

## Appendix XII

### Research Programme: Contextual Islamic Theology

#### 1. Research Areas

Research can be done in four areas of Islamic theology:

- (1) Exegesis of the Qur'an, *tafsir* and *usul* (hermeneutics)
- (2) *Aqida*, *kalam* and dialogue
- (3) Ethics and *Fiqh*, Public Domain
- (4) Practical Theology.

These four areas have been chosen with a view to the profile of the CIT: Islam in the West European Context. The research includes the description of texts, views and facts but its constant goal is to develop the tradition in the current context.

The focus of research at the CIT lies, of course, in normative positions regarding faith and ethics and with regard to practical policy. This research is academically challenging and innovative and urgent as far as society is concerned.

Students can also study for their doctorate in the four areas mentioned. They are supervised as much as possible by a CIT instructor and, depending on their area, by a researcher at an Islamic university or another expert from the VU University. The training of young researchers is a priority.

#### 2. General Characteristics

The four areas use different methods:

- 1) Literary and historical methods and, in connection with the contextual exegesis of the Qur'an, hermeneutical methods as well
- 2) and 3) systematic-theological and philosophical methods
- 4) empirical and hermeneutical methods.

A sound knowledge of the sources of Islam is presupposed in 2, 3 en 4.

In all four areas the question of contextualisation is central; the appropriation of the tradition within the West European society.

Empirical, qualitative research is being used more and more in research into doctrine and ethics (2, 3). Reflection on the contextual appropriation of the Islamic tradition demands insight into the actual situation of the Dutch context in general and the situation of different Islamic groups in particular.

All research is embedded in VISOR. Wherever its research is strengthened as a result, the CIT collaborates with other researchers. Empirical research has to do with research in Islamology, practical theology and/or sociology of religion. Normative research involves researchers in Islamic countries at prominent Islamic universities and researchers in Christian theology.

The CIT staff discusses papers and drafts submitted by staff members bi-weekly. Students in a research project and students who are writing MA theses are present at these meetings. With some research projects the student can choose a sub-topic as the subject of his or her thesis.

### 3. Specific Projects

#### 3.1. Islam and Democracy in a Global Culture

Dr. Yaser Ellethy is working on a monograph called *Islam and Europe: Traditional and Modernistic Interpretations (tafasir) on Democracy and Globalism*.  
(Research Field: Exegesis of the Qur'an and *tafsir*.)

Dr. Ellethy is researching how traditional and modernist Islamic currents interpret the Qur'an in the development of their views of globalisation and democracy, and the values that lie at the foundation of those views

The method followed here is a comparison of the meanings of the Arabic words in the Qur'an and the meanings that are attributed to the Qur'anic concepts in the later formation of the tradition. This analysis of the shifts in meaning is applied to the concepts that are fundamental for the views of globalisation, democracy and the values connected with those concepts in traditional and modernistic currents. Some preliminary studies have already gone to press.

- 1) The Dilemma of Language
  - a) Prolegomena
    - o Language and Religion
    - o Islam and Arabic Language
  - b) Reading Sources between Impartation and Interpretation
    - o The *Tafsir* Tradition and Language Adaptability
    - o The Muslim Intellect and Islamic Textuality
- 2) Classical Sources and Interpretations about Development, Tradition, Compromise and Limits  
(relations with other peoples, Qur'anic sources, pre-Qur'anic sources, development and innovation, openness to reform)
- 3) On Globalisation  
(unity of humankind, otherness, *umma*; Islamic identity in a global world)
- 4) On Democracy  
(theocracy, caliphs, individual and common good, *Sûra*)
- 5) The Paradigm of the Muslim Brothers: A Case Study

#### ***Planning: 2008-2011***

After finishing the study mentioned above, dr.Ellethy will work on the Principles of Koran Exegesis (Usul At-Tafsir), and especially the relation between text, context and tradition in exegesis. The central question in this project is: Do classical works on tafsir have the same authority as the texts of the Koran itself? This project studies the process of mediation between text and reader/believer and the contribution of the exegete as a mufassir ("mediator"). Different views on the relation between the texts themselves and contexts will be described and analysed, e.g. also in Islamist and fundamentalist traditions. One of the main questions is to which extent the exegete has freedom in the contextual interpretation of the holy scripture.

