

Research profile 2010-2011

Prof. Dr. Bert Roebben

My research is focusing on the crossroads of theology, pedagogy and youth research, culminating in the research on religious education, I conceive this discipline as the ongoing hermeneutic of religious practices of children, youth and young adults in church and society, as far as these are articulated in educational processes inside and outside the school. Three steps are important in this hermeneutical enterprise: a phenomenological analysis of 'religiosity in youth cultures' (youth research), a normative reflection on the education of values, norms and meaning (pedagogy), and a confrontation with the wisdom traditions of religions and worldviews, especially of Christianity (theology). Based on empirical data, gathered by others or generated by our own research, I want to obtain insight in what religion does with young people and what young people do with religion. Secondly, I want to examine how this phenomenon is created, transferred, reflected and communicated inside and outside schools. And finally I want to explore with theological imagination the playground of Christian faith within these complex learning environments – and see how this exploration affirms or challenges juvenile religiosity and the diversity of religions and worldviews today.

Since 1989, out of this dynamic source of intra-disciplinary research have been growing several publications. In 1995 my doctoral dissertation *Een tijd van opvoeden. Moraalpedagogiek in christelijk perspectief*¹ was published, which I consider to be a foundation for educational theory. In 2007 my *Godsdienstpedagogiek van de hoop. Grondlijnen voor religieuze vorming* was published (second edition in 2008), which I consider to be a handbook for religious education. It was translated and published in English in 2009.² In the mean time I wrote several essays on religiosity and youth and young adult ministry. In the framework of the Tilburg Summer Academy these insights were confronted with the daily reality of youth workers in the church and also theologically deepened. In 2003, my *Bewogenheid in beweging. De spiritualiteit van een christelijke school*³ and in 2009, my *De speelruimte van het geloof. Getuigenis van een theoloog*⁴ appeared, as a theological recapitulation of the accumulated knowledge on moral and religious education and on youth and young adult ministry.

In the near future I want to apply myself even more on the development of those three domains. Concerning youth research, I will concentrate on my position as chair of the *International Association for the Study of Youth Ministry* (www.iasym.org), which runs till January 2011, and which implies the organization of the international conference in Pretoria (South-Africa) from 6 till 9 January 2011. For the first time in its existence, the association will gather on the Southern hemisphere and will invite multiple scholars and teachers in the field of youth ministry from that part of the world. Concerning the field of religious education, I want to finalize three projects: a handbook on didactics, a German translation of my handbook on religious education and the edition of a series of essays of experts in the field of integrative religious education, which fits into my work of the Inter-FIRE research group at Dortmund University.

¹ A time to educate. Moral education in Christian perspective.

² Published as *Seeking sense in the city. European perspectives on religious education* (Münster, Lit-Verlag).

³ *Inspiration on the move. The spirituality of a Christian school.*

⁴ *The playground of faith. A theologian's witness.*

I hope to be able to work on this mainly during my sabbatical leave in Autumn 2010 and Spring 2011 – *Deo volente*. I am planning to stay for one month in the United States as a visiting professor. During that period, I want to articulate more specifically again the third part of my research, namely theology, as a permanent source of reflection in my work as a professor of religious education and youth ministry. In the long run, I hope to consolidate and crystallize my *practical-theological* knowledge in the field of religious education and youth work in new writings on *fundamental* theology – understood as spiritual theology. This development can also be considered as part of the idea behind the German ROTH-consortium (*Religionsunterricht als Ort der Theologie*), which encompasses a group of researchers who reflect on ‘lived theology’ in the midst of learning processes in schools.