

Introduction

IT HAS NOW BEEN sixteen years since the appearance of the seminal work of Jacob Olupona, *African Traditional Religions in Contemporary Society*.

In the sixteen years since, Olupona continued to press the *Avante Garde* for the evolution of indigenous African scholarship, not only through his steady research and publications, but also as a champion for African scholars to have a place at the table.

This campaign required courage, commitment, and persistence in many strata, tearing at the invisible restraints of race and culture, but also at the practical, economic, and physical constraints.

While difficult and painful at times, the fruits of these efforts have been a blessing; not just to Africa and the stellar generation of scholars this battle produced, but also to the world, which benefits immensely from the increasing availability of the treasure of African spirituality and religious culture rendered theologically and in ways conforming to the discursive parameters of the academy.

I hope for and look forward to an archeology of religious scholarship, which should reveal a fascinating (and rapid) maturation of this discipline and community.

Much of the early work was descriptive, non-analytical, simple transfer of information either entirely novel, or to set the record straight. Much of the early work struggled to radiate sufficient light to break free from the long and heavy shadows of colonialism and cultural imperialism implicit in the ascendancy of European and Arab missionary religions.

Through effort and the passing of time, humble (almost apologetic) self-explanation evolved into a confident guiding voice, offering world spiritualities insights and betterment from the wellspring of African traditions, perception, and spiritual application.

This current issue of *Dialogue and Alliance* represents the full flowering of this evolution to date with seven articles on religion in Africa. The “Diwali” article from the Hinduism family similarly embraces the above-mentioned developments for religions from the

sub-continent. Happily, the Catholic-based article offers a promising report on progress within Catholicism in its positions *vis-à-vis* traditional religion.

We have arrived at an interesting moment in the history of inter-religious relations. I believe the quest for peace is eternal in the human make-up, and exists more or less strongly today than in any other era. The unique quality of today's reality however, is the substantial reality that the world has become one. All histories, all cultures, all times, all places, and all religions are genuinely co-present to one another.

In such circumstances there is universal certitude (either consciously or sub-consciously) that social systems (be they cultural, economic, religious, or ideological) characterized by essential claims of superiority (i.e., innately worthy of privilege and particularistic (parochial) entitlement) are bellicose, whether latent or active, whether overt or surreptitious. This is surely the case with all religions among their conservative believers (and most often their priestly classes), and with some religions worse than others.

Until recently, post-enlightenment secularists sought to address the inherent (latent) threat to peace that shadows religious belief (of a stripe) by attempting to marginalize or entirely purge religion from the project of human development and progress. This work of Sisyphus, misguided for many reasons, now shrinks back into the minority, effete centers from which they sprung.

What has *not* arisen in place of the retreat of anti-religion to a sufficient degree, however, is compelling work to address the implicit threat to peace inherent in the spoken and/or clumsily concealed claims to superiority characterizing virtually all religions.

Interreligious dialogue, especially that brand willing to move beyond surface areas such as humanitarian cooperation to the deeper levels of doctrine, cosmology, and theological views of race, culture, society, and history is the only place where the religious dilemma is broached. It is precisely this area fusing irenicism and intellectual courage that shines through the pages of this issue.

David O. Ogunbile starts us off well with "Cultural Revolution and African Spirituality: The Case of Ijo Orile-Ede Asulawo Ti Kristi Nigera." Ogunbile reveals a comprehensive grasp of the dominant issues in the field and lays them out for us in the opening. These include: "indigenization, inculturation/acculturation/enculturation, adaptation,

and interaction.” He seeks to fill in “gaps in historicity ... [to] link the past to the present,” and speak to the “adaptation of African (Yoruba) culture, beliefs and practices to forming her own mode of worship and liturgy.” He accomplishes this through an insightful and sympathetic treatment of “Ijo Adulawo [who] appears to be the first known indigenously Church in Yorubaland. [It] shows that Christianity should not be viewed as a western religion. It tries to de-robe Christianity from Western garment by exploring and incarnating into it those elements of African culture that do not destroy its Christo-centric content.”

From history to ecclesiology, we move to Oyeronde Olajubu’s “Conceptual Analysis of Leadership Structures in Yoruba Religion and Christianity.” Olajubu retains a careful respect for the literature and provides the reader with a valuable review of Yoruba leadership structures and how these inform the Christianity that settled and flourished in this part of Africa. His analysis of leadership structures is the vehicle through which Olajubu seeks to lay bare one part of the “socio-cultural psyche of the African.” He argues a challenging and courageous conclusion that leadership “structures in both [Christianity in Yorubaland and African Religion] are by and large derivations of the same concept.”

Olajubu writes an encouraging account of successful or promising contextualization whereby Christianity adopted a paradigm of the culture consonant with the “peoples’ cosmic perception,” and in so doing retained its relevance and liveliness. As a positive or successful tale, plus one that is carefully researched and well written, it is an important read.

From ecclesiology to piety, Mojisola Daramola examines “An Examination of ‘Speaking in Tongues’ in Christianity and Among the Ofosi.” Daramola’s is a fascinating study which compares “speaking in tongues in Christianity with a similar occurrence in Ofosi society.” The piece includes an analysis of tongue speaking *an sich*, including its theological and piety roots and significance.

