

## THE STUDY OF RELIGION IN INDEPENDENT NAMIBIA

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### Abstract

*The complex agenda of post-colonial Namibia has stimulated debate on the issue of a viable paradigm for the teaching and study of religion in a country with a strong Christian tradition and ethos, but also a progressive secular constitution and an emerging new multi-faith reality. This article reports on some practical and theoretical considerations that were taken into account in developing an appropriate paradigm for teaching and studying religion, on various levels and for different purposes in independent Namibia.*

### Introduction

Inter alia, the new paradigm in Namibia for teaching and studying religion intends to:

- \* replace the hegemony of a Christian national ideology with a flexible multi-faith approach, including comparative studies and emphasis on religion-society reciprocity;
- \* back up the new curricula for Religious and Moral Education and Religious Studies in schools, and prepare teachers to handle the new teaching challenges;
- \* provide theological courses that are broadly based in ecumenical approaches, relevant to the needs of the churches and society, academically sound, and innovative in e.g. the areas of race, class and gender;
- \* inculcate the neglected but rich heritage of traditional African religion and culture;
- \* incorporate insights from related fields such as hermeneutics, literary and linguistic studies, ideology critique, mythology, social analysis and contextual studies;
- \* provide specialised foci for students interested in different professions, e.g. in teaching, ministry and broader society;
- \* develop pedagogical and facilitating skills that may enhance learner participation and critical thinking.

## 1. The new Namibian Situation regarding the Study and Teaching of Religion

### 1.1 The colonial legacy

Namibia has only gone through the threshold of independence in 1990, and its people are still engaged in an intricate process of shrugging off the balast of many past influences, including the effects of the dreaded Christian national ideology which produced apartheid in South Africa and all its 'colonies', such as Namibia. The agenda of the historical and comparative study of religion, including e.g. the interaction between Christian and African traditions, and interfaith dialogue between Christians (of different denominations) and Jews, Muslims, and other faith groups, is still very young in Namibia.<sup>1</sup> Curriculum development, at all levels, especially in the field of religion, thus faces the challenge to replace dehumanising paradigms, without throwing the child away with the bath water.

For the study of religion in the new Southern Africa it is important to acknowledge that the South African hegemony produced a pervasive, intolerant *culture*, based on a 'Christian' ideology of separation of cultures and the uncontested supremacy of western ideas and practices, myths and rituals.<sup>2</sup>

Before South Africa, as it were, colonised the hearts and minds of the Namibian people, there was a short but powerful period of German influence, going hand in hand with intensive missionary activity by various groups, including Rhenish, Finnish, Methodist and Roman Catholic missionaries.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Namibia was not spared the impact of 'Christian missions on indigenous cultures'.<sup>4</sup>

From a colonial perspective this impact was more successful in Namibia than perhaps anywhere else in the world. Christianity is still claimed as the religious alliance of up to 90% of the population. From an indigenous perspective, however, this religious hegemony included very negative scenarios as well, including Herero genocide, and the abuse of pietist forms of Christianity to appease people while robbing their land and destroying their cultural identity. While the Namibian people were deprived of their land and culture in the name of the Christian God (in colonial guise), new kingdoms, based on doctrines deriving from Rome, Skandinavia, Germany and Britain, were established, demanding the people of Namibia to discard their old customs, myths, rituals and identities in favour of a new 'Christian' culture.

When Germany lost the First World War, the South Africans, initially hailed by some as liberators, became the new Christian oppressors, simply abusing the same

1 It is important to note, however, that the emerging multi-faith reality, even in such an overbearing 'Christian' country as Namibia, has soon after independence become apparent on 'street level': the first mosque is being built in a respected residential area in Windhoek, near a number of prominent embassies, and Bah'ai posters in Independence avenue have become a commonplace reality in the Namibian capital.

2 For an overview of the colonial history in Namibia, see Serfontein 1976; Töttemeyer 1977; Katjavivi 1988; and Du Pisani 1988.

3 For the missionary history in Namibia see De Vries 1978; Buys & Kritzinger 1989; Kritzinger (undated).

4 For the damaging results of some of these missionary activities in Africa, see Cox 1991; Hodges 1978; and Majeke 1986.

western, theocratic imperialism of the mind (and the body!) to incorporate Namibia and its people as a fifth province of the white controlled South African empire.

Under National Party rule Namibia and its people became the testing ground for the notorious apartheid system, and when SWAPO started the liberation struggle, leading eventually to armed conflict in the mid sixties, Namibia also became the testing ground of South Africa's formidable war machinery. Even Christian churches became the target of violent attacks in retaliation of black church leaders' opposition (on the basis of their understanding of God and the Christian Gospel) of the ideological system which took away people's freedom to define their own identity, culture and future.<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2 Independence and a new agenda

Through the determined efforts of the Namibian people, ever-increasing international pressure on South Africa, and the implementation of United Nations Resolutions, Namibia gained its independence in March 1990, immediately implementing a model Constitution, guaranteeing freedom of speech and religion, and all the basic human rights.<sup>6</sup> The new SWAPO government based its policies on the ideal of national reconciliation, speedily embarking on wide-ranging educational reforms to eliminate discrimination, but also to foster national unity and a culture of mutual respect and tolerance.<sup>7</sup>

It is within these parameters that the Department of Biblical Studies, established as part of the pre-independence Academy of Tertiary Education and incorporated into the new University of Namibia in 1992 (as a new Department of Religion and Theology), could at long last see some of its dreams fulfilled. Members of the Department associated themselves openly with the liberation struggle, and had to pay the price in terms of smear campaigns, intimidation and even damage to property. However, they also realised that it was simply not enough to promote and live out an 'alternative' Biblical and Christian ethos. What needed change was the whole old paradigm still prevailing in the schools and popular culture, as far as the study and understanding of religion and morality was concerned.<sup>8</sup>

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5 See the UNIN publication *Namibia 1986*, chapter 1, for a concise history of the resistance. Namibian church leaders, such as Bishop Auala of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the North (ELCIN), became famous for their strongly-worded appeals directed to South African Prime Ministers to stop the war, bloodshed and illegal occupation of Namibia. For documentation of the churches' role in the struggle, cf. Töttemeyer 1977; *The green and the dry wood* 1983; Kairos werkgroep 1983; and Katjavivi et al 1989.

6 See the *Constitution of the Republic of Namibia*, particularly chapter 3. All the internationally acknowledged human rights are entrenched in the Constitution, and cannot be altered, even with a two-thirds majority.

7 Within the first few years after independence, the Ministry of Education and Culture, under the auspices of the Minister, Mr Nahas Angula, published a number of study and policy documents dealing with future educational priorities and strategies, starting with the influential *Education for All* (1990).

