

Purpose of ACRP

ACRP was established as a support service to churches, ministry training institutions and Christian ministries in and outside South Africa with the following purposes:

- To provide a formal professionalisation service, recognised through an Act of Parliament, to Christian religious practitioners. The service is available to churches and Christian ministries, and to pastors and other ministry leaders.
- To develop a training dispensation that will guarantee that all pastors and ministry leaders will have access to affordable, accredited and quality assured ministry training - with a particular focus on the needs of churches and ministries that did not have access to accredited formal training in the past.
- To provide for the formal recognition of the pastoral and spiritual counselling profession in terms of an Act of Parliament, and for the formal registration of persons in this profession in terms of the relevant legislation.

The ultimate aim is, through this, to contribute to the building of the Kingdom of God and to the healing of communities in South Africa and wider.

The guiding light Newsletter



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A Christmas message from Dr Vincent Mazibuko of ACRP

On behalf of the Association of Christian Religious Practitioners (ACRP), I would like to wish everyone a happy, healthy and peaceful Christmas and a prosperous new year.

Christmas means different things to different people. For me, Christmas is a time for family, a time to reflect on the good and not so good things that have taken place during the past twelve months.

It can also be a painful and sad time for many families, particularly for people who have suffered bereavement over the past year. The COVID-19 pandemic has wreaked substantial damage on human lives and the economy in South Africa. But the impact of the measures used to combat the pandemic, such as lockdowns, have not been even. The pandemic has likely worsened the income inequalities that characterise the country's economy thus making our work as religious practitioners very challenging. This called for the change in doing things, it also affected our programmes as a professional body.

Doors locked in churches, mosques, sanctuaries, shrines, and temples across the world are also locked in South Africa. Millions of Christians and other religious people are unable to gather because of the necessary but disruptive measures put in place with regard to social distancing and the lockdown of our country. These measures have forced people to stay at home. The coronavirus is a global pandemic that has decimated the socio-economic, religious, and political life of many and various systems, cultures, businesses, institutions, individuals, and communities.

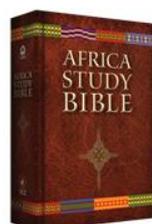
In events of extreme distress, people need one another to help strengthen their coping and surviving mechanisms. In times of crisis, religious organisations—especially the church—offer opportunities for interpersonal relations to enhance coping through pastoral encounters. Due to the lockdown, these can no longer continue.

I would like to encourage people to rally around their family, friends and neighbours and provide them with the help and support that they may need so they are not on their own during the festive season.

Our thoughts must also be with the men and women in the armed forces that serve and protect our country throughout the year who will not be with their loved ones this Christmas as well as the elderly and vulnerable who find the festive season difficult.

So, let us take on board the Christmas message of hope and work towards making our lives and our community a better place.

Time to recharge your batteries and ready yourselves for the challenges that may lie ahead in 2021



Oasis Int. has been intensely involved with the development and distribution of books by authors speaking to the African contexts. The African Study Bible is one of these. They have provided us with a series of articles we will be sharing with you in the upcoming months. Please read their first article on the next page.



THE HISTORY OF CHRISTIANITY IN AFRICA

Africa is one of the most dynamic centres of Christianity in the world. Africa has a significant share of the world's 2.2 billion Christians. It has about 30% of the world's evangelicals, 20% of the world's Pentecostals and charismatics, and about 15% of the world's Roman Catholics. In addition, Africa has significant Orthodox groups such as the Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Tewahedo Churches and the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria.

Christianity was well established in North Africa in the first few centuries after Christ. The story of the growth of the church in Africa can be told by describing four overlapping waves. We'll cover these four waves over the next three months in a series adapted from excerpts from the *Africa Study Bible* article by the same name.

Wave One: Early Christianity in North Africa and Ethiopia

One of the first places that the story of Jesus went was to Sudan when "the treasurer of Ethiopia" (probably Meroe in modern Sudan) believed the good news that Philip told him, was baptised, and took the message to Africa.

The Coptic church of Egypt has long claimed that the apostle Thomas and the evangelist Mark played important roles in the formation of the Church in Alexandria, Egypt. Christian growth was also encouraged by Pantaenus, Origen, and Clement, all teachers at the catechetical school in Alexandria. They attempted to define Christianity in terms of Greek philosophy that well-educated people in North Africa could understand.

Constantine, emperor of Rome in the fourth century, had a dramatic conversion to Christianity, and that had a direct impact on the early Coptic (Egyptian) church, especially in urban Africa. At the council of Nicaea in 325, Constantine attempted to have church leaders agree on how to understand the deity of Christ.

Egyptian Christianity grew and spread and monasticism, which originated in Egypt, spread to the Latin-speaking church of western North Africa. By the fourth century, monasticism, a religious way of life in which priests renounce living in the world and instead live in monasteries, became a powerful force in evangelism and discipleship. Great Africans who helped shape Roman Christianity included Bishop Cyprian of Carthage and Augustine, bishop of Hippo, both of whom were inspired by the second-century firebrand and theologian, Tertullian from Carthage.

Christianity was also growing in the powerful kingdoms of Nubia (ancient Sudan) and Ethiopia. Nubia is one of the two countries that claims to be the world's oldest Christian nation (the other is Armenia). Over the next thousand years, Christianity in Ethiopia grew stronger while in Nubia it declined when it came under the control of Muslim Egyptians. By 1500, Christianity in Nubia all but disappeared.

In contrast, between 1200–1500, the Zagwe dynasty in Ethiopia (a family of Christian kings) revived Christian art, literature, and church expansion. In 1270, a new "Solomonic" dynasty replaced the Zagwe dynasty. This new dynasty reached its peak in the fifteenth century during the reign of Zara Yaqob who helped purge the country of African traditional religion.

In the next newsletter, we'll see how Catholicism dominated many parts of Africa and the rise of Evangelicalism.