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## FROM THE CHAIR

This issue of our AASR newsletter focuses on religious studies in Ghana. In summer 2002, we held a very successful one-day workshop in Accra, attended by participants from very many institutions. On this occasion, we inaugurated the Ghana Chapter of the AASR. While you will read Professor Elom Dovlo's full report of this meeting in this newsletter, I should add that the conference was a major 'eye-opener' for me.

Guided by the skillful leadership of Dr. Elom Dovlo, the University of Ghana's Department for the Study of Religions will become the center of the thriving AASR Chapter in Ghana. The AASR is grateful to Elom and to Dr. J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu for submitting two contributions to this volume. The essays strengthen considerably the focus of this issue on the AASR in Ghana, apparent in several other rubrics of this newsletter. One is the book review. Other interesting entries are news items on Ghana under 'Persons & Posts', and several new entries under the 'Updates to the AASR Register of Members, 2001', as well as reports on AASR and ISS workshops taking place in Ghana during the past few months.

Goodly numbers of up-and-coming young scholars in Ghana are very industriously developing local scholarship in most encouraging ways. Like others on the continent, they, too, struggle under the 'book famine' and lack of resources for research. However, Ghanaian scholars realize the immense opportunities for field research using abundant oral resources in the country. These precious resources should be highly prized and used efficiently.

Shortly after leaving Ghana, I visited Nigeria with excellent dividends. I was encouraged with the response of both young and senior scholars whom I met at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife to assess the progress of the Nigerian Chapter we inaugurated two years earlier. Coordinated by Professor Kenny and Dr. Ayegboyin at the University of Ibadan, the publication project, The Nigerian Religions Series, will surely give the Nigerian Chapter stronger visibility. I must also say that Nigeria, because of its larger size, requires at least three coordinators. We hope to address this problem early next year. From my meetings in Ghana and Nigeria, a request emerged asking that the AASR initiate a regular meeting on the continent. I would like the Executive Committee of this organization to consider holding a regu-

lar triennial conference in Africa. This conference will be in addition to the more formal meetings we hold at the regular IAHR Congress.

I am delighted our Association is becoming well known worldwide. With the assistance of many of you, we are certain to continue making meaningful impact in the study of religion in Africa.

James Cox  
AASR General Secretary & Treasurer  
University of Edinburgh, Scotland

## REPORT

I am happy to report that Jannie Smit, who lectures in the School of Religion and Culture in the University of Durban in Westville, has agreed to become the AASR representative in Southern Africa to replace Isabel Phiri. Jannie will be responsible for the overall co-ordination of the AASR duties in Southern Africa, including distribution of the newsletter, supervising the membership fees for the region and reporting to the Executive Committee about the concerns of the southern African region. As General Secretary, I am now seeking to recruit national AASR representatives in Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Malawi and Mozambique. I hope that a system of national membership fees will be introduced in each of these countries with distribution of the newsletter occurring through the national representatives. Seratwa Ntloedibe-Kuswani of the School of Education in the University of Botswana has agreed to become the national representative for Botswana. As such, she will be responsible for recruiting members in Botswana, maintaining an up to date list of members, receiving membership fees and communicating with Jannie Smit in Durban, who will then report to the International Committee through me as General Secretary.

We hope the model now beginning in Botswana can be applied throughout Southern Africa and also to other regions in Africa. A modified version of this system has already begun in Kenya, where Grace Wamue takes care of the distribution of the newsletter in Nairobi and Adam Chepkwony covers the rest of East Africa. In West Africa also, Elom Dovlo has established a separate AASR chapter in Ghana, with the remainder of West Africa falling under the overall supervision of Umar Danfulani in Jos, Nigeria. The difficulties of co-ordinating a continent-wide association with so many different currencies and local situations are apparent, but a system of national representatives for a number of African countries working within regions seems the most practi-

cal. Although these arrangements are just beginning, over the next year, I hope to have more of them in place.

Despite the difficulties created by geography and communication, dedicated members of the AASR in various parts of the world are working to make the Association a viable network for communication and support amongst those of us involved in the academic study of religions in Africa. Certainly, the newsletter is a key component of the communication process, and a word of thanks must go to Jan Platvoet for his hard work in putting the newsletter together, and to Patrick Maxwell who has just relinquished his post as co-editor. Without the contributions of the editors of the newsletter, we would not be able to disseminate information and to share important news relevant to our common interests. As members will have noted from the message from Jacob Olupona, Matthews Ojo from Obafemi Awolowo University in Ile-Ife, Nigeria has agreed to become the new co-editor of the newsletter with Jan Platvoet.

On matters related to my responsibilities as General Treasurer of the AASR, please note that I have not included a financial report in this issue of the newsletter. I have decided to wait until the end of the year to compile statistics from the various regions. I will be asking therefore all regional representatives to provide me with their financial statements early in January so that I can make a full financial statement in the next issue of the AASR Newsletter. Thereafter, a financial report can be expected to appear in the first issue of the newsletter in each new year.

This newsletter contains announcements of various regional and national conferences. I am hoping to participate in some of them, such as the conference on African and African-derived religions in Bath, England in September 2003. I look forward to meeting some of you there. Unfortunately, we have been unable to organise another AASR conference in Africa since the IAHR Congress was held in Durban, but certainly this will remain one of our major goals. In the meantime, we will work through the various conferences and meetings that occur in the regions whilst relying on this newsletter to act as a general source for communication.



# FOCUS ON INSTITUTIONS

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## STUDYING NEW RELIGIOUS MOVEMENTS & NEW CHURCHES IN GHANA

### *Introduction*

Religion in Africa has always been an attractive area for various types of study.<sup>1</sup> Recently, this has intensified with the proliferation of many new religious movements and new churches whose numbers and dynamics far outstrip their study. The most significant and the earliest studies of New Religious Movements (NRMs) in Africa were on Independent Churches in Africa by Sundkler, Kraemer, Baeta, Barret, Peel and Turner among others. Others, like Margaret Field, however, studied the emergence of neo-traditional movements, especially in West Africa. Many scholars have tried to do systematic studies of the contemporary phenomenon in Africa. My aim in this presentation is not, however, to review or discuss the works of these scholars as samples of studying NRMs in Africa. I would rather prefer to share my experiences in conducting such studies in Ghana. These cover neo-traditional movements, AICs (African Instituted Churches), Oriental groups, African diasporic movements, etc.

Most of our studies were carried out with the introduction of undergraduate and graduate courses on NRMs. An essential component of the courses involves students doing field research. Some went on to write Long Essays and theses on NRMs. The initial problem faced was, therefore, how to simultaneously make the study of NRMs relevant in our own intellectual environment and invoke the interest of students, mostly Christians and Muslims, in a subject matter they would ignore due to their faith convictions.

The question of approach was therefore foremost on our minds as we ventured into the study of NRMs. We found the phenomenological study of religions the most suitable method. Its emphasis on objectivity is relevant in a situation where NRMs are normally stereotyped negatively. Moreover, its

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<sup>1</sup> Summary of a paper presented to a Meeting of SAGA (Study and Advisory Group for Africa) of IIMO (Inter-University Institute for Missiology & Ecumenics) at the University of Utrecht on 10 September 2002.

multi-disciplinary nature allows us to explore and discuss various dimensions of the phenomenon. We had to be careful as we explored NRM terminology, jargons and parlance to understand them. We also had to find ways of handling retroactive accounts coloured by the teachings that respondents had received. Access to the movements is not the most difficult problem, but the expectation that the researcher is a potential convert. Indeed, some of the movements make our task easier by contacting us at Legon, because they wanted to gain some recognition from the University of Ghana.

Some of the general features of NRMs studied were their demographic patterns; the environment that may provide a fertile ferment for their emergence and growth; the question of identity, especially African Identity, in the NRMs; the challenges they pose to older religions such as mainline churches, etc. Examples are drawn from various types of NRMS to illustrate the discussion of the above-mentioned features below.

#### *Demography and NRMs*

One aspect of NRMs that is obvious in Ghana is that they have distinctive demographic features. For example, originally, the AICs attracted a lot of women and people of little formal education. The reasons for this are well known, especially the needs that led women to these churches. Even though the mainline churches created schools that promoted a western worldview, most women were left out of these schools. As a result, they naturally retained the traditional worldview and concerns, which had no place in the formal setting of the mainline churches, but found a place in the AICs. On the other hand, the charismatic churches started as a youth phenomenon with a highly educated generation. For them the older churches had no relevance to their generation and quest for experience. Some even, though they sat in the pews of the mainline churches, were educational higher than those who stood in the pulpits. Oriental NRMs also seem to be attractive to the educated and professionals who want more challenging teachings and are keen on self-improvement techniques.

#### *Environment for NRMs*

Though NRMs normally fill a vacuum left by older religious traditions, they at times thrive in particular environment, which provide fertile soil for their emergence and growth. In studying this ferment in the case of Oriental NRMs in Ghana, it was discovered that, among others, the Second World War, attraction to psychic healing, popular entertainment, folklore ideas about India and mermaid (Mami Water) traditions were very influential in creating a fertile soil for the planting of eastern spirituality.

Some Ghanaians who served in the Royal West Africa Frontier Force during the Second World War in Asia, came back with claims of having acquired various forms of eastern spirituality, especially Yoga. This is not sur-

prising as notions of spiritual potency required for survival had crept into the modern army from the warrior traditions of Ghana. The country continues to train some officers of the Ghana Armed Forces in India, and preliminary investigations reveal that some senior officers who trained in India, have continued the tradition of assimilating religious traditions of the East.

The association of India with magic and spiritual potency is reflected in popular entertainment in the pre- and post-Second World War period in Ghana mainly through film shows and itinerant magical shows in which most of the performers attributed their prowess to Eastern spirituality. To the popular mind therefore, India and the East are synonymous with magic and spiritual potency. This is normally linked with psychic healing as well, and a number of healers in Ghana claim to have knowledge of Eastern spirituality and Ar-yurvedic medicine as part of their credentials. Oriental influences in Ghana can also be linked with literature on Eastern spirituality. Indeed, such literature can also be detected at the crossroads of even AICs, revealing cross-cultural influences beyond the encounter of Christianity and traditional religion that led to the rise of some of these churches. An example of a church, which had some oriental influence, is the Action Church formed in Ghana in 1949. A more recent example is Zetaheal Mission, which in spite of its main focus of uniting Christianity and Islam, has many terms of eastern spirituality in its writings.

### *Political Environment*

One of the hypotheses we worked with originally, when we began to study NRMs was that Politics has also contributed to the proliferation of movements in Ghana as various 'illegitimate' governments, established through coup d'états, sought support from newer religious groups. Further, attempts by individual rulers to hold on to political power made them seek spiritual support from various NRMs purporting to offer such support. The Acheampong regime (1972-1979) is notorious for the proliferation of NRMs in Ghana. The Rawlings regime (1980-2000) was aware that it was more likely to receive block votes from the membership body of NRMs than from the old religious establishment, and so also had a predilection for cooperation with the newer movements. It even opened the state media for programs on, and by, these movements, such as the neo-traditional Afrikania Mission, giving them a national image.

### *NRMs & Identity*

The question of image and identity is an important one that comes up in the study of NRMs. This may be personal identity that goes with the whole question of status configuration, religious identity, ethnic and even cultural identity. One area of identity has been how African the NRMs are. The question of

identity, however, stood out prominently in studying neo-traditional movements and movements from the African diaspora.

In the case of diaphora movements both the Rastafari and African Israelites teach that Jesus is black. The movements therefore urge the need to seek purer and more ancient forms of African spirituality. The Rastafari go back to the 1500-year-old Ethiopian church. The movements propose to take contemporary Africa, tainted with colonial heritage, back to a more genuine heritage. The picture that the encounter between the movements and Ghanaian society presents is a complex one of negotiating identity/identities at different levels. It raises the question: Is there one African identity or several identities?

### *NRMs & Mainline Churches*

Most NRMs draw their members from mainline churches in Ghana. Moreover, there is a high level of polemics and apologetics with older religious traditions, especially mainline Christianity. What is interesting in the exchanges that are taking place, is the undercurrent of a dialogue of the strengths and weaknesses of the new and old as seen by either side. Indeed, some older churches have taken up the challenge of the new and are constructively reforming and making themselves current to the needs and aspirations of their members.

