



DACB News Link

For Friends of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*

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Translation of *DACB* Begins

Thanks to funds received from the Lundman family foundation and the Parker Foundation, translation of the *DACB* into French, Portuguese, and Swahili has begun in earnest. The grants, received for the 2008–2009 fiscal year, made it possible to commence translation of *DACB* stories initially into French and Portuguese.

From September to November 2007, Sam Sigg translated into French over seventy biographies of leaders and pioneers from Francophone countries—Benin, Burundi, Cameroon, Congo, Côte d’Ivoire, DR Congo, Gabon, Madagascar, Mali, Mauritius, North Africa, Rwanda, Senegal—which will double the total number of stories we

have in French. As Francophone regional coordinator Fohle Lygunda says, “The French version of the *DACB* has a lot of catching up to do!” (The English version has about 1,400 stories.) The new French stories are now being prepared for the Web site and will be published this spring.

Portuguese translator Cloves Cardozo, from Brazil, is currently translating forty stories from Portuguese-speaking countries (Angola, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique, Cape Verde) and neighboring countries (DR Congo, Malawi, Zimbabwe). This will more than double our total number of Portuguese stories.

Swahili translation will begin in the 2008–2009 fiscal year (starting after June 30).

A letter from Dr. Jonathan Bonk, founding director of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography*



Those of you whose interest in the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* goes back to the days when it was nothing more than an idea will be encouraged by this issue

of the annual newsletter. If you have visited our Web site recently, you will have been impressed by both the growing volume of biographical content and the remarkable technical improvements to what had already become an outstanding source of biographical information. Credit for this must go to our project manager and Web designer, Mrs. Michèle Sigg, who has been at the helm of the enterprise for nearly eight years.

Elsewhere in this newsletter she has

Stories on AIC Founders and Leaders



Good News Theological College and Seminary (GNTCS), an institution in Accra, Ghana, that trains leaders for African Instituted Churches (AICs), became a *DACB* participating institution in 2004. Dr. Thomas Oduro, who holds a doctorate in church history and a masters in systematic theology from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.A., is the school’s principal and *DACB* liaison coordinator.

Initially started in the choir loft of an AIC in Accra, GNTCS was first established in 1971 under the name Good News Training Institute in response to the phenomenal growth and popularity of AICs in Africa—

especially West Africa. The school is now situated on ten acres of land and is fully equipped with Internet and a large library of over 24,000 books and audiovisuals—one of the best collections in Accra and perhaps all of Ghana.

The seminary plans to establish the Center for the Study of African Instituted Churches (CESAIC) to “document various religious experiences of African Instituted Church (AIC) leaders” and “facilitate the understanding of the doctrines and practices of AICs” (from GNTCS Web site at www.gntcs.org). No such center where researchers can have access to documentation on African AICs and their leaders exists to this date in Africa. A center for the study of AICs does exist at the Selly Oak College of the University of Birmingham in the city of Birmingham, United Kingdom, but it is too far away to be of much use to African researchers.

Dr. Oduro has been a member of an AIC church and has worked with AICs for almost three decades. His passion is to research and document the histories and religious experiences of AICs to facilitate proper ecumenical relationships and



drawn attention to several key donors, whose generous financial support has enabled us to move forward with French, Portuguese, and Swahili translation of the stories and to conduct *DACB*-related workshops and conferences in several countries.

I was personally involved in one such event from November 15 to 19, 2007, representing the *DACB* at the Uganda Christian University’s tenth anniversary celebrations. On



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2006-2008 Project Luke Scholars from Nigeria, Tanzania, and Cameroon



Musa Gaiya was born into a Muslim family in Nigeria but his parents did not practice a devout faith consistently. As a result, he was exposed to religion in many different forms. He attended a Bible class in 1972, where he met Joyce Price, an SIM missionary who had a deep influence on him. He claims her as the one through whom he found Christ.

Two years after his conversion he felt called into Christian ministry. He graduated from the Evangelical Church of West Africa

Seminary at Igbaja. In 1979 he started teaching biblical studies at an all-girls mission high school. He taught this age group for the next seven years, until his 1986 appointment with the School of Preliminary Studies in Keffi where he taught young aspiring Christian leaders about Christianity: its history, spirituality and theology and its active role in modern African society. Since 1990 he has been a professor of church history and African religions at the University of Jos in Nigeria.

