The Study of Religion at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, and Social Transformation

Johannes A. Smit

Abstract

Initiated in 2000, the study of religion at UKZN, Durban campus, takes place via three programmes, viz. the UG programme in Religion, and the two PG programmes in Religion and Social Transformation and Religion Education. This article reviews some of the seminal considerations for the developing of the programmes as well as the dynamics and main considerations that impacted on their actual development over the last ten years. Pointing to the legacies of apartheid, underdevelopment and de-Africanisation, it reviews the focuses of the programmes with regard to their multi-religious approach, and their focuses on religion and development and religion and society. Content-wise it explains the rationales for both religion-specific and inter-, comparative or multi-religion modules. It closes by summarising the critical theoretical perspectives and frameworks in terms of which postgraduate research took place in the areas of religion and civil society; religion and counselling; religion, globalisation and poverty; the southern African Religion and Culture Encyclopaedic framework; and finally the critical perspectives that informed the founding of the programme in Religion Education.

Keywords: apartheid; underdevelopment; de-Africanisation; multi-religious studies; religion and development; religion and society; knowledge production; religion and social transformation; religion education

Introduction

Approved by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in 1999,

the School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, has three relatively new academic programmes in Religion, viz. an undergraduate program in Religion (and Culture), and two postgraduate programmes in Religion and Social Transformation and Religion Education respectively. First offered in 2000 these programmes were developed to conceptualize the study of Religion within a decidedly post-apartheid paradigm. As such, they would constitute a decisive paradigmatic break from previous approaches to the study of religion (and theology) and provide the conditions for the possibility of knowledge production in a new key. The new knowledge would be characterised by knowledge that would not only inculcate new-found values such as freedom, equity, and social justice but also cultivate a liberated citizenry in which the diversity of religions are accorded equal status and respect, and studied with equal rigour as constitutive part of our country's nation-building project, beyond the legacy of apartheid.

In this article, I first briefly reflect on some of the historically-determined rationales that impacted on the designing of these programmes, the nature of especially the undergraduate programme in Religion (and Culture), and the postgraduate programmes in Religion and Social Transformation and Religion Education.

I

Postapartheid realities have been structured and are still determined by its anterior ideological history. This applies despite the very significant changes the new South African Constitution and related legislation made to the structural determinations impacting on the socio-cultural existence of the nation. It stands to reason that the continued impact of this history is multi-faceted and intertwined with new socio-economic and socio-political structural realities and imperatives. Even so, we can mainly identify three of these ideological facts that continue to impact on the polity, *viz.* apartheid, underdevelopment and de-Africanisation.

Apartheid
The racist apartheid state was characterised by its institutionalising of white

racist rule, the fostering of white ascendancy and the active obstruction and frustration of mostly black African aspirations for advancement and modernisation. From ideological perspective, it not only put the Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs) in place for the inculcation of white supremacy but also the Repressive State Apparatuses (RSAs) which were used to administer, manage and police the apartheid ideology (Althusser 1971)[1]. For forty-two years it succeeded in repressing the indigenous population. Not only did it actively promote and foster the improvement of the quality of life of whites at the expense of that of blacks. (Blacks were mostly used in industry and labour sectors – often as illiterate labourers). It also put in place an elaborate ideological framework which was supposed to structure society from top to bottom. Virtually no-one could escape this. Whites were schooled in white-only schools and universities and brought up in the belief of their own superiority, and blacks in their inferiority. The worst kind of outcome of this system was that it produced blacks who believed in their own inferiority. Once this was achieved, the system propagated itself[2]. – obviously within the

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[1] Cf. Althusser's (1971) distinction between ISAs and RSAs. In 1950s France, Althusser identified the ISAs as: 1) the religious ISA (the system of the different churches/ [religions]); 2) the educational ISA (the system of the different public and private 'schools'); 3) the family ISA; 4) the legal ISA; 5) the political ISA (the political system, including the different parties); 6) the trade-union ISA; 7) the communications ISA (press, radio and television, etc.); 8) the cultural ISA (literature, the arts, sports, etc.). The RSAs are characterized by their unified coordinating and managerial ideological function. Resorting directly under the head of state, the ideological system permeated government and state administration, and where dissent was encountered, was policed by a variety of law enforcement agencies, and managed and controlled via the courts, and prisons. This system of ideology is also applicable to apartheid South Africa which similarly had its institutional entrenchment in 1950s South Africa (cf. Smit 2010).

[2] The international sports activist Dennis Brutus played a very important international role in the anti-apartheid struggle. His activism acquires significance in that it aimed at the international isolation of the apartheid sports codes. This strategy impacted on both continuing colonial and then recently-founded apartheid ideological systems in South Africa during the period (1950s – 1970s).

limits set by the liberation struggle and national but especially international critique (cf. Smit 2010)

Underdevelopment

Western colonisation – with its roots in slavery since the sixteenth century – has been a primary force that propelled the development and modernisation of Western life and culture and the neglect or active discouragement of the peoples of the colonised countries to engage the same. If this was primarily the main ideology that drove nineteenth century colonisation (cf Rodney 1972)[3], it was especially since the independence of these countries around the middle of the twentieth century that saw neo-colonial and neo-imperialist forces impact negatively on them (cf. Nkrumah 1963)[4]. Throughout, 'underdevelopment' has become the tenor of these epochs. Underdevelopment not only signifies the inability to develop as one would normally expect given the right environment[5]. It also refers to all those forces that actively oppose, discourage and obstruct development and modernisation. As such it is at base associated with the non-education or mis-education of people. Non-education primarily manifests in illiteracy – still widespread throughout Africa – and mis-education in non-competitive education or education which does not enskill and empower to participate equally in modern economies. People who are underprepared to engage the formidable economies of the developed world and who do not have the

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[3] Walter Rodney's (1972) ground-breaking and foundational study covers the different epochs and related practices focused on 'underdevelopment'.

[4] Kwame Nkrumah (1963) was the first to substantially analyse the realities and dynamics of neo-imperialism on the African continent, and also developed proposals as to how to counter this exploitative system of the erstwhile colonizers. Cf. especially his chapters 2, 3 and 18 on 'Obstacles to Economic Growth', 'Imperialist Finance', and the 'Mechanisms of Neo-colonialism'.

[5] Underdevelopment assumes that development could not take place as expected because the conditions for development were purposely withheld, and structured negatively and disablingly, and constantly dashing hopes of development and rendering even moderate objectives for the improvement of the quality of life unattainable.

requisite knowledge or resources to creatively engage them are not only at a disadvantage but are open to exploitation.

