

Jacob K. Olupona  
AASR President

## FROM THE CHAIR

Greetings from Nigeria. This edition of our Bulletin is the last before the IAHR Congress in Tokyo in March 2005. It is also the last to be published before I step down as the President of the African Association for the Study of Religions, a position I have occupied since 1992. I do not intend to use this occasion to reflect on my twelve years' tenure as President. I will do so in a more comprehensive manner in the near future.

The Association has certainly made significant progress since its beginning in Harare, Zimbabwe. Its central mission to advance the academic study of religion in Africa continues to be fulfilled and we have succeeded in making the Association a central forum where scholars studying religion in Africa the world over can exchange ideas, and pursue their professional interests. The AASR Bulletin continues to serve as the major avenue for learning about the activities and programs of the Association. The various conferences we held have resulted in many publications sponsored and financed by the Association.

This edition of the Bulletin provides details of the IAHR Congress in Tokyo where the AASR will also be holding its meeting. The process of electing a new executive Committee has been well spelt out in the bulletin. I sincerely urge you all to participate in electing the new body that will take charge of the affairs of the Association for the next five years.

A number of important future activities are mentioned in the current edition of the newsletter. I would like to draw your attention to the new development in the North American branch of the Association. There is a concerted effort to reorganize the American branch to be more effective in fulfilling the AASR goals and objectives in America. I am confident that from the year 2005, the group will begin to make significant strides in fulfilling the AASR mission and goals. I should add that the American Academy of Religion has slated the 2006 annual meeting in Washington, D.C., as an occasion to highlight the study of religion in Africa. The AAR committee on International Connections is working very hard to make this a big success. I am sure you will read more about their plans in the next newsletter.

I wish you all a Happy New Year and I look forward to seeing many of you in Tokyo in March 2005.

Gerrie ter Haar  
Academic Programme Director

## 19<sup>TH</sup> IAHR WORLD CONGRESS TOKYO, 24-30 MARCH 2005

The preparations for the 19<sup>th</sup> World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) at Tokyo, Japan, from 24-30 March 2005 were in full swing at the end of 2004. In many respects, it will be a memorable Congress. The number of participants is larger than ever. About 1,400 people are expected to participate, for which a large number of support staff will be required to ensure a smooth organisation. About half of that number will be from Japan, the host country, which is also the largest national affiliate of the IAHR. This fact alone will give quite a different touch to the Congress, which has never been outnumbered by participants from an Asian or other non-Western region. The current geographical location has also attracted a significant larger number of scholars from the wider Asian region. Apart from Japan, this includes scholars from India, Indonesia, Malaysia, China and the Philippines, to give some examples.

The 2005 Congress is going to be truly international, especially since the Japanese host has made a unique effort to raise funds to facilitate the travel to and accommodation during the Congress of scholars from low-income countries. The number of people to be assisted in that way is impressive and concerns all parts of the world, including Africa. African scholars, too, have shown a great interest in the Congress, thus keeping up the spirit of Durban 2000. Several of them will be able to ensure their own funding, but many will not, especially those living and working in Africa itself. Hence, the organisation received many applications, which obviously could not all be honoured. However, the end result is far beyond what could be expected, as a total number of 20 scholars from Africa will be financially assisted: 9 from Nigeria, 4 from Ghana, and 7 from Kenya. This number does also include a substantial financial contribution from the AASR Europe, as well as from some individual members. All in all, a great result!

At the time of writing, by the end of 2004, there were almost 200 organised panels (roughly two-third completed and one-third still to be completed) and many individual papers, which were provisionally organized into about 80 panels. The end result will depend on the ability of all individuals to register effectively, which includes timely payment of the registration fee. In any case, it does not seem premature to conclude that the Tokyo Congress is going to be a feast of diversity, that is proof of a changing world, also in the study of religion!

Teresia M. Hinga  
AASR Representative for North America

NOTES ON  
A MEETING OF AASR CORE MEMBERS  
AT SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS,  
20 NOVEMBER 2004

As a follow-up to the sustained e-mail conversations initiated by Jan Platvoet in summer 2004 regarding the state of AASR in North America and the way forward, particularly in view of the change of guard anticipated at the IAHR congress in Tokyo, March 2005, a meeting of core members of the AASR in the US was held on November 20, 2004. Teresia Hinga, the AASR Representative for North America, convened the meeting during the Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) in San Antonio, Texas, which was attended by a good contingent of AASR members based in the US. Among those present were Kathleen Wicker (nominated AASR representative for North America, 2005-2010); Jacob Olupona (incumbent president of AASR); Kofi Opoku (AASR member and member of the Steering Committee of the AAR-African Religions Group); and Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton (co-chair AAR-African Religions Group).

The Agenda for the meeting was threefold: 1) to examine the case, and provide a rationale, for the establishment of a US 'chapter' of the AASR; 2) to discuss the procedure of formalizing such a chapter and registering it as a functional organization and to brainstorm on a possible agenda for such a 'chapter'; 3) to discuss the relationship between AASR US 'chapter' and AASR worldwide, between AASR US 'chapter' and AAR-African Religions Group, as well as the relationship between AASR US 'chapter' and the African Studies Association (ASA).

*Discussion*

Regarding the case, and rationale, for the establishment of a US 'chapter', it was agreed that formalizing the association would make it easier to conduct AASR business such as collecting dues and raising funds from foundations in order to further the agenda of the AASR. Jacob Olupona and Kathleen Wicker agreed to explore the modalities and legalities of establishing such a chapter as a tax-exempt organization. It was agreed that this should be done as soon as possible, since Jacob as the current president would therefore be able to sign the necessary legal forms in that capacity before the change of guard anticipated at the IAHR in Tokyo in late March 2005.

Regarding the agenda for the AASR US 'chapter', it was agreed that the agenda remains the enhancement of the Academic study of Religions in Africa in the ways outlined, for example, in the May 2004 issue of the AASR Bulletin. Of particular concern was how better to support colleagues in Africa in their study of religion(s). It was agreed that we should find ways to generate a (travel-) fund to support African scholars in attending and organizing conferences. One member suggested that a portion of the annual membership dues be set aside for such a fund. While the AASR US 'chapter' is committed to supporting African scholars in this way, it was agreed that details and modalities of raising such funds would await the establishment of a steering committee of AASR US 'chapter' after the IAHR congress in 2005.

A second highlight was the issue of publications. One of the key goals of the AASR is to 'stimulate the academic study of religion(s) in Africa' by developing publishing opportunities in particular for scholars based in Africa. There were suggestions that the AASR US-based scholars should partner with AAR African Religions Group to explore possibilities of jointly establishing and editing a journal. This could be a long term goal. In the meantime the group agreed to take up a proposal to co-edit an issue of the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (JAAR). Cynthia is in contact with the JAAR editor about this opportunity. Participants felt that the matter of publications should be high on the agenda of the AASR (international) and the AASR US 'chapter' by both locating reputable publishing venues as well as senior members who might mentor aspiring young scholars.

Regarding the relationship between AASR US 'chapter' and AAR-African Religions Group: it was agreed that a sustained collaboration would enhance the goals of both groups and help make the academic study of the religion(s) of Africa more visible in the US. To this end, the two groups will share mailing lists. To facilitate and enhance collaboration, it was also agreed that Cynthia would inquire about formally registering the AASR as an affiliate of the AAR, which would entitle the US 'chapter' of the AASR to reserve a meeting slot every year at the Annual Meeting of the AAR. Cynthia promised to apply for a suitable slot and space, preferably Saturday mornings before the actual AAR program starts. It was agreed that it is important that AASR also be represented at the annual African Studies Association (ASA) meeting. Jacob, who attends both the AAR and ASA meetings (which are generally held back-to-back thus inhibiting attendance by many who would otherwise attend), will explore modalities of the AASR US 'chapter' obtaining affiliation with ASA.

#### *Focus on Africa*

The last few minutes of the meeting were devoted to preparing for a meeting with Mary McGee, Chair of the AAR International Connections Committee (ICC), scheduled for the following day, November 21. The AAR administration has selected Africa as its international focus for the 2006 Annual Meeting

in Philadelphia. AASR meeting attendees thus spent some time fleshing out ideas to present to the Mary McGee and the ICC such as suggestions for potential plenary speakers, topics for special forums, and the need for financial support for participants travelling from Africa. The report on the outcome of the conversation with Mary McGee has been submitted to the *AASR Bulletin* by Elias Bongmba, member of the AAR International Connections Committee.

The AASR meeting adjourned with those in attendance agreeing to assist Teresia in publicizing and promoting the AASR and its goals through a membership drive.



## CONFERENCES AHEAD

AMERICAN ACADEMY OF RELIGION (AAR)

FOCUS ON AFRICA  
& THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS IN AFRICA  
WASHINGTON DC, 18-21.11.2006Reported by  
Elias K. Bongmba  
Rice University, Houston TX

The American Academy of Religion (AAR), the largest association of scholars of religion in the world, includes an international focus at its Annual Meeting. Africa and African scholarship have been designated by the AAR Board of Directors as the international focus for the 2006 meeting, which will be held in Washington DC, November 18-21, 2006. The international focus is a new feature of the Annual Meeting, initiated by AAR's International Connections Committee (ICC). Its purpose is to engage members of the academy with scholarship on religion by scholars in different regions of the world. In an effort to introduce more scholars to the research, work, and priorities of African colleagues, the 2006 Annual Meeting program will feature African scholars, panels on religion and religious studies in Africa, films by African directors, and other events to highlight Africa and African contributions to the study of religion.