Musa opposes the idea that Christianity in Africa is mostly a postcolonial, eighteenth and nineteenth century phenomenon. He argues that Christianity in Africa has an ancient history that should be not only remembered but also celebrated. In recent years he has traveled around the United States, lecturing on the impact of Islamic Sharia law on Christians in Nigeria, and other topics.

As a Project Luke scholar in the fall of 2006, Musa completed his year's residency at OMSC which was interrupted in 2003 when he had to return home after his wife contracted kidney disease. She passed away two years later. Musa has three grown children back home.

Angolwisye Malambugi, our Project Luke fellow in the spring of 2007, was baptized into the Moravian Church as an infant and attended church in Tanzania with his mother. He thought he wanted to be a lawyer, an economist, or a politician, never dreaming he would one day be a pastor.

Malambugi was a schoolteacher when God called him to the ministry. Unsure at first how one became a pastor, he asked church supervisors for help. They directed him to the Moravian Church Provincial Board to be trained, and he was ordained in the Moravian Church



of Tanzania in 1976 after receiving a diploma of theology. He later received bachelor of divinity and master of theology degrees.

He served as the executive vice chairman of the Moravian Church of Tanzania from 1984 to 1988, and then as executive chairman from 1988 to 1994. Under his guidance, and with God's grace, this province (diocese) became the largest Moravian province in the world. Today the Moravian Church of Tanzania is the largest in the denomination and currently supports mission activities in Zambia.

Up to 2007, Malambugi worked as a professor at Teofilo Kisanji University and at the Open University teaching Old Testament, Hebrew, African philosophy, ethics, and African traditional religions. He has also established an NGO that supports orphans, street children, and the elderly.

Robert Pindzie, our 2007-2008 Project Luke scholar, was born into an Islamic community and family in Mimbe village in Cameroon. He gave his heart to the Lord at age fourteen. Though his conversion caused tension in his family, for Robert there was no turning back.

In his youth, when no Christian missionaries came to his area, Robert felt God calling him to preach the Gospel to his people, which he began to do. In 1974 a church-sponsored school opened in Mimbe, and today 70 percent of the village is Christian.

Robert is an ordained Lutheran minister. He studied toward a Ph.D. in church history from Luther Seminary, concentrating in Reformation studies. He is the founder and director of Stream of Life Mission, a Christian outreach ministry in Yaoundé that does church-planting and social work in major cities and rural areas throughout Cameroon focusing on the youth, Muslims, and unreached peoples (Bamoun, Tikar, Bamileke, Bassa, Evouzoum, Beti, Gbaya, Wawa, Mboum-Mbere, among others).

Since 1989, Robert has taught at Lutheran Theological Institute in Meiganga, where he was dean from 1989 to 1997. From 2001 to 2007 he taught at Cameroon Faculty of Evangelical Theology in Yaoundé. He was a missionary to the Bamoun Muslims and the Tikar in western Cameroon. He has held positions as president of the Southern Synod of the Lutheran Church and vice-president of the Protestant Churches in Yaoundé.

Robert and his wife Delphine have four children. Three of them study at Yaoundé University: son Mouna in biochemistry, daughter Mona-Lisa in history, son Feyeta in French and English literature. His son Massike is a senior in high school.

(Adapted from OMSC residents biographies, 2006-2007, 2007-2008)



DACB News and Announcements

Francophone Africa. Rev. Fohle Lygunda, regional coordinator for Francophone Africa, has developed three primary goals for the region: (1) to promote and publicize the DACB in Francophone Africa, (2) to encourage the writing of original stories, and (3) to motivate and support writers. In pursuit of these goals he organized information and training seminars in DR Congo at the Université Shalom in Bunia (April '07), at the Centre Universitaire de Missiologie in Kinshasa (May '07), at the Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Bumba (July '07), and at the Institut Supérieur de

Théologie et de Développement Communautaire in Yakusu, near Kisangani (October '07). In December 2007, he held a consultation in Kinshasa in which thirteen local biblical and theological institutions were represented by their academic deans. The goal was to promote the use of the DACB in their programs and to have each institution integrate the writing of biographies of local African church pioneers into their church history curricula. Ultimately these stories would be published in the DACB. Thirty new participating institutions have signed up thanks to Fohle's work this year.