De-Africanisation

The de-Africanisation of people on the African continent came about through the fact that occupational forces in Africa not only developed systems of disinformation about Africa's past but also denied African people their history, alienated them from their own cultural heritages (Mzamane 1999:173-175) and subjected them to dehumanisation and underdevelopment (Mugo 1999:221). This has resulted in what Teffo (1999:149) calls a moral decay and appalling socio-moral conditions in Africa and what Ntuli (1999:184) calls the existence of a cultural and moral collapse. Coupled with underdevelopment, the result is a radical absence of a modern developmental morality derived from African culture(s). Pityana (1999:140) refers to Africa's 'moral warp'. This has led to a general loss of self-esteem, pride and dignity (Hoppers *et al.* 1999:233). On the education front, 'de-Africanisation' came through underdevelopment, enslavement or miseducation (Mugo 1999:221). The situation this resulted in is that knowledge became 'racialised' – knowledge taught and learnt on the African continent remains focused on a white western world and does not take African realities seriously. In a nutshell, there is a huge need for an 'Africa-focused' (Mamdani 1998:.132,134) intelligentsia.

Given this historically-inherited background with its multi-form excesses and geographical and power-political representations still determining current-day South Africa to various degrees (cf. Adebajo 2010; Mbeki 2009; and Saul 2005)[6], the next section briefly reflects on the nature of the programmes we developed.

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[6] Saul (2005:16ff) positioned his proposal not 'beyond capitalism and socialism' (*a lá* Sklar 1988) nor as a stunted 'African socialism' – or 'African capitalism' for that matter – but as a process that needs to continue to 'juxtapose the rival claims' of capitalism and socialism on the African continent.

II

In practice, the new programmes in the study of religion are interventionist and have a three-fold significance. Given the continuing impacts of apartheid, underdevelopment and de-Africanisation, as well as the fact that a certain brand of Christianity was implicated in apartheid[7], it was important to not only address all religions equally in our courses but also focus their study on realities devoid of non-relevant metaphysical scholarly assumptions and a theorising that ignores the realities and facts of daily life.

The Multi-religious Focus

All programmes invite students from the major religions in the region, African Religion, Christianity, Hinduism, and Islam, to enrol in its courses. This feature of the programmes is important since it is a direct break from the old apartheid ideology-induced schooling system[8] as well as different from the more secular policies followed in the United States. During the apartheid period, Christian-national education was enforced in schools, and the Christian-national educational framework used to propagate apartheid. This meant that even in schools where the minority of pupils came from Christian backgrounds, the school was nevertheless coerced to include certain forms of Christian practice such as Bible reading, Christian prayer, music or singing. The secular system followed in the United States, again, is different, in that it does not allow for any religious practices in state schools at all – not even prayer. Religiously-based private schools and universities, obviously allow

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[7] Students from different religious backgrounds had mainly three options in their studies. They could enrol in the state schools and be exposed to this ideology, attend private schools, or, at least at tertiary level, study at liberal institutions where the ideology was not so severely entrenched and where you did find certain forms of opposition and critique.

[8] Whereas apartheid fostered difference in separate religion-specific departments which did not have to have any interaction with one another (at UCT, UDW, UNISA and Wits for instance), our policy on pluralism means that the religions engage one another in the broader context of the multi-religious framework. They do not remain pigeon-holed without any recognition and interaction in separate religious and faith-based enclaves.

for such, and actively include certain religious elements within the daily lives of faculty, students and pupils. The significance of our graduate and postgraduate programmes is that they do not aim at either of these two options and obviously also not that of the private school.

On the one hand, our programmes do not discourage religious-specific and confessional involvement of students in their courses – they may study their prescribed material from within their own faith traditions. On the other hand, they may focus their studies on faith traditions other than their own, or do it from a secular perspective. The dynamics of this is not the same as when students from different religions participate in a history class or a psychology project for example, because whereas their own faith commitments are not accommodated in these fields, they are, in our religion programmes. This fosters knowledge and learning from living and practicing faith traditions, as well as mutual recognition and the fostering of mutual understanding and respect of human dignity in the secular space of the university. This is in line with the basic hermeneutical premise, namely that not even the strictest of sciences are exempt from acknowledging their own pre-texts and pre-understandings. In this context, it is important, then to acknowledge and not disavow, repress or marginalise these very important and often very personal commitments of students. They should be accommodated in the secular space of the lecture theatre and classroom rather than ignored or at worst marginalised, denigrated and repressed.

Religion and Development

The programmes encompass religion specific modules as well as inter-religious and multi-religious modules[9]. Religion-specific modules focus on the basic knowledge and information related to each of the religions whereas

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[9] We distinguish between inter-religious and multi-religious mainly in terms of whether there is contact between the religions or not, and whether they form part of a process of development or not. The significance of the first distinction is that we respect those religious and faith traditions that do not wish to engage with adjacent traditions. Such a position usually also entails that the religion also does not engage the socio-cultural issues the programmes engage – even though they themselves are also affected by them and they exist in the same geographical area affected by the same issues.

the inter-religious modules[10] provide the opportunity for religions to engage social phenomena and to do so in an equal, equitable and collaborative manner. The latter focus studies the articulation of the religions and religious organisations with issues such as development, conflict, race, gender, class, media, migration, poverty, health, and the environment to name but a few. Students from any religious background may enrol for a selection of these modules, including the religion-specific modules. This policy is also followed at the postgraduate level where students may complete their main projects – the BA Honours Research Project and the MA dissertation for instance – in religions of their choice, i.e. their own religion and religious tradition, or a religion other than their own. In these ways knowledge is produced with regard to the religions themselves as well as the articulation of the religions with the socio-cultural phenomena studied. It is not only religious practitioners who contribute to such knowledge production with regard to their own religion but also students from adjacent religions. This, we believe is laying the foundations for a much more informed development of the religions with regard to socio-cultural phenomena as well as the requisite dialogue that this engenders among fellow students for both the fostering of respect and an equal recognition of standpoints and religious convictions between the religions. It therefore not only pre-empts any form of superiority consciousness between the religions but actively fosters the mutual understanding and appreciation of our religions.

It is important that religious people and students of religion critically reflect on the articulation of the religions with regard to social phenomena. They need to do this from within their religions and religious traditions and practices. Even though this cannot be done equally across the religions –

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[10] Inter-religious refers to those traditions that are open to encountering and engaging adjacent religious traditions and faith communities and also open to engaging the socio-cultural issues we engage. Such engagement of necessity impacts on the development of the religious traditions in themselves as well as with regard to the articulation of religions with the socio-cultural issues studied. In practice they then also recognize the existence of other religions, and contribute to the socio-cultural issues in the public sphere that they share with other religious traditions and faith communities. It stands to reason that this approach constitutes interactive and dialogical processes and never an end in itself.

religions differ among themselves and there is also a great diversity within religions with regard to their potential for 'application' – it is important that religions themselves develop their traditions and critical thinking into modern contexts and with regard to modern and modernising issues and challenges[11]. Moreover, a primary challenge to the religions is to become much more socially conscious in the broader national arenas of socio-economic challenges Africa face[12]. Due to the social capital they harbour, the religious engagements of such phenomena in the interests of collaboration and development are crucial for the collective advancement of society at large as well as the continuous development of the faith traditions and faith communities themselves.