8 See e.g. Smit 1990c:29-43 and 1991:51-67, and Deist 1990:6-15 and 1991:32-50.

### 1.3 University, religion, church and society

The Department therefore, as early as 1984, started with research into the viability of ecumenical study programs in theology and the wider sphere of religious studies, identifying three broad areas of society to be served: *ministry* (with ecumenical, non-denominational, contextual programmes relevant to the needs of churches in Namibia); *education* (with new study programmes in religious studies, and religious and moral education); and *society at large* (with programmes catering for the liberal arts interest in religion, within a historical, comparative and contextual framework).<sup>9</sup>

When finally the new curricula, as developed by the new Department of Religion and Theology, were accepted by the University Senate, it happily coincided with the implementation of new school curricula in the field of religion. These pre-tertiary curricular developments, in which some members of the Department were also deeply involved,<sup>10</sup> led to what can only be described as a total paradigm switch in the study and assessment of the role of religion in society.<sup>11</sup>

In the schools, where previously, in the South African tradition, Biblical Studies was offered as the only promotional subject dealing with religion, and Biblical Instruction was the only form of religious and moral education received by all (except those who were formally barred from it by parents), a new scenario is now unfolding. The promotional subject has now become Religious Studies (focussing on major religious traditions such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam, but also providing for local religious traditions to be studied through course work).<sup>12</sup>

The non-promotional subjects are now Religious Education (for Grades 1-7) and Religious and Moral Education (for Grades 8-10). In these subjects learners are stimulated to share their own ideas and traditions with the class, within a framework of active involvement by all in different learning experiences (discussion, writing, music, drawing, drama, posters, group assignments, community work, etc.). The teacher is no longer the authoritative 'instructor', but has the role of facilitator. The focus (especially in the Junior Secondary classes, Grades 8-10) is on moral issues which are relevant to the life-experiences of, or the new challenges facing, the learners. The school is fulfilling its *educational* role, and is not abused to act as a back-up or even surrogate for any dominant religious tradition.<sup>13</sup>

9 Copies of the Calendar inscription for 1995, as approved by the University Senate in May 1994, and explaining the rationale of the syllabi, are available at the Department of Religion and Theology, UNAM, Private Bag 13301, Windhoek 9000, Namibia.

10 I was chairperson of the first Curriculum Committee (of the Ministry of Education and Culture) for Religious and Moral Education, and Dr Paul Isaak, who is now chairperson of the Department, served as member on this 12 person committee.

11 See Farley 1983 and 1988 for the new role and paradigm required from theology in society and at the university.

12 The syllabus followed for Religious Studies in Grades 11 and 12 is that of the Cambridge IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education), slightly adapted to include Namibian traditions through course work.

13 'Home' and 'church' respectively are thus challenged to play their legitimate and crucial roles in the religious and moral education of the new generation. This corresponds closely to what has been identified by Ninian Smart as the challenge for Religious Studies in the new South Africa, in his paper at the inauguration of the Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa, at the University of Cape Town (Smart 1991).

## **2. Research and Curriculum Development by the Department**

### **2.1 Viability studies**

Convinced of the need for proper study programs in the field of religion and theology, at the University of Namibia, the Department of Biblical Studies started a thorough investigation into this matter towards the end of 1984.<sup>14</sup>

The first stage of the research consisted of a carefully executed viability study into the needs of churches and other interested parties, and the assessment of their reactions to a proposed model of a Biblical, ecumenical and contextual study programme in theology, supplemented by broadly-based studies in religion. The results of this viability study (including a 'contact document' sent out to interested parties, as well as a detailed questionnaire), have previously been reported.<sup>15</sup>

The outcome of this study, in summary, was the general consensus which emerged, viz that a Faculty or Department of Religion and Theology should be established at Namibia's only university.<sup>16</sup> It was, firstly, already clear at that stage that a mere Department of Biblical Studies could not cater for the diversified needs of the Christian churches and other faith groups, the schools, society at large and a broadly-based 'liberal arts' education. Secondly, through the feedback from churches, the need for theological training (with an ecumenical approach to Biblical and Christian Studies, which also included as an option the study of African religion and culture) has been established beyond any doubt. Thirdly, as part of the holistic study of humanity and society, there was a clear need within the Faculty of Arts for a non-partisan study of the role of religion in society (including at least all the major religions relevant in the African context).<sup>17</sup>

### **2.2 Situation analysis and priorities**

In the second phase of the research project, viable programs, curricula and syllabi now had to be investigated. This, obviously, had to be done on the basis of an implicit understanding of various factors which would determine priorities and emphases for the future. Although severely hampered by politically and theologically conservative constraints (and more than often: hazards) imposed upon its efforts by the South African backed 'interim government' and their agents, the Department set about its

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14 The Department was at that stage part of the university section of the so-called Academy for Tertiary Education. The University of Namibia was established after independence, in 1992, incorporating the Academy. The research project of the Department was facilitated by a contract researcher with experience in ecumenical theology, Prof D.J. Smit from the University of the Western Cape, and his recommendations played a significant role in the outcome and application of the research.

15 Cf. Lombard & Smit 1990a:51-58; and Lombard & Smit 1990b:1-81.

16 At first the notion of a Department of Religious Studies, that would also teach theological courses, was debated and accepted, but in a next round of decision-making it was decided to clearly state the two legs on which the Department would walk, in the designation of the Department: Religion and Theology.

17 The Department was fortunate in that its own preference to deal with these different needs on the basis of one consolidated and well-coordinated teaching paradigm for religion, was strengthened by the need to rationalise its planning (due to limited resources). Thus, the University of Namibia, at least thus far, has been spared the fruitless in-fighting between rival departments (with their vested interests) in the teaching area of religion.

task on the basis of a projected scenario for Namibia which included inter alia the following elements:

*Political:* The new study programmes in religion had to be prepared for the 'new' Namibia which would hopefully emerge after the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 435, on the basis of internationally acknowledged elections of a representative government, that would govern in terms of the Constitutional Principles agreed upon between SWAPO and South Africa in 1982.<sup>18</sup> It was anticipated that the new Namibian Constitution would ensure basic human rights, including religious freedom, to all citizens. Our Department expected such a scenario also to include the need for a bigger symbolic presence of African culture in all its manifestations.

*Educational:* The Department worked on the calculated guess that the promotional subject Biblical Studies would be replaced by Religious Studies, and that the Christian national inspired Biblical Instruction would have to make way for broadly-based courses in Religious and Moral Education. This assessment of the future needs in the field of Religious Education would undoubtedly lead to resistance in some church and social circles, but was in line with what happened all over Africa-moving-south, and was the only consistent option to be foreseen in terms of a new 'secular' Constitution.<sup>19</sup>

*Academic:* The Department realised that it would have to be able to defend, rationally, the role it defined for itself in terms of the function of an African university vis-à-vis society and its needs, and the tax payers' money. Given the pervasive public reality of religion in Africa, the challenge would be to teach religion in a non-partisan way, empowering Namibian teachers, preachers, etc. to understand religion and society in their complicated inter-wovenness, and to 'use' religion and morality with respect and tolerance to enhance the common humanity of all citizens, irrespective of faith or creed.

