
THE
AFRICAN
ASSOCIATION
FOR
THE
STUDY
OF
RELIGIONS



STEERING COMMITTEE

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

Regional Representatives



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

North America: Dr. Simeon Ilesanmi, Wake Forest University.

West Africa: Dr. Dan Fulani, University of Jos., Nigeria.

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

North and South America: Rosalind I. J. Hackett, Dept. of Religious Studies, 501 McClung

Tower, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996-0450, USA.

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

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

CHAIRPERSON'S REMARKS

The tenth issue of our newsletter is full of exciting news and activities. I seize this opportunity to talk about our activities this year. I will also discuss some of the moves we have made to make the Association stronger. The most important activity was the meeting of the Association in Hildesheim, Germany on May 23, 1998. The following resolutions and discussion were taken at the meeting.

Dr. Simeon Ilesanmi, of Wake Forest University, has replaced Dr. Hackett as the coordinator of the North American Region. Simeon will also serve as the treasurer for the region. Dr. Dan Fulani, of the University of Jos, Nigeria, will serve as one of the coordinators of the AASR in Nigeria. We will make more appointments in the near future.

It was agreed that approaches would be made to North American scholars of African Religions to pay their dues. As funds always are a problem membership fees from scholars in advantaged countries would be most helpful. It was also noted that some interest among African Americans was shown and this enhanced the possibility of greater interest in African Religion in North America.

Prof. Gerrie ter Haar reported on a drive among members in Europe. Several people had shown interest and a number of new student members had been enrolled. It was however noted that not much progress had been made with recruiting scholars from the French speaking world. Gerrie had had consultation with scholars in Africa and some progress was made in popularizing the work of the Association. It was agreed that greater attention would be given to the matter of fund raising. It was suggested that a financial statement be issued once every six months or so. It was agreed on the proposal of Prof. Ter Haar and Prof. Hackett that a financial report be published in every issue of the newsletter.

It was noted with appreciation that the newsletter of the Association was published regularly. Some members expressed disappointment at the response the newsletter was receiving in Africa. Gerrie ter Haar made an appeal for scholars in Africa to be asked to keep interest in the newsletter and the Association alive.

It was reported that the first conference of the African Association for the Study of Religion would be held in Kenya in the Summer of 1999. Prof. Platvoet reported on the progress made in soliciting funds and extending invitations to paper presenters and other participants in the conference.

The Association will be hosting a workshop/ conference in Nigeria on Dec. 14&15, 1998. This conference will focus on the research activities of scholars of religion in Nigeria. It will also provide an opportunity for the Chairperson to discuss the activities of the AASR and the IAHR with our colleagues in Nigeria.

Let me conclude by thanking you all for your interest in the work of AASR. I wish you all a Happy and Prosperous New Year.

Jacob K. Olupona, Professor African American & African Studies, UC Davis



RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

The **Center for the Study of World Religions** at Harvard University fosters excellence in the study of religions of the world. Two characteristics mark the Center. The first is the international scope of its subject matter and constituency. The second characteristic of the Center is its encouragement of multidisciplinary approaches toward religious expressions, whether in art, medicine, law, literature, music, economic activity, or cosmological sciences. The overarching goal is to understand the meaning of religion, with sympathetic insight into religious communities, and to analyze with scholarly integrity the role of religion in global perspective.

Each year the Center selects an international group of Fellows who represent a variety of scholarly disciplines, cultures, and complementary research interests. Senior Fellows, usually from abroad, join Fellows chosen from doctoral programs at Harvard University. Scholars admitted as Senior Fellows gain access to Director's Seminars and the Harvard University library system. They also have an option to reside at the Center. Fellows pay rent and arrange their own insurance coverage. Funds are limited, and the \$4,000 fellowship stipend awarded to Senior Fellows covers only a small fraction of the expenses. Scholars admitted as Fellows need to seek the bulk of their financial support from sources other than the Center.

