

**Abstract:** This study evaluates the mission histories of the Assemblies of God Church and the Church of Pentecost in Ghana. It focuses on the similarities and differences in their approaches to mission and their different theological orientations that have contributed to their different growth. The issue of mission is problematized because the different conceptions of these Pentecostal Churches have led them to emphasize different aspects of mission. Methodologically, the study employed a historical and comparative approach in its investigation. The historical approach was used in recounting the history of both churches. The comparative approach was used to explain the necessary cause and outcome of the missionary activities of these Pentecostal Churches over time. The researcher made ample use of content analysis of documentary sources. Where necessary, information was gleaned from interviews to augment the documentary sources. The study found that the Assemblies of God is a western Pentecostal mission whereas the Church of Pentecost is an African Initiated Church with a Pentecostal emphasis. These Pentecostal denominations were guided by different mission policies in performing their missionary activities in the country. The Assemblies of God Church started its mission with the policy of holistic mission. Thus, it combined soul winning and church planting with social services. The Church of Pentecost on the other hand, started its mission with the policy of soul winning and church planting almost completely devoid of any form of social service. However, this mission policy of the Church of Pentecost has been modified to respond to the changing circumstances. Thus, the Church of Pentecost has added social services to its mission policy. The study also found that the effectiveness of these Pentecostal denominations on Ghanaian society can be seen in terms of their soul winning, church planting, and the provision of social and economic services. The study concludes that within the Ghanaian context, Pentecostal mission should combine proclamation of the Good News with social services, as has been exemplified by the mainline churches.

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The *Journal of African Christian Biography* was launched in 2016 to complement and make stories from the on-line *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* ([www.DACB.org](http://www.DACB.org)) more readily accessible and immediately useful in African congregations and classrooms.

Now published quarterly, with all issues available on line, the intent of the *JACB* is to promote the research, publication, and use of African Christian biography within Africa by serving as an academically credible but publicly accessible source of information on Christianity across the continent. Content will always include biographies already available in the database itself, but original contributions related to African Christian biography or to African church history are also welcome. While the policy of the *DACB* itself has been to restrict biographical content to subjects who are deceased, the *JACB* plans to include interviews with select living African church leaders and academics.

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## Open Access – Theses

Atuobi, Nyarko Isaac. “**Presbyterianism in Ghana from 1978 to 2013: Responding to the existential needs in the Kwahu Presbytery.**” School of Graduate Studies, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Kumasi. M.Phil. in Religious Studies, 2016.

<http://hdl.handle.net/123456789/10067>

**Abstract:** This thesis examines the various strategies adopted by the Kwahu Presbytery of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (PCG) to contextualize the gospel message to meet the spiritual and social needs of people. The study was conducted in four Church Districts using a sample size of 140 respondents, personal interviews with the clergy, church leaders and administrators, as well as chiefs and community leaders. Secondary sources in the form of written text were also employed. The simple random and the purposive sampling techniques were employed to select respondents and interviewees respectively. Since the research was a qualitative one the descriptive survey design was used. The thesis revealed that Presbyterians in the Kwahu Presbytery perceived the provision of their spiritual and social needs as the main task of the Church. This is because the gospel message entails an enhancement of both the spiritual and physical wellness of people. The presentation of the gospel message was therefore closely connected with the people’s anxiety of familiar oppression, witchcraft, and hope for a better future encountered in their way of life. The lively and vital nature of the church’s worship style and prayer pattern empowered them to fulfill their spiritual emptiness rooted in their cultural settings identified during the period 1978-2013. Provisions were made to cater for their health, education, and socio-economic activities. The study showed that there is direct linkage between the strategies adopted by the church and its numerical growth in addition to human and community development. These were made possible because of the mutual co-operation that exists between the communities and the Kwahu Presbytery. Emphasizing that its liturgy be Christ-centered but African in nature, participatory and modern was recommended to enable the PCG fulfil its mandate in the study area.

Aleh, H. “**A Comparative Study of the Mission Histories of the Assemblies of God Church and the Church of Pentecost in Ghana.**” University of Ghana, M.Phil., 2013.

<http://hdl.handle.net/123456789/12846>

## Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Christianity in Africa

Compiled by Beth Restrick, Head, BU African Studies Library

Beeko, Anthony A. *The Trail Blazers. Fruits of 175 Years of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana (1828-2003)*. Ghana: Afram Publ. Ltd., 2005. \$39.26. [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)  
ISBN-10: 996470349X; ISBN-13: 978-9964703493

**Description:** This book has been written to commemorate 175 years of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. It intends to provide a balanced account of the role of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana since the early nineteenth century, and as such, sheds much light on the history and development of Ghana over the past two centuries. It covers the contributions of the Basel missionaries and their Scottish successors, and emphasizes the contributions of the locals to the mission, particularly in developing local languages, translating sacred texts and compiling dictionaries and proverbs. It illuminates the achievements of the Church and the contributions it has made to the development of moral and spiritual life, education, agriculture, health, Ghanaian languages and music. However criticism of the missionaries is not reserved, being leveled at the rigidity and intolerant attitude of the missionaries towards the indigenous culture. ([www.amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com))

Bongmba, Elias Kifon, ed. *Religion and Social Reconstruction in Africa*. Studies in World Christianity and Interreligious Relations. London: Routledge, 2018. \$77.00 (hardcover). [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)  
ISBN-10: 0815348282, ISBN-13: 978-0815348283

**Description:** Religion has played a major role in both the division and unification of peoples and countries within Africa. Its capacity to cause and to heal societal rifts has been well documented. This book addresses this powerful societal force and explores the implications of a theology of reconstruction, most notably articulated by Jesse Mugambi. This way of thinking seeks to build on liberation theology, aiming to encourage the rebuilding of African society on its own terms. An international panel of contributors bring an interdisciplinary perspective to the issues around reconstructing the religious elements of African society. Looking at issues of reconciliation, post colonialism and indigenous spirituality, among others, they show that Mugambi's cultural and theological insight has the potential to revolutionize the way people in Africa address this issue. This is a fascinating exploration of the religious facets of African life. As such, it will be of great interest to scholars of religious studies, theology and African studies. ([www.amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com))

## Table of Contents

*African Christian Biography* Volume, Serialized: "Pointillist History and the Essential Role of Biography in the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*," by Michèle M. Sigg .....4

Biographies.....26

    Ababio, Isaac Kofi Asomani by Esther Acolatse .....26

    Yeboa-Korie, Charles Yaw by Thomas Oduro .....29

A Tribute to Professor James H. Cone by J. N. K. Mugambi .....46

Book Reviews .....55

    Robert, Dana L., ed. *African Christian Biography: Stories, Lives, and Challenges*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2018, reviewed by Eliakim Sibanda55

    Yusu, John, ed. *Africa Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Oasis International, 2016, reviewed by Jean-Claude Loba Mkole .....57

Recent Print and Digital Resources Related to Christianity in Africa, Compiled by Beth Restrick, Head, BU African Studies Library .....62

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## Pointillist History and the Essential Role of Biography in the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*

By Michèle Miller Sigg

At its inception twenty years ago, the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography (DACB)* was conceived as a project to redraw the maps of Christian history in Africa—imperfect maps at best, informed almost entirely by the records of foreign missionaries and mission agencies. As the *DACB* project creator Jonathan Bonk has poignantly observed,

While Christian numerical growth in Africa has burgeoned from an estimated eight or nine millions in 1900 to some 424 millions in 2008, scarcely anything is known about the persons chiefly responsible for this astonishing growth: African catechists and evangelists.<sup>1</sup>

Bonk noted the absence of basic reference tools on African Christian history due to the inaccessibility of sources such as crucial “paper trails” left by important historical figures.

Therefore, the critical question confronting the *DACB* project at its creation twenty years ago was this: How does one attempt to draw even the simplest historical outline of Christianity in Africa in light of its explosive growth there in the twentieth century? With roughly 575 million Christians in Africa, in approximately 2,208 denominations—which in 2015 represented 48 percent of the continent’s total population—needless to say, the task is still overwhelming.<sup>2</sup>

The initial vision of the *DACB* stipulated that biography would be the principal means for collecting historical data. Biography, like narrative history, prefers description over analysis, eschews generalization and quantification in favor of particularity, and focuses on humans rather than on structures.<sup>3</sup> The strategic choice to use biography intentionally placed the emphasis on people over events as central agents in the historical development of Christianity in Africa.

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan J. Bonk, “Ecclesiastical Cartography and the Invisible Continent: *The Dictionary of African Christian Biography*” (paper presented for African Studies Lecture Series, Yale University, Council on African Studies and MacMillan Center, October 15, 2008; updated October 19, 2009), available online at *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (hereinafter *DACB*), [www.dacb.org/xnmaps](http://www.dacb.org/xnmaps). Bibliographic information on earlier versions of “Ecclesiastical Cartography and the Invisible Continent” can be found in note 1 of the article online. All citations in this chapter from [www.dacb.org](http://www.dacb.org) were accessed October 2015.

<sup>2</sup> Todd M. Johnson and Gina A. Zurlo, eds., *World Christian Database*, [www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/](http://www.worldchristiandatabase.org/wcd/), accessed October 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Lawrence Stone, “The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History,” *Past and Present*, no. 85 (November 1979): 3–4.

challenges by consolidating and expanding the directions Bible societies have taken in the Bibles they have published in Kiswahili, Malagasy, Chichewa and the like. The following are ten types of notes that may improve future Study Bible projects:

- Exegetical notes: explanations of difficult words, technical terms, and proper nouns
- Situational notes: explanations of historical, political, religious, geographical (flora and fauna), economic or artistic realities
- Thematic notes: comments on recurring topics, motifs or concepts in one or more biblical books
- Structural notes: explanations of the literary components and genres of the verses, sentences, sections of a narration, a poem, or that of a book
- Stylistic notes: explanations of the figures of speech used in the original biblical texts or in the translation
- Functional notes: explanations of biblical authors' aims for the choice of particular expressions
- Contextual Notes: explanations of the differences and similarities between the original biblical contexts and those of contemporary readers
- Translational notes: comments on terms, concepts, and expressions of which the translation into the target language is particularly difficult
- Intertextual notes: mentions (allusions, references or quotations) of some biblical texts by others
- Textual criticism notes: Explanations of major variations and reasons for editors' choices regarding the preferred reading.<sup>130</sup>

Jean-Claude Loba-Mkole

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<sup>130</sup> E. Wendland, “Contextualizing Study Bible Notes for Africa,” <https://www.academia.edu/27835438>, accessed on March 24, 2019.

- to create a valuable resource for pastors and teachers as they apply the Word of God for their listeners
- to create a Study Bible that is culturally relevant and readable for the average reader
- to bring African insights and experiences to the text in a way that brings the Bible alive for all readers
- to avoid rehashing specifically Western theological issues and applications (p. A 29).

All the features and goals of the ASB are commendable in terms of general outfit and for the amount of work undertaken by Evangelicals and Pentecostals in Africa and beyond. It is to be noted that the ASB can be seen as a continuation of the commitments by the same Evangelical and Pentecostal churches demonstrated in the Africa Bible Commentary that was based on the *Holy Bible, New International Version*. Challenging views might emerge from important details that pertain to the source text and to the level of critical scholarship. Some African experts in Bible translations have denounced in their publications the malpractice of several Bible translations in African languages that fail to convey a great deal of original biblical meaning, because they were based on secondary sources, namely translations in Western languages.

The ASB, like other Study Bibles before it, has failed to address the challenge of original biblical languages in two ways: first, by opting to produce a Study Bible in a western language for Africa and, secondly, by using a Bible translation in the same Western language as a basis for the study notes. This option certainly led to the second challenge, namely the level of scholarship. The majority of the study notes have remained at the level of comments borrowed from Western biblical exegesis with no deep critical analysis—a major difference being that these comments have been coupled with African wisdom sayings and stories. Almost no biblical term or concept has been explained through direct negotiations between the original biblical languages and African languages. Furthermore, introductions to the biblical books are sketchy in regards to scholarship, offering almost no added value to what an ordinary Christian already knows about the books. For example, critical scholarship would have avoided the use of a tendentious expression such as “Portuguese Catholicism” and could have shown in a balanced way the contribution of the Catholic Church in Africa before the schism in 1054 and that of the Roman Catholic Church after the Schism of 1521. Moreover, the Kimbanguist Church, an established and well documented African Instituted Church, would have featured in the pages on the history of the Church in Africa.

In a nutshell, the ASB has strengths and challenges in several areas that form its content. The next Study Bibles in Africa would do well to address these

Choosing to employ biography—or what I will refer to as “points of light”—can be characterized as a *pointillist* way of writing the history of Christianity in Africa.<sup>4</sup> If one were to draw a pointillist map of *DACB* biographies collected over the last twenty years, it would show an uneven distribution of lights across the continent: very few points of light in North African countries, slightly more in Francophone and Lusophone regions, and more in Anglophone Africa. This illustrates the unevenness of the *DACB* record. While countries Nigeria, Ethiopia, and South Africa have upwards of 280 biographies each, Mauritania, Mali, Niger, Eritrea, and Somalia, unsurprisingly, have less than ten stories each, and Djibouti, Sao Tomé and Príncipe, and Western Sahara have none.<sup>5</sup>

For the *DACB*, “pointillist history” is the use of biography to fill in the gaps in the history of African Christianity, one historical figure at a time. In other words, where traditional historical records are too rare to paint a general picture or to construct a chronology, even a few incidental and narrowly localized narratives tell a partial story of the Christian activity that took place in a certain region. Given the nature of the *DACB* project, no guiding or prioritizing principle governs the accession of materials for this pointillist history. The articles found in the *DACB* simply represent what has been collected so far.<sup>6</sup> A wider picture emerges where there are more lights. Nigeria, for example, where a few local historians have been working systematically for years to write biographies of important figures, presents an increasingly cohesive collection of historical narratives.<sup>7</sup> Sadly, this strategic approach is the exception rather than the rule.

The purpose of this study is to justify the use of biography as a particularly pertinent and essential tool for historical research on African Christianity. Biographical examples from the *DACB* will serve as case studies, illustrations, and milestones. As an introduction, the first part will survey recent discussion on the issue of biography as history and take a brief look at the revival of narrative in the last thirty years to illustrate the evolution of attitudes toward biography as a way of writing history.

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<sup>4</sup> This pointillist metaphor is borrowed from Stone, “The Revival of Narrative,” 17, but is used here with a somewhat different meaning. Stone used the term to describe Peter Brown’s non-narrative method of describing the ancient world by being deliberately vague, using visual representations, and drawing on history, religion, literature, psychology, and art.

<sup>5</sup> See map in Appendix 1.

<sup>6</sup> For an overview of the *DACB*’s modus operandi, see Bonk, “Ecclesiastical Cartography and the Invisible Continent.”

<sup>7</sup> The in-country champion for ongoing Nigerian research is Dr. Deji Isaac Ayegboyin, professor and head of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, and *DACB* Advisory Council member.

## Biography as History and the Revival of Narrative

In academic circles, historians have long considered biography a “degraded form of historical writing” and history’s “unloved stepchild, occasionally but grudgingly let in the door, more often shut outside with the riffraff.”<sup>8</sup> In the past decade, however, vigorous debates have emerged over the use of biography in the craft of history writing. In 2010, the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* devoted an entire issue to biography and history, an issue that featured several eminent historians among the contributors. In his article “Biography as History: A Personal Reflection,” Stanley Wolpert observed that “at its best, biography is the finest form of history.”<sup>9</sup> Robert Rotberg, in an article on biography and historiography, elaborated on the point, stating, “Biography is history, depends on history, and strengthens and enriches history. In turn, all history is biography.”<sup>10</sup> Medieval historian Michael Prestwich added: “Biography is a form, perhaps the purest form, of narrative history.”<sup>11</sup> All the articles of this special issue celebrate biography as a methodology that has finally come into its own with respect to the writing of history.

Openness to the concept of biography as history can be traced to what Lawrence Stone identified in his seminal 1979 article as a “revival of narrative.” Narrative, which Stone defines as “a *mode* of historical writing,” had fallen into disrepute in the 1920s and 1930s because of its perceived inability to answer the *why* questions.<sup>12</sup> At that time, Marxist ideology sparked an interest in explanatory systems while the social sciences provided the analytical and structural methodology. This led to the growth of a new historical research method developed in the French *Annales* School that favored the analytic over the narrative mode. Over time, however, historians became disillusioned with being confined to an analytic model of historical explanation that was subservient to social and economic determinism and the three-tiered argument of the *Annales* School.<sup>13</sup> The model produced a split between social and intellectual

<sup>8</sup> David Nasaw, “Historians and Biography: Introduction,” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 2009): 573.

