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THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION

# Religion: Help or Hindrance to Development?





RELIGION: HELP OR HINDRANCE  
TO DEVELOPMENT?



# RELIGION: HELP OR HINDRANCE TO DEVELOPMENT?

**LWF DOCUMENTATION 58**

**EDITED BY KENNETH MTATA**



THE  
LUTHERAN  
WORLD  
FEDERATION

A Communion  
of Churches

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# PREFACE

*Martin Junge*

From its founding in 1947 to the present day, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has been faithfully living out its commitment and vocation to accompany those in need and distress as a result of natural or human-made disasters. What then distinguishes the LWF's involvement in the world from that of other actors undertaking similar activities? As a communion of churches, the LWF's engagement is informed by its theological resources and its values to love God and serve the neighbor.

The essays included in this book were first presented at an international conference on religion and development, organized and hosted by the Lutheran World Federation and Mission EineWelt in 2012 and attended by some seventy academics, heads of churches, development practitioners and agencies. One of the aims was to help the LWF and its partners further to reflect on and deepen their understanding of the value of religion and religious orientation with regard to the overall well-being of humanity and creation.

Authors from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin and North America not only reflect on the many ways in which religion has positively influenced development, but candidly assess some of religion's negative aspects which need to be addressed. These include, among others, the fact that certain religious concepts, institutions and practices inhibit the broader participation of women and young people in society.

Case studies from Costa Rica, Liberia and Zimbabwe provide vivid examples of the positive impact of religion on development such as encouraging the participation of women and men in peace building, awareness raising and development. Spiritual resources continue to provide horizons of hope and foster resilience in difficult times. Especially in situations of political instability, religious institutions provide orientation for the communities as well as basic services in the areas of health and education.

I commend this publication to theological seminaries and faculties, churches and individuals interested and involved in development who seek to relate their faith resources to the betterment of the world.

# INTRODUCTION

*Kenneth Mtata*

This publication is a result of the international conference on religion and development organized by the Lutheran World Federation in partnership with Mission EineWelt. About seventy participants—academics, heads of churches, development practitioners and agencies—met at the mission center in Neuendettelsau, Germany, 21–25 October 2012, with the aim of deepening their understanding of the relationship between religion and human development in order to help faith-based organizations (FBOs) working in development to strengthen their self-understanding and increase their cooperation in development.

The participants' personal expectations were taken into account and influenced the discussions following the presentations. Participants expressed the desire to find ways of helping churches to be (a) involved in development and development work; (b) participate in public space; and (c) establish a clear relationship between proclamation (mission) (gospel) and development. Moreover, ways were to be sought to bridge the gap between professional development services and church development activities, and many participants were eager further to develop their understanding of the relationship between religion and development, especially regarding leading contemporary ideas, the ultimate goal of development and how different contexts influence the development agendas. For some participants—especially those coming from Asia and Africa—the relation between religion and development in the context of plural faiths was critical. All participants saw the diversity of participants as an opportunity for networking and the exchange of ideas, experiences and good practices, which would in turn help establish and strengthen partnerships and networks in development among related FBOs. Such cooperation also ensures the accountability between and among faith-based development actors. Ac-

countability became a controversial issue between funding agencies in the global North and their implementing partners in the global South, although it was quickly observed that such stereotyping could curtail valuable exchange and honest engagement. Some participants explicitly asked how rich countries could be convinced to share the burden of the poor countries without creating a dependency situation and compromising the dignity of the recipients of aid. The conference sought to explore alternatives to the contemporary development paradigm—informed by the MDGs—which will come to the end in 2015 and possibly to come up with some concrete ideas for strengthening their work back home.

## **METHODOLOGY**

In order to address the participants' questions and expectations, case studies from different contexts complemented theoretical and practical presentations on specific subjects, including religious, theological and economic concepts. The case studies from Costa Rica, Liberia and Zimbabwe by Carlos Bonilla, Lindora Howard-Diawara and Ambrose Moyo respectively address some of the ways in which religion contributes positively to the well-being of society. Moreover, panel-discussions allowed for an in-depth analysis of the presentations, and group discussions provided the opportunity to enhance the discussions.