All application requests and related questions should be directed to: (Ms.) Brooke Palmer, Educative Planning Assistant, Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions, 42 Francis Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138. APPLICATION DEADLINE: JANUARY 15th

The government of the Netherlands is funding a new research programme, called **SANPAD**, which stands for: South Africa-Netherlands Programme on Alternatives in Development. The programme has been set up for the advancement of

development-related research in South Africa, and is a collaborative enterprise of researchers in South African and Dutch academic institutions. It particularly aims to build research capacity in those parts of the research community which have been disadvantaged in the past. In principle, proposals on religion in relation to social development may also be funded. Recently, the Department of Religious Studies of the University of the North, in collaboration with the Anthropology Department of Utrecht University, has successfully applied for funding of a long-term research programme on witchcraft and witchcraft-related problems in the Northern Province of South Africa. The three years' programme is entitled: Crossing witchcraft barriers in South Africa: power, politics, healing, beliefs, and social empowerment. On the South African side the project will be coordinated by Prof. S.T. Kgatla of the University of the North, and on the Dutch side by Dr. G. ter Haar of Utrecht University. Calls for research proposals are sent out twice a year. Information is available from the SANPAD office in South Africa. Interested researchers in South Africa should contact Ms. Jenny Hollander, SANPAD, Private Bag X10, Dalbridge, 4014. Tel. (031) 2602809; Fax: (031) 2602233; email: <hollander@admin.und.ac.za>.

The **Centre of African Studies** in the University of London invites applications for the Oppenheimer Academic Fellowship Scheme from relatively established South African academics, working in the broad field of African studies in the social sciences and humanities, for the Spring (January-April) 1999 and Autumn (September-December) 1999. For details, contact the centre Office at SOAS, Thornhaugh Street, Russell Square, London WC1H 0XG; e-mail: cas@soas.ac.uk



CONFERENCES TO BE HELD

The **Tamale Institute of Cross-Cultural Studies** (TICCCS) in Ghana organises regular seminars on culture and development. Its 1999 Culture and Development Seminar is entitled: 'African Traditional Religion and Development: The Cultural Perspective'. The seminar will be held from 2-6 May 1999. From 6-9 December 1999 another seminar will be held entitled: 'African Traditional Religion and Christian Ministry: The Cultural Perspective'. (Address: P.O. Box 1012, Tamale, N.R., Ghana; e-mail: TICCS@africaonline.com.gh).

The Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (**CODESRIA**) has been inviting submissions for participation in its IXth General Assembly, which will take place in Dakar, Senegal, from 14-18 December 1998. The General Assembly will bring together over 250 scholars from Africa and the African diaspora, as well as delegates from other parts of the world. The theme of the IXth General Assembly is: Social Science and Globalisation in Africa.

The **World Parliament of Religions** is scheduled to convene in Cape Town, South Africa, from 28 November to 5 December 1999. A call for programme proposals has been sent out from Chicago by its Council. For further information, contact Dr. Teresia Hinga, Department of Religious Studies, De Paul University, 2320 North Kenmore Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60614-3298, USA. Email: <thinga@wppost.depaul.edu>

The Annual Congress of the African Theological Institutes in Southern and Central Africa (**ATISCA**) will take place in Harare from 7-14 December 1998, in conjunction with the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The conference theme is on 'Religion and Gender'. The organisation has invited the African Christianity Project

(ACP) - UNITWIN (University Twinning network of Utrecht University) to participate. Apart from Botswana, Zimbabwe and Malawi, who are also part of ATISCA, this would include participation from partner departments in Ghana, Sierra Leone, Namibia, Mozambique, Edinburgh and Utrecht. The conference would then be concluded on the 15th of December with a final meeting of the ACP-Unitwin International Council.

Professor Jim Cochrane with the Research Institute on Christianity in South Africa at the University of Cape Town will be hosting its **Multi-Event 99** entitled *Transforming Public Life: Religion in the Making of Cultural Values and Public Policy* on 14-20 February 1999 in Cape Town, South Africa. The **Multi-Event 1999** aims to put firmly on the map the issue of religion in the public sphere and its place in the making of cultural values and public policy. It is part of a public debate prior to the first fully democratic elections under the new South African Constitution and in the light of the challenges of the new millennium. The **Multi-Event 1999** addresses three interrelated areas: the task of constituting a civil public; the work of forming the cultural bases of a civil public; and the responsibility for shaping public policy. It will emphasise religious experiences, phenomena and institutions to provide particular perspectives upon transformation of public life and the making of public policy. The programme will be available on our website shortly. Interested persons may register or send suggestions for the **Multi Event 99**. Phone/Fax: (021) 650 3176; Alternative Fax: (021) 689 7575; Telephone: (021) 650 4120; or **ME99@SOCSCI.UCT.AC.ZA**

The **Multi-Event 99** organised a preparatory Academic Workshop on the theme of Constructing a Language of Religion in Public Life in Cape Town from September 30th – October 2nd at the Two Oceans Aquarium. It was well attended, the discussions were fruitful and the atmosphere was very positive. All of the concept papers and

workshop results are currently available on the web:
<http://www.uct.ac.za/depts/ricsa/me99/index.htm>.