In preparation for the forthcoming focus on Africa, Professor Mary McGee, Chair of the ICC, hosted a meeting of active members of the African Religions Group during the AAR annual meeting in San Antonio, November 21, 2004. Participants expressed appreciation to the ICC for designating Washington, DC, as the place to focus on Africa because it offers other attractions important to the study of religion in Africa, such as the museum of African Art. Participants also pointed out that a focus on Africa while in Washington, DC, would give the Academy an opportunity to invite members of the African diplomatic corps in Washington to some of the events. Many participants emphasized the critical importance of securing funding to enable colleagues based in Africa to travel to the U.S. for the conference. The AAR will be able to subsidize the travel of some African scholars, but AAR sponsorship is limited. Participants therefore devoted a considerable amount of time to discussing possible supplementary sources of support for conference travel. The AAR International

Connections Committee will also work to arrange visits to US colleges and universities for some of visiting scholars from Africa who attend the AAR annual meeting in 2006.

Acting as a pre-planning committee, those at the meeting drew up a list of possible speakers to feature in 2006 and also discussed program units within the AAR that could devote one or more panels to a focus on Africa (e.g., Study of Islam section; Women and Religion section; Ritual Studies group; Indigenous Religions group; Religions, Medicines, and Healing consultation). An e-mail list will be generated to continue the planning process. Since panel presentations highlight members' research and are a central feature of the annual meeting, participants agreed that the co-chairs of the AAR African Religions Group, Professors Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton, and Kip Elolia, should contact the chairs of other AAR program units to suggest themes that would address the study of religion in Africa in their call for papers. African scholars of religion all over the world are encouraged to consider presenting papers in the different program units that relate to their areas of interest and research. In addition to the annual meeting program, in preparation for this international focus, *Religious Studies News*, an AAR publication, will feature columns on African scholars, institutes, departments, and journals that promote the study of religion.

The International Focus at the annual meeting is an important part of the AAR, which has included the enhancement of the international dimension of the academy among its strategic objectives during the next four years leading up to its Centennial Anniversary. AAR has over 9,000 members, of which 13% are international members. More than 700 international scholars registered to attend the annual meeting in San Antonio this year, and when AAR convenes in Washington, DC, in 2006, we expect that number to be even larger, and we hope that many of our African colleagues will join us for this meeting.

'In a world where religion plays so central a role in social, political, and economic events, as well as in the lives of communities and individuals, there is a critical need for ongoing reflection upon and understanding of religious traditions, issues, questions, and values. The American Academy of Religion's mission is to promote such reflection through excellence in scholarship and teaching in the field of religion' (from the *AAR Mission Statement*). The AAR is committed to strengthening its ties with our international scholars and working with them to promote the study of religion in their respective regions of the world. For further information about the American Academy of Religion, go to the website at <http://www.aarweb.org>. For more information about the international focus on Africa and African scholarship for the 2006 annual meeting, please contact Cynthia Hoehler-Fatton, University of Virginia (chh3a@virginia.edu), and Kip Elolia, Emmanuel School of Religion (eloliak@esr.edu); or the Chair of ICC, Mary McGee, Columbia University (mm383@columbia.edu), and Elias K. Bongmba, Rice University( Bongmba@rice.edu). We welcome your suggestions.

# AEGIS EUROPEAN CONFERENCE ON AFRICAN STUDIES

LONDON, JUNE 29 TO JULY 3, 2005

## *AEGIS*

AEGIS was founded in 1991 as a network of European Centres of African Studies. Its current membership are research centers at Barcelona, Basel, Bayreuth, Bordeaux, Brussels, Copenhagen, Edinburgh, Hamburg, Leiden, Leipzig, Lisbon, London, Naples and Uppsala. For further details see:

<http://www.aegis-eu.org>

## *Call for panels closed*

Following a strong response, the Call for Panels for this conference is now closed; accepted panel proposals may be found on the conference website:

[www.aegis-eu.org/conference/](http://www.aegis-eu.org/conference/)

## *Call for papers*

The Conference Steering Committee is now pleased to invite interested papers-givers to submit a title and 50 word abstract to the convenor of an appropriate panel as apparent from the details available on the website. Panel convenors may accept papers at their discretion so long as they do not thereby exceed their allotted time. In the latter case, convenors will need to liaise with the Steering Committee before accepting further contributions, and a final decision may have to be deferred to the closure of the Call for Papers. The panel convenors will also have discretion to decide what EU languages are used in their panels.

Graduate students interested in Africa are also encouraged by the Steering Committee to submit proposals for papers on subjects across the gamut of the humanities and social sciences applied to Africa. These should be sent to Professor Alessandro Triulzi (e-mail: [a.triulzi@agora.it](mailto:a.triulzi@agora.it)). A number of plenary lectures and discussions, as well as cultural events, are planned. Details will appear on the website as they become finalised. **THE CALL FOR PAPERS CLOSES 1 NOVEMBER 2004.** E-mail enquiries for further information sent to the Centre of African Studies ([cas@soas.ac.uk](mailto:cas@soas.ac.uk)) will be forwarded to the appropriate member of the AEGIS Conference Steering Committee.





# CONFERENCE REPORTS

Päivi Hasu,  
Research Fellow, Nordic Africa Institute, Uppsala, Sweden

## AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

NORDIC AFRICA INSTITUTE, SWEDEN, 29-31 OCTOBER 2004

This international conference, organized by the Nordic Africa Institute, brought together scholars from Europe, Africa and the United States to present papers and to discuss Christianity in the contemporary African societies. Prof. Paul Gifford, SOAS, gave the opening keynote speech on 'Some Recent Developments in Ghana's New Christianity'. Dr. David Maxwell, University of Keele, gave the second keynote speech on 'Post-colonial Christianity in Africa'. The call for papers attracted a considerable amount of interest and by the deadline the organizers received three times as many proposals as they could accommodate and many more after that. This overwhelming attention goes to show how much interest and research there is being done not only on African Christianity but also on religion in general.

Many of the African societies underwent considerable economic, political, social and religious changes during the last decades of the past millennium. Because of economic crises and reforms such as the structural adjustment policies and economic liberalization numerous governments were forced to reduce many of the social services including subsidized or free education and health care. Consequently, the significance of religious organizations such as former mission churches and other NGOs increased in this area. The early 1990s also marked a turning point in many African countries with political reforms and transition to multi-party system. In many cases churches played an important role in catalyzing political change. Mainline churches and newer movements have both supported and opposed the ruling governments to varying degrees. Religious pluralism and dynamics have taken different manifestations in different countries as regards national political processes and ethnicity. Also, the worsening AIDS pandemic with its social and demographic consequences has posed challenges to the African governments as well as the civil society including religious organizations. At the same time the mainline churches have faced challenges created by other forms of Christianity as well as by other religions such as Islam. The past few decades have witnessed an unprecedented growth of independent churches, Pentecostalism and other trans-national and global forms of charismatic Christianity in many parts of Africa. Today it is

hard to call into question the fact that church is an important social factor in the civil society in Africa.

The papers that were proposed to the conference covered a range of topics. The final focus was placed on contemporary African Christianity as it relates to politics and democratization processes; Pentecostalism and other forms of charismatic Christianity; AIDS, Christianity and Christian churches, as well as religious plurality. On the first day papers were presented that discussed the history of the interplay between politics and Christian religion in Nigeria as well as the interpretations of the constitution and the connections to religious conflicts in the country. Furthermore, the role of the Christian churches in the democratization processes in Burkina Faso and Malawi were discussed as was the role of the churches in local politics in Uganda.

A number of papers were devoted to Pentecostalism and other forms of charismatic Christianity. Transnational networks among the Ghanaian Pentecostals were discussed as were the notion of Israel and the expressions of 'home' and 'belonging' among Pentecostals in South Africa. Economic transformations, churches as industries as well as poverty and the prosperity gospel were dealt with in papers discussing charismatic Christianity in Nigeria, Ghana and Tanzania. Religious pluralism, social change and the interplay between Christianity and Islam were examined in papers touching upon occult forces and spirit possession in Tanzania and Cameroon. Finally, AIDS, salvation, widowhood and sex were discussed in Uganda and Kenya.

The final discussion brought up several issues. The present state of affairs in the study of religion, future considerations as well as methodological issues. As this conference concentrated on contemporary Christianity the number of papers with clear historical connections was limited. However, it was pointed out that there is a need to take history more into account. Similarly, papers discussing religious NGOs, civil society and development in detail were absent this time. It was noted that there was great variety in the studies that discussed Pentecostalism but the question was raised whether the amount of research that is being done on Pentecostalism is distortive, or whether it gives a fair picture of contemporary African Christianity. The note was made that there is a need to examine the pentecostalisation of the mainline churches on one hand, and the clericalization of Pentecostalism on the other. It was also felt that more research is needed on the myriad ways religion is connected to dealing with HIV-/AIDS. The more methodological considerations dealt with the general need for long-term studies with historical depth and cross-cultural comparison. The justification of possible instrumentalization in the presentation of research findings was also discussed, as was the question whether engaged or disinterested scholars present research findings in a fair way. It was suggested that multi-faceted approaches and multi-sited research contexts as well as combinations of fieldwork and archival studies are needed. For more information, contact:

[paiivi.hasu@nai.uu.se](mailto:paiivi.hasu@nai.uu.se) and [www.nai.uu.se](http://www.nai.uu.se)

Asonzeh F. K. Ukah  
Leventis Fellow, SOAS, University of London

## AFRICAN CHRISTIANITY IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

UPPSALA, SWEDEN, 29-31 OCTOBER 2004

Between 29 and 31 October 2004, the Nordic Africa Institute (*Nordiska Afrika-institutet*), Uppsala, played host to a conference on African Christianity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The organiser of the conference was Dr. Paivi Hasu, a Finnish research fellow of NAI. He was assisted by Karolina Wimbo, administrator at NAI. The conference highlighted contemporary issues influencing the continuous transformation of Christianity in Africa. In all, 43 scholars were present; and 15 of these presented papers. In addition, there were two keynote addresses presented, one by Professor Paul Gifford of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, London, and the other by Dr. David Maxwell of Keele University, Keele, UK.

