The AHAS Fund is managed by a committee with the following members:

- Mr Jeff Dubberley
- Dr Rachel Muers
- Dr Johanna Stiebert
- Dr Adriaan van Klinken
- Dr Kevin Ward

As Dr Kevin Ward in last year’s newsletter pointed out, ‘this is a period of transition in African religious studies at Leeds.’ This transition related to Kevin’s own retirement as Associate Professor of African Religious Studies at the University, and my arrival to carry on the work. Indeed, in January 2014 we held a symposium on Religion and Sexuality in Contemporary Africa at the occasion of Kevin’s retirement and to mark his great contribution to Theology and Religious Studies, as well as African Studies, at Leeds. A report of the symposium is included in this newsletter. Many colleagues, students and friends gathered that day to celebrate Kevin’s achievements and to thank him for his hard work, dedication and collegiality. At this place, I like to join this choir and thank Kevin in particular for his role in setting up and running the Adrian Hastings Africa Scholarship fund.

Having been at Leeds for almost two years now, I feel honoured to further build and develop African religious studies at Leeds, standing in great tradition started by Adrian Hastings and continued by Kevin Ward. It is not a minor task to carry on their work and legacy, but luckily enough I arrived in a thriving, supportive and welcoming academic community and found an institutional commitment to continue the study of religion in Africa.

How thriving African religious studies at Leeds is becomes clear from this newsletter. It reports about the successful completion of one of the AHAS scholars, now Dr Samuel Awuah-Nyamekye, who now has returned to his home country, Ghana, to assume his post as senior lecturer and head of department at Cape Coast University. Over the past couple of years, Samuel has been very productive, with several academic articles on religion and environmental issues in Africa being published and his monograph – based on his dissertation – coming out soon. We expect to hear a lot more from him in the future. In the meantime, Nyampa Kwabe is laying the final hand on his dissertation on interpreting the Psalms in a Nigerian context, which will be submitted for examination very soon. Our new AHAS scholar, Kwame Aidan Ahaliaga, who arrived last year, has made a successful start with his project and in this newsletter you can read about his experiences and insights from his fieldwork in Kenya last summer.

One only has to observe the dedication and ambition of these students, and the achievements of the scholars that the Adrian Hastings Africa Scholarship fund has been able to support over the past ten years, to realise the importance of the Fund and its significance in enabling talented students from Africa to undertake postgraduate studies in Theology and Religion at Leeds. Hence we express the hope that you will continue supporting the work of the Fund. On the back of this newsletter you find details about how to make a donation.

To further inform you about African religious studies at Leeds, this newsletter includes two more articles: a report by Sandra Nickel, one of our PhD students, of a recent study day on biblical studies in Africa and the UK, and a report of another Leeds postgraduate student, Ben Kirby, about his research on African immigrants and their religious lives in Hong Kong. I trust you enjoy reading this newsletter and will agree that, regardless of any transition, a great tradition continues to thrive.

Adriaan van Klinken

Request:

Please inform us of any change of address.

Also, please let us know your email address so that we can keep you updated on news and developments more frequently. Find the contact details at the back of this newsletter.
My thesis topic was “Managing the Environmental Crisis in Ghana: The Role of African Traditional Religion and Culture”. My main aim was first to find out what the indigenous ecological practices of Ghanaians are involved, and secondly to examine the extent to which these indigenous ecological methods can complement or blend with modern scientific means of conserving the environment for the benefit of the people in the study area in particular, as well as in Ghana more generally.

The following were discovered as the principal indigenous ways of conserving the environment: Sacred groves, totemism, Sasa, tress planting, the institu-

tion of taboo days. Others include; attitude towards bodies like land and water, the use of proverbs and the festivals. I discovered that all these indigenous ecological practices have a religious undertone. For this reason, environmental laws in the area are enforced by the religious authorities—Chiefs, traditional priests and sacred groves attendants since they constitute the major players when it comes to environmental laws enforcement. I however, discovered that generally these indigenous practices promote environmental sanity, yet the protection does not cover all species and ecosystem types, and still there are some that work contrariwise. This notwithstanding, I found these indigenous religio-cultural practices as a potential resource which can be tapped and blend with the moderns means of addressing the environmental problems in Ghana.

