

Ecclesiastical Cartography and the Problem of Africa¹

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There is a natural assumption that maps offer objective depictions of the world. The message of this book is that they do not, and that the innumerable ways in which they do not, serve to place maps as central and significant products of their parent cultures.²

For [post-Columbus] cartographers, maps became ephemera, repeatedly redrawn to new information. The sea monsters and ornamental flourishes disappeared to make way for new landmasses of increasingly accurate shape.³

Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed onto us by those who from the very beginning were eye-witnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed.⁴

A. Africa as *terra incognita* – Christian maps and the invisible continent

Among the better-known medieval maps is the Hereford Mappa Mundi, c.1300, a striking example of historical and theological projection onto an image of the physical world. The map provides an abundance of European and Mediterranean detail, and is congested with familiar towns and cities from Edinburgh and Oxford to Rome and Antioch. It is onto this familiar terrain that all of the significant historical and theological events are projected – the fall of man, the crucifixion, and the apocalypse. As for the rest of the world, the greater part of Africa and Asia blurs into margins featuring elaborately grotesque illustrations of prevailing myths and savage demonic forces.⁵

¹ An earlier abbreviated version of this article appeared in *Missiology: An International Review*, Vol. XXVII, No. 1 (January 1999), pp. 71 – 83, under the title, “The Dictionary of African Christian Biography: A Proposal for Revising Ecclesiastical Maps.”

² Peter Whitfield, *The Image of the World: 20 Centuries of World Maps* (San Francisco: Pomegranate Artbooks in association with the British Library, 1994), p. viii.

³ David S. Landes, *The Wealth and the Poverty of Nations: Why Some are so Rich and Some are so Poor* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1998), p. 99.

⁴ Luke 1:1-3 (NRSV).

⁵ Peter Whitfield, *The Image of the World*, pp. 20-21.

The Catalan World Map some two centuries later was likewise more revealing of European ignorance than of actual geography. “The strangest geographical feature,” Whitfield notes, “is the shape of Africa: at the extremity of the Gulf of Guinea, a river or strait connects the Atlantic with the Indian Ocean, while a huge land-mass swells to fill the base of the map. No place-names appear on it...”⁶ The continent is replete with dog-headed kings, and paradise is located in Ethiopia. Beyond the gates of Europe, the laws of God and nature were apparently suspended, and anything was possible. This map represented, in Whitfield’s words, “a powerful, dramatic but not a logical, coherent picture of the world.”⁷

While considerable cartographic clarity has since been achieved in the realm of geography and culture, ecclesiastical “maps”, on the other hand, continue to badly misrepresent, under-represent or simply ignore the actual state of affairs in much of the world, especially Africa.

Among the most astonishing religious phenomena of the twentieth century has been the growth of Christianity in Africa. As Lamin Sanneh recently observed, “Muslims in 1900 outnumbered Christians by a ratio of nearly 4:1, with some 34.5 million, or 32 percent of the population. In 1962 when Africa had largely slipped out of colonial control, there were about 60 million Christians, with Muslims at about 145 million. Of the Christians, 23 million were Protestants and 27 million were Catholics. The remaining 10 million were Coptic and Ethiopian Orthodox.”⁸ Forty years later, the number of Christians in Africa had multiplied by six to nearly 380 million, overtaking the Muslim population to comprise an estimated 48.37 percent of the approximately 800 million total population.⁹ Between 1900 and 2000, the Catholic population in Africa increased a phenomenal 6,708 per cent, from 1,909,812 to 130,018,400. Catholic membership has increased 708 per cent over the last fifty years.¹⁰

⁶ Whitfield, *The Image of the World*, p. 26.

⁷ Whitfield, *The Image of the World*, p. 26.

⁸ Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2003), p. 16. Sanneh’s figures on Orthodox Christianity in Africa are almost certainly understated. *World Christian Encyclopedia* figures for the Ethiopian Orthodox Church alone in mid-1970 number over thirteen million, with Egyptian Orthodox tallies adding another two millions. See David B. Barrett, editor, *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Church and Religions in the Modern World, A.D. 1900 – 2000* (Nairobi, Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 286, 278.

⁹ Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk with Robyn Johnstone, *Operation World: 21st Century Edition* (Carlisle: Paternoster Lifestyle, 2001), pp. 20-21. According to *Operation World* figures, Muslims constituted 41.32 percent of Africa’s population in 2001. Annual growth rates for Christians and Muslims in Africa are estimated to be 2.83 percent and 2.53 percent respectively. See also “Profiles of the 270 largest of the 10,000 distinct religions worldwide,” in *The World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comprehensive Survey of Church and Religions in the Modern World*, ed. David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), vol. 2, pp. 3-12.

¹⁰ Bryan T. Froehle and Mary L. Gautier, *Global Catholicism: Portrait of a World Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2003), p. 5. This book is the second of a three-volume profile on *The Catholic Church Today*, undertaken by the Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate at Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

Yet, strangely, even the most recent attempts by mainline church historians to help seminarians and church leaders locate themselves and find their way in the terra firma of contemporary world Christianity take scarcely any note of Africa. In 2002, for example, Westminster John Knox Press published Randall Balmer's 654-page *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism*. The author of this volume, far from apologizing for his conspicuous lack of reference to African or any other non-Western subject matter, "readily acknowledges" in his Preface that "the volume is weighted heavily toward North America."¹¹ Africa is represented by a token smattering of Western mission agencies such as the Africa Inland Mission.

Equally unsatisfactory is the *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, published in late 2003.¹² This 789-page cornucopia of information on evangelical figures from the 1730s to the present indeed "brims with interest while providing reliable historical information," as the inside flyleaf attests, yet only a single black African – Samuel Adjai Crowther – merits inclusion. "Geographically," the Introduction explains, "the scope is the English-speaking world, understood in its traditional sense as the UK, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. A few figures from non-English speaking countries have also been included if their ministries or reputations made a significant impact upon English-speaking evangelicals.... [but] In general," the editor continues, "my goal has been to include those figures that would be of interest to scholars, ministers, ordinands, students and others interested in the history of evangelicalism."¹³

Since cartographic studies are as much the *cause* as the *result* of history, continued reliance on such antiquated maps ensures the ongoing confusion of Christian guides attempting to locate themselves and their protégés ecclesiastically. Thus, despite the very modest results accruing from the prodigious efforts of nineteenth century missionaries like David Livingstone, Robert Moffat, Mary Slessor, and C. T. Studd, these names are household words today; contrarily, while Christian numerical growth in Africa has burgeoned from an estimated eight or nine millions in 1900 to some 380 millions in 2003,¹⁴ scarcely anything is known about the persons chiefly responsible for this astonishing growth – African catechists and evangelists.¹⁵

That such a state of affairs should persist despite world Christianity's quantum demographical, spiritual and intellectual shift from the North to the South and from the West to the East is partially explained by factors delineated by Andrew Walls in his 1991 essay, "Structural Problems in Mission Studies." Despite the global transformation of Christianity,

¹¹ Randall Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Louisville and London: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), p. vii. Balmer is the Ann Whitney Olin Professor of American Religion at Barnard College, Columbia University.

¹² Timothy Larsen, editor, with consulting editors D. W. Bebbington and Mark A. Noll, and organizing editor Steve Carter, *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals* (Leicester, UK, and Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2003).

¹³ Larsen, et.al., *Biographical Dictionary*, p. 1.

¹⁴ David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 2003, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (January 2003), p. 25.

¹⁵ Elizabeth A. Isichei, *History of Christianity in Africa: From Antiquity to the Present* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, and Lawrenceville: Africa World Press, 1995), pp. 98-99).

