

Training Imams in Europe: The Challenges of Developing a Unified Program – Leiden University as a Study Case

*Mohammed Ghaly**

Abstract

This article deals with a number of perennial questions which have occupied the minds of both European politicians and Muslim communities living in Europe by examining Dutch attempts to develop a training program for prospective imams. Is it feasible to train imams working in mosques on European soil with the aim of promoting the integration of Muslims in European societies? What should this training look like? Which institutions should be entrusted with this training? What role do Islamic organizations play in such a process?

This article focuses on the Dutch experience and starts by reviewing the main challenges that have until now hindered the development of an „imam-training program“ in the Netherlands, despite the existence of a strong desire to do so. The article subsequently gives a detailed elaboration of the experiences Leiden University has made while developing a program of this nature. This university has managed to attract the interest of two Islamic organizations in the Netherlands interested in participating in the development of such a program. These two organizations, together with Leiden University, developed a draft proposal for an imam training program which was submitted to the Ministry of Education and Culture at the end of 2008.

1. Introductory Remarks

1.1 Historical Background

In the years following the convocation of the Waardenburg Committee in 1982, which made initial suggestions as to training imams in the Netherlands, discussions on the issue gradually gained importance in public debates and have remained at the centre of contemporary discussions right up to the present day. Three programs have been established in Dutch institutions of higher education with the help of subsidies from the government. The first program started at the Vrije Universiteit (VU) in Amsterdam in the academic year 2005-2006. Leiden University and the Higher Vocational School, Inholland in Amsterdam started their programs in the academic year 2006-2007.

Although these three programs were founded in the context of the discussions on training imams, none of them has yet managed to develop an „imam-training program“ which is recognized as both an academic program by Dutch universities and a confessional program by the Islamic organizations. These three programs can only be seen as a first step in this direction. This holds also true for the Leiden University, whose case will provide the main focus of this text.¹⁷⁰

* Dr. Mohammed Ghaly is Assistant Professor of Islamic Studies at the Leiden University.

¹⁷⁰ For more details about the discussions in Dutch society and these three programs, see Mohammed Ghaly, *The Academic Training of Imams: Recent Discussions and Initiatives in the Netherlands*, in: Drees W.B. &

1.2 A Handful of Challenges

Despite the long standing political desire to establish an imam-training program in the Netherlands¹⁷¹ which might put an end to the tendency to import imams from abroad, a number of challenges have up until now prevented the establishment of a program of this nature.

One of the main challenges has consisted in winning the trust of Islamic organizations and thus convincing them to cooperate with the Dutch universities and the respective ministries with the aim of establishing an imam-training program. By the beginning of the 1990s, the Dutch government had adopted a series of very public initiatives aimed at taking out contact with the Muslim community in order to discuss proposals for establishing a program of this nature. However, years passed without the Dutch government receiving any concrete request from Islamic organizations.¹⁷²

This difference between the willingness of the Dutch government to create such a program and the seeming reticence of the Muslim community was at least partially a result of divergences within the country's Muslim community. Muslims in the Netherlands are divided along sectarian, denominational as well as ethnic and national lines. Due to these differences there is not one common viewpoint either on the subject imams in general or on the functions they should fulfill. Consequently, no common standpoint exists regarding the content or the structure of the prospective imam-training program.¹⁷³

Additionally, the Muslim community and the Dutch government, who were supposed to work together in the training of imams, did not have identical aims in this respect. From the perspective of the Dutch government, one of the main priorities of such a program should be to promote the so-called 'Dutch Islam', that is, to interpret Islamic beliefs and ethics in a way consistent with the current situation of Muslims in the Netherlands as a religious minority living in a strongly secularist country. Another, more questionable reason why the Dutch government favors the development of an imam training program is to enable imams to actively contribute to the integration of Muslims into Dutch society. The integration process, as perceived by the Dutch government, is currently negatively influenced by the presence of imported imams.¹⁷⁴ The Muslim community, in contrast, has tended to attach greater importance to other issues, which may not be shared by the government or at least not accorded the same priority. For instance, a significant section of the

P.S. van Koningsveld, *The Study of Religion and the Training of Muslim Clergy in Europe*, Leiden University Press 2008 pp. 369-402.

¹⁷¹ For a brief review of the initiatives and the proposals for establishing such a program within and outside the Dutch parliament, see Mohammed Ghaly, *The Academic Training of Imams*, op.cit. pp. 370, 371, 378 & 379.