Religion and Society

The socio-cultural issues we address in the programmes and that students address in their research derive from within the African context. Rather than studying the religions esoterically, the focus is on the relevant and engaged articulation of the religions with regard to the issues that confront South Africa but also Africa more broadly speaking at the beginning of the twenty-

[11] On this score, one of the most negative effects of past collaboration between religions have been that when initiatives come from one specific religion – Christianity or Islam for example – then the general approaches in that religion provides the template for other religions to follow suit. Recognising the diversity between the religions but also within the religions, we try to prevent this from happening. Each religion and religious tradition needs to engage the issues on their own terms but in dialogue with the adjacent religions. Ultimately, the issues affect all equally, and this calls for collaborative engagement even though there is diversity in how such engagement is grounded (or not) in each of the religious traditions.

[12] Given the history of racism, ethnocentrism, and discrimination on the African continent, it is important that it is especially the religions – those beliefs and practices normally held to be the most conservative – that become involved in these processes. As such, and because they constitute very significant critical mass (as 'social capital'), they can foster collaboration in the face of the existing intolerance, xenophobia, stereotypes, and prejudices on the continent.

first century. At the highest level of abstraction, this may range from the continuing structural effects of apartheid, underdevelopment and de-Africanisation. More closely related to local existence, there are numerous issues that confront local communities on a daily basis. These communities usually do not live in ghettoes but in diverse and dispersed ethnic and religious societies in the same geographical areas. On this score, on the one hand, students of religion should know that the dynamics of the socio-cultural phenomena we face as a society and a country at large has a history and that we are continually confronted by the latent continuing effects of this history. This, however, does not make one a victim of a past that cannot be changed. Rather, it calls forth intervention, innovation and creative agency in the present, to address the wrongs and excesses of the past and the challenge to create structures, institutions and systems that would lay the foundations for a non-racial, non-sexist, non-exploitative and equal opportunity society in future. On the other hand, the socio-cultural issues people face, are also significant in their daily lives. On this score, modules such as Religion and Development; Morality, Ethics and Modernity in Africa; Women, Religion and Culture; Religion and the Media; Religion and Health; Religion and Human Rights; Religion and the Environment; Religion, Poverty and Economics; amongst others, play a significant role at both the large structural levels as well as with regard to their significance in current and local contexts – 'lived religion'[13] in the lived realities of daily life.

Knowledge Production

In the apartheid era, the majority of graduates were trained for work in white sectors, producing a lopsided professional cohort mainly serving the white communities at the expense of black communities. This also meant that whereas these latter communities faced the most severe socio-economic

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[13] Focusing on 'lived religion' Graham Harvey (2010) has provided an important pointer for research in this direction. The importance of this edited collection lies in that it brings to the fore that knowledge of the religions are not acquired through book-learning of ancient sources first and foremost, but in how religions function in the daily lives of practitioners, and the significance the religious and faith traditions have for adherents in the present. (Cf. especially Harvey's 'Introduction'.)

challenges, these were not engaged, the requisite knowledge not produced, and not nearly enough professionals trained for work in these areas. Moreover, this system did not take into consideration the variety of languages, and cultural and ethnic formations in the country inside the disciplines, e.g. an engaged psychology accommodating the specific social, cultural and historical challenges faced in language- and ethnic-specific conditions infused by the specific beliefs and practices in which it functioned. Rather, where much of such indigenous knowledge could be very helpful and positively impact on policy formation, with the requisite education and training of professionals who would be able to optimally serve people in terms of the their different linguistic, ethnic and religious practices and persuasions, this was not taken into consideration. Professionals treated such people in a roughshod manner, often leaving behind greater problems than before their arrival. Another aspect was that even though the servicing of people working in their own community, was taken into consideration, it was so only in so far as it served ideological purposes and objectives. Much of the knowledge people were trained in – and this is still the case in many ways in many communities – did not include knowledge and skills for engaging these communities on their own terms and their own histories and traditions. Therefore, a basic premise of our approach in the modules has been to produce knowledge and graduates who can actively and transformatively work in previously marginalised communities, where they provide previously disadvantaged communities with access to Humanities knowledge. Therefore, a main challenge is to produce knowledge that would benefit graduates and through them, their previously disadvantaged communities they serve.

Multi-religious Expertise

The perspectives outlined above necessarily also impact on the teaching practices in the programmes. Since all staff come from different religious backgrounds, this makes for an important multi-religious input, while all continuously learn and develop knowledge in the social issue areas from multi-and inter-religious perspectives. In the multi-religious modules we either team-teach where a member of staff schooled in a specific religion, takes responsibility for the relevant section, or a single member teaches an inter-religious module in an integrated way. The strength of the first approach

is that students are exposed to in-depth scholarly knowledge from within every religion, concerning the issue studied[14]. The strength of the second is that every member of staff teaching inter-religious modules, become an expert in a specific socio-cultural area and teaches the module from comparative religious perspective, as different insights from each religion, impact on the social issue or socio-economic challenge addressed. There are very few educational institutions in South Africa where this approach is followed, and we regard ourselves as very privileged in this regard. The dynamics this brings to collegiality is a continuing exploration of the various religiously-founded perspectives on a variety of socio-economic and societal challenges our country faces. It adds value in so far as this approach also brings a richness of experience, and historical and cultural understanding together, feeding into more enriching understandings and appreciations of not only the complexities of life, but the array of possible approaches from within the religions in challenging times. Since we expect a certain proportion of the population to be *aux fait* with this kind of socially-engaged comparative religion knowledge, we need to be and produce academics who can provide leadership in this very important area of study.

III

As stated earlier, the undergraduate programme is characterised by both its religion-specific modules and multi- or inter-religious modules. This allows for religion-specific specialisation – especially with regard to those students who want a more thorough foundation in the religion of their choice – as well

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[14] We have learnt that if this approach is followed, we need to still have a module coordinator who can ensure that there is some integration of the different approaches with regard to the issue(s) studied. If this is not done, the module could suffer from just a number of loose perspectives and approaches to the socio-cultural issue studied without any integration. On this score, Comparative Religion provides the general theoretical framework of the programmes for the integrative parameters for the study of the module. The sub-disciplinary focuses are: pluralism, the phenomenological categories for the study of religions (as adapted from Smart 1997), that they be studied in the secular space of the university, contextually, and in a postcolonial theoretical framework.

as the cultivation of expertise with regard to the equal significance of the religions in shared socio-cultural contexts.