*Theological:* In spite of tremendous pressures on the Department to stay in line with traditionally acceptable approaches to religion and theology, conscience and reality demanded close cooperation with the ecumenical Council of Churches in Namibia, which at that stage was one of the major internal influences for political change in Namibia. What was required theologically was a truly ecumenical and liberative

18 Since members of the Department were heavily involved in the activities of a study and pressure group, working towards the implementation of the United Nations Peace Plan for Namibia, the Namibia Peace Plan 435 Group (NPP 435), they were well-informed about the negotiations, especially those dealing with a future constitution. As a matter of fact, NPP 435 published a book dealing with the peace plan, propagating the acceptance of the 1982 Constitutional Principles as a basis for a new Namibian Constitution - which eventually happened. Cf. Lombard, O'Linn et al. 1986.

19 In Namibia, as elsewhere in Africa, the term 'secular' does not imply a total separation between church and state, as e.g. institutionalised through the American First Amendment (which led to religion being kept out of state schools, thus fostering the myth of a 'neutral state' and religion as a 'private affair'). 'Secular' in the Namibian context means that the churches operate in a state which takes the public reality of religion seriously (inter alia through guaranteeing real freedom of religion as a public reality), but does not give preferential treatment to one religion or denomination, and thus does not profess to be Christian or Muslim or whatever. For the realities concerning Religious Education in Africa, cf. Ter Haar 1990 and 1992; and Nondo 1991.

approach, which would not exclude the evangelical and African understanding of God's close involvement in this world. As far as the theological part of the proposed new study courses were concerned, the viability study already showed that three key words elicited general consent from the churches: the theological programmes would have to be 'Biblical', 'ecumenical' and 'contextual'.

### 2.3 A hermeneutical-ecumenical-contextual theological paradigm

In July 1986, exactly at the time when the Department started planning its new programmes, a major ecumenical conference on the future of theological education in Africa took place in Ghana. The concluding and summarising paper of that conference, by Prof John Pobee, Director of the WCC Programme for Ecumenical Theological Education (PETE), strongly confirmed the results of our own research, and the opinions expressed by a body of African and international experts consulted.<sup>20</sup> Behind the *theological* programmes, developed by the Department, thus lies what can be described as a hermeneutical-ecumenical-contextual paradigm.

#### *Hermeneutical and Biblical:*

In a situation where the centre of gravity of world Christianity is moving south, Africa included, and where an exceptionally high percentage of the Namibian population is said to be Christian, the Bible could be expected to function at the heart of theological studies.<sup>21</sup> The centrality of the Bible and the study of the Bible in African theology is underlined in many publications.<sup>22</sup> Even in so-called post-modern debates on the hermeneutical agenda in theology it is stressed that there are two 'constants' in all theology: the present context of the interpreter, and the (Biblical) tradition interpreted.<sup>23</sup>

The message character of the Bible has always been taken seriously within the vibrant church life in Africa, and Pobee urges African theologians to develop their 'natural' kerygmatic approach with vigour, as a much needed contribution towards a

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20 See Pobee 1989, and also Pobee and Kudadje 1990. Members of the Committee of Experts consulted included respected Namibian theologians such as Drs Ngeno Nakamhela (currently General-Secretary of the Council of Churches in Namibia), Dr Paul Isaak (then still lecturer at the Lutheran Seminary, Paulinum) and Pastor Fred Joseph (AFM), together with well-known South African theologians such as Professors John de Gruchy and Charles Villa-Vicencio (UCT), Prof Bernard Latagan (US) and Dr Allan Boesak (then still Moderator of the Dutch Reformed Mission Church). An Advisory Committee of twenty members were also consulted regularly, including figures such as Dr Beyers Naudé and Dr Frank Chikane, and well-known international theologians such as Prof Hans Küng (Tübingen), Professors Wolfgang Huber and Theo Sünnermeyer (Heidelberg), and Prof Canaan Banana (Harare). In the course of the research various African universities (e.g. in Kenya, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Botswana and Zambia) were also visited and consulted.

21 Kretzschmar 1986:14; Pobee 1989:5.

22 Cf the bibliography in Mbiti 1986. See also Parratt 1987:147-53; Schoonhoven 1980:1-49; and Becken 1974.

23 Tracy in Küng & Tracy 1989:35: 'For the fact is that, whatever our more particular theology, each theologian must interpret both 'constants' (the 'present world of experience in all its ambivalence, contingency and change' and 'the Judaeo-Christian tradition which is ultimately based on the Christian message, the Gospel of Jesus Christ').' For trends in post-modern theology cf. Burnham 1989; Griffen 1989; Taylor 1984; Raschke 1982.

viable ecumenical theology. This is, according to him, what Africa owes the world universal and the future of world Christianity.<sup>24</sup>

This daunting hermeneutical task for African theologians can be appreciated in context when one realises the methodological predicament of current western scholarship. Although there is an ever-growing awareness that theology, in all its disciplines, is a hermeneutical exercise (i.e. based on a search for understanding, and thus requiring interpretation), an intense debate is developing on the usefulness of the various exegetical tools developed primarily in the western world:<sup>25</sup> historical criticism, which focuses all attention on the background *behind the text*; structural analysis, which is in danger of getting *trapped in the text*; and deconstruction, which *relativises the text* and its unique communicative potential almost entirely *in relation to other texts*.<sup>26</sup>

It would seem as if the African approach of *communicating with the text* (on the basis of belief in the dialogical potential of the text), forcing the text to speak to the audience *in front of the text*, has a lot to offer the hermeneutical debate.<sup>27</sup> In spite of the danger of fundamentalism which frequently accompanies 'evangelical' African approaches, the focus on praxis, liberation, political ethos and moral education, which is also part of the African theological heritage, is hailed within certain so-called post-modern circles as being extremely relevant.<sup>28</sup>

It is within this context that African theologians have been warned against 'the North Atlantic captivity and inheritance' of African theology, which manifests itself particularly through the 'scientific methods' of the Enlightenment, which have not always proved themselves as relevant tools in the African context; and the legacy of liberalism, which tends to separate the individual from the community and the church from the state - jeopardising the more holistic African and Biblical view of humanity.<sup>29</sup>

Recently, however, as Smit has indicated, new currents in both the hermeneutical tradition (Thiselton and Tracy) and rhetorical criticism (Wuellner and Fiorenza) have been converging in a rediscovery of the *narrative power* of the Biblical text, which may be explored through community-based dialogue (cf Wittgenstein's language

24 Pobe 1989:5. See Muzorewa 1990 and Pero et al 1988 for other formulations of Africa's mission vis-à-vis the First World.

25 See Tracy in Küng & Tracy 1989:42. For an analysis of religion and the 'western mind', cf. Smart 1987.

26 What is said here should not be seen to imply that African theologians can simply side-step the hermeneutical debate as represented e.g. by Alter 1989; Bernstein 1991; Bloom 1986; Culler 1975, 1981 and 1982; Eagleton 1978 and 1983; Frye 1982; Habermas 1984 and 1987; Kristeva 1980; Ricoeur 1974, 1977 and 1981; Ryan 1982; Silverman 1989; Thiselton 1980; and Wellek 1986, to mention but a few. The point is that the African understanding of 'understanding' itself, once intellectually related to this debate, could help the global debate to avoid one-sided hobbies and pitfalls, which are not helpful to the interested 'reader'.