NEWS

The African Studies Centre at Cambridge University (Britain) initiated a research seminar series from Monday 12 October 1998 devoted to "New research in African Studies". Information can be obtained from the Centre: Free School Lane, Cambridge, CB2 3RQ; e-mail: africa-studies@lists.cam.ac.uk

Cette année, dans la première partie de sa session de formation consacrée aux "grands systèmes de pensée et à leur influence dans le monde contemporain", le **Centre des Hautes Etudes sur l'Afrique et l'Asie Modernes** (CHEAM) a Paris (13, Rue du Four, 75006 Paris; email: cheam@imaginet.fr) a fait la part belle aux religions. Sa présente lettre, "La Lettre du CHEAM", s'en fait l'écho, notamment sur l'Afrique, avec trois conférences, du R.P. Luneau, du professeur Jean-Louis Triaud et de Mademoiselle Véronique Duchesne.

The **Maryknoll Institute** of African Studies in Nairobi announced its 1999 programme. The primary goal of the Institute is to teach major themes of contemporary cultures and religions of East Africa in such a manner that students appropriate and articulate an African viewpoint on these themes in a professional way. (Address: P.O. Box 24592, Nairobi, Kenya; e-mail: MIAS@maf.org).

The Department of Religious Studies at the **University of South Africa** has moved from the Faculty of Theology and Religious to the Faculty of Arts. The new department formally severs all links with theology from 1999.

The **Leeds Consultation** on 'The Significance of the African Christian Diaspora in Europe' has created a series of spin-offs in its first year. A conference entitled 'The Significance of Cultural Unity in Diversity' was organised in Vaesteras (Sweden) in April 1998. It was organised by ASPA (African Supporters and Promoters Abroad), and focused on culture and social justice. It took advantage of the fact that Sweden celebrated 1998 as the year of cultural diversity, tapping into her traditionally liberal policy toward refugees and exiles. It was the first event which opened up direct contact between the 5,000 Africans living in the country with mainstream researchers and politicians. The organiser James Ssemakulia, a Ugandan priest, saw the possibility of joining up with the important faith community networks elsewhere in Europe. The positive relations between cultural diversity, social politics and religion (Christians and Muslims) was present throughout.

And yet another outcome was the following: **CREDIC**, the FRENCH missiological society, organised its August 1998 annual colloquium in Glay/Doubs under the theme 'Chretientes d'Outre-Mer en Europe au 20e Siecle: Nouveaux Reseaux Missionnaires ou Refuges Identitaires?' Marc Spindler (formerly of Leiden, The Netherlands) stressed the reality of an urban explosion in Europe with countless diasporas, and of the birth of 'dynamic communities of consciousness' or an 'ecclesiogenesis' therein. The meeting focused on the missiological issue of whether Christians from overseas gather to preserve their cultural and religious identities, or whether they share in the development of a 'new sense of mission' and a new cellular form of the Christian religion. Several African groups in France, Belgium, Switzerland and Canada were represented. The audience was 'extremely positive' in receiving them but was also left with critical questions, such as the the paradigm of mission, and the concepts of identity and diaspora. Generally, the event facilitated contacts between Francophone and Anglophone Christian movements..

Thirdly, the Workshop on **The African Religious Diaspora in Germany**, also the first of its kind, was organised by Dr Amele Ekue of the Academy of Mission at Hamburg University. It focused entirely on the German social and religious situation..

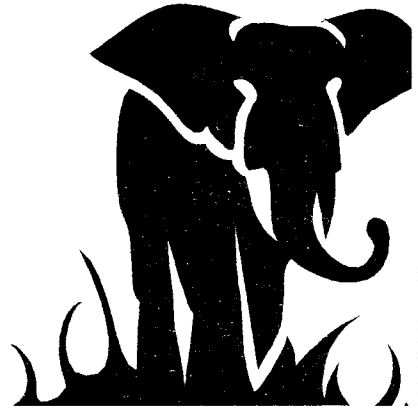
Work in different regions is in the meanwhile progresses. Forming a 'PARTNERSHIP OF AFRICAN CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES IN EUROPE' (**PACCE**), with Jerisdan Jechu-Appiah in the chair, is under consideration. The next international conference is planned for September 1999 in Britain.