#### ***Planning: 2012-2015***

#### 3.2. Medical-Ethical Issues in Islamic Perspective

Dr. Marzouk Aulad Abdellah is preparing a monograph on Islamic ethics and rules in the moral issues that have arisen in current medical practice. He is looking, of course, at the West European context and, in particular, Dutch legislation and discussions. His approach is to go behind contemporary traditional or liberal

positions to get to the ethics of the Qur'an and the intentions of later classical Islamic legislation. He connects the results of these studies of the Arabic sources to discussions in other worldview traditions and Dutch legislation. This study thus contributes to bringing Islamic medical ethics up to date. The collaboration agreements with institutions in Morocco and Egypt are relevant because such questions are posed in academic hospitals. Medical-ethical questions constitute one of the topics in the proposed conference at the end of 2010, in collaboration with the Islamic Universities League (cf. below, section 4).

**Content** (Research Field: Ethics and *Fiqh*)

- 1) Islamic ethics and *Shari'ah*
- 2) The status of embryos
- 3) Abortion
- 4) Organ donation
- 5) Euthanasia
- 6) Islamic ethics in the Western context (including, the concept of humanity)

The chapters follows a similar structure:

- a description of the problem; closer definitions of concepts
- the status of medical knowledge and the moral dilemmas
- the relevant ethical principles in the Qur'an and *hadith*
- classical positions in the different Islamic law schools
- hermeneutical starting points for contextual positions (*usu'l*)
- Dutch legislation and rules
- views from other worldview traditions
- evaluation of moral considerations in the discussions, and conclusion from Islamic perspective

Dr. Aulad Abdellah has already published an article on the on the topic of the introduction. He has discussed other topics in courses and has supervised MA theses on them. Students can write dissertations on sub-topics.

***Planning: 2008-2013***

### **3.3. Dialogue and *Kalam***

In line with earlier publications, Prof. Dr. Henk Vroom is collaborating on a limited research project commissioned by the *Centre for European Studies* on the relationships between governments and Islamic organisations in France, the Netherlands, and Germany. The purpose of this comprehensive project is to gain insight into how, on different levels, governments can promote or hinder the contextualisation and naturalisation of Islam (2009). In addition, Dr. Vroom is also collaborating in an international project on *Dialogue and Hermeneutics* (2009-2010) and is preparing, on the basis of articles, two books on 'pluralism and dialogue in the public domain' and 'the place of theology in a pluralistic world'.

Together with Muslim researchers, since 2009 he has supervised students who want to specialise in *kalam* and Islamic philosophy. If they follow a PhD programme after completing their MA, experts from Islamic universities abroad also supervise them.

**Provisional Content of a Book on Dialogue:** (Research field: dialogue)

- 1) Relevance, definition of concepts, outline of book
- 2) What does religion/worldview do with/for/to a person? What is a worldview?

- 3) Is all faith coincidental? (contingency of views/relativism)
- 4) Can I understand another? Learn from others? 'untranslatable' paradigms, dialogue, respect, consensus forming and critique
- 5) Difference of opinion, conflict, blasphemy, public domain
- 6) Conflict and dialogue (*Dar*/Jerusalem: city of peace? the ambiguous role of religion, causes of conflict, contribution to reconciliation)
- 7) The government: religions as a factor to take into consideration, 'neutrality'
- 8) *Laïcité*, theocracy, common values
- 9) 'Types' of dialogue (types: their 'public', strengths and weaknesses, dimensions of existence).
- 10) Can the state exist without religion/worldviews? Society and responsibility? 'Religion without any ulterior motive' / transcendence

**Planning: 2010-2011**

### 3.4. Islamic Religious Education

Linking up with earlier publications they have produced, Dr. Arslan Karagül and Dr. Stella van de Wetering are writing a book on Islamic religious education in the Netherlands. (Research Field: Practical Theology.)