On the first day, Paul Gifford made an attempt to map out the emerging patterns of the 'New Christianity' currently sweeping across Africa in his address entitled 'Some Recent Developments in Ghana's New Christianity'. This Christianity is sustained largely by the emerging Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in the continent. Though drawing his examples from the Greater Accra region of Ghana, his observations are, *mutatis mutandis*, applicable to Nigeria, Central Africa, as well as to some countries in East Africa and Southern Africa. Although the churches that comprise this new Christianity are internally variegated, they can be recognised by their emphasis on success, wealth, healing and status.

The two sessions on Christianity, Politics and Democracy discussed the inter-connections of faith with politics in Africa. The first paper, jointly written by Ingeborg Grau and Hypolite A. Adigwe, treated the historical interfaces of politics and Christianity in Nigeria since 1960s. This was followed by Simon Aderibigbe's discussion of the constitutional interpretation of the *Shari'a* in Nigeria since 1999 and its implication for religious conflict in a country that has witnessed sectional religious riots very often since 1980s. Shifting the focus from Nigeria to Malawi, Boni Dulani presented the role of Christian churches in safeguarding and nurturing Malawi's nascent democracy. Magloire Somé focused attention on the role of Christian churches in the democratic process in Burkina Faso since 1991. For Somé, the mission churches have played significant roles in agitating for and promoting democratic governance in Burkina Faso, similar to the roles they played in other African countries. Ben Jones in his paper looked at the attempts to normalise the role of the church in Afri-

can politics by examining the activities of a classical Pentecostal group in rural Teso, Uganda.

On the second day, David Maxwell centred his keynote address on 'Post-colonial Christianity in Africa'. Emphasising the youthfulness of African Christianity, Maxwell argued that the average Anglican or Catholic in the contemporary world is a 24 year old African woman or man. This presentation was followed by the session on Pentecostalism and Charismatic Christianity during which six papers were presented. The first three papers were given by Karen Lauterbach (on transnational religious networks between Ghanaians in Europe and in their home country), Kristina Helgesseon (on interpreting Israel and the expression of 'Home' among a South African white Pentecostal group), and Martin Lindhardt (on the ambivalence of power in traditional religion and in charismatic Christianity in urban Tanzania).

The other three papers zeroed in on the economic transformations of Africa's 'New Pentecostalism'. In the first paper Asonzeh Ukah discussed the increasing monetisation of Nigeria's new Christianity by presenting a case study of the economic doctrines and practices of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Nigeria. Brigid Sackey of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, presented a case study from Ghana where the new Pentecostals represent the country's foremost industry in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The last paper was Páivi Hasu's. He educated the participants on World Bank's function as 'Heaven's Bank', and its implication on poverty and prosperity in contemporary Tanzanian charismatic Christianity.

Another session of the conference focused on AIDS and the Christian churches. Two papers were presented, the first, by Catrine Christiansen on the moral and religious dilemmas of Ugandan widows searching for salvation, social support and a fulfilled sexuality. The second paper by Wenzel Geissler and Ruth J. Prince provided detailed information on Christianity, African tradition, AIDS and the emergent pornography industry in rural western Kenya. On the third day, a session that focussed on religious pluralism saw the presentation of two papers. The first paper by Tomas Sundnes Dronen was on the role of religion in social change among the Dii people of northern Cameroon, while Julian M. Murchison spoke on the expression of purity in a Tanzanian town dominated by Roman Catholicism.

Lastly, brief summaries of the conference were presented by Asonzeh Ukah, Paul Gifford and David Maxwell, each pointing out new directions and emphases for research in contemporary African Christianity. The papers were well received and the discussions that followed were animated. An edited volume is expected for the conference proceedings soon. The organisers (Páivi Hasu and Karolina Wimbo) did a very good job in making the participants comfortable and taking them around sites of interest in the city of Uppsala at the end of each day's activities.

Barrister Ndubisi Obiorah  
Centre for Law and Social Action  
Lagos, Nigeria

THE PENTECOSTAL-CIVIL SOCIETY DIALOGUE  
ON RELIGION, PUBLIC ACCOUNTABILITY  
& GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA

18 OCTOBER 2004  
MUSON CENTRE, LAGOS, NIGERIA

On October 18, 2004, the Pentecostal-Civil Society Dialogue commenced with an Inaugural Session at the MUSON Centre, Lagos. The dialogue brought together Pentecostal and civil society leaders for frank and interactive discussions on issues of public accountability and governance – especially the question of how the moral influence of the Pentecostal churches can serve to improve the quality of governance in Nigeria.

The Pentecostal-Civil Society Dialogue is facilitated by the Centre for Law and Social Action [CLASA] with support from the Nigeria Office of the Heinrich Böll Foundation. CLASA, which is co-ordinated by Barrister Ndubisi Obiorah, is an independent, non-profit policy centre, that brings together scholars and activists in law, the social sciences and the humanities for interdisciplinary research and advocacy on governance and development. The project resource persons include Professor Rosalind Hackett of the Department of Religions, University of Tennessee-Knoxville, USA, and Professor Matthews Ojo, of the Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

*Background*

Pentecostal churches are widely perceived as the fastest growing and most vigorous form of Christianity in Nigeria attracting millions of new adherents each year. The Pentecostal movement is a major, perhaps the leading, social movement in Nigeria today with a mass membership running to several millions and commanding immense goodwill and support among its adherents. During the struggle for democracy in Nigeria in the 1990s, the human rights movement allied with the mainline Christian churches to campaign against human rights violations, corruption and military dictatorship. The leaderships of the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches were particularly vocal in public denunciations of human rights violations and authoritarian rule by the military and in demands for the restoration of democracy. Catholics, working

through the Justice, Development and Peace Commission were especially active in defending human rights. Drawing upon Catholic social doctrine, they contended that the church had no option but to oppose undemocratic governance and the violation of human rights. Likewise, Anglican bishops forbade their clergy to seek political office but declared that “the clergy and religious, and for that matter the church leaders in general, cannot but be involved in politics of one type or another”.

Paradoxically, even as the mainline churches became ever more vocal in addressing the political roots of poverty and social injustice in Nigeria, the people in whose name they campaigned against authoritarian misrule were increasingly turning to new religious movements, such as the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. The Pentecostal movement in Nigeria grew rapidly especially from the 1980s. By the mid-1990s, Pentecostal churches were the fastest growing and most vigorous form of Christianity in Nigeria attracting millions of new adherents each year. The new adherents of the Pentecostal churches include many former members of the mainline churches as well as former adherents of the African Independent Churches, Islam and traditional religions.

### *The problem*

The relationship between Pentecostal churches and the human rights movement in Nigeria today is complex and ambiguous. On a personal level, many human rights activists are adherents of Pentecostal churches and some even hold leadership positions in the Pentecostal churches as pastors, deacons, ministers, church workers, etc. In contrast, on the institutional level, the informal ‘alliance’ between the mainline churches and the human rights movement that was forged in the course of campaigning for democracy in the 1990s has not been replicated with the Pentecostal churches.

The reasons for this institutional disconnect are complex and deserving of further in-depth research, analysis and elucidation. Anecdotal sources including some civil society activists in Nigeria suggest that successive military regimes, at the very least, tacitly encouraged the growth of the Pentecostal churches as a means of deflecting popular attention and inquiry from the root causes of mass poverty and social injustice in Nigeria which the activists argue derive from the corrupt misrule of various military and civilian governments. Furthermore, some human rights activists perceive the Pentecostal churches as laying undue emphasis on instantaneous miracles and ‘prosperity doctrine’ while not questioning the political, economic and social conditions in the country which are perceived by these activists as primarily responsible for mass poverty and social injustice in Nigeria. These perceptions that the Pentecostal churches have no interest in social justice, human rights or democracy tend to encourage the activists to continue working only with the mainline churches. As a result, despite the ever-swelling pews of the Pentecostal churches over the last two decades, the human rights movement in Nigeria effectively remains wedded to its

alliance with the mainline denominations while maintaining no institutional relationship with the Pentecostal churches. Moreover, the Pentecostal movement simply cannot be ignored any longer by the human rights movement in Nigeria and at the very least, the human rights movement should engage in a dialogue with the Pentecostal movement to explore prospects for cooperation to promote peace, social justice and accountable governance. Consequently, these considerations motivated the Centre for Law and Social Action to pioneer an initiative to facilitate dialogue between these critical social movements.

### *The keynote presentations*

The first keynote presentation at the Dialogue Session was made by Professor Paul Gifford of the Department of Religions, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. Gifford started his presentation by attempting to identify those Christian churches which are been classified as 'Pentecostal'. He then gave a history of African Christianity and its involvement in public life which according to him had long been restricted to the mainline churches. He cited examples such as the Anglican bishops in Kenya who were the main opposition to President Arap Moi's regime, Archbishop Michael Francis of Monrovia, Liberia, who was sometimes the 'only voice' speaking out in defence of human rights, and the Catholic bishop's Conference in Malawi whose denunciation of corruption and human rights violations eventually prompted the removal of the Banda regime. He called these 'high profile interventions' and further described them as direct involvement.

The posture of the Pentecostal Church which showed a lack of social awareness was of concern, but Gifford stated that he found nothing sinister in it, explaining that the focus of many Pentecostal churches was on evangelisation and personal salvation. He also asserted that indirect involvement was also possible and could actually produce more significant results than direct involvement. He also suggested that Pentecostal churches could impart the leadership skills necessary for citizens of a democracy better than other elements of civil society because among other things, 'members can relate as equals', 'the ambition fostered eliminates despair and encourages a solid work ethic', and also because 'the dysfunctional macho male behaviour is repudiated' in favour of what would benefit the family.