The study further found out that the indigenous ways of addressing environmental problems are not as effective as they used to be and a number of reasons were assigned for this. The major ones include, colonial economic and religious forces- Christianity in particular- have eroded both traditional African religions and ways of life with negative impacts on the regions cultural and biological diversity, political ineptitude and corruption as well as the fact of the consequences of dramatically increasing human populations in the region and the over reliance on purely scientific means of address the area's environmental problems. One thing that came out clearly was that neither the scientific nor the indigenous means alone of

“enabled me to purchase important books for my area of study and to present papers at academic conferences”. 

I must however, emphasise that I will forever be grateful to the Adrian Hastings Africa Scholarship Fund. The award enabled me to purchase important books for my area of study. It as well enabled me to travel to the Netherlands once and twice to America to present papers at conferences, all of which have been published in peer reviewed journals.
Research on Religion and Politics in Kenya

By Aidan Kwame Ahaligah (current AHAS scholar)

My fieldwork in Kenya investigated how religion, understood as the source of (spiritual) power interacts with politics in Kenya’s contemporary public sphere. The research is a comparative study of religion and politics in Africa. As a comparative study of how religion-spiritual power shapes politics, I use Kenya and Ghana’s 2007/8 elections as case studies (this fieldwork was specifically to Kenya). Popular religious understanding of the potency of spirits and the bearing the spiritual world is believed to have on the material/physical world coupled with ‘old’ and novel interpretations of power, violence, progress and retrogression, ethnicity, injustice, and political engagement were of particular interest.

In essence religious conceptions of the spirit world and the power of spirits to effect change and their enabling/disenabling effects on humans, political institutions, space, objects, signs and nations was a specific focus.

I was in Kenya from June to September 2014. July in particular was a politically charged month as it witnessed the Saba Saba rally held at Uhuru park by the opposition political party Coalition for Reforms and Democracy (CORD) led by Raila Odinga, an inter-religious prayers for peace and a group of Kikuyu elders who sacrificed goats and chicken to pray for the peace of the country. Interestingly the 2007/8 post electoral violence was the point of reference for both prayer gatherings; it has become the reason why violence should be ‘prayed’ away.

As part of my thesis, I was also interested in understanding the ‘past’ in an attempt to understand the nature of indigenous leadership and the concept of power in relationship to the contemporary (Morden). Several elders of the Kikuyu’s, Luo’s, Luhyaa’s, Mijikenda (Griama Christians and Digo Muslims in particular) happily provided nuggets of information and explained the persistency of indigenous religious practices and beliefs in contemporary politics. Several cited the numerous news and ‘rumours’ about politicians seeking spiritual powers from powerful prophets, Marabouts, and Ngangas as examples.

Picture of the Saba Saba rally

“I am very grateful

to the Adrian
Hastings

Scholarship fund for
supporting my
fieldwork”.

In all a total 50 towns and villages which cut across central Nyanza Province, Rift Valley and Coast regions were visited for interviews and participatory observations. I had the opportunity to interview a wide range of people ranging from a few government officials to numerous interviews with religious leaders and their members including some who were directly affected by the 2007/8 post electoral violence.

I am very grateful to the Adrian Hastings Scholarship fund for supporting my fieldwork in Kenya and my PhD studies.
“Religion and Sexuality in Contemporary Africa” — Symposium in Honour of Dr Kevin Ward

By Sandra Nickel (PhD student)

Newsletter,
December 2014

At the occasion of Dr Kevin Ward’s retirement as associate professor in African Religious Studies, a symposium was held on “Religion and Sexuality in Contemporary Africa”. In a friendly and warm atmosphere, the symposium brought together scholars, postgraduate and undergraduate students and friends of Dr Ward who were interested in discussing contemporary issues of religion and sexuality in Africa. Correspondent to cause of its ‘anti-gay’ legislation and public protests against homosexuality, particularly by young people in urban areas. Same-sex relationships are seen to be against ‘African norms’, threatening continuity. According to Rev. Kasi- bante, conservative forces in the country interact with those in countries like the United States of America, leading to a reverse mission with Ugandan missionaries visiting Western countries.