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

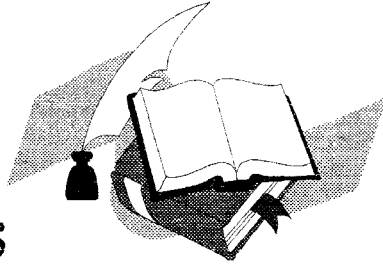
Rosalind I.J. Hackett was accorded distinguished professor status in fall 1998 at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. She is now known as Lindsay Young Professor in the Humanities

Prof. Suleman Dangor of the University of Durban-Westville has been re-appointed to the Religious Broadcasting Panel of the South African Broadcasting Corporation. He and a panel of prominent religious leaders ensure a qualitative and equitable representation of religions in the official South African radio and television media.

Dr. James L. Cox has left the Centre for the Study of Christianity in the Non-Western World at the University of Edinburgh. He has accepted the post of Senior Lecturer in the Study of Religions at Westminster College in Oxford.



Ebrahim Moosa has been promoted to Associated Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Cape Town.



PUBLICATIONS

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Frankfurt/M.: Peter Lang, 1998. ISBN 3-631-33473-7.

Ottino, Paul, Les champs de l'ancestralité à Madagascar. Paris: Karthala, 1998. ISBN 2-86537-77608.

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Leuven: Peeters, 10998. ISBN: 90-429-0663-4.

Waddinton, RR (eds). Religious Education for transformation. Kagiso Publishers ISBN 0-7986-35606.

The Akrofi-Christaller Memorial Centre in Akropong-Akuapem in Ghana has launched a new journal, the **Journal of African Christian Thought**. The first issue was published in June 1998, featuring the theme of "The Church in the African State towards the twenty-first century". The journal is edited by Dr. Gillian Bediako and will be published bi-annually, in June and December. Email address: akrofi@africaonline.com.gh.



The **Ecumenical Centre for Theological Education and Research** (CORVT, Centre Oecuménique de Recherche et de Vulgarisation Théologiques) in Butare, Rwanda, has published its first newsletter, the CORVT Bulletin, in December 1997. The Bulletin brings news about the activities of the centre and publishes texts on contextual Rwandese theology. The Ecumenical Centre CORVT started its activities in 1996 as an initiative of the Presbyterian Church of Rwanda. In the search for reconstruction of ecclesiastical life after the 1994 war and genocide, the Centre aims at stimulating reflection on the message of the gospel in the Rwandese context and the position of the Church in public life. (Address: B.P. 473, Butare, Rwanda).

The **Journal for the Study of Religion**, which is the official journal of the Association for the Study of Religion (Southern Africa), has moved from Kwazulu-Natal to Cape Town with Abdulkader Tayob as its new editor. As in the past, the JSR will publish articles in the cross-disciplinary study of religions in general, and religious traditions in particular. It will also be a critical forum to debate new ways of understanding religion in the context of globalisation, human rights, etc. Special thematic issues with guest editors are also envisaged. For more information, contact Abdulkader at tayob@socsci.uct.ac.za or Dept of Religious Studies, UCT, Private Bag, Rondebosch 7700, South Africa.



FOCUS ON INSTITUTIONS

UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Rev. Dr. James N. Amanze.

The Department of Theology and Religious Studies (TRS) is part of the Faculty of Humanities and plays a vital role in the life of the University. At the time of its inception, the department was meant to cater for people who were going to be teachers of Religious Education in the Secondary Schools in Botswana. Churches were interested in the idea because RE was taught on the basis of church affiliation and some had schools under their jurisdiction. For some time TRS was offered at Diploma in secondary school level and also at Bachelor Degree's level.

A new development, however, took place during the 1983/84 academic year when a Part-time Diploma in Theology was introduced. The aim was to help in the training of church ministers since the churches in Botswana realised the need for local training of ministers. It was becoming increasingly expensive to train people in other countries. The Part-time Diploma in Theology was not very successful and on this account it was changed to Full-time Diploma in Pastoral Theology in 1990.