Gifford then presented a form of involvement which he called the "theology of involvement in public life" which he said was already being pioneered by some Pentecostal churches. He referred to Pastor Mensa Otabil of Ghana whose theology has an explicit emphasis on personal responsibility. Otabil has identified certain attitudes and beliefs as responsible for holding Africa back and these are; inferiority complex, tribalism, cultural stagnation, idolatry and fetishism, the village mentality, ideas of leadership and apathy. Gifford noted that the most remarkable thing about the theology of involvement in public life was that emphasis on the miraculous is reduced and that what is stressed is the

responsibility of the individual. Finally, he concluded by saying that the biggest contribution that the Pentecostal Churches could make is to preach by example, to embody in themselves good political practices, to abide by their own constitutions, to exercise power accountably, to provide a voice for all and to establish structures for empowerment.

In the second keynote address, Professor Matthews Ojo started by observing that religion has always had a great impact on nationalism and democratization in Africa. He cited Benin Republic, Togo, Gabon, Cameroon, South Africa and Ghana as examples of countries in which Catholic bishops and Protestant churches played important roles in fostering significant political changes from dictatorial regimes to democratic ones in the 1980s and 1990s. Ojo however also alluded to President Frederick Chiluba's 1991 declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation as a situation in which the support of the Pentecostals was exploited for sectional interests. Reference was also made to President Jerry Rawlings of Ghana's closeness with the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches as merely providing the regime with a religious and moral legitimacy. In Nigeria, Ojo observed that the 'adoption' of President Olusegun Obasanjo by Pentecostals and Charismatic as 'a symbol of the Christian control of the political sphere' had not resulted in any significant improvement in the country. He stated that leaders of the Pentecostal and Charismatic movements have neither formulated any critical opinion about governance nor spoken out with an 'articulate voice'.

Furthermore, Professor Ojo noted that Nigerian Pentecostals and Charismatics have always been aware and concerned about the deteriorating socio-political and economic situation of the country and they have sought to intervene and change it from their own religious perspectives. He quoted several statements made by leaders of Pentecostals and Charismatics in Nigeria, which in his view, show a determination to change the current state of affairs in the country. Some of the dominant characteristics of the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in Nigeria such as membership consisting of a large number of highly educated young people and vigorous advertisement in the media are key areas which the Pentecostal and Charismatic churches can utilise to influence the society. Besides, Ojo suggested that the Pentecostal movement in Nigeria is in a position to offer solutions to the problems confronting governance in the country because of its institutional strength of having membership drawn from diverse cultures and backgrounds but still solidly united.

Regarding what agenda Pentecostal and Charismatic churches could pursue in stimulating and furthering good governance and accountability, Professor Ojo suggested among other things, that the Pentecostal movement must first condemn the ills of the society such as the perversion of justice, oppression that is becoming institutionalized and the sins that are being glossed over. In addition, he recommended counselling, teaching and social support to reduce the fear, anxiety and hopelessness which have pervaded the African scene



in the last three decades. He also advised the hierarchy of the Pentecostal movements to restructure their institutional framework and make accountability a public agenda by promoting transparency, awareness of the expectations of others, awareness of their statutory responsibilities and the promotion of discipline.

Ojo encouraged the Pentecostal churches to make determined and conscious efforts to stay in the political struggle for democracy not only by denouncing intolerable regimes but also by establishing a democratic order within their constituencies. He concluded by acknowledging the Pentecostal constituency as a 'major social force' in the country which could set the pace for good governance and public accountability.

After the keynote address, a panel of scholars comprising pastors, church leaders and others commented on the various issues raised in the addresses.

### *In conclusion*

Participants welcomed CLASA's initiative in convening the dialogue and agreed that it was a most topical initiative given Nigeria's present political and socio-economic contexts. They broadly accepted that dialogue and cooperation between the human rights and Pentecostal movements is critical to efforts to improve the quality of governance in Nigeria and that there exist significant opportunities for synergies between these movements. They tasked CLASA with taking forward the results of the Inaugural Session including further and deeper dialogue towards realizing an institutional framework for cooperation between these movements. Two other dialogue sessions have since been held on December 1, focusing on 'Public Accountability and Governance', and on 02 December 2004 on 'Women, Pentecostalism and Public Life'. A dialogue session on 'Pentecostalism, Peace and Conflict Prevention' will be held in mid-February 2005.

For further information on events, and for a continuous documentation of the Pentecostal-Civil Society Dialogue, please visit the HBF Website:

<http://www.boellnigeria.org/pentecostal.html>

The papers presented may be downloaded from that site also.



Muhammed Haron  
University of Botswana

## ISLAM IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY

CENTRE FOR INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL SCIENCE,  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA,  
23-25 NOVEMBER 2004

This three-day conference was organized at the Centre for International Political Science by its director, Associate Professor Hussein Solomons. Solomons is a political scientist who hails from Cape Town and has had a keen interest in migration and fundamentalism. This conference was a follow-up on an earlier conference on 'The Challenges Confronting Peace Keepers in Africa', and aimed to further explore the issues of terrorism, fundamentalism and a host of other factors. He therefore invited a broad range of scholars and activists from South Africa and other parts of the continent. Unfortunately, due to circumstances and the time of the meeting, the Mauritians, Egyptians and Kenyans were the only ones that responded to the generous invitation.

The main presenters were South Africans. However, due to the rumour spread among Muslim activists and organizations in different parts of South Africa that this was apparently a CIA funded conference, some presenters withdrew at the last minute. Among them were Professor Suleiman Dangor, Shaykh Shaheed Mathee, Mr. Aslam Farouk-Allie, and others. According to information received, this false rumour seems to have been spread by a proactive Muslim news monitoring group based in Pretoria, the representatives of the Muslim Review Network, and by leading members of the Muslim Youth Movement of South Africa. This was indeed surprising since these very groups usually emphasize 'ethics' as a crucial element in approaching and tackling issues. And it is also surprising that they never engaged in a debate with Hussein Solomons on the funding of conferences such as these and other related matters. It appears that they steered clear of this because Professor Solomons had been involved, earlier on in 2004, in the organization of a conference covering the sensitive field of 'Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism in Africa'. At that conference, Professor Solomons and his assistant and post-graduate student, Gerrie Swart, presented a fairly lengthy and detailed paper on 'Political Islam and the State in Africa' (cf. publications at [www.up.ac.za/academic/cips](http://www.up.ac.za/academic/cips)). This presentation was followed by a range of others that caused Muslim activists to raise critical questions regarding the participants and the themes that were covered.

Turning back to the conference under review, Professor Solomons opened the conference on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of November at about 9h00. He had structured the

conference in such a way that the morning was devoted to the presentations and the afternoon was given to the workshops based upon the presentations and papers. Reports on these workshops were written up and presented at the closing session on the 25<sup>th</sup> November, the final morning of the conference.

During the morning session on 23<sup>rd</sup> November, three participants made their presentations. The first presenter was Dr. Yusuf da Costa, a former High School principal and a former academic in the Department of Didactic at the University of the Western Cape where he was a specialist in Geography. He presented a paper entitled 'An Overview of the Challenges Confronting the Ummah in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century', in which he interrogated Muslim history in general and South African history in particular and questioned terms such as 'ummah' that have been employed. He basically had little positive to say about the South African Muslim community and concluded that the 'ummah' was basically non-existent; he was unable to give ideas on the way forward.

Dr. Da Costa's negative analysis was in contrast to the picture given by Professor Al-Busaidy, a Chemistry specialist from the University of Nairobi in Kenya and the present chairperson of the Kenya Muslim Council, who read the last paper of that morning. He presented a more sober and positive overview of the Muslim contribution to Kenya and Muslim actions in Kenya in it. He gave the audience a run-down of the various activities of the council and particularly of the efforts undertaken by the Muslim community and its representatives to stop the Anti-Terror Bill. He provided interesting insights into the nature of his council and its attempts to unify the Kenyan Muslims.

In between this paper and that of Da Costa, two other presentations were read. The first was by Sakina Mohammed on 'Women in Islam: Perspective and Challenges'. She is not an academic but the provincial director of the Planned Parenthood Association of South Africa. Although she attempted to deal with the topic mentioned, she was unable to make a good impression because of the manner in which she delivered her paper. She tried to demonstrate the mainstream Muslim view that the Shariah does not discriminate against the Muslim women but that the Muslims discriminate against one another. The second presentation was by Mrs. Islambouly, the present ambassador of Egypt to South Africa. She was expected to address 'Islam in Africa' but veered off to show that common elements exist(ed) in the different major religious traditions and that there is a need for dialogue.

On day two, three papers were presented by Drs. Muhammed Haron, Ms. Lubna Nadvi and Associate Professor Nazeem Goolam. Haron, who is attached to the Dept. of Theology & Religious Studies at the University of Botswana, tackled the topic of 'Islam and the Media'. He provided a broad overview of the Muslim media and gave insights into the transformations that some of them have undergone during the last few years. He however neglected to discuss the image of the Muslims in the non-Muslim media, an aspect that some of the participants wanted to hear. Lubna, who is the current chairperson of Political

Science at the University of KwaZulu Natal, read her paper on 'Islam and Politics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century: Reflections on the New World Order'. She discussed the nature of Islam and Politics in the contemporary period and analysed the nature of the new world order. She argued that Islam as a religion is a powerful political force and that it has been the driving force behind a number of events that have taken place since the turn of the century. Goolam, who is an associate professor in the Department of Jurisprudence at the University of South Africa, tackled the old and vexed issue of 'Jihad in Islam'. This paper was well structured in that it traced the concept in the primary sources and also made reference to scholars such as Shaybani and Farabi who had provided an understanding of it. Apart from making constant reference to Muslim scholars, he also compared the notion of 'just war' within the Muslim tradition with the notion as understood within the Christian tradition. After the presentation of these papers, the audiences fielded a variety of questions to each of the presenters.

Dr. Chris Landman, a former career diplomat and at present a Government appointed Commissioner in the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities, addressed a fairly controversial topic in his lecture on 'Christianity: A New Context for Co-Existence and Co-Operation with Islam?'. He argued that the concept of the Oneness of God and His absolute authority over the creation is a topic good enough for Christians – and he emphasized 'reformed' Christians as opposed to the others –, and Muslims about which they may enter into dialogue and co-operate against the forces of evil. Despite his passionate plea to consider this as a way forward, he had no answers for those who questioned him about the conservative (White) Christians who fully supported the USA administration's policies to invade Iraq and subjugate communities across the globe.