Dr Rahul Rao from the School of Oriental and African Studies, London, discussed the post-colonial perception of Mwanga, the last pre-colonial ruler of Buganda, who, according to the story, executed a number of his male courtiers with whom he was rumoured to have had sexual encounters following their conversion to Catholicism. Dr Rao discussed post-colonial interpretations of the story, ranging from a condemnation of Mwanga for same-sex encounters and the execution of his courtiers who became Catholic martyrs, to the notion of homosexuality as an Arabian ‘import’; alien to Sub-Saharan Africa and finally the positive interpretation of homosexuality as a locally present phenomenon. Commemoration ceremonies for the Catholic martyrs on the one hand, and the positive interpretation by LGBT-rights activists in the country on the other hand exhibit the ambiva- lent nature and contemporary relevance of the story of Mwanga.

Dr Ward’s colleague of many years, Dr Johanna Stiebert from the University of Leeds examined readings of incest texts in the Hebrew Bible in Botswana. She drew attention to the significance of the “umbrella law” concerning incest in Leviticus 18:6 for legislation in Botswana and discussed recent interpretations of “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination” (Leviticus 18:22) as referring to male-to-male incest rather than homosexuality in general.

Dr Ward himself concluded the symposium with a distinctly personal account, reflecting on 40 years’ engagement with East African Christianity as a homosexual scholar and Christian. His insights, at times humorous, at times intimate and touching, told the audience the story of a gifted scholar, who spent twenty years as a teacher in East Africa lecturing in theology and church history at the Bishop Tucker Theological College, Uganda (now the Uganda Christian University) and was ordained as a priest in the Church of Uganda. In his honest and unassum- ing manner he talked about his altercations with the Church Missionary Society concerning his sexual orientation, and the warmth and friendliness he experienced in Uganda during a time when homosexuality was yet not as sensitive an issue among both the churches and the government as it is today. Dr Ward has written and taught extensively on varieties of religion in modern African societies, same-sex relations in East Africa, and the World Anglican Communion.

The symposium thus celebrated and honoured the work and achievements of an inspiring scholar. Dr Ward’s research interests, the presentations focussed on East African Christianity and issues of homosexuality and same-sex relationships.

Rev. Amos Kasi- bante from St. Agnes Church, Leeds, gave an insight into sexual morality in contemporary Uganda, linking it to recent political discourse.

Uganda has been on the spot in the media for some time be-
Study Day on Biblical Studies in Southern Africa and the UK in Dialogue

By Sandra Nickel (PhD student)

Newsletter,
December 2014

The study day on 25th September 2014 in Leeds marked the last event of the three-year project ‘Biblical Studies in Southern Africa and the UK in Dialogue: Trends and Challenges’ funded by the British Academy, organised by Dr Johanna Stiebert (University of Leeds) and Prof Musa Dube (University of Botswana).

“More dialogue – and more projects like this – are needed”.

The day started with Dube, who discussed Bible translations as integral ideological parts of the colonial endeavour. Arguing in terms of an intrinsic inequality of source language and target language, Dube pointed out the intertwined nature of translation and domination and how deeply embedded patriarchal and colonial ideology can be said to have been in missionary translation projects. In a response to this, Tarcisius Mukuka (St. Mary’s University College) presented the argument that while the decolonisation of translations is a worthwhile endeavour, translation work can also enrich the translated texts by weaving in locally coloured threads of language.

Rev. Tsaurayi Mapfeka’s presentation read the vow to secrecy in Esther 2:10 in the light of postcolonial hermeneutics. The London based scholar reflected on the context of empire and foreign domination, in which the text was produced, and the parallels between the figure of Esther in the diaspora and the loss and denial of identity and pressure to succumb to the empire under colonial rule. In an inspiring paper, Dr Nancy Tan (Chinese University of Hong Kong) presented a cross-textual reading of the Book of Judith and the Singaporean dystopian novel ‘Agnes Joaquin, Bioterrorist’. Tan read both books in the light of postcolonial feminist imagination, presenting both protagonists as resourceful women rescuing their nations from foreign oppression, confronting empires and challenging patriarchal structures. Next up was Prof James Crossley (Sheffield), whose presentation on the impact of economic considerations and ‘management speak’ on Biblical Studies in the UK inspired a critical debate on the role and relevance of British universities for Biblical Studies in other parts of the world. In the last paper of the day, Sheffield based Dr Katie Edwards discussed the depiction of Biblical women in advertisement in postfeminist pop culture. Using examples ranging from Calvin Klein to BMW and Sex and the City, Edwards made the point that Biblical women are mainly presented as objects of sexual desire, serving to reinforce gender stereotypes and perpetuate rape culture.