<sup>9</sup> Stanley Wolpert, “Biography as History: A Personal Reflection,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2010): 399.

<sup>10</sup> Robert I. Rotberg, “Biography and Historiography: Mutual Evidentiary and Interdisciplinary Considerations,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2010): 305.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Prestwich, “Medieval Biography,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40, no. 3 (Winter 2010): 330.

<sup>12</sup> Stone, “The Revival of Narrative,” 4–5.

<sup>13</sup> According to Stone, “The Revival of Narrative,” 7, the three-tiered argument of the *Annales* School followed a hierarchical organization in which each element is built one on top of

stories in turn “illuminate and complement the biblical text” (p. A 26), however, “the truth of the Bible is to be our authority even when it does not agree with traditional wisdom” (p. A 26). **Articles** address ways to live the Christian life in Africa and “critical concerns that face the Church and its people” (p. A 26). They are meant to provide answers to three questions: the biblical basis of the issue at stake, the specific African issues involved, and the way truth should be applied in daily life (p. A 26).

While the **resources for learning and teaching** are provided throughout as well as at the back of the volume, the **topical index and concordance** give a complete list of all the items discussed. A **narrative timeline of God’s Work in Africa** documents divine interventions on the African continent starting with Abraham’s arrival in Egypt (2000 BC) through the year 2010 (p. A 26-A 27). In addition, **maps, other graphical timelines, and features** are displayed throughout the volume to help the reader “understand the locations, people, time, and structure of the Bible” (p. A 27). Furthermore, the **harmony of the Gospels**, set at the end of John’s Gospel, shows the similitude and difference between the four canonical gospels. Finally, a **Bible overview reading plan** for one year (six days a week), has been created to guide the reader who already might have noticed the colorful original art that portrays the “beauty and power of God’s word” (p. A 27).

The background of the ASB pertains to a concept that originated from “talks among African leaders, Oasis International, and Tyndale House Publishers” (p. A 28). Its vision is to be a “Bible with study tools written by African pastors and scholars” (p. A 28). Its goal is to “increase the understanding of the Bible using African insights and experiences to meet the needs of the church in Africa and around the world” (p. A 28). In terms of outcome, the ASB is expected to reflect “the work of the Spirit” that prevailed during the ad hoc committee meeting in Accra and to “help people make a link between biblical truth and life transformation” (p. A 28). The expression “African writers” has been defined as “those who are African in knowledge, heart, and voice” (p. A 28). They include church ministers and lay leaders (p. A 29). The ASB is based on the New Living Bible, an English translation that has also been translated into French, Portuguese, Arabic, and Swahili (cf. p. A 22, A 29). This partly accounts for the diversity that led to the choice of authors “by language groups, geographical location, denomination, age, and gender” (p. A 29). The work of these authors was to abide by the following specific points and goals:

- to treat the Bible text as the final authority
- to give wise, practical teaching using a non-confrontational approach
- to focus on prescriptive advice, application, and life-transformation
- to attempt to answer questions readers might have

who was son of Aristopoulos of Cyrene (*History of the Patriarchs*) and of Mary of Jerusalem (Acts 12:12). The same happened to be a cousin and missionary companion of Barnabas (Col. 4:10-11), a missionary companion of Paul (Col. 4:10; Phm. 24) and that of Peter (1 Pet. 5:13). More interestingly, he is the founder, the first patriarch, and the first martyr of the Church in Alexandria, Egypt (*Martyrdom of Mark*).

The ASB has preliminary pages that are made of memory Scripture passages, namely Mk. 12:29-31; Eph. 2:8-10; Gal. 5:22-23; Ps. 67; Ps. 91; 1 Cor. 11:23-26; Phil. 4:12-13; Rom. 8:38; 2 Tim. 4:2. These texts are intersected by blank pages for recording the names of the person who received, the one who presented ASB as a gift, and the date of the gift. Other blank pages are left for family and community, as well as for memorable events. These pages for memory Scripture passages and for recording personal / family events likely resonate with practices valued in the church communities of the authors and editors.

The ASB has been commended as God's Word through African eyes by 30 pastors and scholars, including Dr. Mvume Dandala and Dr. Elizabeth Mburu to name but the first and the last on the list. Remarkably, one of the 30 laudatory voices is Dr. G. O. Olutola, JP (JP stands most likely for "Jerusalem Pilgrim," the most desired and cherished titles among some Christians in Nigeria).

The ASB's core content "includes more than 130 articles and Learn Notes" (p. A 11). They have been produced by more than 300 contributors of Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations with support from twelve publishing houses. These include Oasis International Ltd, Tyndale, Association of Evangelicals in Africa, MMD Global, Insight Books, International Fellowship of Evangelical Students, Livingstone Books, PJA, Scripture Union, Africa Christian Text Books, Center for Early African Christianity, and Urban Ministries, inc. (cf. p. A 16-A 21). Noteworthy is the fact that the founding committee of the ASB is made of twelve African scholars while the content and theological review committee is comprised of fifteen members from both Africa and abroad, including an American ranked as a top world-class New Testament scholar.

Contributions in the ASB revolve around African touch points, introductions to each book of the Bible, application notes, proverbs and stories, articles, learn notes, resources for learning and teaching, a topical index and concordance, a narrative timeline of God's work in Africa, maps and other graphical timelines and features, a Bible overview reading plan, and colorful original art.

The **African touch points** "draw attention to Scripture passages with a specific connection to Africa" (p. A 25). **Introductions** to biblical books guide the understanding of these writings in their historical and cultural contexts but also focus "on issues close to the African heart" (p. A 25). **Application notes** are designed to "inspire readers to apply what the Bible teaches to our lives" (p. A 26). **Proverbs and**

history, a split that became more problematic as recognition grew of the importance that ideas and power have for the unfolding of historical events. The return to narrative was also furthered by the bad record of quantification and the insufficiency of mono-causal explanations. In addition, interest in anthropology over economics or sociology increased, and the influence of anthropologists led historians to look more closely at human emotions, behaviors, attitudes, and values.<sup>14</sup>

After forty years of social science interpretation in history, biography has, according to Jo Burr Margadant, come back into fashion in academic circles.<sup>15</sup> Her book—entitled *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France* and published two decades after Stone's article—describes how the "new biographers" re-conceptualized biography. While not all the concepts involved in the new biography are pertinent to those who work outside of Euro-American history, a few of them are applicable to African studies.<sup>16</sup> The new biography brought new historical actors into the foreground—turning the spotlight on previously eclipsed social classes, women, minorities, communities, and groups of workers—and examined their cultures and their shared experience as a foundation for their social identity. Furthermore, the new biography fulfilled two classic objectives of writing about history: to create an engaging narrative for readers and to demonstrate how identity develops within a network of relationships and, often, conflicts. Finally, the greatest ambition of the new biographers may have been to change the "master narratives" of history, bringing women and minorities in from the margins and provoking a reevaluation of the historical record. Their work expanded historical understanding by revealing connections between individuals and established themes.<sup>17</sup>

The connection between the individual person and established themes in history is, in fact, one of the strengths of the use of biography as an integral component of history. As Robert Rotberg states,

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another, like three stories in a house: "first, both in place and in order of importance, came the economic and demographic facts; then the social structure; and lastly, intellectual, religious, cultural and political developments."

<sup>14</sup> Stone, "The Revival of Narrative," 8–14.

<sup>15</sup> Jo Burr Margadant, "Introduction: Constructing Selves in Historical Perspective," in *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France*, ed. Jo Burr Margadant (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 2000), 1.

<sup>16</sup> See Margadant, "Introduction," 1–32. Margadant defines the subject of biography as "a self that is performed" rather than the "coherent self" (7). Also, the new biography uses a "method of analysis that recognizes the constructed nature of our conscious selves and views of others" (8).

<sup>17</sup> Margadant, "Introduction," 9, 16.

Biography is not a method, or an art form, separate from history. Ideally, biographies are as integral to historiography as are the best standard social or economic histories. Biographical treatments must never be divorced from their temporal or spatial contexts. Choice, and rational action, occurs only within such a framework. The individual, in other words, is always within the historical web, not without it—whatever she or he, or biographers, might think.<sup>18</sup>

The work of the *DACB* makes contributions to each facet of the project laid out by the new biographers. The quest to change the master narratives of African Christian history, for example, lies at the heart of the *DACB* project. One such master narrative is the view that the Christianization of Africa was a “foreign affair.” While Western missionaries may have sown the seeds, most of the subsequent conversions can be traced to the work of indigenous evangelists such as William Wadé Harris, who is said to have baptized over 100,000 Africans in the space of eighteen months in four West African countries.<sup>19</sup> The retrieval and preservation of indigenous Christian history in Africa is the only way to counterbalance the persistence of inherited misleading master narratives. Yet despite the strength of biography’s potential contributions, Achim Von Oppen and Silke Strickrodt argue that biography is still underutilized within African historiography.<sup>20</sup> One reason for this seeming oversight is that researchers encounter a lack of biographical material written by Africans. In his work, Kenyan historian William Ochieng’ underlines the scarcity of biographies and autobiographies in Kenya.<sup>21</sup> Though wishing to use biography to reconstruct Kenyan history, he was forced to rely on biographical materials written by Westerners in his analysis of the importance of indigenous political figures in Kenya’s struggle for independence. Making a modest contribution toward addressing this lacuna is part of the *raison d’être* of the *DACB*.

As has been stated, biographical insights give a better understanding of the social forces at work through human agency.<sup>22</sup> Biography may, in fact, become a favored form for historians of the twenty-first century, because even as it examines the interaction between society and individuals, its premise is that individuals are not

<sup>18</sup> Rotberg, “Biography and Historiography,” 306.

<sup>19</sup> For Harris’s story, see David A. Shank, “Wadé Harris, William,” in *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/liberia/legacy\\_harris.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/liberia/legacy_harris.html). The *DACB* also contains several other versions of Harris’s biography.

<sup>20</sup> Achim Von Oppen and Silke Strickrodt, “Introduction—Religious Biography: Transcending Boundaries,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38, no. 3 (September 2012): 429.

<sup>21</sup> William R. Ochieng’, *Place of Biography in Kenyan History, 1904–2005* (Kisumu, Kenya: Mountain View, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Rotberg, “Biography and Historiography,” 305.

This is a scholarly, well-researched volume that deserves a wide reading and provocative discussion. Like all edited works, its essays are of uneven quality—some essays are original and some are not—but the completed work is both thoroughly researched and timely.

Eliakim M. Sibanda

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**Yusu, John, ed. *Africa Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Oasis International, 2016. 2095 pages.**

The wave of Bibles with study notes or Study Bibles is gaining momentum across church traditions, as Evangelicals are coming on board with their own Study Bible for Africa, following the publication of the “Traduction Œcuménique de la Bible” in 1975 for a francophone inter-confessional audience and the “Bible de Jerusalem” in 1981 for a francophone Catholic audience. The latter has been made available by a Catholic translation agency, “Verbum Bible,” in many African major languages. Moreover, Paulines Publications Africa went ahead and published in 1999 a Study Bible (“The African Bible”), based on the “New American Bible.” More interestingly, some Bible societies in Africa have offered genuinely African Study Bibles, based on translations in African languages and made by Africans by birth, using *Biblia Hebraica / Septuagint* and Greek New Testament as source texts. This is the case of the Kiswahili Study Bible (2005), the Malagasy Study Bible (2007), and the Chichewa Study Bible (2014/2018), among others.

The *Africa Study Bible* (ASB) is, in many regards, an Evangelical Study Bible for Africans. It “is dedicated to the Lord’s faithful who, over many centuries, founded the churches that now grow in every part of Africa” (John Jusu, Supervising Editor). One of these faithful might certainly be John Mark of Cyrene (Libya), the evangelist



questions, and thus provides not only a requisite context from which to understand the content, but also offers a useful reading guide to the book.

Structurally, the volume is organized into four parts that reflect the themes of the book itself in dealing with African biography and its centrality in understanding global Christianity (p. x). Part One looks into the importance of Christian biography and the part played by the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB), an “online nonproprietary memory base committed to documenting, collecting, preserving, and making freely accessible biographical accounts and church histories from oral and written sources in order to advance a scholarly understanding of African Christianity” (p.9). Part Two presents biographies of Christian leaders and is an insightful, innovative, and yet contemporary view of the personal identities which constitute selves. The major challenge of a modern perspective of self is a product of the Enlightenment. This view that self/identity was identifiable, unitary, coherent, autonomous, continuous significantly undermined the belief in a coherent self, and therefore the study of biography as a practice of historical inquiry.

More recently, historians are increasingly comfortable with the notion that identity can be conflicted, multiple, and contested, and that it is a product of socio-cultural structures. Identity has thus become a meaningful topic in historical research. This position has permitted the re-entry of biography into historical writing. This section takes the view that identities are multiple (p. viii). The major strength of this kind of approach is that it allows more objectivity and a multilayered analysis in writing about historical biography.

Part Three studies the lives of mostly ordinary women who have contributed significantly to African Christianity. The essays in this section provide a helpful history of gender issues within the African Church where patriarchal structures, like those in the broader society, have refused women voice and history. Thus, in this section, women who have hitherto been voiceless are given visibility by recognizing their contributions in shaping communities. Reading through this section, a reader cannot escape sensing the need for the African church to reflexively examine how social inequalities based on gender, class or otherwise work in their own Christian domicile. Part Four is the most interesting chapter to me as an historian. The section focuses on the writing of African biography with direct implications for the writing of history in general. This section addresses one of the main objectives of this book, which is “to explore multiple dimensions involved in writing scholarly biographies” (p.xii). Those who have an interest in historiography of all sorts will find this section interesting as it struggles with issues of sources and objectivity. The essays challenge us with the complexities of personal and epistemological reflexivity.

captive to social structure.<sup>23</sup> Biography provides more insight when it comes to evaluating the points of contact between African Christians and Westerners such as the missionary, the church leader (e.g., Western bishops of African dioceses), or the colonial administrator. Accurate biography improves one’s understanding of the historical contribution of individuals in their cultural or religious contexts. In a colonial setting, biographical accounts can demonstrate how individuals made choices and acted in ways that distanced them from colonial systems, thus upsetting the commonly accepted notion that they were slaves to the dictates of colonialism.

The founding of the *Journal of Historical Biography* in 2007, which mostly showcased accounts from Western countries and a few from the Global South, further highlighted the growing importance of biography for the historian. Like traditional historians, those who write historical biography base their narrative on evidence, not conjecture. They hold the known facts in balance with what is unknown, stay close to their sources, reference facts and counter facts, and disclose the limits of their knowledge.<sup>24</sup> Rotberg notes that the attraction of writing biography is that “some historians (at least) clearly write biography in order to understand and write history, not because biography is the antithesis of, or some sort of substitute for, history. . . . Writing good biographies means writing good histories. The same evidentiary rules apply.”<sup>25</sup>

But while the same evidentiary rules apply to writing biography as apply to history, biography offers new sources and new methodologies that enrich traditional historical research. These innovations are what make biography a particularly well-chosen mode of historical writing for the task of documenting African Christian history in the twenty-first century.

This brief overview shows that biography has become a critical tool for the historian’s craft and that it is important to foster a healthy symbiotic relationship between biography and history. What follows is an examination of some of the new elements biography brings to traditional historical writing as exemplified in the *DACB*.

### **Biography Addresses the Inevitable Autobiographical Bias**

Biography tends to keep historians more honest about their subjective position as authors and about their rapport with their chosen subjects. The relationship between a historian and the subject of a biography is more personal than the connection between a historian and a theme or time period. The difference begins with the author’s choice

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<sup>23</sup> Nasaw, “Historians and Biography,” 574, 577.

<sup>24</sup> Rotberg, “Biography and Historiography,” 321.

<sup>25</sup> Rotberg, “Biography and Historiography,” 318, 323.

of his or her biographical focus. Choosing to spend a significant amount of time researching and writing about one individual implies a particular attraction to that person, be it emotional (admiration, fascination, disgust), scholarly (curiosity, a quest for understanding), personal (family connection), or ideological (intellectual, professional, or religious affinity). Hence the importance of recognizing the author's "I" behind the third-person narration in a historical account. Granted, narration in the third person gives an aura of scientific objectivity that is prized in Western scholarship. But the integrity of any piece of historical writing, contends Kate Brown, requires that one consider the autobiographical bias of the author. She writes, "Biography, I suspect, is all the more suspicious for historians because it exposes the shading of history into autobiography. Yet, in many ways, there is no biography—nor history, for that matter—without autobiography."<sup>26</sup> In a 2001 article, anthropologist Robert Priest argued that an understanding of an author's autobiographical bias is indispensable to ensuring the integrity of the scholarly enterprise:

Postmodernists call for a recognition that the social location of a scholar (in terms of race, ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation/identity, or religion) is salient to knowledge production and should receive explicit acknowledgment. Indeed, subject positions provide angles of vision, perspectives, and motivations and affect fieldwork relationships in ways which potentially contribute to knowledge production in areas which might be missed by scholars with other subject positions.<sup>27</sup>

For example, in the case of a *DACB* article, a Western male biographer writing about an African woman would struggle to reach the same narrative depth as an African woman writer, especially when it comes to portraying her troubles with racism, paternalism, gender roles, and sexism. Autobiographical bias, therefore, reveals the author's worldview and life experience just as much as it underscores what is missing.