Walls notes, not only do Western syllabuses fail to adequately register this phenomenon, but they "... have often been taken over in the Southern continents, as though they had some sort of universal status. Now they are out-of-date even for Western Christians. As a result, a large number of conventionally trained ministers have neither the intellectual materials nor even the outline knowledge for understanding the church as she is."¹⁶

Furthermore, Walls reminds readers in the same essay, just as the implications of discoveries in other fields were resisted by those whose personally or institutionally vested conventional interests were threatened – one thinks of establishment reaction to such pathfinders as Copernicus or Louis Pasteur, for example – so today, Western Christendom's dawning awareness that her old strength is gone, and that her once vitality is ebbing inexorably away is "... intellectually threatening, requiring the abandonment of too many certainties, the acquisition of too many new ideas and skills, the modification of too many maxims, the sudden irrelevance of too many accepted authorities. It was [and is] easier to ignore them and carry on with the old intellectual maps (and often the old geographical ones too), even while accepting the fact of the discovery and profiting from the economic effects."¹⁷

But might not this troubling lacuna in the existing reference corpus be partially due to an absence of basic reference tools providing convenient access to non-Western Christian data that instructors, desperate to keep pace with ordinary teaching demands, require? I believe this to be at least partially so. Since the new maps have not been created, the old maps must serve. The story of the church in Africa thus remains mere desiderata – a footnote to the story of European tribes – the religious expression of the West's 500-year ascent to world military, economic and social hegemony. Africa remains *terra incognita*, a blur on the margins of world Christianity's self-understanding.

Since the greatest surge in the history of Christianity occurred in Africa over the past one hundred years, and continues its breathtaking trajectory into the twenty-first century, it is both disappointing and alarming that yet another generation of Christian leaders, scholars and their protégés, relying upon existing, "up-to-date" reference sources, will learn virtually nothing of this remarkable phenomenon, or of the men and women who served and who serve as the movement's catalysts. Africa remains "the dark continent," not due to an absence of light, but because the monocle through which the religious academy peers is opaque, rendering Africa invisible.

From time to time, of course, well-meaning efforts are made to bring African Christianity into Western scholarly consciousness, but these are essentially desultory, marketing novelties, with no scholarly traction.¹⁸ Given the realities of world Christianity in A.D. 2004, such

¹⁶ Andrew F Walls, "Structural Problems in Mission Studies." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (October 1991), p. 147.

¹⁷ Walls, "Structural Problems ...," p. 150.

¹⁸ One example is *Christian History*, Issue 79, Vol XXII, No. 3 (September 2003). The subtitle of this 48-page issue is: "The African Apostles: The untold stories of the black evangelists who converted their continent." Included are

scholarly tools and their perpetuation constitute disappointing proof that "Africa and Asia and Latin America and the Pacific and the Caribbean – now major centers of Christianity – are under represented in works that are meant to cover the entire field of Christian knowledge."¹⁹

Perhaps the editors of these otherwise useful reference tools are not to be blamed for their failure to include African subjects. The fact is, information on Africa's Christian founding fathers and mothers is often simply not *available*, and such information as *is* available is often *inaccessible* to any but the most intrepidly ingenious and assiduous researcher.

Why this should be so is not surprising, given the challenges associated with documenting the lives of persons who, even if literate, leave scarcely any paper trail.²⁰ But it compounds the troubling tendency of the global Christian reference corpus to perpetuate the illusion of the West as the axis upon which the Christian world revolves. To the notion that it is otherwise, ecclesiastical cartographers today seem as impervious to the factual verities as was the Catholic Church to the once radically new – but correct – cosmology of Copernicus. The fact is, there are no base-line reference tools to which one might turn for information on those whose lives and activities have produced in Africa a Christian revolution unprecedented in the history of our globe.²¹

stories on Joseph Kiwanuka of Uganda, Apolo Kivebulaya of Congo, Simeon Nsibambi of Uganda, Bishop Crowther of Nigeria, William Wade Harris of Ivory Coast, Simon Kimbangu of Congo, Mahay Choramo of Ethiopia, as well as briefer interpretive pieces. Information on the journal is available online at: [www.christianhistory.net].

¹⁹ Andrew F. Walls, "Structural Problems ...," p. 151.

²⁰ Even a figure as significant as William Wadé Harris, hailed in 1926 as 'Africa's most successful evangelist' in consequence of his astounding impact upon the establishing of the Christian faith among the peoples of the Ivory Coast "... left no writings except half-a-dozen short dictated messages ..." See David A. Shank, "The Legacy of William Wadé Harris," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (October 1986), p. 170.

²¹ In an email dated 16 September 1993, Steve Hayes informed me of an emerging database of biographical, organizational and historical information on African independent churches. Information on some 8000 distinct South African denominations was, he pointed out, "scrappy and fragmentary." While the database itself – which was to have been linked to the Church History Database of the Department of the University of South Africa (Pretoria) – seemed to have stalled (per Hayes' email of 29 May 1998), it could conceivably be resuscitated. In the meanwhile, the Church History Database itself contains some 14,000 indexed records from the early nineteenth to the late twentieth century, and covers the area south of the Cunene and the Zambezi rivers, including South Africa, Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland, Namibia, and Zimbabwe. Professor Willem Saayman, head of the Missiology Department until his retirement in 1999, was a key player in this biography project. His successor was J. N. J. Kritzinger, who as of the date of this writing (September 2003) still holds the chair. The *DACB* actively seeks to discover and cooperate with such endeavors across Africa.

Several African biographical dictionaries have been published. The *Southern Africa Dictionary of National Biography*, compiled by Eric Rosenthal and published in 1966 (London and New York: Frederick Warne & Co.), contains some 2000 entries on deceased persons from then Republic of South Africa, South West Africa, Rhodesia, Zambia, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, Bechuanaland and Basutoland who, in Rosenthal's opinion, played a "...part in our history sufficiently important". Included in the dictionary are 94 chiefs, 94 missions-related subjects, and 106 subjects designated 'religious'. In 1968 the first volume of the *Dictionary of South African Biography* under the editorship of W. J. de Kock (Pretoria: National Council for Social Research), containing biographies of persons who died before the end of 1950, was released. Among the approximately 3000 entries, only subjects whose achievement and influence figured in the larger South African scene were included. As de Kock

B. Mapping ecclesiastical *terra incognita*: *The Dictionary of African Christian Biography*

From August 31 to September 2 of 1995, a scholarly consultation of modest proportions was hosted by the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven. It was convened to discuss the need for an *International Dictionary of Non-Western Christian Biography. Volume I: Africa, or An Oral History Christian Biography Register for Africa*. The official announcement issued by participants at the conclusion of consultation summarized the *raisons d' être* and *modus operandi* of the envisaged *Dictionary*:

A team of international scholars is planning a *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*. While the 20th-century growth and character of Christianity in Africa is without historical precedent, information on the major creative and innovative local figures most vitally involved is virtually absent from the standard scholarly reference works.

The *Dictionary* will cover the whole field of African Christianity from earliest times to the present and over the entire continent. Broadly inter-confessional, historically descriptive, and exploiting the full range of oral and written records, the *Dictionary* will be simultaneously produced electronically in English, French and Portuguese.

The *Dictionary* will not only stimulate local data gathering and input, but as a non-proprietary electronic database it will constitute a uniquely dynamic way

admits in his introduction, "Average and typical figures ... who ... were of limited and local importance only, have usually been omitted" (p. viii). Two editions of the *Dictionary of African Biography*, under general editor Ernest Kay, appeared in 1970 and 1971 respectively. This dictionary, likewise, does nothing to address the concerns of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, limiting itself "... to persons of achievement in all the nations in membership with the Organization of African Unity", and containing "... nowhere within its pages ... any reference to the Republic of South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, or the Portuguese colonies in the Continent of Africa" (from the Foreword). In the end, this reference tool is little more than a record of prominent political and academic figures. More useful, but of little help in identifying figures significant to Christian Africa, is the 40-volume *African Historical Dictionaries* series, edited by Jon Woronoff, and published variously between 1974 and 1985. Worthy of mention are a number of other reference sources: *Encyclopaedia Africana Dictionary of African Biography*, edited by L. H. Ofose-Appiah. This ambitious endeavor was to have run to twenty volumes, but to date, only three volumes have been issued (New York: Reference Publications, 1977). The *International Directory of Scholars and Specialists in African Studies*, compiled by James Duffy, Mitsue Frey, and Michael Sims (Waltham, Mass: Crossroads Press, 1978) is useful though dated, listing 2700 Africanists world-wide. Mark R. Libschütz's *Dictionary of African Historical Biography*, first published in 1978 by Aldine (Chicago) was updated and re-issued in 1986 through the University of California Press (Berkeley). Finally, there is S. A. Orimoloye's *Biographia Nigeriana: A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Nigerians* (Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1977), which understandably makes no attempt to single out subjects for their 'Christianity', but focuses instead upon those traditional social, political, academic or economic criteria that are the stuff of ordinary fame. The fact is, the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* is a unique resource that has already begun to fill a lacuna in the reference corpus currently available on African Christianity.

to maintain, amend, expand, access and disseminate information vital to an understanding of African Christianity. Being non-proprietary, it will be possible for material within it to be freely reproduced locally in printed form. Being electronic, the material will be simultaneously accessible to readers around the world.