Religion-specific Modules

Religion-specific modules are primarily determined by the fact that there is a diversity of religions and diversity within the religions. On the one hand, the religions are studied with full knowledge of the specificity of each of the religions vis-à-vis others. This focus is important because one needs to cultivate an appreciation of the fact that one cannot use one single template and study all religions equally with regard to that template – the historical-critical paradigm for instance. One also cannot equally assume that all the phenomenological dimensions of the religions (*a lá* Smart, Dimensions, 1997) have equal significance across the religions. In some religions ritual, for instance, is much more important than in others. Equally, in some, beliefs are all important whereas in others it is religious experience; in yet others, current moralities can be directly articulated with the divine, whereas in some, it is not related. On the other hand, diversity exists within each of the religions. Such diversity may date from the religion's earliest beginnings or may have developed in history[15]. Very often, people do not make these distinctions – only thinking in stereotypes with regard to a homogeneous African Religion, Christianity, Hinduism or Islam. Religion-specific modules start out with focuses on the basic knowledge of each of the religions but also factor in the diversities since the religion's beginnings or the diversities that developed in history. Such diversity may also impact on the fact that in some strands of a religion, certain historically-developed beliefs may be all important whereas in other strands, specific rituals or a specific group's

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[15] Structurally, Ninian Smart's phenomenological approach (1997) to the 'dimensions' of religion is helpful in studying these different forms of diversity, e.g. in terms of his basic distinctions between beliefs, narrative, morality, ritual, social organization, religious experience and the different symbolic systems that exist in the religions. (Smart's additional dimensions are those of the material and political.) This also allows for constructive comparison between the religions with regard to some of these categories, e.g. narrative, ritual, morality, etc. or in terms of their articulation with social issues (cf. Smit & Vencatsamy 2013).

historically-developed social organisation may be all important.

Both these focuses on religious diversity are covered with regard to the social systems and social formations (as determined by social 'thought') of each of the religions, their significance, prevalence and significance in the history of South Africa and the current challenges they face within the world system.

Inter-religious Modules

Starting from the module, RELG101 Introduction to Religion, the inter-religious modules follow the two main distinctions with regard to diversity between as well as within the religions. In addition, they are studied from a secular perspective, contextually, and in the broader theoretical framework of our current postcolonial condition. The *secular perspective* is important because it allows for students to explore the variety of their own religious commitments without legislating for only one specific religion or belief- or ritual-system. The secular framework, then does not exclude religious commitment; rather, it facilitates mutual recognition and respect of religious diversity both between and within the religions within the secular space of academia. More importantly, it also allows for the engagement of the modernisation debate – i.e. whether the modernisation of the world inevitably lead to the increasing secularisation and decrease of religiosity in the world[16].

The *contextual perspective* comes to the fore in that the social and political contributions of significant historical leaders within the religions are factored into the modules. Furthermore, significant socio-cultural issues and challenges that confront society and communities currently are studied. In addition to the articulation of religion with poverty and wealth creation, modules also focus on sexuality, health, and the environment for instance. The common denominator is that all the people from the different religions

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[16] It is well-known that there has been a great reversal of the secularization hypothesis in the face of the exponential growth of religious organizations in the world over the last decade or more (cf. Berger 2001 for instance). This is especially evident in the phenomenal growth of the Pentecostal churches on the African continent as well as the African Diaspora: cf. especially the research by Paul Gifford (1998; 2004; 2009) for the former and the book edited by Adogame, Gerloff and Hock (2008) for the latter.

are determined by these socio-cultural and often very human factors on an equal basis. This means that if they need to be addressed, they need to be engaged collectively, with religious people being equally engaged – it is not the responsibility of government or a non-governmental organisation (NGO) or community organisation alone. Religious people need to be involved too – both in intervention and creative agency and engagement. In this, the modules play an important social role because they produce the secular knowledge that all should use to engage such phenomena, but also think about them and develop the requisite knowledge to address such issues from within the religions and religious commitment. Community and contextual inclusion ensure collaborative ethical care and joint action and practice with regard to targeted issues – the fostering of a mutually-shared and partnered citizenship in context.

The *postcolonial perspective* is relevant in so far as most of African society has been marginalised and underdeveloped during the colonising and apartheid periods in South Africa. Structurally, democratic South Africa has excelled in putting new legislation and systems in place that could foster social transformation and equality since 1994. The multi-religious modules draw on these realties with regard to especially moral transformation in the interests of racial, gender and class equality. The fostering of a human rights and social justice culture requires buy-in from a variety of stakeholders, not least the diverse religious communities in the country. The modules foster such a culture from within the diversity of religious persuasions studied, while emphasising the primacy of the development of African cultural commitments and practices. Case studies allow for focus on specific issues and social phenomena across the spectrum of the facilitation of religious engagement of socio-cultural phenomena. From positions in the margins, erstwhile marginalised groups and individuals are mainstreamed in scholarship and related practices. Since the religious communities are most closely related to marginalised people – they are present and operate at grassroots levels – it is the leaders and communities on the outskirts of society that need to be engaged and empowered to play constructive roles in the variously related and intertwined social transformation processes.

IV

Over the last ten years, the postgraduate programme in Religion and Social

Transformation had a substantial number of scholarship grants for postgraduate studies. This allowed for the training and graduating of 168 Honours (fourth year), 70 Masters and 20 doctoral students. Students could study in primarily four areas, viz. Religion and Civil Society; Religion and Counselling; Religion, Poverty and Globalisation; and the Religion and Social Transformation Encyclopaedia.

Religion and Civil Society

Due to the de-Africanisation of people on the African continent as well as an orchestrated prevention of African people from equally participating in the development of civil society structures and mechanisms during the colonial, apartheid and even post-independent phases in Africa, there resulted a radical absence of a civil morality derived from African culture(s). Different from Jean-Jacques Rousseau's view of civil society – that the individual or group forfeits certain natural liberties to the state in recompense for statuary protection – it was Hegel and Marx who mustered a critique of modern bourgeois society – that it is not adequate that human beings are seen as mere predicates to the state (cf. Lobkowicz 1967: 259 – 270)[17]. Internationally, this challenge has not been overcome by any country as yet – even more so, as liberal democracies continue to restrictingly and disablingly impact on 'developing democracies' (Cf. Chomsky 1997; and Carothers 1991; 1999). In the contexts sketched above, the challenges concerning civil society involve a number of issues such as the development of moralities within the different religions that could facilitate co-operative commitments of the religious formations with regard to citizenship[18], a just civil society, the movement

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[17] For different models in terms of how civil societies in the past and present articulate with the state, see the 'Introduction' in Van Rooy (2000) for instance.

