

AN INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC CONFERENCE
THE AFRICAN CHRISTIAN AND ISLAM
Accra, 6th – 10th July, 2010

By Serge Moussa Traore M.Afr.

From the 6th to 10th July, 2010, some African Christian scholars of Islam met in Accra, Ghana to search together for a critical African Christian approach to Islam.

The objective of the conference was to examine the various ways in which African Christians have encountered, responded to and engaged with Islam and Muslims over the years with the view of gaining insights and learning lessons for a much more biblically, theologically and missiologically sound ways of engagement in the contemporary African context. The conference was therefore not about Islam in Africa *per se* neither was it about Christian-Muslim relations as such. It was about *critical African Christian reflections* on Islam and a *biblically and theologically sound* engagement with Muslims in Africa. The primary target audience of the reflections was theological students and scholars in Africa but also having in mind sharing the African experience with the wider global audience interested in Christian-Muslim issues.

The Facilitating Institution was the *Centre for Islamic Studies of the London School of Theology (UK)*. The Principal Convener/Facilitator of the Conference was Rev. Dr. John Azumah, Director of the Centre for Islamic Studies - London School of Theology. The conference was **sponsored** by the Center for Early African Christianity – Eastern University, Philadelphia – USA, and the World Christianity Initiative – Yale University, Yale, Connecticut – USA.

The key Note Lecture was given by Prof. Lamin Sanneh, D. Willis James Professor of Missions & World Christianity and Professor of History- Yale University on ‘The African Christian and Islam: Learning from the Early African Church.’ **The conference was chaired** in a very brilliant and well appreciated way by The Most Rev. Dr. John Onaiyekan, Catholic Archbishop of Abuja-Nigeria. He also delivered the Conference chair on ‘The African Christian and Islam: The Roman Catholic Perspective’.

The Participants

We were around 50 from different Christian churches. There were 4 Catholics. They were all priests of which one bishop. The bishop was **Archbishop Dr. John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan**, the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Co-President of the Nigerian Inter-religious Council and Co-President of the African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL). The priests included **Serge Traore**, a member of

the Society of Missionaries of Africa, working in Rwanda. **Boniface Maasoayele** is a diocesan priest of Tamale, director of the centre for Muslim-Christian Dialogue of the Diocese of Tamale, Northern Ghana. **Fr. Matthew Hassan Kukah** is currently Chairman Vicar General of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kaduna, Nigeria. The other participants were from different churches: Presbyterian, Baptists, Evangelical... We were from different countries: Nigeria, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Somalia, Sudan, South Africa, Kenya, Madagascar, Egypt, Tanzania, Uganda, United Kingdom, and United States of America.

The speakers

Prof. Lamin Sanneh did his PhD in Islamic history at the University of London. He is the D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale University. **Archbishop Dr. John Olorunfemi Onaiyekan** pursued a doctorate programme at the Pontifical Urban University, Rome in Biblical Theology. Currently he is the Catholic Archbishop of Abuja, Co-President of the Nigerian Inter-religious Council and Co-President of the African Council of Religious Leaders (ACRL). **Rev. Prof. Elom Dovlo** is Associate Professor in the Department for the Study of Religions, University of Ghana. Rev. Dovlo is also an ordained Minister of the Global Evangelical Church. **Prof. Mattews Ojo** earned his PhD degree from Kings' College and the School of Oriental and African Studies (University of London) in 1986 specializing in African Christianity, with special interest in Pentecostal and Charismatic movements in Africa and Indigenous Initiatives in Protestant Missions from Africa. **Rev. Dr. Abraham Akrong** is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Dr. Akrong obtained his PhD from the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago. Currently Dr Akrong is a Senior Research Fellow and Head of Section of Religion and Philosophy at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra. **Rev. Dr. Johnson Mbillah** is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana. Dr Mbillah did his doctoral work with the University of Birmingham, UK, on Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations. He is currently the General Advisor of the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), based in Nairobi, Kenya. **David W. Shenk** is an ordained minister in the Mennonite Church USA and holds a doctorate in religious studies from New York University. At present he is Adjunct Professor at the Lancaster Campus of Eastern Mennonite University and Global Consultant with Eastern Mennonite Missions with special attention to Islam. **Nicole Ravelo-Hoërsen** from Madagascar is currently doing doctoral research on abused Muslim women with The University of South Africa. **Bishop Dr. Josiah Atkins Idowu-Fearon** is the Anglican Bishop of Kaduna, a Lecturer in Islamic Studies and Director of the Kaduna Anglican Study Centre and a Visiting Lecturer in Islam and Anglicanism at the Canterbury International Centre, U.K. Bishop Idowu-Fearon also serves as Chairperson of the Programme for