Agnes Okoh, Founder of Christ Holy Church International (AIC)

Agnes Okoh was born at Ndoni in the Rivers State, Nigeria, in 1905. When her parents died, she left Ndoni and settled at Asaba. She married James Okoh, a Ghanaian immigrant sailor, in 1924. Later, when she lost all but two of her children followed by her husband, she suffered migraines and fell into a state of despondency. After many fruitless attempts by Western doctors and traditional healers, she was finally healed by a prophetess. She then moved to Enugu to start a textile business.

In April 1943 while returning from a market she heard a voice repeatedly telling her “Matthew 10.” She rushed to a friend and asked, “What is Matthew 10?” The friend asked a young man to read the tenth chapter of Matthew’s Gospel from the Union Igbo translation. Then Agnes sought guidance from the prophetess, who told her this was God calling her to the ministry but that she should wait until God confirmed the call.

Two years later, Agnes had a deep impulse to preach the Word of God. She sold all the fabrics she owned, gave the proceeds to the poor, and began an itinerant evangelistic ministry in eastern Nigeria. Holding a Bible and a bell, she preached in the markets, beginning in Enugu. Her message was new life in Jesus and she emphasized repentance, righteousness, and holiness. Though illiterate, she was said to have frequently quoted portions of the Bible from memory to the astonishment of her followers.

Agnes Okoh also had the gifts of healing and of prophecy. She was said to have raised the dead and healed many diseases. Her ministry was initially a faith ministry, but she relaxed her faith healing stance in the mid-1970s. She did not heal for money, but those healed freely gave in return. On several occasions she gave accurate prophetic utterances, verified by several witnesses.

Agnes Okoh disregarded traditional beliefs inimical to the spread of the Gospel and to development of human potential. She asked local elders to give her portions of the evil forests for prayer centers. Evil forests were dumping grounds for the bodies of slaves, lepers, victims of communicable diseases, lunatics, women who had died in childbirth, those who had committed suicide, and victims of murders or accidents. People believed that the ghosts of the dead were angry at the living for not giving them proper burials and were, therefore, malevolent, punishing anyone who dared to

enter the forest. The local leaders freely gave the forest to Agnes, knowing that if she were a false prophetess the evil spirits would kill her. But after many days in the evil forest without suffering any harm, Agnes urged her followers to farm the fertile ground of the forest. This feat earned her the title Odozi Obodo, which literally means “town repairer.” This is why her prayer ministry was called Odozi Obodo Prayer Ministry. It was later named Christ Holy Church.

Despite these accomplishments, Agnes Okoh was persecuted and accused of being a witch who used evil powers—for example the powers of Maami Water, a mermaid—in her ministry. She and her followers were also ridiculed for clapping their hands, dancing, beating drums, and shouting hallelujahs when worshipping.

Even though women are marginalized in Igbo society and Agnes was illiterate, she used her feminine qualities, spiritual giftedness, faith in God, and motherly passion to train many men to lead the church. She neither claimed any leadership position nor performed any traditional pastoral duties such as baptizing, officiating at the Lord’s Supper, or ordaining pastors. She was officially addressed as “Prophetess Agnes Okoh” but was popularly known as “Mama” or “Odozi Obodo.”

The hallmark of Agnes Okoh’s ministry was her philanthropy. She loved everyone irrespective of gender or denominational affiliation and used gifts received from her wealthy members to provide food, clothing, and cash to the needy and destitute. She single-handedly constructed a nursery and primary school, a maternity home, and a public water spigot at Ndoni, her hometown. Education at the primary school was free, as were the services provided at the maternity home. She led the people of Ndoni to construct roads and streets in the town.

Agnes Okoh died on March 10, 1995, leaving behind a church that is vibrant in evangelism, Bible teaching, and holistic ministry. Twelve years after her death Christ Holy Church International, an African Independent Church, has grown to nearly 850 congregations in Nigeria, Togo, and Ghana.

**Written by Dr. Thomas Oduro, principal of Good News Theological College and Seminary and DACB liaison coordinator. For the complete article with sources, see www.dacb.org/stories/nigeria/okoh_agnes.html.*

What is an African Initiated Church?

An African Initiated Church (AIC) is a Christian denomination started in Africa, by Africans, and not by missionaries from another continent. Other terms used are African Independent Church or African Indigenous Church.

Some scholars argue that independent churches or religious movements are syncretistic, partially integrating aspects of Christian belief with African traditional religion, but the degree to which this happens varies, and has often been exaggerated. Many of these churches have resulted from a process of acculturation between traditional African beliefs and Protestant Christianity, and have split from their parent churches.