Contributors will be drawn from academic, church and mission communities in Africa and elsewhere. The *Dictionary* will not only fill important gaps in the current scholarly corpus, but will inform, challenge and enrich both church and academy by virtue of its dynamic and internationally collaborative character.²²

The prescience of this announcement has been born out by subsequent developments, for the enterprise has crept steadily forward since then, so that as of this writing some ninety four research institutions, seminaries, and university departments in twenty African countries have joined the effort to produce a base-line, biographical memory base by formally identifying themselves as DACB Participating Institutions. It is hoped that by 2010 an additional one hundred African educational and research institutions will officially join in the task of researching and recording the stories of their continent's Church fathers and mothers.

C. The Contours of the *Dictionary*

Chronologically, the *Dictionary* spans twenty centuries of Christian faith on the African continent, thus counteracting the notion that Christianity in Africa is little more than the religious accretion of 19th and 20th century European influence. "Christianity in Africa," Fr. John Baur aptly reminds his readers, "is not a recent happening, nor it is a by-product of colonialism – its roots go back to the very time of the Apostles."²³ As I write, a significant proportion of the stories appearing in the database feature subjects who lived and died prior to the 13th century. Some 378 names have been associated with the "Ancient Church" section of the database, while some 160 of the over 500 subjects associated with Orthodox "Ethiopia" lived prior to the twelfth century, as did a majority of the 226 Coptic subjects identified as Egyptian.

Ecclesiastically, likewise, since Christian expression in Africa does not readily lend itself to standard Euro-American tests of orthodoxy, the *Dictionary* aims at inclusiveness rather than exclusiveness.²⁴ As is customarily the case with encyclopedic works of any kind, exclusion

²² The consultation, hosted by the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut, was underwritten by the Pew Charitable Trusts' Research Enablement Program (REP).

²³ John Bauer, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa* (Nairobi, Kenya: Palines Publications, 1994), p. 17.

²⁴ As Professor J. F. Ade Ajayi wrote in a letter dated April 9, 1998, the issue of just who is and who is not a "Christian" is not always so clear cut in Africa as it is in some parts of the world. He mentioned as an example a well-educated woman, a devout Christian, "who moved from the Christ Apostolic Church to Jehovah Witness without necessarily realizing that she had thereby lost her initial focus on Christ." It seems better to err on the side of inclusion rather than exclusion, allowing end users to exercise their own judgment regarding the appropriateness or inappropriateness of subjects.

is the prerogative of the user. Thus, for example, key figures associated with such heterodox organizations as the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints or the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, as well as those in sometimes highly-controversial African-initiated churches, are included on the basis of their *self-definition* as Christians.²⁵

Inclusion criteria are as broad and as flexible as possible. In general, those persons deemed at local, regional, national or denominational levels to have made a significant contribution to African Christianity, and whose stories are indispensable to an understanding of the church as it is, will be included. While main entries are generally restricted to subjects who are African either by birth or by immigration, non-African subjects such as foreign missionaries, whose contributions to African church history are regarded by Africans themselves to have been significant, are also included. Similarly, while a majority of the subjects will be confessed Christians, some non-Christians are included, if they are deemed to have played a direct and significant role in the regional or national development of Christianity.

Linguistically, dictionary entries now appear in English, with some in French. The plan is for the database to be made available in the five languages most broadly understood across Africa where the Christian presence is notably vital: English, French, Portuguese, Swahili and Arabic. Since the material is non-proprietary, there is nothing to prevent a research institute, academic department or enterprising individual from translating the stories into any language, but the intention is to receive stories in any one of these five working languages, and to have each story translated into the other four languages.²⁶

A **data collection template** has been designed to ensure a measure of uniformity in the cognitive fields around which the details of each subject's life are arranged.²⁷ Insofar as such data as birth dates are actually available, these are included. Otherwise, an attempt is made to link the birth of a subject to a particular period or an auspicious event. Wherever possible, published as well as oral sources of information are utilized. While documentation can pose a serious challenge, the standards commonly employed by those working in the field of oral history are utilized.²⁸

²⁵ A. F. Walls identifies six persisting continuities within the varied emphases characterizing Christianity through the centuries: (1) worship of the God of Israel; (2) the ultimate significance of Jesus Nazareth; (3) the activity of God where Christians are; (4) Christian membership in a community which transcends time and space; (5) use of a common body of Scriptures; and (6) the special uses of bread, wine and water. In instances where a subject's ecclesiastical orthodoxy might be doubtful, these criteria will be employed. See Andrew F. Walls, "Conversion and Christian Continuity," *Mission Focus*, Vol. 18, No. 2 (1990), pp. 17-21.

²⁶ Professional translation costs are prohibitive and out of the question. The publication of all entries into five languages will of necessity be voluntary. Such a translation project would be an ideal undertaking for the religious studies or history department of a university. The DACB would try to provide modest support in the form of software, hardware, and advice.

²⁷ These simple guidelines have gradually evolved into *An Instructional Manual for Researchers and Writers* (New Haven: Dictionary of African Christian Biography, 2004) a 64-page booklet that elaborates the essential techniques of oral history as well as providing examples of a range of stories already appearing in the dictionary.

²⁸ There are no major problems in academia with research into oral tradition, but a number of guidelines need to be kept in mind: (1) Oral data needs to be collected openly in an open forum where it can be challenged or augmented;

The database is comprised of **two levels of information**: one, the *Dictionary* itself, is accessible on-line and on CD-ROM; the other, the *Dictionary's* working database, is accessible only to the editors. The former contains information on figures who, if not deceased, are advanced in years; while the latter stores information on still active subjects who are likely to merit inclusion in the database someday.

The **choice and arrangement of African subject names** has always been a peculiar challenge, as Norbert C. Brockman points out in the foreword to his earlier *An African Biographical Dictionary*: "Names have symbolic and even descriptive meanings among many African groups, and a person may be known by several names, not to mention a wide variety of spellings.... The order of names familiar in the West is not always used, nor are 'family names' a universal custom in Africa."²⁹

But in the case of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, this problem is ameliorated by the nature of the medium itself. Being an electronic database, *Dictionary* CD-ROM users are able to access the information in a variety of ways, including any of the subject's names, ecclesiastical affiliations, countries of residence and citizenship, languages, ethnic group, and so on. Similarly, the problem of evolving and changing country or region nomenclature is resolved by the medium itself, enabling one to access, say, the life of a first century subject by searching by name, by country (Egypt), or by category (Ancient Church). For those accessing the *Dictionary* on the World Wide Web, the process is even more efficient. Simply typing the name of the biographical subject – say, Biru Dubalä – into Google will bring up the Ethiopia Index page of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*.

D. The Dictionary's *Modus Operandi*³⁰

The project's **data collection network** is not hierarchical but lateral – a kind of 'spider's web', with OMSC as the nexus for as many data collection centers as might emerge. The web already

(2) what it told to the researcher must be told and repeated to others in the same area for cross-checking; (3) oral traditions may provide a variety of points-of-view on the subject; (4) oral tradition will be used to augment written sources, and vice-versa. One of the advantages of an electronic database over a published volume is the possibility of including a field for unsubstantiated complimentary (or even contradictory) anecdotes relating to the subject. Such anecdotal information provides texture and depth-of-insight into the subject, or at least into peoples' perceptions of the subject.

²⁹ Norbert C. Brockman, *An African Biographical Dictionary* (Santa Barbara, Denver and Oxford: ABC-CLIO, 1994). Brockman's dictionary "... provides sketches for 549 prominent sub-Saharan Africans from all periods of history" (p. vii).

