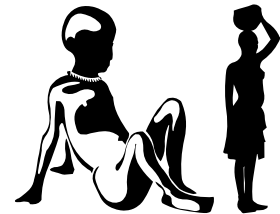

THE
AFRICAN
ASSOCIATION
FOR
THE
STUDY
OF
RELIGIONS



STEERING COMMITTEE

Chairperson: Prof. Jacob Olupona, University of California, Davis, African-American and African Studies Program, Davis, California, 95616, U. S. A.

Regional Representatives



South Africa.

East and Central Africa: Dr. Mary Getui, P. O. Box 52979, Nairobi, Kenya. Fax. 254- 2- 726976.

North America: Profesor Simeon Ilesanmi, Dept of Religious Studies, Wake Forest University, Wiinston - alem, NC 27109, USA

West Africa: Dr. Umar Danfulani, University of Jos; Prof. Friday Mbon, University of Calabar, Nigeria.

Southern Africa: Prof. Abdulkader I. Tayob, Dept. of Religious Studies, University of Cape Town, Private Bag, Rondebosch 7700,

Europe: Prof. Gerrie ter Haar, Dept. of Anthropology, Utrecht University, P.O Box 80140, 3508 TC Utrecht. The Netherlands.

The editors of the newsletters welcome any contributions and comments. Please submit entries to Gerrie ter Haar or Abdulkader Tayob, or any of the regional representatives who will pass them on. We would prefer, wherever possible, your contributions on computer disk format. E-mail messages may be sent to tayob@humanities.uct.ac.za. The information supplied in the Newsletter is accurate to the best of our knowledge. We, however, do not take responsibility for errors and omissions.

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

Jacob K. Olupona

I am pleased to write to you a few weeks before the IAHR Congress in Durban. It is the first congress of the Organization in Africa. We expected many African scholars at this meeting, but the reality is that lack of sufficient funding will make this impossible. On Thursday evening, August 10, 2000, the AASR will hold a general meeting at the close of which we will elect new members to serve in the Executive committee. The nominating committee, headed by Dr. Simeon Ilesanmi, has received nominations for a number of people and the list is published in this newsletter. Since several of our members will not be present, it will be profitable to send your comments to Dr. Ilesanmi at Wake Forest University. You may suggest more names for our deliberations to be added to this list.

I would like to seize this opportunity to thank all the members of the outgoing Executive council for their hard work and sacrifice. Drs. Abdulkader Tayob and Gerrie ta Haar, who have edited our newsletter since the time the organization was founded in Harare, deserve our special thanks. I congratulate our Vice President Dr. Platvoet upon his retirement from the University of Utrecht. He has been the chief architect of the organization and the drive behind several of the conferences sponsored by us. Dr. Platvoet has indicated his willingness to continue to serve in the Executive council.

You will notice that the East African Association for the study of Religion, the aftermath of the first conference of the AASR heard in Kenya, has been born. I am glad to see a long list of active scholars of religion joining this new organization. A disappointing thing to me is that there are no scholars from outside Kenya in either the inaugural meeting or the executive council. The AASR will support the creation of this

new body when it is tabled for deliberation by the IAHR President in Durban, but we hope this serious omission will be rectified very soon.

I regret to announce the death of our Nigerian colleague and friend, Ikenga Meatuh, a Professor for many years at the University of Jos, Nigeria. Ikenga belonged to the second generation of African scholars of African Religion. He mentored many young Nigerian scholars and several of his writings are cited in the literature on African Religions. I hope that the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religion will establish a fitting memorial to him.

I look forward to meeting some of you in Durban and I wish all of us God's traveling Mercy.



AASR ELECTIONS AT THE IAHR

Elections will be held for AASR at the August Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions. The following nominations have been received. Send any new nominations to Prof. Ilesanmi:

President: (a) Jacob Olupona, (b) *****

Vice President: (a) Grace Wamue (b) Jesse Mugambi

Secretary-General: (a) Jim Cox (b) Teresia Hinga (c) Frieder Ludwig

West African Rep: (a) Elom Dovlo (b) Dan Fulani (c) Afe Adogame

European Rep: (a) ***** (b) *****

South African Rep: (a) ***** (b) *****

North American Rep: (a) Ilesanmi (b) *****

East African Rep: (a) Getui (b) *****

Newsletter co-editors: (a) Platvoet (b) *****

Series editors: (a) Berner (b) Platvoet (c) Ilesanmi

Ex-officio: Westerlund, Hackett

PUBLICATION ISSUES

David Westerlund

In July 1999 the first AASR conference, 'The Religions of East Africa in the Age of Globalization', was held in Nairobi, Kenya. It was optimistically hoped that a conference volume could be produced before the 2000 IAHR Congress in Durban. However, some of the contributors were not able to keep the tough deadline that was set, and without some of the key papers, the process of publication could not be completed. The proposed volume, which will be published by Acton Press in Nairobi later, may be included as number five in the AASR series 'Religions of Africa.'

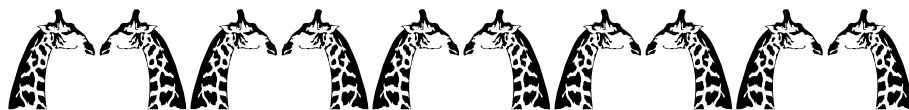
Acton Press has also expressed an interest in producing a new edition of number one in this series, that is, the Harare volume *The Study of Religions in Africa: Past, Present and Prospects* (Cambridge: Roots & Branches, 1996). This would increase the distribution of this important book in Africa. A few copies of the first edition still remain, and some of these will be available at the Durban congress.

Elections will be held for several AASR officers at the Durban meeting . Due to other commitments and some recurring health problems, I will not continue as publications officer. The Durban congress will provide good opportunities for rethinking and partly reorienting the publication policies of the AASR. A broader discussion of such issues

will also be organised in the form of a 'Workshop on Publishing and Book Distribution in Africa', in which both scholars and publishers will take part.

The *Journal of Religion in Africa*, which is published in co-operation with the AASR has recently appointed two new deputy editors. David Maxwell, who took over the sole responsibility as editor at the end of 1999 when Adrian Hastings retired after 15 years of service in that capacity, is now assisted by Karen Middleton and Brad Weiss who have joined the previously appointed deputy editors, Elisabeth Sirriyeh and Kevin Ward. The new review editor is Ingrid Lawrie.