[18] Cf. for instance Mamdani (1998) who in his inaugural address pointed to the question of citizenship in terms of the continued settler – native distinction plaguing Africa. This difference, especially as it signals the divide between advantaged and disadvantaged continue to negatively impact on life in Africa. The reason is that colonisation did not bring equality and an equalising of socio-economic development but compounded inequality. As such, it is a wider African phenomenon than that between white and black in S.A.

beyond past injustices, the cultivation of the various moral discourses, the cultivation of individual responsibility and responsiveness, and a critique of the continuously rising tide of globalization and neo-imperialist forces[19].

The purpose of this focus derives from its ethical, educational and empirical approaches. With regard to ethics, both social and scientific ethics – especially bio-medical ethics – from within each of the religious formations of southern Africa need to be developed for the upholding of constitutional values and commitments. This, obviously, also has an educational component, in that ethical values in civil society constitute the commonly shared moral codes to which all subscribe irrespective of religious persuasion. Further, the purpose of this focus is to address social challenges such as gender, class and race disparities in religions and civil society and issues such as corruption, crime, violence and conflict amongst others.

Completed research has focused on 1) the history of the articulation of Southern African religious formations and civil society; 2) governance, morality and ethics; 3) citizenship and formative, constructive and critical perspectives from within religious formations and faith traditions; 4) socio-ethical transformation challenges in the different religions with regard to each of these three areas; and 5) bio-medical ethics.

Religion and Counseling

That indigenous cultures have not had access to training, theories, methods and skills development in the Humanities concerning personal, social formation and professional counseling is an understatement[20]. Colonialism and apartheid targeted indigenous populations and actively exploited them for their unskilled and mostly illiterate labour without any significant

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[19] In older terminology, there is the distinction between master and servant; citizens with means and subjects denied of their citizenship – see Mamdani (1996); and Hemson (1998).

[20] This means that, with regard to modern society and community in southern Africa, most people did not and still do not have adequate access to counselling systems and practices. Given our past legacies and the different kinds of trauma it effected in society, much of these social and mental traumas are still in need of redress concerning individual, family and group life; cf. Kasiram (1998; and 1999).

development of counseling mechanisms and institutions for people who severely suffered under these inhuman systems. Since this reality is further most forcefully brought to public and academic consciousness due to the devastating impact of the HIV / Aids pandemic, this hiatus presents itself to academia as one of the areas in dire need of redress[21]. Such redress at the current juncture needs to address the legacy of the past as well as lay the foundations for a new generation taking their physical, mental and social well-being into their own hands[22].

Students in the programme include community workers and involve practical work with communities – especially families. Religious organisations of both Eastern and Western religions have taken up the struggle to uplift and better communities with much zeal and expressed commitment to working alongside professionals and paraprofessionals to address the people's spiritual, emotional and social needs. Faith based organizations (FBOs) work within a variety of faith traditions to improve the

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[21] There is little doubt that we are living in a society that is facing serious dysfunction at many levels. In fact, there has been much talk and activity around issues of moral regeneration – which also involved the former and current presidents of South Africa as well as high profile politicians and religious leaders in South Africa. These challenges are compounded by the HIV/AIDS pandemic faced by the nation; cf. Kasiram (2006) where she addresses the need for arriving at practice possibilities that are inclusive of difference and transcend traditional religious divides in the interests of spiritual health and wellness.

[22] South African history has been fraught with problems of exploitation of the 'masses'. Such exploitation involved lack or absence of social and cultural services and limited or no infrastructure for everyday functioning. We have communities that are so seriously disadvantaged, that providing a beginning or entry point where change could be implemented, is sometimes considered an insurmountable challenge. Yet within such a depressed mode, we find community-based work by committed and energetic individuals and NGOs. Many of these leaders and activists, however, are in serious need of further education and training. In this regard, workers are joining hands and collaborate across the disciplinary divides such as in the teaming up of Religion and Social Work graduates and their collaborative development and expanding of their disciplines in practice (cf. Kasiram 2006).

quality of life of people. Due to its inclusiveness, as well as its flexibility to address a variety of systems and complex problems, most of such work is done within an ecological paradigm. Within this framework, research done intervenes at both microsystemic and macrosystemic levels.

Given the devastating impact diseases such as HIV/Aids have on southern Africa and that many religious people have not had access to psychological and social counseling skills development, the purpose of this focus is to train religious people in both these areas. They have been trained to constructively contribute towards preventive and curative counseling[23]. Not only disease, but also challenges faced by the different age and social group formations have necessitated this focus.

Completed research focused on the accommodating of spirituality as resource for mental and social health within counseling. Other completed research focused on 1) the developing of theories and models for the constructive accommodating of religious persuasion in counseling practices; 2) the development of such models for religions which did not have access to such theories and models under the previous dispensations; 3) the targeting of specific areas for such theory, model and practice development, in the areas of HIV/ Aids, pre-marital, family enrichment, teenage, work-life, old-age as well as illness and death counseling[24].

Religion, Globalisation and Poverty

While proponents of globalisation claim that it has expedited economic

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[23] Concerning religious persuasion and the different faith traditions, the problem is that most religious functionaries who do engage counseling practices, are not adequately trained for this important area of intervention in the social and mental health of the nation. Often, due to the fact that they are not well trained, some may cause more 'harm' than effectively assisting people.

[24] To this end, the programme has also empowered community counselors with knowledge and skills in working with people in meaningful ways. Topics such as divorce, abortion and sexuality that were previously considered 'no-go' areas by many faith-based organisations have been embraced by community counselors in a courageous effort to address the often private but also family and social traumas experienced in society.

growth, resulting in general wealth and prosperity for all nations[25] the reality is that globalisation has been accompanied by:

> a) a massive retrenchment of workers;
> b) a widening gap between rich and poor within and between countries;
> c) increased poverty on an international scale;
> d) increased exploitation of working classes in developing countries; and
> e) constraint on local production due to the monopolies of international corporations and the import of cheap processed goods from the east.

In this context, critics of colonialism view this phenomenon as a new form of colonialism and imperialism – neo-imperialism in short – with the progressive pauperization of local and indigenous communities. Moreover, 'First World citizens' are not concerned about the global effects of the systems they benefit from and this has caused scholars to call for drastic changes in international systems, attitude and practice. This transformation has to also factor in the change from commodity production through human labour to knowledge production and information management in the so-called knowledge economies of the world.