In the past few years, further developments have occurred. One of these was the introduction of a Part-time Certificate in Theology in August, 1995. The aim of the programme is to prepare people for entry into the Diploma programme. This programme has attracted a number of people from different sectors of life. It is hoped that in future the Part-time certificate will be made available to as many people as possible at other centres in Botswana such as Francistown, Selebi-Phikwe and

Lobatse. There are also plans in the pipeline to develop Philosophy as a unit within the Department of Theology and Religious Studies. The TRS Department has also successfully revived the M. A. in Religious Studies which lay dormant for many years largely because of lack of a Departmental Professor.

The Department sees itself as having a two-fold mission namely, academic and spiritual. At the academic level, the TRS' primary mission is to assist the nation in its efforts to develop skilled person-power that is urgently needed in Botswana for the socio-economic development of the country. Through its academic programmes the TRS Department has contributed tremendously in the training of graduates who at the end of their studies are absorbed in the job market as teachers, bank officers, church ministers, social workers, librarians etc. In this regard the department aims for academic excellence to ensure that the graduates who pass through the department are well equipped to meet the challenges of real life in the job market.

Secondly, through the religious actives of several members of staff, the department's mission is to assist in the spiritual upliftment of the society as a whole through the inculcation of good moral values in different aspects of life. It is with this understanding that the department is one of the agencies in the University which is the negotiating for the building of a chapel for the spiritual welfare of the University community.

The Department has used different strategies to achieve these objectives. One of these has been the conventional method of lectures, seminars and tutorials in the classroom situation. This means there has been a great drive for academic excellence in teaching in order to impart not only factual knowledge but also creativity, initiative and independent thinking.

Apart from this, the Department has organised national, regional and international conferences and workshops in order to expose students to a much more international way of thinking, thus enabling them to think more globally than parochially. In addition to this the department has strengthened its research base involving not only members of staff but also students at all levels. This has enabled students to develop their intellectual acumen in their approach to issues of an academic or practical nature.

The department has established links with University departments within Africa and abroad such as the Edinburgh Link, ATISCA (Association of Theological Institutions in Southern and Central Africa), and BOLESWA (annual meetings held by the TRS departments of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland), and ASRSA (Association for the Study of Religions (Southern Africa). The department is currently strengthening its link with the University of Stellenbosch.

It should be noted that another way in which the department has striven to fulfil its objectives is through interdisciplinary activities. For example, within the Faculty of Humanities the department has forged links with the Department of History and jointly produces a publication called "Studies on the church in Southern Africa." The TRS department has also been involved in inter-faculty academic programmes with the Faculty of Education resulting in a joint M.Ed in Education and PGDCE (Post Graduate Diploma in Counsellor Education) with specialization in Theology and Religious Studies and Pastoral Counselling respectively.

As indicated above, the primary mission of the TRS Department is to contribute significantly, through its various programs and courses, towards the development of skilled manpower for the total development of our people. The department is also extremely active in its research activities covering a wider spectrum of theology and religious studies. Research has been conducted on Tswana traditional religion, New

Religious Movements, Church History, World Religions, Church and State, contextual theology, Religion and society, Biblical theology, Systematic Theology, Moral Philosophy and other areas of academic interest. Much of our research has been published in books and international journals.



UPDATES IAHR CONGRESS IN DURBAN, SOUTH AFRICA, 5-12 AUG 2000

18th QUINQUENNIAL CONGRESS OF THE INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS 5-12 August 2000, Durban, SOUTH AFRICA

CALL FOR PANELS AND PAPERS

THE HISTORY OF RELIGIONS: ORIGINS AND VISIONS

The International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) is an international body of national and regional societies for the academic study of religion. It is a member of the Conseil international de la philosophie et des sciences humaines (CIPSH) under UNESCO. Through its regional and international congresses it brings together scholars from around the world to discuss, debate and exchange views on their subject. The Executive Committee of the IAHR met in August 1997 in Turku, Finland and

unanimously decided to hold its XVIIIth Congress in the year 2000 in Durban, South Africa. The Department of Science of Religion at the University of Durban-Westville, in co-operation with key members of the Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa, will be hosting the event. This upcoming Congress in August 2000 is significant for a number of reasons. First, it will be the first IAHR congress ever held on the African continent. Second, the IAHR Congress in the year 2000 will coincide with the 50th anniversary of the founding of the IAHR in Amsterdam. Third, it will also mark the 100th anniversary of scientific congresses in the History of Religions.