¹⁷² See for instance W.A. Shadid and P.S. van Koningsveld, *Beeldvorming over de imam in Nederland* (Image of the imam in the Netherlands) in: W.A. Shadid and P.S. van Koningsveld (eds.) *Religie, cultuur en minderheden*, Tilburg 1999 p. 60.

¹⁷³ *Imams in Nederland: wie leidt ze op?* Rapport van de Adviescommissie Imamopleidingen (Imams in the Netherlands: who trains them? Report of the Advisory Commission on imam training). Den Haag: Ministerie van Onderwijs, Cultuur en Wetenschappen, December 2003 p. 20; Mohammed Ghaly, *The Academic Training of Imams*, op.cit. p. 374.

¹⁷⁴ Herman Beck and Abdelilah Ljamai, *De Imam en zijn opleiding in pluralistisch Nederland* (The imam and his training in the pluralistic Netherlands), n.d., p. 8; N. Landman, *Imamopleiding in Nederland*, Den Haag 1999 pp. 21-22.

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Muslim community believes on the one hand that a program of this nature should train imams who are able to combine the traditional tasks of the imam with the new requirements of his office in a non-Islamic Western country. On the other hand, they also believe that imams should participate in formulating the Islamic identity of Muslims in the Netherlands. The content of this Islamic identity is to be decided just by Muslims.¹⁷⁵

2. Leiden University: *Duplex-ordo*

The legislation of 1876 outlined the basic relationship between church and state in regard to education. The theological faculties at Dutch public universities were originally Dutch Reformed but with the formal separation of church and state, the chosen solution was to have what could be called a „public theology“ at the state universities, while confessional training was to take place in seminaries organised by the churches „at“ but not as „part of“ the universities.¹⁷⁶ This model is called *duplex-ordo* and was intended to free the universities of confessional ties.¹⁷⁷ Leiden University, which was established in 1575 and is thus the oldest university in the Netherlands, adopted the *duplex-ordo* system.¹⁷⁸

2.1 Islamic Theology in Leiden: *The Starting Point*

The proposal of Leiden University submitted in 2005 by the Faculty of Theology (since September 2007 the Faculty of Religious Studies, which is currently known as the Leiden Institute for Religious Studies, Faculty of Humanities) to the Ministry of Education and Culture focused on developing a two-tiered program. The first tier was the academic four-year part of the program consisting of three years for the bachelor degree and one year for the master degree. The second part was the confessional program intended for training imams in the Netherlands.

This division was based on the *duplex-ordo* tradition at Leiden University, where the academic study of Christian theology has traditionally been directed by state-lecturers appointed by the university, whilst lecturers appointed by church communities have been responsible for the confessional study. The proposal was made to commence with the academic part of the program and to then at a later stage continue with the confessional part in cooperation with the Islamic organizations, which would play the same role as that exercised by church communities.

In January 2006 the government granted Leiden University a subsidy of 2.6 million Euros for the development of the first part, i.e. the academic four-year program. The government subsidy enabled the program „Islamic Theology“ to successfully commence in September 2006, after previously undergoing an official process of scientific accredita-

¹⁷⁵ Herman Beck and Abdelilah Ljamai, *De imam en zijn opleiding*, op. cit. p. 8; Mohammed Ghaly, *The Academic Training of Imams*, op.cit. p. 376.

¹⁷⁶ Brigitte Johansen, *Islam at the European Universities: Report II*, University Of Copenhagen, Denmark 2006 p. 17, quoting from Vroom, M. Hendrik, *Theology and Religious Studies: Progress and Relevance*, in: M.E. Brinkman, N. Schreurs, H.M. Vroom and C. Wethmar (eds): *Theology between Church, University and Society*, Studies in Theology and Religion, Royal van Gorcum, Assen, vol. 6, 2003 p. 88. For further details on this point and its relevance to the discussions on training imams in the Netherlands, see Mohammed Ghaly, *The Academic Training of Imams*, 2008 pp. 372-374.

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ <http://www.leidenuniv.nl/universiteit.html>

tion.¹⁷⁹ It is at present the only officially accredited program of this type in the Dutch higher education system.¹⁸⁰

The academic program pays special attention to the intra-Islamic pluralism represented by the different Islamic schools of thought and doctrines. These include, for example, the Sunnīs and the Shī'īs. Additionally, the program emphasizes modern issues, especially those related to Islam in the European context.

In this way, the four-year academic program functions as a preparatory stage for the second confessional program in which Muslim communities in the Netherlands, with their different cultural and theological backgrounds, are able to train their imams.