27 This approach, although not (yet) consolidated into a new hermeneutical 'method', is in line with new literature on the re-discovery of 'narrative' and 'reader response' as crucial keys to Biblical hermeneutics, see e.g. Alter 1981; Eco 1979; Fiorenza 1984; Genette 1980; Iser 1978; Lanser 1981; Mitchell 1981; Ricoeur 1984, 1985 and 1988; Scholes & Kellogg 1975; and Tompkins 1980.

28 Lamb in Küng & Tracy, 1989:96-103.

29 Pobe 1989:2-4.



games) and imaginative, metaphorical reading (Tracy, McFague).<sup>30</sup> What is taken seriously in the current debate on Biblical interpretation is the public, social and political responsibility of exegesis, or the socio-ethical effect thereof within the community of readers. It is now being realised that the Biblical stories, which were dissected through critical scholarship, but told, sung and even danced in the vibrant African communities of faith, could indeed communicate much better when approached in a playful, communicative African way. New theological courses in Biblical and Christian Studies, in Africa, should therefore try to inculcate these new insights, without discarding the positive contributions which historical and literary criticism have made and may still make towards understanding 'the text'.<sup>31</sup>

Simultaneously, however, it should be clearly stated that the so-called hermeneutic of suspicion, initiated by e.g. Freud, Marx and Nietzsche, need not and should not be banned from Biblical scholarship in Africa.<sup>32</sup> In fact, people from the so-called Third World have had first-hand experience of how the Bible can be abused ideologically, and have developed a keen ideological-critical sense in their thinking about God and society.<sup>33</sup> African theology, in its openness to story and myth, political involvement and life-encompassing culture, offers a fruitful terrain for socio-historical and cultural analysis of the Biblical narrative, and ideology critique of its use and reception.<sup>34</sup>

Through the concreteness of religious experience in Africa, and so many traditional customs which are much closer to the Old and New Testament world than modern city life,<sup>35</sup> African theologians may have the 'natural' responsibility to salvage the life-relatedness of obscured Biblical messages, linking kerygma not only to the church, the cross and salvation, but also to the more encompassing realities of the Kingdom of God,<sup>36</sup> wisdom,<sup>37</sup> and holistic human liberation.<sup>38</sup>

### *Ecumenical*

An important factor in the continued colonial captivity of the African churches is the persistence of denominationalism, 'which is not only wasteful, but also obfuscates the

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30 Smit 1990b:16-28.

31 Taylor (1984) and Burnham (1989:introduction) explain how these trends in the post-modern paradigm, based on the textuality of reality (Lindbeck 1984), have reinstated the 'power of myth' (Campbell 1988), the imaginative potential of metaphorical God-language, and the formation of character and social ethos through Biblical narrative (Hauerwas 1981).

32 Cf Lamb in Küng and Tracy 1989:66.

33 Cf Leatt et al 1986; Camara 1969; De Vries 1978; Majeke 1986; Dickson 1984:74-88.

34 See Gottwald 1984 and Kraft 1979 for good examples (initiated by 'First World' theologians, but worked out in cooperation with partners in different contexts) of this kind of critical Biblical approach in the field of social history and cultural analysis.

35 See Biko 1978; Tutu in Becken 1973:40-6; Dickson 1984:97,141ff.,179-80; Dickson in Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:95-118.

36 Pobee 1989:8-9; De Gruchy 1979:195-237

37 Pobee 1989:1.

38 Cf. Tutu on the concept of viability in Becken 1973:34-9; Tutu in Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:162-8; Boesak in Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:169-75. Setiloane (in Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:59ff.) is of the opinion that the liberatory African ideas were taken seriously by Western theologians after the Bangkok meeting of the WCC on mission and evangelism, in 1972, after the 'radical' idea of a Moratorium was propagated. Mahan & Richesin 1981 is proof that that breakthrough did occur towards the late seventies.

Christian message and ministry of reconciliation'.<sup>39</sup> In Namibia, although the mainline churches cooperate on many agendas, denominational interests still dominate in the area of theological training. The university clearly can only offer ecumenical programmes that cannot cater for specific denominational accents, and the Department has unequivocally stated so right from the beginning.<sup>40</sup>

As a matter of fact, in Africa most universities have opted for Religious Studies departments to cater for the multi-faith situation which prevails in most countries. Theology, in the modern world, simply cannot be practised in isolation.<sup>41</sup> In the task of interpreting the Christian tradition (or any other faith tradition) for the praxis of believers, in the contemporary world and society, this interpretation must relate to other faith and ideological traditions. In Africa, 'other faith traditions' will definitely include Judaism, Islam and Hinduism, but also African Traditional Religion. It is very important that a survey course in the major religions will be offered in the first year, with possibilities of in-depth concentration in later study years.<sup>42</sup> Fortunately, much has been done and written about the challenge of the pluralistic world of belief in Africa, from which 'late-comers' can benefit.<sup>43</sup>

The cultural and religious pluralism in Africa, asking for ecumenical and multi-faith approaches, includes two very important groups which cannot be allowed to

39 Pobe 1989:4. The Dutch Reformed Church presents an extreme form of denominationalism and isolationism, but also protectionism and state-favouritism, as evidenced through the totally separate structures that were set up for theological education for different ethnic groups, cf. De Villiers 1975. Of course, at UWC a new 'ecumenical line' is now developed, and at different other places a new debate on rationalisation is taking place, not only to 'open up' ecumenically, but also to address the issues on the agenda of a modern, secular state.

40 This was done in the 'contact document' sent out to the offices of almost all the officially established churches in Namibia, including all the churches affiliated to the Council of Churches in Namibia, all the Reformed churches, and all other major churches, including those within the 'evangelical' tradition and some African Independent churches. The document spelled out the advantages of an indigenous Namibian training programme: local training would be cheaper and more directly relevant to the needs of people; it would facilitate practical training in the country; it would be more cost-effective, cutting out unnecessary duplication (e.g. library facilities); ecumenical training would enhance cooperation and counter denominational fragmentation and rivalry; university training would ensure high standards and specialised, inter-disciplinary approaches, as well as access to post-graduate studies; a balanced model of cooperation between churches and the university would ensure maximum joint control and mutual benefit; special arrangements for acknowledgement of extra courses, which may be required/offered by certain churches, may be discussed. The document emphasised that 'Biblical' was not to be understood in a fundamentalist way, but in line with established critical scholarship; that 'ecumenical' was not to be seen as superimposing a new anti-denominational super-theology, but as a joint effort by various denominations to do justice to the contributions (towards a more encompassing perspective on God and the world), made from different backgrounds, mutually qualifying the other partners' strengths and weaknesses; and that 'contextual' could never mean narrow-minded parochialism, but rather applying global perspectives within a relevant, grass-roots understanding of the questions and needs of people living in a particular context.

41 Pobe 1976 and 1989:2; see also Dickson 1984:203-28. For challenging analyses of the necessity for Christianity to participate in the new global debate about God, cf. Smith 1981; Samartha 1974; Race 1983.

