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Towards Job Descriptions of the AASR Executive

Jan G. Platvoet
Convener
AASR-Nominations Committee
2005-2010

An AASR-officer indicated in mid-2004 that he found his job ‘amorphous’.¹ He had received no guidelines as to what precisely he was expected to achieve for the AASR. He felt ‘beleaguered by lack of clarity of the job’s responsibilities’ and was unsure what he should do. Another felt ‘constrained [... by] the informal nature of our association’, and also ‘not clear what [she] ought to be doing’, and ‘hard put to explain, particularly to potential new members what exactly the association is about and what the benefits of belonging to this association are beyond receiving the newsletter’. The members of the AASR-Nominations Committee 2005-2010, of which I was asked to serve as convener, likewise felt a need for articulating what each AASR office entailed when they reflected on whom they might best nominate for the several AASR offices in the next quinquennial period 2005-2010. They felt that their efforts at this articulation might also assist the officers to move beyond a mere intuition of what their posts entail, and thereby to serve the AASR more efficiently.

This need for clarification of job requirements seems a problem in particular of the post-pioneering generation when it takes over from the founding members. The pioneers had enthusiastic but perhaps also rather idiosyncratic visions of what they wanted to achieve. They followed their intuition as to what the several offices entailed and creatively built the AASR from scratch. Though they adopted a constitution, they operated mostly in informal ways, with little explicit articulation, and perhaps also too little structural cohesion. As another AASR-member recently re-

¹ This document was originally written in September 2004, when I had been appointed by the AASR President as convener of the AASR Nominations Committee 2005-2010. I have rewritten parts of it in order to reflect recent developments.

marked: ‘The third generation of most movements usually faces the challenge of deciding what kind of organizational structure is required to fulfil its mission. I think we are in the third generation right now in the AASR’.

So, perhaps the time has arrived for us to develop ‘job descriptions’ for the several offices in the AASR Executive. A first draft of them is offered below. It contains only tentative, at most preliminary guidelines for AASR officers. They can certainly be improved upon. So they will need further discussion and ultimately perhaps formal decision by an AASR General Meeting to become the approved guidelines after which we expect AASR officers to function.

Two big cautions must be sounded, however. One against the danger that such guidelines may insidiously become formal requirements that kill creative zeal. That, I fear, would soon cause more damage to the AASR than the present relative lack of articulation of what each office entails. What we need are dedicated officers who have the well-being and growth of the AASR at heart, who are inspired by its aims as set out on the rear cover of each AASR-Bulletin, know them by heart, and spend much time and creative effort in furthering them in the two periods that they usually serve in an office. The other is the danger that formalising the guidelines slips into the imposition of a hierarchy. That might easily marginalize those not in office, and cause them to feel of no use to the AASR, merely its consumers, not its contributors. The high degree of informality of the pioneer period, and its sense of office being a privilege to serve, and not a brief to rule, should continue to pervade the AASR in this post-pioneer period also.

AASR peculiarities

The AASR was founded in Harare in 1992. It was admitted into the International Association for the History of Religions (IAHR) in its 17th Congress in Mexico-City in 1995 as the third of its four continent-wide ‘regional’ associations: that of scholars of religions in Africa.² But it is also so far its one-and-only ‘global’ af-

² The other three continent-wide affiliates are the North American Association for the Study of Religions (NAASR), admitted in Rome 1990; the *Asociacion Latinoamericana para el Estudio de las Religiones*, (ALER), admitted also in Rome in 1990; the *European Association for the Study of Religions* (EASR), admitted in Durban in 2000. The IAHR terms them ‘regional affiliates’. Other regional affiliates are ASRSA (*Association for the Study of Religion in Southern Africa*), admitted in 1980; EAASR (Eastern African Association for the Study of Religions), admitted in Durban in 2000; and the *South and Southeast Asian Association for the Study of Culture and Religion* (SSEASR), admitted in Tokyo in 2005. ASRSA has, however, so few members outside South Africa that it is counted as a national affiliate by the IAHR.

filiate: of scholars of the religions of Africa in Africa, Europe, North America, Israel and Japan. These peculiar traits caused it to develop an executive, which is markedly different from that of other IAHR affiliates, nearly all of which are national associations.³ Though I wish by no means to imply and further a hierarchy, we may distinguish two concentric rings in the AASR-Executive, to wit:

= the AASR ‘inner executive’, which consists of the President, the Vice President, the General Secretary and the Treasurer. They constitute its ‘central steering and communication committee’, its ‘hub’;

= the full AASR executive as a working body: the ‘inner executive’ together with the Regional Representatives, the Editors of the AASR-Bulletin, the Publications Officer, and the WebMaster or Internet Officer.