2.2 *The Imam-training Program: A Bid to Overcome the Challenges*

Following the establishment of the Islamic Theology program, teaching staff were entrusted with the task of finding possible ways of realizing the second part of the program, i.e. the „imam-training program“ in cooperation with the Islamic organizations. The staff consisted of Prof. Dr. P.S. van Koningsveld (the head of the department), Mohammed M. Ghaly and Umar Ryad (both lecturers) at this time.

As outlined in 1.2, the main challenge consisted in gaining the trust of the Islamic organizations and convincing them that Leiden is the appropriate place to carry out an imam-training program which serves both the interests of Muslims and those of Dutch society at large. The good reputation enjoyed by staff members played a crucial role in this respect. Prof. van Koningsveld already possessed a long-standing and impeccable reputation as an objective scholar who mastered building bridges between the Muslim community and the Dutch authorities. Out of appreciation for such activities, he was awarded the prestigious Order of Orange-Nassau (*Orde van Oranje-Nassau*) in 2007.¹⁸¹ Ghaly and Ryad, regarded within the university as young promising researchers and within the Muslim community as people holding neutral positions towards the different segments of this community in the Netherlands, also played an important role in creating a good image among Muslims of the Islamic Theology program at Leiden University.

After establishing the new academic program, Leiden University also declared its readiness to co-operate with the Islamic organizations with the aim of establishing the previously mentioned confessional program. Additionally, folders and brochures detailing the newly established Islamic Theology program in Dutch, English, Arabic and Turkish

¹⁷⁹ The accreditation process involves the scientific quality of the study-program, teaching staff, etc. being evaluated by a committee of international experts. This is regulated by the NVAO (Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie)- the Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders. It was established by international treaty and guarantees the quality of higher education in the Netherlands and Flanders by means of accrediting study programs. See <http://nvao.net/content.php?a=s&id=153>.

¹⁸⁰ The accreditation committee consisted of Prof. Dr. Jan Peters (Emeritus Professor of Arabic and Islamic studies of the Nijmegen University, Netherlands), Prof. Dr. J. van Ess (Emeritus Professor of Islamic Studies in Tübingen) and Prof. Dr. P. Lory (Professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Sorbonne), see NVAO Toets Nieuwe Opleiding: Paneladvies over Wo-ba Islamitische Theologie: Universiteit Leiden [NAVO (the Accreditation Organisation of The Netherlands and Flanders) study of a new educational program: Panel-advice on the University Bachelor Program Islamic Theology: Leiden University] 12 May 2006.

¹⁸¹ <http://www.hum.leidenuniv.nl/godsdienstwetenschappen/nieuws/koningsveld-nassauofficier.html> (accessed on 1 September 2009).

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were distributed among the Muslim community. A personal visit was also paid by Prof. van Koningsveld and Mohammed Ghaly to the head of the Union of Imams in the Netherlands (*Vereniging voor Imams in Nederland*) to speak about the Islamic Theology program. In the following period, different organizations began to approach the Islamic Theology department, although preference was given to those organizations responsible for running mosques and appointing imams.

At the beginning of 2007 the head of an Islamic organization which runs a number of Moroccan mosques in the Netherlands approached the Islamic Theology department and asked about the possibilities of cooperation. The request of the organization was discussed among the staff members and the decision was taken to reply positively. The staff members were all convinced that it was impractical to wait for a joint proposal supported by the majority of even all of the Islamic organizations in the Netherlands. This is because of the divergent ethnic and denominational backgrounds of Muslims in the Netherlands outlined in 1.2. Bearing in mind that the majority of Muslims in the Netherlands have either Moroccan or Turkish backgrounds, it was plausible to start with a Moroccan organization.

The Moroccan organization already had a clear idea about what the content of the proposed imam-training program should look like. The organization required the feedback and the critical comments of staff members on the suggested plan. After intensive negotiations and meetings between the staff members of Leiden University and the Moroccan organization, which were also occasionally attended by the dean of the faculty and the director of education, a semi-final version of the program was drafted. However, the general belief was that the submission of a proposal for the establishment of a program of this nature which was only supported by one Moroccan organization would not be very appealing to the Dutch government, especially given the absence of any Turkish counterpart. Following internal negotiations the decision was taken to approach an Islamic organization with a Turkish background to inquire about whether they would be interested in participating in such a program. The organization approached answered positively and expressed their interest in joining the negotiations with the Moroccan organization. A new round of meetings and discussions started, which lasted almost another six month period. At the end of this period, the three parties involved, i.e. the faculty and the two Islamic organizations, arrived at an agreement as to the final form and content of the program. The final draft was sent to the board of Leiden University for final approval. The lawyers of the university had a couple of remarks that required some revisions in the draft. These chiefly involved making the draft more compatible with the *duplex-ordo* system of the university. The revisions were subsequently incorporated into the proposal and approved by the two Islamic organizations.