### *Conclusion*

In conclusion, we have found the study of NRMs in Ghana stimulating and challenging. We have found good reasons why it is important to study NRMs. For us in Africa in particular, NRMs enable us to study the reactions and interplay between religions. We have noted already that part of the urgency in studying the NRMs was related to the various challenges they pose to the older religions. NRMs often reveal the strengths and weaknesses of the older religions and denominations. Because of such challenges, NRMs even account for some reforms and revival in mainline spirituality. NRMs also use new and contemporary techniques of proselytising. Such techniques are interesting to study and reveal religious application of modern media. They also form interesting material in the study of the processes of conversion.

If this manner of studying NRMs is feasible, one benefit will be that it will remove stereotyped images and impressions of NRMs. It will enable one to distinguish between various types of NRMs. An emphasis on the concerns of NRMs also gives us knowledge and examples of contemporary religious reactions to crises. New religious movements therefore expose political, social and economic influences on religious life and vice-versa, especially on a continent that is seeking stability in relation to these influences.

Another lesson that studying NRMs has taught us, is that we often take NRMs as fringe movements and associate them with the marginalised. In our studies we have discovered that the membership of NRMs is not necessarily

people marginalised socially or economically, but rather religiously marginalised people. There are a lot highly respected people, holding high offices who are either members or clients of NRMs and whose beliefs many very well affect policies that direct our nations.

*Publication by the author on NRMs in Ghana*

- 2002, 'Rastafarians, Nation of Islam and African Hebrews: Return Home New Religious Movements in Ghana', in *Exchange* 31, 1: 2-22.
- 2000, 'God's Spirit and the Sunday Morning Worship: The Challenge of the Charismatic Movement', in *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 10, 1 & 2: 5-18.
- 1998, 'The Church in Africa and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of New Religious Movements and Charismatic Churches', in *Exchange* 27, 1: 52-69.
- 1995, 'Grace and Faith: The Challenge of Oriental Spirituality to Christianity in Ghana', in *Missionalia* 22, 3: 295-311.
- 1994, 'The Nichiren Shoshu in Ghana', in *Research Review, New Series* [Legon] 10, 1&2: 46-58.
- 1992, 'A Comparative Overview of Independent Churches and Charismatic Ministries in Ghana', in *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 2, 2: 55-73.
- 1991, 'Religious Pluralism and Christian Attitudes', in *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology* 1, 2: 40-50.
- Forthcoming, 'New Religious Movements in Ghana', in *Journal of Religion and Theology in Namibia*.
- Forthcoming, 'The Proliferation of Churches: The Impact of the Phenomenon on Established Churches', in *Maranatha Journal* [Journal of Maranatha Bible College, Sowutuom Accra].
- In preparation, "The Return of the Native": Revival and Renewal Movements in Ghanaian Traditional Religion'.
- In preparation, 'Ghanaian Initiatives in Oriental Religions'





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## THE SRI SATHYA SAI BABA MOVEMENT & THE CHURCHES IN GHANA

Studies on religion in African contexts like Ghana have mostly been conducted in the areas of historic mission Christianity, independent indigenous charismatic churches of various kinds, and the encounters between African traditional religions and Christianity. The AICs (African independent/initiated churches) remain the most intensely studied religious movements on the continent. From about the 1960s through the 70s, the study of independent churches, Ryan has noted, became something of a 'cash-crop venture' among scholars of Christianity in Africa.<sup>2</sup> Hastings observes in this direction:

The scholar ... looking for an interesting research topic in the field of African religion at that time could hardly fail to be attracted by one of the almost innumerable new churches springing into vibrant existence in Zaire, Kenya, Zambia or Ghana in those years. ... 'African Christianity' was now, suddenly, a popular subject indeed but almost entirely in terms of the independent churches.<sup>3</sup>

The expression 'New Religious Movements' (NRMs), as used in the African context, has thus become synonymous with the study of the AICs whose 'Africanness' has for years fascinated mostly western scholars writing on African religions.<sup>4</sup> In addition to the numberless AICs, Ghana, like several other African countries, can also boast of a number of non-Christian NRMs that together makes the religious landscape on the continent fascinatingly pluralistic. The presence of non-African religious movements on the continent indicates that religion in Africa does not necessarily mean African religion. Quite a number of NRMs belonging to the Oriental traditions have proliferated in Ghana since the end of the Second World War. Reinhart Hummel provides the following bird's eye view of the incidence and significance of non-Christian NRMs in Ghana:

It is interesting to note that in Accra, the capital of Ghana, a number of Hindu and Buddhist organisations are active among black Africans. The Hare Krishna movement has a temple and a training centre for black Krishna missionaries there, Svami Sivananda's 'Divine Light Society' is running a 'Hindu Monastery

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<sup>2</sup> Ryan n.d.: 107.

<sup>3</sup> Hastings 1990: 204.

<sup>4</sup> A good example is Turner 1979.

of Africa', a Sri Sathya Sai Baba Centre proclaims the 'Sai Religion', a Guru Nanak Society the Sikh Dharma. The 'Maha Bodhi Society of Ghana' has established a Buddhist Temple, a library, a training centre for Ghanaian Buddhist missionaries and a printing press, and the Nichiren Shoshu is trying to spread its own Japanese version of Buddhism there. Add to this the Ahmadiyya Mission and some Sufi orders, and you have a worldwide missionary outreach of all these traditions.<sup>5</sup>

This short article is part of a larger research project being attempted on some of the major non-Christian movements operating within the volatile Ghanaian religious environment. Here the focus is on a neo-Hindu movement, the Sri Sathya Sai Baba organisation that has been operating in Ghana since the mid 1970s. The membership is 70% Ghanaian. The rest are of Asian, specifically Indian origin. The circumstances surrounding the introduction of Sai Baba into Ghana forcefully underscores the instrumental nature of religion in Africa. In the African context, religion is a survival strategy and often employed as a means towards the very practical ends of healing, protection and empowerment in a precarious environment filled with powerful forces of evil and destruction. The Sri Sathya Sai Baba movement got into Ghana because a politician was searching for security and like a typical African in search of 'salvation' would not rest until the most potent source was secured. A former Head of State, the late General I. Kutu Acheampong, who was known to be a practising Roman Catholic, sought protection from wherever he thought it could be found in order to secure political power and entrench himself in office. That a political figure of such high standing should shop for protection and security through religion is a phenomenon that many Africans now take for granted. The following incidence from Benin and captured by Kalu to underscore the forceful presence of religion in African politics is a case in point:

Soglo, a former World Bank economist, came to power with the support of the church. ... Once in power, Soglo shifted allegiance to Voodoo priests. ... Soglo declared Voodoo as the national religion and installed a Voodoo national holiday. He decorated the roundabouts in the capital city, Cotonou, with Voodoo monuments and symbols. The priests practised their sacrifices in the full glare of the national television blaring their confident support for Soglo in the proposed national election.<sup>6</sup>

In Ghana's recent history, the military government of ex-President, Flt.Lt. J.J. Rawlings tacitly approved the operations of the Afrikania movement led by the late Osofo Komfo Damuah. To the consternation of the mainline Christian churches in particular, Afrikania was granted access to the national me-

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<sup>5</sup> Hummel 1987: 17.

<sup>6</sup> Kalu 2000: XII.

dia in the 1980s, a time when sponsored religious programmes had been banned by the revolutionary government. The charismatic pastor of the Christian Action Faith Ministries also virtually became the unofficial government chaplain. Ghana's first president, Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah was also widely rumoured to have relied very heavily on various religious functionaries of both local and foreign origins for political and personal survival. One of Nkrumah's spiritual consultants was the late Rev. Brother Yeboah Korieh founder of the F'Eden Church who was also consulted by other leading politicians.<sup>7</sup>

*The God-Man: Sri Sathya Sai Baba*

The movement under discussion, the Sri Sathya Sai Baba movement is an avataric neo-Hindu movement in which the central figure becomes *the* object of worship. The divine figure is believed to be an *avatar*, that is, a reincarnation of another transcendent being. The reincarnation of Sai Baba for example is believed to have been in fulfilment of a declaration by the 'Living Master' Sri Krishna, who had appeared five thousand years ago and promised to re-appear to save humankind from a precarious life on earth. As is stated in the Hindu Scriptures, Bhagavad Gita 4:7,8: 'Whenever there is decline of Righteousness, then I manifest myself for the protection of the good, for the destruction of the wicked and for the establishment of righteousness. I am born in every age.'<sup>8</sup> The 'Living Master', as these gurus are normally called, is worshipped by followers through their sculptured or pictorial images, that may be mounted in the presence of worshippers. The 'Living Master' is worshipped also because they are believed to possess supernatural powers for solving human problems.

Sathya Sai Baba was born Sathya Nayarana on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1926 in a remote village in South India called Puttaparthi. Like the claims that are made for all such divine beings or the making of prophets, the circumstances surrounding his conception and birth were miraculous. Sai Baba was not born out of natural means. His father was Pedda Venkapa Raju and the mother, Easwaramma. Sathya Nayarana mother's name, Easwaramma, is supposed to mean 'mother of God'. Unlike her previous births of a son and two daughters, the birth of Sathya Nayarana was said to have been characterised by 'strange happenings.' Sathya Nayarana is believed to have been conceived when during fetching water at a well, a big ball of blue light glided into his mother and in the process knocked her out.<sup>9</sup> The circumstances surrounding the births of such people are retrospectively taken as prophetic, because they

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<sup>7</sup> Pobe 1991: 80.

<sup>8</sup> Oduro 1991: IV.

<sup>9</sup> Oduro 1991: 1.

are considered premonitions or indicators of the destinies of such children. They are viewed as having been chosen to lead or save humankind.

In addition to the miraculous circumstances surrounding his birth, the rise of Sathya Nayarana to his present status as God-man is linked to about three main events in his life. In 1940, Sathya Nayarana was said to have suffered an epileptic fit, a condition that was subsequently explained as his voluntarily leaving his body to help a devotee in need. When he recovered, Sathya Narayana Raju claimed that he was an incarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi. Sai Baba of Shirdi is a historical person who appeared as a Muslim mendicant in a town in central Maharashtra, India, known as Shirdi in 1872. His religious practices are said to have blended Hindu and Muslim elements. Among his religious practices are mentioned both the Muslim *Salat*, that is, Muslim prayer and Hindu prayers and offerings. He also used holy ashes from fire he kept perpetually burning in a *dhuni* (hearth) to perform miracles. This holy ash, known as *vibhuti* is rubbed into the forehead or throat, swallowed, cast into a wound or used in various ways to effect healing and other transformations. The *vibhuti* is now a very cherished prophylactic substance among the followers of Sri Sathya Sai Baba who use it for healing and other religious purposes. After his claim to be an incarnation of Sai Baba of Shirdi, Sathya Sai Baba of Puttaparthi asked the gathered crowd to worship him every Thursday. So at the age of fourteen, he threw his schoolbooks away and left his family. The Sathya Sai Baba movement therefore meets for worship on Thursdays in response to his demand. The story of Sathya Sai Baba leaving his family reminisces those of the Buddha and Jesus Christ who wandered away from their respective families into seclusion and the temple respectively as signs of the future trend of their lives and mission.

The second major event in Sathya Nayarana's life came in 1963 when he made the claim that he was an incarnation of the Hindu god Siva. In June of that year, Nayarana collapsed and went into a coma as a result of another series of seizures that were supposed to have paralysed him. He regained consciousness and after two more attacks insisted on giving his devotees *darshan* (a 'sight' of himself) at the festival of Gurupurnima. This was a festival originally celebrated in honour of a guru called Nyasa and now celebrated in honour of other spiritual leaders. Nayarana was carried in a state of paralysis to the main hall of the *ashram*, a kind of monastery where a guru lives to receive homage from devotees. At the *ashram*, he is said to have performed a total cure on himself. Nayarana explained that he had taken on a devotee's illness and had used that opportunity to declare that he was the god Shiva in mortal form.

Sathya Sai Baba thus made two primary associations. The first was incarnational when he claimed to be Sai Baba of Shirdi. The second was incarnational and that was the claim to be an incarnation (*avatar*) of the god Shiva. These claims, together with demonstrations of supernatural powers are

said to have led to dramatic increases in his following both in India and abroad. Sai Baba has claimed that he will die at age ninety-six and thereafter reincarnate as Prema Sai who would be born in the Manya District of Karnataka in India.

