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GBT-NS, Akwaab'oo!

The Ghana Bulletin of Theology (GBT) has awoken from three¹ decades of hibernation. In Akan tradition, the publication of *GBT New Series* 1, 1 (July 2006) merits a rousing *Akwaab'oo!*,² 'Welcome' back among the academic journals in the field of the study of the religions of Africa. Congratulations are due to the Department for the Study of Religions of the University of Ghana for its rebirth. The reborn *GBT-NS* has an attractive, deep-blue cover, with the journal title in big, brightly yellow capitals on the front cover and a large *Adinkra* sign – *Nyame, biribi wô soro*³ – at its centre; and the table of contents on the rear cover in white characters. *GBT* also is a refereed journal. That will hopefully be instrumental in *GBT-NS* achieving high standards of academic quality in the years ahead.

GBT, 1956-1979

As far as I have been able to reconstruct, the first issue of the bi-annual *The Ghana Bulletin of Theology* appeared at 'Michaelmas Term' (December) 1956, 'in mimeographed form'. As did the second issue, published at 'Trinity Term' (June) 1957.⁴ Judging from the stock leftovers I was able to buy in 1980 when I was a visiting research fellow in the department for half a year, the *GBT* issues of vol. 1, and vol. 2, nos. 1 and 2, were quite small in size (A6, 40 to 42 pp.) with an unassuming

¹ The last issue to appear was 4, 9 (December 1975). It was published, however, in February 1979 only. *GBT*'s hibernation therefore lasted 27 years, 1979 to 2006.

² *Akwaab'oo* is a contraction of *akwaaba*, 'welcome', and the exclamation *oo* by which visitors, and especially those returning home, are bidden welcome in Akan societies. It is all the more appropriate here in view of the etymology of *akwaaba* from *akô aba*, 'to return after a temporary absence', proposed by Christaller (1933: 277).

³ 'Nyame [Akan name for God, JP], something is up there' [i.e., in the sky, in heaven, JP]. Quarcoo (1972: 14) quotes also an extended version of it: *Nyame, biribi wô soro na me nsa nka*, 'Nyame, something is up there, let my hand [me] obtain it'. He regards it as 'a sign of the belief in God's goodness and reliance on Him as one who answers prayers'. The *GBT* editors likewise regard it as 'a symbol of prayer and hope' (inside front cover).

⁴ Letter from Esther Megill, dd. 10.02.1979

chamois (pale yellow) cover and the journal's title, volume, issue number and date in small blue capitals on the front cover, and advertisements of new books, esp. New Testament studies, from British publishing firms on the other three cover pages. As the journal of a divinity department, *GBT* was distinctly a theological journal, with focuses on African Christian theology,⁵ the Bible and its translation,⁶ and Church History, esp. in Africa.⁷ A fourth, but distinctly minor focus was the other religions of Ghana.⁸

In 1961, however, the department's name was changed to Department for the Study of Religions. The change of name seems to have inspired confidence, for from vol. 2, 3 (December 1962) onwards, the size of *GBT* was increased to A5, the contents of each issue were displayed on the front cover, and the Editor and Editorial Board were mentioned on the front inside cover. And a new focus was added: Philosophy of Religion.⁹ But the number of pages was kept around forty,¹⁰ and the name was retained, correctly so, for *GBT* remained primarily a theological journal serving the academic training of Christian ministers in the mainline Christian, mainly Protestant, churches of Ghana.¹¹ Of the 113 articles in my incomplete

⁵ Cf. e.g., D. Ferguson, 'The Cosmic Christ and African Culture', in *GBT* 1, 8: 1-12; K.A. Dickson, 'Relation between Religion and Culture', in *GBT* 1, 9: 18-22; J.V. Stewart, 'On Christian Unity', in *GBT* 1, 10: 2-8; L.H.S. Osae-Addo, 'The Christian and the Pouring of Libation', in *GBT* 1, 10: 8-18.

⁶ Cf. e.g., E. Damman, 'Some Problems of Translating the Bible in African Languages', in *GBT* 1, 8: 29-37; 1, 9: 1-6; Anonymous [K.A. Dickson?], 'The People of God in the Old Testament', in *GBT* 1, 10: 19-35.

