This is a period of transition in African Religious Studies here at Leeds, and, for a change, the news is positive and optimistic. The University has endorsed the importance of the academic study of the religions of Africa, which Adrian Hastings initiated here, by appointing a successor to carry on the work in Leeds when I retire. He is Adriaan van Klinken, a young scholar who is already making his mark in the field. His work on African masculinities, on Pentecostalism and Christianity in Zambia, is widely respected. I personally feel grateful to Adriaan for the support he has given me during this year in which I have been receiving treatment for oesophageal cancer, and I feel excited about the future of African studies in Leeds.

Those connected with the Scholarship wish to pay warm tribute to the tireless and efficient work which Ingrid Lawrie has done, in helping to establish the Scholarship in Adrian Hastings’ memory, in sustaining interest in its work over the years, not least in keeping up-to-date the data base. Ingrid has now retired from active involvement in the AHAS. In the words which both Adrian Hastings and I knew so well from our time in Uganda - Webaale nnyo, enyabo, webalire nnyo ddala. [Luganda for ‘We thank you very, very much indeed’].

Recently a former Hastings scholar, Fr Agbonkhiamegle Orobator, the Provincial of the East African Jesuits, gave the Pope Paul VI Memorial lecture for CAFOD at King’s College in London. The talk had the intriguing title ‘A Billion reasons to believe in Africa: the Long march from the “hopeless continent” to the “spiritual lung of humanity”’ - an ironic comment on a mobile phone advert which has been going the rounds in Africa. Dr Orabotor is one of the most significant theological voices in Africa in these times.

Both our present scholars, Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye and Nyampa Kwabe, are nearing the end of their doctoral studies. They have been doing some exceptionally interesting work – on the environment and religion in Ghana, and on interpreting the Psalms in a Nigerian context. They’re intending to return to Africa to resume their teaching posts - at Cape Coast University in Ghana and at the theological college near Jos, in northern Nigeria. They have made substantial contributions to the life of Theology and Religious Studies in Leeds during their time here.

We are also very pleased to report the arrival of a new Hastings Scholar, Kwame Aidan Ahaligah, whose research is in the area of religion and politics with a focus on Ghana and Kenya. Kwame holds Master of Sacred Theology (STM) degree from the Yale University Divinity. His masters dissertation was titled: The Influence of Indigenous Akan Religious Beliefs and Practices on Pentecostal Christianity in Ghana. Kwame is a Reverend Minister of the Presbyterian Church of Ghana.

We also have a fascinating group of young researchers who are working on African topics: Sandra Nichel on language and bible translation in nineteenth century Yoruba and Ben Kirkby on Christian-Muslim dialogue on the East African coast.

I guess we have a billion reasons to believe in African religious studies in Leeds.
RESEARCH DAYS

ADRIAN HASTINGS AFRICA STUDY DAY, 22 MARCH 2012

Those who attended the Study Day, which had contributions from scholars inside and outside the University, found it stimulating and enjoyable. We were delighted that Ann Hastings was able to join us, and to meet the Hastings Scholars, whose presentations were warmly received. Dr Afe Adogame (University of Edinburgh) gave the keynote lecture, an engaging and eloquent account of AH as an ‘ancestor’ in African religious studies and of the changes in scholarship since his death. The staff of the Special Collections in the Brotherton Library produced an excellent display of AH’s papers from the archives, including some of his youthful writings as a schoolboy.

FIELDWORK RESEARCH BY THE HASTINGS SCHOLARS

Hastings Scholars Samuel Awuah-Nyameke and Nyampa Kwabe have undertaken fieldwork in their home countries as part of their research. Their supervisor, Kevin Ward, visited them in Ghana and Nigeria respectively, and found the experience exciting and rewarding.

Kevin visited Samuel’s home area of Berekum, beyond Kumasi, and, in connection with Samuel’s research on the role of traditional religion in preserving the environment, participated in a fascinating series of interviews with traditional leaders, including clan leaders, diviners and spirit guardians of the forests, springs and rivers. Most were critical of the Christian assault on the traditional religious framework, which, combined with the destruction of forests by logging and over-exploitation of land, has meant a degradation of the environment.

Nyampa’s people, the Kamwe, occupy the Mandara mountains on the borders with Cameroon. One of the features of Nyampa’s research is an exploration of communal tensions as reflected in the Hebrew Psalms. During Kevin’s time in Nigeria, Boko Haram (literally ‘western book education prohibited’), the militant Islamic organisation, was conducting a campaign of bombing churches, and on Christmas Day 2011 a Catholic church in Abuja was targeted, with large loss of life. Muslim-Christian relations were and remain very tense.

Both Scholars will return to their teaching posts after completing their doctorates, Samuel to the University of Cape Coast and Nyampa to the Theological College of Northern Nigeria.
CONFERENCES, WORKSHOPS AND COLLABORATIONS


Nyampa also attended the British-Academy-Founded research event which focuses on Biblical studies in Southern Africa and the UK on the 27 September 2012 at the University of Leeds. He presented a paper titled: ‘The Imprecatory Psalms and the Kamwe’.