Christian–Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA) as well as Co-President, Network for Interfaith Concerns, Anglican Communion. **Dr. Moussa Bongoyok** is currently the Director of the Holistic Mission Institute of the Nations and a faculty member at William Carey International University. **Dr. John Chesworth** is Lecturer and Team Member at the Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies in Oxford. **Rev. Dr. F. Peter Ford, Jr.** is Senior Lecturer of the Programme in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations at St. Paul’s University in Limuru, Kenya. **Rev. Dr. Tharwat Wahba** is an ordained pastor in the Evangelical (Presbyterian) Church of Egypt. He is currently teacher of mission and evangelism and the Chair of Mission Department in the Evangelical Theological Seminary in Cairo (ETSC), Egypt. **Rev. Daniel Abdou Karim L. Gomis** is minister of the Church of the Nazarene of Senegal. Daniel did his Masters in African Literature and Civilizations and presently lectures in Christian Ethics, Homiletics and Spiritual Formation at the Nazarene Theological Institute in Dakar. **Dr. Stephen Mutuku Sesi** is an ordained minister of the Africa Inland Church Kenya. He is now a lecturer in Christian Muslim Relations and Islam in Africa at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology. **Rev. Abdul Rahman Yakubu** is an ordained minister in the Bible Church of Africa, Ghana. He holds a Masters degree in Contextual Theology from Kampen University (the Netherlands), in Christian-Muslim relations. **Rev. Fr. Dr. Matthew Hassan Kukah** is currently Chairman of the Ogoni Shell Reconciliation Committee and Vicar General of the Catholic Archdiocese of Kaduna, Nigeria. **Manfred Jung** holds an MTh from Stellenbosh Univerisity. He is currently pursuing doctoral studies on the dynamics of the expansion of Islam in South Africa. He is heading up CCM-Services and is the managing Director of AcadSA Publishing, a Christian Academic publishing house in South Africa. He is also involved as a trainer and consultant in the field of Muslim Evangelism. **Rev. James Bol Obwonyo Padiet** is an ordained pastor of the Presbyterian Church of Sudan. He holds a Masters degree in Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations from St. Paul’s University, Limuru-Kenya. **Mercy Oduyoye** is a professor of theology in Ghana. **Serge Moussa Traore** holds a MA in Religions and Cultures, specialization in Islam from the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome/Italy. He lives as a missionary in Rwanda where he works for a Muslim-Christian program. **Josephine Mutuku** holds an MA and PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary. She teaches at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology, of the Africa International University.

The conferences were divided into 3 types: 1. Bible reflections; 2. Main Papers; and 3. Country studies.

Bible Reflection aimed at exploring the basis of “a *biblically and theologically sound* engagement with Muslims in Africa.” 3 bible reflections were offered to the assembly: 1. Mark 7: 24-30: Jesus’ encounter with the Syrophoenician

woman, by Mercy Oduyoye; 2. Luke 7: 1-10: Jesus' encounter with the gentile centurion, by Serge Moussa Traore; and 3. Women seclusion in the Qur'an and in the Bible, by Josephine Mutuku.

