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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

I

Among the better-known medieval maps is the Hereford *Mappa Mundi*, ca.1300, a striking example of historical and theological projection onto an image of the physical world. The map provides an abundance of

¹An earlier abbreviated version of this paper appeared in *Missiology* 27(1999), 71-83, under the title "The Dictionary of African Christian Biography: A Proposal for Revising Ecclesiastical Maps." The dictionary's URL is: www.dacb.org.

²Peter Whitfield, *The Image of the World: 20 Centuries of World Maps* (San Francisco, 1994), viii.

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

⁴Luke 1:1-3 (NRSV).

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 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

The Catalan World Map dating from 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” continue to misrepresent badly, underrepresent, 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 popu-

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

⁶*Ibid.*, 26

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids, 2003), 16.

lation.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

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

⁹Patrick Johnstone and Jason Mandryk with Robyn Johnstone, *Operation World: 21st Century Edition* (Carlisle, 2001), 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 (2d ed.: 2 vols.: New York, 2001), 2:3-12.

¹⁰Bryan T. Froehle and Mary L. Gautier, *Global Catholicism: Portrait of a World Church* (Maryknoll, NY, 2003), 5.

¹¹Randall Balmer, *Encyclopedia of Evangelicalism* (Louisville, 2002), vii.

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

¹³*Ibid.*, 1.

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. Conversely, while Christian numerical growth in Africa has burgeoned from an estimated eight or nine millions in 1900 to some 380 millions in 2003, scarcely anything is known about the persons chiefly responsible for this astonishing growth—African catechists and evangelists.¹⁴

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. Despite the global transformation of Christianity, 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.¹⁵

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 geo-

¹⁴David B. Barrett and Todd M. Johnson, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 2003," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 27(2003), 25; Elizabeth A. Isichei, *History of Christianity in Africa* (Grand Rapids, 1995), 98-99.

¹⁵Andrew F Walls, "Structural Problems in Mission Studies." *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 15(1991), 147.

graphical ones too), even while accepting the fact of the discovery and profiting from the economic effects.”¹⁶

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 merely a desideratum—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 on 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 lenses through which the religious academy peers are 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.¹⁷ Given the realities of world Christianity in A.D. 2004, such 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.”¹⁸ 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.

¹⁶Ibid., 150.

¹⁷One example is *Christian History* 22/3(September 2003). The subtitle of this issue is “The African Apostles: The Untold Stories of the Black Evangelists Who Converted Their Continent.” Information on the journal is available online at: www.christianhistory.net.

¹⁸Walls, “Structural Problems,” 151.

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.¹⁹ But it compounds the troubling tendency of the global Christian reference corpus to perpetuate the illusion of the West as the axis on 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 that 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.

II

From 31 August 31 to 2 September 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 a proposed *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 to maintain, amend, expand, access and disseminate infor-

¹⁹Even a figure as significant as William Wadé Harris, hailed in 1926 as “Africa’s most successful evangelist” in consequence of his astounding impact on establishing 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* 10(1986), 170.

mation 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.²⁰

The prescience of this announcement has been borne out by subsequent developments, for the enterprise has crept steadily forward since then, so that at this writing some 94 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 100 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.

III

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 nineteenth- and twentieth-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."²¹ As I write, a significant proportion of the stories appearing in the database feature subjects who lived and died prior to the thirteenth 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.²² As is custom-

²⁰The consultation was underwritten by the Pew Charitable Trusts' Research Enablement Program.

²¹John Bauer, *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa* (Nairobi, 1994), 17.

²²As J. F. Ade Ajayi observed in a personal letter dated 9 April 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

arily the case with encyclopedic works of any kind, exclusion 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.²³

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 and Swahili. 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.²⁴

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.

²³A. F. Walls identifies six persisting continuities within the varied emphases characteristic of Christianity across time: worship of the God of Israel; the ultimate significance of Jesus of Nazareth; the activity of God where Christians are; Christian membership in a community which transcends time and space; use of a common body of Scriptures; and 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* 18/2(1990), 17-21.

²⁴Since professional translation costs are prohibitive, the rendering of all biographical entries into the five stipulated languages must be voluntary, perhaps undertaken by religious studies or history departments.

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.²⁵ 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.²⁶

The database is composed of two levels of information: one, the *Dictionary* itself, is accessible online 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*, "[n]ames 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."²⁷

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 will be 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,

²⁵These simple guidelines have gradually evolved into *An Instructional Manual for Researchers and Writers* (New Haven, 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.

²⁶While there are no major problems in academia with research into oral tradition, a number of standard, commonsense guidelines need to be observed: oral data need to be collected openly in an open forum where it can be challenged or augmented; what it told to the researcher must be told and repeated to others in the same area for cross-checking; oral traditions may provide a variety of points-of-view on the subject; 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 complementary (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.

²⁷Norbert C. Brockman, *An African Biographical Dictionary* (Santa Barbara, 1994).

ethnic group, and so on. Similarly, the problem of evolving and changing national or regional 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*.

IV

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.²⁸ The web already extends to numerous points across Africa. As noted, some 94 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.²⁹ 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

²⁸Failure 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 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 enterprise, rather than a questionable by-product of foreign funds.

²⁹The DACB initially explored setting up an Arabic-language coordination office in conjunction with the Global Institute South at Uganda Christian University, but now anticipates locating the facility in Khartoum, the heart of Christian Arabic-speaking Africa.