One of the problems of the JRA is the paucity of contributions from African scholars. In a recent letter to all the members of the editorial board of the JRA, David Maxwell stressed that "the February 2000 issue of the *Journal* contained the first article by an African scholar (Afe Adogame) since Teresa Cruz e Silva's paper in the Lusophone issue of 1998. We are most anxious to remedy this situation, which should be helped by Brill's introduction of a special lower rate for the *JRA* for subscribers in Africa, and by a splendid initiative by Lamin Sanneh which will bring copies to fifty African universities and higher education institutions."



NEWS

Launching of the **Eastern African Association for the Study of Religions** (EAASR). Following the resolution last year to have an Eastern African Association for the Study of Religions, I am pleased to inform you, nine months later, the baby was finally born on 12th May 2000. The occasion took place at Amani Centre, Nairobi, Kenya. Representatives mainly

came from Kenya with apologies from all over Eastern Africa. The latter were not able to attend the one-day event due to logistics of travel. The association's main objective is to bring together scholars of religions from the region. This is hoped to give them a forum to research and develop the religions of Eastern Africa. Membership is drawn from both individuals and institutions within the region. The elected office bearers are: Chairperson: Dr. Grace N. Wamue (Department of Religious Studies/Kenyatta University, wamue@avu.org); Vice-Chairperson: Dr. Adams Chepkwony (Department of Religious Studies/Moi University, libusers@moivarsity.com); Secretary: Dr. Michael Katola (Religious Studies/Kenyatta University, mkatola@westend.africaonline.com); Treasurer: Rebecca Muriguh. (Religious Studies, University of Nairobi, Kikuyu Campus).

On 13 April 2000 **Dr. Gerrie ter Haar** delivered her Inaugural Address as Professor of Religion, Human Rights and Social Change at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS) in The Hague entitled: Rats, cockroaches and people like us: Views of humanity and human rights. The Inaugural Address has been published, and copies can be obtained from, the ISS (P.O. Box 29776, 2502 LT The Hague; E-mail: promotions@iss.nl).

The **Dutch Association for the Study of Religions** (NGG) held its Annual Conference from 2-3 June, 2000. The conference theme was The Study of Religion and Human Rights. Both international speakers came from Africa (Sudan and Nigeria), though working in the USA. The first speaker was Prof. Abdullahi An-Na'im (Emory University), who presented a paper entitled: "Islam and human rights: Beyond the universality debate." Next Prof. Simeon Ilesanmi (Wake Forest University) presented his paper on: "The political and moral responsibility of religion in Africa."

CONSULTATION ON RELIGION AND MEDIA IN AFRICA, Accra, Ghana May 20-27, 2000. At the

end of May a group of scholars and practitioners working in the area of religion and media convened just outside of Accra at the Ghana Institute of Public Management and Administration. Appropriately known as Greenhill, it is a quiet campus situated on the edge of the lovely University of Ghana campus and far from the hustle and bustle of metropolitan Accra.

The purpose of the meeting was to explore the growing interconnections between religious and media institutions in Africa, particularly in the light of new political dispensations, as well as growing religious pluralization and liberalization of the mass media. It was sponsored by the International Study Commission on Media, Religion, and Culture. The Consultation was organized by Professor Rosalind I. J. Hackett of the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Four Commission members attended, Professor Stewart Hoover of the University of Colorado, Professor David Morgan of Valparaiso University, Dr. Jolyon Mitchell of Edinburgh University, and Dr. Peter Horsfield of the RMIT University, Australia. The Consultation participants came from Nigeria, Prof. Hakeem Danmole (History, Ilorin), Dr. Matthews Ojo (Religious Studies, O.A.U., Ife), and Franklyn Ukah Kennedy (Sociology, Ibadan). Mitch Odero, Director of Communications of the All-Africa Conference of Churches, Nairobi, came from Kenya. Dr. Brigit Meyer travelled from the Centre of Religion and Society at the University of Amsterdam and Rev. Dr. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu came from Birmingham University. North American participants included anthropologist Dr. Brian Larkin from Barnard College and Professor Louise Bourgault from the Dept of Mass Communications at Northern Michigan University.

In addition a number of Ghanaian scholars were invited to participate, such as Dr. Elom Dovlo and Dr. Elizabeth Amoah (Dept. of the Study of Religion), Dr. Sam Quarcoopome and Dr. Brigid Sackey (Institute of African Studies), Dr E. Kofi Quashigah (Faculty of Law), Professor John Collins (Music), Professor Kofi Anyidoho (English), Dr Africanus Aveh (Performing Arts), Dr Boonah Koomson (Communications), and Dr. Sennah Kodjo (Sociology). Also attending were staff from Trinity Theological Seminary (Prof. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, Rev. Dr. S. Asante, Rebecca Dodge). The proceedings were considerably enriched by the presence of media practitioners themselves, such as Alhaji Hamidu Chodi, Rev. George Lomotey, and Alban Mantey all from Ghana Broadcasting Corporation. Armmawu Shaibu came from the Islamic Education Unit as well as Hajj Seebaway Shaibu from Muslim Media Link in Accra. Christian journalists such as Joyce Wereko-Brobby and Pastor Divine Kumah also attended along with local filmmakers, Seth Ashong-Kattai and William Akuffo. Rev. Nathan Iddrisu Samwini of the Christian Council of Ghana was in attendance along with Dr Datey-Kumordzie of the Hu-Yehweh Foundation and Torgbi Korku Nukpese from the Afrikania Mission. The consultation was also graced by Rev. Dr Mensa Otabil, senior pastor and renowned broadcaster, of the International Central Gospel Church, Accra.

The conference was opened by the Media Commissioner, Tim Acquah-Hayford, with remarks also from the Commissioner for Human Rights and Administrative Justice, Emile Short. Sessions were divided into the broadcast and print media, and films and popular culture. There were lively exchanges and informative conversations which extended over the meal breaks and late into the evenings. The overseas participants were taken on field trips around Accra (to visit International Central Gospel Church, JOY FM, GBC, Trinity Theological Seminary, cinemas and video stores), to Akrofi-Akropong to see the Akrofi-Chistaller Research Institute, and also to Kumasi at the

invitation of Bishop Peter Sarpong, a well known and respected anthropologist of Asante culture.

Many of the participants expressed their gratitude for the opportunity for reflection and dialogue that such a diverse gathering offered. Popular topics included the domination of the airwaves by Christian groups, mainly charismatic, and the ongoing “drumming” controversy—the refusal by some churches (pentecostal/charismatic) to respect the annual traditional ban on drumming as part of a Gan festival in Accra and the resultant altercations. There was much discussion on the responsibility of media practitioners to write and produce responsibly in the light of Ghana’s and Africa’s cultural and religious diversity.