After the question and answer session, CIPS' rapporteurs Ms. Suwita H. Randhawa, Ms. Rasheeda Titus and Ms. Firoza Butler read their summaries of the different workshops. Professor Hussein Solomans closed the conference with an excellent and articulate summary of the three days proceedings and his own understandings and insights into the nature of Religion and Politics in the contemporary period.



John Chesworth  
 St. Paul's United Theological College  
 Limuru, Kenya

## SHARIA DEBATES AND THEIR PERCEPTION BY MUSLIMS & CHRISTIANS IN SELECTED AFRICAN COUNTRIES

ST. JULIAN'S CENTRE, LIMURU, KENYA  
 15 -19 JULY, 2004

This four day conference was held in partnership with the University of Bayreuth, Germany, at St. Julian's centre, Limuru, Kenya. More than thirty people attended coming from Nigeria, Sudan, South Africa, Rwanda, Zanzibar, Tanzania, Egypt, Malaysia, Iran, Austria and Germany as well as Kenya.

Over four days twenty-four papers were presented. All centred on concerns with Islamic law within the African context. Hamidin Abd Hamid discussed the history of the Sharia debates in Malaysia, Philip Ostien in Nigeria, Nadjma Yassari in Iran, Shamil Jeppie in 20<sup>th</sup> century Sudan, and Issa Ziddy in Zanzibar. Two more papers were devoted to developments in Nigeria: Ruud Peters discussed the re-introduction of Sharia penal law and examined the Safiyatu Hussaini case (2003); and Musa Gaiya reflected on the future of Sharia in Nigeria. Developments in Sudan were also discussed in two more papers: Mohamed Osman reflected on Sharia and the conceptualisation of an Islamic state by different Muslim groups in Northern Sudan; and Musa Adam Abdul-Jalil analysed the politics of identity and the Sharia debate in the Sudan. Sharia, as affecting personal law in colonial Zanzibar, was discussed by Elke Stockreiter; in post-apartheid South Africa by Ursula Günther; and in Kenya by Rebecca Osiro. The role of the Khadi courts in East Africa, and in particular in Kenya, was discussed in papers by Abdulkadir Hashim, Esha Faki, Anne Kubai, David Kanyoni and Hassan Mwakimako. The different perceptions of Sharia by Muslims and Christians in Uganda was described by Wotsuna Khamalwa, in Tanzania by Elieshi Mungure; and in Kenya by Joseph Wandera. Three other papers were by Hassan Ndzovu, who discussed the Politicization of Islam in Kenya; by Na'eem Jeenah who analysed the battle for gender equality vs. customary law in South Africa; and by Katharina Hofer who described the divergent Christian perspectives on secularism and conversion in Africa and their implications for the perception of Sharia debates

Four alumni of St. Paul's. They were: Joseph Wandera, 'Sharia Debate in Kenya: Some Critical Theological Reflections'; Jonathan Njeru, 'Entrenchment

of the Kadhi Courts in the Constitution of Kenya’; Rebecca Osiro, ‘Sharia Debates and its Perception by Muslims and Christians in Africa: Featuring Muslim Marriages in Kenya’; and David Kanyoni, ‘Christian Perception of Sharia (Kadhi’s Courts)’. The titles of these papers give an idea of the significance of having such a workshop to discuss what Sharia means within the African context. Meeting as Christian and Muslim academics from various disciplines helped to inform each person how Sharia is perceived within the different countries and different faith communities. All the St. Paul’s alumni, who gave papers, are now undertaking post-graduate studies.

As a result of this initial workshop, the University of Bayreuth has decided to begin the process of applying for funding for three year project on Sharia debates. It included St. Paul’s in the application.



# FOCUS ON INSTITUTIONS

James L. Cox  
University of Edinburgh

## INDIGENOUS RELIGIONS AT EDINBURGH UNIVERSITY & THE STUDY OF 'WORLD RELIGIONS'

As an academic subject in its own right within university departments of Religious Studies, the teaching of Indigenous Religions has developed quite recently.<sup>1</sup> It is still rare for students at the undergraduate level to follow courses on Indigenous Religions separately or in tandem with major world religions, such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam or Christianity. One exception to this in the United Kingdom is the University of Edinburgh, where over half the students currently enrolled in Honours programmes in Religious Studies are following a course devoted either solely to examining themes in Indigenous Religions or jointly to the study of Indigenous Religions alongside another world religious tradition.

The study of Indigenous Religions at Edinburgh cannot be understood apart from earlier developments in the University of Aberdeen, which in the mid-1970s, under the direction of Andrew Walls, launched a one year taught postgraduate programme, 'The M.Litt. in Religion in Primal Societies'. The aim of the course was described in its promotional literature as 'providing instruments for the study of the "primal" (or "ethnic" or "traditional") religions characteristic of many societies in Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania'. Those enrolled in the programme studied 'the effects on belief systems, practices and religious institutions of the meeting of these religions with "universal" religions (notably Christianity and Islam), and the new religious movements arising after contact with Western influences'.

In 1982, Walls established a quasi-independent 'Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World' (CSCNWW), but by 1986, due to financial cuts in the University of Aberdeen, was forced to move it to the University of Edinburgh, where it was located in the Faculty of Divinity. Although he no longer maintained a taught postgraduate programme in Primal Religions at Edinburgh, Walls continued to teach courses on Primal Religions as part of a

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<sup>1</sup> This article is reprinted here with permission of the author from *BASR Bulletin* no. 102 (June 2004), pp. 27-29.

new taught Masters degree in Non-Western Christianity. After John Parratt arrived in Edinburgh from the University of Botswana in 1990 as Associate Director of CSCNWW, Primal Religions were taught in the undergraduate programme for the first time, although very few students actually enrolled in such courses.

In 1999, I was appointed convener of the Religious Studies Subject Group in the University of Edinburgh's School of Divinity and very soon began to develop the dormant undergraduate Primal Religions programme into a full-blown study of what I called 'Indigenous Religions'. At the beginning, the Primal Religions courses already appearing in the Calendar simply were re-named 'Indigenous Religions: Sub-Saharan Africa' and 'Indigenous Religions: Traditions of Asia and the Pacific'. Other courses exploring general themes relevant to Indigenous Religions were added in the next few years, such as 'Shamanism', 'New Indigenous Religious Movements' and 'Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religions'. Recently, further curricular offerings have been developed under interdisciplinary headings, such as 'Apocalypse Now: Modern Millennial Movements amongst Indigenous Peoples', 'Islam in Africa', 'Themes in the Recent History of Christianity in Africa' and 'African Voices in the Study of Religions'. By building credits in these subjects and by completing Religion 1, which has five weeks devoted to Indigenous Religions, and the second year course on phenomenological and social-anthropological approaches to the study of religions, students at Edinburgh University can complete an Honours degree in Religious Studies over four years with a specialisation in Indigenous Religions.

At a recent day conference on 'Indigenous Religions in Context', sponsored by the Religious Studies Subject Group in Edinburgh, the problematic nature of developing such a specialisation was considered in detail. In the paper I presented at the day conference, I argued that although this is a field fraught with difficulties, this should not force us to abandon it. This is because, in the first instance, any objections to the study of Indigenous Religions apply equally to the study of religions generally. Oftentimes, what we mean in Western academic language by a religion refers to traditions with written scriptures, with founding figures, identifiable beliefs or doctrines and clearly defined priests or religious practitioners. These categories, which reflect a strongly Christian emphasis, hide the wide diversities and culturally specific contexts that are often lumped under homogeneous classifications such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam. If we expose the real diversity within so-called world religions, what we have studied conventionally as coherent traditions in departments of religion, we see that the entire enterprise suffers from a lack of clarity. The solution seems not to lie in rejecting the study of what we call religions, but to demonstrate in these studies the local, culturally specific and social variations that occur under the general headings we use.



This brings me back to the original idea of Andrew Walls in Aberdeen that a course should be offered studying the Primal Religions in various global contexts, how these have interacted with world religions and what new forms of religion have emerged from this engagement. What we are witnessing now in the study of Indigenous Religions in Edinburgh University may simply suggest a further stage beyond what Walls initiated in Aberdeen, whereby we refine the scope of Religious Studies. The working out of this process has wide implications and may foster academic debates in many contexts, including among those conducting research and teaching in African universities.

John Chesworth  
 Programme Director  
 St. Paul's United Theological College  
 Limuru, Kenya

## MA IN ISLAM & CHRISTIAN-MUSLIM RELATIONS

In September 2001, St. Paul's was approached by the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) and asked to participate in developing a post-graduate programme teaching Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations. Procmura wanted to develop a programme to equip field workers for Anglophone Eastern Africa within an ecumenical setting. St. Paul's was identified as an ideal place to develop the programme.

Three years later the college has completed the process of developing the programme and gaining approval from the Commission for Higher Education. The first intake of students for both the Post-Graduate Diploma and Master of Arts in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations started this September. The intake includes students from Kenya and Tanzania.

The course has two semesters with eight taught units. Those doing the MA spend the second year conducting research and writing a 20,000 word dissertation. Those who do the Post-Graduate Diploma will complete the course in twelve months following the taught units and writing an extended essay during the long vacation.



## PERSONS & POSTS

**Dr. John Chesworth** was awarded Islam in Africa Fellowship in 2004 by the African Studies Centre at Leiden, The Netherlands, and the Centre d'Études d'Afrique Noire (CEAN) in Bordeaux, France, for research in the 'Use of the Internet by Muslims in East Africa, with special reference to their relationship with the State'

**Mr. Ezra Chitando**, Senior Lecturer in the Department of Religious Studies, Classics & Philosophy in the University of Zimbabwe at Harare, Zimbabwe, has been awarded a Humboldt Fellowship. At the invitation of Prof. Ulrich Berner, he is currently spending a ten months period of study at Bayreuth University for writing a study on the African Jews of Rusape, Zimbabwe.