The *DACB* database currently contains 606 biographies written for the project by Africans. Of that total, 230 were written by Project Luke Fellows who received fellowships from the *DACB* so that they could reside for one academic year at the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut, to complete the writing of ten biographies. These twenty-one African scholars came from eleven different countries: Cameroon, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Nigeria, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda. Not all of them were

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<sup>26</sup> Kate Brown, "A Place in Biography for Oneself," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 2009): 599.

<sup>27</sup> Robert J. Priest, "Missionary Positions: Christian, Modernist, Postmodernist," *Current Anthropology* 42, no. 1 (February 2001): 43.

## Book Reviews

**Robert, Dana L., ed. *African Christian Biography: Stories, Lives, and Challenges*. Pietermaritzburg: Cluster Publications, 2018.**

In the 1980s and into the first half of the 1990s, there was an increase in publications of biography and religion. Most of the publications were on the beginnings of Christianity and biography in nineteenth-century Africa and focused on how colonialism and Christianity were intricately interwoven. In that vein, most of the literature asserted that western civilization, the source of the colonial project in Africa, was based on Christianity. However, some challenged this notion that was seen as promoting the existing racial dominance. Very few writings focused on the agency of indigenous Africans in terms of the religious change that occurred during that century.

This timely volume meticulously edited by Dana L. Robert, a prominent scholar in the history of Christianity and missiology, sets out to correct this by focusing on Christian biography of indigenous Africans. Contrasting sharply with most of the previous publications that largely ignored contributions to religious change by Africans, this volume takes an approach that privileges the experiences, agency, and choices of indigenous Africans, and their contributions to world Christianity. The essays in this volume, written by outstanding scholars, half of whom are African-born, illuminate the intersection of Christianity and African culture.

This collection of essays was built on papers presented at a conference that was held in October 2015 in celebration of "the twentieth anniversary of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*..., a preeminent digital humanities project," (p. x). This conference was unusual in that it brought together scholars whose research focused on two different areas: secular African studies on the one hand, and the history of religion on the other (p.xi). This contributed to the production of a rich and deep methodology and historiography of African Christian biography. As a result, the volume's biographical sketches provided readers with a picture of the Church in Africa and its contributions to world Christianity.

The volume opens with a crucial introduction that provides the theoretical framework for the otherwise disparate collection. It succinctly states the text's purpose and direction, and provides a precis of each section. More importantly, on a theoretical level, the introduction grapples with the contested definition of biography and its appropriateness for the study of history. For historians who are biographers and who, in some sense, see history through Thomas Carlyle's "History is biography writ large," the introduction is of special interest. The introduction also lays a necessary foundation for the last section of the book (pp.250-320) that specifically addresses historiographical

move towards the global, and show how the local is affected by the global. Cone's vocation also illustrates the reverse, how the global affects the local. Through such dialectical interaction, new knowledge and expertise is generated, providing insights for effective social reconstruction. I am one of the beneficiaries of Cone's wise counsel in this dialectical approach to scholarship.

### Books by James H. Cone

- Black Theology and Black Power*. New York: Harper & Row, 1969.  
*A Black Theology of Liberation*, (New York: Orbis, 1970).  
*The Spirituals and the Blues*, New York: Seabury Press, 1972. Revised Edition: New York: Orbis, 1991.  
*God of the Oppressed*, Seabury Press, 1975; Revised edition: NY: Orbis, 1997.  
*Black Theology: A Documentary History, Vol. 1: 1966-1979*. James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, editors. New York: Orbis, 1979.  
*My Soul Looks Back: Autobiography*. Abingdon, 1982; Orbis, 1986.  
*For My People*. New York: Orbis, 1984.  
*Speaking the Truth: Ecumenism, Liberation & Black Theology*. New York: Orbis, 1986.  
*Martin, Malcolm, and America: A Dream or a Nightmare?* New York: Orbis, 1991.  
*Black Theology: A Documentary History, Vol. II 1980-1992*. James Cone and Gayraud Wilmore, editors. New York: Orbis, 1993.  
*Risks of Faith: The Emergence of a Black Theology of Liberation 1968-1998*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1999).  
*The Cross and the Lynching Tree*. New York: Orbis, 2011.  
Rufus Burrow Jr., *James H. Cone and Black Liberation Theology*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland Publishing, 2001. ("Splendid, sagacious and systematic survey of the writings of James Cone...must reading.... Excellent bibliography.")

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trained scholars or historians. About half were self-made historians at the time they wrote their biographies, motivated by the task of writing the stories of local Christian figures who had made an impact on their country, their denomination, their region, or, more personally, themselves. Some later went on to seek training as scholars and teachers and inspired their students to write biographies for the *DACB*.<sup>28</sup> The life experience of these African writers influenced their choice of biographical subjects; some chose to write about family members, church figures they had known personally, or individuals who had had an impact on their lives of faith.

For many writers, the autobiographical influence runs both ways. In September 2015 I met with a former Project Luke Fellow from South Africa, George Sombe Mukuka. I had recently learned—to my great surprise—that he was living in Connecticut and working as a Catholic priest. When George came to the United States in 2008, he was a single man who had grown up in a practicing Catholic family and he had been working as faculty research manager at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. Holding several degrees, including one doctorate, he was a brilliant and thorough scholar, as his biographies attest.<sup>29</sup> After his fellowship, he returned home and published his sixteen biographies in a book.<sup>30</sup> When I asked him how he had become a priest, his answer was simple. His work on the first black Catholic priests of South Africa, Zulus like himself, had changed him. He told me that he had been an altar boy while growing up and had wanted to become a priest from early on. Nevertheless, he had pursued a career in academia. Then, years later, his research into the lives and struggles of the first black South African priests had reignited that call to the priesthood, which he said would have “fizzled” had he not come to know their stories.<sup>31</sup>

Not all biographers have such a strong reaction to their subjects. But in

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<sup>28</sup> For a list of the fellowship recipients, see “Project Luke Fellows,” *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/plfellows.htm](http://www.dacb.org/plfellows.htm). Yossa Way and Fohle Lygunda both went on to get doctorates and to teach in religious institutions, incorporating the use of the *DACB* into their curricula. Only two of the twenty-one Project Luke Fellows have been women.

<sup>29</sup> For a list of his biographies see “Biographies by Dr. George Sombe Mukuka,” *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/pluke-part-inst--indexes/mukuka-index.html](http://www.dacb.org/pluke-part-inst--indexes/mukuka-index.html).

<sup>30</sup> George S. Mukuka, *History from the Underside: The Untold Stories of Black Catholic Clergy in South Africa (1898 to 2008)* (Baltimore: PublishAmerica, 2011).

<sup>31</sup> The stories that had the most impact on him, states Mukuka, were the lives of “the first four native priests.” See in the *DACB*, all by George Sombe Mukuka, “Mnganga, Edward Müller Kece,” [www.dacb.org/stories/southafrica/mnganga\\_edward.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/southafrica/mnganga_edward.html); “Mncadi, Alois Majonga,” [www.dacb.org/stories/southafrica/mncadi\\_alois.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/southafrica/mncadi_alois.html); “Ngidi, Andreas Mdontswa,” in [www.dacb.org/stories/southafrica/ngidi\\_andreas.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/southafrica/ngidi_andreas.html); and “Julius uMkomazi Mbhele,” [www.dacb.org/stories/southafrica/mbhele\\_julius.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/southafrica/mbhele_julius.html).

Mukuka's case, his autobiographical bias and his identification with his biographical subjects affected him so strongly that he changed his vocation.

### **Biography Provides a Window into the Formation of Cultural, Religious, and Political Identity**

George Mukuka's story highlights an important reason why biography is crucial to the work of documenting African Christian history: the whole complex of cultural and religious identity. Good biographies focus not only on one individual's life but also on the social, religious, cultural, and political forces that influence the subject's motivations and behaviors. Observes one historian of modern South Asia,

It is also possible to probe key social changes, as well as questions of identity and agency, through the life histories of families. . . . [Life histories] also illuminate important intellectual, social, and political issues, adding depth and complexity to our analyses by anchoring these firmly in lived experience.<sup>32</sup>

The shared experience in related life histories can then be used strategically for historical research to shed light on the larger context.<sup>33</sup>

African Christian history must include reflection on questions of cultural and religious identity. Documenting, through biography, the struggles of Africans as they relate to foreign missionaries and colonial authorities as well as to their Christian peers—indigenous catechists and evangelists—builds a body of knowledge that can be of help as the people of Africa construct new collective identities in their own Christian communities. Biographical writing shows how difficult it is to form identity, especially in the case of African Christian pioneers who, as liminal figures, faced racism, discrimination, persecution, and sometimes physical violence every time they crossed cultural or religious boundaries. In Mukuka's accounts of the first four black Catholic priests in South Africa, these struggles became the leitmotif around which his biographies were structured. Mukuka demonstrated how these difficulties negatively affected and sometimes crippled the ministry of the four pioneers in spite of their success as priests. In this way, he succeeded in rehabilitating their reputation in the historical record.

The pioneer of the four, Edward Mnganga, a highly-educated Zulu, received his training in Rome. Within just a few years of the start of his ministry, however, his

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<sup>32</sup> Judith M. Brown, "Life Histories' and the History of Modern South Asia," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 2009): 593, 595.

<sup>33</sup> Brown, "Life Histories," 595.

the gospel as related to the contemporary problems of Africa.<sup>129</sup>

Conversation between African and African American theologians has already begun, although sporadically. In this global village, it is no longer possible to remain in cultural cocoons. The world has indeed become a "global village," where real-time conversations are now normative. Whereas in the past it would take months or years to communicate across nations and continents, today instantaneous conversation is taken for granted. Whereas publications would take years to come off the press, print-on-demand technology has made book printing instantaneous and cheap. Online publishing has further eased readership, for those with access to fast and affordable Internet connectivity. Thus there is no excuse for avoiding or overlooking conversation and consultation.

### **Concluding Remarks**

The most effective way to conduct theological and philosophical conversations is within a cultural context—irrespective of whether or not a theologian or philosopher explicitly articulates that context, and the perspective is presupposed. Use of the expression "contextual theology" can be misleading if it implies that there are theologies that are not "contextual." When a university or seminary lists a course under the title "Contextual Theology" or "Contextual Philosophy," the risk is that it implies that other courses in the curriculum are "out of context." Such an implication would be unfortunate, because effective teaching and learning should be contextually grounded, especially in the humanities and social sciences.

Professor James Cone has been an exemplary mentor, teacher, and scholar, and has illustrated how themes of global concern can be grounded and explained using actual, local examples—contextual illustrations. He has also illustrated how local themes can have global significance. Cone focused on elaborating themes that both African American and other scholars would take for granted, and wrote books that have made a great impact within academia and outside of it; across cultures and religions. The titles of Cone's published works, elicit curiosity in potential and actual readers. Their linguistic lucidity makes complex themes so clear that they appear too simple. This is a rare skill to master. It has been a joy and a providential opportunity for me to interact with this great scholar. Although he taught and addressed his works primarily to African Americans, his published works illustrate that it is possible to begin with the local and

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<sup>129</sup> James H. Cone, "A Black American Looks at African Theology," in *Worldview*, December 1979, [https://carnegiecouncil-media.storage.googleapis.com/files/v22\\_i012\\_a006.pdf](https://carnegiecouncil-media.storage.googleapis.com/files/v22_i012_a006.pdf); J. N. K. Mugambi, "Liberation and Theology," in *WSCF Dossier No. 5*, Geneva (June 1974).

religious heritage. This commitment is concomitant with that of the Scottish missionaries who inducted him into Scottish Presbyterianism in Central Kenya. Scottish Presbyterianism is both Christian and Scottish. Gatutu insisted that cultural rootedness is biblically justifiable and normal, because the Gospel requires cultural soil in which to germinate and flourish. The charges of syncretism and tribalism that missionaries heaped upon their African converts were inconsistent with the history of Christianity in Europe, where, under the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and the Peace of Westphalia (1648), each prince had the right to dictate the religion of the people he ruled. The consequence was tribal European churches, which were exported to Africa under the European missionary enterprise in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>128</sup>

The volume *Black Theology: A Documentary History 1966-1979 Vol. 1* contains a collection of thirty-five papers under the following six categories: 1) Black Power and Black theology – 5 papers; 2) Foundational Voices before 1980 – 6 papers; 3) Black Theology and the Bible – 4 papers; 4) Black Theology and the Black Church – 8 papers; 5) Black Theology and Black Women – 5 papers; 6) Black Theology and Third World Theologies – 7 papers. The volume concludes with an annotated bibliography of black theology. The providential opportunity for Africans to interact with African Americans in the mid-1970s was instructive and educative for both sides. As the youngest among the participants, the interaction motivated me to read more broadly and sharpen my conceptual focus. I have learned a great deal, especially from Cone, Mbiti, and Tutu. I treasure their wisdom, experience and expertise. In a short paper James Cone published in December 1979, he cited one of mine that had been published in June 1974:

“Liberation,” writes Jesse Mugambi, “is the objective task of contemporary African Christian Theology. It is not just one of the issues, but rather, all issues are aimed at liberating Africans from all forces that hinder them from living fully as a human being.” According to Mugambi, the idea of liberation is inherent in the concept of salvation. “In the African context, and in the Bible, salvation as a theological concept cannot be complete without liberation as a social / political concept.” No African theologians, however, have expressed the theme of liberation more dramatically than South African theologians. Desmond Tutu and Manas Buthelezi are prominent examples of this new theological perspective emerging from behind the apartheid walls of the Republic of South Africa. Both have challenged African theologians to take seriously the political ingredient of

superior, a Mariannahill priest from England named David Bryant, had him locked away in an asylum for seventeen years because Mnganga, incensed at Bryant’s racist provocations, attempted to assault him physically. Mukuka argues at great length that Mnganga was neither psychologically unbalanced nor in any way mentally unfit for his role as a priest. He uses testimonies from African bishops Biyase and Khumalo, a school prefect, the diocesan priest Natalis Mjoli, a woman who became Mnganga’s cook, and a report by a medical doctor from the asylum. The historical situation that Mukuka describes is completely different from what had been recorded in the official church records. Mukuka demonstrates that even though Mnganga reacted angrily to his mistreatment, the light shed on Bryant shows him to have been racist, petty, paternalistic, jealous of Mnganga’s success, maliciously dishonest, arrogant, and vindictive, even to the point of spying on Mnganga in an effort to find evidence of misconduct. For Mukuka, it was important that the historical record show that Mnganga was not insane but that his violent outburst was rooted in anger against Bryant, who obviously suffered from a severe lack of Christian character.

The other three pioneer priests, Alois Mncadi, Julius Mbhele, and Andreas Ngidi, had to fight for the ownership of their farms. These priests, also educated in Rome, were keenly aware of their financial insecurity as single men outside of the traditional African family network and of the precariousness of their positions if they dared to speak out against discriminatory practices in the church. In one of several communications, Bishop Fleischer told Mncadi that the farm put his soul in danger of “eternal damnation” and demanded that he get rid of it. Because the priests refused to sell their land, all three were viewed by church authorities as insubordinate. Mukuka’s research, however, reveals the sinister backstory to this issue of landownership.

In fact, the problem that arose with the farm was much more than a matter of ecclesiastical obedience. During the first decades of the twentieth century, as a result of the 1913 Land Act and several other pieces of colonial legislation, the people in the black middle class were systematically dispossessed of their property. The white colonial government wanted to own not only the land but also the means of production. In this matter, the (white) bishops—and in this case Bishop Fleischer—blindly followed the government’s discriminatory policies.<sup>34</sup>

Mukuka’s careful investigation into what, on the surface, appeared to be a case of insubordination to ecclesiastical authority revealed what it really was: resistance to an instance of missionary collusion with racist colonial policies.

The relationship between missions and colonialism is a theme in many of the

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<sup>128</sup> John G. Gatutu, *Fan Into Flame, An Autobiography* (Nairobi: Moran, 2017).

