

**NETWORK OF THEOLOGY AND RELIGIOUS STUDIES**

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**INSTITUT LUTHÉRIEN DE THÉOLOGIE  
CAMEROUN**

**MEKANE YESUS THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY  
ETHIOPIA**

**LUTHERAN GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY  
MADAGASCAR**

**MHS SCHOOL OF MISSION AND THEOLOGY  
NORWAY**

**LUTHERAN THEOLOGICAL INSTITUTE  
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, SOUTH AFRICA**

**MAKUMIRA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE  
TUMAINI UNIVERSITY, TANZANIA**

**DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES  
MAKERERE UNIVERSITY, UGANDA**

# **The need for contextually sensitive textbooks**

*By Knut Holter, MHS School of Mission and Theology*

One of the topics to be focused in our Network of Theology and Religious Studies – pointed out already at the network consultation in Stavanger back in November 2000 – is the current textbook situation for theology and religious studies in Africa. It was acknowledged that there is a strong need for contextually sensitive textbooks, that is textbooks which reflect the language, culture and price level of the students, rather than those of their European or North American equivalents. The acknowledgement of this need led the network to search funding of a textbook program, and for many years now, the Norwegian Mission Society has offered an annual scholarship for a textbook project.

The present issue of the Network Newsletter will focus on the textbook issue, via a couple of interviews with the two most recent receivers of the textbook scholarship, a presentation of previous projects and the books that came out of them, and an invitation to apply for the textbook scholarships for 2012 and 2013.

## **Interview with Dr Mariette Razivelo**

Dr Razivelo is professor of Systematic Theology at the Lutheran Graduate School of Theology in Madagascar. She had the Textbook Scholarship in 2012. Her textbook is anticipated to be published in 2012.

- *What is the topic of your textbook project?*

I am writing a textbook – in Malagasy, for seminary and graduate school students of theology – about the Lutheran doctrine of the Holy Spirit.

- *What is special about teaching the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in a Malagasy context?*

The traditional Malagasy veneration of the ancestors constitutes a problem. People say “venerate”, but many actually pray to the

ancestors. The ancestors are then supposed to be mediators between the deity and human beings. Another challenge is the belief in spirits, of which some are supposed to be evil and others good. In our church we perform exorcism of evil spirits, and we pray by laying the hands on people, cf. the gifts referred to by St Paul in 1 Cor 12-13 and Gal 5:22-23.

- *How do you relate the doctrine of the Holy Spirit to this context?*

I emphasize that we don't need the ancestors as mediators. The Holy Spirit reveals the only mediator – Jesus Christ. I also emphasize that God has never left this world, he continues taking care of the world, and he brings salvation through Jesus Christ.

- *Is there a need for textbooks into the Malagasy context of bible schools, seminaries and graduate schools of theology?*

Yes, there is a definitive need. We have very few textbooks that are written in Malagasy and reflect the Malagasy situation.

### **Interview with Dr Misgana Mathewos Detago**

Dr Misgana is professor of Old Testament at the Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary in Ethiopia. He had the Textbook Scholarship in 2010. His textbook is anticipated to be published in 2012.

- *What is the topic of your textbook project?*

I am writing a book about the narratives in Genesis 1-11, analysing the key passages and looking into their theological and contextual relevance.

- *What is special about interpreting these texts in Ethiopia, compared with other parts of the world?*

The question of relevance would differ. Even if we share many things about Genesis 1-11 with universal readers, it is particularly relevant for Ethiopian students in many ways. Some of them are: (1) Many Ethiopian readers read the narratives of Genesis not

simply as remote past but afresh. The God who created the humanity and universe, who judged them due the humans' wickedness, does actively work in human life and history today. (2) Many Ethiopian readers take the Genesis narratives literally. For example, based on Genesis 1:28, having many children is thought as fulfilling God's command; based on Genesis 3, serpents are literally considered as the agents of devil; based on Genesis 6-8, torrential rain and destructive flood as divine judgment. The logic behind all this belief is that God is the lord over nature and uses it for his own purpose. The purpose of this textbook is to aid the Ethiopian readers with textual and contextual interpretation of the narratives of Genesis 1-11 so that the students have proper understanding of them and help them to translate this understanding into their practical ministry.

- *What do you think about the focus on textbooks in our Network of Theology and Religious Studies?*

One of our problems in Ethiopia is a lack of textbooks. I suppose theological institutions elsewhere in Africa encounter the same problem. Therefore, this Network project must be encouraged and expanded.

### **Three textbooks from and for Cameroun**

Two colleagues from Institut Luthérien de Théologie, Meiganga (Cameroun) had the textbook scholarships, in 2001 and 2008, respectively.

The first was Dr Ngah Joseph, professor of Systematic Theology. He wrote a textbook on the relationship between Christianity and African Traditional Religion: *La rencontre entre la religion africaine et le christianisme africain*. Ngaoundéré: Tello editions, 2002. The book has a double structure. On the one hand, it follows a traditional systematic-theological approach, with chapters on anthropology, cosmology, spirituality, evil, death. But then, on the other hand, each of the chapters focuses on the traditional African counterparts to a Christian theology, and establishes a dialogue between the two. The book was a most welcome contribution when it came, and in the wake of the publishing,

Dr Ngah was invited to several other academic institutions to lecture on the topic.

