

# Network Newsletter 2

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Institut Luthérien de Théologie, Meiganga (CAMEROUN) – Mekane Yesus Theological Seminary, Addis Ababa (ETHIOPIA) – Lutheran Graduate School of Theology, Fianarantsoa (MADAGASCAR) – School of Mission and Theology, Stavanger (NORWAY) – Lutheran Theological Seminary, Mapumulo (SOUTH AFRICA) – Makumira University College of Tumaini University, Usa River (TANZANIA) – Department of Religious Studies, Makerere University, Kampala (UGANDA)

## **It's not only a question about money!**

In our efforts of building a network we often end up talking about money. The present newsletter is no exception from this; its general mood seems to be that the projects are many, but the funders are few!

However, let us, once again, remind each other about the basic fact that money is not the goal of our network, but only one of the means to achieve the goal. And what is then our goal? Interaction, I would say, personal, spiritual and academic interaction. Personal interaction, in the sense that we by staying together learn more about what it is to be human beings. Spiritual interaction, in the sense that we by praying together and by sharing our faith with each other learn more about what it is to be Christians. And academic interaction, in the sense that we by studying and lecturing together, and by writing and researching together, learn more about the lengths and depths of our service and profession.

Money is indeed important. Without funding there will be no projects and no interaction. Let us therefore pray that our projects may find funding. Still, let us first and foremost pray that our various experiences of interaction touch us as human

beings, as Christians and as professionals, so that we better can serve church and society.

# Exchange

Exchange of students and academic staff is one of the major visions of our network. During the network consultation in Stavanger in November 2000, it was repeatedly emphasized that a sharing of personal, spiritual and academic experiences is of utmost importance to each of the seven participating institutions. On this background it is encouraging to see that the various exchange programs now are beginning to function.

- Exchange of students, South→North: The School of Mission and Theology runs a two years M.Phil. program in theology. Entrance requirements are a B.Theol./B.A., recommendation from church/educational institution, and a satisfactory knowledge of English. The school has a quota of 10-14 scholarships, funded by the Norwegian state, and six new quota students have just (medio August 2001) arrived in Stavanger, ready to start their studies. Five of these six come from partner institutions within our network (the sixth, Zhang Jie (f), comes from China):
  - From Cameroon: Jean Marc Baba Tonga (m), New Testament
  - From Ethiopia: Fekadu Gurmessa Ofgaia (m), Science of Mission
  - From South Africa: Zipho Ignatious Ntuli (m), New Testament
  - From Tanzania: Hoyce Daniel Mbowe (f), Old Testament
  - From Uganda: Kintu Mugeni Justice (m), Science of Religion
- Exchange of students North→South: A program has been organized by the School of Mission and Theology this year; the program is partly funded by the Norwegian state, partly by the School of Mission and Theology, and then the students will be expected to pay parts of it themselves. The program only covers short visits of 5-6 weeks, and the purpose is to expose the Norwegian students for an African context of theological and religious studies. Three students will be going this term, all three to Tanzania: Agne Skretting (m), Ingvild Sandve (f), and Tobias Gutman (m).
- Exchange of staff, South→North: A program has been organized by the School of Mission and Theology this year; the program is partly funded by the Norwegian Missionary Society, which invites one Guest Professor a year from the institutions it already has an economic relationship to (in Cameroun, Ethiopia, Madagascar); for the remaining institutions no funding is found till now. A Guest Professor from Madagascar—Dr Rakoto Endor Modeste; New Testament Studies—spent one month in Stavanger in the Spring term 2001; a Guest Professor from Ethiopia is invited for one month in the Spring term 2002.
- Exchange of staff, North→South: The School of Mission and Theology has for several years had a program enabling two professors a year to visit related institutions in Africa and Asia for intensive lecturing (3-4 weeks). This term Assisting Professor Jan Opsal (Science of Religion, Islam) will visit the Institut Luthérien de Théologie, Cameroun. The network institutions are encouraged to invite colleagues in Stavanger for such intensive lecturing.

## Textbook program

Following up suggestions made during the network consultation in November 2000, the School of Mission and Theology has recently organized a textbook program related to the network. Many of the network institutions experience a very difficult textbook situation, with a general lack of books that are relevant with regard to language, context, and price. However, at the same time, several professors in the network institutions have valuable experiences in teaching their subjects, experiences that should be converted into textbooks. In response to this, the program intends to invite professors from the network institutions to Stavanger for periods of three to four months, with the purpose of writing textbooks that reflect the contextual demands of the particular institutions.

Till now it has only been possible to find funding for textbook projects related to three of the network institutions. The Norwegian Missionary Society has agreed to fund one textbook scholarship a year to one of the institutions it already has an economic relationship to (in Cameroun, Ethiopia and Madagascar). The first scholarship is awarded to Dr Ngah Joseph, Professor of Systematic Theology (and Rector, Cameroun, whose textbook project is entitled *A Dialectical Study of African Religions and Christianity*. He arrived in Stavanger in medio August, and will stay there for three to four months. Information about a textbook scholarship for 2002 is already sent the three institutions.