Sathya Sai Baba's claims therefore link him to three incarnations: Sai Baba of Shirdi (Shirdi Sai), Sri Sathya Sai Baba (Sathya Sai) and later Prema Sai. When he reincarnated as Shirdi Sai, Sathya Sai claims to have laid the foundation for the spiritual mission of bringing about a Hindu and Muslim unity. His present task as Sathya Sai is to build on that foundation. This is to direct his new universal religion, which he calls Sai Religion. It is supposed to represent the essence or extract of all religions.<sup>10</sup>

### *Unification of Religions*

The unification of all religions in Sai Baba has been symbolised in two ways. First, by the 'Sarva Dharma Prem Aikya' stupa of Sai Baba's Bombay Centre. This is said to be a slender column with a spire in the shape of a lotus flower. It has texts from the holy scriptures of the different major religions chiselled at its base. This is meant to express the unity of all religions in love, that love which Sathya Sai himself personifies. Second, Sathya Sai Baba as the unifying factor of all religions is also expressed in the movement's emblem. This is a lotus around which lie the symbols of Hinduism (the mantra *ohm*), Buddhism (the wheel), the Parsi religion (fire), Islam (the star and half moon) and Christianity (the cross). In 1950, Sathya Sai Baba built an important ashram called Prasanthi Nilayan, 'abode of perfect peace', at Puttarpathi. The city has now a modern temple, hospital, college buildings and guest quarters. Every year devotees, who can afford to travel to Puttarpathi, go there in the hope of meeting Baba and participate in Mahashivaratri. This is a festival at which Baba makes a special demonstration of his powers. A popular reason for pilgrims to attend is to solicit for healing and to benefit from the materialisation of holy ashes, *vibhuti*, talismans, sweets, crucifixes, etc.

The Sathya Sai era is believed to have been inaugurated in 1961, because the number of his devotees was said to have grown substantially. In 1967 there was an all-Indian conference of Sai Baba service committees (*Seva Samitis*). It was followed by a world conference of the movement in 1968. These conferences paved the way for the eventual proclamation of the Sai Religion on 1<sup>st</sup> October 1976. The English version of the draft of proclamation ends with the following invitation:

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<sup>10</sup> Hummel 1985: 11. Cf. also White 1972: 868.

All you who have entered the Sathya Sai Organisation, if anyone asks you what is the religion of Sathya Sai and of Sathya Sai Organisation, you must have the courage and the determination to say with one voice that the essence of all religions is the religion of the Sathya Sai Organisation.<sup>11</sup>

*The Sathya Sai Baba Movement in Ghana*

An Indian businessman, Kishin Khubchandani, introduced the Sri Sathya Sai Baba movement into Ghana in 1976. In 1974, the then Head of State and Chairman of the National Redemption Council (later the Supreme Military Council), General I. Kutu Acheampong honoured one of his former teachers, Paul Duah with an ambassadorial appointment to India. It was while in India that according to Khubchandani, Ambassador Duah heard about the miraculous powers of Sai Baba and recommended him to Kutu Acheampong. The Head of State who was then in a desperate search for power to secure his position sent for his friend Khubchandi and promptly dispatched him with a letter to Sai Baba inviting the God-man into Ghana. In the words of Khubchandani, Ambassador Duah told General Acheampong that if he could secure the services of Sai Baba his rule may never be interrupted. The Head of State became interested and thus sent Khubchandani to bring Sai Baba to Ghana.

That the Head of State, General I. K. Acheampong should become interested in a religious figure, as noted above, is hardly surprising in an African context where the search for security occurs within the religious and theological realms. Recourse to the use of medicine and rituals either to obtain or if already obtained, for the protection of riches, success, children, wealth, promotion, employment, marriage, political power and other advantages in life form a common feature of African socio-religious life. As Birgit Meyer so forcefully illustrates from her study of the anthropology of evil among the Ewe of Ghana, ritual in the religious life of Africans are directed primarily at such practical ends as health, fertility, protection, success in life, or help to win court cases.<sup>12</sup> In pursuance of these very practical ends sought in religion, clients consult religious persons including Christian Prophets, pastors and functionaries of other religions whom they deem capable of helping them achieve their goals. These religious persons are often the source of various types of medicines, or 'black power' as these are popularly called that help people to deal with the difficulties of life. The use of *dzo* (medicine) among the Ewe as discussed by Meyer is paradigmatic of the use of such substances in various African contexts:

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<sup>11</sup> Hummel 1985: 12.

<sup>12</sup> Meyer 1999: 68.

*Dzo* was applied in fields of (potential) affliction such as war, health, pregnancy and birth, hunting and agriculture, trade, play, love affairs, family conflicts and dead person's spirits. ... People used *dzo* not only to cure bodily ills, but also to improve their trade or the growth of their plants, to become invulnerable in war and win fights, to be protected against evils inflicted upon them by others (for example, the evil eye or mouth, witchcraft, spirits of the dead), or to harm others.<sup>13</sup>

In Ghana, politicians happen to be regular clients of those adept at medicines for protection and survival. Accounts of nefarious relationships in popular discourse between diviners, sorcerers, fortune-tellers, medicine men and the elite such as politicians are quite popular across Africa.<sup>14</sup> That medicines could be obtained in order that people could make themselves 'invulnerable in war and win fights' is particularly instructive for our purposes.

### *Religion, Medicine and Politics in Ghana*

That is precisely the reason why General Acheampong, in typical African fashion, accumulated in his personal world a number of religious sources. General Acheampong's inclusivist religious orientation for the perpetuation of his political career has been studied extensively by John S. Pobee and as the latter shows in one of his works, the phenomenon was not limited to Acheampong.<sup>15</sup>

During the Rawlings era, his late vice president, Kow Nkensen Akaah revealed how he had refused to swallow a live frog at a shrine as part of a religious ritual to sustain the regime. Similarly during the 2000 General elections in Ghana, two MPs from the Volta Region contesting on the ticket of the National Democratic Congress openly accused each other of resorting to the use of *dzo* ostensibly to gain advantage in the voting process over the other. A New Patriotic Party parliamentary candidate, who also collapsed and died suddenly after returning from a campaign tour, had been killed, according to popular belief, through supernatural means by a rival candidate using medicine from a shrine. The use of religion to serve such ends as health, fertility, and cure of ailments, gain promotion, harm competitors and pursue political ambitions is accountable, to a very significant extent, for the quantitative proliferation and popularity of new religious movements in Ghana.

In the case of Acheampong and the Sai Baba movement, Khubchandani claims he was initially sceptical about the claim by the Head of State that

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<sup>13</sup> Meyer, *Religion and Modernity*, 70.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Shaw 1996 for a useful study of the resort to juju and diviners by politicians in the search for position and power in Africa.

<sup>15</sup> See also Pobee 1988.

‘God had come to India’. He went on the journey in an attempt to bring Sai Baba to Ghana only because refusal to go would have amounted to an affront to the Head of State. Once in India, Khubchandani says two things convinced him about the supernatural abilities of Sai Baba. These were, first, that Sai Baba responded to the contents of General Acheampong’s letter without reading it. Second, Sai Baba performed some miracles in Khubchandani’s presence. In his words: ‘I was really shaken up, outside, there were also thousands of people waiting to see the man’.

On his return to Ghana, Khubchandani arranged for his wife too to visit Sai Baba. She was also convinced about Baba’s powers. Thus sometime in 1976, Khubchandani and his wife brought a few business friends together and started a Sai Baba worship centre at Osu in Accra. According to Khubchandani, ‘when you have something good, you share it with friends’. So he took advantage of the many friends he has to introduce the Sai Religion in Ghana and started *bhajans* as the devotional services dedicated to the worship of Sai Baba are called.

The average attendance at *bhajans* is about one hundred. The numbers may be small when compared with the crowds that patronise the mega-size, new independent charismatic churches in Ghana. The significance of Sai Baba arises within the context of the many other non-African religious movements operating in Ghana including as we have noted, such as the Eckankar, the International Society of Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), and the Nichiren Shoshu Soka Gakkai. The numbers patronising these movements are significant for another reason. They belong mainly to the middle class but more importantly a majority claim a ‘previous religious background’ in one of the historic mission denominations—Methodist, Presbyterian, Anglican or Roman Catholic. The significance of this trend and its implications for historic mission Christianity has been succinctly articulated by Dovlo as follows:

Thus in our pluralistic society the greatest challenge to Christianity is not simply that it has to compete with other faiths for converts but that its supposed adherents have become the proselytising target of other faiths. This creates the impression that the faith has lost its significance for people.<sup>16</sup>

Members of mainline denominations have become the proselytising target of these Oriental movements as a result of the high rate of nominalism among the pioneers of Christian mission in Africa. Pentecostals and charismatics have in the meantime blossomed and their emphases on experiential religion and the immediacy of God’s presence serve as critiques of the dry denominationalism and the non-interventionist theology associated with Western mission-related Christian piety. Thus the drift of members of historic mission

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<sup>16</sup> Dovlo 1991: 43.



into non-Christian movements underscores the Pentecostal accusation that the Christianity of these older churches are nominal and the faith of many of their members cerebral and superficial.

### *Inclusivism*

Members of the Sathya Sai Baba movement continue to affiliate with their historic churches. In Ghana's historic church traditions, membership is mostly acquired through attending mission schools, parental inheritance or through the routine sacraments of infant baptism and confirmation. The routine processes of incorporation into the church accounts in part for the high rate of nominalism in the historic mission churches. This situation has led some members to continuously harp on the need for a more comprehensive renewal of the church than has so far been allowed by church authority. Those maintaining affiliation with their older churches seem to have fallen for the inclusivistic claim that Sri Sathya Sai Baba himself makes with respect to other religions as shown in the following quotation from *Sathya Sai Speaks* (vol. 7, no. 7):

Continue your worship of your chosen God along the line already familiar to you. Then you will find that you are coming nearer and nearer to me; for all Names are mine and all forms of are Mine. There is no need to change your chosen God and adopt a new one when you have seen Me and heard Me. Above all, develop love. Love all religions as the path leading to the same destination.<sup>17</sup>

Members of the movement in Ghana freely quote Sai Baba's statement above as a proselytising technique. But in effect, the claim, accepted by all the devotees whatever they previously believed, is that Sai Baba is God.<sup>18</sup> For example, Khubchandani was forthright in his answer concerning the meaning his relationship to Sai Baba has for him: 'Sri Sathya Sai Baba is my God.'

So, in spite of the complementary posture, in practice, the Sri Sathya Sai Baba movement directly rivals Christianity because the founder of the movement, who claims to be an incarnation of the Hindu god Shiva, is held by devotees to be their God. He is placed on the same pedestal as Jesus the Christ. Prof. Oduro, a professor of anaesthesia at the University of Ghana Medical School, is a leading member of the Presbyterian Church. He is also a prominent member of the Sai Baba movement. Prof. Oduro writes in his book, *Who is Sai Baba?*:

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<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Oduro 1991: 32.

<sup>18</sup> Klass 2001: 202.

Sathya Sai Baba is at present repeating all the miracles [of Jesus Christ] – spiritually transforming the lives of people and making them ‘fishers of men’, converting whisky into water ... healing the sick by word, will or touch, making the blind see, the lame walk and the dead ... rise up and walk, stopping floods and heavy rains, causing rainbows to appear, creating life etc., ... Sai Baba is omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent. His knowledge of the present, past and future is incomprehensible.<sup>19</sup>

### *Social Services, Miracles and Proselytisation*

The Sathya Sai Baba movement in Ghana has attracted large numbers of professionals and top civil servants including medical doctors, university professors, secondary school teachers and the like. Members are able to pull resources together to carry out *Seva*, ‘social service’, that has helped to endear the movement to beneficiaries. *Seva* is a charitable service in which money and other items are donated to needy persons and institutions as part of the religious duty of devotion to Sai Baba. *Seva* is considered such an important religious duty that the movement is sometimes referred to as the ‘Sathya Sai Baba Seva Organisation.’