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<sup>34</sup> Mukuka, “Mncadi, Alois Majonga.”

biographies in the *DACB* as well as an important factor in identity formation. Many African Christian leaders started their spiritual journeys while being imprisoned by colonial authorities. Modi Din, an evangelist of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Cameroon, received his calling to the ministry while a prisoner of the German occupation authorities between 1914 and 1916.<sup>35</sup> A more well-known figure, Simon Kimbangu, spent thirty years in prison in the Belgian Congo after an astounding ministry of only six months. His living martyrdom and eventual death in prison sealed his reputation among his followers as a Christ-figure.<sup>36</sup> Biographies of William Wadé Harris tell how he experienced a trance-visitation from the Angel Gabriel while in prison which launched him on his journey as a prophet and evangelist in Liberia, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, and Sierra Leone.<sup>37</sup> These prison experiences are examples of disruptions that are best highlighted in biographical studies.

Von Oppen and Strickrodt underline the point.

Life stories of individuals, groups and cohorts show especially clearly the disruptions and constraints caused by colonial and post-colonial rule, and by the boundaries they imposed. . . . For Africa in particular, recent biographical research has shown that personal lives, as processes reconstructed by the researcher but also as narratives (texts) produced by actors themselves, have much to tell us about the production of new individual and collective identities in the face of different, changing and often oppressive conditions.<sup>38</sup>

The descriptive and interpretive resources of biographical writing demonstrate how imprisonment at the hands of the colonial authorities proved to be not only a negative disruption (an act of racism), but also a positive turning point in the lives of Modi Din and Harris, because it was in prison that their identities as powerful evangelists were forged.

In addition to documenting colonial disruptions, biography underscores how individuals struggle with their identities as they confront cultural and religious boundaries. Religious biography in particular often focuses on the struggle of missionaries and evangelists to transcend these boundaries.<sup>39</sup> In writing the story of

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<sup>35</sup> Robert Amadou Pindzié, "Modi Din Jacob," *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/cameroon/modi-din.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/cameroon/modi-din.html).

<sup>36</sup> Multiple biographies of Simon Kimbangu are found in the *DACB*. See "Democratic Republic of the Congo," *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/demrepcongo/demrepcongo.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/demrepcongo/demrepcongo.html).

<sup>37</sup> See the many biographies of Harris listed in "Liberia," *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/liberia/liberia.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/liberia/liberia.html).

<sup>38</sup> Von Oppen and Strickrodt, "Introduction," 429.

<sup>39</sup> Von Oppen and Strickrodt, "Introduction," 430.

In *Black Theology: A Documentary History 1966-1979 Vol. 1*, Cone and Wilmore have compiled a treasure of documentation on the initiatives of African Americans to document their responses to, and appropriations of the Christian faith during the 1960s and 1970s. The documents are neither exhaustive nor comprehensive. Rather, they are indicative of the creative genius of African American scholars during these two decades, based on the foundations laid by earlier generations. This volume, together with its sequel, remains one of the most valuable published collections of African American Christian theological authorship. The challenge is for African scholars to compile similar volumes, nationally or regionally. Hans Engdahl, in a review of this volume with reference to South Africa, provides a glimpse of what a contextual documentary history of black theology might contain. He cites the life background of Archbishop Desmond Tutu thus:

Those who know anything about Tutu as a man of the church would also place him firmly within the Anglican Church. But, he was literally shaped in a quite different ecumenical milieu of the black church in the poor townships in western Johannesburg. His basic theological insights were made in this township church way before King's College, London. Black people struggled just to make a living, but in this very situation of hardship the church was present, in the everyday life, in all sorts of ways. This is vividly illustrated by Tutu's childhood. This is still in many ways typical South African township life. The church is there in all its shapes. One could truly talk about the ecumenical church, which means that many denominations are on offer, and families would often times freely make their choices, individually or collectively. In Tutu's case, it was like this. His father worked as a teacher at a Methodist school, and his grandfather was an African Independent Church minister. As a boy, he frequently joined his uncle, also a priest in this African Independent Church.<sup>126</sup>

Another example could be cited from the autobiography of Moderator John G. Gatutu, *Fan Into Flame: An Autobiography*.<sup>127</sup> John Gatutu rose to become head of the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, and chairman of the board of trustees of the All Africa Conference of Churches. In his autobiography, he emphasizes that, in addition to his acceptance of the Christian faith and his membership in the East African Revival Movement, throughout his life he remained appreciative of his African cultural and

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<sup>126</sup> Hans Engdahl, "The Black Atlantic as reversal: A reappraisal of African and black theology," in *HTS Theological Studies*, Vol. 73 No. 3 (2017), <https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/article/view/4618/10200>.

<sup>127</sup> John G. Gatutu, *Fan Into Flame: An Autobiography* (Nairobi: Moran, 2017).

cargo between 1441, when the first slaves were shipped from Africa to Portugal, until 1888, when Brazil abolished slavery.<sup>121</sup> Western Christianity is implicated in this sad history.<sup>122</sup> Africans and African Americans make a distinction between God, the Creator, and God as presented to them through the missionary enterprise. This is their rational explanation for African conversion to Christianity. Most missionaries, however, failed to appreciate the profundity of African religiosity prior to missionary arrival in various parts of Africa, with few exceptions.<sup>123</sup>

The rise of African and African American Independent Churches is a testimony to the distinction that Africans and African Americans have made between their own deep religiosity, and that of the missionaries whose culture they could neither understand nor internalize. African Christianity remains a multi-cultural mosaic, with importations from abroad, superimposed on a deeper religiosity rooted in the African cultural and religious heritage.

This phenomenon is not unique to Africa. Early European converts to Christianity incorporated some insights from the Aramaic religiosity that Jesus bequeathed to his disciples. It is this pre-Christian religiosity that is the motif of the European Christian festal and liturgical calendar—names of days and names of months were retained from pre-Christian ontology, and the old ceremonies were incorporated into Christian liturgy. The early African and European expressions of Christianity—in both Latin and Greek—ensured resonance between Aramaic doctrine and religiosity with European ontology and culture. Such was the task of the great North African pioneers of Christianity.<sup>124</sup>

The liturgical calendar of European Christianity is not Aramaic. It is based on pre-Christian Nordic and South European religiosity—including days of the week and some Christian festivals. Thus contextualization is an inescapable outcome of the missionary enterprise, irrespective of the cultures involved. European Christmas festivity is neither Jewish nor Mediterranean. It is Nordic. African Christianity is awkward when it adopts rituals from other cultures, while denigrating its own.<sup>125</sup>

***Black Theology: A Documentary History 1966-1979 Vol. 1 (Orbis, 1979)***

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<sup>121</sup> <https://www.thoughtco.com/trans-atlantic-slave-trade-timeline-4156303>.

<sup>122</sup> On this point see, for example, the “Apology by the Church of England” published in *The Guardian* on February 10, 2006, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2006/feb/09/religion.world>.

<sup>123</sup> For example, John V. Taylor, *The Primal Vision* (London: SCM, 1963).

<sup>124</sup> Athanasius (c. 296–373 CE); St. Augustine of Hippo 354–430 CE; Clement of Alexandria (ca. 150–215 CE); Cyril (ca 313–386 CE); Origen (185–253 CE); Tertullian (155–225 CE).

<sup>125</sup> See, for example, H. R. Ellis Davidson, *Gods and Myths of Northern Europe*, Pelican, 1964.

Apolo Kivebulaya (ca.1864–1933), an Anglican missionary from Uganda, Project Luke Fellow Rev. Yossa Way described Apolo’s cross-cultural struggles upon arriving in Boga, in northeast Congo. Some people responded to his teaching, but most people, including the chief, rejected his message and ordered that he not be given any food. Apolo had traveled with his Bible *and* his hoe, however, so he could cultivate food for his own survival.<sup>40</sup> He eventually had a successful ministry and went on to become known as the apostle to the Pygmies.

In reality, not all cultural and religious struggles ended happily for African Christians. Project Luke Fellow Kehinde Olabimtan introduces the story of Henry Johnson (1840–1901) by describing the difficult cultural context that local Africans faced in the mid-1800s:

Henry Johnson, son, was born at a time when the fledgling Sierra Leone community of creoles was beset with the problem of identity in a westernizing but ambivalent social environment. . . . The colony, as a meeting point of European and African cultures, became a source [of] temptation to these colony-born young people. They despised their parents’ African culture while being attracted to the European lifestyle they saw in Freetown for which they had no resources or qualifications.<sup>41</sup>

Henry Johnson worked for many years to translate the New Testament into Mende and held a strong desire to see Mende children benefit from the education that the Church Missionary Society could offer them. Unfortunately, his rise as a leading figure in the mission was halted by the envy of Western missionaries who were less qualified, less energetic, and less passionate than he was. This is the way that Olabimtan concludes Henry Johnson’s story:

Johnson represented a double liability because he came from Sierra Leone, where nationalist fervor was a cause for concern among European missionaries in the Yoruba mission. . . . The archdeacon was, therefore, a victim of the times in which he lived, but the inherent ambivalence that made and unmade him continues to characterize the relationship between Africa and the West. The continent and its people must not be allowed to sink, but they must also not be allowed to excel and escape the control of the West. Will the time ever come “for [them] to be believed?”<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Yossa Way, “Apolo Kivebulaya,” *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/demrepcongo/kivebulaya\\_apolo.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/demrepcongo/kivebulaya_apolo.html).

<sup>41</sup> Kehinde Olabimtan, “Johnson, Henry,” *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/sierraleone/johnson\\_henry2.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/sierraleone/johnson_henry2.html).

<sup>42</sup> Olabimtan, “Johnson, Henry.”

One cannot help but hear Olabimtan's autobiographical voice in this closing plea—for him, Johnson is a model for the struggles that modern Africans face in the contemporary globalized world.

For many *DACB* authors such as Mukuka, Way, and Olabimtan, the biographical lens has served as a powerful tool for exploring, in depth, the formation of their subjects' social, cultural, religious, and political identities. Sometimes the rapport they have formed with their subjects has served as a catalyst for their own reflections on questions of personal and collective identity.

### **Biography Provides New Methodologies, Categories, and Subject Matter That Challenge Stereotypical Views of History**

As is true for history in general, to achieve a well-rounded view of any given subject the biographer must employ interdisciplinary research methods. For example, biography, like social history, uses what anthropologist Clifford Geertz called "thick description," which can be harvested using the methodologies offered by oral history.<sup>43</sup> Oral history interviews allow the researcher to gain deep insights into her or his subject's history, relationships, and contexts. In addition, the interviewer can cross-check facts during exchanges with individuals holding different and sometimes opposing viewpoints. Interviews allow narrators to give an alternate perspective on written documents such as colonial or ecclesiastical records and may, in some cases, prove these sources wrong.<sup>44</sup> Mukuka, for example, used interviews in several instances in his studies of the first black Catholic priests in South Africa. As with Mukuka, oral history methodology is essential in the research of many *DACB* biographers because it provides an alternative to received narratives and historical stereotypes.

One of the most entrenched stereotypes in the history of Christianity in Africa is that of the "bad white missionary." Even though one cannot deny the many mistakes missionaries have made, this stereotype is based on a superficial understanding of mission history and on the fallacious tendency to judge the past with the yardstick of today. More thorough research into the legacy of foreign missions in Africa reveals that many Western missionaries played positive roles among the people whose culture they embraced. Many devoted their lives to advocacy in the name of human rights, to

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<sup>43</sup> Lois W. Banner, "Biography as History," *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 2009), 580–83, referencing Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, Geertz (New York: Basic, 1973), 3–30.

<sup>44</sup> David J. Mitchell, "'Living Documents': Oral History and Biography," *Biography* 3, no. 4 (Fall 1980): 283–85.

In December 1975, Cone gave a well-attended lecture at the Catholic Chapel in the precincts of the University of Nairobi, organized as a side event during the WCC Fifth Assembly. A prominent German Protestant theologian posed the first question: "If this theology of liberation is achieved, what next?" I wondered how Cone would respond. He replied: "The kingdom of God will have arrived!" There was murmuring among the audience, as Cone added: "From the perspective of the oppressed, what matters most is their liberation. And God liberates the oppressed." Calm returned and the question-and-answer session continued. Such concise and precise use of language is rare, especially in such academic discourses as theology and philosophy.

Theology, like Philosophy, is a reflective undertaking—processing ideas that reach our attention through various channels, the most significant of which are written sources and interaction with fellow scholars. Inter-generational mentorship is particularly essential for the cultivation and sharpening of conceptual clarity. In my own theological journey, I have been nourished by the exposure provided by the ecumenical movement. It has also been a privilege for me to interact with the wider circle of African Christian theologians—both the older and younger ones. Those of us who have been thus mentored have a duty to pass on the torch to the next generation.

I am particularly grateful to the younger scholars who have written critiques on my published works, especially on the theme of social reconstruction. The more we learn from one another, the stronger will be our collective endeavor. In particular, I wish to refer to the caution expressed by Professor Tinyiko Maluleke as early as 1996, and by Professor Vellem as recently as 2018—that theology at its best is continuous reflection, in which it is risky to settle upon a fixed idea or claim.<sup>120</sup> St. Paul cautions us not to be conformed to the norms of this world. Instead, we ought to become agents of social transformation, through the renewal of our minds. For me, this is what the theology of reconstruction is about—a continuous search for new answers to old challenges and refusing to take any solution for granted.

### ***God of the Oppressed* (Seabury Press, 1975)**

In *God of the Oppressed*, Cone emphasizes that suffering is embedded in the historical background of African Americans, dating from the tragic four-century trade in human

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<sup>120</sup> Tinyiko Maluleke, "Black and African theologies in the new world order: A time to drink from our own wells," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, Vol 3 Issue 1 (Jan. 1996), 3-19; See also, for example, Ntozakhe S. Cezula, "Identity Formation and Community Solidarity: Second Temple Historiographies in Discourse with (South) African theologies of Reconstruction," PhD Thesis, Stellenbosch University, 2013; Vuyani S. Vellem, "The Symbol of Liberation in South African Public Life: A Black Theological Perspective, PhD Thesis, University of Pretoria, 2007.



Within the continent of Africa, only in the former British Dominion of South Africa, did skin color become a label to officially discriminate between Europeans or whites and Africans or blacks. The following remark by Mbiti from Kenya may perhaps provide a succinct explanation of the subtle problem of color and race in African and Africanist scholarship:

A prejudiced nineteenth century European writer reported that, “the Bushman [San] is eminently superstitious, and is a believer in an Invisible-Agency-in-human-affairs-distinct-from-man,” which they call God. Other than the cancer of prejudice, which plagues many foreign writers about African life, there is no reason why anyone with any scholarly sanity, should label such a belief in God as “superstitious.” Nevertheless, this description shows the strength and antiquity of African religion, which revolves around the belief in God.<sup>117</sup>

I met Cone during my involvement with the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), the World Council of Churches (WCC), and the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC). All these exposures broadened my perspective of the Christian faith, far beyond the narrow confines of denominational identity. Although my childhood was socialized within the Anglican fold, in adulthood I became open-minded and inclusive, without compromising my commitment as a Christian. At the same time, on a practical level, I learned that there is no abstract Christian Faith apart from Christianity lived in specific national, cultural, and social contexts.

Both Cone and Gayraud S. Wilmore remained consistently broad-minded and inclusive in their counsel to the various factions of leadership among Americans of African ancestry. Their published works attest to that broad-minded consistency.<sup>118</sup> Wilmore deserves a similar tribute.<sup>119</sup> Cone insisted that nobody should be compelled to apologize for who they are. Those who denigrate others are guilty of blasphemy because they presume to find error in God’s creatures—human beings included. Cone’s use of the English language was so striking that his remarks remain memorable to his audiences.

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<sup>117</sup> John S. Mbiti, *Concepts of God in Africa*, 2nd ed. (Nairobi: Acton, 2012), 409ff.

<sup>118</sup> In this paper, references to Cone’s published works concern their impact on my overall appreciation—in view of the relationship between African and African-American theological scholarship.

<sup>119</sup> Professor Gayraud Wilmore’s book *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Doubleday, 1973; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Orbis, 1998) also focuses on an overview of African-American responses to race relations in the U.S. He co-edited with Cone the volume *Black Theology: A Documentary History* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, Vol. 1: 1966-1979; Vol. 2: 1980 – 1992).

preserving culture by teaching in the local language, to the social uplift of women and girls, to education, and to defending the local people against the encroachments of colonial systems. Catholic bishop Pierre Claverie is one example.