The other was Dr Jean Koulagna, professor of Old Testament. As part of his textbook scholarship, he actually managed to write two books. The first, *L'Ancien Testament: pour commencer*, Stavanger: MHS School of Mission and Theology, 2010, belongs to the traditional genre of 'introduction', with chapters on the physical milieu of Canaan/Palestine, the cultural and religious milieu, the history of Israel, the literary genres and the canon of the Old Testament, the Pentateuch and historical literature, the poetic and wisdom literature, and the prophetic and apocalyptic literature. The book mainly presents traditional, historical-critical perspectives on the Old Testament, but it also includes a brief section on African Old Testament studies (pp. 9-12). The other textbook, *Dire l'histoire dans la bible hébraïque. Perspectives exégétiques et herméneutiques*, Stavanger: MHS School of Mission and Theology, 2010, is an investigation of Old Testament historiography, with special attention to the role of narrative texts. First, the different 'historical' genres are investigated: myths, legends, etiologies, novels, epics, and genealogies. Then, narrative, historiographical sources are analyzed: Pentateuch, Deuteronomistic Narrative, and Chronistic Narrative. Finally, the question of an Old Testament 'theology of history' is discussed and related to the African context, from inculturation as well as liberation hermeneutical perspectives.

### **Other textbook projects**

There have also been a couple of projects that turned into something else than a traditional textbook. One is Pastor Sigfried Abrahamse's project (2003) on pastoral care vis-à-vis patients with HIV/AIDS. Abrahamse worked at that time as a lecturer of Practical Theology at the Lutheran Theological Seminary at Mapumulo, South Africa (the predecessor of Lutheran Theological Institute, Pietermaritzburg). Abrahamse was able to give seminars and lectures on the topic, but due to circumstances outside his – and the Network's – control, he was unfortunately not able to complete the book project.

Another is the essay collection that came out of the Network conference at Makerere University in 2005, on the interpretation of classical religious texts in contemporary Africa. The essay collection, Knut Holter (ed.):

*Interpreting Classical Religious Texts in Contemporary Africa*. Nairobi: Acton, 2007, includes a number of contributions by senior academic staff members in the Network institutions, and it is well suited as a textbook.

## **Network of Theology and Religious Studies Textbook Program, 2012 and 2013**

### **Context and content**

The network consultation in Stavanger in November 2000 pointed out the current textbook situation for theology and religious studies in Africa as a major challenge. As a response to this, a couple of attempts were made to establish a textbook program, based – on the one hand – on the general lack of textbooks relevant to the individual institution (language, context, price etc.), and – on the other hand – on the valuable experience many senior academic staff members have in teaching their subjects.

The Norwegian Mission Society was approached, and it has funded several textbooks, in collaboration with the MHS School of Mission and Theology. The NMS has recently (December 2011) decided to fund the Network Textbook Program for a period of three more years, 2012, 2013, and 2014, with an annual sum of approx. US\$ 10.000. The Network is therefore now able – and happy! – to announce textbook scholarships for the two first years of this period: 2012 (deadline for application: March 1, 2012) and 2013 (deadline for application: September 1, 2012).

On this background, senior academic staff members within the network institutions are invited to apply for scholarships enabling them to spend periods of three months in the Research Library, MHS School of Mission and Theology (Stavanger, Norway), with the purpose of writing a textbook that reflects the demands of their institutional context.

### **Application**

There is no special application form. The application is expected to be a project proposal of two to three pages, which should include:

- A presentation of the demand: institutional priority of the textbook project, current textbook situation in this field.

- A presentation of the background of the applicant: academic degrees, teaching experiences.
- A presentation of the content of the textbook project: table of contents – with comments, e.g. on the number of pages of the finished work, and further the academic level and pedagogical approach of the project.
- A presentation of the status of the project: what has been done till now, and what will be done from now until the visit to Stavanger, in order to secure a satisfactory finishing of the project within the three months in Stavanger.
- A presentation of the infrastructure of the textbook project: (i) the number of students who are supposed to follow the course(s) / buy the book each year, (ii) printing costs for e.g. 300 copies, each on e.g. 120 pages.
- Decisive criteria for a successful application will be the local needs, and then the relevance, practicability, and economy of the project.

## **Conditions**

The scholarship includes:

- Travel to/from Stavanger: cheapest air flight.
- Housing: MHS School of Mission and Theology.
- Library services and a working place with a PC: Research Library, MHS School of Mission and Theology
- An economic grant related to extra living expenses: approx. US\$ 800 per month.
- Printing subsidies for the book: US\$ 1.000-2.000.

The receiver of the scholarship should:

- Complete a textbook manuscript within the three months period in Stavanger, so that it is ready for printing.
- Send a report from the project and ten copies of the published book to the General Network Coordinator, Network of Theology and Religious Studies, within six months after the period in Stavanger.

## **Procedure**

The Dean/Rector of each network institution is asked:

- To make the textbook scholarship known amongst the faculty.

- To encourage senior academic staff members to develop projects.
- To send one or several (then: prioritized) project proposals to: General Network Coordinator: Professor Knut Holter, Network of Theology and Religious Studies, MHS School of Mission and Theology, Misjonsmarka 12, N-4024 Stavanger, Norway; fax: +47 5151 6225, e-mail: [knut.holter@mhs.no](mailto:knut.holter@mhs.no)

Further treatment of the project proposals:

- Proposals for **2012** should be received by the General Network Coordinator by March 1, 2012.
- Proposals for **2013** should be received by the General Network Coordinator by September 1, 2012.
- The project proposals will be scrutinized by the Research Committee (MHS School of Mission and Theology), and the final decision will be made by the General Network Coordinator together with the regional network coordinators.

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