and Nzema origins, and to Mary Emma Evans, the daughter of William Timothy Evans, a catechist with the Basel Mission and the son of a Welsh trader. William Evans, my maternal grandfather become the second headmaster of the Basel Mission Middle School (now Osu Salem) and later a tutor and housemaster at the Mission Seminary in Akropong. My maternal grandmother, Emma Evans, came from the Reindorf family, a descendant of Carl Christian Reindorf. I later attended the same Basel Mission School and then went on to Achimota School.

At Osu Salem, with its Presbyterian ethos, I received a holistic education—education that was geared to the whole person. There was emphasis on working with one's hands as well and seeing the honor in that. Physical labor was nothing to be ashamed of.

Where did you grow up? What were the circumstances of your upbringing?

I was born and grew up in the Evans Family House before starting school. My father was a produce cocoa buyer and worked for a few years at Mangoase and Prako, so I would spend short periods there with my parents and elder brother, Joe. At my grandfather's retirement in 1912, we settled in Mampong-Akwapem, but I spent time shuttling between my home in Accra and Mampong. When we lived in Accra, visits to my grandfather's home, Beula in Mampong, hold fond memories for me. Beyond the opportunity to play with my brother and cousins, we had the chance to meet numerous august visitors including ministers from the Basel mission. Grandfather would line us up and give us a sort of Bible quiz, knowing full well we were well versed in the Bible stories. Such experiences helped form in me an early the desire to become a teacher.

Were there individuals (parents, siblings, spouse, relatives, friends, teachers, mentors, role models) who particularly influenced you? What was it about them that made an impact on you?

I remember at age four a significant event. My grandfather asked me if I knew the meaning of my name Emmanuel. He explained that it meant “God with us.” That baffled me quite a bit since I had been made to believe that God was everywhere. Why were some particular people then singled out for the presence of God and not others? While I did not understand the entire explanation offered by my grandfather that day, the point that God was with me stuck. I always knew that, wherever I was and whatever I did, God was with me.

I was raised Presbyterian and, as you know, Presbyterians are the fountain of discipline. The kind of discipline I received both at home and from my teachers during my years at Osu Salem formed the bedrock of how I have conducted my life. Christianity, I was taught, was a way of life, and I tried to make it my way of life everywhere I was. I lived the scripture which tells us to be doers of the word and not hearers only. It was not just about obedience to scripture but also about the integrity of hard work. I feel, at UST⁴⁶ for example, because of my Christian way of life, the integrity of hard work was an ethos that guided how I approached my work and expected the school to function. It became my way of life.

Were there events, circumstances, or books that were somehow pivotal in your life?

One saying that is not in the scriptures, which also guided my life and work and interaction with those with whom I worked, and as I quoted in the introduction to my book, is what Lincoln said: “As I would not be a slave; so, I will not be master.” I don’t want to be anybody’s slave, and I don’t want anybody to be my slave. And in a way it started from Salem. The hierarchical structure which many might resist today was a well of wisdom. You started by obeying orders and then continue by giving orders. And it made you understand more what Lincoln said. This idea was followed in Achimota. Achimota was a leveling ground. Achimota didn’t care where you came from. I played hockey; hockey taught you that you were not just playing a game, because it was a game with rules. As a player, you should know the rules as well as the referee. So many

⁴⁶ This is the Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, named for the founder and first President of the Republic of Ghana. It is the first indigenous university in Ghana and primarily focused not on the Liberal Arts but on Technical and Practical education, with the aim of enhancing industry and technology in Ghana. Over time, it has become increasingly an institution for the humanities and social sciences as well.

supporters of football today and even the players don't know the rules. If the referee makes a decision against you, you need to be able to understand that. You can transfer this way of understanding the rules of a game to public life. It is about sportsmanship. As a government we can't just be excited about and spend money supporting the football team without looking at the long-range goal of what is gained by the individuals and society that will learn to govern their lives by rules and expect to be governed by rules that work.

I remember that you were in government at a point. What were you doing? How did you live your faith in your role?

I was a member of the Council of State in Liman's government. Here, as in other facets of my life, I lived my faith visibly. Just as Jesus said, let your light shine before men so they may glorify your father who is in heaven, or put another way, brighten the corner where you are. Sometimes you may be the only one around. I was always quick to explain things to people in a way that will help them understand and apply it. Whatever I know, I'm happy to share. An intentional teaching life.

Considering your age—ninety-nine years old—did you meet any of the early missionaries of the Basel Mission?