Below I discuss the AASR offices in this order.

President

The President is ‘the Chair’ of two kinds of meetings. Firstly, of any General AASR Meeting: during the IAHR congresses, AASR-Conferences in Africa, and any other conference on the religions of Africa at which so many AASR-members are present that their presence justifies an AASR General Meeting, as was the case e.g. at Bayreuth in October 2001, in Legon in 2004, in Tokyo in 2005, and in Gaborone in 2007. Secondly, he or she chairs any meeting of the AASR-Executive, or part of it, at which he himself, or she herself, is present. He or she also finalises the agenda which the General Secretary has prepared for these meetings, makes announcements, introduces the various speakers and/or items to be discussed, directs the discussions, and summarises the conclusions, especially those by which a new policy or line of conduct is adopted for strengthening the AASR in some respect. He or she also takes care that they are duly noted down, and later checks whether they have been properly implemented. Apart from Chair, he/she is the AASR-President *ad extra* and *ad intra*.

Ad extra: it is he/she who, together with the AASR General Secretary, maintains close relations between the AASR and the IAHR: the world-wide, non-confessional academic body of scholars of religions of which the AASR is an affiliate since it was admitted in its 17th Congress at Mexico-City in 1995. He/she takes part on behalf of the AASR in the meetings of the IAHR International Committee twice in

³ In addition to its five ‘regional affiliates’, the IAHR has 36 ‘national affiliates’ since in Tokyo in 2005. For the full list of IAHR affiliates, visit: <http://www.iahr.dk/associations.htm>.

every quinquennial period, takes part in as many other IAHR meetings and conferences as possible, and remains in close touch with the IAHR-Executive, especially the IAHR President and General Secretary. In the past decade, the AASR has played a prominent role in the IAHR, and the AASR-President needs to cherish that tradition.

In addition, the AASR President may, and at other times should, formally represent the AASR towards any other external body where and when such a formal representation is necessary or expedient, e.g. towards a government, or towards a government office that may e.g. grant tax-exempt status to the AASR or one of its regions; or when the AASR applies for (large) subventions with (major) funding organisations for a conference, a series of summer schools, or some other of its core activities; or towards an academic journal, or publishing firm, when the AASR as such is involved.

Ad intra: in the internal affairs of the AASR, the President is especially the person who develops and directs policies by means of which the aims of the AASR are furthered by constant reflection on them, and by their pragmatic implementation in as far as the financial means, and the time, effort and input by AASR-members will allow. They are short term and long-term goals.

As for the short term aims, the AASR has achieved the development of one fairly good means of internal communication and external promotion in the AASR-Bulletin.⁴ It should now develop others. One is a flyer for speedy external promotion, e.g. at conferences. It should detail the AASR, its history, its affiliation to the IAHR, its aims, its officers, the conditions of membership, and a membership application form. Another is a membership registration form. A third, a website for both external promotion and internal communication.⁵

But the matter that, fourthly, most urgently needs attention is the improvement of the AASR record of the organisation of AASR Conferences in Africa in the past decade. Article 5b of the AASR Constitution offers leeway not to organize an AASR Conference in Africa at all in a quinquennial period. It merely demands that the AASR ‘endeavour to organize a major regional conference in Africa at least once every five years’. As a result, these most important conferences were given no great priority. They were organized only in the nick of time in each of the two quinquennial periods: in July 1999 in Nairobi, Kenya, and in February 2004 in Legon, Ghana.

⁴ See below on its defects.

⁵ For details, see below and my e-mail message to AASR members in North America, dd. 19.08.04.

I suggest that the AASR President takes care, first, that article 5b of the AASR Constitution is changed to the effect that in each quinquennial period at least one AASR Conference in Africa *must* be organized. Secondly, that it is organized within the first two years of his or her period of office. And thirdly, that the AASR will seriously endeavour to organise at least one other AASR Conference in each quinquennial period, but preferably aim for three: one in Southern, one in East, and one in West Africa every five years. Their planning and organisation should, in my view, be the top priority of the AASR President, and the whole AASR-Executive. After its election it should, therefore, at once make firm and feasible decisions about the whole period: when, where, and on what theme to hold the first of the three AASR conferences in Africa, and who are to organise it; and assemble a task force for settling in time where and when the two AASR conferences of that quinquennial period are to be held.