42 Such a course is included in the first year of the subject Religion, Morality and Society, which theological students would be advised to take. Students who major in this subject have ample opportunity to choose the focal point of their studies, especially through various mini-thesis options.

43 Cf. Mbiti 1970, 1974; Parratt 1987:12-57; Tlhagale & Mosala 1986:73-130; Ammah in Pobe & Kudadje 1990:98-119; Young 1985; Pobe 1976; Tshibangu in Appiah-Kubi 1979:109-116. For the current debate on pluralism in theology, cf. Tracy 1981 and 1989; and Anderson and Stransky 1981.

operate in isolation: the African Christian Independents and the so-called Evangelicals.<sup>44</sup>

As far as the Independent Churches are concerned, the indications are that mainstream theology is beginning to take serious cognisance of the valuable contributions which these churches, rooted in African praxis, can and should make towards a theology of all God's people.<sup>45</sup>

As far as the Evangelicals are concerned, they are a major force in African theology, but frequently suffer from politically conservative alliances with fundamentalist groups pouring in money from the First World. As Bosch, Kraft and Gifford indicate, the choice for Africa should not be between God and the world, or between politically progressive Ecumenism and fundamentalist Evangelicalism.<sup>46</sup> Rather, a proper Biblical spirit should pervade the ecumenical endeavour and revitalise social concern and activity in the body of Christ in this world.

Within such an encompassing theological framework the specific contributions of Liberation Theology and Gender Theology should be taken seriously. The theological agenda in Africa, as elsewhere in the world, should be one of healing and total liberation.

Other crucial tasks for ecumenical theology in Africa would be to foster a critical and self-critical faith;<sup>47</sup> to develop the public character of theological concern,<sup>48</sup> and to contribute towards a new common ethos or language with which the marginalised and the privileged could identify,<sup>49</sup> and within which the so-called development task may be performed with renewed energy.<sup>50</sup>

#### *Contextual:*

According to Pobee the major challenge for theology in Africa would be to re-contextualise the Good News, 'so that the Word may become flesh in Africa too'.<sup>51</sup>

This re-contextualisation would entail *inter alia* that a deliberate praxis-oriented theology be developed,<sup>52</sup> rooted in African tradition and experience. This theology

44 In Namibia the Oruano church and the AME church represent two large church groups in the tradition of African Independency, having broken away from the Lutheran and Methodist mainline respectively. The Independent churches operate under an umbrella called the Association of African Independent Churches in Namibia, and they frequently participate in ecumenical endeavours. The Evangelicals have recently succeeded in uniting themselves in the Namibian Evangelical Fellowship, even with participation of some Pentecostal groups. They are also now in the process of providing joint theological training at the Namibian Evangelical Theological Seminary, having taken over the Windhoek Theological Seminary from a manipulative Dutch Reformed initiative. Some of their ex-students are already carrying on with their studies at the University. For literature on the importance of the African traditional religions in Africa, cf. Gehman 1989; Idowu 1975; Olupona 1987; and Parrinder 1962.

45 See e.g. Appiah-Kubi 1979:117-25; Kretzschmar 1986:43-57; Martin in Pobee & Kudadje 1990:18-31; Sprunger in Becken 1973:163-73; Daneel in Hofmeyr & Vorster 1984:36-79.

46 Bosch 1979; Kraft 1979; Gifford 1980.

47 Cf. Van Huyssteen 1986 and Theissen 1979.

48 Cf. Stackhouse 1987 and Ritschl 1984.

49 Cf. Smit 1986. Cf. also Mott 1982 on the role of a Biblical ethos in change in society.

50 See De Gruchy 1991, for an assessment of the positive role which the Reformed tradition can play in this process, once it succeeds in liberating itself from its own restrictions.

51 Pobee 1989:3. For this to happen the concept of 'inculturation' should be explored: cf. Marty 1993; Geertz 1975; Hirmer 1981.

52 In the spirit of McKann & Strain 1985.

would have to incorporate the agendas of total human and ecological liberation,<sup>53</sup> including the liberation of women,<sup>54</sup> as a well-developed political ethos for action in the world.<sup>55</sup> It would have to include notions of self-reliance,<sup>56</sup> and the agenda of reconciliation and justice,<sup>57</sup> focussing on important current issues in Africa, the so-called Third World, Southern Africa, and Namibia.<sup>58</sup>

Contextual theology would have to develop self-conscious methods of 'constructing local theologies', mastering the tools of social and cultural analysis.<sup>59</sup> Such a theological agenda cannot be handled without inter-disciplinary work, involving the Social Sciences. The course package for theological training would therefore have to include the study of languages, but specifically also a choice of various Social Sciences, and ideally also the study of Philosophy and Myth.

In line with the main areas which should be covered by theological education, as distinguished by Tracy, Rossouw, Bosch, Fiorenza and others,<sup>60</sup> Pobeë distinguishes at least four types of theological training for which special foci should be provided: church-related occupational roles; education-related occupational roles; academically-oriented occupational roles, and a more diffused group of occupational roles, e.g. those related to mass media, welfare work, adult education, etc.<sup>61</sup>

Another very important aspect of contextual orientation in theology is recognition of the partners: the churches, the ecumenical (and inter-faith) partners, and the state. Since university education is a function of organised society, theological education at university should also be in tune with the ethos and spirituality of society at large, which does not mean it should simply adapt to what seems to be the newest craze.<sup>62</sup>

53 See Tutu and Boesak in Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:162-75. See also Carmody & Carmody 1993; Ellis 1989; McFague 1987.

54 Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:145-54.

55 Cf. Bonino 1983; Segundo 1984; Stackhouse 1987.

56 Banana 1982; Kalilombe in Appiah-Kubi & Torres 1979:36-58.

57 Smit 1986; Kretzschmar 1986:17-8; Iileka 1991 and 1994.

58 Suffice it to say here that since the *Belhar Confession* (1978, and officially: 1982), the *Kairos Document* (1986), and the *Road to Damascus Document* (1988), and all the contextual theological work done by e.g. the Institute for Contextual Theology, addressing the wrongs in the old South Africa, the whole scene has changed: The Eastern Block has collapsed, Reaganism and Thatcherism have come and gone, Namibia and South Africa have been liberated, a post-modern world is emerging, and although the world is still saturated with injustice, evil and inequality, new paradigms are required to cater for the new agendas. An important aspect which contextual theology would have to address, is the one of empowerment: empowering people in their contexts to analyse their situation, to read their faith texts meaningfully, and to read the signs of the times, developing their own strategies for action in the world, incarnating the will of God.

59 Cf. Berger & Luckmann 1967; Berger 1970, 1980; Schreier 1985; Stackhouse 1988; White 1989 (discussing Habermas' recent work on justice and modernity); Wuthnow et al 1984 (providing a very useful summary of the socio-cultural approaches of Berger, Douglas, Foucault and Habermas).

60 Cf. Rossouw 1990; Bosch 1991 (in which he inter alia discusses the positions of Fiorenza and Tracy). Bosch himself distinguishes the three areas *theoria*, *poiesis* and *praxis*, reflecting the three 'publics' of theology and theological education: the academy, the church and society.