Well, there were people like Opoku and Asante, Karl Reindorf, E.B Freeman. All those with Christianity in various forms and focus. And then they made their contributions together under difficult circumstances. For example, in the Presbyterian Church in the early mission days, many were dying, and many lie in cemeteries in Akropong and Abokobi. Andrea Riis is the one who survived in Akropong and tried to convert the inhabitants. The chief, Akropong Hene, told him, "Bring me a Blackman who is a Christian, and I will then encourage my people to become Christians." So, Riis brought Black people from the West Indies. These were the Clarkes, the Swanikers, the Anthesons. My second Headmaster at Osu Salem was from the West Indies, the descendant of a Clarke. Today we may forget the history, but the faith lives on.

What were some of the greatest challenges or obstacles that you encountered in becoming who you are?

In terms of career, I became primarily a medical doctor, then the Vice Chancellor of a University, a Commissioner of Education, and a recipient of many awards for public service. But there were financial challenges from the beginning which could easily have derailed my educational aspirations. That challenge would continue into medical school in England. Living frugally on a

strict budget and saving as much as I could saw me through. But one has to learn this simplicity of life at an early age, and my years in Osu Salem, with its strict puritanical training supplemented by the liberalism of Achimota, gave me the balance I needed to cope.

One could also say that the transitioning between Ghana and the UK and back was difficult to navigate. There were the usual impediments of bureaucracy. After years of study, with less than adequate funding from the Colonial Office in Accra, I was hoping to return home to take up the position of a medical officer, and I was searching for a job. Initially, there was silence from the Colonial Office after I had written to apply for the post of medical officer. Then came the response that I would be offered a job only after I arrived home, and even then at the level of assistant medical officer or clinical assistant. I rejected that response outright and informed the Colonial Office that I would continue to work towards enrolling in the Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons Examinations and also look for a job in Edinburgh. The expected response came immediately via telegram. I was to be appointed at the rank of medical officer, and a passage was being booked for me on the MV Apapa from Liverpool to Accra. I made a further request that the appointment be dated for the day of the start of my passage home, which was April 6th, 1950. I knew they were probably getting quite tired of me, but I received a prompt response agreeing to my request.

But one thing was for sure, and it was well phrased by one person at reception for my return home after a long journey and eight years abroad. My cousin, Mr. Jonas-Ridley Coleman, then Headmaster of Accra Bishops' Girls' School, reminded me of the stock from which I come, my heritage and upbringing, and the qualities I had cultivated from childhood to date, and he encouraged me never to forget my humble beginnings. He reminded me of my initial ambition to become a teacher and train as a catechist and later to become a minister of the Gospel. I was to view my being a doctor as a vocation, a calling I should view in the same way as if I were a minister. I would be serving people as I minister from my consultation room. I would, through my relationship with my patients, bring the sympathy care and achieve the same ends as if I were a minister of the Gospel. Above all, I was to put the needs of the patients before my desire for profit.

That was my watchword throughout my career, and those who know me can attest that I tried to keep this advice.

What do you feel were your most significant accomplishments?

There are many things I have to celebrate, from sportsmanship, which I have already said teaches good life lessons, to the academic field, my calling as a

medical doctor, and my work in public service. I recall the pleasure I felt in being nominated to the Spartan Club at the University of Edinburgh where I played hockey. In my third year, I became captain of the team by a unanimous vote, a position which I occupied for two years. This was the highest honor the University Sporting Club can bestow on people who excel in the field of sports. To be adjudged alumnus of the year in 1996 by my alma mater for my contributions to medicine in the Congo as well as for medical education in Ghana I count among my notable achievements.

My contributions to education in Ghana, not just as one-time Commissioner of Education and Health, but also the various ways I contributed to the educational life of the country and beyond by serving on various committees to ensure educational integrity—what I call a teaching life—I'm most proud of. Then, of course, is the honor of being decorated with the Star of Ghana, the highest honor in the land. In my public service, I had the opportunity to speak up for justice and peace and to stave off the public persecution and killings during the AFRC rule in Ghana. But all that is nothing compared to the fact that at the dusk of my life, I can still help guide and teach others. Sometimes, I can impart knowledge and at least inculcate some intellectual curiosity in the nursing assistants who care for me at home, which is very satisfying. I find that younger medical professionals still seek me out for insights at critical moments in their career, especially in testy moments in which their need for better conditions is being weighed against their Hippocratic Oath. It is quite an achievement when I am able to let at least a few understand that always they are first doctors and ought to never go on strike while on the job.