All this is not possible without, fourthly, significantly improving the financial health of the AASR. So, the AASR President with the Treasurer, and the Executive should see to it that each Regional and National Representative introduces, in a democratic manner by consultation, explanation and consent, an annual membership fee proportional to what is reasonable and feasible in the context of the economic situation of each region or nation. The several local AASR funds so developed should normally stay in the region or nation in which they are collected, be managed by the Regional or national Representative, and primarily, except for Europe and North America, be used for local AASR purposes. All Representatives, however, should send in a financial report to the AASR Treasurer once a year to account for both the revenues in, and the expenditures from, that local AASR fund.

In addition, fifthly, major AASR events such as AASR-conferences in Africa, and the need to assist AASR-members in Africa to attend them and other conferences or congresses, demand that the President, the Executive and the whole AASR be actively intent on soliciting funds for the AASR from whatever possible source. But one should be realistic and honest in this respect, for only some of us will be able to assist the AASR in a meaningful way at certain moments and opportunities. Appointing a fundraising committee may seem an attractive option and an easy way out, but is often counterproductive, for it is likely to cause all others to sit back and wait for ‘them’ to ‘deliver’, and look at them with reproach when they fail to do so.

I fear also that one of the laudable AASR-aims, that of establishing a well-endowed ‘travel fund to enable scholars [from Africa] to attend academic conferences both in Africa and overseas’, will prove to be at most a long term goal. It will more likely remain a utopian vision for ever, for the financial means of the AASR, by membership dues and fundraising, will likely continue to be small and to allow at most that some members are incidentally and only partially supported in their travels to academic meetings in Africa and overseas. This financial predicament of the AASR was duly noticed and discussed in the recent AASR conference at Gaborone, and it was even suggested there by some that it is time now, in view of the fact that universities in Africa can, and do, provide their staff increasingly with the financial means to attend conferences, that the AASR travel fund should be given a much lower priority than it has had so far, or even be removed from the list of AASR aims altogether.

It is, therefore, important that an AASR President develop a long-term vision of the future of the AASR. In what direction should it develop? How should the wide diversity of scholars of the religions in Africa, and of scholars of the religions of Africa outside Africa, be induced to join the AASR in the coming decennia? How can the different interests of these two constituencies – in Africa and outside Africa – be reconciled? How can they be made to cooperate towards the long-term common good of the AASR? And what can he or she and his or her team do during their terms of office to develop visions, and initiate policies, that will begin to translate such a vision into reality? There are very many scholars of the religions of Africa in and outside Africa who are not even aware of the AASR. For the AASR to become a vibrant and large association for many more of them, our present severe limitations will have to be overcome and a number of chasms will have to be bridged.

One limitation is that the AASR is very much an Anglophone association centered in Departments of Religious Studies with a vigorous tradition in Protestant liberal theology. It is generally perceived as restricted to Christian Religious Studies, i.e. to scholarship on the religions of Africa inspired by one of the several Christian theologies. A ‘secular’ scholar of the religions of Africa attending an AASR conference may think he has strayed into a congregation of Protestant theologians at prayer when he finds that an AASR conference is scheduled to be concluded with a Christian service. A first chasm the AASR therefore needs to bridge is the cosmological and methodological one between religiously inspired and ‘se-

cular' disciplines in the study of the religions of Africa in order that AASR become a multidisciplinary, religiously and ideologically neutral, scientific association for the study of the religions of Africa 'on sound social scientific and historical principles'.⁶ It is only in such a non-confessional, academic association striving after empirically testable knowledge that historians, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists, archaeologists and other 'secular' scholars of the religions of Africa will also feel welcome and at home.

Other chasms are the numerous religious divides, e.g. between varieties of Protestant – liberal, orthodox, Pentecostal – scholars of the religions of Africa; between Protestant and RC, and Christian and Muslim, and between all these and scholars of the religions of Africa of again other religious persuasions. Another huge divide is the linguistic one between the Anglophone and Francophone academic communities in Africa and elsewhere, and between these and those of other language communities: Portuguese, Italian, Arabic, etc.

All three divides – cosmological/methodological, religious and linguistic – need urgent and sustained attention and sound policy development. Bridging the Christian-Muslim divide in scholarship on the religions of Africa should, however, perhaps have top priority at present. Muslim scholars of the religions of Africa should be encouraged to join the AASR and take part in its conferences as long as they respect that the AASR is an academic, non-confessional association. The AASR should not only be a methodologically and cosmologically inclusive, multidisciplinary association, but also be religiously ecumenical.