**Drs. Muhammed Haron** takes part in a team working with Dr. Kipton Jensen (project leader) in a newly proposed Departmental based project 'HIV/Aids Prevention and Response Initiatives within Faith-based Organizations in Botswana' in the Department of Theology & Religious Studies at the University of Botswana (2004-2006).

**Dr. Abdulkader Tayob** delivered his inaugural address on 10 September 2004 as Professor of Social Processes in Modern Islam at the Radboud University in Nijmegen, The Netherlands. Its title was 'Reading Religion and the Religious in Modern Islam'. In it, he discussed the distinctive views on religion of two modern Muslim intellectuals: Sayyid Ahmed Khan (1817-1898), and Jamal al-Din Afghani (1838/9-1897. Khan held that religion was an innate disposition of human beings that corresponded to the principles of order and harmony in nature. Afghani regarded Khan's view of religion as 'materialist naturalism' and serving European imperialist goals and himself took a functionalist approach to religion by regarding it as belief in a creator and in reward for good deeds and punishment for evil ones which was useful for building a good and powerful society. Tayob devoted the remainder of his address to demonstrating how modern Muslim intellectuals have used the religion-secular conceptual division for adjusting religion to the modern social and political transformations in the powerful modern nation-states; and to the analysis of the prominence of the mosque in them as sacred place and as a male-dominated site.

**Dr. Frans Wijzen** has been appointed a Member of the Academic Advisory Council of the African Studies Centre at Leiden, The Netherlands. His appointment reflects the increase of interest in the African Studies Centre in the part religions play in political, social and economical processes in Africa.

Matthews Ojo  
Abafemi Awolowo University,  
Ile-Ife

PROFESSOR JACOB OLUPONA'S  
PUBLIC LECTURE AT IBADAN, NIGERIA

On 15 December 2004, Professor Jacob K. Olupona, University of California, Davis, and President of AASR, delivered a public lecture in Ibadan, Nigeria, in a Distinguished Lecture Forum organized by the Centre for Ethics and African Studies (CEAS), an NGO, that promotes critical reflections of religious and social issues affecting the Nigerian society. Mr. Olusanya Awosan, Coordinator of CEAS, has published an extensive interview with Professor Olupona in the issue No 4 (2004) of the *Nigerian Essence* magazine.

Professor Olupona's lecture was entitled 'Sinners and Saints: The Crisis of Religious Faith in Contemporary Nigeria'. First Professor Olupona suggested that 'Sinners and Saints' are metaphors for describing and naming the ambiguities and paradoxes that are noticed in the Nigerian religious scene. These include a high level of religious piety and an endemic religious violence both growing together in intensity at the same time.

Olupona recognized that indigenous religion, Islam, and Christianity still hold sway in local, national, and regional affairs, while religion still serves as a conduit for political, social, and moral scenes of the Nigerian society. However, the Nigerian phenomenon contradicts the secularization thesis and the assumption that in modern democracies, there is separation of religion and state, with the religious institutions fixed in the private domain and the state, in the public. For Nigerians whose history, culture, and indigenous religion have always integrated these realms, i.e. the secular and the sacred, modern democratic principles have created a dilemma, which has partly fuelled the crisis of religious faith in the country.

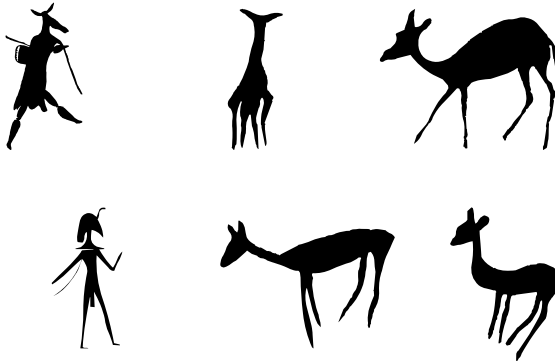
Reflecting further, Professor Olupona examined the role the Nigerian Anglican Communion played in the controversy surrounding the consecration of homosexual bishops within the global Anglican Communion. With the vigorous pietistic African intervention, he argued that suddenly, the world press realized the enormous power of a Third World church to shape public opinion in far distant places as Britain and America. Consequently, African Christianity has moved from the sideline to the centre of Christendom. However, the question remains: Can Nigerian religious leaders use their newfound influence to fight the political and social immorality at home?

In addition, he suggested that there is a need to interject strong principles of moral leadership into the new dispensation in the country. The quest for 'ci-

vility’, i.e. ‘norms and standards proper to the conduct of modern life’, and the basis and ethos of proper living are required of every political leader. Hence, a leader who loses the moral trust of the people is as good as finished. The disconnect between indigenous moral and ethical systems and perverted ethical standards of the contemporary society may signify the source of the present Nigerian political crisis

Professor Olupona further noted that Nigeria is fast becoming something of a battleground between fundamentalist Christianity and radical Islam, thus intensifying the viciousness of religious violence and aggression across the nation. He then suggested that the removal of African Traditional Religion from the public sphere, a religion that has served as a buffer between Christianity and Islam, is partly responsible for the continuing religious violence in the country. According to Olupona, ‘since the state is weakening, and indigenous forms of spirituality are declining, we have seen the intensification of violence as both forces (i.e. Christianity and Islam) attempt to consolidate their influence in the society. He also noted that as Christian-Islamic conflicts became more pronounced, so has Nigerian civil religion witnessed decline. In fact, those national symbols and religious rituals such as the National Youth Service Scheme created by General Yakubu Gowon to galvanize the nation into a unifying whole in the early 1970s have been eroded by religious bigotry.

Lastly, Professor Olupona called on scholars of religion to study and interpret the nature of the Nigerian problem. Arguing that if scholars are alert to the seeming contradictions, paradoxes and ambiguities in the religious scene, they will be able to do a better job in analyzing and interpreting the trends in Nigerian religious national life.



# THE INTERNET

African Studies Centre, Leiden, The Netherlands

## NEW WEB DOSSIER ON AFRICAN ART

The Library, Documentation and Information Department of the African Studies Centre (ASC) at Leiden, The Netherlands, has compiled a web dossier on African Art to coincide with the annual conference of the African Studies Association in the Netherlands (NVAS), which was held at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden on 26 November 2004. The theme of the conference was 'Art in Africa?', and discussion focused on the dynamics of various visual art forms on the continent, notably in West Africa. The dossier is based on the ASC Library's collection and contains titles of books and articles published in the last ten years. A brief introduction on the ways in which African arts have been categorized is followed by titles on African art in general, visual arts, painting, and sculpture. A number of periodicals on African arts are listed separately. The dossier concludes with a selection of web resources on African art. The dossier can be found at our web dossier page, together with earlier dossiers on subjects such as Conflict in Sudan: the case of Darfur, African sport, HIV/AIDS in Africa and Youth in Africa.

Visit: <http://asc.leidenuniv.nl/library/webdossiers/>

## AASR REGISTER OF MEMBERS UPDATE

### **Kuponu, Selome Igbekele**

2. Assistant Lecturer in the Dept. of Religions, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos, Nigeria
3. Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Bayreuth, Germany
4. Phone: +49 (921) 555430 (office); +49 (921) 1508432 (home)
5. E-mail: [Selome.kuponu@uni-bayreuth.de](mailto:Selome.kuponu@uni-bayreuth.de); [se\\_kuponu2001@yahoo.co](mailto:se_kuponu2001@yahoo.co)
6. B.A.Hons Christian Studies (1995, Lagos State University, Ojo, Lagos).  
M.A Christian Studies (1998, Lagos State university, Ojo, Lagos), Ph.D (in view, University of Bayreuth, Germany)
7. New African Movements
8. –
9. Member of the National Association of Biblical Studies (NABIS), Nigeria.

## REVIEWS

Eugene Turner  
Fayetteville, N.Y. 13066, U.S.A.

IN HONOUR OF  
BONGANI MAZIBUKO, 1932–1997

Roswith Gerloff (ed.) 2003, *Mission is Crossing Frontiers: Essays in Honour of Bongani Mazibuko*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 574 pp., ISBN 1-875053-37-9, R120.00, US\$ 25.00, £15

*Mission is Crossing Frontiers* honours Dr. Bongani A. Mazibuko (1932–1997) who began working on the staff of the Centre for Black and White Christian Partnership in Birmingham, England, with Roswith Gerloff in 1980 and joined her as co-director in 1982. He earned his Ph.D from Birmingham University in 1983 and in 1985 returned to his native South Africa where he was appointed Dean of the Faculty of Theology at the University of Durban-Westville and had an illustrious career until his untimely death in 1997.

This thick volume of his selected writings and eighteen essays by his friends and colleagues is a fascinating treatment of how the African Instituted Churches (AICs), merging the sources and norms of Christianity they received from the western missionary churches with their own indigenous African cultures and religions, are creating a new and powerful interpretation of the Christian faith contextualized to the special conditions and experiences of African people and African-descended people in the diaspora.

In the Foreword, Gayraud Wilmore, who helped to introduce Mazibuko to the theory and praxis of American Black theology when the latter visited the Black Church Studies Program at Colgate Rochester Divinity School in the 1980s, paints a background picture for understanding and appreciating Mazibuko's unique contribution to African theology and his person-centered, experiential approach to Christian education at the grassroots level of church life in South Africa. Roswith Gerloff writes an interesting Introduction to the book, entitled 'Learning to Fly', in which she gives us the essential details of Mazibuko's troubled and sometimes tragic life. She shows how he, inspired by Richard Bach's Jonathan Livingston Seagull, 'learned to fly' – the symbol of liberation from South African apartheid and the repressions of an imported European theology and ecclesiasticism. Gerloff summarizes her view of how Mazibuko broke into a new pedagogy by quoting his observation that Christians must teach an 'unconditional acceptance of everyone human, of passionate

speech about God and people, of the church as a living instrument for changing society, and of education as facilitating this transformation'. Among some of the more quotable of Mazibuko's thoughts, as reported by Gerloff are these classic examples:

Now, if God is going to be authentic in terms of my own understanding, he must appear in the image of the father I know. This means, if you are white, you see the white side of God. I see the black side of God because I am black. As long as we both know that this is our Father—this is my Father—it does not matter, because colour is subjective to culture and depends on your perspectives. Significant is who God is! ... What is more, God is requesting me to affirm the other person's perspective of seeing God, and not to declare: you must use my own lenses!

