

**An Informal Report**  
**From a meeting held on Monday, 20 November 2017 in**  
**Boston, MA, USA**  
**On the occasion of the 2017 AAR/SBL Annual Meeting**

**General Secretary: Corey L. Williams**

***Introduction***

Due to a number of concurrent sessions related to (the study of) African religions, the AASR business meeting that was scheduled attracted a low number of attendees (7 total). As a result, the AASR President (Elias Bongmba) and I decided to cancel the official business meeting. This is an informal report of our brief conversation.

***Announcements***

A couple of important announcements were made:

- AASR members should be aware that the AAR has a travel grant program to assist with the participation of underrepresented minorities at the annual AAR conference. For further details, see: <https://www.aarweb.org/programs-services/annual-meeting-travel-grant-program>
- The AASR Paypal account is working again. This can be used to pay annual dues and conference fees.

***Thematic Proposals for the 2018 AAR/SBL Conference***

Two thematic proposals for AASR panels at the 2018 AAR conference were made by those in attendance:

- An author meets critic session focused on *City of 201 Gods: Ile-Ife in Time, Space, and the Imagination* by Jacob K. Olupona.
- The state of African Religions in (global) higher education.

***Future Issues for the Next Business Meeting***

The next business meeting will be held at the 8<sup>th</sup> AASR conference in Lusaka, Zambia in August 2018. This meeting will include a number of critical discussions, including:

- The possibility of adding ‘diaspora’ to the name of the AASR. One suggestion is: Association for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora (ASRAD).
- Adding a PhD Representative to the Executive Committee. This person would be specifically tasked with initiatives to involve younger scholars.
- A report from the committee formed in Ghana that discussed:
  - Delineating the duties of the Vice-President.
  - Structural issues related to AASR representatives.
  - How to raise funds for the association.
  - Student award and/or book and paper award.

**Minutes of the AASR Business Meeting**  
**Held on Thursday, 2 August 2018 from**  
**17:30-18:45 at**  
**Justo Mwale University**  
**Lusaka, Zambia**  
**On the occasion of the 8<sup>th</sup> AASR Conference in Africa**

**General Secretary: Corey L. Williams**

***Opening and Welcome***

The business meeting commenced at 17:30 with the AASR Executive Committee presiding over the meeting. There were 48 people in attendance. AASR President, Elias Bongmba, welcomed everyone to the meeting, briefly reflecting on the successful conference so far in Lusaka. He also extended a special thanks to Marja Hinfelaar and the entire Local Organizing Committee for their tremendous efforts in organizing the 8<sup>th</sup> AASR conference in Lusaka. Finally, he recognized the presence of IAHR President, Tim Jensen, and IAHR Acting Secretary General, Satoko Fujiwara, and extended a special welcome to them.

***Adoption of Minutes from Previous AASR Business Meetings***

The AASR General Secretary, Corey Williams, referenced the minutes of two previous AASR business meetings and asked for their adoption. This included the minutes from the 7<sup>th</sup> AASR Conference in Ghana (published in AASR Bulletin 45) and the 2016 AAR/SBL meeting in San Antonio (published in AASR Bulletin 46). He then asked all AASR members in attendance to indicate their support with a motion of 'all in favor'. A majority of members raised their hands in support and the minutes were adopted.

***Report from the President***

The AASR President noted that the AASR continues to be very active and productive. He noted the success of the 7<sup>th</sup> AASR Conference that took place in Ghana in 2016. The theme of the conference was "Religion, Sexuality, and Identity in Africa and the African Diaspora". 27 Panels constituted the academic discussion of the conference and on these panels, 114 members of the Association made presentations. He reflected that the highlight of the conference was a visit to the historic Cape Coast, where members toured the so-called slave castles such as Elmina, an experience that shook many of those who participated in the excursion.

Since the Ghana conference, the AASR has been actively involved in organizing panels at the annual conferences of the African Studies Association (ASA) and the joint meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). In total, in 2016 and 2017, the AASR organized 7 panels and 2 co-sponsored panels at these conferences.

The President extended special congratulations to the following colleagues:

1. Professor Gerrie ter Haar of Erasmus University Rotterdam has been honored with a Life Membership in the IAHR for her research and promotion of the study of religion.
2. Professor Musa Dube of the University of Botswana has been awarded an honorary Doctor of Theology from the University of Cape Town in March 2018.
3. Professor Elias Kifon Bongmba of Rice University has been awarded an honorary Doctor of Theology from Lund University in Sweden in May 2018.
4. Professor Afe Adogame of Princeton Theological Seminary has been awarded an extraordinary professorship at Stellenbosch University.
5. Professor Jacob Olupona of Harvard University has been awarded the Martin E. Marty award for the Public Understanding of Religion from the American Academy of Religion.

