



Announcing the Sanneh Institute for the Advanced Study of Islam and Christianity December 2018

In the Majority World, where we work, many faiths and people groups exist. From the leaders and schools we serve, we know that relevant resources for well-informed and substantive dialogue across faiths are scarce and that scholars of various religions long for networking opportunities.

To facilitate answers to this need, a new initiative from SCHOLARLEADERS, *Catalytic Ventures*, asks: *What must be done to equip the Church intellectually for ministry among other faiths and in other cultural settings?*



John Azumah, Larry Smith, and Sheikh Osman Nuhu Sharubutu, National Chief Imam of Ghana (July 2018)

This year, we are focusing on a top priority in West Africa: establishing an institute for the advanced and cooperative study of Christianity and Islam in the West African context. The institute will be based in Ghana, affiliated with but independent of the University of Ghana in Accra, and led by SCHOLARLEADERS board member Dr. John Azumah, Professor of World Christianity and Islam at Columbia Theological Seminary.

Born and raised in Ghana, John has taught at theological schools in Ghana, India, the UK, and the US, and has published several books on Islam, including *[My Neighbor's Faith: Islam Explained for African Christians](#)* (co-authored with Dr. Kwame Bediako) and *[The African Christian and Islam](#)* (co-edited with Dr. Lamin Sanneh).

Distinct cultural factors make Ghana an ideal host for such a project. For one, followers of different faiths have long coexisted peaceably in the country, and often in the same family. Ghanaian Muslim leaders have received us warmly, expressing as much interest as Christians in this shared endeavor. There seems to be genuine hunger to engage and learn together.

In recognition of his scholarship on Islam and Christianity in Africa, the center will be named for Dr. Lamin Sanneh, the D. Willis James Professor of Missions and World Christianity at Yale Divinity School, Professor of History at Yale University, and Director of the Project on Religious Freedom and Society in Africa at the Whitney and Betty MacMillan Center for International and Area Studies at Yale. Read Yale's announcement [here](#).

The Sanneh Institute will enable Muslims and Christians to engage in substantive dialogue and jointly to explore and publish findings on important topics related to religion and West African society – such as forgiveness and reconciliation, religious freedom and the rule of law, character formation, and faith healing. We anticipate that the institute will be launched in 2019.



Atta Barkindo, John Azumah, Cardinal John Onaiyekan, Bishop Matthew Kukah, and Larry Smith at the University of Ghana (July 2018)

Currently, we are conducting a feasibility study, funded by the John Templeton Foundation and the Blankemeyer Foundation, to determine potential investment opportunities, design a sustainable plan for the Sanneh Institute and its programs, and identify partners. The study will include a survey and evaluation of existing scholarship, Islamic and Christian studies programs at West African universities, and curricula of key Islamic madrassas and Christian institutions in the region. Project advisers, multifaith and multidisciplinary leaders, and prospective funding partners will gather this month to assess findings and identify topics for collaborative research by Muslims and Christians through the Sanneh Institute.