The consultation was ably coordinated at the local level by Anna Mensah of SECAM and Benedict Assorow of the Dept. of Social Communication, National Catholic Secretariat.



FUTURE MEETINGS

From 2-5 August 2000, preceding the IAHR Congress, a **SANPAD** workshop will be held in Durban, South Africa to discuss the research findings of students from the University of the North with regard to witchcraft accusations in the Northern Province. An interim report will be published at the time of the Congress and be available for those interested, in conjunction with a portrait gallery of all participants in the research project. SANPAD is a Dutch government-sponsored South Africa-Netherlands Programme on Alternatives in Development.

The **Centre for Contemporary Islam's** Africa-wide project will hold its first of three symposia in Daressalam, Tanzania between 21-23 July 2000. The symposium will gather some 30 scholars, mostly from Equatorial Africa as well as participants from other regions and countries. The project investigates the role of religious law, in this case Muslim Family Law, in the post-colonial African state. The project will attempt to make new surveys of Muslim Family Law in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as look at the discourses between religion (religious law) and the state. It will also focus on the issues of law and identity in the African context. Two other symposia are planned for Dakar and Cape Town in 2001.

Mission, Nationalism, and the End of Empire is a conference organised by Currents in World Christianity and supported by The Pew Charitable Trust being held from 6 to 9 September 2000 at Queen's College, Cambridge, U.K. The theme will cover the complex relations between Christian missions and imperialism. Most recent work has concentrated on the nineteenth century with comparatively little being written on the twentieth century. The conference aims to explore the nature of the relationships between churches and mission and anti-colonial and 'nationalist' movements in the twentieth century, and to assess the impact on mission organisations, churches (both non-Western and Western), and the Christian understanding of 'mission' of the end of the Western colonial empires from 1945.



GRANTS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

Leventis Reserach Cooperation

Programme: The Leventis Foundation supports collaborative reserach between the Centre of African Studies in London and colleagues in Nigerian universities. The successfull applicant(s) will be attached to the Centre of African Studies, SOAS, for a period of three months. Applications should include a complete curriculum vitae, a 1000 word statement of current reserach interests and aims to be achieved during the research period in London. This programme is particularly suitable for younger academics, perhaps working up a Ph.D thesis into a publishable form. The deadline for applications is 1 May 2001. Further information may be obtained from the Centre office. (E-mail: cas@soas.ac.uk)

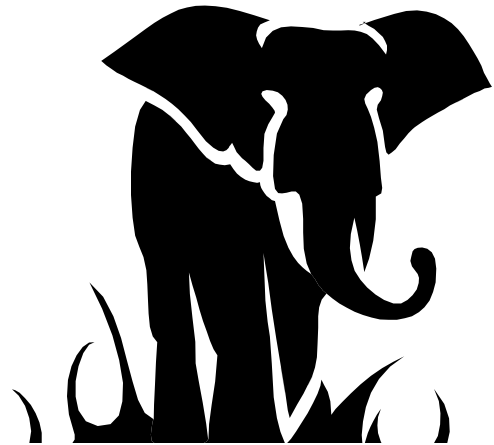
East African Scholarship Scheme: The Centre of African Studies at SOAS administers the East African Visiting Scholarship scheme which is aimed at academics from Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. The successful applicant(s) will visit the Centre for a three month period in order to pursue research and/or course development in the broad field of African studies in the social sciences and humanities. Preference will be given to academics at the early stage of their career. For further information please contact the Centre office (E-mail: cas@soas.ac.uk). The closing date for applications for a choice of either the Autumn term (mid-September to mid-December) 2001 or the Spring term (mid-January mid-April) 2002 is 30 April 2001.

Masters Scholarship: Thanks to the Ernest Oppnheimer Memorial Trust (EOMT), SOAS is able to offer a generous one-year scholarship to an outstanding South African student wishing to study any of its Masters programmes in

the academic year 2001-2002. The award covers both overseas student fees and subsistence and is administered from the Centre of African Studies and the EOMT.

For further information please contact the Centre office. (E-mail: cas@soas.ac.uk).

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE



Dr. Simeon Ilesanmi has been appointed Zachary T. Smith Associate Professor of Religion and Ethics. This is a new position at Wake Forest University, which will be effective from the 1st July 2000.

Professor Jacob K. Olupona will receive the the Honorary Degree of Doctor of Divinity of the University of Edinburgh (Edinburgh, Scotland) during the University's graduation ceremony on Friday July 21, 2000 at 10 a.m. A reception in Professor Olupona's honor will be held in London by friends, former students and relations on Sunday July 23.

Dr. Chirevo Kwenda of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town in South Africa will be in the United States as a WEB DuBois Fellow at Harvard University, Cambridge, Ma from August 2000.

Dr. Oyeronke Olajubu, Senior Lecturer, Dept. of Religions, University of Ilorin (Ilorin, Nigeria) has been appointed a visiting Lecturer and

Research Associate in the Women's Studies in Religion Program, Harvard Divinity School, Cambridge MA, USA from August 2000.

Dr. Jan Platvoet will be retiring from Leiden University as from 1 July 2000. He will remain active as a scholar and writer, and continue to serve the AASR. We wish him a fruitful post-institutional academic life!

Cephas Omenyo from the Department for the Study of Religion of the University of Ghana is a visiting scholar at Utrecht University till 1 September 2000. He is presently completing his Ph.D on the "charismatisation" of mainline churches in Ghana.

PUBLICATIONS

Amanze, James, *A history of the ecumenical movement in Africa*. Gaborone, Botswana: Pula Press, 1999.

Anderson, Allan, *Zion and Pentecost: The spirituality and experience of Pentecostal and Zionist/Apostolic churches in South Africa*. Pretoria: Unisa, 1999.

Behrend, Heike, *Alice Lakwena & the Holy Spirits: War in Northern Uganda 1986-97*. Oxford: James Currey, 1999.

Behrend, Heike & Ute Luig (eds.). *Spirit possession, modernity & power in Africa*. Oxford: James Currey, 1999.