³⁰ Failure to secure a grant in the early stages of the enterprise was fortuitous, although it meant that the project has necessarily evolved more slowly than originally envisioned. Instead of being whisked to its destination in a Mercedes Benz, the *Dictionary* has trudged its way slowly but steadily on foot. Walking requires more effort than does being a passenger, to be sure, but the three-mile-an-hour pace is more conducive to contact with fellow pedestrians, and the requisite exercise ensures that it will be better shape when it gets to where it is going. And because the dictionary is not money-driven but idea-driven, it truly belongs to Africa and Africans. Its stories are the result of African ingenuity and dedication, rather than a questionable byproduct of foreign funds.

extends to numerous points across Africa. Some ninety four seminaries, university departments and research centers in twenty countries have joined the enterprise as participating institutions, formally agreeing to actively promote the research and writing of the stories of persons deemed to be of significance to any adequate comprehension of the *how* and *why* of the Church in a given locale. In some instances, the research and writing of a story is a requirement for graduation. The information is organized and written in conformity to standard DACB guidelines. Duly designated liaison coordinators then send these stories either directly to the coordinating office in New Haven, or to one of four DACB offices in Ghana, Zambia, South Africa, and Nigeria.³¹ The New Haven office is responsible for entering the stories into the database.

Both the legitimacy of the subject and the accuracy of the story are safeguarded by associating the names of the participating institution, the liaison coordinator, and the author, with each biographical entry. Once each year, participating institutions receive the updated CD-ROM version of the dictionary, whose contents can be freely used – with attribution – in the preparation of syllabi, supplementary readings, or booklets. No restriction is placed on making copies of the CD-ROM.

Biographical subjects – now approaching 3000 – are identified on the basis of their perceived local, regional, national, or continental or denominational significance. No subject is excluded if, in the opinion of communities of local believers, his or her contribution is deemed singular. In addition, printed materials of all kinds – church and mission archives, church histories, mission histories, denominational histories, doctoral and masters' theses, in-house denominational and mission society magazines, as well as existing reference tools and biographical dictionaries – have been and continue to be culled with a view to discovering the identities and stories of key African Christians.

E. Project Luke Fellowships

Project Luke, so-named for the Church's first historian, is the project's scholarship component, providing annual fellowships for two African Church Historians to come to OMSC in New Haven for periods of up to nine months. At OMSC, fellowship recipients are trained and mentored for the task of recording – like latter day Lukes – local, regional, and national stories of *their* "early church" and its founding personalities. Uniquely positioned to supply resources and expertise in oral history and mission not available at any single African site, OMSC enables fellowship recipients both to pursue their own information collecting and writing projects, and to serve as a resource to *DACB* collaborators in Africa. As of this writing, nine Project Luke Fellowships have been awarded.

F. Publication and Distribution

³¹ The *DACB* initially explored setting up an Arabic language coordination office in conjunction with the Global Institute South at Uganda Christian University, but now hopes to locate the facility in Khartoum – the heart of Christian Arabic-speaking Africa.

The Dictionary is being produced as a web-based resource and distributed as a CD-ROM. The advantages of electronic publishing are such that academic publications and reference works are increasingly appearing in digital form. This was the burden of an article by the director of Yale University's Center for Advanced Instructional Media nearly a decade ago, considering the organizational and technical implications of publishing on the World Wide Web:

Look what has happened to encyclopedias: sales of the digital CD-ROM versions have surpassed paper versions this year, and at the current rate, there may not be any paper encyclopedias in production two years from now (collectors take note). The cost advantages of Internet publishing or publishing on CD-ROM are so great that the capital-starved, price-sensitive world of academic books and professional journal publishing will become primarily digital and net-worked long before the mainstream publishing giants convert most of their back lists to digital formats.³²

But as an African proverb wryly observes, “the darkest place in the house is beneath the candle,” for another, darker side to the rosy inevitability of electronic publishing was likewise identified a decade ago. Information available only in digital form it can quickly find itself rendered passé, prisoner to a technology that is both expensive and doomed to rapid obsolescence. This point was eloquently made by Jeff Rothenberg, a senior computer scientist in the social department of the RAND corporation in Santa Monica, California:

Although digital information is theoretically invulnerable to the ravages of time, the physical media on which it is stored are far from eternal.... The contents of most digital media evaporate long before words written on high-quality paper. They often become obsolete even sooner, as media are superseded by new, incompatible formats – how many readers remember eight-inch floppy disks? It is only slightly facetious to say that digital information lasts forever – or five years, whichever comes first.³³

Rothenberg goes on to remind readers that digital information requires sophisticated, expensive, and rapidly evolving hardware and software for its storage and retrieval.

If we need to view a complex document as its author viewed it, we have little choice but to run the software that generated it.

³² Patrick J. Lynch, “Publishing on the World Wide Web: Organization and Design,” *Syllabus*, Vol. 8, No. 9 (1995), p. 9.

³³ Jeff Rothenberg, “Ensuring the Longevity of Digital Documents,” *Scientific American*, Vol. 272, No. 1 (1995), p. 42. According to the National Media Lab (www.nml.org), “CD-ROMs have a certified lifetime of 10 years.... [while] magnetic tape is good for 5 to 20 years, conventional CDs up to 50 years, and archival microfilm for 200 years. The longevity champ.... [is] acid-free paper... [which] should last for 500 years.” Furthermore, “Print ... avoids what University of Michigan data expert John Gray calls ‘the problem of unstable technology’—the likelihood that media will outlive the devices that can read them.” See Stephen H. Wildstrom, “Bulletin Board: Data Life Span,” *Business Week* (June 17, 1996), p. 22.

What chance will my grandchildren have of finding that software 50 years from now? If I include a copy of the program on the CD, they must still find the operating system that allows the program to run on some computer. Storing a copy of the operating system on the CD may help, but the computer hardware required to run it will have long since become obsolete. What kind of digital Rosetta Stone can I leave to provide the key to understanding the contents of my disk?³⁴

There is surely a lesson here for the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*! I well remember my tentative first steps into the computer age in 1985, almost twenty years ago. I became the proud owner of an Osborne, CPM, with 64 kilobytes of memory, utilizing twin floppy drives into which a word processor (in my case, Word Star) was inserted on drive A, and a single-sided, single-density floppy disk capable of storing 80 kilobytes of material was put into drive B. In less than three years, this 'state of the art' machine was obsolete, software was no longer being written, diskettes were unavailable, and my new DOS-based computer was not capable of reading or translating my old CPM files. For a short while – around two years – it was possible to translate the material into a DOS format using Media Master, a conversion software. With technology's rapid evolution to the current level of sophistication, this software no longer works. The information ... several books, numerous articles and reviews, hundreds of letters, and scores of sermons ... is effectively lost.

As mercifully providential as this may seem to those upon whom these effusions might otherwise have been inflicted, their loss illustrates the hazards of relying exclusively on an electronic medium in a world where economic resources are unevenly distributed, and in which the short-term economic outlook for the continent of Africa is not bright.

The Rosetta Stone, twenty-two centuries after its composition, is still readable; Shakespeare's first printed edition of Sonnet 18 (1609) is still legible nearly four hundred years later; digital media, on the other hand, becomes virtually unreadable within a decade.

It is for reasons such as this that any reference work, including the one being contemplated, should be made available in both electronic (web and CD-ROM) and paper form.

³⁴ Rothenberg, "Ensuring the Longevity of Digital Documents," p. 45. Stuart Lipoff's response to a query (appearing in the November 13, 2003 issue of on-line edition of *Scientific American*) regarding the life expectancy of a CD-ROM is pertinent here: "The lifetime of CD-ROMs is unknown, as the discs have not been in existence long enough for us to study and understand the mechanisms by which they wear out... The disc of a CD-ROM is made of polycarbonate plastic and an encapsulated thin, reflective layer of aluminum. The digital information on the disc is imprinted in that aluminum layer. There are a number of possible wear-out mechanisms that could damage or destroy the information on a compact disc. Ultraviolet light can alter optical properties of the polycarbonate plastic; cold flow of the plastic could lead to mechanical distortion of the disc; and oxidation could impair the readability of the aluminum reflective layer... Practically speaking, the most likely wear-out mechanism for CD-ROMs will be the changing technology of data storage. Long before the disc itself becomes unreadable, it is likely that the CD-ROM will be replaced by a new medium and that it will not be possible to find a CD-ROM reader, except perhaps in a museum." (http://www.sciam.com/askexpert_question.cfm?)