Even so, globalisation is also a religio-cultural phenomenon. To some degree, the media has facilitated the cross-cultural understanding of world religions and cultures. However, it has primarily promoted 'Western culture' at the expense of indigenous and minority cultures, or the fostering of alternative cultural formations. This reality, together with how affluence and cultural hegemony or endemic poverty and cultural depravity articulate, is an area which has received less attention than the focus on economic globalisation and international resource and labour exploitation[26].

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[25] For both affirmative and critical perspectives, see Castells (1983); Sklair (2001) as well as Arrighi (1996); Jameson (1997) and Muller *et al.* (2001).

[26] The eradication of poverty has become a priority for Africa in general. The success of the renewal, modernization and development in Africa, in fact, will be measured to a large extent in terms of economic growth, and the elimination of disease.

As part of the developing world, South African poverty[27] has not escaped the devastating impact of both economic and cultural globalisation. It is therefore understandable that trade unions and community structures have started to support the international campaign against globalisation. This drive derives from the international discontent with regard to the free market system or so-called neo-liberal democratic market capitalism. Internationally, there is a rising tide of movements working towards a more just, humane, and equitable system. Religious formations are playing and will in future continue to play an important role towards the development of such an economic system[28]. It will have to involve those most closely associated with grassroots life. They will do so at primarily two levels:

a) in contributing towards the debate on alternative models of economic and cultural development; and

b) in empowering impoverished communities to sustain themselves through the developing of sub-economies and sustainable livelihoods[29].

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[27] Recent studies point to a generic link between poverty (economic globalisation) and de- or aculturisation (cultural globalisation). Many intellectuals, therefore, are convinced that the eradication of poverty needs to articulate with local cultural resources. In the face of much negative commentary (cf. Saul 2005), the main assumption for this project is that it is especially religious organisations which can make an important impact in this area, because they are present and work at grassroots levels of society.

[28] This focus therefore engages the eradication of poverty from a religious perspective, importantly including that of the variety of African Initiated Churches and Religious Organisations as well as African Traditional Religion. Faith communities can make a valuable contribution in this regard and should be challenged to contribute to the prosperity, health care and food security of Africa. Much of the research is therefore collaborative – in partnership with religious institutions and leaders, as well as NGO's and FBO's providing relief.

[29] South Africa is strategically positioned to make a major contribution to the development in Africa not only because its leaders enjoy great respect in Africa, but also because of its well-developed infrastructure.

This focus[30] derives from the fact that the phenomenon of poverty must invariably be understood within the context of larger historical forces such as colonialism, apartheid and globalisation. Even as it is a local phenomenon, past and current regional and global imperatives necessitate its study within broader context[31]. Moreover, contributions religious people make to poverty alleviation derive from the fact that they per definition, often live and work among the poor. The purpose of this focus has been to assist religious people and religious formations in their facilitation of poverty alleviation and economic development. It has been both analytical and constructive and primarily addresses class disparity[32].

Completed and current research has focused on the economic and cultural problematics around colonialism, apartheid, globalisation and poverty. In addition, research focused on 1) the history, systems and practices of the articulation and intervention of religious organisations with regard to poverty; 2) the development of models and strategic interventions in rural and

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[30] South Africa's tertiary institutions for instance have the capacity for research that could be harnessed for the development of programmes for sustainable livelihoods throughout the continent. (Several thousand students from Africa annually graduate at South African tertiary institutions.) The significance of applied research by religious organisations in the context of socio-economic development cannot be over-estimated.

[31] It has been necessary to draw on expertise in the field of poverty alleviation both from theoretical and practical perspectives. Scholars, activists, relief workers and a variety of organizations working in communities – representing both the religious and secular sectors of society – have been engaged and provided source material for this research. Experts have been invited to present theoretical insights as well as practical guidance from the fount of their own expertise in working in and with impoverished communities.

[32] The main problem in this regard, is the impoverishing of sub-Saharan Africa due to the predatory nature of its political elites. The countries' own peasantries and industries are not empowered and no requisite infrastructures developed. Rather, political elites nationalize institutions for their own benefits and enrichments, and extract surplus even from the poor and especially the African peasantry – who is also not allowed to own the land they work (cf. Mbeki 2005; Saul 2005).

urban economic and cultural development; 3) the study of formative and critical perspectives on poverty within faith traditions; 4) the study of existing practitioners and programmes in the field of Religion and poverty alleviation as well as job creation; 5) and the study and furthering of sustainable development in the face of forces of underdevelopment and cultures of poverty.

The Southern African Religion and Culture Encyclopaedic Theoretical Framework

Since the colonisation of Africa, southern Africa has been an ever-increasing pluralistic society. Colonial policy nonetheless inhibited the developing and flourishing of religious formations and cultures other than the colonial –- particularly indigenous ones. This reality had far-reaching consequences in society. It impacted on how the different religions are understood or misunderstood today, the development of government policies which restricted indigenous cultural formation development[33] and the progressive development of an inclusive society. The system of apartheid pursued by the successors of the colonial governments systemically entrenched many prejudices and stereotypes of the southern African communities and stunted development. The old constitutions made it difficult for the natural and unforced interaction of cultures and religious groups within society. However, the new constitution provides for freedom of expression, religious practice and cultural development. The South African constitution and government policy now provides for a free and open pluralistic society in which all people can pursue their respective cultural and religious traditions

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[33] Cf. Chidester's hypothesis (1996: 233ff), with regard to the progressive subjection and control colonization exerted on the indigenous population. Prior to subjection and control, colonial agencies could not detect the presence/ existence of 'religion' amongst the indigenous populations (the phase of 'denial'). In this, they worked with a Protestant-induced set of criteria of what constitutes 'religion'. However, as the indigenous populations were progressively subjected by colonial powers (the 'losing of frontiers') colonial protagonists – including missionary agents – identified the existence of 'religion' amongst them – 'denial' lost its strategic 'value'.

and identities without prejudicing the other[34].

Although in theory this change has provided opportunities for communities to interact freely in an open society, in practice, many prejudices and stereotypes about each other continue to exist. The encyclopedic theoretical framework deals with this complex issue in the southern African community and the need to renegotiate on issues such as race, gender, religious fundamentalism, ethnic identity, the status of immigrants (or refugees) and their many negative consequences for society as these articulate with core religious beliefs and practices. In the past few years, global society has witnessed religious discontent – with religious organisations being implicated in acts of violence. Such events call into question the historical role that religion plays in society. As we move toward building a civil society based on tolerance and respect for each other's traditions and beliefs, sustained and reasoned understanding of our religions and their various roles in society need to be investigated, analysed and explained. In addition, Religion as discipline engaging public issues must be developed together with these focuses.