Berge, Lars, *The Bambatha Watershed: Swedish Missionaries, African Christians and an Evolving Zulu Church in Rural Natal and Zululand 1902-1910*. Studia

- Missionalia Upsaliensia, LXXVIII. Uppsala: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 2000.
- Braun, Willi & Russel T. McCutcheon (eds). *Guide to the Study of Religion*. London, New York: Cassell, 2000. ISBN 0-304-70175-0 (hrd); 0-304-70176-9 (paper).
- Carmody, Brendan. *Education in Zambia: Catholic Perspectives*. Lusaka: Bookworld, 1999. \$15.00 plus postage. Available directly from: Gadsden@zamnet.zm
- Clasquin. M. & J.S. Kruger, *Buddhism and Africa*. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1999.
- Edgar, R.R. & H. Sapire, *African apocalypse: The story of Nontetha Nkwenkwe, a twentieth-century South African prophet*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press & Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1999.
- Eide, Øyvind M., *Revolution & religion in Ethiopia: The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus under the Dergue, 1974-85*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000.
- Ellis, Stephen, *The mask of anarchy: The destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African civil war*. London: Hurst & Co., 1999.
- Geertz, Armin & Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Perspectives on method and theory in the study of religion: Adjunct proceedings of the XVIIth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions*, Mexico City, 1995. Leiden: Brill, 2000.
- Haar, Gerrie ter, *Rats, cockroaches and people like us: Views of humanity and human rights*. The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 2000.

Levtzion, Nehemia & Randall L. Powels (eds.), *The history of Islam in Africa*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2000.

Ludwig, Frieder, *Church and state in Tanzania: Aspects of a changing relationship, 1961-1994*. Brill: Leiden, 1999.

Maxwell, David, *Christians and chiefs in Zimbabwe: A social history of the Hwesa people ca. 1870s-199s*. Edinburgh: International African Library, 1999.

Middleton, Karen (ed.), *Ancestors, power and history in Madagascar*. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

Sullivan, Denis J. & Sana Abed-Kotob, *Islam in contemporary Egypt: Civil society vs. the state*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999.

Vähäkangas, Mika, *In search of foundations for African Catholicism: Charles Nyamiti's Theological methodology*. Leiden: Brill, 1999.

Walsh, Thomas and Frank Kaufman (eds). *Religion and Social Transformation in Southern Africa*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon Press, 1999.

Wijsen, Frans & Ralph Tanner, *Seeking a good life: Religion and society in Usukuma, Tanzania, 1945-1995*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications, 2000.

Zartman (ed.), I. William, *Traditional cures for modern conflicts: African conflict "medicine"*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1999.



The International Review of Mission (IRM), Geneva, July 2000 issue, edited by Roswith Gerloff and Jacques Matthey, will publish the papers originating from the September 1999 Cambridge Conference on the African Christian Diaspora in Europe. The issue contains among others academic papers on migration, racism, women's issues, Black youth identity, spirituality and hermeneutics; reports on regions and councils in different European countries; illustrations and an extensive bibliography on the subject. To be ordered from World Council of Churches: Mission Study/IRM, P.O.Box 2100, Ch-1211, Geneva 2, Switzerland; e-mail: jem@WCC-coe.org.

Black Theology in Britain, A Journal for Contextual Praxis, Millennium issue no 4, May 2000, has published a number of articles on Pan-Africanism, Racial Identity Issues, Black and Mixed Parentage, et al, by Ronald A. Nathan, Robert Beckford, Valentina Alexander, Janet Johnson, Lena Robinson and an essay by Roswith Gerloff on 'An African Continuum in Variation: The African Christian Diaspora in Britain' (pp. 84-112).



BOOK REPORT

Carmody, Brendan. *Education in Zambia: Catholic Perspectives*. Lusaka: Bookworld, 1999. \$15.00 plus postage. Available directly from: Gadsden@zamnet.zm

Education in Zambia: Catholic Perspectives traces the history of the Catholic Church's contribution to the development of education in Zambia for more than a century. In so doing, the author provides much precious data not only on the Catholic endeavour but also on the overall educational history of Zambia.

This book presents both the Catholic missionaries' perspectives and those of catechists, teachers, administrators and students. In this it has employed numerous interviews. While the Catholic Church authorities clearly articulated their purposes in setting up and maintaining schools, the author argues that it was not a one-way street. There often were conflicting viewpoints in terms of what government, students, and parents wanted from the Catholic schools. This on-going interaction is treated with care. During the colonial period, for instance, the Church's relationship with the state differed significantly from that which existed in post Independence times. Similarly, relationships between staff and students in the Catholic institutions altered considerably as evidenced by the gradual reduction in the number of student strikes after Independence.

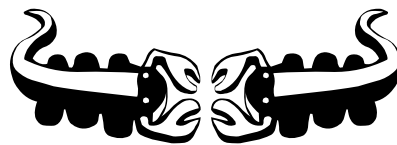
After a somewhat slow start, Catholic schools responded to the demands of their students for academic schooling. As years went on, they excelled and today hold a high reputation for their achievements in this area. Although the author acknowledges this, he endeavours to place it in its religious perspective. Preparation of competent citizens is undoubtedly valuable, but do they carry with them the kind of religious vision that enables them to act responsibly?

The author argues that Catholic schools have been instruments of liberation to both the Zambian men and women which they educated. In the discussion, he recognizes the ambiguities of modernization and the need to respect and acknowledge the riches of Zambia's traditions. It is not enough for Catholic schools to propel their students into a modern economy that is debt-ridden and swamped by poverty. Catholic graduates need to walk with both a sense of justice and of self-respect that yearns for greater autonomy.

Among other things, *Education in Zambia* reflects the on-going search of the Catholic schools for a greater sense of identity. Many factors eroded this not least of which was the emergence of a non-confessional Religious Educational programme. Various stages of this search are described and analyzed. A new concept of Catholic school with a predominantly non-Catholic student population is one of the outcomes. Is this the type of school that will mold the character and outlook of a nation that is progressively more pluralistic and ecumenical?

On the rather controversial and once again topical issue of the hand-over of the Catholic primary schools to government in 1973, *Education in Zambia* is clear. Although Catholic authorities handed over the schools somewhat reluctantly, the hand-over brought much needed relief in terms of finance and administration. It is hardly any wonder that the Catholic Church remains cautious about accepting back these schools in any but piecemeal fashion.

This is a highly readable and informative book which should be of great assistance not only to students of education in Zambia but also to the Church and political history of the country. The theoretical issues raised should be of interest to specialists in international and comparative education, history, missiology, sociology, psychology and related disciplines.



FOCUS ON INSTITUTIONS

The Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research in

Utrecht has decided to increase its efforts on research on Church and Religion in Africa during the next five years. For this purpose it has created a committee of experts in the academic world in The Netherlands and Belgium who have experience in these fields.

