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Introduction: a DACB tribute to Lamin Sanneh

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Introduction: A DACB Tribute to Lamin Sanneh

By Michèle Miller Sigg

This issue of the *Journal of African Christian Biography* is dedicated to remembering the life and work of Lamin Sanneh (1942-2019). His support of the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* was invaluable and meaningful from the very beginning of the project. The tributes collected here are the memories of friends, family, and scholars—several of them pioneers, like Sanneh himself, in the work of missionary translation and World Christianity.

First, DACB Director Jonathan Bonk remembers Sanneh as a longtime friend with whom he shared many a conversation over tea and coffee in the warm kitchen of the Overseas Ministries Study Center in New Haven, Connecticut. A member of the inaugural Advisory Council and later on the Executive Committee, Sanneh offered crucial insight and support during the formative years of the DACB in the context of the OMSC, the project's first home base. The second tribute, by Andrew Walls, highlights Sanneh's role in the founding and leadership of the Yale-Edinburgh group and the influence of his scholarship in the study of Christianity and Islam in Africa.

Next, the transcript of an Interfaith Memorial Service offers remembrances of family, schoolmates, and friends from the Gambia, the land of Sanneh's birth. Advisory Council member and fellow Gambian Gabriel Allen was an organizer of the service that was held on the fortieth day after his death.

John Watters offers a fitting perspective, as someone who served for 48 years with Wycliffe Bible Translators and SIL International in Cameroon and Nigeria, on the repercussions of Sanneh's legacy for missionaries in the field of biblical translation. Francis Anekwe Oborji, professor at the Pontifical Urbaniana University and founder of the International Association of Catholic Missiologists, shows the importance of Sanneh's theological thought on scholarship from an African and world Christianity perspective. David Bratt, editor and publisher of two of Sanneh's books, provides a snapshot of the stunning effect that his translation theory had on a particular graduate student. Sanneh's "surprising assertions" would soon cause a ripple effect throughout the academic world—in the field of history and beyond.

This issue also features four biographies written by Lamin Sanneh—three drawn from his book *Abolitionists Abroad* (Harvard University Press, 2009) and one written for the *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Mission* (Eerdmans, 1998), edited by Gerald Anderson. African Studies librarian Beth Restrick has compiled a brief selected bibliography of Sanneh's work, focusing primarily on the last twenty years. This was not an easy task because Sanneh's last updated CV

dates from 2004, according to Michael Glerup who worked closely with him on several projects, including the Center for Early African Christianity (<https://www.earlyafricanchristianity.com/>). To help fill the fifteen year gap in Sanneh's CV, Glerup gave the following information:

He was appointed by John Paul II to serve on the Pontifical Commission of the Historical Sciences at the Vatican and by Pope Benedict XVI to the Pontifical Commission on Religious Relations with Muslims. He is an elected life member of the Council on Foreign Relations. (...) He is editor of the multi-volume Oxford Studies in World Christianity series. In 2011, he received the Marianist Award for his teaching and scholarship from the University of Dayton. He directs the Religious Freedom and Society in Africa Project as a program of the World Christianity Initiative at Yale (WCI).¹

Lamin Sanneh left us at the "height of his considerable powers," as his friend Andrew Walls put it. His funeral was held on January 12 in Marquand Chapel at the Yale Divinity School. In an email to DACB Advisors on January 15, Dana Robert (Executive Committee) wrote:

Esther Acolatse, Michele Sigg, and I all attended Lamin Sanneh's funeral. The chapel was full, and the service was very moving. We were so happy it was live streamed and that others got to share in the occasion. The reception afterward took place in the refectory of the divinity school. We will all miss his graciousness and wisdom. (...) There are many projects including the DACB that will miss him terribly. But as Andrew Walls wrote to me, quoting Charles Wesley, "God buries his workmen, but carries on His work."²

The best way to honor the memory of Lamin Sanneh who has inspired so many as a friend, a scholar, a mentor, and a pioneer is to continue the work that he began. If he were here, he no doubt would agree, with one of his wide grins.

Michèle Miller Sigg

DACB Associate Director

¹ Email from Glerup to Sigg, dated 3/26/19.

² Email from Robert to Sigg, dated 1/15/19.