Do you have any regrets?

I have no regrets. I have lived a full life with many years behind me. I lived within my means and was happy with my pension. I built a house within my means with no loans and worked with joy. God gave me a worthy partner in Leonora, my wife who supported my endeavors. I remember when I was first posted to a hospital in Northern Ghana. I said it was too far, and the posting officer asked me, "Far from where?" The Dutch travelled miles to go there, and I was trying to resist it. One has always to think of giving back to the taxpayer. I would have missed a good opportunity.

I learned many wonderful lessons along the years of being a doctor, which I pass on to younger doctors. One clear lesson is this—"Whatever happens, do not leave patients on the ward." In fact, when it comes to patients, there are two sides of Dr. Evans-Anfom, as staff came to learn. There is the soft spoken nice one and the one who would be angry and call you out for lack of proper

attention to a patient. All in all, I've lived a full life and contributed the best to the places I found myself. I invested in my nation and invested in my children. In all I have lived by "hearing and doing" the Word.

What are your concerns for Africa (or for your church or your country) as you contemplate the future?

As I contemplate the future for Africa, I have to say it is going to get worse before it gets better. In many ways, our leaders have not worked with the poor in mind. For instance, they have not built with the poor in mind. Moving forward there is a lot of misinformation in our country's history that needs to be corrected. There is the place of Kwame Nkrumah in the story of Ghana, for example. I somewhat agree with Ali Mazrui who says Nkrumah was a great African but not a great Ghanaian. And in many ways, the way the history has been narrated leaves out much that would offer us a more textured portrait of Nkrumah, especially his interaction with the opposition. Most of the opposition had invited him, and in a sense sent him a mandate for independence at the soonest possible time, which he ignored and demanded "Independence now." What happens with a nation that demands independence when it is not fully ready with the resources for self-governance? What does it mean to account for the atrocities against the many who worked tirelessly for what we would become? I think of Arku Korsah, Akuffo Addo, and Van Lare, who were punished in those days for freeing people who were accused of plotting Nkrumah's assassination? How do we learn from such history moving forward?

As an educator, I think we lost our way in many ways, including in our education. The purpose of a university, our highest centers of learning, is three things: a) obtain new knowledge, b) revamp old knowledge, and c) impact the future. We need to attend to these in earnest if we are to be the nation we should be and create the kind of citizens that would benefit a nation.

What are your dreams and hopes for the Church in Africa? If you were to return to this continent one hundred years from now, what would you hope to find? What would you fear you might find?

This is a question I need to ponder so I can speak more objectively. But from what I see now, with uneducated people who claim ordination from Jesus Christ and occupy pulpits and say all sorts of things, it is disheartening. We hear a lot of talk; much of it means nothing. Faith without works, as James says, is dead; real faith cannot be without works. Fake faith, as I've come to see it, is braggadocious because it cannot show works, as we see with so many these days.

We see it in the attitude to life of the young who have become greedy and want wealth without work.

I look back at the life of the old Presbyterians and other pastors who, with their Standard 7 leaving certificate, had a wealth of knowledge and continued to be trained theologically for the pastoral ministry. With few resources, they set up schools and hospitals and educated and cared for people. Today the churches are not following that example.

I'm watching our technological advancement and seeing it as a double-edged sword that is taking from us as much as it is giving. Moral education has not gone hand in hand with moral development, and it has become easy to hide our deficiencies, which will catch up with us sooner or later.

Do you have words of advice for readers of the JACB?

If I have any it would be simply "Do the Word." Live humbly, learn to work with your hands, and find no task as being beneath you. Put God and country above self. If you follow this simple rule, you can do anything, and you can find joy.

Interviewee Publications:

Evans-Anfom, Emmanuel. *To the Thirsty Land: Autobiography of a Patriot*. Accra, Ghana: Africa Christian Press, 2003.

Evans-Anfom, Emmanuel. *Traditional Medicine in Ghana: Practice, Problems and Prospects*. Ghana Academy of Arts and Sciences, Vol 17, JB Danquah Memorial Lectures, 1993.

Evans-Anfom, Emmanuel. *Political leadership and national development in Ghana*. Accra, Ghana: N.pub., 1992.

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Interview of Cardinal Christian Wiyghan Tumi

By Prof. Paul Nkwi

Cardinal Tumi is Archbishop Emeritus of Douala (Cameroon). He was proclaimed cardinal by Pope St. John Paul II in 1988, and he served as archbishop from 1991-2009.

Can you share something of your family background, childhood, and education?