For it is doubtful whether many users in Africa will be fiscally able to keep requisite pace with the expensive technological upgrades necessary to keep an electronic data base usable. Consideration is being given to producing a printed version of the Dictionary that would be distributed to all participating institutions sometime after 2010.

From the very beginning, the DACB has maintained that publishing rights should be freely granted to churches, denominations, national or international publishers wishing to produce a printed version of the entire electronic database or printed versions of any portion of the database deemed useful to them. In other words, the electronic version of the *Dictionary* has, from the beginning, been non-proprietary.³⁵

Were the *Dictionary* to be conceived as a proprietary, profit-making venture, it is highly doubtful whether it could gain significant Africa-wide circulation. The cost of purchasing such a database would be prohibitive to most Africans, making the stories unavailable to Africans themselves. The cost of producing and distributing the dictionary in it annually updated, non-proprietary CD-ROM form is borne by the central office in New Haven.³⁶ Likewise, facilitation of publication rights for those local, regional or national interests wishing to produce a paper copy of the *Dictionary* is handled by this office. There is a possibility that a representative selection of 1500 - 2000 stories featured in the electronic database might be edited and published as a reference book within the next ten years. But were this to happen, guarantees would be secured ensuring that all participating institutions and contributors would receive a complementary copy.

G. Africa and the Internet

The DACB exists as both a CD-ROM and as a web-based resource. The CD-ROM version is essential since, while many African educational and research institutions have access to computers, a relatively small proportion of them have reliable and affordable access to the worldwide web. But while African Internet users outside of South Africa are relatively few, the potential of the Internet in Africa is, according to the authors of an article in a 2002 issue of *Carnegie Reporter*, “staggering.”³⁷

³⁵With the burgeoning popularity of the World Wide Web, it is not necessary to think in terms of a physical CD-ROM version of the *Dictionary*, not is it essential to compile all of the texts in one place. Rather, the Project could encourage institutions around the world to make their texts available through linked WEB pages. This way the Project might simply produce a resource web page which would provide a link to each of the cooperating sites, wherever they might be. This would eliminate the need to have a database duplicated many times to make it useful to a large number of people, and would distribute the challenge of collecting and maintaining the information among those individuals and institutions best suited to do so.

³⁶ Assistance is sometimes provided by groups with special interest in certain segments of the African Church. For example, the Church Missions Publishing Company (Diocese of Connecticut) provided a modest one-time grant to cover the cost of making available to all ANITEPAM-related institutions a copy of the CD-ROM version of the DACB, together with a copy of *The Dictionary of African Christian Biography: A Procedural Manual for Participating Institutions* (New Haven: DACB, 2003).

³⁷ “Using the ‘net ... impoverished Third World peoples can engage with the intellectual capital of the West. A virtual university, for instance, could at little cost bring many of the benefits of Stanford to Senegal.... Large-scale

While most Africans are still unable to access the web, and while civil wars, the AIDS pandemic, and the tyranny, incompetence, and sheer corruption of African governments have combined to send such infrastructures as may have been inherited from the colonial masters into seeming fatal decay, there are nevertheless hopeful signs. The capital cities of every country on the continent now have access to the Internet, and information technologies are gradually making their appearance in many other urban areas as well.³⁸ But the going is slow. As Robins and Hilliard observed in 2002,

Basic communication systems lag badly behind the rest of the world. With about 13 percent of the earth's population, Africa has only 2 percent of its phone lines; sub-Saharan Africa ... has about 10 percent of the world's population and only about one-half of 1 percent of its phone lines. At the beginning of 2000, Africa had approximately 200 radios and 50 TV sets per thousand people; by contrast, North America had some 2,000 radios and 1,000 TV sets per thousand; Europe 750 radios and 475 TVs; South America 375 and 200; and Asia 225 and 85.³⁹

Since, as Hilliard notes, there is "a direct correlation exists between established telecommunications systems and the growth of the internet," African prospects of "catching up"

sharing of information resources is a dominant feature of the African media landscape. A given copy of any newspaper might be read by more than ten people, there are usually perhaps three users per dial-up Internet account, and it is not uncommon to find most of a small village crowded around the only TV set, often powered by a car battery of small generator. Why not shared public Internet terminals?" See: Daniel Akst and Mike Jensen, "Africa goes Online," in *Carnegie Reporter*, Vol. 1, No 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 3-9.

[http://www.Carnegie.org/reporter/02/Africa/index_low.html]. Akst, former assistant business editor for technology at the *Los Angeles Times*, writes for the *New York Times* and the *Industry Standard*. Mike Jensen, a South African based in Port St. Johns in the East Cape, is an independent consultant with nearly two decades of experience establishing information and communications systems in almost forty African countries. He maintains a website on African internet issues at: [<http://www3.sn.apc.org/>] Updated in July of 2002, his website reports that of the approximately 816 million people in Africa in 2001, it is estimated that only: 1 in 4 have a radio (205m); 1 in 13 have a TV (62m); 1 in 35 have a mobile phone (24m); 1 in 40 have a fixed line (20m); 1 in 130 have a PC (5.9m); 1 in 160 use the Internet (5m); and 1 in 400 have pay-TV (2m). *World Press Review* (February 2004, pp. 22-25) carried three reports on the U.N. World Summit on the Information society convened in December 2003, "aimed at democratizing the digital world." 174 countries pledged universal internet access by 2015, but the challenges associated with financing the technology and ensuring the free flow of information are daunting. The reports include Christine Tréguier, "Bridging the Digital Divide," pp.22-23; Peter Glaser, "A Digital Gulf Divides the World," pp. 23-24; and Peter Baumgartner, "Africa's Poor Connection," pp. 24-25.

³⁸ Milinda B. Robins and Robert L. Hilliard, eds., *Beyond Boundaries: Cyberspace in Africa* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 2002). For the "first and most comprehensive assessment of the networked readiness of countries," see *The global information technology report 2002-2003: readiness for the networked world*, edited by Soumitra Dutta, Bruno Lanvin, Fiona Paua (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). The report is published by the World Economic Forum where it is a special project within the framework of the Global Competitiveness Programme. The *GITR* is the result of a collaboration between the World Economic Forum and INSEAD, France. It is 355 pages in length, and can be viewed online at: [www.oup-usa.org/reports]. Chapter six (by Mike Jensen) is entitled "ICT in Africa: A Status Report" (pp. 86-100).

³⁹ Robins and Hilliard, *Beyond Boundaries*, p. viii.

are bleak. Compounding the situation is the relatively prohibitive cost of renting a telephone – in Africa an astounding 20 percent of a person's average income. It is little wonder that, excluding South Africa, there is only one telephone for every 17,000 persons in Africa.⁴⁰ To provide a sense of economic scale, Hilliard and Roberts point out that “the gross national product of one small European country, the Netherlands, is greater than the combined GNP of 47 nations in sub-Saharan Africa.”⁴¹ Needless to say, a vast majority of Africans have never seen a telephone, never mind made or received a phone call, and probably won't within the next decade.

This being the case, one might well question the appropriateness or usefulness of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*! While there are sound reasons for the decision to make the stories available in a non-proprietary, electronic form, it is appropriate to highlight briefly some current developments that will undoubtedly have a direct and positive impact on the digital divide and its implications for the DACB.

Three years ago *Fortune Magazine* carried a report on an ambitious undertaking

“... to encircle the continent with 32,000 kilometers of submarine fiber-optic cable that will deliver 80 gigs per second, some of the world's fastest broadband. Organized by Africa ONE of New York and using Lucent and Bell Labs technologies, the \$1.6 billion effort will use wireless microwave and cable to bring signals ashore. Submarines run by Global Crossing will begin laying the fiber in early 2001; the ring is to be complete by 2002. ‘Africa will literally skip years of the process that other countries went through,’ says Patricia Bagnell, president of Africa ONE. ‘It's going to be amazing for growth.’ And a major step toward closing the so-called digital divide.”⁴²

Six months later the Carnegie Reporter carried a similar report, although by then the estimated cost had increased from \$1.6 to \$1.9 billion, and additional economic benefits of the optical fiber necklace were touted: “Africa ONE contends that when the project is complete it will not only vastly expand telephone and Internet capacity on the continent, but will also eliminate \$600 million a year in connection fees that Africans pay to complete international calls – many of them between African nations.”⁴³

⁴⁰ Robins and Hilliard, *Beyond Boundaries*, p. 3.