⁷ E.g. A.H. May, 'Anglicanism', in *GBT* 1, 9: 22-33; Margaret Shinnie, 'The Church of Nubia', in *GBT* 1, 9: 34-41; J.V. Stewart, 'Anglicanism', in *GBT* 1, 10: 36-42; E. Ilogu, 'The Contribution of the Church to National Unity', in *GBT* 2, 2: 28-38.

⁸ E.g. [H. Debrunner, H.H.A. Fisher & H.F. Fisher], 'Early Fante Islam', in *GBT* 1, 7: ??-??; 1, 8: 13-29; J.H. Kwabena Nketia, 'Worship in African Religions' [on Ga *kple* spirit possession], in *GBT* 2, 2: 1-28.

⁹ E.g., David C. Hicks, 'What is a Person', in *GBT* 2, 4: 11-18; 2, 5: 8-15; 2, 6: 8-16; J.A. Thrower, 'Karl Marx on Religion', in *GBT* 2, 8: 33-39; 2, 9/10: 44-49; J.A. Thrower, 'Secularisation, Secularism, and the Need for a Natural Theology', in *GBT* 3, 6: 11-18.

¹⁰ Except for 2, 9/10 (54 pp.), 4, 3 (59 pp.), 4, 6 (70 pp.), and 4, 9 (80 pp.), the very last issue. Therefore, the first ten issues (December 1956 to June 1961) were collected into vol. 1; the next ten, from December 1961 to December/June 1966, into vol. 2; the ten from December 1966 to June 1971 into vol. 3; and the last nine, from December 1971 to December 1975, into vol. 4.

¹¹ Cf. J.K. Agbeti, 'Theological Education in Ghana: 1943-1993', in *GBT* 3, 10 (June 1971): 23-34, esp. 23, 29, 32-33; J.K. Agbeti, 'New Perspectives in Theological Education, with special reference to Ghana', in *GBT* 4, 6: 19-36, esp. 32-33. Agbeti, on the one hand, considered 'departments of religious studies in Ghana's universities [not] relevant' for the training of ministers because 'Universities do not consider it their business to make pastors but to produce academics in the Study of Religions' (*GBT* 4, 6: 21). They care for their rational, but not for their 'divine' development (*GBT* 4, 6: 34). On the other hand, however, he regarded the Legon Department next doors to Trinity College as providing the University education of which Ghanaian pastors were sorely in need 'so that the pastor can confidently and

GBT collection,¹² the great majority, 88, was devoted Christian theology, and only 25 to the remainder of the wide field of the religions of Ghana and Africa, to wit 1 to an early and long defunct AIC,¹³ 6 to Islam,¹⁴ and 18 to indigenous religions of (Southern) Ghana.¹⁵

Included in 4, 9 (December 1975) was a letter from the *GBT* Business Manager, Esther Megill, dated 10 February, 1979, stating: ‘We have been forced to cease publication of the *Ghana Bulletin of Theology*’, because the problems of getting the printing done ‘seem insurmountable’. She added that the manuscript for the combined 1976 issue had been at the printer’s ‘for about 18 months’, but ‘we still have hopes of eventually getting [it] from the press’. It never was published, nor was the combined 1977 issue which also had long been ready to publish, but for which no printer could be found.¹⁶ By 1979, Ghana’s economy had been devastated by the kleptocratic (*kalabule*) military NRC (National Redemption Committee)

meaningfully minister to the fast growing literate population of the Church and society [in Ghana]’. He also requested that ‘a course in Practical Theology [...] be established in one of the Departments of Religion’ in Ghana, and that Trinity College ‘be made a College of that University’ as a step in its transformation to a ‘Religious University’ (embracing all religions). But that, he admits, is ‘a wild dream’ (*GBT* 4: 33-36).

¹² I lack vol. 1: 1-7; vol. 2: 1, 3, 7; vol. 3: 9.

¹³ K.A. Dickson, ‘The “Methodist Society”: A Sect’, in *GBT* 2, 6: 1-7.