### ***Report from the General Secretary***

The General Secretary extended a special thanks to the Local Organizing Committee in Zambia. He noted that given the ongoing situation in Cameroon, a switch of conference location became necessary and the Zambia team, led by Marja Hinfelaar, did an incredible job putting everything together in a relatively short amount of time.

He went on to remind those present about the various ways in which information is recorded and communicated to AASR members. The business meeting minutes are published regularly in the AASR Bulletin and general emails are sent on a semi-regular basis (usually only a few times per year). These emails contain only the most critical information. For the most up to date information about the broader academic field, however, the AASR website and social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) should be utilized. This is where members can find regular updates about conferences, funding opportunities, recent publications, member news, etc., which is managed by the AASR Webmaster, Sara Fretheim.

Lastly, the General Secretary encouraged conference attendees to consider submitting written conference reports (500 – 1,000 words) for inclusion in the next AASR Bulletin and/or the AASR website. These reports should reflect upon the various conference experiences, including academic, social, and cultural events.

### ***Report from the Treasurer***

The Treasurer, Abel Ugba, gave the following report on the financial status of the AASR. At the end of 2016, the account had £2,778.72. In 2017, there were deposits of £2,807.23 (including £1507.84 received by the IAHR for funding the Zambia conference). There were no withdrawals in 2017 and by the end of the year the account had £5,585.95.

The Treasurer reminded everyone to pay his or her annual dues. There are several ways of doing this: PayPal, transferring directly into the AASR bank account, or if neither of these two methods is feasible, through an AASR national or regional representative.

One AASR member had a question about how many members are paying their annual dues. The Treasurer responded that it is inconsistent. Members are good about paying their dues during the year the AASR organizes a conference in Africa, but not during the year(s) when there is no conference. However, he noted that the AASR is in an improved financial state compared to 2-3 years ago.

### ***Report from the Editor-in-Chief of the AASR E-Journal***

The Editor-in-Chief of the AASR E-Journal, Afe Adogame, stated that the journal can be found on the AASR website. It is open access and peer reviewed. There are typically two kinds of submissions: (1) individual/joint articles; or (2) special issues. For the special issues, it is possible to be invited as a Guest Editor where you solicit the articles and write an Editorial. For instance, the latest special issue is the result of a conference in Ethiopia. Afe noted that the next special issue will be published by the end of 2018 or early 2019 and is dedicated to AASR member, Dr. Jan Platvoet.

### ***Update on the Ghana Committee***

A committee (consisting of Jan Platvoet, David Ogunbile, Adriaan van Klinken, and Loreen Maseno) that was formed at the 7<sup>th</sup> AASR Conference in Ghana was tasked with looking into the following issues:

- Delineating the duties of the AASR Vice-President.
- Structural issues related to AASR representatives.
- How to raise funds for the association.
- Publication strategies.
- The possibility of implementing a student award and/or book or paper award at the AASR Conferences in Africa.
- The possibility of adding 'diaspora' to the name of the AASR. One suggestion is: Association for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora (ASRAD).
- Adding a PhD Representative to the Executive Committee. This person would be specifically tasked with initiatives to involve younger scholars.
- Appointing a financial secretary/auditor to assist the Treasurer with AASR finances. The Treasurer reported that this would mean that a second pair of eyes would be on the finances, which would hopefully engender greater confidence in the accounting process. The individual(s) would also assist with membership fee collection and in conjunction with the General Secretary would assist in keeping track of the membership registry.

Since the Ghana conference, Jan Platvoet has written a paper that explored some of the historical issues and how these relate to contemporary challenges. This has been released in the AASR Bulletin. Following this, a draft proposal was put together, but the chair of the committee, Jan Platvoet, had to resign from the committee. David Ogunbile has since stepped up to fill the chair position. The committee proposes that they need a new committee member and requests at least another 12 months to respond to these issues. Rosalind Hackett was subsequently nominated and accepted the nomination to serve on the committee. Regarding the timeline, it was decided that the committee should report on these matters at the AASR Conference in 2020.

### ***AASR Bulletin***

The future of the AASR Bulletin was briefly discussed and it was decided that the association would continue to publish one issue in December each year. The publication will continue to be made available on the AASR website.

### ***Nominations Committee for AASR Elections in 2020***

With AASR elections coming up in 2020, it was necessary to form a nominations committee to facilitate the election process. The following AASR members were nominated and accepted their nomination:

- Marja Hinfelaar
- Adriaan van Klinken
- Njoki Wane
- Danoye Oguntola-Laguda
- Chammah Kaunda
- Rose Mary Amenga-Etego

### ***Location of the 9<sup>th</sup> AASR Conference in Africa***

Before taking suggestions from the floor, the AASR Executive noted that the association continues to be interested in breaking into Francophone Africa.