This final draft of the confessional program kept two central issues in mind. The first issue stressed in the final draft concerns the cultural and religious specificities of Islamic communities in the Netherlands. A program for training imams with Moroccan background would, for example, not be identical to a program for training imams possessing a Turkish background. Whilst special attention has to be given to the Mālikī juristic school and the *Aṣ'arī* theological school when training prospective imams with a Moroccan background, attention is paid to the *Hanaḥī* juristic school and the Māturīdī theological school in the case of future imams with a Turkish background. The same holds true for other religious groups whose organizations will be potentially interested in participating in this

confessional program. Thus, bearing in mind the cultural and religious diversity of Muslim communities in the Netherlands, the confessional program of Leiden University has been developed in such a fashion that differing Islamic organizations active among specific Muslim communities in the Netherlands are able to join at different points of time.

The second issue is that, in addition to considering the cultural and religious diversity within Muslim communities in the Netherlands, the promotion of the integration and active participation of Muslims in the Dutch society should be also one of the main objectives of this program. This is to be achieved chiefly through a profound and scholarly study of the modern sciences of religion and of the position of religion in Dutch society.

2.3 The Importance of this Confessional Program for the Dutch Society

The affiliated partners believe that such a program is extremely beneficial for Dutch society as a whole. The rounded, two-sided knowledge which prospective graduate imams will acquire during this program can be regarded as representing a breakthrough in the relationship between Dutch society and Islam.

On the one hand, graduate imams will gain a normative knowledge of Islam and especially of those juridical and theological traditions prevalent in Muslim communities in which the imams will work. On the other hand, the acquisition of sufficient knowledge about Dutch society will help imams to work as bridge-builders between the Muslim community and other members of Dutch society.

This proposed program thus aims to mark a new phase in the history of imams in the Netherlands and perhaps in the whole of Europe. This is because graduate imams will be able to tackle the alleged difficulties ensuing from the need to combine the acquisition of a normative knowledge of Islam on the one hand and a thorough understanding of Western societies on the other. Bearing in mind the fact that prospective imams will work not only in mosques but also as spiritual counselors in prisons and healthcare centers, special attention is paid to „spiritual care counseling“ as a specific specialization within this program.

3. The Moroccan Model

Bearing in mind the fact that the first positive sign for cooperation came from a Moroccan organization, the program outlined below is formed in conformity with the Moroccan model, in which the Mālikī juridical school and the *Aṣʿarī* theological school play central roles. As well as the Turkish version, the program is still open for additional sub-forms in which other models can be further developed. The Moroccan model of the program has been approved in its entirety by the Moroccan organization, and the broad lines of the additions and amendments necessary for the Turkish model have also been approved by the Turkish organization.

Below, the focus will be on the scientific content of the program. The administrative complications have been left for the regular meetings between Leiden University and the Islamic organizations.

3.1 The Scientific Content of the Program

This proposed program is a two-year M.A. program. Only students possessing a specific educational background are eligible to take part in the program. The main criterion in this

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regard is the bachelor program „Islamic Theology“ at Leiden University. It was thus agreed that students wishing to participate in the M.A. program should be required to have first obtained the aforementioned „Islamic Theology“ bachelor or an equivalent degree in Islamic studies from inside or outside the Netherlands.

For the sake of clarity, an overview of the „Islamic Theology“ bachelor at Leiden University, as it was structured during the negotiations with the Islamic organizations, will be given so that a clear idea might be formed about the educational package which prospective imams will eventually have after graduation.

3.2 Educational Background: Bachelor Program

The scientific content as presented in the „Islamic Theology“ bachelor program is seen as the minimum requirement which students are required to fulfill before being allowed to join the confessional program.

Due to the central role played by the Arabic language in the „Islamic Theology“ bachelor program, a large part of the first year is dedicated to an extensive study of this language. During the second and the third years, attention is paid to the classical disciplines of Islam with the help of Arabic sources and texts. The main focus of the second year is the classical period of Islam, whereas the focus of the third year is on modern times.

The three-year bachelor program has in total 180 ects, 60 ects per year. An outline of the modules which students can study as part of the bachelor program is presented below in tabular form, followed by a series of comments on the program as a whole. It is to be noted that the details of this program are presented as they were when the program started. However, some details might have slightly changed in the intervening period.