Several questions arise as the year 2000 draws near. First, it will be appropriate to take stock and reflect on where we as an international body of scholars engaged in a common scholarly enterprise are coming from. What are the central themes, the important empirical areas, the debated issues and the shared approaches that have carried us to this point in time? In which parts of the world have we succeeded and why? How has the history of religions contributed to educational and cultural development in general? Second, it will also be appropriate to discuss directions for the future. In what ways does increasing globalisation change the nature of the subject of our study? What methodological and theoretical approaches are most appropriate to these challenges? Is the history of religions capable of dealing with these new developments, and is the IAHR doing what it can in these respects? Are we truly engaged in a common endeavour?

The Durban Congress seeks in particular to promote the historical, cross-cultural, interdisciplinary, comparativist and critical study of religion, as well as newer and neglected areas of research, rather than just the tradition-specific sections which have characterised previous congresses. There is also a concern to examine, wherever appropriate, the links between the theoretical, methodological, empirical, and pedagogical aspects of our field of study. To this end, a number of panels and symposia are already being planned on religion in relation to multiculturalism, fieldwork, texts and textuality,

comparativism, globalisation, syncretism, millennialism, shamanism, spirituality, religion and human rights, civil society, media, cyberspace, diaspora, material and expressive culture, gender, ecology, dance, music, healing, literature, cognition, cultural studies, tourism, as well as religious education and the political economy of religious studies etc. Several of these themes will highlight the rich diversity of religious traditions in Africa, not least South Africa, and the heritage of several decades of African scholarship in the study of religion.

KEY DATES

31 December 1998: proposals for panels, symposia and roundtables to reach the Secretariat on or before

30 April 1999: Proposals for individual papers to reach the Secretariat on or before.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMME

The academic programme will consist of keynote addresses, plenary sessions, panels, symposia and roundtable sessions. Panel/symposia proposals will be posted early 1999 to encourage and guide paper submissions. Individual papers may be submitted independent of any panel, but wherever possible should reflect the Congress theme. Questions regarding panel and papers proposals may be directed to Professor Rosalind I.J. Hackett (Chair, Academic Programme Committee) at rhackett@utk.edu. For information on submission and registration procedures, consult the Congress Website: <http://www.udw.ac.za/iahr>

EXHIBITORS' INFORMATION:

Book sellers, publishers, and others are invited to exhibit their products at the congress site. Those who wish to exhibit books, computers, software, etc., should contact the

Secretariat for details regarding the exhibition. Space is limited and therefore we encourage prospective exhibitors to book well in advance (by 31 August 1999). Please contact the address below for more details.

All FINAL panel and paper submissions, and questions regarding the organization of the congress, should be sent to: Prof. Pratap Kumar, Director of the IAHR Congress, PO Box 1376, UMHLANGA ROCKS, Durban 4320, SOUTH AFRICA. Tel: 027-31-562-9461, 027-31-562-9416, Fax: 027-31-562-9945 Email: velia@iafrica.com

Further details on Durban and the Congress (e.g. accommodation, transportation, registration fees, tourism, etc.) may be found on the CONGRESS WEBSITE: <http://www.udw.ac.za/iahr>.

AASR Conference in Africa

The First AASR Conference in Africa has been rescheduled. It will not be held from 5 to 9 January 1999, as was announced in the AASR Newsletter no. 9 (June 1998), pp. 14-16. The funds requested have become available only very recently. That allowed too little time for properly organising it on 5-9.01.1999. This conference will now be held from Tuesday 27 July (day of arrival and opening at Kenyatta University [KU], Nairobi, Kenya) till Saturday 31st July 1999 (day of departure). It will be hosted by the Department of Religious Studies of KU. As was announced earlier, its theme is 'The religions of East Africa in the age of globalisation'. Participants will be mainly from East Africa. The conference has been granted the special status of IAHR Regional Conference. A very limited number of AASR members from outside East Africa may be admitted. Those interested should contact me. I will make the selection in consultation with the other members of the AASR Executive in the coming weeks. As the funds are very limited, AASR members from outside East Africa will normally have to pay their own fares, and also boarding and registration fees. Details about the

latter may be obtained from me. Jan Platvoet: Gildenring 52, 3981 JG Bunnik, The Netherlands, Tel./Fax: + 31.30.656.2680; E-mail: jgplatvoet@wxs.nl

REVIEW

Issue No. 9, you may recall, had a new review section. We apologise for the fact that we had not mentioned the name of the author of the review, Dr. Jan G. Platvoet of Leiden University, the Netherlands. Notwithstanding our omission, Dr. Platvoet has sent us another review which we are grateful for, and which we are happy to present here. We plan to publish at least one review in every issue of the newsletter, so please send them to us. Do not forget reviews written by students.