Biblical Studies in Southern Africa and the UK in Dialogue: Trends and Challenges

Study Day, September 2012

The first events funded by a three-year British Academy International Partnerships Award took place in September and October 2012. Visiting scholar Dr Makhosazana Nzimande (University of Zululand) gave a major presentation at a well attended research day at the University of Leeds, at which Nyampa Kwabe was also a speaker. There was much forging of academic links and a fruitful discussion on the trends and challenges affecting biblical studies in both southern Africa and the UK. While in Yorkshire, Dr Nzimande and the Revd Bellina Mangena (Pietermaritzburg Diocese) also attended several church services as well as a Bible study group at the College of the Resurrection, Mirfield.

Dr Johanna Stiebert Report from South Africa and Botswana

In September 2013 Dr Johanna Stiebert (University of Leeds) travelled to Botswana for the second part of a three-year British Academy funded International Partnership Fund project. She was hosted by the University of Botswana where Prof. Musa Dube, co-applicant of the project, is based. Following on from a lively and stimulating first year, when Dr Makhosazana Nzimande (then at the University of Zululand, South Africa) came to Leeds and Sheffield to present her postcolonial-critical work on the Hebrew Bible, the second stage was again busy and vibrant. There were three major events. Two of these were a series of presentations and responses held at the University of Botswana. Dr Stiebert presented at both, as did biblical scholars from the University of Botswana, Dr Mmapula Kebaneilwe, Dr Rosinah Gabaitse and Ms Malebogo Kgalemang, and visiting postgraduates from Zimbabwe, Ms Elizabeth Vengeyi (currently completing her PhD at the University of Bamberg) and Ms Nelly Mwale (an applicant for postgraduate study at the University of Leeds, who is currently teaching in Zambia). It was heartening to see that biblical studies in Botswana is going strong. The third event was hosted by Kgolagano College (Gaborone, Botswana) and consisted of a lively response to a recent publication by postcolonial biblical critic R. S. Suggirtharajah, Still at the Margins: Biblical Scholarship Fifteen Years After the ‘Voices from the Margin’. Alongside these three half-day long events, Dr Stiebert also spent time meeting with junior scholars for mentoring sessions and editing, as well as meeting with the Dean of Humanities and the Director of Research of the University of Botswana with a view to facilitating more collaborations between Leeds and Gaborone. Next year, in September 2014, we are thrilled to be hosting Prof. Musa Dube in Yorkshire. She will be presenting at both Leeds and Sheffield and we are very excited to have the opportunity to meet with and hear from one of the world’s foremost postcolonial critics who is also a fabulous presenter and truly original voice in the discipline of biblical studies. If you would like to be kept informed as to the calendar of events during Prof. Dube’s time in Yorkshire, please contact Johanna Stiebert, j.stiebert@leeds.ac.uk.
VISITS

In October this year, Leeds TRS was privileged to receive Professor Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, an eminent scholar on Africa Christianity as a visiting scholar. A master class was organised as part of the programme. The master class was in two parts. Part one was dedicated to the discussion of two of his publications—‘Broken calabashes and covenants of fruitfulness: Cursing barrenness in contemporary African Christianity’ and ‘Christ is the answer: What is the question? A Ghana airways prayer vigil and its implications for religion, evil and public space’. In the second part, Prof. Asamoah-Gyadu was to comment on the research papers of three postgraduate students -- Sandra Nickel, Benjamin Kirby and Aidan Kwame Ahalijah — who had earlier on volunteered to send their papers to Prof. Asamoah-Gyadu for that purpose. A general discussion followed the presentations.

SYMPOSIUM IN HONOUR OF DR KEVIN WARD

In February 2014, Dr Kevin Ward will retire as associate professor in African Religious Studies at the University of Leeds. At this occasion a symposium is being organised on 23 January to honour Dr Ward’s significant contribution to Theology and Religious Studies at Leeds and to the study of Christianity in Africa. The theme of the symposium is ‘Religion and Sexuality in Contemporary Africa’ and the programme is as follows:

11:00 Coffee and tea
11:30 Welcome by Dr Rachel Muers (University of Leeds)
   Rev. Amos Kasibante (St. Agnes’ United Church, Leeds): Sexual Morality and Recent Political Discourse in Uganda
   Dr Adriaan van Klinken (University of Leeds): Queer Lives in a Christian Nation: Zambian Gay Men Negotiating Sexual and Religious Identities
13:00 Lunch
14:00 Dr Rahul Rao (SOAS University of London): Re-membering Mwanga: Same-sex Intimacy, Memory and Belonging in Postcolonial Uganda
   Dr Johanna Stiebert (University of Leeds): Reading the Bible’s Incest Texts in Botswana
15:30 Coffee/tea break
16:00 Dr Kevin Ward (University of Leeds): Intimate Encounter: A Gay Scholar Reflects on 40 years’ engagement with East African Christianity, Revival, Conflict and Sexuality
17:00 Drinks

You are welcome to attend the symposium, which takes place in the Old Mining SR building, room G.19. Please confirm your attendance at the symposium with an email to Adriaan van Klinken, a.vanKlinken@leeds.ac.uk

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