Year	Module	ECTS	Remarks	
First	Arabic Language: Grammar and reading religious texts	15		
	Modern trends within Islam A	5	Focus on texts written in western languages	
	Modern trends within Islam B	15		
	An introduction to the Science of religion	5		
	An introduction to the Social Sciences	5		
	Outlines of the history of the Islam	5		
	Psychology of religion	5		
	History of Christianity	5		
		Total:	60	
	Second	Qur'ān sciences A	5	Focus on texts written in western languages
Qur'ān sciences B		5	Only texts written in Arabic	
Islamic Theology and philosophy A		5	Focus on texts written in west-	

Article / Artikel

			ern languages
	Islamic Theology and philosophy B	5	Only texts written in Arabic
	Islamic law and ethics: rituals and symbols 1A	5	Focus on texts written in western languages
	Islamic law and ethics: social dealings 2A	5	Focus on texts written in western languages
	Islamic law and ethics: fatwas for Muslims in the West B	5	Only texts written in Arabic
	Ḥadīṭ sciences A	5	Focus on texts written in western languages
	Ḥadīṭ sciences B	5	Only texts written in Arabic
	Philosophy of religion	5	
	Comparative science of religion	5	
	History of Judaism	5	
		Total: 60	
Third	Qur'ān exegesis A	5	Focus on texts written in western languages
	Qur'ān exegesis B	5	Only texts written in Arabic
	Principles of Islamic law A	5	Focus on texts written in western languages
	Principles of Islamic law B	5	Only texts written in Arabic
	Modern Islamic Theology	5	
	Minor	30	Space for choosing optional modules
	Bachelor thesis	10	
		Total: 60	
	Grand total	180	

Arabic Language and Normative Sources

One of the main aims of this program consists in giving students the chance to gradually become acquainted with the authoritative normative sources in Islam. In order that this might be achieved, students start with an extensive Arabic course in which they study the Arabic grammar and exercise those syntactical rules usually employed in the religious texts selected from the normative sources. The study of these texts allows students to come into contact with the religious terminology and the typical linguistic structures used in these normative sources. As well as being taught Arabic during this course, students remain in contact with the normative sources and gradually learn to read, translate and analyze the technical content of these sources. All modules followed by the letter (B) in the table found above are aimed at fulfilling these objectives.

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Scientific and Critical Capacities

Besides studying the Arabic normative sources, students also study the Islamic Sciences as approached by modern academic studies written in western languages. The aim is to allow students to become acquainted with the different viewpoints and analytical remarks expressed by these modern researchers about the different backgrounds of these Islamic Sciences. Moreover, the modules on the Social Sciences, science of religion, etc. are aimed at broadening and deepening this skill among students. The bachelor thesis is seen as a step crystallizing this whole set of scientific and critical capacities. Finally, the „Minor“ part of this program is made up of a number of optional modules intended at giving students the chance to attend lessons which serve to deepen their knowledge on any relevant field that might offer future employment opportunities.

It is to be noted in this context that the main focus of this program is on tracing the link and interaction between Islam on the one hand and the West on the other. Students thus learn throughout all of the modules about the following issues: firstly about the way in which Islam functions in Dutch society and in European society at large, secondly about the types of social problems which Muslims face in this non-Islamic context and thirdly about the solutions which have been proposed by Islamic sources and Muslim scholars.

3.3 Educational Continuity: M.A. Program for Training Imams and Spiritual Counselors

The aforementioned interest in studying the normative sources of the Islam, acquiring the scientific and the critical capacities and the focus on Islam in the West are also present in the imam-training program, although at a more advanced level. This is because the program will grant an academic Masters degree and the graduates will receive an M.A. diploma from Leiden University as well as the confessional diploma they will receive from the Islamic organizations involved in this program.

As this program is intended for people interested in working either as imams in mosques or as spiritual counselors in prisons and healthcare centers, it has been designed to fit both groups. For the „imamat“ specialization, the two modules on „principles of Islamic Jurisprudence“ (*uṣūl al-fiqh*) (5 ECTS) and „principles of issuing fatwas“ (*uṣūl al-iftā'*) (10 ECTS) are obligatory. Students choosing to specialize in „spiritual counseling“ are obliged to attend the three modules on spiritual care (15 ECTS). The program is a two-year master program consisting of 120 ECTS, 60 ECTS per year. An outline of the modules to be taught in this confessional program, presented in tabular form and followed by a clarifying note on a) Islamic Sciences, b) Social Sciences and finally c) training and M.A. thesis, can be found below.