*What are the objectives of raising children in the Islamic faith and Islamic religious education, in general and particularly in the Dutch context? How can these objectives best be achieved?*

- 1) Objectives of Islamic religious education and religious training
- 2) The place of Islamic religious education (IRE) within the Dutch educational system
- 3) The theory (importance, purpose, content, method, etc.) of IRE and the issues that arise in a multicultural setting
- 4) IRE in public schools and in mosques in the Netherlands
- 5) The preferences of Muslim parents with respect to religious education in the public elementary schools – empirical research under the supervision of Drs. Redbad Veenbaas<sup>1</sup>
- 6) IRE in special schools and the future of Islamic schools in the Netherlands.

They are analysing different 'knots' in the policy, including the policy regarding religious education in the public schools and the 'stakeholders' in this area, and the advantages and disadvantages of separate Islamic schools and the discussions surrounding these schools.

They are also collaborating on a topic for the intended conference at the end of 2010, in cooperation with the Islamic Universities League (see below, section 4).

**Planning: 2009: nos. 2 and 5; 2010: nos. 1, 2, 4, 6.**

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<sup>1</sup> Drs. Veenbaas is doing a 'Need Research into Religious Education in Slotervaart'. A questionnaire was sent to parents of the six public schools in Slotervaart to determine their need for religious education. The Slotervaart district commissioned this study. The law allows for possibility that parents organise this education themselves, whereby the school has a facilitating role.  
*Relationship to Islamic theology:* it concerns primarily Muslim parents. The research is especially relevant within the framework of practical theology: the educative transfer of Islam in the context of other religions and beliefs about life.  
*Scientific relevance:* an empirical, descriptive contribution to this topic of religious education at public elementary schools. The research is embedded in the wider research project, already discussed, of Dr. Karagül and Dr. Van de Wetering. Planning: October-December 2009.

### **3.5. Muslims in the Netherlands: Formation of Opinion in Turkish Mosque Communities. Questions to and Answers by Imams**

Via quantitative research Drs. Fatih Okumus has established the subjects on which members of Turkish mosque communities seek the imam's advice most frequently. This concerns primarily the religious duties such as prayer and fasting, and matters that are related to the place of men and women in society and the family. From qualitative research it appears that the more serious issues are somewhat different from how they are stated in the questionnaires that were filled in. Okumus shows how the initial traditional culture of the 'guest workers' generation' has changed, and how especially younger people are asking different questions. Against the background of the Turkish Islamic views he describes how imams approach those questions.

*Planning: 2007-April 2010.* (Research field: Practical Theology)

### **3.6. Supervision of Young Muslim Detainees for Islamic Spiritual Caregivers: What Role Does Faith Play?**

The research by Drs. R. Veenbaas will be done among Muslim detainees up to about 25 years old and their Islamic spiritual caregivers. It is still in the planning stage. Drs. Veenbaas has years of experience with youth research and is an prominent expert in the situation of Islamic youth 'between two cultures'.  
(Research field: Practical Theology)

*Relation to Islamic Theology.* This research is particularly relevant within the framework of practical theology, both descriptive and normative: description of the practice of the dialogue between Islamic spiritual caregivers and Muslim youth and the methodical reflection on and elaboration of this.

This research is extremely relevant for answering the question if religion plays a positive role in the supervision of delinquents. In France the prevalent idea among policy makers, both in the state and in Islam, is that Islam does not play any role in the guidance of young people whose parents come from Islamic countries. The reason for delinquency is sought in the building up of backgrounds. That is why no positive role is accorded to Islam in the supervision of these youths. The same view is prevalent in local policy regarding youth care. This view can be tested empirically by research into the spiritual care for Islamic youth in penitentiaries.

*Scientific and Social Relevance:* the research offers insight into extremely current issues such as:

- What role does Islam place in the views and behaviour of Muslim youth with criminality problems?
- What role can Islam or Islamic spiritual care play in the supervision of these young people and what are the results of this for the young people?

