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Introduction: the story of a collaboration: new wine in New Wineskins

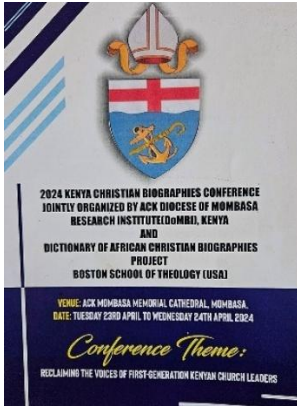
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Introduction

The Story of a Collaboration: New Wine in New Wineskins

By Michele Sigg, Editor



The collaboration between the Diocese of Mombasa Research Institute (DoMRI) and the *Dictionary of African Christian Biography* (DACB.org) began after an email exchange I had with Director Ferdinand Manjewa M'bwangi in early 2023 (Read about the genesis of DoMRI p. 3 by Rt. Rev. Dr. Baya). A month later, the fledgling research institute decided to undertake an ambitious project—organizing the very first national Christian Biography conference on the African continent. The Kenyan Christian Biography Conference took place in April 2024 in the Anglican cathedral of Mombasa (see photos, left).

The DACB-DoMRI collaboration exemplifies a renewed approach that reflects core values central to the DACB's mission and informing all of our initiatives. These values include: (a) placing the African and ecumenical narrative of Christianity on the continent at the center of the broader historical record; (b) fostering equitable cross-cultural and inter-church collaborations that address resource-based power differentials; we do this by prioritizing local leadership in organizational decisions and content selection (e.g., biographical subjects); (c) incorporating women as both writers and biographical subjects in equal proportion wherever possible; and (d) ensuring universal accessibility of biographies through the DACB website, our open-access e-journal, or locally published volumes.¹

This approach had several practical implications for the conference. First,

¹ A more extensive list of values is being developed for other DACB initiatives, such as workshops. You can read more about these in a forthcoming article (2026) co-authored with Dr. Anicka FAST in the *International Bulletin of Mission Research*.

the collaborative relationship did not come with a large influx of foreign money. DoMRI had to raise funds to cover most of the costs of surrounding the conference. DACB was able to contribute a modest subsidy.² Second, the inter-disciplinary team of DoMRI researchers decided on the overall theme of the conference focusing on stories of Anglican and other Christian forebears in the Diocese of Mombasa, while each of them chose their own biographical subject. Third, the proceedings of the conference include four biographies of men and four of women. In addition, the conference presenters included two women and three female panel moderators. Fourth, these proceedings will be published in the *Journal of African Christian Biography* and on DACB.org. The website and the journal are fully open access and the content can be freely reproduced with attribution.

The conference proved to be a groundbreaking event that generated significant local engagement. It attracted considerable attention from Mombasa's primary news outlets and the cathedral's media team recorded all presentations in full. Those who attended the Sunday worship service at the cathedral a few days after the conference heard about the biography recovery work that the Diocese of Mombasa was undertaking under the visionary leadership of Rt. Rev. Dr. Alphonse Baya. I was honored to give the sermon that day and to be part of the vision of Bishop Baya and DoMRI. I hope that these friendships will endure for many years. Like new wine in new wineskins, may this collaboration and these friendships create opportunities for shared joy as we work together to recover and document the stories of African Christian forebears.

² DACB is a entirely funded by private donors and grantmakers.