	Imamat	Spiritual Counseling
First Year		
The science of reciting the Qur'ān (<i>tağwīd</i>) according to the <i>warṣ-qirā'a</i> and memorizing 5 Parts of the Qur'ān	15 ects	15 ects
Sciences of the Qur'ān: Advanced	05 ects	05 ects
Ḥadīth sciences: Advanced	05 ects	05 ects
Islamic law I (devotional practices, <i>ibādāt</i>): The Mālikī	05 ects	05 ects

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School		
Islamic law II (Social dealings, <i>mu'āmalāt</i>): The Mālikī School	05 ects	05 ects
Islamic Theology: The Aš'arī School	10 ects	10 ects
The religious history of the Netherlands	10 ects	10 ects
Social Sciences (sociology and psychology) applied to Islam in Europe especially in the Netherlands I	05 ects	05 ects
Second Year		
Comparative Islamic law (<i>al-fiqh al-muqāran</i>): Advanced	05 ects	05 ects
Comparative Islamic Theology: Islamic Schools in the field of theology (Advanced)	05 ects	05 ects
Social Sciences (sociology and psychology) applied to Islam in Europe especially in the Netherlands II	05 ects	05 ects
Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (<i>uṣūl al-fiqh</i>): Advanced	05 ects	---
Principles of issuing fatwas (<i>uṣūl al-iftā'</i>)	10 ects	---
Spiritual care and sense-giving: introductory	---	05 ects
Spiritual care: multi-religious perspective	---	05 ects
Spiritual care: perspectives within Islam	---	05 ects
Training and M.A. thesis	30 ects	30 ects
Total	120 ects	120 ects

A) *Islamic Sciences*

Islamic Sources: Qur'ān and Hadīth

- The Science of reciting the Qur'ān (*tağwīd*) according to the *warṣ-qirā'a* and memorizing 5 Parts of the Qur'ān (15 ECTS)

Students learn to recite the Qur'ān according to the standard method used in the North-African countries, namely the *warṣ-qirā'a*. Moreover, they are required to memorize five out of the thirty parts of the Qur'ān.

- Sciences of the Qur'ān: Advanced (05 ECTS)

This module is a further development of the four modules „Qur'ān Sciences A & B and Qur'ān Exegesis A & B“ given in the aforementioned bachelor program. Material employed for this module will be taken from sections of relevant Islamic sources such as *'ulūm al-Qur'ān* (Sciences of the Qur'ān) by as-Suyūfī and the Qur'ān commentary *tafsīr al-Qurṭubī* made by the Mālikī scholar al-Qurṭubī.

- Ḥadīṭ Sciences: Advanced (05 ECTS)

This module, also based on the two bachelor modules „Ḥadīṭ Sciences A & B“, gives students the opportunity to carry out a detailed study of the well-known Ḥadīṭ-collections such as *al-Buḥārī* and *Muslim* and their commentaries. Furthermore, attention is paid to studying parts of the Islamic sources on Ḥadīṭ terminology (*muṣṭalaḥ al-ḥadīṭ*).

Islamic jurisprudence and its Principles (*al-fiqh wa uṣūluḥ*)

- Islamic Law I (devotional practices, *‘ibādāt*): The Mālikī School (05 ECTS)
- Islamic Law II (Social dealings, *mu‘āmalāt*): The Mālikī School (05 ECTS)

Students are given an overview of the main lines of the Mālikī School in these two modules. Special attention is paid to the rulings (*aḥkām*) which are relevant in the context of Muslims living in the Netherlands in the present day. Parts of early juristic sources and modern studies will be used as study material. These include *al-Kāfi fī Fiqh Ahl al-Madīna al-Mālikī* by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr, *al-Fiqh al-Mālikī al-Muyassar* by Waḥba az-Zuḥaylī and *Early Mālikī law: Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam and His Major Compendium of Jurisprudence* by Jonathan E. Brockopp.

- Comparative Islamic law (*al-fiqh al-muqāran*): Advanced (05 ECTS)

After getting a general idea on the Mālikī School, students are then given the chance to compare this with the other schools of Islamic law. This module is also based on three modules offered as part of the bachelor program – „Islamic Law and Ethics: Rituals and Symbols 1A, 2A, B“. The juridical encyclopedia *Bidāyat al-Muḡtahid (The Beginning of an Independent Scholar)* by the Mālikī jurist Ibn Ruṣd will be used as study material.

- Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence (*uṣūl al-fiqh*): Advanced (05 ECTS)

This module, based on a module offered in the bachelor program under the same title, is intended as an advanced study on the methods and theories which Muslim jurists employ in order to extract the rulings (*aḥkām*) from the available sources of Islam, especially in the case of new and unprecedented cases. The principle study material will be *Taqrīb al-Wuṣūl ilā ‘ilm al-Uṣūl (Giving an Access to the Science of the Principles)* by the Mālikī jurist Ibn Juzayy al-Ġirnānī and *The Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* by Hashim Kamali.

- Principles of Issuing Fatwas (*uṣūl al-iftā’*) (10 ECTS)

In this module special attention is paid to the normative sources pertaining to the principles and ethics of issuing fatwas, a knowledge which is of vital importance for imams. As study material, sources written by Mālikī scholars will be used. These include *Ġāmi‘ Bayān al-‘Ilm wa Faḍluḥ (The Conclusive Explanation of Knowledge and its Virtue)* by Ibn ‘Abd al-Barr and *Manār Uṣūl al-Fatwā (The Landmarks of the Principles of Issuing Fatwas)* by Ibrāhīm al-Luqqānī.

Islamic Theology

- Islamic Theology: The Aš‘arī School (10 ECTS)

This module is intended to provide students with detailed information on the Aš‘arī School by paying special attention to two main points. Firstly, the history of this school and the main figures that played important roles in its formation and development are examined. Secondly, the main tenets and dogmas of this school are looked into. Study material will include *Al-Ibāna fī Uṣūl ad-Diyāna* by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Aš‘arī and *Tabyīn Kaḍīb al-Mufatrī fīmā Nusiba ilā al-Imām Abī al-Ḥasan al-Aš‘arī* by Ibn ‘Asākir.

- Comparative Islamic Theology: Islamic Schools in the field of theology (Advanced) (05 ECTS)

This module, based on the two bachelor modules „Islamic Theology and Philosophy A & B“, pays attention to two main points. Firstly, the main tenets and dogmas of the different theological schools which have existed throughout Islamic history are examined. Secondly, a range of specific theological topics, especially those which are of relevance for Muslims in the West and in particular in the Netherlands, are studied, so as to clarify and analyze the differences among the above mentioned theological schools. Students will study books such as *Maqālāt al-Islāmiyyīn wa Iḥtilāf al-Muṣallīn* by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Aš‘arī and *al-Milal wa an-Nihal* by aš-Šahrastānī.

B) Social Sciences

- The religious history of the Netherlands (10 ECTS)

This module is intended to provide students with an overview of the religious history of the Netherlands in the context of religious developments in the wider European and global arenas. The module is structured around two main focal points. The first of these involves an examination of the main constitutional concepts which have played a central role in Dutch history and which are also directly or indirectly relevant for Muslims residing in the Netherlands today, such as the relationship between the state and religion. Secondly, the relations which the Netherlands have maintained with Islamic countries, especially Morocco and Turkey, as reflected in both the early history and modern times, are also critically analyzed.

The study material for this module is largely to be developed by the lecturer. However, as a starting point, unpublished study material developed by Prof. Dr. P.S. van Koningsveld for the program „Netherlands and Islam (*Hūlandā wa al-Islām*)“, a course attended by religious teachers of Iraqi origin during the period 2005-2007, can also be used.

- Social Sciences (Sociology and Psychology) applied to Islam in Europe especially in the Netherlands I and II (10 ECTS)

This module is based on the following three modules offered in the bachelor program: „An introduction to the Social Sciences“, „Psychology of Religion“ and „Islam in Europe.“ These are taught as part of the minor space in the third year of the Bachelor degree. To be able to take this module, students are required to have a good knowledge of the book

Training Imams in Europe: The Challenges of Developing a Unified Program

„*Muslims in Nederland en België [Muslims in the Netherlands and Belgium]*“ by W.A. Shadid and P.S. van Koningsveld (3rd edition), especially as regards the legal rules with relevance to Islam in Europe.

This module pays attention to the scholarly research on Muslims in the Netherlands. The study material will be selected from the most recent scholarly publications in this field, one of which is the study conducted by the Dutch Social-Cultural Plan-bureau (SCP) *Muslim in Nederland* (Muslim in the Netherlands), a work which has been published in different parts.

- Spiritual care and sense-giving: introductory (05 ECTS)

As can be derived from the title, this module focuses on two main issues, i.e. spiritual care and sense-giving. Special attention is paid to the different forms of sense-giving, especially in the (post-) modern period. Learning how to understand, analyze and lead the process of sense-giving are also focal points of this module.