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.

V

The Dictionary is being produced as a web-based resource and distributed as a CD-ROM in its annually-updated form to all African participating institutions. 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, in 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.³⁰

But as an African proverb wryly observes, "the darkest place in the house is beneath the candle," for another, darker side to the rosy in-

³⁰Patrick J. Lynch, "Publishing on the World Wide Web: Organization and Design," *Syllabus* 6/9(1995), 9.

evitability of electronic publishing was likewise identified a decade ago. Information available only in digital form 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.³¹

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.

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?³²

³¹Jeff Rothenberg, "Ensuring the Longevity of Digital Documents," *Scientific American* 272/1(1995), 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, "[p]rint . . . 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* (17 June 1996), 22.

³²Rothenberg, "Ensuring the Longevity," 45. Stuart Lipoff's response to a query (appearing in the 13 November 2003 issue of on-line edition of *Scientific American*) regarding the life expectancy of a CD-ROM is pertinent here: http://www.sciam.com/askexpert_question.cfm?

Twenty-two centuries after its composition, the Rosetta Stone, he notes, 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, become virtually unreadable within a decade. It is for reasons such as this that consideration is being given to producing a printed version of the dictionary, in abridged and rigorously edited form, to 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, and 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. Were the *Dictionary* to be conceived as a proprietary, profit-making venture, it is highly doubtful whether it could gain significant Africa-wide circulation. Purchasing such a database would be out of the question for most Africans, making their stories unavailable to Africans themselves. The cost of producing and distributing the dictionary in its annually updated, non-proprietary CD-ROM form is borne by the project management office in New Haven.³³

VI

Among the several ongoing challenges facing the dictionary, an obvious one is the unevenness of its country, language, and denominational content. It is 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 *linguae francae* of Africa are not represented at all. This is due neither to 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. Not *DACB* facilitators in New Haven, but participating institutions and their duly-designated liaison coordinators in Africa, are the key to researching and writing dictionary entries.

Added to this is the somewhat patchy quality of the stories. Anyone browsing the *DACB* will at once be struck by the patchiness of both the quality and consistency of the nearly 1000 biographies that currently con-

³³Assistance is sometimes provided by groups with a special interest in certain segments of the African church. For example, the Church Missions Publishing Company (Episcopal 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 *DACB Procedural Manual* referred to above.

stitute 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. But since this is a first generation tool; since the stories are non-proprietary, belonging to the people of Africa as a whole; and since, finally, it is assumed that *some* memory is better than total amnesia, the inchoate quality of some of the entries is to be expected, tolerated, even welcomed. This being a first-generation memory base—an attempt to ensure that there is some kind of memory to which scholars and leaders of subsequent generations will have access—it will remain for another generation to redress the weaknesses and deficiencies inherent in the present dictionary.³⁴

There is also a cluster of questions relating to 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 World Wide Web. But, while African Internet users outside of South Africa are relatively few, the potential of the Internet in Africa is “staggering.”³⁵

The stone scrapers and blades of our Paleolithic forbears, deemed to be functionally deficient in our age, were nevertheless the survival tools of

³⁴Some of the stories that have been submitted are entirely inadequate. In November of 2003, for example, of some 50 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 the inadequacies in scholarship and documentation that are to be expected from researchers who frequently lack even the most meager formal training in research and writing.

³⁵See Daniel Akst and Mike Jensen, “Africa Goes Online,” *Carnegie Reporter* 1/2(Spring 2001), 3-9. [http://www.Carnegie.org/reporter/02/Africa/index_low.html]. *World Press Review* (February 2004), 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. See also Milinda B. Robins and Robert L. Hilliard, eds., *Beyond Boundaries: Cyberspace in Africa* (Portsmouth, 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*, ed. Soumitra Dutta, Bruno Lanvin, and Fiona Paua (New York, 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 collaboration between the World Economic Forum and INSEAD, France. It can be viewed online at: [www.oup-usa.org/reports]. Chapter 6 (by Mike Jensen, pp. 86-100) is entitled “ICT in Africa: A Status Report.”

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 that spark disgruntled users to develop better ones is reassuring.

The *DACB*'s approach to story research, writing, and publication is predicated on the active cooperation of African participating institutions. Not all of the 100 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*.

Annual *DACB*-related trips to Africa since 1999 have taken me to scores of universities, seminaries, and research centers in Kenya, Ethiopia, Uganda, Zambia, Ghana, Nigeria, South Africa, Namibia, and Egypt. Journeys to Malawi, Mozambique, and Tanzania are contemplated in the near future. The *DACB* has co-sponsored a series of one-week oral history workshops in Kenya, Zambia, and Madagascar, attracting faculty members and academic researchers from scores of African countries. 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. Finally, the *DACB* is actively cooperating with the International Association of Mission Studies to circulate an archives manual designed specifically for non-Western institutions.³⁶

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.³⁷

³⁶Martha Lund Smalley and Rosemary Seton, comps, *Rescuing the Memory of our Peoples: Archives Manual* (New Haven, 2003). Copies of the manual, in English or French, are available for \$10.00 U.S. from OMSC, 490 Prospect Street, New Haven, CT 06511.

³⁷E. F. Schumacher, *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York, 1977), 1.

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.