The day was rounded off by a discussion led by Prof Dube. A small survey she had conducted among Biblical scholars in South Africa and Botswana showed that research connections with scholars based in Britain were regrettably deficient. The discussion then circled around the British academy in comparison with similar centres in the United States and New Zealand, concluding that the latter appear to teach African-centred approaches to Biblical Studies alongside other postcolonial and local approaches more routinely. One African scholar mentioned that he felt freed up in his intellectual development in Britain and was first exposed to postcolonial and inculturation approaches when studying at British universities. The study day therefore ended on a rather positive note, highlighting at the same time that more dialogue – and more projects like this – are needed.

Dr. Johanna Stiebert with study day speakers Prof Musa Dube and Dr Nancy Tan.
African Religious Life in Hong Kong

By Ben Kirby (PhD student)

Newsletter,
December 2014

I spent the months of October and November 2014 at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK) as a visiting PhD student under the Global Scholarship Programme for Research Excellence. I used the time to conduct a small research project, investigating the phenomenon of African-initiated Pentecostal churches in the region, as well as the religious lives of African Christians living and working in the area more generally.

There are about ten African-initiated Pentecostal churches in Hong Kong, each attracting between 30 and 100 people for their main Sunday service. These congregants are typically African business entrepreneurs and traders or PhD students at Hong Kong universities. For the most part, they are individual men, though some churches attract African families that have more established and long-term positions in Hong Kong. Likewise, all of these churches are led by an African pastor. It is surprising however, that at three of the four churches studied, a very comfortable major-ity of the congregants at a Sunday service are Filipino. There are over 300,000 Filipinos and Indonesians working in Hong Kong as domestic helpers, the vast majority of whom are women. Most have Sunday as their day off. Many spend it outdoors relaxing with friends; yet there are those who choose to spend part or all of their Sunday at one of these African-initiated Pentecostal churches.

Another matter that has caught my attention is what could be called the religio-political horizon against which several African Christians that I have spoken with, (particularly the pastors) imaginatively locate their church, its mission, and the city of Hong Kong. According to the dominant narrative, the West is experiencing ethico-religious decline (atheism, homosexuality) and a loss-of-nerve in the face of the rise of Islam as a transnational religio-political force; if there is to be a response, there is greater hope to be found in China’s (divinely-sanctioned) ascent and its growing appetite for Christianity. This is imperative because ‘The East’, as one church website articulates it, ‘is destined to dominate in [the events of the end times] and will host the final events’ as cities divide and nations gather to battle (Rev. 16:12).

There is a common feeling that ‘African missionaries’ are best-equipped to tackle this difficult ‘mission field’ because they have ‘the right experience’, as the same website puts it, having endured ‘persecution, slavery, long economy suffering, rejection, and exploitation.’ Africans who find themselves in Asia are called to invest in the evangelisation and formation of the Chinese people. Islam, understood as a spiritual ‘principalities’, and China, dominated by ‘national’ or ‘territorial spir-its’ (traditional Chinese religious practices, Buddhism), can only be overcome through the practice of ‘spiritual warfare’ or prayer. Hong Kong is imagined as a ‘gateway’ to both China and the world; that is, politically (i.e. at the interface of West and East), and because of the sheer concentration of different nationalities passing through the city who can be ‘touched’ with the Holy Spirit and carry it with them.

DONATION TO ADRIAN HASTINGS AFRICA SCHOLARSHIP FUND

The Adrian Hastings Africa Scholarship is a non-profit initiative established in connection with the University of Leeds and recognised as an exempt charitable programme under s. 125A of the Education Reform Act 1988.

If you wish to make a donation to the fund by bank transfer: Make a payment to The University of Leeds, Barclays Bank, Account 20821845, Sort Code: 20-48-46, IBAN GB48BARC20484620821845, SWIFT BARCGB22, with reference to the account code for the Adrian Hastings Fund: 654690. By cheque: payable to The University of Leeds. Send the cheque to Adrian Hastings Scholarship Fund, School of Philosophy, Religion and History of Science, University of Leeds, 173 Woodhouse lane, LS2 9JT, Leeds. You may also contact us at: ahas@leeds.ac.uk