In the interests of these objectives, the focus in this area has been the developing of relevant knowledge through both the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. The main aim has been to develop a comprehensive, multi-religious body of knowledge concerning the history of religions as it pertains to social formation and transformation in southern Africa as well as the developing of the religions in terms of current socio-cultural challenges. Since religious formations have played and still do play a crucial role within the southern African polity, this broad research focus has started to constructively contribute towards cross-religious understanding, education, respect and tolerance.

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Given staff shortages, the postgraduate Religion Education programme has not been developed to the same degree as the Religion and Social Transformation Programme. Even so, from the few Masters and Doctoral studies completed and currently engaged, we can already identify some

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[34] Cf. Kumar (2006) for a selection of studies on current systems of pluralism in the world. For an analysis from a Muslim perspective, see Dangor (2009).

important aspects[35].

In line with the new education policy of South Africa, the constitution of the country is secular – fashioned along the lines of secular society – but provides for religious tolerance and freedom of religious practice[36]. It is not secular in the same way that the constitution of the United States of America is secular[37]. Voiced accordingly at the 'Launch of The

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[35] This is an important area in need of tertiary scholarly development, especially as it impacts on the schooling system in South Africa. The subject of Religion Education forms part of the Life Orientation programme at school throughout all twelve years of schooling. Since 2005, the subject of Religion Studies is a fully accredited Grade 12 subject. Pupils can study this subject as a main subject in Grades 10 – 12 alongside the likes of Mathematics, the languages and Physical Sciences.

[36] An analogy is the Canadian constitution that provides for multiculturalism and religious pluralism, although it does not go as far as the U.S. constitution that restricts the states' involvement in religious matters. (For South Africa cf. Asmal and Sachs below.) There are different models of secularism and the South African constitution is secular in so far as it provides for religious and cultural diversity. The Indian constitution provides another analogy – similar to the South African Constitution it too operates with an inclusive secular notion of state.

[37] Operating in a Human Rights framework, the National Policy on Religion and Education (NPRE) promotes the fundamental values of the Constitution, builds national unity, aims at the fostering of common national values with regard to citizenship, and fosters the learning about the various forms of cultural diversity in the country, including religion. While facilitating transformation from the previously racist cultural ideology to an open, democratic society, learning about diversity is central to both the Constitution and the policy on Religion Education. When we founded our programmes in 1999, the formulations eventually accepted in the NPRE in 2003, were present in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa but not yet as precisely as in the Religion Education Policy. It was only through the efforts of a variety of organizations and lobby groups that the new education policy was eventually accepted and passed by government in 2003. Cf. Chidester (2008) for an overview of the processes that lead to the eventual formation of the NPRE.

Policy on Religion and Education in Parliament', Cape Town, South Africa, 9 September 2003[38], the then Minister of Education, Professor Kader Asmal, said:

> In many countries, the practice still exists, by which a state designated religion dominates the education system. We have lived through this, and reject it. In other countries, including the United States, the separation of church [read religion] and state is so severe as to deny the obvious interaction between growing up, being educated, and the formation of beliefs and values. We have decided to adopt a *co-operative model*, with the state and church [read religion] in harmony, *existing separately in our specific spher*es, and working collectively in *shared spheres of interest*, like education.

Referring to the significance of the launch of the National Policy on Religion and Education, he continued:

> In doing so we declare to the nation, and to the world, that we have put behind us the days of religious intolerance in education, of sanctified repression and abuse in our schools, and we intend to work towards seeing religion as a *tool of freedom*. We are convinced that this policy, in its guiding principles, sets the tone for a *healthy relationship between religion and education* that will be good for education, good for religion, and good for our schools in a democratic society.

What is evident from the minister's speech is that a few of his own assumptions that lead to the formulation of this policy, was 'the religious nature of our society', that this has to be engaged 'with sensitivity to the different beliefs of *our young citizens*', thereby referring to the person of most concern, the pupil in the multi-religious classroom: 'No child today should feel ashamed or excluded because his or her beliefs are not those of the majority in a school'. He continued:

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[38] See: http://www.espshare.org/download/attachments/1803660/Speech_By_ The_Minister _Of_Education_09Sep03.doc (accessed 16 July 2011).

> Whilst the policy protects learners from discrimination it also enables them to engage with religion –- as a rich heritage, as a source of moral reflection, and as a resource for spiritual formation –- in ways that are consistent with the educational aims and objectives of an integrated school curriculum. In this way, teaching and learning about religion and religions will form part of the curriculum, to provide learners with the skills they will need to contribute to our diverse and changing society[39].

'Religion Education' in South Africa has its beginnings in the work of 1970s South African exiled academic, Basil Moore. Banned in 1972 for his editing of *Black Theology: The South African Voice*, Moore positioned the book in the framework of Black Consciousness, and South Africa's history of struggle against oppression and quest for justice and reconciliation. Prof Kader Asmal's positive appraisal of Religion Education also derives from the work of famous Religion Studies scholar, Ninian Smart who advocated a non-confessional and positive impartiality to the study of religion, religions and religious diversity in the interests of learning about difference and identity. While recognising and respecting the diversity of religions, the diversity of theological and confessional commitments, and the various positive contributions of the religions to our country, the educational objectives of the Policy on Religion and Education 'charts' a course *for our schools* to make their own, distinctive contribution to teaching and learning *about religion* in ways that will celebrate our diversity and affirm our nat-

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[39] The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, and values of citizenship, human rights, equality, freedom of conscience, and freedom from discrimination played a central role in the policy's approach to religion in schools. Asmal said: 'To promote a particular religion, or a prescribed set of religions, or a particular religious perspective, would place our learners, who come from diverse religious, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds, at risk of discrimination and prejudice'. As such, no one religion is regarded or treated as superior or inferior to another. This perspective is central to the NPRE which was finally accepted by Parliament in September 2003, under the leadership of then Minister of Education, Mr. Kader Asmal.

ional 'unity'[40] (e.a.).

This concurs with the 1990 view of recently retired Constitutional Court judge Albie Sachs. Already in 1990, Sachs stated: 'We want a secular state in South Africa, but a secular state with religion, indeed with many religions [...]'. In addition to a number of issues he then touches on, Sachs also pointed to five 'constitutional options' for 'governing the relations between religious organisations and the state'. These are:

☐ Theocracy, that is, the acknowledgement of religious organizations as the holders of public power and of religious law as the law of the state.

☐ A partly secular, partly religious state, with legal power-sharing between the state and religious institutions –- each exercising constitutionally recognized power in its own sphere, usually with religious bodies controlling family law and, possibly, criminal law, and the state controlling all other aspects.