Most devotees carry with them small portraits of Sai Baba or have stickers of him on their vehicles. A very cherished religious item of the movement is the *vibhuti*. The *vibhuti*, as has been noted, is believed to possess medicinal and ‘magical’ powers and the ash has helped in recruitment as people searching for healing have found it helpful. Thus one of the main sources of attraction of the movement for its Ghanaian devotees seems to be the miraculous powers, attributed to Sai Baba, as mediated especially through the holy ash, *vibhuti*. Several devotees, I interviewed, testify to have received healing for illnesses that previously defied treatment, a situation that in the African worldview engenders explanations of mystical causality against the backdrop of the traditional belief in the powers of witchcraft and other malevolent spirit beings.

### *Education in Human Values (EHV)*

Another public programme of the Sai Baba movement is its EHV programme. The EHV programme is normally target at the younger generation through talks and workshops in schools. According to a booklet on the Education in Human Values programme compiled by two of the movement’s Ghanaian followers: ‘the purpose of the programme is to strengthen character in the younger generation.’ The Sathya Sai Education in Human Values programme identifies five basic values: Truth, Love, Right Conduct, Peace and

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<sup>19</sup> Oduro 1991: iv-v.

Non-Violence, and the ideals, which flow from them, as 'human values', because they are the values which, when pursued, lead us to the realisation of our true potential as human beings.<sup>20</sup>

The patronage of the Sri Sathya Sai Baba movement by leading members of the historic denominations serves as a pastoral challenge to the mission of these pioneers of the Christian evangel in Ghana. The drift into NRMs like Sai Baba by Ghanaian Christians is essentially the search for spiritual fulfilment and supernatural intervention in lives that stand in need of such power to overcome the difficulties and uncertainties of life within a precarious environment. Most devotees spoken to explained their affiliation with Sai Baba in terms of a search 'spiritual development and fulfilment'. In the Sai Baba movement, devotees are taught meditational techniques during *bhajans* that help them in the realisation of the spiritual development that they seek. Some claimed that joining this neo-Hindu movement has deepened their faith in Christ.

What provides the basis for the feeling that faith in Christ is deepened with affiliation to Sai Baba is the complementary attitude adopted by the movement towards Christianity. The interior of the Sai Baba temple is supplied with an array of pictures depicting various Indian saints and founders of world religions. Conspicuous among these is a picture of Jesus Christ. Listening to the members and reading the literature of the movement, it seems clear, as has been noted, that the finality of Christ is effectively denied. Sri Sathya Sai Baba is said to have quoted Jesus Christ on Christmas day in 1972 as saying:

'He who sent me among you will come again. His name will be truth, Sathya. He will wear a blood-red robe. He will be short with a crown of hair'. Does that mean it was you who sent Jesus into incarnation?, Baba was asked. With ineffable simplicity in his soft gentle voice, Swami nodded and said, 'yes'.<sup>21</sup>

The denial of the finality of Christ is also evident in some of the lyrics of the choruses used during *bhajans*. A number of these local Ghanaian Christian choruses that have been adopted by the movement but with references to Jesus Christ substituted with the name of Baba. The following are two such choruses frequently sung at *bhajans*:

*Baba ne fie ye me fie; Mekra dzi dew wo ho; Baba ne fie ye me fie; Ho na mbosom daa; Motonton Sai Baba; Wo no do kese; Baba ne fie ye me fie; Ho na mbosom daa*

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<sup>20</sup> Johnson Asamoah-Gyadu 1994: 111.

<sup>21</sup> Hummel 1985: 10.

Translation:

My soul rejoices therein; Baba's home my home; I'll always worship/serve there; I'll praise/adore Sai Baba; For his great love; Baba's home my home; I'll always worship there

The chorus above is popular in Ghanaian churches. In such songs, the vernacular title for Jesus Christ, 'Ewuradze', 'Lord', gives way to Sai Baba. In this way the movement removes the Christian component of the choruses but maintain their tunes.

*In conclusion*

So it is ironically significant that a number of such Oriental movements claim a complementary attitude to Christianity. This is a proselytising technique that has worked effectively on the nominal members of the historic churches in particular. The vulnerability that members of historic churches have shown in the face of the invasion of the non-Christian movements is an indication that the routine processes of incorporation into the church, namely infant baptism and confirmation, has contributed to the superficiality of the religion and missionary methods of these older churches. The Sri Sathya Sai Baba movement is significant because not only has it attracted into its fold many socially prominent and very well educated professionals but the majority of patrons claim a background in the historic churches. Some continue to divide the religious allegiance between their churches in which they serve as leading laypersons and financial contributors and the supplementary religion of Sai Baba. Whatever it is, the fact that significant numbers of members of historic mission churches patronise such movements as Sai Baba is an indication of the enormous challenge that the NRMs poses to the mission of the historic churches in Ghana.

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## POLITICS LINK WITH RELIGION TO CREATE MISS WORLD VIOLENCE

Nigeria, once again, is embroiled in street riots and violence. This time it is over the Miss World Beauty Contest that led to the death of more than 200 persons and widespread destruction of property, including places of worship.

The immediate cause of rioting, began by Muslim youth, was an article, responding to criticism by Muslims that the beauty contest should not take place in Nigeria. Muslims interpreted as offensive the writer's statement that the Prophet would approve of the contest and most likely marry one of the beauty queens. Undoubtedly, the latest spiral of violence, that has become a regular occurrence in Nigeria, clouds deeper and more profound social, cultural and political crises that often manifest themselves in ethnic and religious conflict. At the deepest level, the two warring groups, Muslims and Christians, are competing for the soul of Nigeria, in ways that continue to hold Nigeria's status as a multi-religious and multi-ethnic democratic state highly problematic.

The Miss World contest took place in the Muslim month of Ramadan at a time when the world's attention focused on the highly publicized ruling of the Sharia court of appeal that sentenced a young Nigerian woman, Amina Lawal, to be stoned to death for having a baby outside of marriage. Clearly, from the beginning, the Miss World Contest was in a tense religious and social setting.

I, myself, visited Nigeria twice this year and read the hot debates over these issues in the Nigerian dailies. Previously, I interpreted these as a healthy development fostering an emerging Nigerian democracy. But now I think the state should have considered the conversations more carefully and moved the event to southern Nigeria where the people are more accepting of Western cultural values like a beauty contest. Many Nigerians, especially Christians, would have interpreted the cancellation of the Miss World Contest as capitulation to Islamic control of national public space, in the same manner as they interpreted Nigeria's attempt for membership in the Organization of Islamic Conference years ago, as a surreptitious way of declaring Nigeria a Muslim country. Membership in the Islamic organization similarly divided the nation along religious, ethnic and class lines. The Miss World violence clearly reveals the unease over Nigeria's future.

In 1960, the nation of more than 250 ethnic groups and more than 120 million people became independent from the British colonial government. Shortly after independence, the Nigerian civil government was overthrown by a violent military coup. It suffered a bloody civil war and consequently numerous coups that replaced one greedy military elite with another – interspersed with short-lived civil rule. In 1999, after a series of failed attempts at democratic rule, the international community helped Nigeria to elect a democratic government. The fragile democracy has, as before, continued to face intense religious and ethnic conflict, now fueled by militant Islamism, fundamentalist Christianity, and ethnic and communal strife, often witnessed in the oil-producing areas of the Niger Delta region, the result of state neglect and violence.

The immediate cause of conflict is a combination of many factors. On the one hand, Christians and members of indigenous groups, who apparently have been sidestepped in these conflicts, uphold secular values of the emerging nation-state. On the other hand, the largely Muslim Nigerians in the north uphold the Islamic cultural values and Islamic identity by adopting Sharia Muslim law. The Law of Sharia has always been part of Nigeria's legal system, but in many instances it was limited to legal issues concerning family, marriage, and inheritance. Its application then did not create the kind of violence that now makes Nigeria look like the Sudan. In 2000, however, as political power shifted to the south, state government in the north officially widened Sharia's purview to cover all facets of life, which promulgated draconian punishment such as amputation of hands and stoning to death.

When Obasanjo, a southern chief and ex-military ruler, became president, religious violence flared again in a struggle of identity and the source of moral authority – hence, the clash between secular goals of the nation-state and sectarian goals of religious groups, especially radical Islamists, and elites. Religious groups fail to see the nation state and its secular value system as having greater moral authority for its members and the society.

Social and economic injustice, and the appalling impoverishment of most Nigerian citizens, especially viewed in the context of Nigeria's enormous wealth in oil, that has been squandered over the last 30 years by the state and ex-military elites, bogus politicians, and business men and women. This impoverishment breeds many grave social ills – youth unemployment, abject poverty, armed robbery, and violence on the Nigerian streets.

The deeper issues that Nigeria ought to address are the triple evils of dubious acquisition of wealth, militant faiths, and inordinate political ambition of the elites – all of which result in nothing but violence and impoverishment of its citizens. The three cankerworms of Nigerian society and body politic dovetail regularly promoting self and group interests at local, state, regional, and national levels. One doubts if Nigeria's rulers believe a thing about the country's symbols of unity that adorn the state building and public space. The

failure of the nation and its elites to promote ideas, values, and programs of nation-building and civic consciousness continues to encourage the growth and spread of these three evils.

Nigeria will have to do some soul searching to ask if the country's unity is worth the recurring, unpredictable violence and if there are reasons, other than the wealth of oil the nation's elites shamefully appropriated among themselves, to continue bound together as one nation.



## PERSONS & POSTS

**Dr. Jim Cox**, AASR-General Secretary and Treasurer, was elected BASR President-Elect on 10 September 2002 during the Annual General Meeting of the British Association for the Study of Religions at the University of Surrey, Roehampton, UK. In the year 2002-2003, he serves concurrently with Prof. Peggy Morgan, the existing BASR-President. He will serve as BASR-President from 2003 to 2006.

**Rev. Dr. Elom Dovlo** has been appointed on promotion as Associate Professor in the Study of Religions at the University of Ghana, Legon. The appointment has been backdated to November 2000.

**Dr. Roswith Gerloff**, Honorary Lecturer in the School of Theology & Religious Studies of the University of Leeds, recently spent a semester as Senior Scholar in Residence at the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut. She continues her research on the African Christian Diaspora in Europe.

**Dr. Rosalind I. J. Hackett** was made a Distinguished Professor in the Humanities in August 2002. In November 2001, she was invited to attend the United Nations International Consultative Conference on School Education in Relation to Freedom of Religion or Belief, Tolerance and Non-discrimina-



tion, in Madrid from 23 to 25 November 2001. There was a strong delegation there from Cameroon and two religious education specialists from Namibia, and the South African ambassador to Spain breezed in. But apart from that, Africa was poorly represented given its long experience in this field.

She traveled to Brazil in May 2002 to attend the 4th Annual Meeting of the Brazilian Association for the Study of Religion and delivered a keynote address. She also made a long awaited visit to Bahia in NE Brazil to learn more about Candomble. In July 2002, she was invited to a conference on 'Evangelicals and Democracy in the Third World', held near Washington, DC, which was attended by several African colleagues from Nigeria, Kenya, South Africa and Zimbabwe. Lastly, as IAHR-Vice President, she represented the IAHR at the 26<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of International Council of Philosophy and Human Sciences (CIPSH) at Porto-Novo, in Benin, from 18 to 21 September 2002. See also her publications in the rubric Recent Publications.

### **The First Adrian Hastings Memorial Lecture**

The School of Theology & Religious Studies in the University of Leeds has established the Adrian Hastings Africa Scholarship (see below). This fund and African Studies in the School of Theology & Religious Studies in the University of Leeds are funding an annual lecture, the **Adrian Hastings Memorial Lecture**, in memory of this foremost scholar of Christianity in Africa, who died on 30 May 2001.

Prof. **Terence Ranger** has delivered the First Adrian Hastings Memorial Lecture in the University of Leeds on Wednesday 6 November 2002, at 5.30 p.m. He spoke on 'Christianity and the First Peoples: Some Second Thoughts'. The text of the lecture is available on the Adrian Hastings African Scholarship website at: < [www.leeds.ac.uk/trs/hastings](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/trs/hastings) >.