This lengthy description of the 'job' of AASR President may seem daunting and too big for any single scholar to shoulder in addition to his or her usual heavy load of teaching, supervision, administration, research and writing. It is, therefore, as much a task for his or her team as for him or her. Several of these tasks require that their day-to-day practicalities are run by particular other officers in the inner or outer circles of the AASR Executive, or even by others. Other tasks the President may delegate in order to achieve an equal workload for all AASR officers. The President primarily needs to develop a comprehensive vision and keep an overall view on who does what, and on developments in general. One to whom tasks may be delegated is the AASR Vice President.

⁶ Letter of Armin W. Geertz, IAHR General Secretary, dd. April 14, 2001, to Prof. Karma Oraon, President of the Indian Association for the History of Religions, in *IAHR Bulletin* 37 (December 2002): 11.

Vice President

The office of AASR Vice President is a virtually empty one at present. Its only function so far has been to be ready to take over from the President in the unlikely case that he or she dies or falls ill so seriously that she or he cannot complete her or his term of office. It is good, perhaps, to have such a ‘President-in-waiting’, but if that remains its only content, then that office will continue to be the ‘amorphous’ office by excellence, or very much a merely honorific position. There are other models in the IAHR. The IAHR itself has two Vice Presidents, but their position is clearly honorific and as empty as the AASR one. Most national IAHR affiliates have no Vice President. The British Association for the Study of Religions (BASR) has a President-Elect, who is groomed to take over in the next period. The BASR model provides for stability and continuity, for the President and President-Elect serve very much as a team. It has the added virtue of a fairly rapid ‘turn-over’ of officers, as an officer serves only one term in each of these two offices.

A change-over to another model, however, requires that article 6a of the AASR Constitution be changed. I suggest, therefore, that the AASR for the moment keep the office of Vice President, but explore a number of other options to give more content to it. The AASR President may delegate some, or one, of the short or long term goals of the AASR, enumerated above, specifically to the Vice President, or request that the Vice President assist an other AASR officer in new activity – e.g. the internet –, or in one that needs a rethinking and redirection – e.g. AASR publication policy –, or join the team of the editors of the AASR Bulletin in order that another AASR region be better covered. Or the Vice President may take charge of maintaining the AASR Register of Members, an important activity that has not yet been structurally allotted to any specific AASR office.

General Secretary

The post of Secretary General is in my view, the pivotal post in the AASR (inner) Executive, and the AASR as a whole. Whereas the President presides over AASR-meetings, supervises the AASR in a general way and represents the AASR *ad extra*, the General Secretary has two important tasks: to take the minutes of the AASR general meetings as well as those of the AASR-Executive, and publish them in the AASR Bulletin; and to see to it that the decisions taken in them are executed. The latter means that the General Secretary is the officer who actually runs the daily

affairs of the AASR. He must liaison both with the other three main officers of the AASR (inner) Executive – the President, the Vice-President and the Treasurer – and between them and the AASR full Executive: the AASR Representatives, the Editors of the AASR Bulletin, and the AASR Publications and Internet Officers; and through all these with the AASR members at large.

It is also a tradition in the IAHR that an affiliate is normally represented in the IAHR International Committee by its president and secretary. So, it is part of the task of the AASR General Secretary to join the AASR President in representing the AASR in any IAHR business and event, and to maintain close relations with the IAHR, and in particular with his counterpart, the IAHR General Secretary.

Because this office is so crucial, it must not be overburdened. The 2004 Nominations Committee, therefore, proposed that the post of Treasurer be separated from it again. It was added to it in 2000 in order that an AASR-financial policy be developed and the dispersed AASR-financial affairs be somehow supervised. Moreover, at some time in the future, maintaining the AASR-Register of Members may have to be relocated with the AASR General Secretary.

Treasurer

The AASR needs a separate officer in the AASR inner Executive to coordinate its financial policy and affairs, to keep a central account of its dispersed local funds, and see to it that an AASR financial statement is published once a year in the May AASR-Bulletin. One top priority has been achieved, to wit that the AASR-members in North America now follow the example of the AASR-members in Europe and like them pay a substantial annual membership fee for the sake of enabling the AASR to pursue its aims, especially that of furthering African scholarship on the religions of Africa. Till 2005, the European AASR fund was the sole financial backbone and mainstay of the AASR. The costs of the production and shipment of the AASR-Bulletin were till then paid from that fund, as well as considerable subventions to AASR Conferences in Africa, and to AASR publications. New activities, such as the development and maintenance of an effective AASR-internet site, have initially also been paid from the European fund, but clearly demand that the AASR develops considerably larger financial means by all AASR members in well-to-do nations paying the agreed substantial annual membership dues.