⁴¹ Robins and Hilliard, *Beyond Boundaries*, p. 164.

⁴² “Africa ONE,” *Fortune Magazine*, October 9, 2000, p. 206. Africa ONE Limited is a private company responsible for building, owning, and operating the 32,000 kilometer cable system that will have 20-30 landing points at key coastal cities in Africa, the Middle East and Europe. See: <http://www.africaone.com/english/about/about.cfm>.

⁴³ “Africa ONE: One of the “most important telecom projects on the continent,” in Carnegie Reporter, April 30 (Spring 2001). The full report may be viewed at: www.carnegie.org.

Even granted the improbability of continent-wide electrical or telecommunications grids in Africa, a project currently underway in Laos suggests that these money-labor-and-maintenance-intensive infrastructures may not be necessary after all. *The Economist* recently reported that a remote Laotian village with neither electricity nor telephones is nevertheless being connected to the internet.⁴⁴ This exercise in technological ingenuity is being spearheaded by Lee Thorn, head of an American-Lao organization known as the Jhai Foundation.⁴⁵

A similar initiative by Canada's International Development Research Center (IDRC) is an international program to empower sub-Saharan communities with the ability to apply information and communication technologies (ICTs) to their own social and economic development. Known by its acronym, ACACIA is designed as an integrated program of research and development and demonstration projects to address issues of applications, technology, infrastructure, policy, and governance. Conceived and led by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Acacia supports Canada's contribution to the African Information Society Initiative (AIS) which was endorsed by African governments as an action framework to build Africa's information and communication infrastructure.⁴⁶ Such developments augur well for the *DACB* in its first-generational digital form.

H. Challenges and opportunities

Unevenness of country, language, and denominational content. A perusal of the database makes it readily evident that while the numbers of stories in English are relatively plentiful, with French-language entries lagging far behind, the languages representing the other three lingua franca of Africa are not represented at all. This is due to neither oversight nor neglect, but to the linguistic limitations of the principals involved, and to the fact that the dictionary reflects only those stories that have been submitted. *DACB* facilitators in New Haven do not research, write or commission the stories. Participating institutions and their duly designated liaison coordinators are the key to dictionary entries.

Uneven quality of stories. Anyone browsing the *DACB* will at once be struck by the unevenness of both the quality and consistency of the nearly one thousand biographies that currently make up the database. Some of the stories are a mere one or two sentences in length, while others run to several thousand words. While scholarly exactitude mark some of the entries, a large number have been contributed by persons who are neither scholars nor historians. The stories are non-proprietary, belonging to the people of Africa as a whole. Since this is a first generation tool, and on the assumption that *some* memory is better than total amnesia, the checkered quality of the entries has been tolerated and even welcomed. This being a first-generation memory base, an attempt to ensure that there is some kind of memory to which

⁴⁴ *The Economist* (September 28, 2002), p. 89.

⁴⁵ See Appendix B.

⁴⁶ See the IDRC website: www.idrc.ca/acacia.

scholars and leaders of subsequent generations will have access, it will be left for another generation to redress the weaknesses and deficiencies inherent in the present dictionary.⁴⁷

The stone scrapers and blades of our Paleolithic forbears, deemed to be functionally deficient in our age, were nevertheless the survival tools of another. It is inevitable that any early tool should, by the standards of a later generation, be regarded as primitive and somewhat unsatisfactory. But lest this truism stifle the creative process, the reminder that it is often just such inadequacies which spark disgruntled users to develop better ones is reassuring.

The DACB's approach to story research, writing and publication is predicated upon the active cooperation of African participating institutions. Not all of the ninety-four different

educational institutions and research centers formally identified with the project have submitted stories to the Dictionary. An effort is being made to encourage incorporation of biographical research and writing assignments into the syllabi of appropriate university or seminary courses, utilizing the standards provided by the DACB.⁴⁸

I. Imitation, the sincerest form of flattery⁴⁹

The DACB continues to capture the imagination of scholars and research institutes in Latin America and Asia whose own church histories are, like Africa's, all too often little more than religious expressions of European or American expansion. In a series of email exchanges in late 2001, I was informed that the Centre for the Study of Christianity in Asia (Trinity College, Singapore) had decided to use the DACB as a model for a similar effort currently underway to produce an Asian Christian biographical database.⁵⁰

In early December 2002, the first issue of the *DACB News Link*, a bi-annual newsletter on DACB activities and people, was mailed. That same month a collaborative relationship was established with Stephen Hayes, who maintains a database of African Independent Churches and a website with many church and mission-related resources for Africa. The DACB published several stories Hayes supplied on a template of the DACB story format, making it possible to

⁴⁷ Some of the stories that have been submitted are entirely inadequate. In November of 2003, for example, of the more than fifty stories received from Nigeria, only five or six were usable. The rest had to be returned for further work. Such experience has resulted in a more robustly directive procedural manual that anticipates inadequacies in scholarship and documentation that are to be expected from researchers who are for the most part not academically trained.

⁴⁸ See Appendix A.

⁴⁹ See Appendix C.

⁵⁰ My correspondent was Mr. Chan Yew Ming, Research Advisor for Trinity Theological College. The Centre for the Study of Christianity in Asia was officially launched on 4 October 2001. The purpose of the Centre is to serve the churches in Asia as they seek to witness to Christ and to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom within the region and beyond. Therefore, the Centre will focus on mission research, as well as the training of missionaries and scholars in mission studies. For further information, go to their website: [<http://www.ttc.edu.sg/csca.htm>].

process the stories efficiently. The *DACB* New Haven office hopes to implement this model in collaboration with our Africa offices, to streamline the process of story editing and preparation for the Web.

The work has focused on adding stories to the *DACB* Web site and on helping our new liaison coordinators launch the *DACB* project in their institutions. The new *DACB* logo was silk-screened onto a supply of blank CDs so that the *DACB* CD may be produced in bulk quickly on demand. A *Procedural Manual for Participating Institutions* has been developed to offer suggestions and facilitate the implementation of the *DACB* at our participating institutions.

My *DACB*-related trips to Kenya and Ethiopia in February of 1999 and 2000 were the first of regular annual trips to various African countries. In February 2001 I traveled to Uganda and Zambia, and in 2002 to Ghana. In 2003, my itinerary took me to universities in Ibadan, Calabar and Port Harcourt, Nigeria, and then to numerous centers of research activity in South Africa and Namibia in January 2004. Ninety four African seminaries, universities and research centers are now registered as official participating institutions, contributing to a steady flow of biographical materials for the *Dictionary*. Increasing numbers of African churches and academic institutions are cooperating by encouraging their members and students to research and produce the raw narratives from which the database is being created. The enterprise and its far-flung participants is overseen by a part-time Project Manager who occupies a fully equipped office, provided by the Overseas Ministries Study Center.⁵¹

⁵¹ While I was itinerating in Nigeria in February of 2003, a one-week oral history workshop co-sponsored by the *DACB* was being conducted at Daystar University, one of the institutions that I had visited on my trip to Kenya in 1999. Another *DACB* co-sponsored oral history workshop will be conducted the first week of April 2004 in Madagascar. Rev. Kehinde Olabimtan, the Ghana-based West Africa Coordinator of the Project, also continues to be actively engaged in the promotion of the enterprise. See "DACB Project Update" in the *Akrofi-Christaller Centre News* (January-June 2003), p. 7.