THE TREE THAT SAW IT ALL

Gerrie ter Haar, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe*. Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press, 1998, vi + 220 pp., ISBN 1-899025-03-0, £ 16,95.

In the early evening of Sunday 4 October 1992, just after Ter Haar had started her four - year research on the subject of this book, an El Al 747 freighter plane crashed on two flats in the Bijlmer, a suburb of Amsterdam in the flight path to *Schiphol* Airport. Destroying several storeys, it set off a blaze in which at least 43 people were killed. The tragedy united the *Bijlmer* inhabitants, Dutch and non-Dutch alike, in grief. A spot nearby was spontaneously converted into a ritual space for commemorating the victims. At its centre is a large tree which had survived unscathed. It is now known locally as 'the tree that saw it all' (42, n.19).

Among the victims were several Ghanaians, some of whom lived there as 'undocumented' residents, *i.e.* without residence and work permits (116-120). 'It is widely believed', Ter Haar (42) writes, 'that the real number of dead was higher, possibly much higher, because

of the number of illegal immigrants and others living clandestinely or without proper authorisation in some of the flats which were destroyed.' The press exposure of the events made the Dutch aware of the cosmopolitan character of this part of Amsterdam with its 60,000 residents from 'no less than 70 different nationalities' (34), and of the large number of Ghanaians living there, some with, and many without, permits. But it also showed that religious life, Christian and other, was thriving in the Bijlmer – a remarkable fact for the Dutch whose society is rapidly secularising – and that these communities served important social functions for the new residents. This was not only true during such moments of grief but also in surviving and getting settled in Dutch society which, as part of 'fortress Europe', is ever more intent on restricting admission.

In the early 1980s, when Ghana was hit by severe droughts and Nigeria expelled great numbers of Ghanaians, young Ghanaian males, and soon also young females, mainly from Twi-speaking areas, began to travel in numbers to Europe and Northern America. This was a tradition well established all over Africa but especially so in Southern Ghana, of migration for the purpose of seeking employment and economic success elsewhere (4, 73-76, 87, 132-133, 135ff.). The political and economic situation in Ghana itself was in a poor shape (81, 133-134, 150). On the continent of Europe, Germany and The Netherlands have been the main destinations. The Netherlands now has slightly over 15,000 Ghanaians with permits and a few, perhaps several, thousands more without documents (126). They have flocked mainly to the cities of Rotterdam, The Hague, and Amsterdam, and in the latter city especially to the Bijlmer; in Germany, many have congregated in Hamburg. Their presence is generally not a conspicuous one (126-127). The undocumented especially manage to survive only with great difficulty by menial jobs which often require them to work at ungodly hours, and by relying on their informal networks to survive when all other means fail (126).

One trait has, however, become noticeable: the great number of AICs, 'African initiated churches', that have sprung up among them. In Amsterdam, some forty existed in 1997, most of them founded by Ghanaians. These churches are the main subject of study of Ter Haar's book, and more in particular The True Teachings of Christ's Temple church in the Bijlmer, the oldest and largest of these congregations in Amsterdam with some 600 regular members. It grew since the early 1980s from the ministrations of Daniel Himmans-Arday, born in Agogo, Ashanti, in 1943 and raised as a Methodist (30-33). This, and most other AICs in the Netherlands belong to the evangelical tradition with its outspoken belief in the Bible as the unique message of salvation for all humankind and persistent emphasis on the need for a personal conversion. 'Challenging Western Christianity on its home territory' (8), they practise the 'reverse mission' of preaching the need to convert secularist Europe (1-3, 12-17). They are churches of the enthusiast, pentecostal/charismatic kind, known in Ghana also as the 'spiritual churches' (*sunsum asore*), in which faith healing is prominent (17-21, 25-26). Furthermore, like the newest AICs ('African indigenous, African instituted, or African initiated, churches') in Africa, the AICs in Europe are very much 'African international churches' (21-25, 178-180). They aspire 'to be part of the international world in which they believe themselves to have a universal task' (24). Spreading through Europe now and back to Ghana (33), they are part of both European and African church history, and, as in the days of the slave trade, reflect 'today's triangular flow of ideas between Africa, the Americas and Europe' (6).