¹⁴ S.A. Kamali, ‘Islamic Views of Other Religious Communities’, in *GBT* 2, 7: ??-??; 2, 8: 17-27; B.A.R. Braimah, ‘The Concept of Islam’, in *GBT* 4, 1: 31-40; B.A.R. Braimah, ‘Morality in Islam’, in *GBT* 4, 3: 45-53; B.A.R. Braimah, ‘Islamic Education in Ghana’, in *GBT* 4, 5: 1-16; L.O. Sanneh, ‘The Muslim View of man: Its Basis in the Qur’an, Doctrine and tradition’, in *GBT* 4, 9: 37-56; P.J. Ryan, ‘The Descending Scroll: A Study of the Notion of Revelation as Apocalypse in the Bible and the Qur’ān’, in *GBT* 4, 8: 24-39.

¹⁵ More often for the sake of contextualising Ghanaian mainline Christianity than as objects of study in and for themselves. They were the following: J.H. Kwabena Nketia, ‘Prayers at *Kple* Worship’, in *GBT* 2, 4: 19-29; 2, 5: 1-7; J.C. Steemers, ‘The *Kènèkra* Tradition of the Kratchis’, in *GBT* 2, 7: 1-8; 2, 8: 1-10; J.C. Steemers, ‘The *Ôkra* Traditions among the Guangs of the Volta basin’, in *GBT* 2, 9/10: 1-11; 3, 1: 1-9; O. Ampofo, ‘The Traditional Concept of Disease, Health and Healing’, in *GBT* 3, 2: 6-9; Christian Gaba, ‘Contemporary Research in African Traditional Religion’, in *GBT* 3, 4: 1-13; C.R. Gaba, ‘Sacrifice in Anlô Religion’, in *GBT* 3, 5: 13-19; 3, 7: 1-7; C.R. Gaba, ‘An African People’s Concept of the Soul’, in *GBT* 3, 10: 1-8; C.G. Baeta, ‘Some Aspects of Religious Change in Africa’, in *GBT* 3, 10: 9-22; C.R. Gaba, ‘Sin in African Traditional Religion’, in *GBT* 4, 1: 21-30; Kofi Asare Opoku, ‘Aspects of Akan Worship’, in *GBT* 4, 2: 1-13; E.H. Mends, ‘The Concept of *Mbusu* in the Ritual Ceremonies of the Fante’, in *GBT* 4, 2: 14-24; Peter A. Sarpong, ‘Aspects of Akan Ethics’, in *GBT* 4, 3: 40-44; P.P. Dery, ‘Traditional Healing and Spiritual Healing in Ghana: Christian Attitudes’, in *GBT* 4, 4: 53-64; J.N. Kudadjie, ‘Does Religion Determine Morality in African Societies?: A Viewpoint’, in *GBT* 4, 5: 30-49; S.U. Eriwo, ‘The Concept of God among the Urhobo of the Niger Delta’, in *GBT* 4, 6: 48-58; Peter A. Sarpong, ‘African Worship and Theology’, in *GBT* 4, 7: 1-9; N.K. Dzobo, ‘Logical Demonology among the Ewe of West Africa’, in *GBT* 4, 7: 10-30; Peter A. Sarpong, ‘Media of Revelation in African Traditional Religion’, in *GBT* 40-47.

¹⁶ It seems to me a duty of filial piety that the editors of *GBT-NS* trace these 1976 and 1977 combined issues, document their contents and perhaps publish them, or some of them.

and SMC (Supreme Military Council) governments of Acheampong (1972-1978) and Akuffo (1978-1979) building a foreign debt of US\$ 1,35 billion and causing a roaring inflation of over 100% per annum. It caused the young army officer, J.J. ('Junior Jesus') Rawlings, to attempt his first coup d'état on 15 May 1979, to be tried publicly for it, to be freed by fellow officers, to successfully to seize power again on 4 June 1979, and to put Acheampong, Akuffo and six other senior military officers before a firing squad on 16 and 26 June 1979.

GBT-NS 1,1

GBT 1, 1 is an enlarged A5 and has 127 pages, thrice the number of the average *GBT* issue. Its sparkling blue cover with big brightly yellow character and large *Nyame, biribi wô soro Adinkra* sign is impressive. These significant differences in size and external appearance aptly symbolise in my view the considerable political stability and improved economy that Ghana is enjoying now. It has since long emerged from the economic despair and political turbulence of 1979.