Gerrie ter Haar and Corey Williams made a case for hosting the conference in **Senegal**. While the AASR doesn't have a membership there and there are not Religious Studies departments, they have very good facilities and many AASR members have research interests and networks in the country. It is also a wonderful place and given the Muslim majority this could present interesting opportunities in terms of balancing out the focus of different African religious traditions.

Afe Adogame said that we could explore Senegal as an option while looking to North Africa as a plan B. In particular, we could look at **Morocco** or **Tunisia**, where the AASR has had members from in recent years. It was noted that there is now an MA in African Studies in Tunisia, so we could look at cooperating with colleagues in that programme.

Damaris Parsitau seconded the suggestion of **Senegal**. She noted that having CODESRIA based in Dakar means that there are really interesting opportunities to cooperate with colleagues in the broader social sciences. She also suggested **Ethiopia** as an option.

Professor Bernard Boyo, Deputy VC at Daystar University, proposed that his university would be willing to host in Nairobi, **Kenya**.

Afe Adogame suggested that the Executive Committee explore the different options, while prioritizing the interest of hosting in a Francophone country.

The Executive Committee agreed and said that they would give an update at the Business Meeting due to take place in November 2018 at the AAR/SBL Conference.

### ***Report from the IAHR***

The Acting Secretary General of the IAHR, Satoko Fujiwara, expressed thanks to the AASR Executive Committee and the Local Organizing Committee. She noted that the 22<sup>nd</sup> Quinquennial World Congress is due to take place at the University of Otago in New Zealand from 23-29 August 2020. The theme of the Congress is: Centres and Peripheries. More information is available on the Congress website. Satoko also referenced the 8<sup>th</sup> SSEASR Conference taking place in Dacca, Bangladesh from 6-9 June 2019, as well as upcoming collaborations such as the IAHR-NAASR Co-sponsored Conference and the IAHR-SBL Special Conference. Lastly, she announced the AAR Collaborative International Research Grant scheme, which could be interesting for many AASR members.

The President of the IAHR, Tim Jensen, expressed that he greatly enjoys reading the AASR publications (including the AASR Bulletin), as they keep him up to date with all of the critical details and activities of the association. He noted that the IAHR still has one print publication that is published every five years, but that they also keep a catalogue of past publications on the IAHR website that are open access. He also mentioned that the IAHR continues to prioritize using some of its funds to assist its member associations in organizing conferences and that he looks forward to further cooperation between the IAHR and AASR. Lastly, Tim said that he was delighted to be in Lusaka with the AASR and appreciated the invitation from the AASR Executive.

### ***Closing***

What followed briefly was a moment of disagreement regarding the IAHR's intentions to become a truly global organization. A couple of AASR members expressed frustration with the IAHR's slow progress on this point. Yet, as the conversation became heated, the AASR President said that while such a debate was welcome, this was not the time nor place to have this type of conversation. With that, the AASR President motioned to close the Business Meeting. The conference dinner followed at a nearby restaurant.

**Minutes of the AASR Business Meeting**  
**Held on Monday, 19 November 2018 in**  
**Denver, Colorado, USA**  
**On the occasion of the 2018 AAR/SBL Annual Meeting**

**General Secretary: Corey L. Williams**

***Opening and Welcome***

The business meeting commenced at 10:45 AM with the President, Elias Bongmba, the Vice President, Damaris Parsitau, and the General Secretary, Corey Williams, presiding over the meeting. There were 27 people in attendance. The President opened the meeting on behalf of the AASR Executive and thanked everyone for attending and participating in the AAR/SBL conference.

***AAR/SBL 2019 Thematic Proposals***

The President opened up the floor for any ideas related to sessions for the 2019 AAR/SBL Annual Meeting in San Diego. Those in attendance proposed the following ideas:

- Religion and Violence (or perhaps conflict to broaden the topic):
  - o Boko Haram in Nigeria. Getting an update on the situation.
  - o Violence in West Africa/Nigeria.
  - o Violence instigated by religion.
  
- Religion and Governance:
  - o What role is religion playing in governance? Function and dysfunction.
  - o Accountability and corruption; interaction between religious and political entrepreneurs.
  - o Corruption in religious bodies.
  
- Transformations:
  - o Not just continuity and change, but what elements have changes brought about.
  - o Positive changes brought by African Religions.
  
- Relationship of Africa and Israel:
  - o Pilgrimages
  - o Political understandings
  
- Issue of Tithes:
  - o Issues of exploitation, Biblical teachings, how tithes are used, etc.
  - o Broader idea: religion and economy.
  