I was born in Kikaikilaiki, Nso, on October 15, 1930. I started my primary education here in Kikaikilaiki. I did eleven years of primary school, three years in the local language. Prof. Fonlon was my teacher, and he taught me in Lamso. After three years, I went to Shisong, a neighboring village, to begin strictly primary school in English. In Shisong, I started with what was then known as infant 1 and 2, then standard 1-6.

After six years of primary education, I decided to go to Nigeria and meet my parents. I travelled from Kikaikilaiki to Jos, Nigeria, on foot, and it took over a month for us to make the journey. We went without shoes because there were no shoes in those days. Upon arrival in Nigeria, I nearly died, travelling for a month without rest except for Sundays, for the person I travelled with was a staunch Christian. "Sundays is the day of the Lord" was what Pa Ngondze said, and so we didn't travel on Sundays. This was the day I always looked forward to for rest.

Can we say he is one of those who played a role in your Catholic faith?

This Pa Ngondze cared a lot for me throughout the journey. My uncle was a trader in kola nuts on the long distant trade to Nigeria. As he carried his kola nuts, I carried a bag of corn flour, the basis of our daily feeding. As an experienced long distance trader, I had been entrusted to him to get me to my parents in Jos. That's how I joined my parents and finished my primary education in Nigeria.

When I finally joined my parents, they wanted to send me elsewhere, as there were no Catholic schools in Jos. At that time, a Catholic was not allowed to send his children to a non-Catholic school. Being headstrong at the time, I told my parents "No." I refused to leave my parents again.

Searching for a Catholic school would mean separation, and it was completely out of place for me to leave my parents. The nearest Catholic school

was a hundred kilometers away from where my parents lived, Mbom. There was a public school close by, but my father had to consult the parish priest in Jos, about sixty kilometers away from Mbom, to obtain permission for me to attend a government school.

My father was authorized to allow me to attend a government primary school only on condition that I complete my primary education at St. Theresa's Catholic School, Jos. That's where I finished my primary education. Because I loved teaching, I went to a Teachers' Training College after standard 6. I was very often called up to teach the pupils in the lower classes when the teachers were not available. So my love for teaching was nurtured and began to grow.

So how long was the Teachers' Training College course?

I spent three years in the Teacher's Training College, after which I received my vocation to the priesthood. This was during my professional training as a teacher. The Teacher's Training College was Catholic. The Catholic Church had many teachers' training colleges for training Catholic teachers, especially the one in Nkafachang in the Jos diocese.

I received my vocation in funny (absurd/bizarre) way when I got a letter from a primary schoolmate from Jos. He was in the minor seminary in Ibadan. So, I said to myself that if Stephen, my former classmate, could make it into the seminary, then I could as well. If Stephen Mao, my own tribesman, who was a rascal and extremely headstrong could make it into the seminary, then I too could. I recall Stephen beating up a teacher.

I then prayed and fasted, asking God to call me to the seminary as he had called Stephen. At the end of the year, the principal of the TTC, an Irishman called Father McLill, sent me to the minor seminary in Ibadan, where Stephen was.

No sooner had I arrived in the seminary than Stephen was dismissed. So, people thought I would leave the seminary because Stephen had been dismissed. The seed had been sown into my heart, so there was no way I would leave the seminary. I had prayed for this, and God had answered my prayer.

When did you go to the junior seminary?

I can't remember the exact date, but I think it was around 1952. I was enrolled into philosophy in my first year in Ibadan, and I left that minor seminary in 1954. With the potential civil strife in Nigeria, my parents decided to return home to Cameroon. I told my Nigerian bishop that I would also return home. I came back to Cameroon and went straight to meet Bishop Rogan, the bishop of Buea diocese at the time. Bishop Rogan told me to leave the Major Seminary in

Ibadan and move to Enugu Bigard Memorial Seminary, where I completed my priestly formation.

What brought you to the Holy Family Seminary, Sasse?

I came to see the rector, Father Tool, who was the Rector of the Minor Seminary. He told me to go back to Nigeria, but I was not satisfied with his decision. On leaving, I met with Father Olyslagar, who advised me not to return to Nigeria but to discuss the issue with Bishop Rogan, the Bishop of Buea. When I met Bishop Rogan, he told me to go back to Nigeria, pack, come back to Cameroon, and prepare to go to Bigard Memorial Seminary in Enugu, Nigeria. He had effectively accepted me as a future priest of his diocese.