More important, however, is the continuity of content. The contributions to *GBT-NS 1, 1* show that the journal has correctly retained theology in its title, not merely for historical sentiment and continuity, but because *GBT-NS 1, 1* has the same preponderance of Christian theological contributions as had *GBT*. Likewise it naturally is preoccupied with Ghanaian religious realities, but of a rather narrow circumscription. Despite its being part of a secular state university *GBT-NS 1, 1* is, like *GBT*, very much a journal of African Christian Theology of, and for, the mainline churches of Ghana, particularly the Protestant ones.¹⁷ That is apparent from the fact that all contributions deal with subjects proper to a department of modern liberal mainline-church Christian theology rather than a department for the study of religions, as my survey below documents; and the fact that five of the seven members of the *GBT-NS* Editorial Board on the inside front cover are Reverends, i.e. ordained ministers of a Ghanaian Christian church.

As for the contents: three of the eight articles in *GBT-NS* are on Christology, Abraham Akrong, Senior Research Fellow in the Institute of African Studies of the University of Ghana, presents an 'ancestral Christology' (20-26, esp. 29, 31) after having surveyed the several African Christologies developed in the past three

¹⁷ Since the mid-1960s, there has always been one Muslim and one RC scholar on the staff of the Dept. for the Study of Religions. The other five or six staff members belong to the mainline Protestant churches assembled in Christian Council of Ghana.

decades. Emmanuel Martey, Associate Professor at the adjacent Trinity Theological Seminary, discusses the Christological foundations of the New Testament and of contemporary African Christology as well as their fluidity and plurality (83-94). The Rev. Father Dr. Osom Batsa, Lecturer in the Dept. for the Study of Religions of the University of Ghana, reviews how Muslims and Christians look at Jesus and examines whether Christian Christology is, or is not, a stumbling block for Muslim-Christian dialogue. He suggests that Jesus as the incarnated Word be equated with the Qur'an, and that both be viewed as part of 'God's progressive communication in history', however imperfect the analogy between Jesus and the Qur'an may be (95-101, 100).

The other article on Islam is by Abdul-Rahman Yakubu, currently a PhD student at the (Protestant) Theological University at Kampen, The Netherlands. He reviews the efforts of the Christian Council of Ghana (CCG) and of the Ghana Catholic Bishops' Conference (GCBC) to further the dialogue with Muslims for the purpose of fostering the peaceful co-existence of the two faiths in Ghana (102-117). The 'exceptional religious tolerance' that has prevailed in Ghana for decades contrasts starkly with the 'current global state of religious intolerance' (102, 117). Yakubu, however, deplores the absence of collaboration between CCG and GCBC in fostering tolerance and dialogue (117).

The *GBT* tradition of having articles on the Bible is continued by Eric Anum, Lecturer in the Dept. of Religious Studies at Cape Coast University. He reviews the use of the Bible in African missionary history (69-82). He criticises the ideological luggage hidden in that usage. It served as a basis for colonial ideology and provided 'imperialistic models of interpretation [...] incompatible with [...] enculturation models'. Anum is particularly interested in the role German *Kulturprotestantismus* ('Cultural Protestantism') played in colonial ideology and in biblical interpretation in Africa in the 19th and 20th centuries (69, 71). He concludes that very little research has been done on the legacy of the 'closed' Bible as a strange object of power [for ordinary Christians?]. He proposes as the solution to its persistence 'to dig out the pre-colonial and the pre-translation appropriation' of the Bible. That, however, has 'just barely begun' (82).

Of the three remaining articles, two deal with current Pentecostalism in Nigeria and Ghana. Deji Isaac Ayegboyin, Senior Lecturer in the Dept. of Religious Studies of Ibadan University, and Editor of *Orita*, is the only non-Ghanaian author to contribute. He discusses the 'borrowed robes' of the new Pentecostal churches of

Nigeria. Though these churches are very critical of the older AICs, they exhibit noticeable similarities with them in at least eight different spheres: pneumatic emphasis; central place of prayer; and of life and healing; the externalisation of evil as demons and witches; contextualised worship and leadership; vigorous evangelism; and a communal ethos (37-54).