**Dr. Cyril Imo** of the University of Jos, at Jos, participated as a Research Fellow in the project Evangelical Christianity and Third World Democracy funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts. The three-year project under the directorship of Vinay Samuel and Timothy Shah explored the responses of Evangelical Christianity to Democracy and Governance in Asia, Africa and Latin America. In Africa, six countries - Nigeria, Zambia, South Africa, Kenya, Mozambique and Zimbabwe were selected as cases studies. Professor Terence O. Ranger co-ordinated the African section of the project. Other research fellows were Dr. Anthony Balcomb (South Africa), John Karanja (Kenya), Isabel Mukonyora (Zimbabwe), Isabel Phiri (Zambia), and Teresa Cruz e Silva (Mozambique).

Dr. Imo examined issues involved in the implementation of Sharia (Islamic legal system) in Northern Nigeria since 1999, and the responses of evangelical Christianity to this new dimension of the interplay of religion and

politics in the country. Dr. Imo also attended a conference held in Washington, D.C. USA in June 2002 to discuss the findings of the research projects.

Further information about the project and the papers may be obtained from: < <http://www.evangelicalsandpolitics.org> >. Timothy Shah may be reached by e-mail at: < [tim@eppc.org](mailto:tim@eppc.org) >.

**Mr. Joseph K. Koech**, of Moi University, Department of Religion, was awarded a three months International Graduate Research Fellowship at Concordia Seminary, U.S.A. The Fellowship commenced in September 2002 and is expected to end in December 2002. The fellowship will enable Mr. Koech to work on his Doctor of Philosophy degree in New Testament Studies.

**Dr. Samuel Kaveto Mbambo**, from Mupapama, Kavango, Namibia, successfully defended his Ph.D. thesis before the Faculty of Social Sciences of Utrecht University on 11 September 2002. Promotors were Prof. Dr. Arie de Ruijter and Prof. Dr. Gerrie ter Haar. Dr. Wouter E.A. van Beek was co-promotor. The title of his thesis is: *'Heal with God': Indigenous Healing and Religion among the Vagciriku of the Kavango Region, Namibia* (Utrecht: Unitwin, 326 pp., ISBN 90.393.3129.4). The thesis will be reviewed in AASR-Newsletter 19.

**Mr. Mohammed Suleiman Mraja** of Moi University, Department of Religion, won a DAAD scholarship to pursue his PhD studies at Freiburg University in Germany. Mr. Mraja left Kenya in September 2002 and is expected to complete his studies in the next five years.

**Dr. Matthews A. Ojo**, of the Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, successfully submitted a project to IFRA (*Institut Français de Recherche en Afrique*; the French Institute for Research in Africa). In April 2002, it called for submissions for a research programme entitled 'Transnational Networks and New Agents of Religion in West Africa'. Ojo proposed to study 'Pentecostal Movements and Trans-national Religious Networks in West African Coastal Regions'. His project was of the several which were funded for the year 2002/2003. Further enquiries may be obtained from < [ifra@skannet.com](mailto:ifra@skannet.com) >.

**Dr. Cephas N. Omenyo**, of the Department for the Study of Religions in the University of Ghana, at Legon, has been promoted to Senior Lecturer with effect from May 2001, when he applied for that promotion.

Omenyo also successfully defended his Ph.D. thesis before the Faculty of Theology of Utrecht University, in the Netherlands, on 12 September 2002. His promotor was Prof. Dr. J.A.B. Jongeneel, of Utrecht University. Prof. Dr. Kwame Bediako, Director of the Akrofi Christaller Memorial Cen-

tre at Akropong-Akuapem in Ghana; and Prof. Dr. Elom Dovlo, of the University of Ghana were co-promotors. The thesis' title is: *Pentecost outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of the Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana*. A commercial edition of it is about to be published and will be reviewed in AASR-Newsletter 19.

**Dr. Tabona Shoko**, Department of Religious Studies, Classics & Philosophy of the University of Zimbabwe, is presently on a sabbatical at the Inter-University Institute for Missiology and Ecumenics (IIMO) at Utrecht University in The Netherlands. He is using this study leave from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2002 till 1<sup>st</sup> March 2003 primarily for preparing a commercial edition of his 1994 Ph. D thesis at the University of Zimbabwe on Religion and Healing among the Karanga of Zimbabwe.

**Dr. Kevin Ward**, Lecturer in African Studies in the School of Theology & Religious Studies of the University of Leeds, has been awarded a Procter Fellow at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, for the autumn term of 2002.

**Dr. David Westerlund** has been appointed Professor of Religious Studies (*religionsvetenskap*) at the new Sodertorn University College in Stockholm. He will take up that post in 2003, but will continue teaching for some time at Uppsala University too, where he may be reached by using the old addresses.

## OTHER NEWS

**Moi University:** The Department of Religion of Moi University, Eldoret, Kenya, won a course award of \$10,000 in a course competition sponsored by the Center of Theology and Natural Sciences at Berkeley, California. The course, 'African Traditional Healing and Science', was developed by Prof. Adam K. arap Chepkwony and Dr. Hazel O. Ayanga. Prof. arap Chepkwony, who is the current Head of Department of Religion, travelled to Berkeley to receive the award in June 2002. The main objective of the course is to encourage dialogue between African and modern scientific methods of healing. The course was launched in September 2002 in the Department.

**Professor J. K. Olupona** of the University of California, Davis, and the Chairperson of AASR, has established a fund to support the publication of manuscripts produced by scholars of religion in Nigeria. The fund will serve to offset or supplement the production cost of manuscripts accepted by publishers locally. Further details about the funds and modality of submitting

proposals may be obtained from Dr. Deji Ayegboyin, University of Ibadan, Ibadan at <dejigboyin@yahoo.com >.



## SCHOLARSHIPS & FELLOWSHIPS

### THE ADRIAN HASTINGS AFRICA SCHOLARSHIP

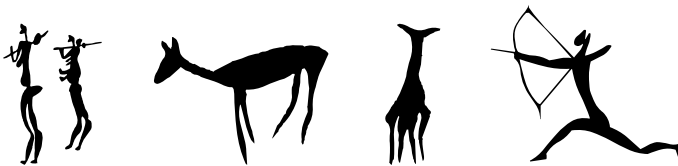
In 2001, the School of Theology & Religious Studies of the University of Leeds established the Adrian Hastings Africa Scholarship, a permanent endowment fund in memory of Adrian Hastings, who died on 30 May 2001. Adrian Hastings was one of the foremost scholars of the history of Christianity in Africa. See his obituary by Ingrid Lawrie in *AASR Newsletter* 15/16: 29-31. The fund will grant significant annual scholarships towards the tuition costs of doctoral students from Africa. The scholarships will be open to those wishing to research any aspect of religion at the University of Leeds.

The Leeds School of Theology & Religious Studies reports that it had received £ 35.000 by July 2002 by appealing for donations from friends, students and colleagues of Adrian Hastings. By November 2002, that sum had risen to £ 50.000. It will continue to solicit for funds, especially from the many corporations and trusts interested in African studies and education in general.

The School has also announced the first two recipients of the Adrian Hastings Africa Scholarship. One is **Fred Sheldon Mwesigwa**, from Uganda, who is doing postgraduate research on the impact of religious pluralism in education in Uganda in the School of Theology & Religious Studies of the University of Leeds. The other is **Agbonkhianmeghe Orobator**, from Nige-

ria. His postgraduate study, also at Leeds, will focus on the impact of poverty and AIDS on African society. The wonderful reception they were given at the first Adrian Hastings Memorial Lecture (see above) was a tribute to the importance of this scholarship both for the Leeds School of Theology & Religious Studies and the continent of Africa.

The Leeds School of Theology & Religious Studies already received numerous applications for postgraduate studies from African in the past years due to initiatives of Adrian Hastings, who secured education for many of them. The news of this scholarship, however, has caused the number of applications for study at the Leeds School of Theology & Religious Studies to increase significantly over that of the previous years. For further information, visit < [www.leeds.ac.uk/hastings](http://www.leeds.ac.uk/hastings) >, or contact < [ahas@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:ahas@leeds.ac.uk) >.



# CONFERENCE REPORTS

Elom Dovlo  
AASR-Ghana President

## AASR-GHANA SYMPOSIUM & BUSINESS MEETING, 10<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 2002, UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON

THEME: THE STUDY OF RELIGIONS IN GHANA:  
PAST, PRESENT & PROSPECTS

The meeting was initiated by Prof. Jacob Olupona, AASR-President, to coincide with his visit to Ghana. Papers were invited for a morning symposium session to be followed by a business meeting in the afternoon. A package for the meeting included the programme for the day, the AASR Constitution, AASR-membership registration forms, and AASR-Newsletter 17 (May 2002).

### *Attendance*

Eighteen participants attended the meeting, including the AASR-President. Thirteen of the participants are Faculty Staff at five different tertiary institutions in Ghana. Two graduate students from the University of Ghana also participated. Two members of AASR Nigeria, who were attending a meeting of the West African Association of Theological Institutions in Ghana, also participated. Apologies were received from seven colleagues. Due to prior commitments, they could not attend the meeting.

### *Proceedings*

The meeting began with a Welcome Address by Rev. Prof. Elom Dovlo. He welcomed and introduced the AASR President, Prof. Jacob Olupona to the meeting. Prof. Dovlo thanked him for his initiative in suggesting that the meeting coincide with his visit to Ghana and for arranging the finances for it. He expressed the hope that the meeting will mark the beginning of sustained activity by AASR-Ghana. After the welcome address, the participants introduced themselves.

In his opening remarks, Prof. Jacob Olupona gave a brief background to the AASR and its objectives. He encouraged contemporary Ghanaian scholars to emulate the high standard and international reputation for scholarship

that Ghana was associated with in the 1960s through the works of scholars like Christian Baeta, Kwesi Dickson, Mercy Oduyoye and John S. Pobee. Prof. Olupona challenged AASR-Ghana to take ownership of scholarship on religions in the country by starting a Series on Religions in Ghana. He encouraged the branch to send regular reports of activities relating to religious studies in general for publication in the AASR Newsletter. He noted that in Africa, theological studies and constructive theology also form a focus in Religious Studies. So AASR-Ghana must be flexible in its recognition of the subject matter for the Study of Religions. He encouraged the branch to be gender sensitive and encourage the training of younger scholars.

*Paper presentations:*

In all six papers were presented as follows:

= 'The State of Religious Studies in Ghana: Exploring New Sources and Dimensions', by Rev. Dr. K. Asamoah-Gyadu, Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon;

= 'The Study of Islam in Ghana', by Hajj Mumuni Sulemana, Dept. for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana, Legon;

= 'The Study of The Bible at the University of Ghana: Past Present and Prospects', by Rev. Dr. B. Y. Quarshie, Dept. for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana, Legon;

= 'Methodological Issues in the Study of African Traditional Religion and Culture', by Rev. Dr. A. A. Akrong, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon;

= 'The Changing Scope in the Study of Religion at University of Cape Coast', by Yaw Sarkodie Agyeman, Department of Religions' Studies, University of Cape Coast;

= 'Doing Religious Studies in the Department for the Study of Religions at the University of Ghana, Legon', by Rev. Prof. Elom Dovlo, Dept. for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana, Legon.

The presentations were very stimulating and well received. Additional papers were invited, so that after peer-review and editing a volume on the theme will be published by AASR-Ghana. A deadline of Mid-October 2002 was set for the final drafts. The meeting broke for lunch at 2pm.

*Business Session*

The Business Session convened at 2.45pm. Prof. Jacob Olupona in his opening remarks informed the meeting about the Tokyo IAHR Congress due to take place in 2005. He encouraged members to start making arrangements to access funds for the meeting. He also noted the growing importance of Asia and the need for African scholars to engage in dialogue with Asia. He encouraged the creation of a database of scholars by the Ghana branch, which should be made available to the AASR. He also emphasised the need for the

branch to agree on an annual fee which, though it will be controlled by the branch itself, should be reported to the AASR treasurer. He again stressed the need to vigorously pursue a publication programme, and contribute to the AASR Newsletter.

### *Elections*

The following were elected as the Executive Committee of AASR-GHANA:

President: Rev. Prof. Elom Dovlo, University of Ghana

Vice-President: Rev. Dr. A.A. Akrong, University of Ghana

General Secretary: Rev. Dr. K. Asamoah Gyadu, Trinity Theological Seminary

Treasurer: Dr. R. Ganussah, University of Ghana

Chairman, Publication Committee: Dr. R. Asafo, Valley View College

Ex-Officio Members/ Area Representatives:

Cape Coast: Rev. Dr. Eric Anum

Kumasi/North: Dr. Samuel Adubofuor, Christian Service College

Members of Publications Committee:

Rev. Dr. Eric Anum, Dr. Rabiatu Ammah

The President constituted and mandated the Executive to run the affairs of the AASR-GHANA. There was a short brainstorming session on how to run AASR-Ghana and keep it active. The meeting ended at 4.30 pm.