Pierre Claverie, Catholic bishop of Oran and protagonist of Islamo-Christian dialogue, was assassinated by Islamic militants in a booby trap explosion at the entrance to his house. His young Algerian driver, Mohammed Bouchikhi, died with him and the mingling of their blood was seen by many as a symbol of the bishop’s desire to find a home in the hearts of the Algerian people and to participate in their sufferings.<sup>45</sup>

This kind of devotion is common for many missionaries, numbers of whom came to see Africa as their adopted home and chose to die and be buried among “their people.” For example, missiologist Roland Allen (1868–1947) is buried in Nairobi, Kenya, and missionary-activist John Philip (1775–1851) lies in a graveyard for “coloreds” in South Africa, to mention only two. Many *DACB* biographies tell the story of what might be, for some, a new category of subject matter in African history: that of the *good* Western missionary.

Biographies of African Christians offer new subject matter which the Western academy considers to be of questionable historicity because of Western epistemological biases. Perhaps the most controversial of these categories is that of supernatural phenomena such as accounts of miraculous events, healings, and visions. The use of biography to recount these phenomena makes it possible to present the material within the worldview of the biographical subject, preserving both the account and the integrity of the narrator’s perspective. Berthe Raminosa Rasoanlimanga, a Project Luke Fellow in 2008–09, wrote the stories of three major leaders in the *Fifohazana* Revival in Madagascar, a movement that has been ongoing since October 15, 1894, when the first leader, Rainisoalambo, received a vision of Jesus telling him to throw out his fetishes.<sup>46</sup> In addition to being a trained archivist, Berthe is also a shepherd, or evangelist, within the revival movement. Her accounts of the two women *Fifohazana* leaders are perhaps her most remarkable and—to Western ears—incredible biographies. Ravelonjanahary (ca.1850–1970) was the second leader of the revival and ministered during the last sixty years of her 120-year life.<sup>47</sup> Nenilava (Germaine Volahavana; 1920–98) was the revival’s

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<sup>45</sup> Aylward Shorter, “Claverie, Pierre,” *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/algeria/claverie\\_pierre.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/algeria/claverie_pierre.html).

<sup>46</sup> Berthe Raminosa Rasoanlimanga, “Rainisoalambo,” *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/madagascar/rainisoalambo.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/madagascar/rainisoalambo.html).

<sup>47</sup> Berthe Raminosa Rasoanlimanga, “Ravelonjanahary,” *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/madagascar/ravelonjanahary.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/madagascar/ravelonjanahary.html).

fourth leader.<sup>48</sup> There are common themes in the two women leaders' life stories: both were illiterate and grew up in families that practiced traditional religion with fathers who were healers and seers; both received a direct call from Jesus and visions instructing them in their ministry; both had gifts of miraculous healing; and both were said to have died for several days and to have come back to life after going to heaven, where they saw visions.

In her biography of Ravelonjanahary, Rasoanalimanga tries—through her use of sources—to address the skepticism such stories provoked among local Malagasy. She quotes from a journal for former students of the Protestant Mission, entitled *Gazety Ranovelona* [Living water], that collected reactions from four different newspapers to the miraculous events surrounding Ravelonjanahary's ministry. The article in *Gazety Ranovelona*, published on January 31, 1928, includes this response taken from *La Grande Ile* [The great island], one of the newspapers:

Putrefaction can only come from the dead. Was there really an occurrence of this nauseating odor that is putrefaction? If the answer is yes, then it is true that Ravelonjanahary really did rise from the dead. According to what people are saying, the blind are recovering their sight, the deaf their hearing, the mute are speaking, paralytics are standing on their feet and other ills are being healed as well. The Gospel that she is preaching to sinners is not a shame, but rather an honor for the Protestant Church. . . . But the most remarkable thing is that Ravelonjanahary is not asking for money from anyone. . . . The number of people who have come to see her over the last five weeks or so is up to 871, and that number includes six *vazaha* (Europeans). There were also Indians and Chinese, as well as childless people who came asking to have children.<sup>49</sup>

The sources Rasoanalimanga references in this article and in her biography of Nenilava are written rather than oral—something that, for Western-educated scholars, lends them more credibility than would oral sources. One of the sources to be found in the bibliography of her biography of Nenilava is a booklet of collected stories and eyewitness accounts, published in 2007.<sup>50</sup> In 2011, when Berthe did her research, there were people

Demographically, the African presence in South and Central America has been substantial because of the millions of African slaves who were shipped there. However, African expressions of liberation theology in South and Central America have not been proportional to the numbers of people of African descent in that region, compared with those of European descent. Churches resulting from the missionary enterprise conformed to the norms of colonial polity and economy, which resulted in segregation on an institutional, racial, ritual, social, political, and economic level. The formation of African Instituted Churches (AICs) is a glaring manifestation of the alienation African converts felt in missionary led churches.

Denominational identity has been further complicated by the influx of new missionary initiatives from Europe and North America, leaning towards evangelical, fundamentalist, and charismatic expressions. Thus the denominational spectrum of African Christianity is much wider than in other regions worldwide. In Tropical Africa, by design, the colonial localization of oppression ensured that Africans were deliberately schooled, indoctrinated, and classified in “tribal enclaves” rather than in “racial” terms. This stratification was in accordance with the prejudiced ethnographic monographs that formed the basis of colonial policy. For instance, in the British Crown Colony of Kenya, there was a “Color Bar” that dictated that the Africans were not referred to as “Africans” or “Blacks.” Instead, they were called “natives,” in contrast with “Europeans” and “Indians.”

This background partly explains the greater focus on African-ness (or Pan-Africanism) among African scholars outside South Africa.<sup>114</sup> Not all Africans are black. At the same time, not all Europeans are racists. It is in the context of this background that many African Christian theologians outside South Africa, although taking their African-ness for granted, have not belabored the fact of their dark skin.<sup>115</sup> The Nigerian Nobel Laureate Wole Soyinka summarizes this perspective with these subtle words: “I said: ‘A tiger does not proclaim his tigritude, he pounces.’ In other words: a tiger does not stand in the forest and say: ‘I am a tiger.’ When you pass where the tiger has walked before, you see the skeleton of the duiker, you know that some tigritude has been emanated there.”<sup>116</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Berthe Raminosoa Rasoanalimanga, “Nenilava (Volahavana), Germaine,” *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/madagascar/nenilava.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/madagascar/nenilava.html).

<sup>49</sup> See Rasoanalimanga, “Ravelonjanahary.”

<sup>50</sup> Rasoanalimanga, “Nenilava (Volahavana), Germaine”; *Ankaramalaza-Germaine Volahavana Nenilava: Histoires et Témoignages* [Ankaramalaza-Germaine Volahavana Nenilava: Stories and witness accounts] (Antananarivo, Madagascar: Imprimerie Luthérienne Malgache, 2007).

<sup>114</sup> Motion on Abolition of the Color Bar, *House of Commons Hansard*, London: May 1, 1953, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/commons/1953/may/01/colour-bar-abolition>.

<sup>115</sup> See, for example, John G. Gatu, *Joyfully Christian, Truly African* (Nairobi: Acton, 2005); Ingvard Wilhelmsen, *I Don't Eat Blacks: The Life of Richard O. Odeng* (Naivasha, Kenya: Old Africa Books, 2013).

<sup>116</sup> Wole Soyinka, cited in Janheinz Jahn, *Neo-African Literature: A History of Black Writing* (New York: Grove Press, 1968), 256.

## A Tribute to Professor James H. Cone (August 5, 1938 – April 29, 2018)

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Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

In this paper, I pay tribute to a major scholar who has influenced my vocation, Professor James Hal Cone (1936-2018).<sup>113</sup> Cone studied, worked, researched, and published in the U.S. context. His publications had an impact far beyond North America, especially among African Christian theologians in the ecumenical movement, mostly between 1973 and 1994. Until his death in April 2018, Cone was one of the most articulate and most prolific of African-American Christian theologians.

I first met Cone in early June 1973 when I visited Union Theological Seminary, New York, to attend the first exploratory meeting between African and African American Christian theologians. Cone was our host. The other African attendees included John K. Agbeti, Kwesi Dickson, Edward Fashole-Luke, Christian Gaba, John S. Mbiti, and Desmond Tutu. Among the African-Americans, there was Herbert Brown, Horace Campbell, Charles Long, Preston Williams, Gayraud Wilmore, John Deortis Roberts, and Shelby Rooks. When I returned to Kenya after the meeting, I was a changed person, having interacted with senior theologians and church leaders of great stature.

A few conceptual clarifications are in order here by way of introduction. Theologies of liberation arose from the contexts of the oppressed. Voices of subaltern communities in Latin American liberation theology have not been as audible as those of the rulers. This liberation theology has been less vocal on race relations than black liberation theology in North America. Likewise, theological scholarship in South Africa has continued to be dominated by South Africans of European descent. This can be seen in publication output. These contrasts are academically interesting, but ethically puzzling, considering that European invaders found flourishing civilizations in the lands they invaded, conquered, occupied, and plundered. The descendants of those earlier civilizations are still extant even though their perspectives are hardly visible in academic discourse.

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<sup>113</sup> This paper is in partial response to a request by Professor Jonathan Bonk, Director of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB.org) for short pieces hinting at some of the scholars who have influenced my vocation. He is one of those at the top of my list.

still living who had known Nenilava and could talk about their encounter with her.<sup>51</sup>

*DACB* biographies showcase new methodologies, categories, and subject matter that are not commonly used in Western history writing. In Africa, the conduct of oral history research is important to the retrieval of history that is in danger of disappearing.<sup>52</sup> The perspectives of African biographers challenge historical stereotypes and introduce new subject matter, such as supernaturalism, to the toolkit of historians.

### Biography Is a Response to the Scarcity of Sources

The scarcity of written sources creates considerable challenges for biographers working on the life stories of African Christians. The difficulty is compounded when it comes to writing about women, and the ideas and practices of women generally must be culled by exploring their lives as practitioners. In her history of American missionary women, Dana Robert underlined the “raw and uncharted state of the sources” related to women’s mission history and theory. She noted,

It is impossible to track their mission theory through reading formal documents, theological treatises, or by following debates over mission theory in various denominations. In the early nineteenth century, published diaries and letters are the major source from which women’s mission thought must be inferred against the more general history of the American missionary movement itself.<sup>53</sup>

Paper trails for African Christian women, however, are even more rare, for the women often received little or no education. Many of the major female leaders of independent churches were illiterate when they received their calling. Agnes Okoh, founder of the Nigerian independent church, Christ Holy Church International, received her calling when she heard a voice repeating “Matthew 10.” Confused about what this meant, she had to ask a young man to read that chapter of Matthew’s Gospel to her. That revelation

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<sup>51</sup> The *Fifobazana* movement has not had any nationally recognized leader since Nenilava’s death in 1998. Mama Christine, a woman from among the Bara people in the southern part of the island, however, is rumored to be the next leader. As part of my research on this revival movement in 2011, I was able to meet with and interview Mama Christine through the intermediation of Berthe Rasoanalimanga, who served as my research assistant. See Appendix 2 for an excerpt from an interview in which she tells the story of her heavenly encounter with Jesus and Nenilava.

<sup>52</sup> A classic oral history resource book is Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978).

<sup>53</sup> Dana L. Robert, *American Women in Mission: A Social History of Their Thought and Practice* (Macon, GA: Mercer Univ. Press, 1997), xx.

eventually led her to become a powerful prophetess and spiritual leader, and the church she founded now numbers nearly 850 congregations in Nigeria, Togo, and Ghana.<sup>54</sup> Fortunately, though Okoh never left a paper trail, the many oral testimonies to her life's work made it possible to construct a full account of her legacy.<sup>55</sup>

Most of the *DACB*'s 226 biographies of women list very few written sources, for the biographers were forced to rely on oral material. For example, the biography of Hakalla Amale lists only four sources: an interview between the author and the subject before her death and interviews with three other individuals from her church or family. Her story is brief, focusing mainly on one powerful incident of persecution.

While Hakalla was pregnant with her second son, the persecution increased. The village elders came to her home, forced her outside, and demanded that she deny Christ, threatening to curse her if she refused. On that particular day she was preparing a traditional medicine which people believed made labour and delivery easier. In their presence, she drank the medicine in the name of Christ. The men then cursed her. Hakalla was willing to die rather than deny Christ. Later that day, she gave birth to a healthy second son and the people saw that the power of Christ had overcome the curse.<sup>56</sup>

The vividness of this scene gives it a lively and performative quality that reflects the oral testimonies on which it is based. It also implies that this confrontation was probably a memorable village event that many individuals could corroborate.

According to historian David Nasaw, the lack of written documents and archives is not necessarily a handicap for biography, a judgment that can give courage to biographers working in Africa, for as just illustrated, oral history is sometimes the only source of historical data available there.<sup>57</sup> One scholar has pointed out that it is the responsibility of historians to use all possible means to rescue the history of ordinary people from oblivion. This may mean, in some cases, "abandoning the comfort of texts" or stepping across disciplinary boundaries into archeology and forensic anthropology as means for exploring the physical remains of mummified individuals or abandoned places that may retain some traces of Christian peoples who have long since

Vol. 1, No. 1 (January/February, 1968).

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This story, received in 2019, was written by Rev. Thomas Oduro, Ph.D., President of Good News Theological College and Seminary, Accra, Ghana, *DACB* Advisory Council member, and *JACB* contributing editor.

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Oduro, "Agnes Okoh," *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/okoh\\_agnes.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/okoh_agnes.html).

<sup>55</sup> Oduro lists twenty interviews in his bibliography in addition to many written sources, though none by Agnes Okoh herself.

<sup>56</sup> Belaynesh Dindamo, "Hakalla Amale," *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/ethiopia/hakalla\\_amale.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/ethiopia/hakalla_amale.html).

<sup>57</sup> Nasaw, "Historians and Biography," 574.

immensely to the growth of Christianity. However, many of those who have toiled tirelessly and selflessly to expand the Kingdom of God in Africa are unsung heroes—and virtually unknown. One major reason is that most Africans emphasize the perceived mistakes and shortcomings of their leaders more than their incontrovertible contributions. We lose sight of the fact that the people God uses are imperfect human beings. It is time we change our attitudes so that we do not persist in faultfinding and witch-hunting when it comes to our leaders but rather concentrate on their achievements and contributions.

Charles Yaw Yeboa-Korie, obviously, had his shortcomings, as a human being, but they pale in comparison with his accomplishments and contributions to African Christianity. David Beckman, an American scholar and theologian, saw many good things in Yeboa-Korie. This is what he wrote about him after having moved around with him closely for over a year:

Yeboa is a superlative orator in public and in the pulpit. He is at home with the resounding Ghanaian Christian high life music; yet often he would spend the whole night alone on the mountain slopes of Aburi in dead silence and prayer. He is at home with both professor and illiterate, with millionaire and Lazarus, with statesman and streetman. He combines in him the life of a vegetarian and a teetotaler, and love for chastity and music. We are in the presence of a naturalist, humanist, moralist, and a religious man par excellence. At a first encounter with the man, you could mistake him for a crank, for he is a man of very sharp contrasts.<sup>112</sup>

*Osofo* Yeboa-Korie, “Teacher,” “African boy,” was a great servant to Ghanaians. Therefore, we should seize every opportunity to reflect on his life dedicated to God while on earth, and to celebrate his achievements and contributions. Above all, we need to thank God for giving Ghana and Africa Brother Charles Yaw Yeboa-Korie – a great and selfless church leader with infectious charisma; an educationist, an ecumenist, a teacher, a pastor, a musician, a choirmaster, a journalist, a healer, an author, an itinerant evangelist, a media evangelist, a church planter, a Christian strategist, and a disciplinarian.

Thomas Oduro

#### Sources:

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<sup>112</sup> Eden Handbook, 17.

disappeared.<sup>58</sup> In the *DACB*, this means preserving as a “biography” of Samuel Johnson an account as cryptic as this one from a registry of catechists and evangelists:

1886, January 6, ordained a deacon and 1888, May 6, ordained a priest by Bishop of Sierra Leone, and stationed, 1886, at Ode Ondo. 1887, to Oyo, Lagos. Brother of Henry Johnson and Nathaniel Johnson.<sup>59</sup>

In this case, some memory is better than no memory at all. The mission of the *DACB* is to recover and preserve, by all possible means, some memory of African Christian history, in spite of the scarcity of sources.