In addition, the AASR Treasurer should also promote that the AASR members in Africa pay an annual membership fee also, be it one that is feasible within their

economies.⁷ However small that may actually be, it should cover, or assist in covering, the costs of regional AASR affairs, such as the distribution of the AASR-Bulletin and the organization of regional or local AASR contacts. The AASR Treasurer should therefore communicate regularly with AASR Representatives about the introduction of the AASR annual membership fee. And once they have been introduced he/she should inquire what local AASR funds have been developed from the membership fees, and perhaps also from fund raising, and request annual reports on revenues and expenditures from it.

Lastly, I suggest that the need to pay membership dues should be further emphasized and strengthened by the introduction of an article into the AASR Constitution – or if that is too stiff and formal, by the AASR General Assembly agreeing upon a generally accepted rule of conduct – that a member who has defaulted in respect of paying his or her membership dues for two years will, after two requests to pay the arrears, be struck from AASR Register of Member at the request of the AASR Representative of region or nation to which he or she belongs. As a result, she or he will no longer receive the AASR Bulletin, nor have access to the Members-Only Area of the AASR website, nor be entitled to any other AASR privileges, such as reduced AASR conference registration fees and assistance in costs of travel to AASR conferences, IAHR congresses, or other events relevant to the academic study of the religions of Africa.

The Representatives

The tasks of an AASR Representative are several. I see seven:

1. to serve as liaison between their region, or nation, and the AASR General Secretary and other Officers of the AASR inner and outer Executive, especially the AASR Treasurer, the Editors of the AASR Bulletin, the AASR Internet Officer, and with the AASR Publication Officer if an AASR publication is being planned or prepared;
2. to distribute the AASR-Bulletin to the members;
3. to use the promotional copies of the AASR-Bulletin and other means (e.g. a flyer) for actively promoting the AASR among scholars of the religions of Africa

⁷ The AASR Executive decided in its maiden meeting at Tokyo that the ‘flat rate’ of the annual membership fee for AASR members in Africa was to be set at the local equivalent of US\$ 10 (cf. AASR Bulletin 23 [May 2005]: 9-10). It also decided that only fee-paying members were to receive the AASR Bulletin and to be granted access to the Members-Only Area of the AASR website (cf. AASR Bulletin 23: 19).

in their region by presenting promotional copies either to prospective members, or to libraries, or to publishers in the field of the religions of Africa;

4. to see to it that new members send in electronically the relevant details for their registration in the AASR Register of Members,⁸ pay their annual membership fee, are struck off if they fail to do so, and inform the AASR WebMaster in order that their access to the Members-Only Area of the AASR website be withdrawn;
5. to provide the Editors of the AASR Bulletin with copy for the AASR Bulletins by reporting on news, past and upcoming conferences, new publications, 'persons and posts', scholarships and fellowships, etc., in their region or nation, relevant to AASR members in their region or nation and elsewhere, and with copy for any of the other rubrics of the AASR Bulletins; and by encouraging AASR-members in their region or nation to do likewise, e.g. by reviewing a new book in our field for the AASR Bulletin. The purpose of this is not merely to disseminate news, reports, announcements and reviews, but especially to show that the AASR in their region is alive and kicking;
6. to develop and administer a local AASR-fund by collecting systematically and continually the agreed annual membership fees from the AASR-members of their region and report on its revenues and the ways it was used once a year to the AASR-Treasurer;
7. to consult with other AASR members in their region about activities by which the AASR may be promoted in their region, such as conferences or panels organised on behalf of the AASR; or about how important activities of the AASR elsewhere, such as conferences, especially in Africa, may be supported.

These tasks, or their formulation, need to be modified, added to, or subtracted from, by individual AASR Representatives according to the special requirements of their region, and/or their own inclination on how to perform their job best. In the recent spate of comments from AASR members in North America on the memo I sent them recently on the subject of membership dues and the need to have an AASR internet site, several such complementary ideas emerged. In respect of AASR membership, it was remarked that perhaps 'a more formal way of indicating, measuring and nurturing real membership needs to be devised'.