Perhaps the greatest benefit from this article is the opportunity to learn the rich and fascinating spirituality of the “Ofosi [which] is composed of women who are initiated into an esoteric and deeply religious society involving periodic ‘possession.’ The language and social contribution of this community is carefully delineated. The writer recommends similarities and distinct differences in the two phenomena.

The next two articles represent something special for *Dialogue and Alliance*. They grow out of a creative scholarly project initiated by Professor Jameson Kurasha, who divides his time between The Greenville College and University of Zimbabwe, and Houghton College in Western New York State (USA).

Kurasha combined his view that “spirituality [is] an urgent area of investigation and meditation,” with his vision to “further a deeper and harmonious relationship among Africans and Americans.” The project was designed to “benefit future generations of Americans and Africans.” With his Greenville collaborators adopted the theme Dialogue and Alliance, named after our own journal! Two of the four submitted articles were selected this time.

The first is by Hoffman, Kilbourn, Oldenkamp, and Stevenson who examine “A Symbiotic Relationship between the Person and the Community: A Catalyst for Dialogue between Africans and Americans.” They broach a core and vital dimension of African and American dialogue

Through contrasting the extremes of a collectivistic society and an individualistic society and using the concept of moderation to synthesize the two, the establishment of a symbiotic relationship allows for the realization of both the person and the community.

Matheson, Prestemon, and Worden write on “A Dialogical Analysis of African Traditional Culture in the Face of Modernity,” in which they examine core concepts and elements of African culture including time, birth and child rearing, initiation, marriage and family, and life and death. They conclude by warning strongly against modernization concepts that fail to retain and integrate traditional culture.

We are truly blessed to have in this collection an intervention from Professor Jacob Olupona from UC Davis.

Olupona leaps with both feet into the raging flames kindled by Oyèrónké Oyèwùmí’s *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*, which alone spawned and continues to inform major conferences in the African Studies pantheon. The point and counterpoint of the (gender) issues at stake, as well as the implications for scholarly inquiry are simply as rich as one can find, not just for the community of African Studies, but everywhere!

Outcomes from these debates have serious implications both for the future of African-Western relations, and for the study of colonialism as a historical discipline (including academic colonialism). Further it has implications for gender questions at the ontological level.

Olupona buries inconspicuously, as though merely in passing, the explosive observation “There is a clear indication of gender fluidity in Yorùbá religious traditions, and religious discourse is framed in a manner that may be entirely unfamiliar to Western contexts”! The article, a *tour de force* of multi-layered concept and research, is a field of diamonds. We are delighted to carry it on our pages, and proud of the long-standing association Professor Olupona maintained with *Dialogue and Alliance*.

We move from Africa to India for a lilting and edifying meditation on “The Light of Diwali.” Celebrated on “the darkest night of the darkest period,” explains Swami Chidanand Saraswati, “yet it is a festival of light... Diwali is heralded as the triumph of good over evil... righteousness over treachery, truth over falsehood, light over darkness.”

The article by Saraswati is both informative and pastoral. Gently and seamlessly embedded in the historical and religious explanation of the sacred narrative and rituals and symbols is an interpretive schema that infuses an invitation to the modern to benefit from the spiritual regimen embedded in these ancient cues. It seems to me that a careful reader will recognize a great window into interreligious dialogue, especially with the Jewish time period of Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashona (Although Saraswati does not recommend these links on his own).

Saraswati, in an elusively simple account of a popular holiday, similarly brings forth a potent challenge to the West and the forces of modernization, this time in a voice from our ancient origins not African, but from India.

Balance thankfully and with serendipity comes to us from Father Leonardo Mercado, from the Catholic Bishops’ Conference of the Philippines.

The Catholic Church is perhaps the single most unified doctrinal and ecclesiological fused system in the service of a single point of an embodied temporal authority in human history. If there is a single community of faith with which all indigenous spiritualities implicitly dialogue, it is the Catholic Church. Its position and directions are im-

portant, plain and simple.

Mercado is a reliable source of Catholic writing, assuredly within the parameters of its imprimatur. For this reason it is genuinely encouraging to read by his pen that “the Catholic Church has “shifted in treating followers of Traditional Religion (TR) as pagans to treating them as true partners in interreligious dialogue.” Mercado offers an honest account of the history and evolution of official Catholic positions *vis-à-vis* TR, even acknowledging periods in which it was questioned if TR believers were fully human(!), and in which “indigenous people [were considered] living fossils... If pagans did not convert to Christianity... killing them was justified.”!

Thankfully these positions have yielded to the humane, broad and inclusive requirements of *Nostra Aetate* and *Dialogue and Proclamation*, the latter of which states that “the members of the Church and the followers of other religions find themselves to be companions on the common path which humanity is called to tread.” Pope John Paul II asked forgiveness for past mistakes.

In his summary and conclusion, Mercado brings us to the rays of hope grounded in the Christian and especially Catholic insistence that “understanding of the word of God grows.... If the Catholic Church was the enemy of TR in the past, the new realizations has also made the Church a new ally in respecting the followers of TR as equal partners in interreligious dialogue.”

The final two articles depart from the issue theme of the emerging gift and authority of the indigenous voice. My own article outlines seven crucial foundation stones without which peace in the Middle East will forever elude us, and Jason Williams lifts the heart through a story about the eternal beauty of self-realization through interreligious experience and discovery.

Frank Kaufmann
Editor in Chief