### Biography Gives Voice to the Subaltern

In the 1960s and 1970s, writers became conscious of the fact that women’s stories could not be told in the same way as those of men. The stories of women needed new categories, new frames of reference, and new structures to capture the reality of their lives.<sup>60</sup> Biographies, which generally portrayed men, tended to be success stories, following a certain formula that focused mainly on the public aspects worthy of attention and praise. To tell a woman’s story, however, demands exploration of both public and private life, including inner life and specifically feminine physical experiences, such as childbearing. The concept of “success” must also be redefined, and the writer must demonstrate, through a variety of means, what it is that makes a woman’s life worthy of biographical attention.<sup>61</sup>

Describing female experience and success in a biography depends on being able to hear a woman’s voice. When sources are scarce, capturing this nuance is an added challenge. In her study of the correspondence of German female missionaries, Lize Kriel shows that it is impossible to untangle the life stories of the German and African sisters simply because the records of the Berlin Missionary Society shed a greater light on the lives of German women than on the lives of African Christian women. In addition, she points out that “such letters are not only a reservoir of information about the daily life on mission stations, but also about the ways in which these lives were ‘staged’ for far-

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<sup>58</sup> Robin Fleming, “Writing Biography at the Edge of History,” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (June 2009), 613–14; Brown, “A Place in Biography,” 599, 605.

<sup>59</sup> “Johnson, Samuel,” *DACB*, [www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/johnson\\_samuel.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/johnson_samuel.html); original source: Church Missionary Society, *Register of Missionaries: Clerical, Lay, and Female, and Native Clergy from 1804 to 1904* ([London]: Church Missionary Society, [1905]).

<sup>60</sup> Linda Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women’s Lives: The New Biography* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1994), 4–5.

<sup>61</sup> Wagner-Martin, *Telling Women’s Lives*, 5, 7, 11.

away audiences.”<sup>62</sup> The pressure missionaries felt to provide positive reports to their home agencies calls into question the understanding of the African women’s perspective expressed in these letters: How well was it represented? Were the descriptions of their lives accurate?

The story of Lydia Mengwelune, written by 2008–09 Project Luke Fellow Robert Pindzié, illustrates how devoted missionaries sometimes wrote detailed accounts of the lives of their African collaborators. Missionary Anna Rhein-Wuhrmann was a close friend, supporter, and overseer of Mengwelune’s ministry. Pindzié uses her testimony—along with the reports of several other narrators—to paint Mengwelune’s life in such a saintly light that his account borders on hagiography. But readers might ask: Does Mengwelune’s perspective come through in this story? Would Mengwelune have recognized herself in their accounts and in the *DACB* biography? The reality is that if Mengwelune comes across as a saintly figure, the glowing account reflects well on the missionaries—among whom is Mengwelune’s friend Rhein-Wuhrmann—and it serves as a personal as well as an official validation of their work in the field. *DACB* author Pindzié, a Bamoun like Mengwelune, also cannot hide his admiration for the legacy of this exceptional woman who is a national symbol of evangelical Christianity in his country. Perhaps, however, because he realizes that his account might come across as overly enthusiastic, he includes in the final note to his article—appended to the biography’s very last paragraph—an excerpt from a letter written by Mengwelune to her friend Rhein-Wuhrmann:

Foumban, July 9, 1927

Dear friend, my mother, do you think of me and do you have sleepless nights as I do because of you? Oh, I know that often you can’t sleep when you think of me. I want to thank you for having written the story of my life in a book. If everything is well with me in Foumban, it is thanks to you; if people love me and say good things about me, you are the reason why that is so. I have been very sick and my body was broken. I thought I was going to die (rheumatoid arthritis); now however, I am well again. (News of several people follows. . . .) I, who am your child, greet you warmly.

Lydia Mengwelune<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Lize Kriel, “A German-Christian Network of Letters in Colonial Africa as a Repository for ‘Ordinary’ Biographies of Women, 1931–1967,” *Journal of Southern African Studies* 38, no. 3 (September 2012): 452–53.

<sup>63</sup> Robert Adamou Pindzié, “Mengwelune, Lydia,” *DACB*, n17, [www.dacb.org/stories/cameroon/mengwelune-lydie.html](http://www.dacb.org/stories/cameroon/mengwelune-lydie.html); this letter extract originally appeared

As a result of his respect for culture and his attempts to inculturate some aspects of Ghanaian culture into Christian liturgy, he endeared himself to the hearts of two prominent kings in Ghana – the Asantehene, Nana Sir Osei Prempeh II, and the Okyenhene, Nana Ofori Atta II. These kings and other traditional rulers like the Begorohene, and Akwamuhene were not just admirers of Yeboa-Korie, they also supported the ministries of the Eden Revival Church.

### Yeboa-Korie and Politics

Yeboa-Korie initially did not show any interest in politics but he asked his followers to pray for the head of the ruling government. Some top politicians became acquainted with him when they asked for prayers and the healing of diseases. The healing of Elizabeth Koranteng, who suffered from blindness, brought the spiritual activities of Yeboa-Korie to the attention of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of the Republic of Ghana. Although some leading politicians of the Convention People’s Party (CPP), the ruling government at the time, insinuated that Yeboa-Korie was a tyrant, a counter-revolutionary, and a religious quack, the head of the party, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, invited him to become a member of Parliament, ostensibly, to tap into his oratorical and leadership skills.<sup>110</sup>

Yeboa-Korie rejected the invitation. He was perceived to be sympathetic to the National Liberation Council (SMC), the Progress Party, and the National Redemption Council (NRC) / Supreme Military Council, respective governments of Ghana up to 1978. As a result, he was allowed airtime to preach on two stations of the Ghana Broadcasting Corporation—the only radio and television station in Ghana at that time. He served as a member of the committee that drew up the National Charter of Redemption, a seven-point political document on national unity; total manpower development and deployment; revolutionary discipline; self-reliance; service to the people; patriotism and international brotherhood; and the mobilization of the spiritual and intellectual will-power of the people.<sup>111</sup> From June 1979 on, Yeboa-Korie was reticent in relation to politics in Ghana until his death in 2000.

### Conclusion

God has richly blessed Africa with powerful men and women who have contributed

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<sup>110</sup> John S. Pobee, *Religion and Politics in Ghana* (Accra: Asempa Publishers, 1991), 81.

<sup>111</sup> The Best of SMC & the National Anthem, <http://justiceghana.com/blog/our-country/history-and-politics/the-best-of-smc-the-national-anthem/>, accessed March 19, 2019.

It is amazing how, today, when the Eden Choir and Orchestra feature at Ghanaian Christian Orthodox Christian churches, not only the congregation but even their clergy, both expatriates and native, are known at times to break church protocol, jump from the rostrum, and sing and dance to God's glory. Wherever Eden's Choir, Orchestra and gramophone recordings have been heard in Ghana, the people have been caught in the fever of the Ghanaian Christian music craze. Today, millions of Ghanaians are daily raising their voices to God in natural prayer—music—without being fully aware of it. Eden's music has brought us closer to the Christianity we so earnestly desire, one in which all human faculties will be centered on God.<sup>107</sup>

The Christian Council of Ghana did not lose sight of Yeboa-Korie's immense contribution to Ghanaian church music. In a tribute, the Christian Council observed:

It is worth noting that although brass bands had been used in churches in Ghana before the advent of the F'Eden Church, these bands had then largely led choirs and church congregations in the singing of Western hymns and other Western church music. It is to the credit of the Rev. Bro. Yeboa-Korie that tunes composed for worship in Ghanaian idioms were adopted by him to play a dominant part in the mode of worship in the F'Eden Church, which he promoted. There is no doubt that this innovation contributed to the proliferation of the gospel music, which, within the last four decades or so, has been accepted as a universally adopted feature in Ghanaian Christian worship. One such song that has become popular today is "*Yehowa yeyi w'aye, wodin na ye kamfo* [God, we praise you, your name do we glorify].<sup>108</sup>

Gospel music in Ghana is now a popular phenomenon. In fact, a private radio station could play Gospel music for 24 hours non-stop. Yeboa-Korie was a pacesetter in popularizing local Gospel choruses and songs – not for the sake of making money and or earning popularity but for using music as a medium for proclaiming the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ and thus leading people to Jesus Christ.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> The Eden Handbook, 11.

<sup>108</sup> "Tribute by the Christian Council of Ghana on his [Rev. Bro. Yeboa-Korie] departure from this Life to Eternity" in Burial, Memorial and Thanksgiving Service for the Late Rev. Bro. Yeboa-Korie (1931-200), 42.

<sup>109</sup> I was a chorister for over 25 years. As a result, I love church music and have been an avid follower of church music for the greater part of my life on earth. I must confess that I am yet to find any church leader who has worked more tirelessly to enrich Christian music than Brother Yeboa-Korie.

Mengwelune's reaction to her own story is not unexpected—she would have been naturally reticent to say anything critical to her "mother" in the faith for fear of appearing ungrateful. But her letter presents an interesting twist: she seems to say that local people now treat her with respect *because of* Rhein-Wuhrmann's story, which has validated her ministry among her people. Conversely, Mengwelune's reaction validated her missionary friend's account of her and, implicitly, Pindzié's retelling. But Pindzié's use of this quotation seems to hint at his own motivation for telling Mengwelune's story: he wants his audience—a worldwide audience—to recognize the importance of Mengwelune's contribution to the growth of global Christianity. In any case, he has made sure that readers hear Lydia Mengwelune's voice so that, in some way, she has the last say in her own story.

The *DACB* database is a collection of stories of those who have often been overlooked by historians of Christianity in Africa. Long considered as "subalterns," African evangelists—men and women—have played an essential role in the spread of Christianity across the continent. The work of the *DACB*, a biographical project, is to make sure that their stories are told truthfully, as fully as possible, so that they take their rightful place in the greater story and are not forgotten.

## Conclusion

Biography is essential to the *DACB's* work of recovering and preserving African Christian history. Because biography addresses the autobiographical bias, biographers can examine questions of identity formation as they reflect on the lives of their subjects. Biography is particularly well adapted to the African context, provides new methodologies and frames of reference, and rises to the challenge of the scarcity of written sources. As a historical tool, biography gives voice to those who have not, thus far, had much of a voice in the writing of their own history.

Even though an enormous task remains for the *DACB*, the growing number of individual points of biographical light widens and deepens existing knowledge, creating a pointillist history of African Christianity. As the database grows, the hope is that the balance of historical truth will tip in favor of revising the master narratives of African Christian history. By challenging received narratives, biography has a truth-telling power that is critical. The recovery of lost or distorted history is the goal, even though this truth telling might be resented and attacked, and might sometimes lead to

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in Anna Rein-Wuhrmann, *Au Cameroun, Portraits de Femmes*, trans. E. Lack (Paris: Société des Missions Évangéliques, 1931), 44.

mentorship.<sup>64</sup> As a pedagogical tool, however, biography can create a counterbalance, and a fresh critique of history.<sup>65</sup>

Rather than prioritize events, biography helps to keep the central focus of the historical narrative on the people who shaped the history. It also allows the African agents to speak more powerfully through their life stories and the ideas they incarnated—ideas that biographers can eavesdrop upon in their narratives.<sup>66</sup> The task of the *DACB* is to guard the memory of these individuals so that ordinary Africans can tell the fuller stories of the great figures of African Christian history in their own denominations, communities, or homes. These stories can even be shared and republished in local newspapers. One day in Lagos, Nigeria, where I was teaching an oral history seminar, my hosts presented me with a short biography in the local newspaper that listed no sources. They kept telling me how important this figure was and that this biography warranted inclusion in the *DACB*. The story sounded strangely familiar. Intrigued, I did a quick search on my computer. It turned out that it was, in fact, a biography from the *DACB*. The story, once an oral narrative, now a written account, had taken on a life of its own.<sup>67</sup>

### Appendix: Mama Christine's Trip to Heaven

The life stories of Ravelonjanahary and Nenilava—the first two women and the second and fourth persons, respectively, to lead the *Fifobazana* Revival in Madagascar—and that of Mama Christine share many of the same elements mentioned earlier. A noteworthy aspect of Mama Christine's trip to heaven, which took place in 1998, the year of Nenilava's death, is that she met not only Jesus but also Nenilava. This meeting was particularly significant as Mama Christine saw herself as poised to be Nenilava's successor. In this excerpt from the interview with her, she describes her encounter in heaven.

Another gate appeared, a living gate like the one before: Jesus was there. Many children stood around Him, like flowers, as it were. Jesus turned around and saw us at the gate. He approached us. He was wearing a sign on his chest, the letters were animated: there was also this sign: "Jesus

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<sup>64</sup> Wolpert, "Biography as History," 408.

<sup>65</sup> Banner, "Biography as History," 585.

<sup>66</sup> Brown, "Life Histories," 589.

<sup>67</sup> Biographies in the *DACB* are free to be reproduced without permission, but appropriate acknowledgement of the source should be included.

Methodist, A.M.E. Zion, Salvation Army, American Baptist, Lutheran (Missouri Synod), and Mennonite denominations.

### Integrating Ghanaian Culture in Christian Music

One area where Yeboa-Korie left an indelible mark in African Christianity was that of inculcating Ghanaian culture into Christianity. In the 1960s, when most Ghanaian Christians were seriously thinking of the appropriateness of integrating some aspects of Ghanaian culture into Christian liturgy, Yeboa-Korie boldly but wisely made it a policy of his church to contextualize and Africanize Christian liturgy. According to James Anquandah, "at one crusade held in Kumasi in 1971, he called on the Asantehene and asked for the largest Asante drums to be, as it were, 'baptized' for church worship in Eden Revival."<sup>105</sup>

When it came to incorporating culture into Christian worship, particularly through music, Yeboa-Korie stood taller than his peers. Being a musician and a choirmaster himself, he composed many local choruses. Notable among his compositions was *Onyame tie m'asem*,<sup>106</sup> a gospel song that has been popular throughout Ghana, and beyond, since its launch. At the headquarters of the church, he formed a choir and a symphony orchestra. He imported saxophones, trombones, trumpets, guitars, organs, pianos, flutes, castanets, rattles, and drums from England. Other music groups in the church were the Eden Gospel Singers, the Eden Gospel Band, and the Singing Stars.

He sought the services of renowned musicians at the time to help build the choir. Among them was Prof. Emeritus J. H. Kwabena Nketia, a renowned ethnomusicologist of international acclaim, Mr. H. O. Beeko, and many other choirmasters and organists of no mean repute. In their efforts to make high quality church music, the Eden Revival choirs and orchestra worked hard to be the favorite choice of music lovers. Everybody wanted to listen to their choirs and invite them to minister at functions. Unsurprisingly, they featured regularly on radio, television, evangelistic crusade platforms, and in funeral programs.

The Eden Revival Church of Ghana Handbook describes the effects and popularity of Eden songs in the following words:

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<sup>105</sup> "Tribute by Prof. Anquandah, University of Ghana" in Burial, Memorial and Thanksgiving Service for the Late Rev. Bro. Yeboa-Koree (1931-200), 49.

<sup>106</sup> The translation of the song into English language can be found in Asempra Hymns, number 15. See Asempra Publishers, *Asempra Hymns* (Accra: Asempra Publishers, 1980).



doctrinal misconceptions. “I have nothing against Pentecostals...But some Pentecostals think that speaking in tongues is a ticket to heaven and if I am a non-Pentecostal then I will not be saved. Whenever the Holy Spirit is allowed to work in a disciplined well-ordered Pentecostal Church I will certainly go and worship but places where everybody just shouts ‘in tongues’ in confusion and pandemonium are not for me.”<sup>101</sup> In spite of his misgivings about some Pentecostal doctrines, he was able to bring together Pentecostal leaders of various shades and colors to a conference at the Young Men’s Christian Association (YMCA) center in Accra. The objective of the conference, dubbed “Conference of Pentecostal Leaders,” was to break ground for the formation of a Christian Council of Pentecostal Churches.