It is interesting to note that on my arrival at Holy Family Seminary, Sasse, the person who first received me and gave me a tour of the campus is the same person interviewing me today, Nkwi Nchoji Paul. Life is an interesting experience. Did I ever know or guess we would be sitting here and chatting about my life experiences?

Having been accepted as a seminarian for the Diocese of Buea, I was sent to Enugu, where I spent six years and was ordained on April 17, 1966, in Soppo. After my ordination I returned to Enugu to finish some courses for my priestly studies. My first appointment as a young priest was in Kumba, where I served for a year. I was later transferred to the minor seminary in Soppo to teach because Bishop Rogan had retired. After two years I was sent to France for further studies. My new bishop, Julius Peteers, decided to send me for further studies along with others.

After the reunification of Cameroon, the Bishop of Buea continued to send his seminarians to Enugu, Nigeria, despite the fact that there was a major seminary in Yaoundé. One day I asked my bishop why he kept sending seminarians to Nigeria when there was a major seminary in Cameroon. He said, "Christian, that's a political question."

After my ordination in 1966, my bishop wanted me to go for further studies. This, of course, troubled me, as I wished to know why my colleagues and I were being sent abroad. As a man of dialogue, the bishop was ready to answer whatever questions I had in mind. So, I said I was ready to go and study in Rome but would prefer to study in Cameroon and learn the French language, as the country was bilingual.

My bishop said he did not know where to send me for further studies, and so I proposed Congo Kinshasa. He said Mobuto had suspended the Catholic University of Lovanium for two years, and students were being sent for military training. He had a friend from the Diocese of Nkongsamba, Monseigneur

Ndongmo, who visited him often in Buea. On this particular day, my bishop narrated my story to Mgr. Ndongmo. He responded by saying, “Send him to Lyon in France. That’s where I have sent my priests.” And that’s how I found myself in Lyon, France. It is there that I did my master’s degree.

After graduating from Lyon, I went to Switzerland to serve in the cathedral Parish of Fribourg. While living in the parish house, the parish priest, a German, very hardworking and active, proposed that I apply for a scholarship and study in Fribourg. I eventually obtained a scholarship from L’oeuvre St. Justin and went on to do my doctorate of philosophy at the University of Fribourg.

Prof. Nkwi, who was already studying in the same university, encouraged me to apply. He even took me to Fr. Bernardin, the director of the scholarship board. After studying his request, I was offered the scholarship. So, I moved from Lyon to Fribourg.

It is during this period away from Cameroon, that my diocese, Buea, was split, and a new diocese of Bamenda was created. With the creation of the Bamenda diocese, the priests in the former Diocese of Buea were asked to choose. And so I made the obvious choice, the Diocese of Bamenda. The new Bishop for the Diocese of Bamenda was Paul Verdzekov, who gave me the permission to continue with my advanced studies. So, with the bishop’s permission, I went on and got my doctorate at the University of Fribourg in Switzerland.

Prof. Urs was my professor and supervisor of my PhD thesis. Before I chose him, I had been warned that he was a very tough and strict person. Even those who gave me the scholarship to study at the University of Fribourg were surprised and amazed at how quick I validated my thesis. This was because I didn’t take any vacations, outings, or visits whatsoever. I went to bed at midnight and rose by 5pm. I worked hard day and night to meet the standards of my tough professor.

Prof. Urs made it possible for doctoral students to present chapters of their dissertations to the group. Since he presided over group discussions of thesis chapters, the students were confident about incorporating his comments in the rewrite of appropriate chapters. This method encouraged me to be always ready with chapters of my thesis.

Instead of praising me, Prof. Urs praised the Germans as he made the following a joke: “I see that the Germans left something in Cameroon: handwork.” My sponsors and other professors were very happy with the progress I made, and I finished in record time especially as I was anxious to return to Cameroon. As soon as I graduated with a *summa cum laude*, I was on a flight home. Although I was interested in African philosophy, I chose to focus on a

criticism of English philosophers. Choosing an African theme would have delayed further my desire to return home.

Do you think that this kind of education prepared you for the life you have lived?

Yes. I think those who have gone through different stages of formation prepare themselves for life.

It seems the training you received prepared you for the pioneering work in your priestly ministry, especially in the creation of the St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary. Is this true?