The committee is called the IIMO Study and Advisory Group on Africa (SAGA). The Interuniversity Institute for Missiological and Ecumenical Research, founded in 1969, is a Dutch co-operative venture in the field of missiology and ecumenics. All Dutch universities that include a Theological Faculty as well as some missionary and Ecumenical organisations are members of IIMO. IIMO fosters missiological and ecumenical research in The Netherlands by means of regular seminars, through the meeting of professional societies, and by the publication of books and its periodical *Exchange*. Five full-time staff members, and several research associates who are appointed on a temporary basis for special study projects staff the Institute, which maintains professional contacts with academic institutions and organisations in other countries.

IIMO has a library of about 10.000 volumes and receives some 600 theological periodicals from six continents. *Exchange* is a scholarly periodical issued three times a year with emphasis on ecumenics and on theological developments in Africa, Asia and Latin-America. At the moment, three research fellows are preparing a PhD thesis on a subject in the field of Africa studies: Martha Frederikse researches the survival of Christian minority groups in the Muslim-dominated society in Gambia, Cephias Omenyo (University of Ghana) examines the influence of charismatic groups in the mainline

Churches in Ghana, and Marc de Mey, investigates the role of Kiswahili in the Christian-Muslim relations in Tanzania.

The main reason which led to the creation of a special Africa Research Committee has been the observation that whereas the centre of Christianity is more and more in the southern world, and Christianity is no longer to be seen as a Western religion, religious change and the development of Churches in Africa risk to be neglected by theological institutions in the North. SAGA will function as a platform and a pool of experts for those who are involved in research and teaching religion and theology in Africa. It will develop initiatives to stimulate exchange of teachers in theology and explore ways for Dutch students of theology to realise part of their studies at theological institutions in Africa. SAGA will also look for means to publish precious research done by African institutes or individuals.

SAGA will be co-ordinated by Dr. Gerard van 't Spijker, who has a long missionary experience in Rwanda, and did his PhD in Anthropology and Theology on the question how to integrate the traditional funeral customs in Christian family life and the liturgical life of the Church. One of the first initiatives of SAGA is a two-years research Programme in close collaboration with the Ecumenical Institute for Theological Education and Research in Rwanda. The students of the Faculty for Protestant Theology of Butare, Rwanda, will be full participants in this research and its evaluation in view of their pastoral parish work. The research is focused on two subjects which are interconnected: 1) people's theology as expressed through the message of newly-composed credal hymns presented by the numerous choirs in the parishes, and 2) the meaning of the immense growth of African-initiated churches after the civil war, which ended with the genocide in the recent past.

Persons and institutions who are interested to get involved in SAGA and its current research programmes, as well as those who want to be kept informed on its progress, are invited to contact the SAGA group by addressing themselves to: IIMO, Dr. Gerard van 't Spijker, co-ordinator SAGA-group, Heidelberglaan 2, 3584 CS Utrecht, The Netherlands. Tel: +31.30.2532079; Fax: +31.30.2539434; E-mail:

[<gvspijker@theo.uu.nl>](mailto:gvspijker@theo.uu.nl)



UPDATE

ON THE 18TH QUINQUENNIAL WORLD CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS

Program Chair, Professor Rosalind I. J. Hackett, University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Final plans are being made for the 18th Quinquennial World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions to be held in Durban, South Africa from August 5-12, 2000. More than 500 delegates are expected from around the world to converge for the first time on African soil. For many it will be their first visit to South Africa, for some their first time in Africa. Several of the more than one hundred and fifty panels focus on Africa, in particular on South Africa. There is a particular emphasis in these panels on the relationship between religion and the state, and religion and public life in Africa. In addition there are sessions on witchcraft and occult power in Africa, new religious movements, as well as on book distribution.

Two of the keynote speakers will address the African context: David Chidester, Director of the Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa, University of Cape Town, will speak on the study of religion in South Africa in his talk entitled

"History of Religions, Durban 2000: Identity, Location, Media, Method, and Education". Abdullahi An-Na'im from Sudan who teaches at Emory University Law School will speak on "Human Rights, Religion and Secularism: Does it Have to be a Choice?" Madhu Kishwar from India will address gender issues in "Allies or Adversaries? The Continuing Hold and Power of Female Moral Exemplars in Hindu Religious Tradition". There will also be keynote addresses from Michael Pye, University of Marburg and President of the IAHR, "Memories of the Future: Looking Back and Looking Forward in the History of Religions" and Jonathan Z. Smith, University of Chicago, "A Twice Told Tale: The History of the History of Religions' History". For information on the other panels which reflect the rich array of interests and disciplinary perspectives of scholars of religion the world over, please consult <http://web.utk.edu/~rhackett/durban.html>

Several cultural events and visits are planned during the Congress to introduce participants to South Africa's fascinating religious and cultural diversity. We are expecting a record number of participants from around Africa, also from India since Durban has one of the largest Indian populations outside India and has strong Gandhi connections. For further information on the Congress, see the Congress website: <http://www.udw.ac.za/iahr> or contact Pratap Kumar, Congress Director, kumar@pixie.udw.ac.za or Rosalind I. J. Hackett, rhackett@utk.edu

REFLECTIONS

PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS, CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA:
1-8 DECEMBER, 1999

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Only those who attended the recent Parliament of the World's Religions in Cape Town, South Africa, would appreciate the impossibility of providing a comprehensive account of this vast and momentous gathering. From December 1-8, 1999 thousands of people from all over the world met against the stunning backdrop of Table Mountain at the Cape Technikon and Good Hope Centre to explore interreligious issues and cooperation, and celebrate religious and cultural diversity and unity. They included religious leaders and adherents, social activists, journalists, politicians, teachers, scholars, lawyers, scientists, doctors, performers, artists, and business people. My initial reluctance to attend such a non-academic event was overcome by an invitation to organize a session on religious freedom and conflict in Africa as part of a wider set of panels on the topic.

After a relatively hassle-free registration many participants were seen poring over their hefty programs to work out which of the many plenaries, scores of cultural events, and hundreds of panels they wanted to attend. The Parliament began officially with the Opening of the International AIDS Quilt in the center of Cape Town in recognition of International AIDS day. This was followed by a procession from town to the official site in what is known as District Six. As this colorful stream of people wound its way to the stage for the opening prayers and greetings, the immense diversity of cultures and religious traditions became apparent. It took some organizing on the part of the local Anglican vicar and master of ceremonies to get everyone to settle down, but before long, we were being greeted by a variety of religious representatives. Perhaps the most meaningful greetings came from the colored people who had originally lived on this rather desolate piece of land before being forcibly removed in the 1960s under the Group Areas Act. One elderly Muslim woman spoke movingly of her desire to return to the area to end her days.