During the colonial period, many black converts to Christianity were unable fully to reconcile their beliefs with the teachings of their church leaders, and separated from their parent churches. The reasons for these splits were usually either political—an effort to escape white control—historical—many of the parent



churches, particularly those from a Protestant tradition, had themselves emerged from a process of schism and synthesis—or cultural—the result of trying to accommodate Christian belief within an African worldview.

The various AICs differ widely in their organizational forms. Some resemble Western Christian denominations (Ethiopian types), while others may not (Zionist types). Some have large numbers of affiliates located all over a country (the Zion Christian Church of South Africa), while others may consist of only an extended family and their acquaintances meeting in a house or out of doors.

AICs are found across Africa, particularly in southern Africa (more than 10,000 in South Africa alone) and West Africa. One scholar suggests that at least 36 percent of the population of Africa belongs to an African Initiated Church. Some are now in the United States and Europe.

Many AICs share traditions with Christians from other parts of the Christian world, and these can also be used in classifying

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What is an AIC? *continued from p. 3*

them. So there are AICs of Anglican, Methodist, Roman Catholic, Pentecostal and Orthodox traditions. Some are Sabbatarian, some are Zionist, and so on. Church historians group AICs in the following general categories, but the boundaries between them remain fluid.

- Ethiopian churches arose from the Ethiopian movement of the late nineteenth century, which taught that African Christian churches should be under the control of black people.

- Zionist churches, mostly found in southern Africa, emphasize divine healing, the wearing of white robes, and some Pentecostal teachings such as the use of spiritual gifts. Example: Zion Christian Church.

- Messianic churches focus on the power and sanctity of their leaders. Examples: the Kimbanguist Church and the Nazareth Baptist Church of Isaiah Shembe.

- Apostolic churches are similar to Zionist congregations but often place more emphasis on formal theological training.

- Aladura Pentecostal churches rely on the power of prayer and on all effects of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Example: Christ Apostolic Church (that grew out of Joseph Babalola's revival).

(Adapted from Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Initiated_Church)

Stories *continued from p. 1*

understanding. In the past year he has submitted five stories on AIC founders and leaders to the *DACB* for publication. Presently, three are online—Agnes Okoh (see article on p. 3), Marius Okoh, and Solomon Krow—and two others are in preparation. He is working on a series of biographies of AIC leaders.

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Many thanks and congratulations to Dr. Deji Isaac Ayegboyin for his hard work as liaison coordinator in several institutions in Ogbomoso and Ibadan, Nigeria. Since 2006 he has sent in over twenty-five stories from his students that are now being prepared for the Web site.

Call for Photos

Please send in photos for use in our biographical articles to DACB@OMSC.org.

How you can support the *DACB*:

1. Sign up online for the free *DACB* newsletter.
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3. Support the *DACB* financially.
4. Become a Participating Institution, a Non-African Participating Institution, or an Affiliated Research Institution.
5. Use the *DACB* by incorporating parts of the Web site or selected information into your training programs.
6. Give us your feedback and recommendations by letter or email on ways to improve the *DACB*.



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this auspicious occasion, the Global South Institute, under the direction of former OMSC resident Rev. Canon John Kateeba Tumwine assisted by Dr. Christopher Byaruhanga (2005-06 Project Luke Fellow), organized a four-day *DACB* workshop attended by more than seventy Anglican church leaders and academics from every diocese in the country. The Global South Institute regards active involvement with the *DACB* as an integral part of its primary mission.

The future looks promising. We look forward to welcoming two Project Luke Fellows into our OMSC community in September—one an archivist/librarian from Madagascar, the other a professor from the University of South Africa. Both of them have already done substantial biographical research and writing. Plans are under way for a major oral history workshop that will involve qualified participants from Francophone Africa.

Where do we go from here? Our vision

for an Arabic version of the *Dictionary* has yet to be realized, which means that Christians in Africa's eleven Arabic-speaking nations remain on the dim margins of our consciousness. An Arabic *DACB* will require the dedicated services of someone with special linguistic and technical skills, as well as institutional support resources that we do not have at the present time. In the meanwhile, we will work hard to make accessible the fruits of African biographers writing in English, French, Portuguese, and Swahili so that their labors are not in vain!

Jonathan J. Bonk

DACB Site: Daily Average Page Views and Visitors **January–March 2008**

	January	February	March
Page views	3,001	3,437	4,207
Visitors	930	1,217	1,162