- Spiritual care: multi-religious perspective (05 ECTS)

How do different religious/philosophical traditions consider spiritual care? What type of questions/themes do spiritual care counselors encounter in their professional practice? How do they make use of their traditions to give form to spiritual care as a professional practice? How do they handle the cultural and religious diversity they encounter when practicing this profession? This module pays attention to the backgrounds, starting points, aims and practices of spiritual care within different religious traditions such as Protestantism, Catholicism, Humanism, Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism.

- Spiritual care: perspectives within Islam (05 ECTS)

This module focuses on the visions and perspectives developed within Islamic traditions which concern the different themes which have been already dealt with in the previous two modules. As no study material is available that is directly relevant to the issues discussed in this module, the pedagogic and scientific capacities of the lecturer are of vital importance in order to prepare a relevant *reader*. In order to do this, the lecturer can make use of studies such as:

- Brand, Femke, *Islamitische geestelijke verzorging in Nederlandse ziekenhuizen: inhoud, functie en belangrijkste knelpunten*.
- Justitie, *Islam en de imam: verslag conferentie Moslims en geestelijke verzorging, 9 juni 1997, Nieuwe Kerk, Amsterdam*

C) *Training and M.A. thesis* (30 ECTS)

For the „*imamat*“ specialization, profession-oriented training is to take place in one of the mosques affiliated to the Islamic organizations involved in this confessional program. For „*spiritual care*“ specialization, the training can take place in healthcare institutions, hospitals, prisons, etc. The decision regarding the place, content and form of the training is to be negotiated with the Islamic organizations cooperating in this program. Students also have the chance to do a specific part of their training abroad. Bearing in mind the profession-oriented nature of this program, part of the M.A. thesis can consist of a report on the training period.

4. Concluding Remarks

The aforementioned program, consisting of an academic bachelor and confessional master, keeps in mind the expectations of both Muslim and non-Muslim citizens of Dutch society concerning what imams should be, regardless of whether they work in mosques or elsewhere. Whilst these expectations are mostly presented as being contradictory, the proposed structure of this program aims to prove this is not the case.

Additionally, the proposed program is not just a theoretical framework for something imaginary. The academic part is already running and is starting to gain publicity and popularity among members of the Muslim community and Dutch society as a whole. After intensive discussions and negotiations, the two Islamic organizations, backed by Leiden University, submitted the proposal of this program to the Dutch Ministry of Education on 6 October 2008. A response from the Dutch Minister was sent to the organizations on 1 April 2009. The Minister expressed his interest in the plans of these two organizations and in the program they had submitted. However, he also added that funding the program within the *duplex-ordo* system was difficult due to legal obstacles. The main legal obstacle was article 16.21 of the Dutch Act on Higher Education and Scientific Research (*Wet op het hoger onderwijs en wetenschappelijk onderzoek*). According to this act, the training of clergy belonging to one of seven religious groups contained on a list could be funded as part of the above mentioned system. This list did not include Islam. In addition, the Minister said that a proposed amendment of this law was under consideration in the Dutch parliament. The Minister promised to reconsider the proposal and look at further possibilities once the amendment was approved.

In June 2009 the Dutch parliament decided to remove the restrictions tying the funding of clergy to their religious denomination, i.e. to their belonging to one of the seven religious groupings named in article 16.21 which can be funded for confessional programs. On 3 July 2009 the Islamic organizations, together with representatives from Leiden University, were invited for a meeting at the Ministry of Education to discuss their proposal submitted on 6 October 2008 in light of the new developments. During the meeting, the Islamic organizations again expressed their desire to establish the imam-training program in co-operation with Leiden University. The parties involved gave clarifications to different questions raised by the Ministry of Education. The Ministry promised to study the proposal again in the light of the latest (legal) developments and convey their final decision to the parties involved in the following period.

The final concluding remark refers once again to future challenges. If the proposal is rejected by the Ministry of Education, the main challenge for the Islamic organizations will clearly be to continue in their attempts to establish the program. However, if the Ministry decides to support the proposed program, the challenges will not disappear. How can capable staff be procured who can convince both the Muslim community and the Dutch academic community? Will the new program stand up to the challenge of accommodating other Islamic organizations? Will the graduates of this program be able to take an active part in the complicated socio-political debates in Dutch society? Will they satisfy the needs of the Muslim community? All these questions will represent serious challenges that should be taken into consideration and thus not forgotten in the midst of the euphoria caused by a possible positive decision from the Ministry of Education.