61 Pobeë 1989:10.

62 The Dutch theologian A.A. van Ruler has constantly been challenging the so-called 'duplex ordo' in state universities, under which the church subjects such as systematic theology and church history were not seen as 'science' and had to be taught separately by 'church professors'. He maintained that theology, as such, is not a matter of the church, but really a matter of the state, or as he called it 'christianised society': culture without theology would be shallow and without basis and direction (cf. Van Ruler 1969a:38-9; 1969b:78).

## 2.4 A multi-disciplinary setting for the study of religion

Apart from the more specific theological considerations, as set out above, the Department of Religion and Theology incorporated other needs and approaches in the process of curriculum development, e.g. those related to the training of teachers for religious subjects at school, and the more secular interest in the role and function of religion in society. It has already been pointed out that also for theological students exposure to comparative religious studies, African religion and culture, languages and social sciences, was identified as an important curricular factor.

If the Department could therefore develop curricula and syllabi that provided various modules from which 'customers' (whether churches or individuals) could choose study packages, tailor-made to suit their respective needs, maximum flexibility and effectivity could be assured, even within quite severe financial and staffing restrictions. This is indeed what happened: apart from Biblical and Christian Studies (which will form the core of the theological degree), African Religion and Culture is presented from the second year onwards, and Religion, Morality and Society from the first year. The latter two subjects could become majors within the ordinary bachelors degree, or can be chosen as minors within the theological degree, depending on choice and focus of study.

Originally the offerings presented under Religion, Morality and Society were presented by two separate subjects: Religion and Society (which included elements of Religious Studies, social ethics and practical theology) and Religious and Moral Education (focussing on teacher training and moral issues). However, after careful consideration, it was decided rather to offer various choice modules covering all these areas, exactly to ensure more flexibility, depending on candidates' preferences. Of course, when hopefully the University will eventually implement a fully modularised offering of all course materials, even more options could become possible. The Department has already planned its courses in terms of three trimester courses per subject per year (at least).<sup>63</sup>

Ideally, the Department would have wished to extend the study possibilities in what could be called the 'liberal arts interest in religion', normally covered by Religious Studies. In principle, in terms of the rationale followed, it should be possible to debate the viability of theological studies in other major religions, and it will remain a priority to have an expert in comparative religious studies appointed in the Department. At present, however, the first priority within the limited staffing options, i.e. to implement a staff development programme for a Namibian to eventually take full responsibility for the teaching of African Religion and Culture, is well taken care of. This subject is developed as a new, full-blown subject in its own right, catering for the renewed interest in African religion and culture.

Against this background it can be stated that, since Namibian independence, a whole new scenario as far as the study of religion within the African context is concerned, has been unfolding in Namibia. It is obviously significant that the study of African religious traditions has an equal place next to Christian Studies in the

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63 In Religion, Morality and Society it already offers a choice between different modules from the second year onwards, cf. the Addendum giving an overview of all course offerings.

curriculum. However, these subjects are not offered as rivals. They are both offered in recognition of the fact that the one without the other will lead to a skewed picture within the African context. And they are offered within the wider context of 'Religion, Morality and Society', by a Department of Religion and Theology, situated within the multi-disciplinary setting of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

### 3. Details of the new Study Programmes in Religion and Theology

It is impossible to convey the substance of the extensive submission that served at Senate, spelling out the details of the new programmes in Religion and Theology at UNAM. The *Addendum* supplied here, summarising the course offerings, will have to suffice for this purpose. However, a few comments, touching on the rationale, qualifications and core content of the new programmes may be helpful.

#### 3.1 Rationale for the study of religion and theology at UNAM

Since the place and function of religion (including the Christian religion, which has almost become a state religion) will and should be debated in the new South Africa, it may be interesting to share some of the considerations reflected in the intense debates we had on these issues at Faculty and Senate level at the University of Namibia.

The first consideration was that the new Department that would cater for the study of religion and theology would be known to provide in specific, well-established needs. The viability study, the feedback from questionnaires and the advice of experts all supported the rationalised model developed for theological training, teacher training and liberal arts study of religion.<sup>64</sup>

The second matter which received scrutinising attention was the question about the legitimacy and the necessity of religious and theological studies at university level.<sup>65</sup> It was clearly underlined that these subjects could not be studied at a modern, secular university on some specific (or hidden) confessional basis. However, it was also pointed out that, in terms of modern theories of science, even the secular search for truth could not be understood as a neutral, value free enterprise.<sup>66</sup> The positivist notions about science, as developed in the nineteenth century, according to which 'science' was equated with speaking about 'positive facts' (on the assumption that religion and God were merely matters of private opinion), have finally been overtaken by the post-modern paradigm.<sup>67</sup> Not only did the university as idea and reality originate, to a large extent, from the debate on God and morality, but up to this day leading universities all over the world have dynamic, pace-setting Faculties or Departments of Religion/Theology, where religion is studied in all its various facets as an integral and crucial part of human reality.<sup>68</sup> In the newest paradigms of modern

64 The proposals were e.g. discussed with and endorsed by ASATI, SACTE and the Theological Committee of the Council of Churches in Namibia, before they were presented to the University bodies.

65 For an intriguing answer to this question, cf. Cobb 1985:104-19.

66 Cf. Van Huyssteen 1986; Barbour 1971:122-4; Botha 1984.

67 Cf. Küng & Tracy 1989.

68 Cf. Stackhouse 1988:157: 'Believing that religion is the most significant aspect of life, and holding that knowledge of the *logos of theos* is possible (within limits), modern theology was born - the first of

science it is readily accepted that all scientific endeavours are theory-laden; embedded in value horizons, which should be explicated clearly in terms of assumptions and hypothetical approaches to the realities that are being studied - whether these are physical, human or metaphysical.

The arguments for studying religion properly, within the main stream of 'academy', are however not only historical and theoretical, they are also cultural and contextual. It is simply a fact, even after many centuries of modern scientific enterprise, that the world's basic religious texts still function as fundamental texts for human self-understanding.<sup>69</sup> Their dynamic 'Wirkungsgeschichte' in human history simply cannot be denied and should be studied seriously, not only in the private realm of personal myth or ecclesial seminaries or sectarian ghettos, but preferably in the public realm of the 'universitas'.<sup>70</sup> When the cultural realities 'God' and 'religion' are not freely and publicly studied at the university, according to all the well-tryed, but also new and experimental plurality of approaches and methods; when the challenging voices of Marx, Freud, Nietzsche, Weber, Habermas, Mead, Parsons, etc. are avoided, as could easily happen when theological debate is relegated to small seminaries; when religion is not recognised as a public reality and driving force... then the healthy process of secularising and liberating the human mind will not be able to penetrate the churches and organised religion. But then the university will also not fulfil its cultural and contextual role in society: the churches will be left to their own denominational kingdoms; the schools will probably be indoctrinating our children with new but uncritical and unchallenged ideas on 'religious and moral education', and state and society will be entangled in all the new agendas without a debated moral vision, struggling with 'the naked public square'.<sup>71</sup>

A final perspective should be added to the argument: the important one of the democratic freedom to scientific debate and research. The state has the responsibility to provide for the structures necessary to pursue open, inter-disciplinary debate and research, also in this crucial area within the humanities and social sciences: the public reality of religion in society.