Awareness of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* continues to grow. As virtually the only central source of information on African Christian biography, the *DACB* website is experiencing steady traffic, as indicated by the table below:

DACB Website traffic from June 2003 to February 2004⁵²

Month	PAGE VIEWS	DAILY AVERAGE PAGE VIEWS*
June	14800	493
July	16627	536
August	15842	511
September	15623	521
October	16973	547
November	18778	625
December	17001	548
January	20691	667
February	20807	717

The DACB office at the Akrofi-Christaller Centre in Ghana has been active, convening quarterly working sessions at which biographical research still in process is presented and critiqued.⁵³

Similar good news came in the form of a letter (dated November 6, 2003) from Dr. Russell Staples, for many years a prominent missiologist and leader within the international Seventh Day Adventist denomination:

Dear Jonathan,

This is a rather delayed report of the meeting with the Africa representatives of the Adventist Church in Africa two weeks ago. In all about 50 were present, three Division presidents, the others mostly union leaders. M. Bediako chaired the session. There were other items on the

⁵² Statistics provided by Gospelcom Network.

⁵³ I quote from the "DACB Project Update" appearing in *Akrofi-Christaller Centre News*, No. 33 (July-December 2003): "Following the presentations, the session decided that an editorial committee should be constituted ... to assess written stories and recommend them for presentation at each quarterly meeting. It was also decided that the first draft of every biography should be presented to the editorial committee before being presented at the working session, in order to ensure that stories have adequate shape and focus. In a closing devotion, Rev. J. Edusa-Eyison encouraged participants to remain committed to the vision of the project." (p. 11)

agenda for this special meeting, but Bediako introduced the DACB project with considerable enthusiasm, and everyone seemed keenly interested.

I provided an introduction to the work you are doing with the DACB, and worked through the DACB Cd-Rom supplied by Michele Sigg. A few were acquainted with the project, but many knew nothing about it. The extensity [sic] of the undertaking was a surprise to all, and all were impressed with the wonderful opportunity it presents of recapturing the stories of the pioneers of the Christian message in Africa before time erases memories.

We handed out copies of the introductory folder, and of the two guidelines to all, and a sheet I had written: “Suggestions regarding ways to facilitate research and the writing of stories.”⁵⁴ The Division leaders will promote the project and appoint regional coordinators centering the major responsibility on an interested faculty member at each of the colleges.

The response was really enthusiastic. Of course this is the easy part but I will follow up with letters to the parties concerned and hope that we have now initiated a serious commitment to ongoing work. Bediako has promised to continue encouragement and support.

I will report developments to you. I greatly appreciate the vision that drives you in this undertaking, and the enormous service you are rendering to the followers of Christ on the African continent. Thank you for your help. May God bless you richly in this and OMSC projects.

Yours, Russell

Dr. Staples has been a vigorous supporter of the DACB from its early beginnings, but this letter was particularly heartening, given the fact that over the past five years the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Africa has been completely reorganized, and, had it not been for Dr. Staples’ assiduousness, the DACB would have likely disappeared from the denomination’s agenda.

Also encouraging was my participation in the Third International Interdisciplinary Conference of the African Diaspora in Europe (September 11-15). Dubbing the event “The Berlin-Congo Conference 1884 – The Partition of Africa – And Implications for Christian Mission Today,” conference organizers generously allotted me a full 90 minutes of plenary time

⁵⁴ As a result of this report, we were alerted to the need to provide more explicit directives and guidelines for DACB researchers and writers in Africa. Accordingly, Michèle Sigg adapted the oral history materials that Jean Paul Wiest has utilized for his teaching of the subject here at OMSC, to produce the “Oral History Techniques for Writing a Biography” guidelines that are found in Section 3 of the Appendix. These guidelines are available on the DACB-CD as well as on the DACB website.

(compared to an average of 30 minutes for other presenters) to talk about the DACB. So great was the interest that the session stretched to two hours. A report of this meeting, together with the typescript of my lecture, can be found elsewhere in your binder, behind the DACB tab.

Would that all of our Liaison Coordinators in Africa were as tender of conscience as Paul and Lila Balisky, in Ethiopia. Ethiopia was the first country that I visited in my annual junkets to that continent. It was here in February of 1999 that the DACB inaugurated and cosponsored the Frumentius Lectures, featuring Professor Andrew F. Walls. Heartening indeed was the e-mail that I received on Thursday, November 20:

Dear Jon,

Greetings to you from Addis Ababa where we are in the middle of the Frumentius Lectures with John Stott.⁵⁵ The DACB project has become like a sore gum boil (to use an AFW expression) to both Lila and me for the past several months. We are now in the process of attempting to remedy that. I trust you have not given up on those of us on the Ethiopian team. Let me share what Lila and I are presently pursuing on the DACB project:

1. The *DICTIONARY OF ETHIOPIAN BIOGRAPHY*, edited by Belaynish Michael, S. Chojnacki, and Richard Pankhurst, Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Vol. I, 1975, has been mailed to Mr. Jim Daly (son-in-law of Dr. Nathan Barlow, Sharon's husband) who has kindly offered to key or scan this document into this computer so it can be available electronically for DACB. This 218 pp. book covers the period from early Ethiopian history to 1270 AD. This book has been mailed to Jim Daly yesterday. It won't all be relevant, but you can choose those who are worthy to be included in DACB.

2. R. Pankhurst also gave me about 150 other biographical entrees written out by hand which have also been mailed to Jim yesterday. I must say that these handwritten documents will be a challenge for Jim to decipher.

3. I have about 20 biographies (probably more) written by EGST and ETC students that will sent off to Jim for keying in. Dr. Debela also has about 20 biographies written by his students.

4. At the Frumentius Lecture tomorrow evening, Dr. Debela, Lila and I will be presenting three prizes to EGST students who wrote exceptional biographies. We are doing this as an incentive for others to produce biographies. The 700 plus attendance is rather phenomenal this year at the Lecture Series.

You will note that I have copied this e-mail to Jim Daly. He may want to communicate directly with you as he proceeds with his laborious task of keying in the

⁵⁵ The Frumentius Lectures in Addis Ababa were inaugurated as a DACB co-sponsored event in February of 2000. Professor Andrew F. Walls was the inaugural lecturer, followed by Dr. Kwame Bediako in 2001.

biographical entries. Lila joins me in sending our warmest greetings to both you and Jean,

Peace,
Paul, with Lila⁵⁶

J. Conclusion

Maverick economist E. F. Schumacher once stood on a street corner in Leningrad, trying to get his bearings from a map provided for him by his Russian hosts. He was confused, because while there was some correspondence between what the map registered and what he could see with his own eyes (e.g., the names of parks, intersecting streets, etc.), several enormous churches looming in front of him were nowhere indicated on his map. Coming to his assistance, his guide pointed out that while the map did indeed include some churches (pointing to one on the map), that was because they were actually museums. Those that were not museums were not shown. "It is only the 'living churches' we don't show," he explained.⁵⁷

Africa clearly has a distinctive and growing place in Christian history, yet many parts of the African Christian story are too little known, not least within Africa itself, and in Western Christian consciousness, the continent continues to be regarded as a forbidding and dangerous mass, known chiefly for its capacity to generate the stuff of which newspaper profits are assured: rampant corruption, political dysfunction, recurring famine, and genocidal civil wars. A parallel and more significant reality, comprised of a richly diverse and thriving range of Christian congregations whose churches serve as centers of human normalcy, integrity and hope, escapes notice. The *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, the fruit of inter-African and international cooperation, is offered as a modest first step in bringing our ecclesiastical maps up to date.

Appendix A: Guidelines for DACB Researchers and Writers

In preparing a biographical study for inclusion in the Dictionary of African Christian Biography, please see that your article includes information on as many of the categories suggested below as possible.

⁵⁶ In their December 2003 newsletter to supporters, Paul and Lila Balisky highlighted the work of the DACB, inviting their supporters to donate money to the cause. "We are attempting to accomplish as much as possible [on the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*] with the assistance of a very able Ethiopian friend whom we will personally fund for a year to the tune of about \$2000. If you would like to contribute to this project, gifting to our Ministry Account through SIM will be most welcome."

⁵⁷ E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1977), p. 1.