While I was studying in Europe, discussions about creating a major seminary in English-speaking Cameroon were ongoing. Bishop Awa consulted three of us: Fr. Clement Ndze in Germany, Fr. Engelbert Kufon in Rome, and myself in Switzerland. He told us of the possible creation of the major seminary, and he wanted our reactions to the idea. I asked him (Bishop Awa) who would be the rector, and the bishop replied, "Fr. Clement." I was happy with the answer, but I said, "It's good we should begin something ourselves instead of always inheriting from others. Either we succeed, or die in the attempt to succeed." Fr. Clement eventually turned down the offer. Bishop Awa turned to me, and I took on the task head-on with open arms. Fr. Clement said he would give his full support. The bishop's long journey in finding a rector finally came to an end.

In all this, it was a job not open to failure. Some people thought the project would not succeed. I talked to Bishop Paul Verdzekov, who confirmed my fears. However, I said, "I will do it and do it well or die attempting doing it well." Bishop Paul Verdzekov went to the founding fathers and told them, "Not at this time." "Point taken, and we shall support you" was their response.

I went to Nigeria to see some bishops and visited the Bigard Memorial Seminary in Enugu. On my return, I told Fr. Clement, "There's nothing there that we can imitate; we read the documents of the church and built on that, the directives." When the seminary at Bambui was opened in September 1973, I was the only African on the teaching staff. The others were European Benedictines and Franciscans who taught temporarily before going on to Nigeria.

At the time, there were just eight teachers and twelve students. Nine later on became priests. Amongst the staff of eight, I served as rector with Fr. McGild, among other Europeans. Nine of my pioneer priests studied in Europe, and one of them became Rector of St. Thomas Aquinas Seminary, Bambui. This showed the quality and competence of the pioneer priests. One of these pioneer priests was Father Patrick Adeso (R.I.P.), who later became a professor at the

Catholic University of Central Africa.

Bishop Nkuo of Kumbo Diocese was one of my students (third batch). It is interesting to note that I admitted Bishop Nkuo into the Bishop Rogan Minor Seminary and, in 1978, I admitted him into the Bambui Major Seminary. In that same year, 1978, I asked Prof. Nchoji Nkwi to come and teach cultural anthropology to our seminarians. Cultural anthropology was considered important for the training of African priests.

Among all these people you have met in your priestly ministry, is there anyone you can really say made a difference in your life or helped, as a teacher, friend, bishop, etc.?

The bishops, of course. Bishop Paul Verdzekov was ahead of me in primary school. We were almost the same age with only a difference of three months between us, I being the elder. During one of our 'play fights' in the village, Paul entered the house and took the gizzard, saying, "It's not because you are three months older than me that gives you the permission to have it." He walked off and ate the gizzard. And I said, "If anything happens to you, don't ask why, as you have not respected the traditional rites." It was said in jest. (In this part of Cameroon, gizzards of chickens are eaten only by the elders.)

How did Bishop Paul Verdzekov influence your life?

We were great friends. I admired also his studious way of life and his ambitions and vision about the new Major Seminary in Bambui. When I was appointed rector of the seminary, we were advised to affiliate it to the major universities so students could obtain first degrees in ecclesiastical sciences of theology and philosophy. Still the lone Cameroonian on the academic staff, I met stiff resistance to the issue of affiliation. The non-African members of staff asserted in very strong terms that the seminary would only breed intellectuals.

I went to Bishop Paul Verdzekov and Bishops Pius Awa and told them what the thinking was among a majority of staff members. I further told them that I wanted to know their thoughts on the matter. Bishop Paul said, "If anybody can cite a document of the church to prove that you are going against the intentions of the holy seal, let the person produce the document. So please continue with what you are doing."

With this strong response I continued the affiliation project of the seminary and eventually obtained the affiliation of philosophy and theology. As such, students got out of Bambui with two degrees. This made it possible for our students to pursue further their studies anywhere in the world.

Talking about Bishop Paul, most of us looked at him like a real preacher, in the way he prepared his sermons systematically.

His homilies were too intellectual and very educative, but they seemed not to be for the ordinary man.

But they were based on the church's teachings.

Yes, but not for the ordinary man's level. That's the only criticism I have. He made it a point to always prepare his speeches and sermons. If he didn't prepare on a subject, he wouldn't talk. For example, he wouldn't just read the first and second reading, and the gospel, and spontaneously preach. He refused even when he came to my chapel in Douala.

Why do you think he did this?

I believe it was because he is afraid of heresy or anything against Catholic doctrine. He was too conscious of that. He was also conscious of his duties as a priest and as a bishop.

As such, he lived his life in poverty. He didn't have an account? Is that true?

Throughout my years travelling to Europe, as bishop or cardinal, I never took or carried money with me. I have never owned a bank account and don't imagine a priest having one. Today some do. All gifts sent to me either go to the diocese in Douala or to the diocese of Koumoussou. No bank accounts. Neither am I poor nor rich.