A great healing crusade at the National Liberation Circle (now Kwame Nkrumah Circle) followed the meeting at the YMCA. All the Pentecostal ministers sat on a dais in a brotherly / sisterly manner. The conference at the YMCA and the healing crusade at the National Liberation Circle were considered historic and unprecedented. It is safe to affirm that Yeboa-Korie planted the seed of a Pentecostal / charismatic ecumenical body in Ghana known as the Ghana Pentecostal and Charismatic Council (GPCC) that was formed in 1969, even though Yeboa-Korie’s name is not mentioned in their historical records.<sup>102</sup>

On July 14, 1968, while preaching at the Fifth Anniversary of the Pentecostal Association of Ghana, he expressed his conviction regarding ecumenism in Ghana: “We need one love, one spirit, one mind, and one heart to save the people for God. But it is Christ who ultimately does the work of salvation, not Yeboa-Korie or Pastor ‘X’ or Bishop ‘Y.’”<sup>103</sup>

These words show that Yeboa-Korie shared his immense gifts with other Christians for the sake of leading people to Jesus Christ, not for personal adulation. His vision of unified ecumenical activities became complete when the Eden Revival Church was admitted to the Christian Council of Ghana on July 9, 1970, after “a period of study and observation of the principles, organization, and evangelistic work.”<sup>104</sup> The admission was significant because it was the first time a church founded in Ghana by a Ghanaian became a member of the Christian Council. Prior to that, the Christian Council of Ghana consisted of the Anglican, Presbyterian, Evangelical Presbyterian,

Christ.” The angel left me. . . . We could see nothing but the Earth and nothing escaped us, we could even see the ants, as if it were very close. We arrived in front of a door where Volahavana Germaine [Nenilava] was. She took me in her arms: I said to her: “Ah! Is that you, Mama?” She stroked my back and I sat at her feet. She made me sit on a chair that I cannot describe but I refused. Jesus said: “This is your mother who just finished her mission on Earth and who just arrived in her heavenly home. . . .” Then Mama spoke to me, as a salutation, she gave me a Bible verse from John 13:34–35. And as a meal, she gave me a Bible verse chosen in Rom. 6:1 to the end. This is what happened with Neny Lava. When she had finished speaking, Jesus said to me: “It is I who brought you here. This is the reason: there is a mission to be accomplished on the Earth; this is what is happening: in the first place, God created the Earth; secondly, He sent me to the Earth for the salvation of all humans. Thirdly, and this is the final mission, that of the Holy Spirit.”

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<sup>101</sup> *Eden Christian Torch*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (June 1970), 5.

<sup>102</sup> See History and Background of the GPCC, <https://gpccghana.org/history-and-background/>, accessed March 14, 2019.

<sup>103</sup> *Eden Christian Torch*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (October 1968), 9.

<sup>104</sup> *Eden Christian Torch*, Vol. 2 No. 2 (September 1970), 2.

## Biographies

**Ababio, Isaac Kofi Asomani**  
**1940-2018**  
**Presbyterian**  
**Ghana**

Many people growing up in the 1960s in Ghana would have known Isaac Ababio, a popular evangelist at that time, supported by a massive evangelistic choir during his open-air crusades and radio broadcasts with the signature tune of the song “Showers of Blessings.”

### Birth and Early Life

Isaac Ababio was born on April 26, 1940 to Abena Nipaa from Kwahu Nkwatia and Kwaku Abaah of Peki-Blengo. He was the last born of Abena Nipaa’s seven children. His mother died when he was two years old and his father when he was sixteen. He hardly knew his father who moved away when Isaac was seven years old. He never saw him again until news of his death reached him at age sixteen. Isaac was brought up by his sisters and uncles in Kwahu Nkwatia, where he grew up. An Ewe and Akan by birth, he grew up speaking Akan and English.

### Education and Conversion

Isaac was educated in Presbyterian primary and middle schools where he had exposure to the Scriptures and to Scripture memorization. Later he did his secondary education at Accra Academy, a premier boys’ secondary school in Accra, beginning in 1956.

During the Thanksgiving Service of the Silver Jubilee celebrations, he was convicted by a scripture passage read from Ecclesiastes 11. He gave his life to Christ not long after that and experienced a dramatic transformation in his life, to the amazement of his friends. He fed voraciously on the Scriptures and lived in full surrender to God.

In 1960, he gained admission into Kumasi College of Technology, now Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology (KNUST), where he studied physics. He became part of the Christian Fellowship on campus. Before long he had read through the Bible many times, and was reading Christian books and listening to messages from the likes of Dr. Billy Graham on the Hour of Decision, Dr. Howard O. Jones on the Hour of Revival, and Dr. Stephen Olford on Calvary Hour, as well as other Christian radio programs.

Inter-church relations in the 1960s were porous. Bitterness and antagonism characterized the relationship between the mainline churches, Spiritual churches<sup>96</sup> and Pentecostal / charismatic churches. Those were the days when the western-mission founded churches, otherwise known as “mainline churches,” referred to the Spiritual churches as,

*nyamanyama* churches (“worthless” churches)... while some Pentecostal ministers described them privately as “fornication societies” or “juju societies.” The term “spiritual” (which is generally used by leaders and members of the Spiritual churches)... was held up for ridicule by many other Christians in town, who were fond of saying, “if they are Spiritual churches, then we must be Physical churches; what nonsense!”<sup>97</sup>

Most Pentecostal church leaders regarded members of Spiritual churches as belonging to “occult” groups who needed deliverance before they could be regarded as Christians.<sup>98</sup> The Spiritual churches, on the other hand, regarded the mainline churches as “churches without the Spirit of God.”<sup>99</sup> Prophet Jehu-Appiah, leader of Musama Disco Christo Church, an African Independent Church, buttresses the spiritual egoism of the African Independent Churches thus, “Politically, we are the harmless; economically, we are feeble; socially, we are downtrodden; but spiritually, we are more than giants.”<sup>100</sup>

As a result, it was difficult to unify Christians in Ghana. In spite of this challenge, Yeboa-Korie, in February 1966, tried to bring together denominations in the Pentecostal, mainline western churches, and the Spiritual churches. Consequently, a mammoth church service, dubbed “unity service,” was held at the Palladium Cinema Hall, Accra. Yeboa-Korie, as an ecumenical unifier, thus, set the pace for what is now known as the “All Believers Prayer Meetings / All Night,” a prayer session attended by Christians irrespective of denominational affiliations. This service is now popularized by Bishop Yaw Owusu Ansah, the Accra West Regional Overseer of the Resurrection Power and Living Bread Ministries International.

Yeboa-Korie continued his tireless efforts in bringing denominations together, after the success of the 1966 unity service at the Palladium Cinema Hall. He attempted to unify all Pentecostal churches in 1968. He was wary of some of the Pentecostal

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<sup>96</sup> African Independent Churches are popularly called “Spiritual churches” in Ghana.

<sup>97</sup> Robert W. Wyllie, *Spiritism in Ghana: A Study of New Religious Movements* (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1980), 32. Italics not mine.

<sup>98</sup> J. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Achimota: Africa Christian Press, 2005), 164-175.

<sup>99</sup> Robert W. Wyllie, *Spiritism in Ghana*, 128.

<sup>100</sup> Robert W. Wyllie, *Spiritism in Ghana*, 105. Mathapoly Moses Jehu-Appiah, the Akaboha of the MDCC was the one who made this statement.

*Osofo* Yeboa was also deeply concerned about the lack of appropriate education and the training of leaders and shepherds of Ghana's mushrooming Independent Pentecostal and so-called Spiritual Churches. He advocated the establishment of an independent theological college for independent churches. He was a founding member of the Good News Training Institute established in 1971, which stood the test of time and is now a fully-fledged theological college located along the Adenta-Dodowa road.<sup>93</sup>

The Good News Theological Institute,<sup>94</sup> now known as Good News Theological Seminary, which is accredited by the National Accreditation Board of Ghana,<sup>95</sup> has trained many people (Ghanaians and non-Ghanaians) who under normal circumstances would not have had access to quality theological education. Alumni of the seminary include bishops, seminary professors and administrators, Bible teachers, church musicians, evangelists, and missionaries.

The schools Yeboa-Korie established served as a training ground for many scholars – teachers, administrators, industrialists, medical doctors, bankers, accountants, engineers, and managing directors. Surely, the second point of his socio-spiritual enhancement program was fulfilled.

### **Ecumenical Activities**

Yeboa-Korie was an ecumenist. He did not limit his gifts, resourcefulness, and amiable personality to the Eden Revival Church only. He made friends with pastors from other denominational traditions and biblical inclinations. He invited pastors to Eden Church and was invited to minister in their churches. He found time to fellowship with member churches of the Pentecostal Association of Ghana, an ecumenical group of African Independent Churches.

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<sup>93</sup> "Tribute by Professor Anquandah, University of Ghana" in in Burial, Memorial and Thanksgiving Service for the Late Rev. Bro. Yeboa-Koree (1931-200), 48.

<sup>94</sup> I am an alumnus of the Good News Theological College and Seminary, the Bible school of which Brother Yeboa-Koree was one of the founding members. I enrolled in the school when I was a member of a Spiritual church. There would have been no way I would have had access to theological education in the Bible Colleges of the mainline churches at that time, being a Spiritual church member. Therefore, I am a beneficiary of the vision, tenacity, and foresight of Brother Yeboa-Korie.

<sup>95</sup> The Good News Theological Seminary is now located on a 10-acre plot campus on the Adenta-Dodowa road, shortly past the northeastern side of Accra. The seminary runs certificate, diploma and first degree courses for leaders and members of African Independent Churches.

### **Evangelistic Work at Home and Abroad**

He joined outreach teams and went on evangelism trips to nearby towns and villages. He introduced Bible Study in the daily programs of the Government Voluntary Work Camps, the first of which was the Agbozume Work Camp in the Volta Region. His passion for the salvation of souls, for all to be saved and live victorious lives in Christ Jesus, led to him serve on evangelistic teams over the summer vacation during his university years.

He was both a participant in and a leader of what was known as the All for Christ Campaigns that held evangelistic crusades in Nkwatia, Akwapim Mampong, and Akropong and Nsawam, all in the eastern region of Ghana. The Nsawam crusades covered multiple towns and were coordinated by the late Dr. Isaac Allotey, a longtime friend and professor of engineering at KNUST.

In 1966, Ababio felt called into full time ministry as an evangelist. He participated in the first World Congress on Evangelism, where he presented a paper that convicted the hearts of many with an increased passion to save the lost at all costs. In the latter part of 1966, he launched out as an itinerant evangelist, holding crusades in many towns and villages all over Ghana.

In 1967, he married Miss Grace Appiah-Kusi and settled in Accra. That year, he held crusades at Bukom Square and Baden-Powell Memorial Hall. Many young men and women gathered to support the great work. They started regular open-air crusades at Kwame Nkrumah Circle from Wednesdays to Sundays, every week, for several months at a time.

In 1968, he began the Hour of Visitation Radio Broadcast on National Broadcasting Network GBC-2 every Saturday from 6.45 to 7.00 am, thus becoming the pioneer radio evangelist in Ghana. The Hour of Visitation Choir was formed to back the radio programs. The program ran for fourteen years until 1982 when the military government of J. J. Rawlings took the program off the air. Rawlings later banned The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and Jehovah's Witnesses and gave their missionaries one week to leave the country. The Hour of Visitation was broadcast on Radio ELWA from Monrovia, Liberia from 1987 to 1990 until its return to Ghana. There it was broadcast on JOY FM from 1995 to 1999, switched to a different channel on that network, and then finally to Spring FM.

In 1969, Ababio and his family moved to Australia and Papua New Guinea where he worked tirelessly in missions and evangelism. The family returned to Ghana in December 1973 and, in 1974, he moved to Kumasi to work with the Christian Service College to train workers for mission and evangelism.

Ababio was consistent to his calling and to the passion he felt for the souls of men. He was instrumental in the establishment, development, and growth of many parachurch organizations such as New Life for All, Christian Outreach Fellowship, Ghana Congress on Evangelization (GHACOE), Ghana Institute of Linguistics, Literacy and Bible Translation (GILLBT), and the National Association of Evangelicals (NEA) of Ghana. He served as the first chairperson of the NEA of Ghana from 1992 to 2000, and was involved in many missions in universities, schools, and colleges. However, he remained a Presbyterian and at least one or two churches of the Presbyterian Church Ghana (PCG) started in his home.

One mission held at the University of Ghana, Legon shows how Ababio was imbued with the charism of evangelist, a charism which, when in operation, transforms a quiet gentle person into a giant among orators. The main speaker for that the week was the Rev. Gottfried Osei-Mensah who had taught eloquently in the power of the Spirit. Then came the altar call, the moment of decision that follows the message. Counselors were lining up in front and the piano was playing softly in the background as the invitation was made. There was no response for several minutes as Rev. Osei-Mensah extended the invitation. As if propelled by the Holy Spirit, Ababio practically sprinted up to the stage, took the microphone, placed his hand on the back of the main speaker, and seamlessly continued the altar call. He spoke the same words of invitation that Rev. Osei-Mensah had spoken earlier and people began to come forward. He left the stage without fanfare. This demonstrates how the charisms are brought together in witness under the Spirit as, together, the teacher and the evangelist invite souls into the Kingdom.

Ababio led numerous evangelistic crusades, church-based outreaches, school outreaches, crusades of international evangelists (such as T. L. Osborne, Archbishop Benson Idahosa) and Leadership Counselor Training Courses all over Ghana.

Ababio passed into the Church Triumphant on Friday, July 6, 2018, following complications from an orthopedic surgery. He is survived by Grace, his wife of 51 years, and six biological children: Steven, Jonathan, Grace, Mercy, Peace, and Paul. In addition, he has produced several thousands of children in the Lord. Indeed, his works follow him.

Esther E. Acolatse

#### Sources:

Funeral Brochure (compiled by the family), August 4, 2018.  
Conversations with Rev. Grace Ababio, widow, July 12, 2018.

Darkuman Junction near the Mobil Petrol Station, and F'Eden Secondary Commercial School, Odorkor, Accra.

The Eden schools emphasized quality secular education that was interwoven with sound Christian principles and morals. Eden schools gained credibility in the educational environment in Ghana to the extent that they were recognized by the West African Examinations Council (WAEC) and allowed to take the General Certificate of Examinations (GCE) "O" Level Examinations as private schools with their own centers. The schools became important examination centers for other private schools.

Unlike today's private schools in Ghana where charging exorbitant fees is the norm, Eden school fees were very affordable. Because Yeboa-Korie did not establish schools to amass wealth, many people wondered what his motive was behind the establishment of the schools. According to Mr. D. M. Dankyi, former Headmaster of F'Eden Secondary and Commercial School at Odorkor, "Bro. Yeboa-Korie<sup>90</sup> was a great educationist, and like many an educationist, he felt and believed that the best legacy a nation can bequeath to his posterity is education. He therefore showed a keen interest in the education of the child."<sup>91</sup> Another motive was to instill Christian character formation in the students. This could be deduced from the following tribute by alumni of Eden educational institutions:

During his [i.e. Yeboa-Korie's] time [as proprietor], he used to gather his students always in a big bus and brought us to church from our school site at Darkuman to Kokomlele, on every Sunday, where we gathered with people and learned about God. He always taught us to fear God because he said that was the beginning of wisdom and knowledge. This spiritual exercise drew the students of F'Eden High School closer to God and it helped us to lead good and decent moral lives.<sup>92</sup>

Following in the steps of the early western missionaries, Yeboa-Korie, who was also called "Teacher," ensured that the schoolchildren received Christian training. According to the former students of F'Eden High School, Yeboa-Korie was perceived as a visionary and an educational genius who was not only concerned with building Ghana through quality secular educational institutions; he was equally concerned with improving the quality of pastoral ministry at all levels in this country. James Anquandah states:

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<sup>90</sup> Yeboa-Korie and Yeboa-Koree are used interchangeable but they refer to the same person.

<sup>91</sup> "Tribute to the late Rev. Bro. Yeboa-Koree by Mr. Dankyi, former Headmaster, F'Eden Secondary Commercial School, Odorkor, Accra" in Burial, Memorial and Thanksgiving Service for the Late Rev. Bro. Yeboa-Koree (1931-200), p. 36.

<sup>92</sup> "Tribute to the Late Rev. Bro. Yeboa-Koree by Old Students of F'Eden High School," in Burial, Memorial and Thanksgiving Service for the Late Rev. Bro. Yeboa-Koree (1931-200), 22.

you are healed of your ailment or not, you will die one day anyway. Purging the soul of immoral ailments for eternal life must therefore go side by side with the healing of the body.”<sup>88</sup> Yeboa-Korie stressed wholistic healing when writing about healing in Pentecostal churches: “With regard to healing, I think it is essential that we regard the person as a whole—body, mind, and spirit. The healing of the body alone should not be the sole endeavor. We must aim at winning the person as a whole. The healing of the body alone should not be the sole endeavor. We need to redeem body, mind, and spirit. That is total healing.”<sup>89</sup>

### **Yeboa-Korie’s Contribution to Education in Ghana**

Yeboa-Korie established the Eden Revival Church at a time when there were very few private schools. Almost all public schools were run by the government of Ghana and by churches that were planted by Western missionaries – Presbyterian, Anglican, Catholic, and Methodist, among others. After having had a stint in the teaching profession before he was called to ministry, Yeboa-Korie knew the role good educational institutions play in nation building. He was, however, not oblivious of the poverty in his own family and the widespread nature of poverty in Ghana—a phenomenon that hinders many children from being educated. In compliance with the second point of his socio-spiritual enhancement program, he used part of the gift from his western friends to study medicine in the U.S. to build educational institutions alongside Eden Revival Church.