### *Gratitude*

AASR Ghana is grateful to Prof. Olupona for his initiative in setting up the meeting and his personal financial support of \$500; The North America branch of the AASR for a donation of \$500 solicited on behalf of AASR Ghana by Prof. Olupona; Jan Platvoet for efforts that got the AASR-Newsletter in on time for the meeting; and o all colleagues who made time at short notice to attend the meeting, especially those who were able to present papers.

### *Participants*

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Gerrie ter Haar  
Institute of Social Studies, The Hague

## ISS-WORKSHOP IN GHANA, 4-9.11.2002

Under the auspices of the ISS Chair in Religion, Human Rights and Social Change a five days international workshop was held in Ghana on the issue of religion and human rights. The workshop took place from Monday 4th to Friday 8th November in the Marina Hotel in Dodowa near Accra, and was hosted by Prof. Elom Dovlo of the Department for the Study of Religions in the University of Ghana. Sixteen persons participated, half of them came from Ghana.

The workshop brought together all participants in a research network on religion and human rights that had been initiated under the auspices of the Chair. The research project aims at investigating basic concepts of human rights among religious communities, notably in Africa. It has been focusing in particular on African-initiated churches, which is an important but virtually unresearched area. In fact, our research reveals that these churches are aware of, and committed to, human rights issues, even if they are not conversant with international human rights instruments. However, the research also covers other areas that bring out the significance of religion in human rights issues, such as the unresolved issue of the SWAPO detainees.

The research was, and continues to be, carried out in collaboration with colleagues in departments for the study of religions in various African countries, notably in Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Namibia and South Africa. The network was expanded to West Papua, and will hopefully come to include other regions of the world in years to come.

Two vital questions have guided our work. First, how can religious resources present in any society be used for the protection and promotion of human rights? Secondly, how can religious communities, notably at the grassroot level, be mobilised for the sake of human rights? The research project, therefore, has been investigating concepts of human rights in a bottom-up approach. The underlying idea is contained in my inaugural address *Rats, Cockroaches and People like us: Views of Humanity and Human Rights* (April 2000).

Researchers from Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Namibia, West Papua and the Netherlands gathered for the workshop to share their provisional findings and discuss policy implications. The workshop was deliberately designed as a

meeting with a practical side to it, as the overall objective of the project is to contribute to a better understanding of the relationship between religion and human rights with a view to influence policies. The workshop therefore considered how religion can be incorporated as a relevant factor in policy discussions on human rights. The participants came up with a number of practical suggestions that are addressed to three major actors: departments of religious studies, churches and other religious organisations, and all those concerned with human rights advocacy. They will be further elaborated in the edited volume that is to emerge from the project.

The workshop consisted of two parts. The first three days were devoted to presentations and discussions of the research findings so far. We deliberately opted for a stocktaking not at the end of the project but during the process, in such a way as to be able to benefit from each other's comments. The second part of the week was devoted to an important social issue with serious human rights implications: the problem of witchcraft accusations in Africa. Apart from sharing our own knowledge and insights on the matter we had invited Ms Comfort Ntiamoah-Mensah, a development officer of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana, for a special presentation on the rehabilitation project of this church, which has been successfully intervening on behalf of the women accused as 'witches'. This is a life-saving project that not only deserves but urgently needs support from relevant bodies. I would therefore like to call on the NGO's that support the ISS Chair, notably ICCO, to consider to come to the project's aid. Policy recommendations can be made available to those interested.

The conference was opened by Mr. Emile Short, the Ghana Commissioner for Administrative Justice and Human Rights, an important and influential person who acts as a human rights ombudsman on behalf of the government. Both the opening and the closing of the meeting were reported with live interviews in the national news on the radio by Ghana Broadcast. A special programme will be devoted to the subject matter of the conference next week, including interviews with participants. The workshop and its subject matter were also reported in the *Daily Graphic*, the country's largest daily paper, as well as in the weekly *National Mirror*. In addition to the press coverage, the workshop participants produced a short report for dissemination in their countries of origin. They also published a press statement to attract the widest possible attention for a matter deemed so important.

All participants agreed that there is a need to increase awareness of human rights among religious communities, since human rights is a responsibility of all. They further agreed that human rights activists should not only use material but also spiritual resources to harness a better understanding of human rights. For further information or follow-up on the activities, please contact me by E-mail at <[terhaar@iss.nl](mailto:terhaar@iss.nl)>

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Ile-Ife, Nigeria

## AASR-WORKSHOP AT ILE-IFE, 10.10.2002

A workshop with the theme 'The Academic Study of Religions in Nigerian Universities and Colleges: Past, Present and Future', was organised under the auspices of the African Association for the Study of Religions on Thursday, 10 October 2002. The workshop was hosted by the Department of Religious Studies, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife. It was attended by scholars of religions from nine institutions in South-Western Nigeria.

The first session focused on the design and contents of Religious Studies curriculum, hence papers were presented on Religious Studies Curriculum, Graduate Studies in Religion, and Curriculum of Theological Institutions. The second session discussed the Integration of Current issues, and papers were presented on current issues in the following specialisations: Islam, African Traditional Religion, African Christianity, Biblical Studies, Sociological & Anthropological Study of Religion, and Feminist issues.

The third session was chaired by Professor J. K. Olupona, of the University of California, Davis, USA, who is the Chairperson of AASR. He highlighted the activities of AASR as a continental and international association providing networks, research, and publication opportunities for scholars of religion in various parts of the world. Plans are underway to publish the proceedings of the workshop.

After the workshop, a number of scholars indicated their interest in the AASR and submitted their particulars for future issues of the AASR-Newsletter. It was also agreed that each member will paid a sum of N1,000.00 per annum towards the administration of the newsletter. Further enquiries may be directed to Dr. Matthews A. Ojo at < matthews\_ojo@yahoo.com >



# CONFERENCES AHEAD

## THE GLOBALISATION & LOCALISATION OF RELIGIONS

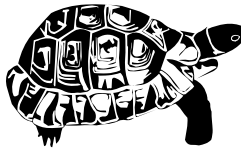
3<sup>RD</sup> EASR CONGRESS & IAHR SPECIAL CONFERENCE,  
BERGEN, NORWAY, 8-11 MAY 2003

The European Association for the Study of Religions will hold its Third Congress at the University of Bergen, in Norway, from 8 to 11 May 2003 in association with the IAHR and the Norwegian Association for the History of Religions. Its theme will be The Globalisation & Localisation of Religions.

Globalisation is understood here as referring to the effects which rapid means of communications and economic, political and cultural forces of integration are having on the interaction between religious traditions, their internal development, and on the emergence of new religious forms. Localisation is understood as referring to the accommodation and creative interpretation of larger religious traditions and trends within local contexts.

Proposals for papers and panel sessions may be sent to the Conference Organiser, Prof. Einar Thomassen, IKRR-Religion, Oisteinsgate 3, N-5007, Bergen, Norway; e-mail: < [ainar.thomassen@krr.uib.no](mailto:ainar.thomassen@krr.uib.no) >

The congress is also a Special IAHR Conference. It will serve as venue for a meeting of the IAHR-International Committee, the IAHR Executive Committee, and the Editorial Boards of *Numen* and the *Numen Book Series*. The next quinquennial IAHR-Congress in 2005 in Japan will be a major object of discussion and deliberation.



AFRICAN & AFRICAN-DERIVED  
RELIGIONS CONFERENCE  
BATH SPA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE,  
8-11 SEPTEMBER 2003

This conference was first announced in AASR-Newsletter 17 (May 2002): 20-21. Its four keynote speakers, and the subjects of their addresses, will be the following. Prof. **Rosalind Hackett**, University of Tennessee, will speak on 'Religious Conflict, with Special Reference to Nigeria'. Prof. **Gerrie ter Haar**, Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, will discuss 'African Religions and Human Rights'. Dr. **James Cox**, University of Edinburgh, will reflect on 'Issues in the Academic Study of African religions'. And Prof. **Elom Dovlo**, University of Ghana, will analyse 'Renewal Movements in African Traditional Religion'.

Proposal for papers and registration information should be sent to:  
Dr. Richard Hoskins, Study of Religions Dept., Bath Spa University College,  
Newton Park, Newton St Loe Bath, BA2 9BN, UK.  
E-mail: < [r.hoskins@bathspa.ac.uk](mailto:r.hoskins@bathspa.ac.uk) >



THIRD INTERNATIONAL  
INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE OF THE  
AFRICAN CHRISTIAN DIASPORA IN EUROPE  
11.-15. SEPTEMBER 2003, AT HIRSCHLUCH  
CONFERENCE CENTRE NEAR BERLIN, GERMANY

The Third International Interdisciplinary Conference of the African Christian Diaspora in Europe will be held at the Hirschluch Conference Centre, near

Berlin, in Germany, from 11 to 15 September 2003. The theme of the conference will be: 'The Berlin-Congo Conference of 1884: The Partition of Africa and its Implications for Christian Mission Today'.

The conference will be run under the auspices of the *Council of Christian Communities of an African Approach in Europe* (CCCAAE) in conjunction with Humboldt University, Berlin; Rostock University in the former Eastern Germany; and the Academy of Mission, Hamburg. The Council is a new venture which attempts to network between such different traditions as Protestants, Catholics, Orthodox, Evangelicals, Pentecostal-Charismatics, Sabbatarians, Spirituals and AICs, build bridges with the indigenous European churches, and focus on inclusion, not exclusion, in the spirit of Christ. It will hold its first General Assembly during the conference.

Next to the intentional expansion of religious movements by mission, peaceful or forced migration is one of the most significant factors bringing about religious dispersion. This is highlighted by the departure of African beyond the shores of their continent to other geo-cultural contexts. Africa, with the traumatic experience of the transatlantic slave trade as an unprecedented mode of forced exile, and with the new development of accelerated intercontinental migration in the context of globalisation, has gone through numerous phases of internal and external migration. This has effected the arrival and settlement of larger or smaller African migrant groups in Europe, and, in fact, the presence of religious traditions quite alien to European established religion. Consequently, scholars of religious, anthropological and theological studies now acknowledge, more than the churches, the significance of these 'religions on the move'. To avoid any misinterpretation and undue exploitation, such studies must be done in direct human encounter and with the African churches.

The Berlin conference is, therefore, the next in a series of at least five consultations (two of them international) on the significance of this phenomenon. Earlier ones took place in Leeds (UK) in 1997; Västerås (Sweden), Glay (France), Hamburg (Germany) in 1998; and Cambridge (UK) in 1999. With the establishment of the CCCAAE in 2001, with future headquarters in Berlin, there is now the nucleus of a Europe-wide African partner-organisation to explore this further and attempt to redeem the past. By linking the conference with the historical epoch after the Berlin Congo Conference of 1884, and the partition of Africa among European nations, the organisers intend to set a symbolic sign by serving as an interface between scholars in this field and religious practitioners: academia and grassroots pastors, oral and literary history and theology, European indigenous and African Christianity.

The aims of the conference are four. First, to examine the historical and socio-political consequences of the partition of Africa for the continent and the African Diaspora, highlighting issues such as migration, racism and sexism. Second, to look critically into the political role the Christian mission

played in colonising Africa, as well as into the paradigm shift in mission today locally and globally. Third, to inquire into the significance of the diverse indigenous movements (not least the Pentecostal ones), emanating from the Two-thirds-world in their struggle for survival in dignity, as well as their interaction with religious and secular European institutions. And four, to explore in all these aspects the practical consequences, and not least that of giving Black women a prominent place in the proceedings.

By pursuing these aims, the conference hopes to contribute to a new understanding of faith, to overcoming racial and cultural barriers, and to promoting intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in a polarised world. Resource people from Africa, America and the Caribbean are invited to highlight specific issues, as well as engage in a mutual exchange of ideas and experiences. The languages will be English and French with possible translation into German.