In respect of membership dues it was proposed by one member that 'a structure [be established] to enable financial transactions to be conducted with some sense of appropriateness, and for conveying to where the collected dues are supposed to

⁸ For the ten point model to be followed, see above note 5.

go to meet the needs of the association'. And by another, to 'set up the AASR [in North America] as a tax-exempt organization to be able to receive checks made out to the AASR either for dues or as separate 'charitable' (i.e. tax-deductible) contributions', and to develop 'a systematic plan for collecting [membership] dues'. A scheme was also proposed how they might be spent: 'Perhaps each region needs to be responsible for providing [remitting] a certain percentage of their dues and contributions revenue to the Treasurer. The role of the regional representatives is to forward funds on a regular (to be specified) basis to the Treasurer (International) with the rest to be administered by the regional representative and an active council of advisers made up of some set number of the members. There are also expenses that each region will incur for which some fixed percentage of the revenues is appropriately used. There should be a balance of some percentage of funds to be used for specific projects, whether [for] supporting the work of scholars in Africa or funding the internet project or whatever'.

Another member proposed as a cost reduction measure that 'the newsletter [be posted] electronically and several AASR members/officers [be designated] who would be responsible for printing out copies of the newsletter off the website, collating them simply with staples, and mailing them to members in their respective regions who require a paper version'.

With respect to the promotion of the AASR in North America, it was proposed that 'a formal membership registration form' be created, and that 'an agenda and platform for action' be developed. That might take the shape of 'an outreach program to get new members and to give current members some reason to be engaged in the organization'. An AASR research project on 'recent developments in the study of religion[s] in Africa' was proposed and to 'devote an issue of JAAR (*Journal of the American Academy of Religion*)' to its outcome. It was also suggested that 'a good information piece [is needed] to acquaint potential members about the organization and a systematic plan to distribute the information and have some public gathering of members and interested parties'. One should 'flesh out how our association and its activities connects, if at all, also with [those of] other associations, where members are also engaged in the study of Africa and its religions'.

A specific pool of new members, one member remarked, were 'students doing their graduate work on (religions of) Africa here in the US'. The AASR could offer them 'a forum and network particularly in terms of mentorship. [...] Such students

and emerging scholars of religions of Africa could also be given possibilities of sharing their research [with the senior AASR members acting as their mentors] and even of publishing it through the association’.

AASR Bulletin Editors

Many AASR officers and members have expressed appreciation for the quality of the AASR Newsletter in the past few years. For this reason, it was suggested that it should be renamed AASR Bulletin. I for one, however, am far from satisfied with its present content, for it only incidentally reflects the AASR in Africa, Ghana perhaps excepted,⁹ and had very little on AASR in North America except for AASR Bulletins 25 and 26. Despite efforts on my part to have it demonstrate that all AASR regions are alive and kicking, the contributions to AASR Newsletters/-Bulletins have remained far too Eurocentric so far. Most of what is reported in them respects what is going in the study of the religions of Africa in Europe, and in particular in The Netherlands, and especially in Utrecht University. The latter happens to have developed a close link with the Department for the Study of Religions of the University of Ghana in the past few years, and that, and my own long-standing relation with Ghana and that department, account for Ghana being an exception to the general absence of Africa and North America from the AASR Newsletters, now AASR Bulletins. The fact that I was its sole editor from 2001 to 2003 is also to blame.

Prof. Matthews Ojo, Obafemi Awolowo University at Ile-Ife, Nigeria, has joined me in 2003 as Editor of the AASR-Bulletin. He is now taking part actively in editing the AASR Bulletin as is apparent from *AASR Bulletin* no. 21 (May 2004): 43-47. And he has produced and shipped AASR Bulletin 26. It is most fortunate that he has now been joined by a Co-Editor from Southern Africa, Dr. Lovemore Togarasei, University of Botswana, Gaborone. So, one may trust that that the AASR Bulletin will now become more ‘Afrocentric’, especially if AASR-Representatives and other AASR Officers, and the AASR members, especially the senior ones, in Africa become more active in supplying the AASR Bulletin Co-Editors with copy than they have done in the past few years. Many of them have never, or hardly ever, sent in copy for the AASR Bulletin despite appeals for it, and as a result their regions, and they themselves, remained invisible in the AASR Bulletin.

⁹ Cf. *AASR Newsletter* no. 18 (November 2002), ‘Focus on Ghana, I’, pp. 4-21, 30-35, 51-56, and *AASR Newsletter* no. 19 (May 2003), Focus on Ghana, II’, pp. 40-52.