By 1972, that is, nine years after establishing Eden Revival Church, Yeboa-Korie had established the following educational institutions:

1. The Accra Educational Institution, an evening school for workers.
2. Eden Junior International School.
3. Eden Secondary [Senior High] School.
4. Eden Christian Secondary/Commercial (Winneba road, Police Barrier)
5. Eden School of Business Management (Legon).
6. Eden Christian Junior School (Accra New Town).
7. Eden- German Mission School (Begoro).
8. Eden International School (Kumasi).

Other schools that were established included: Secondary/Commercial School at Kwabeng, Preparatory School (now Primary & JSS) Kokomlemle, Secretarial School at Wato near the General Post Office, Accra, F’Eden Secondary/Commercial School at

<sup>88</sup> David Beckmann, *Eden Christian Torch*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (June 1970), 6

<sup>89</sup> *Eden Christian Torch*, Vol 2 No. 1 (June 1970), 4.

Esther E. Acolatse, excerpt from the tribute in the Funeral Brochure and personal knowledge of his ministry from the late 1960s to 1989.

This article, received in 2018, was written by Rev. Dr. Esther E. Acolatse, Associate Professor of Pastoral Theology and Intercultural Studies at Knox College, University of Toronto, Canada, member of the DACB Advisory Council, and JACB contributing editor.

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### **Yeboa-Korie, Charles Yaw 1932-2000 Pentecostal Ghana**

Pentecostalism in Ghana<sup>68</sup> from the mid-1960s to the early 1990s was not a big force to reckon with in Ghanaian Christianity. At best, the major emphasis was on the importance on being born again and the ability to speak in tongues—a gift that was considered as the initial evidence of the spiritual birth.

Charles Yeboa-Korie, though a stalwart Pentecostal leader and preacher, did not belabor those issues to the neglect of other important teachings in Christianity. Like the Apostle Paul, he did not hesitate to preach to his audience the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27). To Yeboa-Korie, not all Pentecostals were true. “The true Pentecostals are neither chosen nor trained by men, nor do they give themselves up to champion the course of Christianity or Spirituality. They are, however, grafted into the revealed divine personality of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>69</sup>

He used various means to spread his understanding of Pentecostalism – sermons, teachings, music, presentations, Gospel crusades, meditations on Ghana television and radio, and newspaper publications, among others. Though he critiqued many Pentecostal doctrines, he was not against Pentecostalism as an institution. It was

<sup>68</sup> Pentecostalism in Ghana refers to either Pentecostal/charismatic churches whose emphasis is on glossolalia or to African Independent Churches. Yeboa-Korie’s concept and experience of Pentecostalism lean more towards the African Independent Church type although he had many encounters with the Pentecostal/charismatic type.

<sup>69</sup> *Eden Christian Torch*, Vol. 2 No. 1 (June 1970), 4

noted that he began a Pentecostal Revolution with the establishment of Eden Revival Church. “Indeed, it became crystal clear that the Pentecostal Revolution ... was spreading like wildfire throughout Ghana.”<sup>70</sup>

Yeboa-Korie was able to seek the views of prominent church leaders, theologians, and laymen in the 1960s to discuss what true Pentecostalism is. Some of the leaders were Rev. W. G. M. Branful, General Secretary of the Christian Council of Ghana, Professor Ronald Rife, Principal of Ghana Christian College and Seminary, Robert Djan, a journalist, and Dr. Yaw Manu, Lecturer, Political Science, University of Ghana.

The impact of the Pentecostal revolution that Yeboa-Korie started is what we are witnessing today. However, it must be stated categorically that he did not embrace Pentecostalism for personal gain as some Pentecostals have done. Consequently, Yeboa-Korie is one of the few chief trailblazers of Ghanaian Pentecostalism. In fact, the historical record would be incomplete without acknowledging Yeboa-Korie’s contributions to Pentecostalism in Ghana and passing them on to the next generation.

### **Birth and Parentage**

Charles Yaw Yeboa-Korie, who became popularly known as Brother Yeboa-Korie, was born on Thursday, December 1, 1932<sup>71</sup> at Enyiresi in the Akyem Abuakwa State. However, his hometown is Asunafo, also in the Akyem Abuakwa State. His parents were Opanyin Kwame Yeboa and Madam Maria Biama.

### **Education and Working life**

As Yeboa-Korie’s parents died when he was young, his uncle, Mr. Ebenezer Aninakwa, single-handedly sponsored his elementary education. He began his secondary (senior high school) education in 1953 at a time when resourceful members in his family were either dead or had become impoverished. He received a scholarship from the administrators of the Akyem Abuakwa State Scholarship Scheme (a scholarship in memory of the King of Akyem Abuakwa, Sir Nana Ofori Atta I) that enabled him to enroll at Abuakwa State (Senior High) College (ABUSCO).

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<sup>70</sup> *Eden Torch*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (October 1968), 8.

<sup>71</sup> All the documents of the church state that Yeboa-Korie was born in 1932. David Beckmann, however, states that he was born in 1938. See David Beckmann, *Eden Revival: Spiritual Churches in Ghana* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1975), 48.

He later visited Germany, England, and New Jersey in 1969 on a preaching tour. Regarding his in-depth knowledge of the Bible and his hermeneutical skills, James Anquandah notes, “Indeed people are known to sit open-mouthed and glued to their seats during his sermons. His exposition of the Biblical message of our Lord Jesus is always simple yet as novel and revolutionary as the teachings of Jesus sounded to his contemporaries.”<sup>85</sup> Many people heard him preach on national television and radio. The church grew in quantity and in quality under his leadership. In 1965—that is two years after its founding—Eden Revival Church had about 5,000 members. He led the church for seventeen years until his death on July 31, 2000, after suffering from a stroke in 1997.

### **Healing and Teaching in Eden Revival Church**

David Beckmann, an American research scholar on the Pentecostal churches of Ghana sums up the healing dexterity of Yeboa-Korie. “Yeboa is a Master-Healer. People are sometimes healed if Yeboa merely stands close to them. After the healing service many people told me they always felt better. I have learned from Eden to see miracles.”<sup>86</sup> Beckmann continues:

He teaches that all Christians can heal in Jesus’s name... But repeated and prolonged fasting has supposedly given Yeboa exceptional power; when others fail, he may be able to help, because some demons cannot be driven away by anything but prayer and fasting (Matt. 9:29)... When Yeboa prays for people, the Spirit often “catches” them as part of the healing process. Others are “caught” unexpectedly as they dance and sing or when they are splashed with water. Their bodies become tense, they quiver, and often their legs kick and arms swing spasmodically... Occasionally, a person like this actually does pass on into sleep... The same Spirit which catches the sick to heal them may seize the wicked to “beat” them. A person punished by the Spirit will twist and flail uncontrollably, perhaps pommeling his own body.<sup>87</sup>

In spite of the prominence of healing and miracles in the church, Yeboa-Korie believed “more in teaching than in healing. He says if you heal somebody and he jumps up to steal or kill or commit adultery, you have not done much. And, in any case, whether

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<sup>85</sup> James Anquandah, “Brother Yeboa-Korie,” *The Edenian*, Vol. 1 No. 1, p. 4.

<sup>86</sup> David Beckmann, “Eden A Shining Example of Pentecostalism” *Eden Christian Torch*, Vol. 1 No. 1 (June 1970), 6.

<sup>87</sup> David Beckmann, *Eden Revival*, 66, 67.

country. For this I have given my whole heart and soul to God.”<sup>81</sup> Thus, he did not relent in leading many people to Jesus. As a result, he preached to students of tertiary institutions, to senior high schools, to members of other denominations, and to the general public through electronic and print media. Repentance and the return of Jesus Christ were core messages in his evangelistic ministry:

You want Brother Freeman or Prophet so and so to pray for you so that you men have prosperous jobs, so that you women get husbands and children, so that you get healed of your diseases. But whether you obtain those wishes or not, you are one day going to die, whether you like it or not. Christ will come and destroy your present world and take away those who listened and obeyed his commands. In the days of Noah, repentance was preached; the people did not listen so they were destroyed. If you believe in all that I have said, then prepare yourself, for the Lord is coming... Think not, Brothers and sisters, of your problems but of the last coming of Jesus.<sup>82</sup>

The Eden Revival Church attracted the core of intelligentsia, business people, students, market women, top civil servants, and respected elderly persons in Ghana. At the University of Ghana, Legon, he attracted the attention of intellectuals—faculty, staff, and students—when he organized a question and answer forum on Christian doctrines that led to the planting of a congregation on the campus. Vincent Asiseh, then a lecturer of the University, states how Yeboa-Korie was perceived on Legon campus in 1968:

Brother Yeboa has, indeed, become the living voice, the breathing form, the expressive countenance on this campus—the University of Ghana. The subtle manifold spirit of edenism has been poured into the minds of the scholars here by what we saw, by what we heard, by what we felt. It has been poured into our minds and is sealed up there in perpetuity.<sup>83</sup>

Yeboa-Korie made a study tour of Great Britain and the United States in 1966. “On returning from America, the church launched into the real phase for which it had been formed, namely evangelism. From now on, the watchword ‘Crossing Africa with Jesus’ appeared on the calendars, letterheads, envelopes, and signboards of the church.” In a matter of three months, the Eden Gospel Choir comprised of 100 male and female voices, was established side by side with the new Eden Gospel Band.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> E. Oppong-Antwi, “Fifth Anniversary Celebration in Eden.” *The Eden Torch*, Vol. 1 No. 3 June 1968, p.6.

<sup>82</sup> *The Eden Torch*, Vol. 1 No. 4 (October 1968), 8.

<sup>83</sup> Vincent Asiseh, “Eden Goes to Legon.” *The Edenian*, Vol. No. 2 (February/March 1968), 5. Note: This text was originally all in capitals.

<sup>84</sup> James Anquandah, “Brother Yeboa-Korie,” *The Edenian*, Vol. 1 No. 1, p. 3.

James Anquandah, a long-time friend of Yeboa-Korie and one-time member, assistant secretary, and junior pastor of Eden Revival Church notes that, “While at ABUSCO, he was notorious for being constantly ill and he may well have been aptly called ‘The sick man of ABUSCO.’ He always spent a good deal of the school year in hospitals around Ghana but he surprised everybody when he seasonally fled the hospitals to come and take part in Inter-College and International Athletic contests which earned for his school and Ghana many gold and silver caps for the throwing of Shot and Disc.”<sup>72</sup> One day, while Abuakwa State College was playing a hockey match with Kumasi University, now Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, the hockey ball hit him hard in the eye. It caused considerable damage to his eyes.

After completing his education at ABUSCO, he taught at three schools – Juaso Presbyterian Middle School, Prempeh College, and Begoro Secondary<sup>73</sup> School.

### His Religious Experience

The damage to his eyes developed into a chronic eye disease. In spite of that damage, he never lost hope. He turned to God through habitual and long periods of fasting and zealously searched the Scriptures. God had mercy on him and healed him. In addition to his teaching profession, he formed prayer and Bible study groups which he called Spiritual Groups. He narrates his religious experience thus:

On one of my usual visits to a Spiritual Group, I encountered a sick man. Then all of a sudden, I felt there was a Spirit force working on me and urging my inner self to explain to my mind the precise nature and origin of the man’s sickness. I felt most frightened and disturbed and wanted very much to run away from the place but the spirit force urged me forward to pray for the man who also moved forward under spiritual pressure to meet me. When I laid my hands on the man and prayed for him, the latter suddenly started wallowing in an unconscious state on the ground. When he ceased rolling, he openly testified that his sickness had disappeared.<sup>74</sup>

Prior to having a religious experience, Yeboa-Korie met American, English and Canadian individuals who participated in a Youth Organization Conference in Kumasi of which he was the local organizer. He so impressed the westerners with his organizational skills that they promised to sponsor him to study either medicine or

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<sup>72</sup> James Anquandah, “Brother Yeboa-Korie and the Eden Revival Church,” *The Edenian* Vol. 1 No. 1 (January/February, 1968), 3.

<sup>73</sup> Secondary schools in Ghana are also called senior high schools.

<sup>74</sup> James Anquandah, “Brother Yeboa-Korie,” *The Edenian* Vol. 1 No 1, p.3.

religion in the United States. They backed their promise by sending him a handsome gift of money to prepare for the trip. He still studied the Bible, fasted, prayed, and meditated on Scripture for many days in seclusion. As a result, he healed many people of diseases that had hitherto defied the potency of western medicine. As a result of his healing prowess, members of the Spiritual Group he founded at Nsawam prevailed on him to establish a church. However, he was reluctant since he was preparing to go the United States of America to study medicine.

In a state of confusion, he recalls walking down a lonely bush path and musing, “Shall I be a doctor and heal people? Shall I be a teacher and teach crowds of people? Shall I be a statesman, perhaps a prime minister?”<sup>75</sup> Later, he claimed to have had a vision in which the Holy Spirit assured him of a great healing ministry. Therefore, he declined his cherished ambition of studying medicine abroad. He became a pastor and turned the Spiritual Group at Nsawam into a church, known as Eden Revival Church,<sup>76</sup> on February 9, 1962. Before the church became rooted in the religious terrain of Ghana, Yeboa-Korie was entangled in a legal suit for allegedly calling a woman “a witch.” He was denied bail for contempt of court so he was kept in prison cells at the James Fort prisons in Accra while the case dragged on for six months when he was acquitted and discharged. His stint at the prison gave him the opportunity to lead some of the prisoners to Christ.

### His Evangelistic Ministry

With the speed of an eagle, coupled with his healing prowess, Bible knowledge, the money he saved towards his intended travel to the USA, and his oratory abilities, Yeboa-Korie planted many congregations of Eden Revival Church in Accra, Begoro, Akwamufie, Nkawkaw, Winneba, Kumasi, Takoradi, Wamfie, London, and many other places.

He oriented Eden toward evangelism, adopting its present slogans “Crossing Africa with Jesus” and “Eden Is Africa’s Hope.” He bought striking uniforms for the choir. He hired musicians to train the new choir and band. He bought a short-lived Eden Poultry Farm and founded a private elementary school, later secondary and commercial schools, to provide funds for evangelistic crusades.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> David M. Beckmann, *Eden Revival*, 48.

<sup>76</sup> The name of the church was changed to Eden Mission Church. It is now known as Eden Revival Church International.

<sup>77</sup> David Beckmann, *Eden Revival*, 52.

He was initially bent on eradicating poverty and illiteracy in Ghana so he drew up a three-point socio-spiritual enhancement program to guide him:

1. Christ’s Pragmatic Benevolent Acts – in which the average Ghanaian will be empowered to acquire and pay for his own house within a specified period of time;
2. Provision of free and liberal education for the poor and illiterate, partly through a free offer of services by all Church Organizations;
3. Spiritual revival of the nation to wipe out spiritual and moral decay in society.<sup>78</sup>

His observations regarding the effect of idolatry on Ghanaians were lucidly narrated in a tribute by James Anquandah:

In my view, where *Osofo*<sup>79</sup> Yeboa blazed a new and significant trail was not so much in crusades, fasting, church planting, and starting up missionary schools and colleges *per se* as in his persistent crusade against idolatry in Ghana and Africa...he fiercely attacked uncompromisingly the negative aspects of traditional culture – the destructive power of *suman*, witchcraft necromancy, juju, “Mame Water” spiritism, and the many human sacrifices of historic and recent times – all of which had brought down curses onto the Black race...He deprecated the fact that after centuries of Christianity in Ghana, by the 1960s, the Christian faith was by and large a marginalized foreign religion, hovering precariously on the fringes of the hearts and minds of a majority of Ghanaian “Kwesi Amankwaa” Christians [i.e. nominal Christians]. He attributed this state of affairs to (1) the way the Church had for long conducted its worship, evangelism and teaching programs using foreign concepts, languages, musical and liturgical systems, and (2) the lopsided general educational systems which put so much stress on material and secular knowledge with relatively little or no input from spiritual education.<sup>80</sup>

Having observed the Ghanaian Christian scene and desiring to pursue the third point of his socio-spiritual enhancement program, Yeboa-Korie expressed his heart for doing evangelism in Ghana, “I am convinced that Ghana is thirsting for Christ; I am going to wrestle in prayer for the Lord to tell me know how best to evangelize throughout the

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<sup>78</sup> “Life history of the late Rev. Brother Yeboa-Koree” in Burial, Memorial and Thanksgiving Service for the Late Rev. Bro. Yeboa-Koree (1932-2000).

<sup>79</sup> “*Osofo*” is an Akan word for Pastor/Reverend Minister.

<sup>80</sup> Tribute by Prof. Anquandah, University of Ghana” in Burial, Memorial and Thanksgiving Service for the Late Rev. Bro. Yeboa-Koree (1931-2000), pp.48, 49.