## Nufu applications

NUFU – an abbreviation for the Norwegian Council of Universities' Committee for Development Research and Education – is a major funding agency in Norway for university cooperation between Norway and Africa. By April 1 our network submitted four applications to NUFU – for research cooperation and institution development. These four applications are at present (medio August) being evaluated by NUFU, and they compete with no less than 140 other applications from Norwegian and African universities and research institutions. The following abstracts give some indication of the focus of the four applications, and we pray that at least one of them will succeed.

- 1) *Africanization of Biblical Studies in Three Eastern African Research Institutions*  
Coordinators: Dr Serapio Kabazzi-Kisirinya (Uganda), Dr Knut Holter (Norway)  
Participants: Uganda, Norway, Madagascar, Tanzania

The question of Africanization is a major challenge to African research institutions in religion and theology, and especially to their presentation of biblical studies. Whereas the Bible used to be the book of the colonizers, it is today acknowledged as a book that expresses central aspects of African experience and identity, traditional as well as post-colonial, and there is a strong need to let this new understanding of the book be reflected in academic biblical studies. In response to this, the present project focuses on Africanization of biblical studies from two perspectives: staff development and scholarly approaches. Main goal: *The project aims to contribute to an Africanization of biblical studies in three Eastern African research institutions*. Sub-goals: (a) *Staff development*: The project will train African researchers for senior positions in three Eastern

African research institutions. The training will be organized as three Ph.D. projects. (b) *Scholarly approaches*: A primary aim of the project is to develop Ph.D. theses that relate biblical studies to the hermeneutical concerns of the African context (the project's major perspective). A secondary aim is to analyze critically the presuppositions and potentialities of the concept of an Africanization of biblical studies (the project's meta-perspective).

- 2) *The Role of Religion in Human Rights, Conflict and Reconciliation*  
Coordinators: Dr Birungyi George (Uganda), Dr Øyvind Eide (Norway)  
Participants: Uganda, Norway, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Madagascar

The School of Mission and Theology aims at assisting in the development of academic competence—four M.Phil. candidates—on two subject matters within the discipline of Practical Theology, in four theological institutions in Africa and Madagascar. The first issue relates to the fact that religion has got increased importance as a framework within which human rights are defined. A focus of interest is therefore to capture the progressive function of religion within the domain of human rights. The second issue deals with religion as a cause for conflict as well as a resource in conflict prevention, conflict management and reconciliation. The projects will give priority to the African female perspective and focus on theoretical and practical skills in mediation, primarily at family and village level. The theological institutions are educational centres for churches, counting their members in millions. The church organisations, with their members, congregations and workers, constitute one of the best functioning networks in Africa. The populace has confidence in their religious leaders. Therefore the training of church workers in conflict management and mediation is of great strategic importance.

- 3) *International Conference on Religion and Conflict Resolution*  
Coordinators: Dr Nkurunziza Deusdedit (Uganda), Dr Knut Holter (Norway)  
Participants: Uganda, Norway, Madagascar

This project aims to bring together scholars of the partner institutions as well as other international scholars to discuss the dynamic function of religion in the context of a global escalation of conflicts at all levels of society. The conference has also an aspect of networking, and dissemination to challenge religions to become chief providers of reconciliation and sustainable peace. The conference will also articulate issues and solutions to the current conflicts in the Great Lakes Region.

- 4) *Library Co-operation North—South*  
Coordinators: Dr Bakeine Robert (Uganda), Senior librarian Arne B. Samuelsen (Norway)  
Participants: Uganda, Norway, Madagascar

A well functioning library with relevant collections and resources is vital for all scholarly activity, including research in religion and theology. In this respect there is a general imbalance between Northern and Southern research institutions, as the Southern ones, generally speaking, lack adequate library services. The collections are small and to some extent outdated, adequate international reference tools are non existent, and there is practically no infrastructure for interlibrary loan and copy services on regional or national level. *The main goal of this project is to make adequate international reference tools – together with the infrastructure for copy services of a Northern institution – available to two Southern institutions.* The goal will be reached: (a) by providing two Southern institutions with adequate technical equipment and database licences, (b) by motivating and training scholars and library staff in the co-operating institutions in South, and (c) by using the infrastructure of the Northern part to serve the Southern ones. – If the pilot project leads to a positive evaluation, the intention is to include other Southern institutions in the interlibrary co-operation.



Network Coordinator / Editor of the *Network Newsletter*: Dr Knut Holter, School of Mission and Theology, Misjonsvegen 34, N-4024 Stavanger, Norway. Tel.: +47 5151 6227. Fax: +47 5151 6225. E-mail: [kh@mhs.no](mailto:kh@mhs.no)