### 3.2 New qualifications in religion and theology

The Department of Religion and Theology at UNAM has started its new programmes in 1993. On offer is a four year B.Th. degree, supplementing the existing three year B.A. (which may soon also become a four year B.A. Religion, pending university decisions on the basic degree structure and core curricula), a Post Graduate Diploma (for students with an acknowledged three year degree who wish to further their studies, e.g. towards Master degree studies), and a three year Diploma in Religion and Theology. A submission by the Department for implementing Masters degree

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the litter, and in some ways the mother of those forms of modern jurisprudence, art, medicine, astronomy, physics, and social sciences that are universal in influence.'

69 Cf. Cambell 1988, who firmly believes that this 'power of myth' will endure. It has become quite fashionable, and even profitable, to publish compendiums of 'world scriptures', cf. Smart 1983; Kramer 1986; Smart & Hect 1993.

70 Cf. Lindbeck 1984.

71 Cf. Neuhaus 1984, especially chapter 5, see p. 86; also cf. MacIntyre 1981; Bloom 1987.

(M.Th. and M.A.) by course work or research, and doctoral studies in approved topics, are currently awaiting final university approval.

For the B.Th. the main focus on Biblical Studies (soon to include Biblical Languages) and Christian Studies (which includes historical and systematic theology, and ethics) can be supplemented through various modules in the two remaining subjects offered: Religion, Morality and Society, and African Religion and Culture. The syllabi of the latter subjects are developed in such a way that they offer modules relevant both for teacher training (for the school subjects Religious Studies as well as Religious and Moral Education) and for theological education. Apart from historical, phenomenological and comparative studies in religion, the subject Religion, Morality and Society offers modules in Practical Theology and Social Ethics. Through selection of choice modules from the four subjects offered (plus other subjects offered by the Faculty), students interested in occupations in theology, education or broader society can make up their own study packages.

Diploma students who pass their third year with 60% may be considered for entering the final year of the four year degree. Students passing their final (fourth) year B.Th. with 60%, and with three (in stead of two) third year subjects, may be considered for entrance into the Masters degree. The same applies for Post Graduate Diploma students.

### 3.3 The courses offered

The Department of Religion and Theology thus started its new programmes by offering four subjects: Biblical Studies, Christian Studies, Religion, Morality and Society, and African Religion and Culture. Soon, however, Biblical Languages will be presented on first and second year level, and will be compulsory for certain modules in Biblical Studies.<sup>72</sup> As stated earlier, the Department would also wish to extend its offerings as far as the study of other major religions are concerned.<sup>73</sup>

#### *Biblical Studies:*

These courses are already well-established, but the hermeneutical insights gained through our research (see 2.3) are now being worked into the course offerings and approaches to their teaching. The Department has developed an approach to the study of the Bible which includes relevant background studies,<sup>74</sup> orientation in hermeneutics and exegetical method, introduction into selected corpuses of Scripture, exercises in the use of Scripture, Biblical ethics, and a study of contemporary issues in Biblical

72: Biblical Languages I will be compulsory for hermeneutics and exegesis modules in the fourth year, and Biblical Languages II will be required for specific courses on Masters level.

73: Currently the emphasis will be on Judaism and Islam (apart from African traditions), since these are part of the school syllabi for Religious Studies, but also because these are the living minority religions in Namibia. I had the good fortune recently to be invited to a workshop in Jerusalem on the teaching of rabbinic Judaism in Christian contexts, organised by the International Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization. I could not help realising, once again, how dismally the Christian churches have failed to integrate the Old Testament theologically as 'Hebrew Scriptures', and how Biblical Studies has become an agenda dominated by the biases of 'western scholarship'.

74: In the revision of syllabi Biblical sociology has been added in the second year to supplement Biblical archaeology, and in the fourth year a separate module deals with the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha.



perspective. The 'ethics of interpretation'<sup>75</sup> receives increasing attention and the study of issues in Biblical perspective generate excitement amongst the students, and occasionally even in public.

Given the conservative pedagogical and theological traditions in Namibia, the Department's hermeneutical ideal may be unrealistic, but we are convinced that this is the crucial challenge. In the words of visiting professor, Herman Waetjen from San Francisco Theological Seminary, who has been teaching at UNAM for one academic year, the challenge of Biblical Studies in our context is 'to subvert as thoroughly as possible the so-called 'banking-method' of learning', to help the students to become 'autonomous interpreters', who can build up 'their own relationship with the text', to break their 'dependency on 'Western' commentaries and 'what the professor says'', and to encourage them to bring to bear 'the dimensions of personal experience and reflection on the enterprise of interpretation'.<sup>76</sup>

#### *Christian Studies:*

In this subject a combination of systematic and historical theology is sought. In each year the students will do a survey of certain selected periods of church history and doctrinal development, as well as relevant doctrinal loci. Included in the package will be *capita selecta* from Namibian and African church history and from contemporary theologians, as well as from the ecumenical agenda. Hermeneutical theory will be presented in the first year, but the hermeneutical approach (focussing on the interpretation of tradition and society) will be balanced by emphases on ideology critique (i.e. the transformation of tradition and society). The doctrines will be studied against the socio-historical conditions and power struggles out of which they arose.<sup>77</sup> In-depth studies of particular loci, theological and ethical issues, traditions and personalities will be done in the final year.

#### *Religion, Morality and Society:*

As explained (in 2.4), this subject, through a variety of choice modules, caters for the following interests: the historical and comparative study of religion; religious and moral education; the reciprocal relationship: religion and society (including moral issues and aspects of 'practical theology'). The subject thus offers three supplementary perspectives on religion and society, in line with the clients identified: a liberal arts view, a theological view and an educational one.

The first year, which will be compulsory for the B.A. Religion, but also strongly recommended for the B.Th., will give an introduction to three areas: the study of religion (history, philosophy, sociology, psychology and phenomenology of religion);<sup>78</sup> the prophetic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Bah'ai faith);<sup>79</sup>

75 See Smit 1990b, 1990c and 1991; cf. also Vorster in Hofmeyr & Vorster 1984:204-19.

76 African students should, in the words of Schreier (1991), not be afraid to show the African faces of Jesus.

77 For literature on the church in Africa, cf. the bibliographies in Taber 1978; Hastings 1979; Dammann 1968. For introductions to ideology critique, cf. Larrain 1979 and Thompson 1984. The study of doctrine will be done along the lines of ecumenical consensus, including the plurality of approaches as discussed by Smit (1987 and 1990a); cf. Migliore 1992 and Hodgson & King 1983.