In a discussion with his students on the *Imago Dei* and human creation, Mazibuko said that you must have a tripartite vision of self to know how one is created in the image of God. The vision must be of self, of God, and of responsibility. He advised his students to do the following:

Spell out your strengths. Map out your struggles. Suggest how experiences could guide and assist the student in your area of knowledge. Let culture and context be your guides as you make this valuable contribution!

In another part of the book he muses in his candid, unabashed manner of speaking on one of his major themes—a critique of the multiculturalism and the unpreparedness of the churches of the West to properly understand and exploit it.

For several years I lived in the West. Looking at the Church in England or Germany, some have asked me what I consider the main task of the Church, in view of the multicultural and multireligious nature of these societies. The most serious problem I perceive, rightly or wrongly, is that taint of arrogance among the older cultures. The worse part of it is that this arrogance is not just cultural but also religious, which is such a big tragedy. People, who had a long history of believing, project an image by which we can hardly see in whom they believe any more, because the churches are frozen. The people are closed. The love that has been permeating is far, far absent from their worship.

Roswith Gerloff has wisely chosen, among the many contributors to *Mission is Crossing Frontiers*, writers from almost every ethnic group and nationality represented in contemporary South Africa. To mention only a few of them: Maria Victoria Pereira is Portuguese, born in Mozambique, lecturing and writing about science and religion and children's stories in English and Zulu; Nico A. Botha is a professor and head of the Department of Missiology at the University of South Africa; John Adegoke is an accountant who lives in Birmingham, England, and is a Special Apostle in the Cherubim and Seraphim

Church of the U.K.; Marsha Snulligan Haney is an African American Presbyterian who has done research in South Africa and teaches missiology and world religions at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta, GA; Devarakshanam Betty Govinden is a feminist lay minister in an Anglican parish in Durban and former dean of the Faculty of Education at the University of Natal. Readers will recognize among those who contributed chapters several scholars with international reputations in missiology and evangelism, like Patrick A. Kalilombe, Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen, Isabel Apawo Phiri, and Walter J. Hollenweger.

The western missionary churches have been in Africa since the 1800s, planting churches while rejecting the integration of the African cultural, spiritual, and religious heritage in the theology, missiology, and pedagogy that white missionaries and evangelists proffered to their black adherents. *Mission is Crossing Frontiers* presents the evolution of African Instituted Churches in a way that will be shockingly novel to many English and American readers. It is a collection of thoughts and ideas on how this new expression of Christianity finally rested in the life and labor of the people—not in the theological academies and missionary compounds. And prominently embedded in the new God-talk, worship, action, and education in South Africa is the personality and creative imagination of Professor Bongani A. Mazibuko, whose life and thought have been devotedly preserved in this Festschrift by the indefatigable German theologian and missiologist, Dr. Roswith Gerloff, until recently a senior research fellow and lecturer at the University of Leeds.

This book is an excellent resource for scholars and anyone who is interested in the Christian faith and the impact it is making today on grassroots African Christianity. It is true that the culture of the West is very present in the African Instituted Churches and danger flags abound, but this collection of essays makes it clear that if the missionaries had been better listeners than preachers they would have caught the accents of a new and richer faith in Jesus Christ aborning on the African continent. By hindsight we must now conclude that many ideas, concepts, and perspectives of African theology and evangelical pedagogy would have been more accessible to congregations and denominations that sorely need them in this era of dechristianization in our North Atlantic Community.





Jan G. Platvoet  
AASR Bulletin Co-Editor

## THE PLURALITY OF HEALING

Olov Dahlin 2002, *Zvinorwadza: Being a Patient in the Religious and Medical Plurality of the Mberengw District, Zimbabwe*. Frankfurt am Main, etc.: Peter Lang, 295 pp., 6 appendices (glossary of Shona terms; list of abbreviations; list of interviews; list of institutions and events visited; summaries of the case histories; tables of questionnaire results), bibliography, frontispiece + 48 pictures, index of subjects, indexes of persons and places, 2 maps, 7 figures, ISBN 3-631-39576-0

### *The book*

This PhD by a Swedish anthropologist and historian of religions was supervised by David Westerlund and defended at Uppsala University in 2001. It is based on two periods of research in medical and religious anthropology in the Mberengwa district in Zimbabwe: a preparatory one from October 1991 to February 1992, and a foundational one from March 1997 to March 1998. Its focus is the case histories of twenty patients who practiced religious and medical plurality by seeking help for their illnesses in different quarters: Western mission and government hospitals, Shona (Karanga) traditional healers, and AICs (African-initiated churches) practicing faith-healing and exorcism. The book consists of a preface, eight chapters, and an epilogue. In addition, it contains six substantial appendices (217-263), a bibliography (265-271), some fifty photographs (9, 273-292), and seven figures presenting data on the case histories and models.

The preface is quite lengthy (11-20). Dahlin describes in it what assistance he received from others and how the research affected him personally. His research was much furthered by the fact that his parents worked as medical doctors at the Mnene Lutheran hospital, the largest mission hospital in the Mberengwa district. Not only did his parents assist him in the selection of the patients who could serve as research objects, but as the son of missionaries Dahlin also met with much goodwill from the many Lutherans in Mberengwa district, in which they constituted the largest mainline church. Dahlin furthermore lists his several 'guides in the field', and narrates how he met them, and how he spent his year of his research at Chief Mataga's residence away from the comfort of mission hospitals, in order to experience the world of the rural Karanga 'from within' (12). He had a round hut built for him there and gradually learned to live life in the traditional way, even to the degree of realising towards the end of his stay that he had 'actually acquired the insider view' (15) and was having 'traditionalist experiences' (15-17). But the hardships and accidents of that life

also made him fall ill, and share the experiences of the patients who were his objects of study (17-19). But he had 'never saw any spirits' (23), as did Edith Turner, nor had religious experiences of the kind Young and Goulet gathered in *Being Changed: The Anthropology of Extraordinary Experience* (Ontario: Broadview Press, 1994).

Chapter 1, Introduction (21-47), is the methodological chapter, in which Dahlin details the aims of his research project, the questions at issue, his methodology of 'reflexivity', and his definitions of the central concepts of 'ill health', such as 'illness', 'disease' and 'sickness', and of 'healing', and 'cure'. In addition, he surveys earlier relevant literature in medical African anthropology and in Shona, especially Karanga, ethnography and history, e.g. by students and staff of the Dept. of Religious Studies of the University of Zimbabwe at Harare, and by other Zimbabwean, Swedish and other European researchers. He also delineates his 'field material' and the three methods he used to obtain his data: participant observation, oral interviews and questionnaires. He used the first two in his research on action taken to remedy ill health in the extended family of Chief Mataga, who was a Lutheran by upbringing, a 'traditionalist' by practice, and a Zionist when he saw cause. His four surviving wives, sons, daughters and grandchildren represented all the religious traditions of the area: the mainline churches, Karanga indigenous religion, and the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal AICs. Four members of Mataga's family were spirit mediums (*masviriko*); three of them, and another member, were 'healers' (*n'anga*); two were AIC 'faith healers'; and one was a Western-trained medical doctor (37). Lastly, Dahlin briefly describes the two 'sources of his theoretical inspiration' (43): social anthropology and the comparative study of religions. From them he derived his understanding that 'the social context is indispensable for a proper representation of religion in any society', but also his conviction that religion 'cannot be explained only by its social function and role in society' (43). Dahlin's approach is, therefore, contextual and non-reductionist. Furthermore, he departs from the assumption that 'reality is thoroughly pluralistic in nature', for it consists of the 'many worlds in the world' which humans construct by postulating certain things about reality and holding certain worldviews in order to make life meaningful (43-44). Illness puts that perceived order to the test and may involve a re-ordering of the world of a patient by means of an aetiology, or 'explanation', in order to find new meanings and regain control. Dahlin's thesis focuses on the pragmatics of the quest for therapy in a world of religious and medical pluralism.

The subject of Chapter 2 (49-69) is the ethnography of the Mberengwa district. It is ethnically pluralistic, but has a majority of Karanga-Shona. 'Ethnicities', however, are fading through intermarriage. Dahlin reviews the colonial and postcolonial history of the district, its traditional and modern politics, its economy, housing and nutrition, and Karanga kinship, gender divisions, and sociability, and how these have been affected by the benefits and ills of (West-

ern) ‘modernity’ introduced by missions, education, medical care, mining industry and job mobility. Among the ills Dahlin reckons alcoholism, moral dissolution, increased crime rates, and the spread of HIV/AIDS. In religious matters, modernity has resulted in religious eclecticism: ‘commonly people combine traditional beliefs with some aspects of Christianity’ (69).

The religious plurality of the Mberengwa district is delineated in greater detail in chapter 3 (71-97) by surveys of Karanga indigenous religion (71-82), the ‘mission churches’ (82-87) and the AICs (87-92). In its last section (92-97), Dahlin examines how these three religious traditions have interacted. He also notes ‘indications of secularisation among those who are socially and economically marginalised’ (97).