The conference organisers are Afe Adogame, Roswith Gerloff, Alimamy Sesay, and Andreas Feldtkeller.

The members of the Conference Committee are: Dr. Afe Adogame (Bayreuth), Revd. Dr. Kingsley Arthur (Berlin), Pasteur Dibudi Way-Way (Brussels), Prof. Dr. Andreas Feldtkeller (Berlin), Revd Dr. Roswith Gerloff (Leeds), Revd. Dr. Andreas Heuser (Hamburg), Prof. Dr. Klaus Hock (Rostock), Revd Dr Joseph Mudimba Kabongo (Geneva), Pasteur Dominique Kounkou (Paris), Lelo Matunde (Brussels), Pater Josef Rohmeyer (Berlin), Deacon Alimamy Sesay (Berlin), Dieudonné Tobbit (Berlin).

#### *Call for papers and reports*

All those interested in the topic are invited to attend the conference. Academic researchers as well as grassroots religious leaders are encouraged to participate actively in the consultation. They should indicate on their registration form (see below) whether they intend to contribute a scholarly paper, or a practical report from their area of work, church and community, or participate in some other way.

Registration forms and for further information, e.g. on financial assistance to low-income people, students, refugees, asylum-seekers, and pensioners may be obtained electronically from the conference organisers at:

< [roswithgerloff@onetel.net.uk](mailto:roswithgerloff@onetel.net.uk) >, or < [afe.adogame@uni-bayreuth.de](mailto:afe.adogame@uni-bayreuth.de) >.

Preliminary registration, and the topic of a paper, should reach the organisers at the latest by 15. February 2003, and an abstract of a paper by 30. March 2003! The organisers also will endeavour to sponsor a limited number of resource people from Africa, the Caribbean and America. Requests for a letter of invitation from the Humboldt University for obtaining visa may also be directed to the organisers. For more early information, visit < <http://www.-missio-religionum.de/diaspora> >, or < <http://www.multimania.com/ccceae> >.



BASR ANNUAL CONFERENCE

RELIGIONS IN TRANSITION:  
DIACHRONIC & SYNCHRONIC PERSPECTIVES

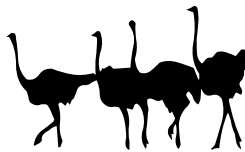
15-17 SEPTEMBER 2003

CHESTER COLLEGE OF HIGHER EDUCATION,  
CHESTER, UK

The Annual Conference 2003 of the British Association for the Study of Religions will discuss the dynamic character of religious change in the broadest possible sense, including, e.g., analyses of religious syncretism, transplantation, diaspora and emergent religion, and encounters among religious communities from historical perspectives and in contemporary situations. A full draft programme and registration details will be posted on the BASR-website < [www.basr.org.uk](http://www.basr.org.uk) >

Offers of papers and reports on work in progress should be sent before 1 May 2003 to Dr Ron Greaves, Dept of Theology & Religious Studies, University College Chester, Parkgate Road, Chester, CH1 4BJ, UK.

Bookings for registration should be directed before 15 July 2003 to Dr. Marion Bowman, BASR-Conference Organiser, Religious Studies Dept., The Open University, Walton Hall, Milton Keynes, MK7 6AA, UK.



## IAHR REGIONAL CONFERENCE

## RELIGIONS IN THE INDIC CIVILIZATION

INDIA INTERNATIONAL CENTRE,  
NEW DELHI, INDIA, DECEMBER 11- 14, 2003

*Theme & Aim of the Conference*

The Indic universe not only gave birth to four major world religions but also to numerous sects and schools of metaphysical thought. It has witnessed dramatic and sometimes cataclysmic encounters with non Indic/ Semitic religious traditions. This sub-continent also nurtured several persecuted religious traditions (e.g. Jews, Zoroastrians, Bahai'is) from different parts of the world. The process of their interaction transformed not just the Indic religious traditions but also the non-Indic ones. The subcontinent has also been a place for diverse communities to work out dynamic norms of co-living and modes of conversation, often altogether bypassing theological differences. Through this process, they evolved common cultural symbols, social-religious practices and codes of behaviour that made for easy and respectful co-existence between different communities, even while they retained their specific identities. Consequently, the dividing lines between various religious communities as well as between folk and classical religious traditions have retained a great deal of fluidity. And yet, the religious-ethnic communities living in the sub-continent as well as their inter relations have been viewed through simplistic and often misleading stereotypes.

This Conference aims at filling the gaps in social scientific studies of religion with respect to religious traditions in the Indic civilisation (Hinduism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism including their various sects and branches). It is also the intention of the Conference to establish a process for bringing together annually scholars in India working in the field of religion.

*Call for Papers, Panels, and Symposia*

Panels, symposia and individual papers are welcome on selected themes that include the following:

- = studies of traditional religious texts with special focus on the following themes: notions of hierarchy, common/public good, sharing of wealth, ecology, women's rights and gender relations, theories of kingship, justice and social order, *etc.*;
- = relations between religious communities, syncretic traditions and folk lore;

- = religious philosophy, custom, and indigenous social practice;
- = control and management of religious institutions in India- past and present;
- = politics of religious conversion;
- = religion, culture and space for dissent;
- = methodological issues relating to the study of religions in Indic civilisation

Proposals are invited for three kinds of presentations: panels; symposia; individual paper presentations. NB: Please note that those who wish to submit panels or symposia will have a total of two hours allocated for those sessions including presentation and discussion. The person who submits proposal for a panel or symposium will be considered the convenor and he or she should have at least two or three persons who would make presentations and one person to respond to the panel of speakers. Each speaker will have 20 minutes of presentation and the respondent will have 10 minutes to respond. The remaining 40 minutes will be devoted to discussion.

It will be the responsibility of the convenor of the panel or symposia to contact the speakers and the respondent and submit all the names in one form, as part of the abstract, to the organisers. The person who convenes a panel or symposium will also be the chair of the particular session concerned. The abstracts for panels or symposia should include information regarding the main title of the session and subtitles for each of the presentations.

Abstracts may be sent in by e-mail to <[iahr\\_csds@email.com](mailto:iahr_csds@email.com)>, or by ordinary mail to: The Programme Committee IAHR Conference, Centre for the Study of Developing Societies, 29, Rajpur Road, Delhi-110054, (India); or by Fax: +91 (11) 394 3450, before 31<sup>st</sup> October 2002. They will be confirmed before 31<sup>st</sup> December 2002.

#### *Registration, Accommodation & Organisation*

The registration fee for early registration (before 31<sup>st</sup> July 2003) is US\$ 175 for scholars from outside India. After that date, it is US\$ 200. The India International Centre, the venue of the conference, has comfortable air-conditioned rooms. The price for a single room is US\$ 40 (without breakfast); and for double occupancy US\$ 65 (without breakfast).

The Local Organisers are Madhu Kishwar (CSDS, Delhi) and Amarjiva Lochan (Delhi University). The members of the International Committee are Prof. P. Kumar, South Africa, (Chair); Prof. Armin Geertz (General Secretary of the IAHR); Ex-officio Prof. Abraham Khan (Canada).

For further information, visit: <<http://dreamwater.net/iahrind/>>; or contact Prof. P. Kumar, Director, School of Religion and Culture, University of Durban-Westville, Private BagX54001, Durban, 4000 South Africa, Tel: 027-31-204-4539 (work), Fax: 027-31-204-4160 (work). Inquiries may also be sent to Dr. Madhu Kishwar at <[madhuk@csdsdelhi.org](mailto:madhuk@csdsdelhi.org)>.

UPDATES  
AASR-REGISTER OF MEMBERS  
2001

SOUTHERN AFRICA

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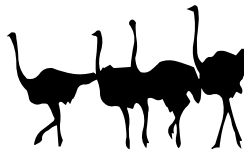
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# ON THE INTERNET

## RELIGIOSCOPE A NEW WEBSITE ON RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS IN TODAY'S WORLD

A new website on religious affairs in the modern world has been launched: Religioscope. Its internet address is: < <http://www.religioscope.com/> >. Its primary language is French, but it will be developed into a multilingual site with the help of native English speakers. In addition, the French version will also feature some articles in English, and a special section listing the material available in English will be maintained on the website for the benefit of English-speaking visitors. Those with no, or little command of French, may visit: < <http://www.religioscope.com/intro/english.htm> >.

On that site, the following articles are available on line:

- = 'Faraj and the Neglected Duty: Interview with Prof. J.J.G. Jansen'. Jansen is author of *The Dual Nature of Islamic Fundamentalism* and *The Neglected Duty* about the creed of Sadat's assassins. The interview is a key text for understanding the background of the so-called 'jihadism';
- = the full text of 'Join the Caravan', the manifesto of Abdullah Azzam, which has been rather difficult to find since September 11, 2001;
- = an interview with Prof. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi about Sayyid Qutb!

In addition, there are English announcements in the multilingual Calendar (Agenda). If you are looking for the next academic conference on Pentecostalism, or religion in Europe, a symposium about the history of Jews in China, or the next North American Zoroastrian conference, this is the place for finding out when it is and where! Let me know if you hear about some interesting meeting, which you feel should be included in the calendar.

While much of the material currently posted deals with Islam related topics, the website will deal with a variety of religious traditions. If you want to know when new material is posted on the website, you can subscribe automatically. If you subscribe in French on: < <http://www.religioscope.com/inscription.htm> >, you will get messages in French listing all the new material (in French, English or other languages). If you subscribe in English on: < [http://www.religioscope.com/inscription.htm#email\\_english](http://www.religioscope.com/inscription.htm#email_english) >, you will be notified only about new material in English. Do not hesitate to subscribe. You can remove your address automatically at any time, and your address will not be shared with third parties. For further information, you may contact Jean-Francois Mayer at his e-mail address: < [JFM@mcnet.ch](mailto:JFM@mcnet.ch) >.

## BOOK REVIEW

J.G. Platvoet

AASR-Newsletter Editor

### 300 YEARS GHANA-HOLLAND

Kessel, Ineke van, (ed.), 2002, *Merchants, Missionaries & Migrants: 300 Years of Dutch-Ghanaian Relations*. Legon: Sub-Saharan Publishers (PO Box 358, Legon, Accra; ISBN 9988 550 77 4); Amsterdam: KIT Publishers, 159 pp., 28 full colour + 29 black & white illustrations, 3 historical maps, ISBN 90 6832 523 X (hard cover), Euro 29,00

On 7 November 2001, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs sponsored a conference in The Hague, The Netherlands, on the various aspects of 'three centuries' –actually four– of relationships between Ghana and the Netherlands: commercial, diplomatic, religious and migratory, on which I reported in AASR-Newsletter 15/16: 17-19. This is the beautifully produced proceedings of that conference, which has been sponsored by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs too.

The main title indicates the three parts of the book. Part I deals with the commercial and diplomatic relations between the Netherlands and the Gold Coast, nowadays Ghana, since 1593 when the first Dutch ship sailed to it to trade for gold dust and ivory (11-13). It has five articles. In the first, the full period, 1593 to now, is surveyed by Michel Doortmont, University of Groningen (19-31). He pays special attention to the 'Euro-Africans', the powerful merchant class in Elmina and other coastal towns in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, which descended from marriages of Dutch traders and soldiers with local women (23-26). He also notes that the Dutch, who outlawed the slave trade in 1814, negotiated a contract with the Asantehene in 1837 for the delivery of 1,000 recruits for military service in the Dutch colonial army in the Dutch 'East Indies', now Indonesia (28, 136). In the second article, Akosua Perbi (University of Ghana, Legon) examines the internal organisation of the slave trade in the Gold Coast by means of as many as sixty-three slave markets, inland and coastal (33-39). Both she and Doortmont emphasise that the slave trade was between equal partners, and highly profitable for both the local traders and the Dutch (22, 31, 38, 39).

The four centuries of Dutch-Ghanaian relations are reduced to three in the subtitle of the book in order to highlight David van Nyendael's embassy to Kumasi in 1701-1702. His visit is symbolic because it initiated a solid, po-

litical and commercial bond of the Dutch and the people of Elmina on the coast with the landlocked state of Asante in the hinterland. It lasted till 1872 when the Dutch withdrew from the Gold Coast (11). Henk den Heijer (University of Amsterdam) provides a biography of David van Nyendaël (ca. 1667-1702), and an analysis of his visit to the court of the Asantehene on the basis of Dutch archives (41-49). Den Heijer suggests, *pace* Bosman (1705/1967: 76-77), that Van Nyendaël, though he had provided Bosman with a detailed report on Benin (Bosman 1705/1967: 423-468), did not keep a diary during his stay in Kumasi, and that his 'lost report' will therefore never be found (45, 47).