Main Papers

The content of the main papers includes 1. a description of the nature and manifestation of the particular "face" of Islam, with references to historical and contemporary examples within the African context 2. It should shed light on the specific theological, missiological and existential questions and challenges the particular face of Islam raises for African Christians. 3. It should provide scriptural and theological resources for Christians in their engagement with that particular face of Islam. In other words, the paper should proffer guidance on sound biblical, theological and missiological Christian engagement with that face of Islam. 12 main papers were presented:

1. 'The African Christian and Islam: Learning from the Early African Church,' (Prof. Lamin Sanneh).
2. 'The African Christian and Islam: The Roman Catholic Perspective,' (Archbishop Dr. John Onaiyekan).
3. 'The African Christian and Islam: Insights from the Colonial Period,' (Rev. Prof. Elom Dovlo).
4. 'African Pentecostals & Charismatics and Islam,' (Prof. Matthews Ojo).
5. 'ATR as a substructure for African Christianity and a Bridge for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa,' (Rev. Dr. Abraham Akrong).
6. 'Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa Today,' (Rev. Dr. Johnson Mbillah).
7. 'The African Christian and "Folk" Islam & Islamic Mysticism,' (Dr. David Shenk).
8. 'The African Christian and Progressive Islam,' (Nicole Ravelo-Hoëron).
9. 'The African Christian and Islam: Between Naivety and Hostility,' (Rev. Dr. John Azumah).
10. 'The African Christian and Ideological Islam,' (Bishop (Dr.) Josiah Fearon).
11. 'The African Christian and Muslim Militancy,' (Dr. Moussa Bongoyok).
12. 'The African Christian and Islamic Da'wah and Polemics,' (Dr. John Chesworth).

Country Studies

The country studies include the following: 1. A brief historical survey on the arrival and spread of Islam and Christianity in the country, as well as major divisions and denominations within the various traditions – Shia/Sunni/Sufi – Catholic/Mainline Protestant/Charismatic/Pentecostal etc. 2. The demographics – including percentages and major ethnic and/regional compositions of the two faiths; 3. An account of the ways in which Christians have encountered Islam and engaged with Muslims in different regions and the country as a whole. 4. Which of the following "faces" of Islam predominates in the country thereby posing the most challenges to Christians requiring biblical, theological and missiological reflections: Islamic Missions and Polemics, The Ideological face of Islam, e.g. Islamic State and Shariah Law, Muslim Militancy

(violence/terrorism), Folk Islam, “Africanized Islam” and Islamic Mysticism, “Progressive”, “Moderate”, “Liberal” or self-critical face of Islam in which some Muslims reject the Shariah and militancy in preference to modern democracy. 5. How do the major Christian denominations or traditions in the country differ in their attitudes towards Islam and engagement with Muslims?

We learned very enlightening information about Muslims and Christians in those countries: 1. Ethiopia (Rev. Dr. Peter Ford); 2. Egypt (Dr. Tharwat Wahba); 3. Senegal (Rev. Daniel Gomis) ; 4. Tanzania (William Kopwe-PhD Student); 5. Kenya (Dr. Stephen Sesi); 6. Ghana (Rahman Yakubu-PhD Student); 7. Nigeria (Dr. Matthew Kukah); 8. South Africa (Manfred Jung-PhD Student); 9. Sudan (Rev. James Obwonyo).

Recommendations, What next?

The participants were very pleased with the initiative. They consequently expressed those wishes: Christians should be more united; they should form one body in their witness to Muslims. We should include the francophone countries experience of Muslim-Christian relations. We need to collaborate with specific institutions and religious orders like the Missionaries of Africa (White Fathers) involved in the Muslim world of Africa. We should continue to deepen some live question like the relation with African Traditional Religions, the question of the crusades in Muslim-Christian Relations, A Magna Carta of religions in Africa. The Programme of Christian Muslim Relations (PROCMURA) in Africa should be empowered. We need reflective practitioners in Africa: our reflections should impact the grass root. Potentially vulnerable groups like the youth should be included in our reflection. There is need to rethink and rewrite our African history and the history of Christian and Muslim relations in Africa from our African perspective. This initiative should be institutionalized. Our peculiar African approach would need more cooperation in areas of study, keeping our scholars in a network, empowering the existing institutions. We may need to bring together not only scholars but Christian African religious leaders on the same issue of our African approach of Islam.

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