78 Since this is a new field of study for our students it may be wise to work with materials and examples known to them, e.g. Bourdillon (date?), Cox 1991.

selected issues (theories of social structuration, case studies in the public role of religion in Africa, etc.).<sup>80</sup>

In the second year the focus is on religious and moral education, with three sub-foci: comparative study of approaches to religious and moral formation in different global contexts, e.g. North and South America, Europe, United Kingdom, Africa, Asia;<sup>81</sup> religious and moral education in Namibia (preparing teachers, and ministers, to handle the challenges of the new school syllabi for Religious and Moral Education, and Religious Studies);<sup>82</sup> and the pedagogy of religious and moral education (theory on the formation of character and didactics of the subject).<sup>83</sup> It is important to note that the Department would still wish to supplement these offerings in the second year with modules dealing with comparative religious studies, in future.

In the third year and fourth year alternative modules are offered each term, catering for a differentiation of needs (see Addendum with core syllabi), facilitating specialisation in a certain direction *or* a wide orientation in the field of religion and society. From the modules offered it should be clear that the Department wishes to blend theoretical, practical, historical and contextual approaches to the study of religion in its societal setting, illuminating the conservative and transformative role of religion in human history.<sup>84</sup> It should also be apparent that the current debate on the possibilities of 'a global ethos' is taken seriously.<sup>85</sup>

#### *African Religion and Culture:*

From what has been said about the impact of traditional African religion and the Independent Churches in Africa,<sup>86</sup> it should be obvious why a course such as 'African Religion and Culture' should complement the Christian and liberal arts approaches described thus far. It is very important to get the help of a specialist in this field to assist the Department to develop courses for this subject. However, some general comments can be made provisionally about possible approaches and contents: In the first year (which in fact will be in the second study year, after the student has already done Religion, Morality and Society I) a general introduction to African religion and culture, with historical, descriptive and experiential perspectives, supplemented with aspects of the African heritage in Namibia, can be offered; in the second year, historical and other perspectives on African religion and culture in Southern Africa can be supplemented with a study of selected aspects of African theology; in the third

79 Cf. De Gruchy & Pozesky 1991; Lion's Handbook of World Religions (now also published by Eerdmans and Struik).

80 E.g. some readings in Berger (theory) and study of current documents dealing with religion and society (*Road to Damascus, Kairos, Justice, Peace and Integrity of Creation*).

81 Cf. *Encyclopedia of Religious Education* 1994.

82 Cf. the syllabi of the Ministry of Education and Culture: Religious and Moral Education, Grades 8-10 (1990), and Religious Studies, Grades 11 and 12 (1994).

83 Cf. for the theory of the formation of character Hauerwas 1975 and 1981; Fowler 1981; the articles on affective development (Smith 1994:20-2) and cognitive development (Hatch 1994:136-8); and on the didactics of religious education in a pluralist world: Palmer 1991.

84 Cf. e.g. Berger 1992; Frazier 1975; Geuss 1981; Hauerwas 1991; Kraft 1984; Leatt et al 1986; Luzbetak 1988; Waligo et al 1986.

85 Cf. Küng 1993; Roof 1991.

86 Cf. also Makhubu 1988, and of course the publications of G.C. Oosthuizen.

year, African religion, as reflected in philosophy, music, drama and art can be studied, together with the blending of Christianity with African culture in Namibia.

*Other courses:*

The Department hopes to be in the position to offer Biblical Languages from 1995 onwards. The curricula for the B.A., the B.Th. and the Diploma have 'open spaces' for special interest subjects, such as Languages or Social Sciences, and each student will be encouraged to discuss a viable study package with the Department before enrollment. When all the offerings at UNAM are eventually modularised, there should be even more flexibility for tailor-made study packages.

#### **4. Restrictions and Problems, and Future Prospects for the Study of Religion and Theology in the Namibian Context**

In conclusion, it will be prudent to ask some sobering questions about the future of the study of religion and theology in the Namibian context. What are the restrictions and problems, and what are the prospects?

##### **4.1 Restrictions and problems**

As most other tertiary institutions in Africa, the University of Namibia is constantly faced with a limited budget, and the Department of Religion and Theology has to accommodate the new programmes with five established lecturing positions, and one staff development fellow.<sup>87</sup> These financial and staffing restrictions also played a role in the decision to rationalise the courses in the subject Religion, Morality and Society, as explained (see 3.3).

The post-graduate study programme (for Post-Graduate Diploma students and M.Th or M.A. students) follow the same syllabus on a three year rotation, meaning that not all the modules are offered each year. However, they still offer enough scope (especially through the option of mini-theses, which could focus on specific topics of choice) for special interests.

The Department still needs some specialists (e.g. for African religion and culture and comparative religious studies), but exchange programmes are possible and staff development programmes are being implemented.

The teaching of the religious subjects at school level still suffer from a lack of proper text books and qualified teachers. Some members of the Department are so involved in battling with these teething problems in the schools that they hardly find time for any other academic work. However, the successful implementation of the school curricula is of prime importance for the success of the new Departmental courses in this field.

As indicated (under 'Biblical Studies', 3.3) the Department's real challenge lies in empowering our students, coming from a deprived and uncritical background, to become 'autonomous readers of the text'; to take their own experience, tradition and wisdom seriously in a critical dialogue with the subject matter. Teachers in the

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<sup>87</sup> I have recently been appointed as Director of the Ecumenical Institute for Namibia (EIN), and will only have a limited teaching role in the Department in the foreseeable future.

African context can never challenge themselves and their teaching strategies enough on this critical point.<sup>88</sup>

#### 4.2 Prospects

Positive factors, strengthening the work of the Department tremendously, have been the encouragement and endorsement received from the Council of Churches in Namibia, the Namibian Evangelical Fellowship, and the Association of African Independent Churches.

The Department's involvement in so many joint ventures with these partners (such as the 'Worshipping God as Africans' project, the Unemployment project, the Conference on Ecumenism and Evangelism, the Beyond the Road to Damascus initiative, to mention but a few), assures contextual relevance and exposure, which will certainly rub off on the teaching in the Department.

The establishment, at the University of Namibia, of the Ecumenical Institute for Namibia (EIN), publicly enhances the department's aims and programmes, strengthening the initiatives in the areas of multi-faith dialogue, justice and democracy in civil society, and the development of truly ecumenical teaching materials.<sup>89</sup>

The new Namibian context in school, church and society, carried by strong commitments to real religious freedom, is very stimulating for the critical and comparative study of religion and theology.

The Department has benefitted enormously from contacts with academics and religious leaders from all over the world. Members of the Department have been active, against all financial odds, in the work of the American Academy of Religion, the Society for Biblical Literature, the Association for the Study of Religion in Africa and Southern Africa, and most of the Societies related to Bible, Philosophy, Theology and Religion in Southern Africa.<sup>90</sup>

Last, but not least, the students and staff of the Department are dedicated and enthusiastic. Without their commitment this report on some joint-dreams-come-true would not have been possible.

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88 I believe we have not yet grappled seriously enough with Paulo Freire's 'Pedagogy of the oppressed'.

89 For this foresightedness and vision the UNAM management can only be praised. One of the priorities within EIN is to establish an ecumenical chaplaincy at the University, in cooperation with the religious student bodies and the churches.

90 Some members of the Department also serve on editorial boards or executive committees of influential publications or societies. Increasingly 'Windhoek' is now also included in the itineraries of overseas visitors, and even as a conference venue.

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