☐ A secular state with active interaction between the state and religious organizations, which not only have a constitutionally recognized sphere of autonomy, but collaborate with the state in tasks of mutual concern.

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[40] This was the product of the work of the 'uniquely South African body', the Standing Advisory Committee on Religion and Education that 'shows that religion can be handled respectfully, with integrity, and within in the framework of tolerance and human rights enshrined in our Constitution'. The main elements of the policy are:
• Definition of Religion Education: 'teaching and learning about religion, religions, and religious diversity in South Africa and the world'.
• Framework for schools: providing guidelines 'in regard to voluntary Religious Instruction outside of the formal school curriculum, and for Religious Observances during school hours'.
Clarity of guidelines concerning application: the policy's 'application in public and independent schools, as well as in public schools on private property, to ensure that there is no misunderstanding about what elements of the policy apply in the latter two instances'.

☐ A secular state in which religious organizations have a tolerated, private sphere of action, but there is no overlapping or joint activity with the state.

☐ A secular state in which religious organizations are repressed.

In his analysis of these options, their related questions, and assessment as to the most desirable – that would attract most support – Sachs' view was that:

> [T]here is no scope at all for the suppression of religion, nor is there any possibility of having a state religion in South Africa, nor of giving religious organizations judicial or other authority beyond the voluntary authority accepted by members. It would seem that in the light of South Africa's history and culture, something along the lines of the third option mentioned above would achieve the greatest support, namely, *a secular state with active interaction between the state and religious organizations*[41] (cf. Sachs (1990: 43, 45, 46).

'[T]eaching of religion' is the 'responsibility of the home, family, and religious community' and that the responsibility of the school, is to teach 'about religion and religions'. This latter practice requires the school to see religion education not as, 'catechism or theology, defined as the formal study of the nature of God and of the foundations of religious 'belief', but rather as to 'contribute' to the wider framework of 'education as defined in international standards'[42].

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[41] Cf. also Smit and Chetty (2009) that critically reflect on the dynamics of the teaching of Religion Education at school up to 2009.

[42] Cf. reference to the UN Special Rapporteur for Freedom of Religion or Belief in Asmal above. Three important scholarly resources for Religion education are: 1) the *Manifesto on Values, Education, and Democracy*; 2) the edited *Numen* volume on 'The Challenge of Religious Education for the History of Religions' – cf. especially Alberts, Editorial; and Chidester (2008); and 3) the edited volume of *Alternation* on 'Religion and Diversity' by Smit and Chetty (2009).

Johannes A. Smit

Conclusion

In conclusion, the overall approach in the programmes constitutes processes of engagement with students and communities as well as through students, with actual development and service delivery work according to their specific career paths. A very large proportion of Honours, Masters and Doctoral students have come from actual jobs and careers. They enrolled in our programmes with the aim of enskilling themselves at the university through our religiously-accommodating programmes. This has led to the production of graduates who returned to their communities and continue their work and careers in religion-specific or inter-religious environments, but now in a much more informed, and trained way. This engaged approach constitutes an intervention in our collectively determined postcolonial and postapartheid world with its specific historically-determined challenges.

More specifically, a main aspect on this level is that much of our students' research follows participatory models that involve communities. These projects impact positively on both students and communities in a variety of ways. Students are better enskilled for their work and careers in actual service and working conditions. Communities, again, are not studied 'objectively' and never able to own the knowledge they produce as part of the participatory research models. Rather, since they are involved in the processes of knowledge production, researchers help them to create new and more informed social systems and structures which can be owned, administered and managed. This is a primary assumption of research undertaken in the Program for Religion and Social Transformation. This process ensures that data is not gathered and stored away in libraries, but disseminated and given back to the community so that the community can act on it in an informed, consultative, and orderly way. In these ways, we prepare students to apply their knowledge and skills for the benefit of our multi-faith communities, also meaning that the levels of knowledge and skills feeding into communities do not differ from one area to another, from the erstwhile white areas to the black areas, or more importantly, the rich and the poor communities. The assumption is that the same standards and processes of knowledge production must feed into the communities – especially in both urban and rural traditional African communities where students come from these areas.

In addition to many of the scholarly outcomes of the programmes our

students and we ourselves have experienced so far, is the important fact that they foster inter-religious understanding, tolerance, and trust. The cultivation of relationships of trust in the public domain aim at collective solidarity and engagement of commonly shared socio-cultural challenges and problems. Adherents to religions can make their own individual contributions but our programmes also importantly foster collaborative engagements and contributions. The programmes not only provide for the accommodating secular space and the freedom to collaboratively work towards commonly shared secular goals, but also empower students through the relevant knowledge and skills – which are provided irrespective of race, class, or gender. It is hoped that such an approach will continuously make the hidden and latent ideologically-infused covert systems and practices redundant. Prejudices and biases as well as the infringement of social apparatuses on individual and collective aspirations and dreams are openly acknowledged and recognised as part of the human condition. Yet, this opens the space for the free development of trust, respect and the cultivation of dignity, in the place of 1) resistance and struggle as in the days of the apartheid regime; and the 2) continuously manoeuvring forces ('old boys networks', 'cabals', etc. emblematic of post-apartheid transformation forces jostling for position and acquisition.

The cultivation of trust takes its cue from those who struggled together irrespective of ethnic, class, gender, religious or other disparities and divides, and the continuous resuscitation of the common project of the developing of a common South Africa. At base lies the common sense that derives from and is founded on the recognition of the vulnerability of all involved, the vulnerability of the common project, but also that equal recognition that collective achievement only derives from individually- and collectively-motivated participation in the fostering of the common goals of excellence and achievement through collective synchrony. As such, we also foster an open, honest and integrity driven social whole emanating from the aspiration to maximise individually-motivated contributions to common objectives. This, we hope will in time translate into an ever larger commonly shared objective of an efficient, high profile, community- and context-relevant, research-led university deriving from the personal commitment of both staff and students, as well as the democratisation of knowledge and institutional practices. In these senses, knowledge and power are not struggled for, taken hold of, and exercised through measures of control and

ideology in the interests of only a select few, but openly distributed, and democratically shared.

As more and more students complete their studies, we hope that the programmes in Religion at our university will be a constructive contribution not only to real transformation in society but a fostering of tolerant, cooperative, integrated communities. A central feature of these communities will be the recognition and respect of the dignity of the other, and knowledge and understanding of difference and diversity. These communities hopefully, will live according to our national values, hopes and aspirations, and as one nation, pro-actively and constructively collaborate with one another irrespective of their religions, gender, class, or race.

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Johannes A. Smit
Dean and Head of School
School of Religion, Philosophy and Classics
University of KwaZulu-Natal
smitj@ukzn.ac.za