

Topic: Rethinking our Thoughts on Religion and Development
Lecturer: Dr. Teddy Sakupapa

Presentation overview:

- Definitional debates
- Ecumenical development discourse
- Development discourse and the decolonisation of theology

Dr. Sakupapa, an African Ecumenical Theologian and Historian, starts with some definitions of Religion and Development (R&D). For religion, as challenging as it is to define it, some definitions given are: multi-dimensional and human making activity. For Dr. Sakupapa, he would define religion as “a mode of understanding reality.” Various ideas regarding the definition of development are: holistic, transformation, Ubuntu and prosperity.

Dr. Sakupapa then recounts a brief history of ecumenicalism, starting in the 1960s. He drew some links between it and development that culminates in the idea of liberation. Some distinctive roles of development were noted: religion and health, religious epistemologies and social capital, citing Swart’s work. The benefit of R&D has extended to Religion and Politics, an offshoot the Pentecostal church is engaging in. There is however some ambivalence to the debates around R&D as religion is subject to scrutiny due its inability to deal with issues such as patriarchy.

Dr. Sakupapa questions the who “we” are in ‘our idea/thoughts’ on R&D. It is at this point that the debate around decolonisation is crucial in R&D. It is not so much the decolonisation of development, but the decolonisation of theology. Dr. Sakupapa notes that theology arises in the social context of the person. African theology on the African context and South African black theology arises due to racial issues. Scholars do question theology’s impact and response to decolonisation.

The question then arose: what *is* decolonisation. It could be best described as the recognition of coloniality matrix of power that manifests itself in knowledge, ideas of truth, what is good and beautiful. Decoloniality is thus the de-linking from the logic of coloniality to an ecology of knowledge.

My impression of Dr. Sakupapa’s presentation was that he is very passionate, and knowledgeable, on the topic of decolonisation. During the presentation Dr. Sakupapa paused a few times and allowed for some questions and his responses were fluid, clear and replete with history. Prior to the presentation, we were given three questions to reflect upon that was to be part of the discussion. I will list the questions as an annexure below. Unfortunately we did not manage to do so due to the overwhelming amount of questions the attendees had. He did however cover the three questions in his presentation and afforded us his understanding of it. The questions posed to Dr. Sakupapa were very interesting and it demonstrated the level of thought he invoked in his audience.

Annexure

Questions for discussion

1. What challenges and opportunities does the debate on decolonisation open up within your context and field of research?
2. Is epistemology (i.e. what counts as knowledge [the nature, limitations and sources of knowledge] and how do you know?) and ontology (being) connected? If so, briefly explain how this is the case by means of a practical example?
3. How would you assess the significance of decolonisation in the field of religion and development?