



# DACB News Link

Issue no. 11, November 2015

## Former President Obasanjo writes for the DACB



On August 24 of this year, *DACB* advisory council member, Deji Isaac Ayegboyin, Professor and Head of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan, interviewed the former President of Nigeria Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, regarding his interest in the work of the *DACB* and his recent contributions to the dictionary.

A long-standing advisor and supporter of the *DACB*, Dr. Ayegboyin is currently acting as a supervisor to Chief Obasanjo while he pursues a course in Christian Theology at the National Open University of Nigeria, (NOUN).

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## From the Director



In August this year the *DACB* celebrated its 20th anniversary. It does not seem that long ago when a small

group of us met in New Haven, at the Overseas Ministries Study Center, to consider how the peculiar lacuna in African church history—an almost exclusive reliance on foreign sources and perspectives and the relative absence of African subjects or voices—might be redressed. We could not then have imagined that the outcome would be the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, the now well-established, widely emulated, go-to source of information on those African figures chiefly responsible for the uniquely dynamic character and growth of Christianity on that continent.

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## African Christian Biography Conference



The time has come! From October 29-31, Boston University will be hosting the conference on “African Christian Biography: Narratives, Beliefs and Boundaries.”

**All are welcome at the open sessions.**

These are:

**Thursday, October 29,**

**4:00 - 5:30** Opening reception at the African Studies library

**Friday, October 30,**

**9:00 - 10:00** Morning plenary: Lamin Sanneh,

“Biography and the Narrative of History”

**2:00 - 3:30** Panel: Tim Longman, chair -

“Biography as History,” panelists:

Kathleen Sheldon, Diana Wylie, Richard Elphick.

A full schedule and program details can be found on the *DACB* website.

For anyone who is not able to attend, the open sessions will be live-streamed and available for listening online at:

<http://livestream.com/accounts/4958196> \*\*

- Samantha Roebuck

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## Interview with Chief Obasanjo

Introduced to the *DACB* by Professor Ayegboyin, Chief Obasanjo expressed his support of the *DACB*'s endeavor to document the history of African Church leaders and their role in the growth of Christianity across the continent. In order to highlight the geographical, political and denominational range existing in Nigeria, Obasanjo has written biographies of Catholic, Protestant and Indigenous church leaders from the East, West and North of the country. Two of these have been published on the *DACB* website. The third is forthcoming.

- Samantha Roebuck

### Extract from the interview:

**DEJI:** What do you think is the significance of writing stories about eminent African Christians generally?

**OBASANJO:** I appreciate the fact that not enough has been written about the contribution of Africans to the spread of Christianity in Africa in general and in Nigeria in particular. Stories of foreign missionaries spreading the Gospel and evangelizing Africa abound and most of these stories are written from the foreign missionary point of view.

**DEJI:** What is the importance of writing the stories about Nigerian Christians in particular?

**OBASANJO:** There is obvious need for more of these stories and for them to be 'indigenized'. The more we write and read about the involvement of African Christian leaders in the issues of Christianity in Africa, the more Africans will be able to claim ownership of the religion, especially in Nigeria. The Church of Christ is global in content, context and outreach. Nigeria must claim and appropriate it for herself.

**DEJI:** Would you like to say anything else?

**OBASANJO:** In conclusion, I am grateful to God that I have the opportunity to have contact with the *DACB* through the instrumentality of Professor Deji Ayegboyin, who has been designated as one of my supervisors for my study in Christian Theology at the National Open University of Nigeria. My research and written work for the *DACB* have widened my horizon and made me appreciate better what must not be taken for granted – the work and leadership of Africans in propagating and spreading the Gospel in Africa. Their complementary efforts to those of foreign missionaries are vitally and crucially significant for where Christianity is in Nigeria today and where it will go in the future. The work and objective of the *DACB* will preserve the past, capture the present and inspire the future. We can all look forward to a glorious future. \*\*

- Professor Deji Ayegboyin

## The *DACB* is Introduced at the ATISCA/EDAN Conference



**Professor Dr. James N. Amanze** (center in photo), Secretary-Treasurer of ATISCA (Association of Theological Institutions in Southern and Central Africa), and valued member of the *DACB*'s Africa Advisory Council, introduced the *DACB* to attendees at the ATISCA/ EDAN (Ecumenical Disabilities Advocacy Network) joint writers' workshop and conference at **Chancellor College, University of Malawi**, in Zomba from July 20–25, 2015. Registration packets provided for conference participants included *DACB* brochures, copies of Dr. Bonk's published lecture on "Pre-Christendom Faith in a Post-Christendom World: Africa and the Future of Christianity," and copies of the *DACB* database itself on a flash drive. At the ATISCA business meeting on July 24, Dr. Amanze reported and explained to members the activities of the *DACB*. He reported that "The message was received warmly," and expressed the

confident hope that attendees would begin to contribute to the *DACB*.

Dr. Amanze, a tireless and effective advocate of the *DACB*, and a valued member of its Advisory Council, is a senior Professor in the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities, at the University of Botswana. \*\*

- Dr Jonathan Bonk

## Influence of the DACB



Over the years it has been gratifying to discover that *The Dictionary of African Christian Biography* has become a stimulus for similar data gathering initiatives elsewhere. From **September 10-14, 2015, I was in Lima, Peru**, where I had been invited to talk about the *DACB* at a conference “¿Quién la historia? Espiritualidad e identidad indígena de la misión” (Who’s Story? Identity, indigenous spirituality and mission), convened at **Centro Evangélico de Misiología Andino-Amazónica (CEMAA)**, Jr. Las Monjas 140, Urb. Santa Felicia, La Molina, Lima 12, Peru (<http://www.cemaa.org/quienessomos.htm>).

