A Contemporary Global Muslim Engagement with Theology and Social Transformation

Engaged Theology is the attempt to make sense of religion and religious texts while being seriously engaged with questions of social transformation.

This course is a somewhat unusual one; it is partly autobiographical and partly scholarly. I am aware that it may come across as rather presumptuous to use one’s own journey as the basis of a course. I would not normally do this but am taking advantage of my status as a Visiting Professor. After providing some of my personal and socio-political context, coming from a Muslim minority community in an overwhelmingly Protestant Apartheid South Africa, I will connect my own religious journey with the foundational texts of Islam, the Hadith and Sunnah (Muhammad’s paradigmatic precedent) in the quest for liberation on the one hand and simultaneously introduce the class to at least some of the major (OK, not all of them are major 😊) tendencies and developments in contemporary Islam.

Conscious of the pitfalls of typologies, these streams will cover the following:

- Traditional Islam (The Tablighi Jama’at, The ‘Ulama (religious scholars) and their formation and tensions between what has been described as folk and high Islam).
- Islamist Islam (Also described as ‘political’ and ‘radical Islam’, the Muslim Brotherhood and the Jam’at-i-Islami and the Taliban.
- Progressive Islam (Also described as, or intersecting with, ‘Liberal or Modernist Islam, my case study here is the Progressive Union of North America).
- Islamic Liberation Theology (not to be confused with Islamic liberal theology, my case study here is the South African organization, The Call of Islam).
- Islamic Decoloniality. (Here I will consider some of the contemporary ideas on Islam and decoloniality as represented by the Summer School movements of Cape Town, Grenada and Kerala.)

In discussing each of these tendencies, I will provide three types of texts: autobiographical, sacred texts (Qur’an and Hadith) and scholarly writings on these tendencies or by one or more of the major thinkers representative of them.