*Planning: 2010-2013.*

### **3.7. Gender issues and exegesis**

After finishing the book on religious education dr. van de Wetering will continue her studies over the years on women issues and Koaran exegesis, and start with an article on Women unfriendly exegesis of divine revelation:

Basic conceptions in the Qur'an concerning gender questions

- 2) Gender questions and exegesis
- 3) Reinterpretation of some verses
- 4) Conclusion

*Planning: 2012-2014*

### **3.8. Islamic Spiritual Care**

Na afronding van zijn studie over islamitische godsdienstonderwijs (i.s.m. dr. Van de Wetering) zal dr. A. Karagül eerst een enigszins vergelijkbaar boek schrijven over islamitische geestelijke verzorging. Een dergelijke studie bestaat niet; dr. Karagül zal in mei 2010 gastcolleges over dit onderwerp verzorgen aan de theologische faculteit van de Universiteit van Ankara. Belangrijke vragen zijn: 1) wat is de specifieke inbreng vanuit de Islam en welke specifieke vormen krijgt de geestelijke verzorging?; en: 2) Welke kenmerken van heel de plurale beroepsgroep deelt de islamitisch geestelijk verzorger met andere geestelijk verzorgers? Wat empirisch materiaal betreft wordt dit onderzoek gesteund door de uitkomsten van het beschrijvende onderzoek van dr. R. Veenbaas over de islamitische aspecten van de geestelijke verzorging in penitentiaire instellingen (2010-2013).

Voor dit onderzoek zal dr. Karagül ook aansluiten bij overleg in de beroepsvereniging van geestelijk verzorgers, en studies van prof. dr. R. Ganzevoort, die een college Theorie van de Geestelijke Zorg II verzorgt en expert is wat betreft de verhouding tussen algemene en specifieke aspecten van de geestelijke verzorging in de plurale samenleving.

Planning: 2011-2014. Daarna hoopt dr. Karagül aan een boek te werken met levensvragen die in de islamitische geestelijke zorg worden besproken (kalam in relatie tot geestelijke zorg). Studies over geloofsvragen in de geestelijke begeleiding van moslims in Westerse context zeer uiterst zeldzaam als ze al bestaan.

## **4. Two Conferences**

In 2010/2011 two dialogue conferences will be held in collaboration with the Islamic Universities League in Cairo between Muslim and Christian researchers. The conferences will each have three sub-topics (with each resulting in a volume, possibly with separate publication in English and Arabic). English will be used at the conference.

The topics are as follows:

- 2010:**
- 1) The idea of God (attributes of God / names of Allah)
  - 2) medical ethics
  - 3) religious education.

There will be 7 sessions for each of these topics (and a keynote speaker), with a Christian and Islamic research on the same topic at each session. There is limited room for short papers

Authors in mind:

- \* specialists from the institutions with which the CIT has collaboration agreements and other specialists from Islam
- \* specialists from the VU (theology/medical faculty) and some foreign scholars

**2011:** 1) basic constitutional values  
2) moral principles of banking  
3) gender issues

Authors in mind: among others, VU experts from the faculties of law, social sciences, and economy.

## **5. The Further Distribution of Knowledge**

The CIT staff advises Islamic organisations in the Netherlands. In 2008 and 2009 Dr. Ellethy gave a series of four public lectures on Islam at the VU. A study day was held in 2008 on the introduction of *shari'ah* with prominent experts from Malaysia, Nigeria and the USA. Dr. Aulad Abdellah is collaborating on the course 'Church and Law' (collaboration between Law and Theology). Dr. Ellethy gave a short general course on Islam at the VU in 2008 and 2009. In 2008-2009 dialogue meetings were held in five places in the country after the publication of the volume (which was quickly sold out) on the topic of 'Jesus and Mohammed'. On 23 November 2009 the CIT collaborated on an afternoon meeting on 'citizenship and religious education' in cooperation with the Council for Christian MBO and the ROC (Regional Education Centre) Amarantis. Most of the meetings are organised in collaboration with *VU Connected*.