There was an outburst of excitement when Supreme Master Ching Hai ascended to the platform. The enthusiastic and devoted followers of this diminutive, finely dressed Asian woman threw flowers onto the stage and rushed forward to catch a glimpse of her. They were restrained by well-trained bodyguards in dark suits. Many of the devotees were bedecked with her image around their necks. The majority appeared to be from Korea while others came from as far away as New Zealand. I later learnt that this international meditation movement is renowned for its humanitarian causes.

There was an interesting “confrontation” as the retreating Ching Hai supporters disrupted some informal dancing by South African women in their traditional Xhosa costumes. I managed to capture on photo the efforts of the Supreme Master to calm the ruffled feathers of the African women. (Her upstaging of the AIDS quilt ceremony earlier that morning, and later efforts to gain impromptu access to the plenary events, also caused some consternation.) After the ceremony in the relentless sun, some of us gratefully retired to the cool welcome of one of the three extant religious institutions in District Six—the charming St. Mark’s Church. The non-stop tea and sandwich service was especially appreciated.

The next day the sessions began in earnest. I headed for a human rights panel which was considerably enhanced by the presence of Bishop Samuel Ruiz Garcia from Chiapas, Mexico. The discussion was lively and helpful. It was clear from the start that there were all manner of expertises and life-experiences present. Helped by much-appreciated volunteer guides, I then moved on to the start of the South Africa Forum. This was an extensive set of panels involving South African scholars, religious leaders and politicians, discussing the myriad aspects of religion in the new South Africa. They were well attended for the most part, as many people, such as myself, wanted to learn more about this complex country with its painful history and new dispensation. Imam Rashied Omar, one of the co-chairs of the Parliament, and a leading South

African Muslim, began his address with the statistics from the 1996 census. They reveal that 66.4% of South Africans are Christians (of which more than 30% belong to the African independent churches), 1.74% are Hindus, 1.1% are Muslims, .41% are Jews, .15% belong to other religions, and 30% profess no religion at all.

Omar spoke of the way religious groups have lost their prophetic role in post-apartheid South Africa—their theology of resistance seeking to become a theology of reconstruction. He also pointed to the fact that influential religious leaders had been drawn off into government positions, and that the South African state itself has consciously promoted religious pluralism and interreligious cooperation. As had other speakers in this Forum, Omar spoke of South Africa’s rightful pride in its progressive Constitution and Bill of Rights. But these gains were being offset by the frustratingly slow economic and social progress for many of South Africa’s peoples and their struggle to find political, educational, media, and cultural space in the new public sphere. Especially revealing for outsiders such as myself was the Muslim critique of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission with its emphasis on (Christian) forgiveness rather than restitution. David Chidester, the Director of the Institute for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa, chose to focus his critique on the worrying recolonization of South Africa by global market forces.

Aside from the more South Africa-oriented panels there was an unbelievably extensive range of offerings from full-scale, specialist symposia on the environment, business ethics, microcredit, peacemaking, sustainability, and science which lasted for several days, to hour-long sessions where a single individual laid out his or her views on anything from debt cancellation to nature worship. The official program sub-divided the workshops and seminars into major presentations (although the meaning of “major” was not always apparent), and those focusing on either identity, dialogue, and

critical issues. There was standing room only in some of the sessions on Wicca. I was informed that their presence (as well as that of the neo-Pagans) had caused a stir at the 1993 Parliament, and caused the Greek Orthodox Church to withdraw. Their role in the present Parliament had apparently been negotiated with care. Guru Ma, a well-known American guru from Kashi Ashram in Florida, had in fact been one of the principal motivators behind the Parliament's focus on AIDS. Other sessions, such as on the True Rascal Mystery School, Jesuit Astrophysics, or the gun industry of Africa attracted more specialized audiences. As might be expected, many of the sessions focused on questions of interreligious cooperation and dialogue. There was, to my pleasant surprise, a good deal on more worldly issues such as human rights—notably economic rights.

There were two other sessions that I particularly enjoyed. One was a well-attended talk by South Africa's leading conservationist, Dr. Ian Player (the brother of the famous South African golfer, Gary Player). He created the Wilderness Foundation which organizes eco-tourist trips to Zululand and is the author of *Zulu Wilderness: Shadow and Soul* (1998). Player spoke very movingly on "Wilderness and the African Spirit" bringing tears to the eyes of many on the spirituality of the African landscape. But I was uncomfortable with his essentializing and Jungian representations of African nature and spirit. Right at the end of the conference, I joined a small group of people to hear staff from the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) talk about religion programs. This was an extremely interesting session in that we were treated to video clips of their range of programming and the underlying philosophy of promoting and protecting South Africa's religious and cultural diversity. Despite swingeing budgetary cuts and heavy pressure, SABC have so far resisted the selling of air-time to religious groups, or taking free programs from American evangelicals. This is not the case in many other parts of Africa. They said that in fact they buy

several documentaries from Britain rather than the US, but I opined that they should be turning the tables and thinking of selling documentaries on the diverse and lively South African religious scene to Britain and the U.S.

Each day began with a choice of prayer and meditation sessions organized by different religious leaders and practitioners. The emphasis was on ecumenical participation. Some of us preferred the intercultural encounters that presented themselves over a leisurely breakfast. In our hotel, for example, we found ourselves each morning conversing with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Sudan, the head of the Orthodox Church in Sudan, and the Vice Chancellor of the University of Khartoum. The daily offerings culminated in the evenings with a plenary and cultural performances. This was a time for the cultivation of spectacle and *communitas*. As one observer commented, it all seemed so *American*. (Indeed, the whole Parliament was masterminded by Jim Kenney and his team from Chicago with the cooperation of local organizers.) That notwithstanding, thousands of people turned up (overall attendance was purportedly around seven thousand). As for the Parliament in general, these evening events placed a strong emphasis on the next generation. The thousands of Tibetan-style prayer flags that adorned the conference sites were colorfully decorated messages of peace from children all over the world. They were but one of the hundreds of “Gifts of Service to the World” which were shared in the course of the 1999 Parliament. These represented the “creative, constructive, and transformative power” of religious organizations the world over to “make a difference.” They ranged from healing and reconciliation rituals, to educational projects, prison welfare, and healthcare. (Details of these and other aspects of the event can be found on the two main websites, <http://www.cpwr.org> and <http://www.cprw.net>.)

