

## Abdou Gaye's dissertation "Introducing the Holy Marriage Blessing to Muslims"

Robin James Graham

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*Dr. Hugh Spurgin, president of Unification Theology Seminary, confers the D.Min. degree on Abdou Gaye*

Dr. Abdou Gaye earned his Doctor of Ministry with a dissertation on "Introducing the Holy Marriage Blessing to Muslims: Testing a Quranic Approach".

His spiritual (and academic) journey has been tempestuous. The following excerpts are adapted from an article by Jones Iziomo which give us some insights into his life beginning in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania.

Abderrahmane "Abdou" Gaye is the second son of nine children from a strong Moslem family. The name Abderrahmane (pronounced in its short form as Abdou) means "the servant of the Merciful."

Mauritania is a small African Moslem state in which sharia law is highly effective. According to sharia law, anyone found abandoning the original (Moslem) faith for any other faith will be indicted for treasonable felony, the punishment for which is death.

"To compare the Bible with the Koran is regarded as sacrilegious," Abdou said.

And this he was doing, together with a university class mate, to the consternation of some of his friends who, in fear of the law, regarded their actions as an abomination.

In time, word got to the police that there were two heretics on campus working to pollute people's faith in Islam. The chief of police came to the house with several of his men, to apprehend those trying to disturb the stability and peace of Islam in Mauritania. He picked up a book which called for the Unification of World Christianity.

"It means you are no more Moslems!"

They were taken to the police station to be interrogated. Remanded in custody, this was a scandal not only for the two families but for the whole nation.

After one grueling week in custody, they were brought before the police chief who made them renounce their exploration of a new faith or face death according to the law. A statement of renunciation was written and they were forced to sign it. Their new found faith was never in doubt, though.

The two friends spent ten years leading an underground mission, cooperating with the neighboring country, Senegal which has non-sectarian policies.

Abdou came to UTS in 1994 to prepare himself for a great task ahead. He feels inspired that the seminary is an international place that helps students go beyond national and racial boundaries. He believes that leaving his country is like "going for a period of preparation to come back with better spiritual ability to do the mission back home."

In 1996 Abdou said, "If I have my way, I would like to go back to my country one day because there is a lot to do there."

It has been a long road, but Abdou is planning a return to Mauritania in July, 2016 to spend a month there, establishing a foothold once again in his homeland. Older, wiser, he is taking the challenge very seriously, as he says with greater "maturity."

Dr. Abdou Gaye has been active exploring the significance of holy marriage within Islamic culture. For his D. Min. dissertation he researched the Koran to find the bridges of faith and reason which can support the holy blessing of marriage which he himself has found to be so uplifting and liberating.

In 1992 he entered into holy marriage with his wife Marra, from Cameroon who comes from a Christian background. They have two sons, Alioune and Felix who are now in their 20s.

Dr. Gaye is also one of three UTS alumni behind the initiative Islam Forum which has been previously covered in the UTS News.

Abdou Gaye explained that the Abrahamic religions are often seen to have huge, almost insurmountable, differences in their expression of faith: their creeds, dogmas and rituals. However, when the mystical dimension of the three faiths, Judaism, Christianity and Islam are explored we can mostly find commonalities; mysticism as a bridge between the religious divides. Mysticism guides us to explore the internal, to experience the heart and soul of God's beauty and love; mysticism reveals to us the oneness of humankind. Gaye explained that he himself had experienced personal transformation and growth through such an awakening. His roots in Mauritania gave him the structure of Islamic faith and life, but his wider immersion in the embrace of other paths in spirituality had opened up new possibilities for interfaith unity and the peace of God.