Ter Haar's book has ten chapters. Chapter 1 is a methodological introduction in which she critically discusses the concepts scholars use in their description of African Christianity. She highlights the subtle mechanisms of exclusion operating in e.g. an emphasis on its 'Africanness'. Against symbolist anthropologists, she insists that their theologies should also be studied in order to properly understand their important social functions for their members (6-7, 10-12). In chapters 2, she looks at the Bijlmer, its religious communities,

their social functions. She contends that 'religious faith can also constitute a successful social strategy' (45). It creates a sense of belonging, and a place to be at home for many migrants. How precisely their bible-centred approach creates a supportive, inclusive community is analysed in chapter 3, in which Ter Haar also examines their notions of 'spirit', 'power' and 'prosperity', and the role of ritual in obtaining one's share in them in the liminality of the diaspora. In chapter 4, she surveys the history, past and present, of that 'dispersal' of Africans outside Africa. She also takes a critical look at the mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion inherent in the uses of the concept of diaspora. They may serve to exclude especially when its three key notions of dispersal (forced or voluntary), cultivation of an 'African' identity, and the wish to return 'home' (80) are attributed to the migrants, but not cultivated by the migrants themselves, as is the case with many migrants into Europe. This concept, and other attributions, then become the subtle but effective instruments of separation and exclusion used against them by the 'native' residents and churches of Europe (82-88, 159-167). The history and present distribution of the AICs in Europe is examined in chapter 5. Chapter 6 discusses the attempts of 'fortress Europe' to stem what it perceives as the 'flood' of immigrants, particularly the so called 'economic refugees' without permits, often smuggled in by human trafficking. The 'exodus' from Africa to Europe is discussed in greater detail in chapter 7 with an emphasis on the migrants from Ghana and their cultural organisations in the Netherlands. The reactions of the mainline churches in the Netherlands and in Ghana to this phenomenon are studied in chapter 8, as is that of a Ghanaian pentecostal church, the Resurrection Power and Living Bread Ministries, which established a branch in Amsterdam and is now one of the larger AICs there. The Dutch mainline churches have emphasised the Africanness of the AICs. By that label, they have provided 'themselves with an opportunity to distance themselves' from the AICs in Europe by 'othering' them. That is, says Ter Haar, the more prevalent mode of modern racism (161-167). In chapter 9, Ter Haar surveys the history of Christianity in Ghana, including its bewildering variety of AICs, the major influence in the

religious developments among Ghanaians in Europe. She points out that 'fundamentalism' is another of the several dubious categories and labels that have bedevilled the study of AICs (185-188). In chapter 10, she concludes the book by showing from the example of the Bijlmer that AICs do have an important social function for migrants from Africa in the modern cities of Europe.

This is a well-written and excellently documented book with a sure grasp of both long range historical developments and the baffling complexities of the present day situation, religious and political. I have two reservations. One is that the 'reverse mission' seems, so far, to be for internal use only. It seems to serve as one of several optional means of identity construction by which a 'community of elect' may separate itself ideologically from 'immoral' Western society into which it fervently wishes to integrate economically. The other reservation respects Ter Haar's somewhat indiscriminate polemics against the social-scientific studies of AICs in Africa and Europe by 'secular' anthropologists who adopt a symbolist approach in the study of religions. In her view, they 'consider religious belief and religious practice as mere representations of the secular' (5, 6; also 7, 9, 10, 164). Though she is correct to emphasise with Horton (8-12) that their religious notions and rituals need to be studied both for their own sake and for the social functions they serve, I feel more at ease with her admission that 'the study of religious phenomena in Africa [as] a branch of scientific inquiry [...] has been revolutionised by the insights of anthropology' (8). That includes, in my view, those of several 'symbolists'. All in all, however, this is a lucid book on an important development in the history of both African and European religiosity. It lays bare some of the well-hidden mechanisms of identity construction as a means for survival as well as for 'othering' in order to separate, exclude and expulse. It is important for the academic study of religions both for its substance and the methodology it advocates.

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