Gifts of Service were presented on the Sunday evening to Nelson Mandela or “Madiba” as he is affectionately known in South Africa. The atmosphere was simply electrifying as he moved to the podium. The renowned Yoruba musician, Olatunji, drummed out praise songs in true African style to this most respected and beloved South African leader. To then hear Mandela speak crowned this memorable experience and fulfilled one of my lifelong ambitions. The final session on the following Wednesday afternoon also exceeded expectations. After peace greetings in various languages from numerous religious and spiritual leaders (what an exercise in the politics of representation and inclusion), the Dalai Lama addressed us briefly. The more profound and challenging address was delivered under the auspices of the Archbishop Desmond Tutu Memorial Lecture by the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Bloemfontein, Buti Thlagale, a major anti-apartheid campaigner. Boldly citing Derrida and mocking Huntington’s theory of civilization, he articulated forcefully the spirit of regeneration and self-determination engendered by South Africa’s “African Renaissance.” He was followed by the forthright South African Vice President, Jacob Zuma. We were suitably entertained by Asian-African fusion dancers, and by popular acclaim, the evening was brought to a climax by the energizing and core-shaking Japanese Taiko drummers. I can still hear and feel them in my bones as I write this.

It was of course these high-profile events that the media chose to cover. They also honed in on some of the conflicts surrounding the Parliament that we might not have heard about, such as the pressures by the Chinese government on President Thabo Mbeki not to meet the Dalai Lama. Some of the media did not know what to make of the whole event, highlighting the cultural aspects rather than anything substantive. Thankfully, John Dart (retired *Los Angeles Times* religion reporter) had been engaged to write daily conference reports for the *Cape Times*. A concerted effort had been made to give a prominent place on the Parliament’s agenda to the issue of AIDS

treatment, education and prevention. This is big news in South Africa at the moment. Posters were everywhere. It took some of us some time to work out that what we thought was a giant Christmas tree on a city building near the conference center was in fact the image of a giant red and green condom!

If one tired of talking heads, one could slip away to the impressive film and video program, an interreligious happening or a meditation workshop. But for many the most popular and useful part of the day was the lunch break—where participants of all races and religions mingled in the hot sun or sat under shady trees, munching their sandwiches and discussing the morning’s deliberations with a neighbor. There were also all the handbills for the unlisted sessions to contemplate. Different cultural performances were laid on each day in the outdoor amphitheater of the Technikon. These tended to limit conversation in their respective ways. The Taiko drummers from Japan played their huge drums so athletically and vigorously that few were left talking. The traditional Xhosa women dancers sang in such a hauntingly beautiful way that many were drawn down to the stage. KukumbaZoo had the youngsters hopping and the energetic young Zulu dancers had the cameras clicking. Nor should we forget the dulcit tones of the great American folk singer, Arlo Guthrie (a disciple of Guru Ma). Another favorite occupation was people-spotting—working out who the celebrities were or who belonged to which religion. I did espy the leader of the Sikhs, with his impressive retinue, but failed to catch a glimpse of Goldie Hawn. Like many others I wondered who were the “Egyptian” pharaoh and his wife being interviewed by South African TV (I have since discovered that they were American Pagans and leaders of a revived Egyptian form of Goddess worship).

In the late afternoon, many would drift on down to the other main site, the Good Hope Centre, where the book display and main exhibition area were situated. This was quite

frankly the best place for data collection (or spiritual enquiry depending on your point of view). It was also a multicultural extravaganza. One could play Tibetan bells, reconsider one's diet, rechannel one's charitable contributions, have one's upper body massaged or one's aura worked on, purchase an Indian sari, listen to Rasta music, contemplate the manifold books and videos, or choose a meaningful crystal. One of the best conversations I had was with a Sufi sheik from Senegal whose globalizing Sufi movement is fielding a presidential candidate in the next Senegalese elections. I spent a lot of time redeeming my sins (of non-communication) at a free e-mail and Internet access stand thanks to some interreligious foundation. And all this while listening to great music selected by the expert team of young South African computer consultants!

When one tired of propaganda or posturing, one could descend to the basement and sample the prandial delights of Chinese Buddhist cuisine or Hare Krishna fare, followed by the purest of pure Italian *gelati*. All of which could be washed down by global Coke or local Rooibos (great South African "redbush" tea). Alternatively one could wander through the impressive art exhibition, "Spirit in Art," marvelling at the diverse artistic forms that people employ to express their perceptions of the divine-human encounter. Some participants chose to escape to the top of Table Mountain or even further down to the Cape of Good Hope. Others went off to browse Cape Town's great second-hand bookstores or make pilgrimages to such famed locations as Robben Island or St. George's Cathedral (Archbishop Desmond Tutu's former base). Good fish and great wines were readily available in the panoply of culturally diverse restaurants.

Cape Town seemed generally enthusiastic about the hordes of religious folks descending on them from all corners of the world. The Parliament dovetailed

appropriately with the “One City, Many Cultures” initiative of this beautiful city’s largest newspaper, the *Cape Times*. The taxi drivers and local retailers relished the extra business. There were, of course, some dissenters. Many conservative Christians stayed away or kept a very low profile, mistaking the title of the conference to mean Parliament for a *World Religion* rather than *of the World’s Religions...* Some fundamentalist Christians opted for open protest and installed themselves with placards and tracts in front of the main arena. They claimed the whole affair was a satanic and New Age conspiracy. They found unexpected allies in the like-minded Muslims who had positioned themselves on the other side of the road. After a couple of days they seemed to agree on the Zionist and satanic underpinnings of the Parliament, and its links to the nefarious New World Order, and set up shop (their own mini-Parliament?) not far from each other on the main sidewalk!

Diversity was indeed the watchword of the 1999 Parliament. But where was the unity? It was certainly not in the quest for a common world theology. Nor was it in common understandings of dialogue or pluralism. It lay rather in the celebration of diversity and harmony, the potential of religious and spiritual traditions to address the critical issues of the 21st century, and the quest for pragmatism and commitment. The latter was essentially the charge of the Assembly—an invited group of several hundred religious leaders, scholars and activists who met in the latter part of the Parliament “to consider the relevance of religion and spirituality to today’s world.” At the 1993 Parliament in Chicago they deliberated over the document—“Towards a Global Ethic.” In Cape Town they reflected on “A Call to Our Guiding Institutions” which took the ethical directives of the world’s religions and brought them to bear on the powerful and influential institutions of the modern world. They also advocated greater “creative engagement” between religious and spiritual groups and these “guiding institutions.”