If they remain inactive and leave the collection of copy to the Editors only, the AASR Representatives should see to it that a member is appointed in their region to serve as reporter to the AASR Editors about the AASR in their region. Only then may we be assured that conferences, symposia, and panels on the religions of Africa of interest to AASR members, are announced in time, and reported upon; and that new books are reviewed, scholarships and fellowship announced; that recent publications are sent in; that news about AASR members is reported; and that minutes of AASR meetings and activities in the regions are published.

Publication Officer

A brief history is in order here. The first AASR-Publication Officer was Dr. (now Prof.) David Westerlund. Together with Prof. Jacob Olupona, he edited the AASR-series *Religions of Africa*, between 1995 and 2000. African scholars in particular were encouraged to contribute to it. Four volumes were published with different publishers, to wit the proceedings of the IAHR conference at Harare in 1992, at which the AASR was founded,¹⁰ and monographs by Simeon Ilesanmi,¹¹ James Cox,¹² and Abdulkader Tayob.¹³ The AASR also sponsored a research report by James Amanze, *Islam in Botswana* in 1999 as the first of a projected second AASR series of research reports of small size. Dr. Simeon Ilesanmi was appointed Publications Officer in 2000,¹⁴ but has not been able to develop David Westerlund's significant work due in particular to a major shift in his field of study.

Since 2000, however, three new series of publications emerged which are linked to the AASR in various ways. One is presented explicitly as an AASR-series, being published by the AASR Publications Bureau in Nigeria. However, it is limited to the study of the religions of Nigeria. It is *Religion in Nigeria*, directed by Prof.

¹⁰ Jan G. Platvoet, J.L. Cox & J.K. Olupona (eds.) 1996, *The Study of Religions in Africa: Past, Present and Prospects; Proceedings of the IAHR Regional Conference at Harare, Zimbabwe, 1992*. Cambridge: Roots and Branches (= *Religions of Africa*, 1).

¹¹ Simeon Ilesanmi 1997, *Religious Pluralism in the Nigerian State*. Athens (Ohio): Ohio University Center for International Studies, (= *Religions of Africa*, 2).

¹² James Cox 1997, *Rational Ancestors: Scientific Rationality and African Indigenous Religions*. Cardiff: Cardiff Academic Press (= *Religions of Africa*, 3).

¹³ Abdulkader Tayob 1999, *Islam in South Africa: Mosques, Imams and Sermons*. Gainesville: University of Florida Press (= *Religions of Africa*, 4).

¹⁴ Together with a 'Publications Committee' (cf. *AASR Newsletter* no. 14 [November 2000] 1, 22)? As far as I aware, no such committee was appointed.

Joseph Kenny o.p. and Prof. Jacob Olupona.¹⁵ The second series has no such formal link with the AASR, yet breathes its spirit and pursues its aims in that it attempts to further explicitly opportunities for publication for African scholars of the religions of Africa and make their publications available outside and inside Africa. It is the series *Religion in Contemporary Africa* directed by Jim Cox and Gerrie ter Haar. The series is published by Africa World Press in Lawrenceville, New Jersey, USA.¹⁶ ¹⁷ A third is the series *African Religions in Global Contexts*, directed by Prof. Jesse Mugambi of Nairobi University and published by Acton Press in Nairobi, Kenya, which has also several other series of publications by scholars of religions and theologians in East Africa. Acton Press negotiated permission with some North Atlantic publishers for an African edition of books on the religions of Africa in Africa and the 'diaspora' in its series *African Religions in Global Contexts*.¹⁸ It includes two volumes by Gerrie ter Haar.¹⁹ Acton Press has also published the revised and selected proceedings of the First AASR Conference in Africa, held in Nairobi in July 1999, at which the Eastern African Association for the Study of Religions (EASR) was founded.²⁰

This is an exciting spate of publishing initiatives in the field of the religions of Africa. All pursue explicitly a main aim of the AASR: to assist African scholars in getting their work published. In comparison with the series *Religions of Africa*, they have the distinct advantage of each being published by one publisher only.

¹⁵ One volume has appeared in this series: Andrew Olu Igenozu 2003, *Polygamy and the African Churches: A Biblical Appraisal of an African Marriage System*. Ibadan: African Association for the Study of Religions (= *Studies in Nigerian Religions*, 1). For a review, see *AASR-Bulletin* 21 (May 2004): 43-45. On the series and the book, cf. also *AASR Newsletter* 15/16 (May-November 2001): 1, 5-6; 18 (November 2002): 27-28; 19 (May 2003): 32-33.