The two editors of *GBT-NS*, Cephas Omenyo and Abamfo Atiemo, Senior Lecturer and Lecturer in the Dept. for the Study of Religions of the University of Ghana, examine the 'neo-prophetic' strand in modern Pentecostalism in Ghana (55-68). It is a type marked by 'blunt, and sometimes vulgar language' by 'semi-literate or entirely illiterate pastors and evangelists' (60) from 'obscure and questionable backgrounds' (66). They exercise a ministry in which power and miracles are emphasized (60), that attracts numerous 'people of low socio-economic status' with a 'primal world view' who 'do not fit in well into the rather elitist Charismatic Churches' (56). In prayer meetings, they express their fear of 'the enemy' ritually by carrying canes for whipping or slapping him (63-64).

Lastly, *GBT-NS* 1, 1 is opened by Elom Dovlo, Associate Professor in the Dept. for the Study of Religions, with an examination of the role of religion in the 1992 and 1996 presidential election campaigns (3-19). After the Christian mainline churches had braved Rawlings in 1990-1992 by instituting platforms on which the people could speak their minds freely on the course the nation should take, and had issued booklets on democratic culture and human rights, they appealed to Ghanaians to elect a 'God fearing man' as their President in 1992 (4-5). That set in train the use of religion, especially the Christian religion for electioneering purposes, e.g. by three candidates of the National Independence Party: the 'born-again' Kwabena Darko; the Muslim Prof. Abdallah Botchway; and the RC Dr. George Hagan; and also by the mainline-Protestant nominee of the National Patriotic Party, Prof. Albert Adu Boahen. But Evangelicals refused to get involved in politics and denied their support to Darko. However, instead of the Christian candidates, Rawlings was elected who had declared publicly that he was neither a God fearing nor a God loving man (6-9). Dovlo further discusses the attempts to discredit the religious credentials of contestants (10-12), the use of Christian tunes, and of publicity over sexual and financial scandals (12-15) in the two campaigns. The 1996 campaign was marked by a resurgence of traditional religion in the use of the 'great oath' (*ntam kèse*) for countering false allegations, and 'drinking [or eating] the god' (*abosomnom*) for securing the loyalty of voters (15-18).

Assessment

All of the eight articles are well-written, well-structured and well-documented but one. The exception is Anum's, the division of which jumps from (1) *History and Mission* (69-70) to (4) *Baur's usage of history as an ideological tool* (70-72), and consists for the remainder of a rambling and unstructured (5) *Comaroff's view of reception history of the Bible in Africa* (72-82). The referee of this article should have assessed it more critically and the editors should have spotted not only its lack of structure, but also that some of its quotations are not closed on p. 69, and that 'resistant theology' should have been 'resistance theology' (76, line 16). They should also have edited the incomprehensible lines 20-23 on p. 80. The article is also disappointing in that it does not deliver what it promises.

A few more matters for improvement may be noted. The page-lay out should be made uniform in respect of headers and margins. These are fine in Dovlo's article, but in all the other contributions the headers are too far removed from the pages, and the margins are too small causing the text to disappear into the binding, esp. on the even pages. That is also the case on the inside front and rear covers. The font used is quite small but just readable as long as the print is black and sharp. But that is not always the case in my copy, which makes for difficult reading at times. The List of Contributors also needs to be made uniform by the removal of bold and underscoring.

The Dept. for the Study of Religions of the University of Ghana is, however, most certainly to be congratulated with this splendid re-entry of *GBT* into the forum of scholarship on the religions of Africa. I do, however, hope that future issues will not only publish ecumenical Christian theology that 'promotes the encounter between people of different faith commitments', but will also attempt to cover the entire field of the religions of Ghana, Africa and Africans worldwide in interdisciplinary ways that produce a wide range of scholarly perspectives on these complex phenomena. By being less parochial in scope, *GBT-NS* may realise to some degree also the second of the two purposes that it has ambitiously staked out for itself on the inside front cover. That would also honour the name the department adopted in the early 1960s, and its place in a secular university.

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