- Accountability and Failed States:
  - o Ex. Congo and peacekeeping efforts.

- Music:
  - Issues surrounding music and African spirituality.
- Law and Religion in Africa:
  - Perpetuation of violence, corruption, borders, etc.
- General structural point:
  - It was suggested that we identify 2-3 countries that are implicated in these themes.
    - Ex. Religion and Governance—Rwanda closing down churches; comparison with Nigeria.
  - Then seek case studies that will allow for empirical comparison.

Adriaan van Klinken noted that we should collaborate with the African Religions Unit and the African Diaspora Religions Unit before we finalize our Call for Papers. As well, given the broader interests of the AASR, we should keep in mind the possibility of having themes that cross over to the interests of the SBL.

### ***2020 AASR Conference in Africa***

The Executive Committee announced that the next AASR Conference in Africa is planned for Dakar, Senegal in the summer of 2020. The association is planning to collaborate with CODESRIA. The Vice President reported that she has been in consultation with the Executive Director of CODESRIA and that the organisation has tentatively accepted our request to collaborate. CODESRIA is having their General Assembly meeting in December 2018 where our request will be formally discussed. This means that discussions can begin in earnest starting in January 2019.

The Vice President noted that CODESRIA is a pan-African organization, so whichever theme is chosen needs to speak to pan-African issues. One potential theme is: Governance and Social Transformations.

### ***AASR e-Journal***

The Editor-in Chief of the AASR e-journal, Afe Adogame, gave a brief update about the activities of the journal. Afe noted that the next issue is due to be released in late 2018 or early 2019 and is a special issue dedicated to Jan Platvoet. There are two special issues related to the Nagel Institute Templeton research projects that are set for release in 2019. These will be on Christianity and Social Change in Contemporary Africa and on Literature and Music in Africa. Finally, Afe encouraged everyone to think about putting together future special issues related to their own research and research networks.

### ***AASR Website and Social Media***

Sara Fretheim, the AASR Webmaster, announced that she is open to suggestions for making better use of the website and social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter). If anyone has ideas, they can contact Sara at [sj.fretheim@gmail.com](mailto:sj.fretheim@gmail.com).

### **General Announcements**

- Edward Curtis, Editor of *Journal of Africana Religions*, made an appeal for articles and roundtables.
  - o For further information, see: [http://www.psupress.org/Journals/jnls\\_JAR.html](http://www.psupress.org/Journals/jnls_JAR.html).
- Sara Fretheim announced a conference in Ghana from 24-26 July 2019 on ‘African Music, Language, Literature, and Prayer Repertoires: Exploring Indigenous Epistemologies and Spiritualities’. Here is the CfP: <http://www.a-asr.org/cfp-african-language-literature-music-prayer-repertoires/>.
- Joel Carpenter, Director of the Nagel Institute for the Study of World Christianity, announced that 16 projects have been granted funding for the African Theological Advance Initiative—a number of which include AASR members. These projects were selected from over 100 submissions.
  - o For further information about the funded projects to date, see: <https://calvin.edu/centers-institutes/nagel-institute/projects/african-advance/awarded-grants/>.
  - o As the website indicates: ‘Each of these projects will produce multiple publications, host conferences and workshops, and develop new theological curriculum. The project leaders (PL) from these proposals will meet together for a developmental workshop in Pretoria, March 2019, and then again for the culminating conference in Abidjan, March 2020.’ Joel mentioned that collaboration with the AASR is certainly possible for the Abidjan conference.
- The editors of the *Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology* welcome proposals for articles.
  - o The website can be found here: <https://dsc.duq.edu/beth/>.
- Afe Adogame announced that the Ife Institute of Advanced Studies (IIAS) will be hosting its third summer programme from 21 July – 3 August 2019. Proposals are welcome until 30 May 2019.
  - o More info can be found on the IIAS website: <https://www.ife-ias.com/call-for-applications>.
- Relatedly, Jacob Olupona, the Convener of the IIAS summer programme, noted that we have to take responsibility for what is happening throughout Africa. He said we must begin to rethink how we are training scholars in Africa? How can we do these things given limited resources? The IIAS is one initiative seeking to make a difference. It has been running for two years now and it is clear that the fellows involved receive some of the critical training that is needed to transform the quality of their scholarship and expand their networks.
- AASR President, Elias Bongmba, expressed congratulations on behalf of the Executive Committee to Jacob Olupona, who received the 2018 Martin E. Marty Award for the Public Understanding of Religion. For more information, see: <http://www.a-asr.org/jacob-olupona-wins-award/>.

### **Closing**

The AASR President thanked everyone for their contributions and recommended attending the remaining AASR and African Religions Unit sessions on Monday and Tuesday.