Apart from Bishop Paul Verdzev, who has had an impact in your life? You mentioned Bishop Awa Pius earlier.

We lived, worked, and influenced one another. Bishop Awa was a difficult person to live with. Whenever he got angry, it was tough to bring his temper down. Once in Soppo, Awa insisted on going to Sasse College to see Tasinda, the principal. Along the way, I felt so uneasy, and I asked him that we return. So, we returned to Soppo.

Who from among the lay people made an impact in your life?

Dr. Bernard Fonlon was my primary teacher in my home village of Kikaikilaiki, but he came to regard me as more of a small friend. My mother used to cook food for him as he didn't cook himself. He was an excellent flute maestro and would often walk around the village playing a tune. I had a lot of admiration for him. When I was made Bishop of Yagoua in 1980, Dr. Fonlon came to visit me, staying for a few days.

After being rector of the Major Seminary in Bambui, I was appointed Bishop of Yagoua in 1980. The actual appointment was on December 6, 1979, and I was ordained by Pope John Paul II (now beatified) on January 6, 1980, in Rome as Bishop of Yagoua. Three of us were consecrated on the same day. One of the three is of late, Bishop Martino of Milan (Archbishop), and another worked in the diplomatic service of the church.

Why did they choose to ordain you in Rome?

Only the Pope can answer that question, as I was already planning my ordination in Yagoua. I go to Yaoundé to meet the Nuncio to make preparations for Yagoua. On arrival in Bamenda, Bishop Paul tells me he has received a call from the Nuncio in Yaoundé telling him that the Pope will ordain me in Rome, and so I had to leave for Rome within a week.

Bishop Paul followed me throughout important ecclesiastical experiences and happenings. He was there in Soppo when I was ordained a priest in 1966, when I said my first mass in Kikaikilaiki, in Rome when I was consecrated bishop in 1980, and when I was raised to the rank of cardinal in 1988. He was the one person I was close to and who knew me very well. It's Paul who wrote my CV with details I never knew.

I was bishop of Yagoua for three years and then transferred to Garoua as archbishop for two years, replacing Archbishop Yves Pioumet. I was sent to Garoua because, as the Nuncio explained, the Holy Father wanted me there since I was the only Cameroonian bishop who knew well the north province.

After eight years in Garoua, again the Nuncio told me that the Holy Father wanted me to move to Douala. I was raised to the rank of Cardinal in 1988, and I moved to Douala in 1991. So, one day I meet St. John Paul II, and he told me it wasn't an easy decision for him to move me from Garoua to Douala.

His reason was that while in the north, I was dialoguing seriously with Islam on religious liberty. I was moved to Douala to handle administrative problems. That's how I got to Douala. On arrival in Douala, the coffers had barely 48,000 FCFA. Unbelievable!

What are the greatest challenges you have faced in your life?

I have never had them. I just did my work as a priest and bishop. And I enjoyed every step.

Further Interview Conversation on April 3, 2020

What about the book you write about yourself entitled in French *Les deux*

régimes politiques d'Ahmadou Ahidjo, de Paul Biya et Christian Tumi: prêtre (2006) [The two political regimes of Ahmadou Ahidjo, of Paul Biya and Christian Tumi, priest]?

The book is about the political situations in which I have lived, the Ahidjo and Biya regimes. It talks about the relationship I had with the different administrations as a priest. This started with a group I founded and to which Bishop Paul Verdzekov was invited. It was known as “The Christian Study Group.” I started in Bamenda when I was just a simple priest, and it continues till today.

What do you think is your significant achievement?

Obviously, the fact that the bishops listened me regarding the founding of a major seminary constitutes a source of pride for me. I had no knowledge about establishing a major seminary. I just read all the church documents that eventually guided me in founding the major seminary in Bambui.

It seems you laid the foundation for the training of future of priests. Can you talk to us about that?

Let me also include the Diocese of Yagoua. My appointment as Bishop of Yagoua in 1979 was indeed an opportunity for me to found a young church. While in Yagoua, I had only two Cameroonians priests; all the others were foreign missionaries. Today, there are over fifty priests in that diocese. I also established a minor seminary in Guinée/Guidee.

Can you say the Archbishop of Douala is among the generation of priests you trained?

The Archbishop of Douala was one of my senior seminarians from Yagoua. He had just finished his philosophy at Nkolbisson, near Yaoundé, and I sent him for theological studies in Rome.