The medical plurality of the Mberengwa district is examined in chapter 4, first, by a survey of indigenous medicine and healing, which is the domain of the *n’anga* (healers, herbalists), but may also involve the *masviriko* as ‘mediums’ of the *vadzimu* (‘ancestors’), who are believed either to battle the *varoyi* (‘witches’) as the cause of illness, or to permit them to inflict disease (99-106). He then describes the history of modern curative health care in the district (106-111) and how the latter is ideally complemented in mission hospitals by ‘Christian care’ (111-112). ‘Christian healing’, however, is practiced only by the AICs. Their Spirit-inspired prophets and healers blame illness on the *mudzimu* (‘ancestors’) or *mashave* (‘foreign spirits’) of indigenous religion and exorcise them as ‘evil spirits’ (112-117). The few Neo-Pentecostal churches in Mberengwa, however, do not ‘heal’, but make glossolalia their central feature. Dahlin concludes the chapter with a comparison of the three medical systems through a discussion how they complement each other in some respects, are each other’s rivals in others, and have failed to ‘integrate’ into the one national health system planned by the government of Zimbabwe, because of their fundamentally different worldviews, their incompatible aetiologies of ill health, and their depreciative and separatist attitudes towards each other (117-124).

In chapter 5 (125-142), six case histories are extensively discussed, four of which occurred in Chief Mataga’s family. In chapter 6 (143-181), they and the fourteen other case histories, described in appendix 5 (231-247), as well as the data obtained through the questionnaires (160-171, appendix 6: 249-263), are compared in respect of the social situation of the patients, their religious affiliations, their views of their illnesses, the aetiologies they held, the kinds of help they sought, and why they sought those particular types of help, and how they viewed the three medical systems. These two chapters amply document the prevailing medical inclusivism: even believers, who were staunch adherents of one particular religious option as long as they enjoyed good health, resorted to consulting the ‘healers’ of another religious alternative, or both other religious alternatives, when they were confronted with a severe illness and failed to obtain a cure from their ‘own healers’. This medical eclecticism was fostered by the religious plurality prevailing in extended families and the neighbourhood.

Whereas nuclear families might be mono-religious, extended families and neighbourhoods were pluri-religious and often counted indigenous and faith healers among their members (145-147, 158). Though 'patients usually try hospital care as the first alternative' (178, 180), distance, poor bus services and the costs of hospital treatment and Western medicines often caused families to opt first for the indigenous and/or faith 'healers' nearby and seek hospital treatment only after the local healers had failed to restore health (147-150). Hospitals were also not consulted when the ill health was perceived as caused by witches, ancestors, or 'evil spirits', and in need of ritual instead of biomedical treatment (151-155, 179), or in need of both (180). Dahlin concludes this chapter by comparing his findings with those of other scholars of Shona societies and other African societies and by drawing a few general conclusions (171-181). One respects the tendency to diminish attribution of illness to God, ancestors and nature spirits, and to increase attribution to natural (biomedical) causes and to 'witches'. This change reflects the increasing Christianisation, secularisation and individualisation of African societies and the growth of competition and tension in them (176-178). Dahlin agrees with Westerlund that indigenous African therapy systems have always been plural: its aetiologies comprised both natural and 'cultural'<sup>2</sup> (culturally attributed) causation. It could, therefore, easily integrate the Western biomedical care as a complement to its own multidimensional and flexible system (181).

Chapter 7 (182-205) concludes Dahlin's thesis by means of an *emic*, or 'inside', analysis of the 'life-worlds' of the patients, whose multi-episodic ill-health histories have been described in the book. The 'life-world of a patient' refers to how a patient experiences his or her 'world', and in particular his or her ill health, and the meanings which she or he attributes to it (17, 44). Dahlin investigates the concepts of 'health' and 'well-being' of these Karanga patients (182-185), the natural and 'cultural' causes to which they attribute ill health (186-187), the different 'healing' processes for which they opt (187-191), and the noxious or curative effects which these causes and processes have on the (minds of the) patients by the ways in which they understand and experience them (192-196). By these mental effects, illnesses and healings are not merely physiological, but also psycho-somatic and culturo-somatic processes (211). Not only physiological pathogens need to be neutralised in healings, but also the psychological and cultural 'pathogens' (of 'social or spiritual origin' [197]) need to be addressed at their own levels and in their own idioms. Dahlin says: 'From this perspective both these medical systems [the indigenous and faith healing ones, which acknowledge the prevailing beliefs in witches, JP] – seem rational' (198). He suggests that there is a two-way interplay between body and

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<sup>2</sup> Dahlin avoids 'spiritual causation', because the term 'spiritual' suggests a separation between the 'spiritual' and the 'natural' worlds, which Karanga believers clearly do not hold, for they regard and experience them as integrated in their world (44n71).

mind, and that neuro-peptides serve as a means of communication between them. Actually, we should do away with the body-mind dichotomy, for there is only, Dahlin says, an ‘embodied mind’ and a ‘minded body’. Which is why illness involves both the body and the mind, and also his or her cultural and natural outer worlds in as far as they are significant for the life-world of a patient. Biomedicine needs to review its Cartesian positivist legacy of the separate body and mind and its exclusive concern with physiological pathogens and lesions. It needs to appreciate the multi-dimensionality of illness, and it may learn much from ritual healing in respect of psychosomatic and culturo-somatic illnesses (200-205).

### *Appreciation*

The summary of the book’s contents presented above demonstrate that Dahlin’s thesis is a model, methodologically and content-wise, of a research project into the important interface between the medical and religious domains, in particular in Africa where religious and medical plurality is a notable feature virtually everywhere. For that reason, one would wish that at least one copy of this thesis were present in all university libraries in Africa for inspection by staff and students of Departments for the Study of Religions and of the Social Sciences in order that they might study the book not only for its contents, but in particular for Dahlin’s research methods, and the manner in which he has presented the outcome of research in this book.

I have but one critical note. It respects Dahlin’s thesis that illness is caused not only by physiological pathogens (the disease causing agents which Western biomedicine is eager to trace and cure), but also by cultural ‘pathogens of social and spiritual origin’ (197). I agree that these should be ritually addressed by the appropriate healer in order to bring relief, and perhaps healing, to the patient whose health has been adversely affected by e.g. belief in witches and their perceived ‘evil craft’. Dahlin should, however, perhaps have taken another step also. As biomedicine not only combats biological pathogens – bacteria and viruses –, but also tries to eradicate them and the diseases they cause, certain cultural pathogens, such as the belief in witches and their alleged witchcraft, need not only be ritually combatted by religious healers for relief, but also need to be eradicated for the social harm they cause, as the history of European and African witch-beliefs amply demonstrates. But that cannot be done by healers, for they have a vested interest in these beliefs. It takes teachers to do that. Dahlin’s thesis certainly makes a contribution to that (unintended) greater aim.



## DISCUSSION

Graham Harvey

Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

### RESPONSE TO A REVIEW IN AASR BULLETIN 21

The allegation that my work clearly pushes the new primitivist approaches which Armin Geertz criticised (in another book reviewed in that Bulletin) is both insulting and damaging to my work and that of colleagues participating in it. Firstly, none of the peoples or religious phenomena in any of the three books mentioned is primitive. This is a term I and those colleagues who contributed to the reviewed books explicitly reject for good and hopefully obvious reasons. Secondly, my interest and that of most of the contributors to these edited volumes is in contemporary or recent cultural and religious self-expressions among indigenous people. Thirdly, despite the suggestion that because I have also written about contemporary Pagans I am partisan to dubious purposes, my scholarly aim is not only to understand the phenomena that present themselves in religious activities but also to reflect on their meaning today. Among the implications of scholarship interested in indigeneity must be the question of the nature of modernity and the academic approaches arising in them. Since Descartes and others were so clearly wrong about the relationship between mind and matter, it is hardly likely that the culture made in their image was correct in its colonial dismissal of alternatives as primitive or in its celebration of other-than-Western art as primitivist over against its claimed superior or progressive products. To claim to be modern and scientific without distancing oneself from Cartesian versions of modernity looks increasingly foolish. A more careful reviewer of another edited book of mine (i.e. one on shamanism) has noted that it raises the question of whether modernity is anything more than a Western / European tribal view of and approach to the world exported as a globally applicable universal. I think that is a debate worth continuing.

My own purpose in the reviewed books and in my book on Pagans that appears to be slighted in passing has been to provide some introductory material that may further advance the study of particular groups of religions by making existing connections and debates more evident more widely. In particular, these books about indigenous religions demonstrate that similar issues are debated among scholars of North American indigenous religions as among those interested in Oceanic and African indigenous religions. Other scholars, and my later writing (and my book about Judaism that the reviewer does not mention), engage with more detailed and more critical debates. The reviewed ones were in-

tended to provide entry level or student accessible works that permit scholars of indigenous religions to further enhance our dialogues about the value of studying indigeneity in greater depth. They are not intended to be the last word for researchers but only among the first as far as students might be concerned. It would be a pity if colleagues did not check their utility because of an unhelpful allegation of primitivism. On the other hand, I would welcome offers of more advanced books about indigenous religions for the series I co-edit with Dr Tabona Shoko (University of Zimbabwe) and Dr Lawrence Martin (University of Wisconsin, Eau Claire) and published by Ashgate ([http://www.ashgate.com/subject\\_area/religion\\_theology/vitality\\_religion\\_series.htm](http://www.ashgate.com/subject_area/religion_theology/vitality_religion_series.htm))



Jan G. Platvoet  
AASR-Co-Editor

The passage to which Graham Harvey objects (AASR Bulletin 21: 51) runs as follows:

But I [JGP] also have reservations, for Harvey, as editor, clearly also pursues his own agenda. He has a partisan interest in indigenous religions and modern neopaganism. His purpose is to 'aid and abet' dialogue with them, promote 'joyous participation' in them, and engagement with the struggle of the First Nations of the Fourth World movement. Though many of the points he makes are historically and methodologically correct, he clearly pushes the 'new primitivist' approaches which Armin Geertz criticised.

I regret that due to much other pressing work I was not able reply to this response in this bulletin. I will do so in the AASR Bulletin 23.



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