As a somewhat inveterate conference-goer, I am always interested in who gets included or excluded in religion conferences. I was told reliably by Professor Gordon Melton, Director of Institute for the Study of American Religion (who should be everyone's guide to this type of event given his vast knowledge of religious groups the world over), that this Parliament was much more inclusive of new religious movements than was the previous one in 1993. Leaders of the Ramtha Fellowship, a New Age channelling organization from the West Coast, told me they were surprised at how easily they got registered. I heard similar comments from members of another controversial group, The Family. A major Scientology leader gave a well-publicized address at the Parliament. A banned French movement, AUMISM, set up a prominent stall and its members were quite vocal in some of the sessions I attended. Perhaps by the next Parliament some of them may make it into the plenary sessions. The efforts to give a voice and a place to women and women's issues were commendably apparent, not just in the panels and workshops but also on the central platforms. Of course the organizers were not helped by the fact that the world's "major" religious traditions are still struggling with their patriarchal structures.

The Parliament did not get a passing grade on two counts, however. While we did see the leaders of some indigenous religions among the dignitaries on the public stage, we did not see more rank and file participation. It raises the issue, as I have argued elsewhere, about the artificiality of extracting the "religious" dimension from indigenous cultures and designating cultural leaders as religious leaders (and, by extension in people's minds, as religious authorities). For example, Rigoberta Menchu, the controversial Nobel peace prize winner from Guatemala, had been invited in this capacity, was not able to attend and sent a representative instead. No one who reads her work would consider her as an advocate of indigenous religions. She writes more of the Catholic Church than anything else. In similar vein, the

Muslim theologian, Dr. Farid Esack, who serves on the Gender Commission and whose critical views are well known through his weekly column in the *Cape Times*, held up for scrutiny the political economy of the Parliament. In a television interview on SABC's "Heart and Soul" following the Parliament, he rightly bemoaned the dominance of (white) Americans and the absence of black South Africans. Missing too were several local scholars from other parts of South Africa who did not receive their official invitations in time to get funding from their institutions. This resulted in a number of frustrating "no-show" panels. But as ever there are pluses to be derived from minuses, and several commented on how worthwhile the session on debt forgiveness turned out to be in the absence of the principal speaker—with members of the audience stepping forward to share their varied opinions on the subject!

Toward the close of the Parliament, it was inevitable to hear people reflecting on the event as a whole. One of my South African theologian friends observed (and he was more experienced in the realm of interreligious dialogue than I was) that there was more posturing than actual dialogue. Another remarked that the radical, liberationist perspective had dominated over the more conservative one of reconciliation. For him this was epitomized by the zapping of the Afrikaner part of the National Anthem in the final ceremony. I myself was struck by the prominent and pervasive use of that innocuous and pliable term, spirituality. It was present in the official publicity of the CPWR (Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions)—"this most extraordinary interreligious gathering of our time. Thousands of people representing the diversity of the world's religious and spiritual traditions will gather in Cape Town..." (*CPWR Newsletter* 2,2 [summer 1999]). It was present in the titles of many of the sessions—"Spirituality and Psychology"; "Science and Spirituality in Hinduism"; "African Spiritual Practice"; "The Spiritual Crisis of Globalization." Does the use of this term represent an attempt to broaden the spectrum of inclusion, to democratize

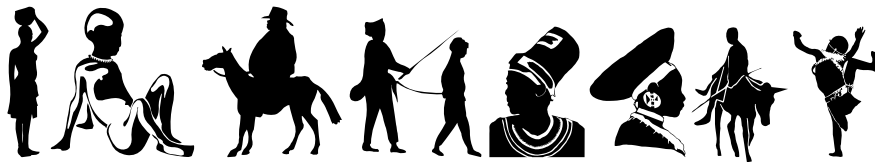
participation, to deinstitutionalize power? Whatever the intentions of the organizing powers, it certainly added a New Age hue to the event.

Whether you came as advocate, academic, or spiritual-seeker, you could not fail to take away a host of contacts, ideas, images, sounds, encounters, and memories. It is certain that few people there had ever been part of such a diverse gathering of people. Was it not suitably humbling for religious leaders to share the limelight? But was it finally all too benign and convivial? Were not the very people who needed to hear this globalizing religious discourse absent? Would more fireworks have helped? Would not more emphasis on the “badness” and “inequalities” engendered by religious belief and practice have been salutary? Or was it a case of, as one plenary speaker averred, “damned if you do, damned if you don’t.” In other words, the Parliament was criticized for fostering conflict and division between religious groups or the lack of it (too unreal). My only really negative memory (apart from the exorbitant registration fees and shuttle bus costs) was of the almost incessant wind in Cape Town. But it is no ill wind down there—in fact they refer to it as the “Cape Doctor” as it is supposed to blow all your sicknesses and troubles away!

The location of the next Parliament of the World’s Religions in 2004 will be decided (in Olympics style) at the end of the year. It might be Barcelona or Rio. It could also be India—another attractive location rich in religious diversity but with its own contemporary challenges. Perhaps by then they will have a clearer vision of what they are about—a big celebration, a meeting ground for dialogue, a place to initiate cooperative action—or still all of the above.

If you feel that you missed out on going to South Africa, all is not lost. Many of us will be meeting in Durban next August 5-12, 2000 for the 18th World Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions. An academic feast awaits you,

so drop me a line if you are interested, rhackett@utk.edu or check the Durban Update page, <http://web.utk.edu/~rhackett/durban.html> and the official Congress page, <http://www.udw.ac.za/iahr> !



THE AFRICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS

promotes the academic study of religions in Africa and the study of the religions of Africa more generally through the international collaboration of all scholars whose research has a bearing on the subject.

The AASR aims to stimulate the academic study of religions in Africa in the following ways:

- by providing a forum for multilateral communications between scholars of African religions;
- by facilitating the exchange of resources and information;
- by encouraging the development of linkages and research contacts between scholars and institutions in Africa, as well as between scholars in Africa and those overseas;
- by developing publishing opportunities particularly for scholars based in Africa;
- by establishing a travel fund to enable African scholars to attend academic conferences both in Africa and overseas;
- by organizing conferences in Africa on topics relevant to scholars of African religions and panels on the religions of Africa in conferences held outside Africa;
- by establishing a newsletter as the major medium of communication between scholars of African religions around the world;
- by creating a directory of scholars in the field of African religions.