In terms of shaping the future of Cameroon, have your contacts with the two heads of state had any impact on these two leaders of our country? That is, Ahidjo and Paul Biya?

I don't think so. At the time of Ahidjo, people were afraid for nothing. I never had political ambitions in my life. Because of my defense of truth and justice, people thought I wanted to become president of Cameroon. I never, and will never, dream of it, but in my mind, this is the truth and the right thing to do.

Did they ever think you were trying to take on political leadership?

Like I said, some politician thought that I was going to be a candidate for the presidential election, so much so that the presidency at one time sent two persons from the diplomatic corps to come and ask me the question directly. This was during the presidential election, and I simply smiled. I told them that I had other ambitions and I have attained them already.

But don't you think that there are many Cameroonians, both Francophones and Anglophones, who think you are the best choice to provide leadership in a country whose moral fabric is at its lowest level?

I don't know what they see in me, but I know myself. I cannot run a campaign in a village.

I think the problem, your eminence, is that you always articulate the very feelings and aspirations of all Cameroonians, both Francophones and Anglophones.

That's what they say. It is true that I say what my convictions are. And I'm not afraid to say them.

Absolutely. So, what can you say you are convinced of?

What I say I am perfectly convinced of, otherwise, I would not say it.

Okay. Do you have any regrets? Things you should or shouldn't have done?

Yes. I have regrets concerning my spiritual life. Things that I have done that I shouldn't have done. I won't make them public because this isn't a public confession. I'm conscious of my weaknesses, all of them, and my one ambition is a prayer I repeat after communion every day: "Jesus the savior, make me pure and ..." I repeat this prayer three times. And there's another I repeat daily after mass: "Jesus the savior, strengthen my faith, hope and charity." This is because I feel my weaknesses always.

What are your dreams and hopes for Africa? If you were to return to this continent one hundred years from now, what would you hope to find? What do you fear you might find?

What I would like to find is more love of one another. Until we love one another, there will always be wars and rumors of wars.

Do you think that there are obstacles in achieving this vision?

The obstacles are human. The obstacles are in our human judgment. I

have just visited a village destroyed by the army, and I asked myself, “What was the purpose?”

You’re making reference to Taben in Bui division of the North West Region, I suppose.

There are places I have visited, destroyed by the military (not Taben), where the village inhabitants did anything wrong. I heard a soldier was killed there. This ought to be condemned because every life is precious. But this does not mean that when one person is killed, everybody in that village is guilty. I think that by not taking the patience to investigate to get the culprit, the easy way for the army is to just mow people down. And it seems the army has become a gang of thieves in certain areas, because they steal money and other property. I visited a home in Mbi near Tadou where soldiers stole a generator.

We understand you are writing a book. Can you tell us about it?

I am writing about human morality, not just Christian morality. Christian morality is based on the word of God, and human morality is based the spiritual part of man as God created him. Every man is spiritual. Every man knows what should be done and what should be avoided. That’s why, when you do evil, it strikes you; and when you do good, it strikes you as well. That’s why there are prisons, because people know what to do but still act differently. It’s a human judgment. By principle, good must be done, and evil must be avoided. That’s the fundamental human moral principle for everybody. Before Christ came there were moral principles. He came to give a new dimension to these principles. I am trying to develop a philosophical treatise on morality.

Is this new effort built on your life as a preacher, as a priest, and as a great leader in the church?

No, it focuses on society, what the spiritual aspect of society ought to always be, and what it ought not to be.

What philosophic treatise has been a guiding principle in your life as a student of philosophy?

What has influenced me in my life is systematic philosophy. That is what shapes the philosophical conscience. Having an idea of philosophy does not make one a philosopher. It does not give you a philosophical conscience. What gives us a philosophical culture or conscience is seeing how to apply the basic principles of science, for these do not change.

At the beginning of this interview, I described a group of African scholars working on the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, trying to capture Christianity in the lives of African leaders. Is there any advice you could give to the African leaders and, more importantly, to this particular group?

We have to live our lives according to ethical principles that shape our ordinary life. All I can say is, it's a wonderful initiative, and they should continue. I am always ready to contribute in any way, especially intellectually. I'm not an expert at everything, but I think I have a long experience in our African affairs to share with our brothers and sisters, if this would help shape a better future for our continent.

Thank you, Your Eminence.

Interviewer details: Professor Paul Nchoji Nkwi is Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at the Catholic University of Cameroon in Bamenda and a member of the DACB Advisory Council.