After 1872, ties between the Netherlands and the Gold Coast were not completely severed, for consular relations were maintained in the Gold Coast, e.g. for the former soldiers who had served in the Dutch East Indies. They had mainly been settled on 'Java Hill' in Elmina after their return (141). The Javanese calico wax prints they brought home (138) proved immensely popular and have ever since been an important Dutch import article into the Gold Coast/Ghana, and into other parts of West Africa. It is unfortunate that Vlisco's booming business in 'real Dutch Java prints' in Ghana and elsewhere is passed over in silence in this book. Two other important trade relations are, however, dealt with in part I: the export of Dutch *jenever* to Ghana, and the export of cocoa from Ghana to the Netherlands.

In the fourth article, Emanuel Akyempong (Harvard University) deals with the import of spirits into the Gold Coast/Ghana: rum, gin, geneva, and beer. He provides a brilliant history of the Gold Coast/Ghana as successively a rum, gin, and beer drinking nation. He analyses the vicissitudes by which Dutch geneva (*jenever* from Schiedam) acquired the position of *Ahenfo Nsa*, 'the Drink of Kings', after 1930. In the past half century, it became a set custom for traditional leaders to perform libations in honour of God, the gods, the ancestors, the recently deceased, the newly born, or in any other rite of passage only with 'Dutch Aromatic Schnapps' (51-59). The fifth article, by Victor K. Nyanteng (University of Ghana, Legon), surveys Ghana's cocoa trade, and the important share of Dutch firms in it after World War II (61-69).

Part II, on 'missionaries', consists of three articles. Two deal with Jacobus Eliza Johannes Capitein (1717-1747), who dismally failed to make true his dream of being a missionary to his own people. The life of this former slave boy, who achieved his freedom by being taken to the Netherlands by his owner, is described by the journalist Henri Van der Zee (73-79). As the first black student in theology at Leiden University from 1737 to 1742, Capitein achieved great fame at that time in The Netherlands by completing his studies with an essay on 'slavery not being in conflict with Christian liberty'. His theology of slavery is analysed by David Kpobi (University of Ghana, Legon) (81-87). Capitein held that slave trade was compatible with Christianity and could be practised alongside its propagation among Africans, be-

cause conversion to Christianity demanded only an inner, spiritual, and not an outer freedom' (82). So, slaves could be converted without property damage to their owners and the slave traders. Kpobi suggests that Capitein was under pressure to endorse the opinion, current among lawyers and theologians in The Netherlands in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, on slavery as an acceptable and justifiable practice, being legitimised in the Bible in the 'curse of Ham' (Gen. 9: 25) and in the letters of Paul (e.g., I Cor. 7: 22-23), and for other reasons (82-84).

The West Indian Company (WIC) never made any attempts to convert the native population to Christianity (101). As vicar at the WIC headquarters in Elmina from October 1742 to early 1747, Capitein certainly meant to be a missionary to his own people, and perhaps even to the slaves in the dungeons under his quarters in the castle. For he 'started to translate [...] documents of Reformed doctrine into the local Fanti language', had them printed in the Netherlands, and used them in his school, to which he admitted not only mulatto but also African children (76, 87, 106). But as a puritan parson, and an African to boot, he met with his doom soon, for several reasons. The Dutch inmates of the castle brooked no reproach of their 'immoral' lifestyles from him and were very insolent and extremely hostile towards him (78). His request that he, like everyone else, be allowed to marry an African woman, was bluntly refused (76). At Elmina Castle, he was confronted with the de-humanising practice of the slave trade as it was actually conducted. Lastly, as soon as he gave in to that other common temptation, and practice, of every other inmate of the Castle, private trading, he accumulated large debts, for which he was convicted in a humiliating trial in December 1746. Briefly afterwards, on the 1<sup>st</sup> February 1747, he was found dead. Van der Zee writes that he 'almost certainly' took his own life in despair (79).

The third article, by Rijk van Dijk (African Studies Centre at Leiden), deals with the Ghanaian minority in the Netherlands and its odd forty Pentecostal churches (89-97). They were founded in the train of the immigration of the numerous young Ghanaians into the Netherlands in search for jobs, since 1974 but especially in the past two decades. 13.000 of them have so far obtained legal residence in the Netherlands, but another unknown number are 'undocumented', and therefore illegal, immigrants. Whereas the former are 'by and large well-integrated' into Dutch society, most having acquired Dutch citizenship (90), the others, who also aspire to obtain work and other permits, are severely harassed by Dutch civil authorities in their attempts to stem the 'flood' of illegal immigrants. The verification procedures, to which these Ghanaians are subjected, e.g. the investigation of their identities back home in Ghana, are experienced by them as humiliating (91-94). Van Dijk regards the Ghanaian Pentecostal churches in the Netherlands as the havens in which these ambitious young Ghanaians can recover from the humiliations to which they are subjected by Dutch society: 'what Ghanaian men and women

lacked in the outside world is being created inside the church community' (96).

Van Dijk deals only with this psychological function *ad intra*, and fails to note any ambition *ad extra* which these Pentecostal churches may entertain, e.g. that of the 'reverse mission' to re-convert Dutch secularised society (13). One may question, therefore, whether this chapter should have been included in part II, on 'missionaries'. In my view, it should have been inserted into part III, on 'migrants'. One may also wonder whether part II deals with 'missionaries' at all, for this reason and two other reasons. One is Capitein's utter failure to realise his missionary dream. The other is that the one successful Dutch missionary enterprise in Ghana, that of the numerous Dutch Roman Catholic priests, lay brothers and nuns, who came to Ghana after 1920, is not examined in this part. This 'extraordinary outburst of missionary fervour', by which the large RC Church in Ghana's Twi and Ewe speaking parts was established, is only mentioned in passing in the editor's introduction (13).

Part III, on migrants, voluntary and involuntary, has six chapters. In the first, Nathalie Evers (Leiden University) explores the (atypical) life stories of two Euro-African women, Helena van der Burgh, and Wilhemina van Naarsen, who were both sent to the Netherlands to receive a Christian education (101-109). Helena, who was a free woman, first lived in Amsterdam from 1685 to 1712, where she was baptised, went to school, married a goldsmith, and became a widow in 1712. She returned to Elmina in that year at the request of her African mother. In 1715, she married the minister of Elmina Castle, Ludovicus Adama. He died in 1719, and in 1723 she sailed again for Amsterdam, together with the five year old Wilhelmina, who was a slave but became a free person, at least in the Netherlands, by accompanying her father, Carel van Naarssen, there. Helena returned to Elmina again in 1726, bringing the ten-year old Wilhelmina with her as her adopted daughter. There she used her position as the former vicar's wife to obtain a formal deed, in which Wilhelmina's freedom from slavery was recognised also in Elmina. Wilhelmina used it, first to marry a junior Dutch merchant in WIC service, and later, after his death and Helena's, to marry the surgeon of the castle and return with him to Europe in 1751.

In the second and third contributions to part III, the historian Jean Jacques Vrij and the Winti traditional healer André M. Pakosie discuss links established by the slave trade between the Gold Coast and the Dutch plantation colony of Surinam. Vrij examines data in Dutch colonial archives about slaves with an Akan background in Surinam by means of another set of atypical cases (110-119). As they all spoke Akan dialects, they were counted there as one 'nation', that of the 'Coromantees' (*Kormantijnen*). Many of them fled from the plantations and joined the Maroon societies of fugitives in the hinterland. Pakosie, himself of Maroon descent, traces the many elements of Akan culture preserved in Maroon matrilineal social structure, religion,

system of authority, manner of punishment of crimes, ritual language, names and drum language (121-131).

In the fourth and fifth articles, Ineke van Kessel (African Studies Centre, Leiden) and Endri Kusruri (Salatiga, Indonesia) explore the history of the Indo-Africans, whose forefathers were recruited in the Gold Coast between 1831 and 1872, and in particular in Asante between 1837 and 1841, for military service in the Dutch colonial army in the 'East Indies' (now Indonesia). Van Kessel describes the recruitment of these 3,000 soldiers, the contract under which they served in that army, and the peculiar position they held in it as *Belanda Hitam*, 'Black Dutchmen' (132-141). Most of them married Javanese or Indo-European women, were baptised, and opted not to return to the Gold Coast after their term of service. They became the founders of Indo-African communities in five garrison towns in Java, the most important being that in Purworejo, where they had been given a plot of land in 1859 on which they built their own *Kampung Afrika*. Its history has been investigated by Kusruri (142-149). In 1939, it housed 25 families and 88 persons. The sons and grandsons served in the colonial army by tradition, spoke Dutch, attended Dutch schools, and became Dutch nationals. Nurturing a Dutch identity, they became oblivious of their African roots. After Indonesia's independence in 1949, most of them opted for 'repatriation' to the Netherlands. Those who stayed on in Indonesia were forced to leave after 1956. Only in the late 1970s did they begin to rediscover their Ghanaian background. More recently, they have re-established contact with Elmina, where in 2002 a Java Museum, devoted to these 'Black Dutchmen', has been opened (141, 144).

Part III, and the book, is concluded by an examination by Daniel Kojo Arhinful (Amsterdam School of Social Research) of the money transferred by Ghanaians in the Netherlands to their relatives in Ghana, and how traditional social networks operate in the context of international migration (151-159). After cocoa and gold export, money transfers from Ghanaians abroad are Ghana's most important source of foreign currency. Arhinful views migration as strengthening, instead of destroying, social ties between the migrants and their relatives back home. Their money transfers in particular have 'kept family ties intact'. Main purposes which these money transfers serve are the building of a house and assisting other relatives to travel abroad also (158-159).

This conference and book, and the visits of the Dutch prince royal to Ghana in April 2002, and of the Asantehene to the Netherlands in June 2002, show that the tie between Ghana and the Netherlands continues to be cultivated, particularly at the diplomatic and commercial levels. Maroon and Creole descendants from slaves carried to Surinam, now living in the Netherlands, have recently become aware of the part Africans played in the slave trade. Some of them refused to attend receptions in honour of the Asantehene, as neither he,

nor modern Ghana, nor the Netherlands have offered apologies for their share in the slave trade so far.

## AFRICA & ITS RELIGIONS IN FICTION

Because this issue was growing oversized, the Editors have decided to transfer the review of a novel on the religions of Africa and Africans to AASR-Newsletter 19 (May 2003).

In it, Arthur Japin's *The Two Hearts of Kwasi Boakye* (London etc.: Vintage, 2000, ISBN 0-09-928787-0, £ 6.90) will be discussed. It will be reviewed against the background of historical studies on why the Kwaku Dua Panin (1797-1867), Asantehene from 1834 to 1867, sent his son Kwasi Boakye (1827-1904) for education to the Netherlands in 1837, together with his matrilineal nephew and possible claimant to the 'golden stool', Kwame Poku (1827-1850). The latter returned to the Gold Coast in late 1847, after having received a military training in the Netherlands. He committed suicide in Elmina on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 1850, most likely because he felt that he had been deprived of any hope for a normal career in Dutch colonial military service, and also of prospects of ever returning to Kumase to play a meaningful role there. Kwasi Boakye was trained as a mining engineer. He left the Netherlands in 1850, not for gold mining in the Gold Coast, but for coal-mining on Java. He too was frustrated in his career by the racial prejudices of some of his superiors, and withdrew from government service in 1857 to become a tea- and coffee-planter.

This review will not be the only carry-over of this AASR-Newsletter, for Cephas Omenyo's book on the Pentecostalisation of the mainline churches of Ghana will also be discussed in it. AASR-Newsletter 19 will, therefore, carry the title 'Focus on Ghana, II'.





# RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON THE RELIGIONS OF AFRICA

- Abrahams-Willis, Gabeba, 2000, 'Slave Lodge to Become a Major Tourism Magnet: Preliminary Report on Year 2000 Excavations', in *The Quarterly Bulletin of the National Library of South Africa* 54, 4 (June 2000): 134-143.
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