¹⁶ James L. Cox & Gerrie ter Haar (eds.) 2003, *Uniquely African?: African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives*. Trenton (New Jersey): Africa World Press. A first volume has appeared in this series. On this book and this series, cf. *AASR-Newsletter* 19 (May 2003): 31-32.

¹⁷ A few more volumes have appeared in it recently. They have been noted in the rubric Recent Publications.

¹⁸ On Acton Press and this and its other series, cf. *AASR Newsletter* 14 (November 2000): 26-31; 15/16 (May/November 2001): 46-47.

¹⁹ Gerrie ter Haar 2001, *African Christians in Europe*. Nairobi: Acton Press (= Gerrie ter Haar 1998, *Halfway to Paradise: African Christians in Europe*. Cardiff: Academic Press); Gerrie ter Haar (ed.) 2001, *Religious Communities in the Diaspora*. Nairobi: Acton Press (= Gerrie ter Haar [ed.] 1998, *Strangers and Sojourners: Religious Communities in the Diaspora*. Leuven: Peeters).

²⁰ Jesse K.N. Mugambi & Mary N. Getui (ed.) 2004, *Religions in East Africa under Globalisation*. Nairobi: Acton Press, 267 pp., ISBN 9966-888-73-X.

But, from the point of view of an integrated AASR publication policy, they have the disadvantage of being dispersed over three different series with diverse foci. They seem to hold little promise for successful coordination by the AASR-Publication Officer. One may also wonder whether they are in need of being coordinated, and, if coordinated, what the AASR would gain from their coordination.

Another matter that needs attention is the formal link between the AASR and *Journal of Religion in Africa* (JRA) established in 2001 after the AASR General Meeting at Bayreuth, Germany.²¹ That link is as yet an empty one, and *JRA* has so far taken no move to provide some content to it. Moreover, none of the editors of *JRA* is a member of the AASR, and of the *JRA* eighteen-member editorial board, (only) seven are AASR-members (Adogame, Gifford, Hackett, Kastfelt, Ludwig, Tayob, and Westerlund). They are on its editorial board, however, not because they are AASR members but because of their different specialisations and proficiencies in the wide field of the study of the religions of Africa. Even so, the AASR-Executive, or an AASR Publication Officer, might perhaps 'mobilise' them to strive for a more satisfactory relationship between *JRA* and the AASR.

AASR needs also to reflect whether or not new options, such as electronic publishing and an AASR electronic journal, should be explored, and perhaps be developed. The AASR Executive clearly needs to reflect on the present confused but promising situation and devise policies for strengthening the AASR position in it.

Internet Officer/Webmaster

The AASR Executive decided in its maiden meeting in Tokyo that the AASR should develop its own internet site and appointed an AASR Internet Officer.²² As a result, the AASR website is now being developed into three parts: one about the AASR, accessible for the general public, with an online membership application form; one with privileged information, such as the AASR Bulletins, the online AASR Register of Members, the Calls for Papers rubric, the Scholarships and Research Grants on offer, information on research projects, E-publications and an electronic archive, etc., to which only fee-paying AASR members with a working e-mail address are granted access; and a Forums facility for internal communication. The part for the general public is now fully developed and well maintained; the second part is operational also, but is still being developed. E.g. older AASR

²¹ Cf. *AASR Newsletter* no. 15/16 (May-November 2001): 10.

²² Cf. AASR Bulletin 23: 18-19.

Bulletins, and the electronic archive need to be included and/or expanded. The Forums facility will become operational, it is hoped, in the coming months.²³

In conclusion

The aim of the draft is to stimulate critical institutional analysis by all members who have the interests of the AASR at heart. We need to reflect on what policies may best further the aims of the AASR in the coming period. The job descriptions outlined are offered for discussion in order that the AASR Executive may subsequently take decisions on them and an AASR General Meeting may approve formal guidelines that will serve as the parameters for each AASR office in the period 2010-2015. They are also my belated contribution to the AASR ‘think tank’, instituted by the President in 2000, of which I was appointed as convener,²⁴ but which I never convened, in part for private reasons, in part because a think tank runs the same risk as a fund raising committee. I apologise that this document has become so lengthy.

Bunnik, 20 September 2004 / 24 August 2007

²³ For progress reports, cf. AASR Bulletin 25: 13-16; 26: 18-20.

²⁴ Cf. *AASR Newsletter* 14 (November 2000): 17; 15/16 (May-November 2001): 6, 9.