On March 18, 2014, I was contacted by Mr. Drew Jennings-Grisham, who had been referred to me by Dr. Joel Carpenter of the Nagel Institute in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Mr. Jennings-Grisham, who had been work-

ing with pastors and churches in indigenous communities in Bolivia for the Christian human rights organization, Pas y Esperanza, and who had been involved in the Latin American Theological Fraternity (FTL), told me that he and a group of indigenous Latin American Christian leaders had been in regular conversation about the lack of indigenous theologies in the theological discourse within the FTL and within the Latin American church generally. To that end, he had been mandated to establish a website that would be a “virtual space for indigenous Christians to share their thoughts, reflections and stories ... through the written word, photos, video or audio.”

The website URL is: [www.memoriaindigena.org](http://www.memoriaindigena.org).

There is an uncomfortable awareness among indigenous leaders that while scores of autobiographical and biographical stories have been published in English by North American missionaries, detailing their work among aboriginal peoples, and that while the accounts of anthropologists and sociologists sometimes mention the impact of missionary work among Latin America’s indigenous peoples, “there has been little to no documentation of the histories of [any kind] from indigenous perspectives” (from his email to Joel Carpenter, Monday, March 17, 2014). When Mr. Jennings asked if I would be willing to meet with the group in September of this year, I gladly accepted his invitation, and a full year and a half later—on September 10, 2015—found myself in Lima, Peru, at the Centro Evangélico de Misiología Andino-Amazónica (CEMAA). Thirty one people—representing thirteen different indigenous groups from seven Latin American countries—took part in the conference. Two of us were from North America, and one was a long-time resident of Paraguay who lived with the Guarani and who had recently retired to Germany. The meeting was a great encouragement, and from the perspective of those who organized and hosted the conference, a resounding success. At the end of the meeting, the group organized, appointing a committee responsible for creating, administering, and promoting an online database to serve multiple functions consonant with rescuing and preserving the memory, and thus cultural integrity, of indigenous Christianity throughout the continent. The URL of this significant endeavor is: [www.memoriaindigena.org](http://www.memoriaindigena.org). The *DACB* has agreed to serve in an advisory capacity, as and when needed. ✨

- Dr Jonathan Bonk

## DACB News

**Filling in the gaps.** Over the summer, Laura Chevalier, a third year doctoral student at Boston University has created a database of mission agencies and faith based post-secondary institutions located in African countries from which the *DACB* has fewer than twenty biographies. This information will be crucial to the *DACB* as it takes practical steps to fill information gaps over the next five years. Laura’s interests lie in mission history, African Christianity, Holiness/Pentecostal movements, and women in mission. Her special interest is in mission spirituality and how the cross-cultural and inter-religious component of missionary work influences the spiritual lives of missionaries.

**Biography and Church History.** Until recently, the *DACB* has focused exclusively on biography. Over the next five years, the enterprise will also be receiving and publishing church histories: local, regional, national, and denominational. We believe that this will enhance the usefulness of the *DACB* as a resource for teachers, students, church leaders, and historians.

**More good news!** You will be pleased and encouraged to know that the *DACB* has received assurances of support from several donors, enabling us to cover the cost of part-time student staff at the Boston University *DACB* office, African Advisory Council annual meetings, and occasional oral history workshops in Africa. ✨



Awareness of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* continues to grow as it is increasingly utilized by instructors who require their students to get into the habit of using the database for their African Church History assignments. As virtually the only central source of information on African Christian biography, there have been more than one million unique visitors to the website since January of 2014. As I write this column (September 29, 2015), StatCounter tallies for the months of July, August and September 2015 indicate 137,649 page views (an average of 2,185 per day); 103,696 unique visits; 92,824 first time visits; and 12,039 returning visits. For the three hours prior to the time of my writing (Tuesday, September 29, 3:00 p.m. Central time), users could be traced to:

United States – 26.60%

Nigeria – 21.40%

South Africa – 13.60%

Kenya – 8.00%

United Kingdom – 5.00%

Uganda – 3.60%

Ethiopia – 2.40%

Somalia – 2.00%

France – 2.00%

These percentages fluctuate, depending upon the time of day when statistics are checked.

While the Web is integral to the dynamism and usefulness of the *DACB*, there are also “feet on the ground” initiatives. From April 7–17, I had the opportunity to lecture on the *DACB* at two of our participating institutions. At **Justo Mwale University** in Lusaka, I was hosted by Dr. Edwin Zulu, Rector and CEO of the university, who organized a three-hour seminar/workshop on the *DACB* attended by eighteen invited academics and church leaders from the region. A few days later I conducted a similar workshop at the **Theological College of Central Africa**, recently granted university status. Here, I was the guest of Dr. Lazarus Phiri, Rector, and Dr. Timothy Churchill, Academic Dean.

This brings my Director’s Column to a necessary conclusion. Throughout this newsletter there is much more to encourage all of us who use or support the *DACB*! \*\*

Jonathan Bonk  
Project Director  
September 29, 2015



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\*American donations in support of the *DACB* should be sent to:

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<http://www.dacb.org/supportthedacb.html>  
For information regarding wire transfers, contact Mr. Kevin Keith at: [kkeith@bu.edu](mailto:kkeith@bu.edu).

Canadian donations should be sent to:

Dictionary of African Christian Biography  
Attn: Business Office  
Providence University College and Seminary  
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