1. Given name(s) of Person (as necessary, provide explanations of these names)
 - A. Baptismal names
 - B. Kinship names
 - C. Nicknames
2. Family names (in cases where there is more than one spouse, list the children under the appropriate mother or father)
 - A. Ethno-linguistic group
 - B. Kinship group
 - C. Father
 - D. Mother
 - E. Wife/Wives
 - F. Husband/Husbands
 - G. Children
 - H. Grandchildren
3. Life Story
 - A. Date or approximate date of birth
 - B. Place of birth: village, city, province, nation
 - C. Unusual circumstances associated with birth
 - D. Formative experiences, such as illnesses, personal misfortunes, tragedies, visions, etc.
 - E. Education, degrees (including dates)
 - F. Conversion (including date, if applicable)
 - G. Calling / ordination to ministry (including date)
 - H. Date or approximate date, place, and circumstances of death
4. Nationality / citizenship
5. Languages (including first, second, third, fourth, fifth, etc.)
6. Church affiliation
 - A. Roman Catholic
 - B. Orthodox / Coptic
 - C. Protestant (Conciliar, Evangelical, Anabaptist)
 - D. Independent (African initiated, Spiritual, Pentecostal / Charismatic)
7. Names, locations, and descriptions of churches begun or served by the subject
8. Ministry details (Where? How long? What happened? Short term and long term impact? Please provide detailed information wherever possible, including anecdotes, stories, and hearsay)
9. Continuing influence and significance of the Subject
10. Publications, reports, writings, letters, musical compositions, artistic contributions by the Subject
11. Sources of information about the Subject
 - A. Unpublished
 - 1) Eyewitness accounts (give names and addresses of storytellers who are or were eyewitnesses; include details of their relationship to the Subject)
 - 2) Oral and anecdotal (give names and addresses of story tellers wherever possible, and include details of their relationship to the Subject)

B. Published (include full bibliographic data wherever possible: book title, author, publisher, year of publication; title of chapter within a book, author of the chapter, title of the book, name of the editor of the book, full publication data; article in periodical should include title or article, author of article, periodical title, date of periodical, page numbers of article, place of publication.)

12. Other pertinent information

With the story please also provide the following information, without which the story will not be utilized:

- ◆ Your name and address
- ◆ Name and address of the church with which you are affiliated
- ◆ Name and address of affiliated educational institution of mission agency
- ◆ Name of individual(s) chiefly responsible for researching the story of each Subject
- ◆ Name and position of the liaison coordinator
- ◆ Date the story was submitted to DACB

Appendix B: Technology for Harsh Conditions

The Jhai Website description of the “Remote IT Village Project” is quoted below:

Technology for harsh conditions. Without telephone lines or electricity, amid torrential rains followed by high temperatures and thick red dust, standard technologies won't function. Many of the villagers whom Jhai is working with are low-literate and do not speak English, so e-mail won't help them, the Internet is inappropriate.

To respond to their needs, Jhai Foundation is developing

*A rugged computer and printer assembled from off-the-shelf components that draws less than 20 watts in normal use - less than 70 watts when the printer is printing - and that can survive dirt, heat, and immersion in water.

*A wireless Local Area Network with relay stations based on the 802.11b protocol, which will transmit signals between the villages and a server located at the Phon Hong Hospital for switching to the Internet or the Lao telephone system.

*A Lao-language version of the free, Linux-based KDE graphical desktop and Lao-language office tools.

Villagers in five villages and their surroundings will use this Jhai Communications Center to make telephone calls within Lao PDR and internationally (using voice-over-Internet

technologies), and for the activities, such as accounting, letter writing, email, that are so important for their start-up enterprises.

Village youth and children will receive technology training and micro enterprise training using the Jhai Computer, with some young people joining the project as Youth IT Entrepreneurs. The Youth IT Entrepreneurs will support their elders in the use of the technology and in business operations.

.... The Jhai Communications Centers and wireless network will be owned by the villages. Small fees will be charged users to support costs for personnel, paper and other consumables, and telephone charges, making the project fully sustainable immediately upon completion of the training period.

The Jhai Communications Center, with wireless network and youth entrepreneurial support for business creation, will serve as an easily replicable model for the delivery of Information Technology services to poor and remote regions throughout the developing world.⁵⁸

Appendix C: The DACB as Stimulus

A number of inquiries have been made by persons interested in emulating the DACB in non-African contexts. The three letters below are indicative of the extent to which the DACB model seems to serve as a catalyst for similar biographical projects elsewhere.

November 20, 2002

Dear Dr. Bonk,

Greetings from SHILLONG in North East India. I hope you do not think that I have forgotten you. I have pleasant memories of our meeting in Rome: "*Rescuing the Memory of our Peoples*." I cannot forget your kindness to me on different occasions. Thank you

⁵⁸ For more information and numerous links to news coverage of this remarkable effort, see the Jhai Foundation website: [http://www.jhai.org/jhai_remoteIT.html]. A similar initiative by Canada's International Development Research Center (IDRC) is an international program to empower sub-Saharan communities with the ability to apply information and communication technologies (ICTs) to their own social and economic development. Known by its acronym, ACACIA is designed as an integrated program of research and development and demonstration projects to address issues of applications, technology, infrastructure, policy, and governance. Conceived and led by the International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Acacia supports Canada's contribution to the African Information Society Initiative (AISII) which was endorsed by African governments as an action framework to build Africa's information and communication infrastructure [<http://www.idrc.ca/acacia>].

so much. Soon after my return to India, I was involved in the immediate preparation for a National Symposium. It got over on 5th November. Then other works kept me busy. I am sorry for the delay in writing to you.

When we were in Rome, I was much impressed by the project, *The Dictionary of African Christian Biography*, which you are preparing. I shall be grateful to you if you could send a CD of it. We could think of preparing something similar for the North East of India (to begin with) and for India and later on even for Asia.

If you have any other useful material on CD, please kindly share it with me too. We have a cultural and missiological Centre here in Shillong. When you happen to be somewhere in India, please contact me and come to visit us in Shillong – in India's unique North Eastern corner. Welcome!

May God bless you abundantly in your ministry of preparing overseas ministers of the Gospel.

With love,

Fr. Joseph Puthenpurakal SDB
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MAWLAI, Shillong – 793008 Meghalaya - INDIA
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Another encouraging letter received on May 2, 2003 was further indication that the DACB is wielding a modest exemplary influence beyond Africa. The letter was written by Dr. Jacob Thomas, of Pune, India, who was in residence at Crowther Hall during my visit in February 2003, and who had at that time expressed a deep interest in both the project itself and in the modus operandi of the enterprise. Here is his letter:

Dear Jonathan,

I do hope you will recall our meeting at Crowther Hall, Birmingham while you were there recently. I was on my sabbatical from UBS. It was a significant meeting as far as I am concerned.

I must say that your presentation on the DACB motivated me to take up the challenge of a Dictionary of Indian Christian Biography. I am now seeking your counsel

and guidance as the Contextual Theology Dept. of Union Biblical Seminary takes up the challenge of initiating the project.

We certainly want to hear from you as you have valuable insights from your own efforts and leadership in the DACB. Please be kind enough to guide and encourage us as we get down to the planning and launching of the project. I hope to be the coordinator of the project with a few of my colleagues in the department who will be the editorial team.

I shall look forward to hearing from you soon.

With warm regards, Dr. Jacob Thomas (Jacob)

In early September of 2003, I received official notice that an editorial team consisting of members of the Contextual Theology Department of the Union Biblical Seminary and coordinated by Dr. Jacob Thomas, supported by an all-India Council of Advisors, has embarked on a biographical project modeled after the DACB, but focusing on the Indian sub-continent. "The inspiration for this project," reads the public announcement, "comes from ... the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB@OMSC.org). The DICB project is grateful for the partnership by which there is mutual encouragement and sharing of relevant ideas."⁵⁹

The DACB has sparked similar interest in Malaysia, as the August 27, 2003 email from Ms. Aileen Khoo Hooi Ai indicates:

Dear Dr. Bonk,

We met in Rome last year when you presented this Dictionary of African Christian Biography project to the participants. We here in Malaysia are interested in this and feel that this is something we will benefit and can handle. Can you give me (or point me to the right direction) a check list of things we need to do to get started?

Our Board of Archives and History will meet in September 20. It will be nice if I can share some information with the members.

Thanks. I hope you are keeping well and are planning to come to Malaysia for the IAMS conference 2004.

Yours sincerely, Aileen⁶⁰

⁵⁹ From an announcement sent to me by Jacob Thomas as an email attachment, 5 September 2003, Puna.

⁶⁰ Aileen Khoo Hooi Ai is with the Trinity Methodist Church in Selangor Dural Ehsan.

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