## **THE PUBLICATION**

All but two of the essays in this collection were first presented at the conference. In his opening remarks, Eberhard Hitzler outlines the context and raises some of the questions that the conference was to explore. Michael Martin's opening sermon is based on Nehemiah, the book around which all morning devotions were organized. Martin refers to the reconstruction of Germany in the aftermath of WWII and clearly shows how outside support and internal focus informed by a rich Christian tradition supported the reconstruction process. Kenneth Mtata's essay, "Religion and Development: Friends or Foes," provides an overview of the relationship between religion and development through the ages and emphasizes the crucial role of religion in thinking and implementing development today. Religious ideas and practices shape development ideals and practices. Vítor Westhelle demonstrates this on the basis of Luther's views on usury, while Andreas Heuser looks at how some contemporary African Pentecostal Churches conceive of and get involved in development. Of importance here

is how certain theological ideas among these groups influence their vision of the world. Karel Th. August raises numerous challenges with regard to the contemporary development models and proposes one that is ingrained and sustained by local cultural and religious resources. Michael Biehl investigates the concept of religion in Western thought and investigates how different academic traditions influence the understanding of development. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro focuses on the quasi-religious nature of capitalism, while Theresa Carino gives an overview of the prominent public role of religion in China in light of the rapidly growing Chinese economy. Samuel Ngun Ling and Johnson Mbillah explore the complexity of development in the context of religious pluralism showing that, coupled with ethnic and political power struggles, religion can potentially play a negative role if care is not taken to highlight its positive values. Madipoane Masenya ngwan'Mphahlele demonstrates how certain interpretations of religious and cultural texts can marginalize women from development, while Lindora Howard-Diawara, who herself played an important role in the women's peace movement in Liberia, shows how women can become a force for peace. In countries that are undergoing transition, peace-building and conflict management are important tools whose religious roots can be easily identified. Ambrose Moyo describes how the Ecumenical Church Leaders' Forum in Zimbabwe has been working to restore peace in the volatile political situation in Zimbabwe. Much of the international development work is now being run by FBOs. What distinguishes FBOs from other development actors? Rebecca Larson tries to answer this question using the case of ACT Alliance, while Kjell Nordstokke, gives an overview of FBOs and demonstrates their distinctive contribution to development. Many FBOs are being restructured in order to help them better to implement their programs. In her presentation, Claudia Warning explains how this is playing out among FBOs in Germany and what implications this has for development.

While the contributors do not point to a homogenous way of looking at the relationship between religion and development, they concur that religion is central to the way in which development work should be conceived of. Since its presence cannot be denied, it is imperative that development thinkers and/or practitioners investigate the possible implications of religion on their work.



# OPENING REMARKS<sup>1</sup>

*Eberhard Hitzler*

To talk about religion and development is quite a challenge since neither of these words, religion or development, is clearly defined. As a result, most of us most probably have our own understanding and interpretation of, history with and stories about religion and development.

The first story that springs to my mind might not be significant, even banal, but it might illustrate the many-sidedness of religion and development.

Walking around Geneva or Amsterdam, many German visitors notice one obvious difference in lifestyle: there are almost no curtains. Passersby can freely look into people's living rooms, kitchens and even bedrooms while, in Germany, curtains or shutters prevent the passerby from looking into people's houses. This small, maybe rather insignificant, cultural difference goes back to Calvin who profoundly influenced Geneva. He had ordered the removal of all curtains from the citizens' homes in order to enhance transparency and ethical discipline. He was of the opinion that good people have nothing to hide and that therefore they did not need curtains or shutters. The German reformers never intended to exercise such strict control over the believers' private sphere and hence this difference which one notices still today, almost five hundred years later.

Religion and development is an important topic, far beyond the issue of curtains. I am very glad that Mission EineWelt and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have jointly organized this conference, which has attracted so many participants. I am especially glad that participants come from many parts of the world and different areas of expertise—academics as well as practitioners, representatives of churches as well as development and mission organizations.

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<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the international conference on religion and development, Neudettelsau, Germany, 2012.

The topic religion and development has become increasingly important. Since it is impossible to cover all aspects at one conference, the LWF Communion Office decided to address this topic with a comprehensive three-year program. We hope that all of you as well as other organizations and individuals will continue to contribute to this program beyond this conference.

To make adequate and meaningful introductory comments is a difficult task. I shall, nonetheless, attempt to do so since I like challenges and difficult tasks. Moreover, as a theologian, I am used to talking about things that I do not fully understand. I would like to make a few remarks which I hope can guide the discussions over the next days.

## **THE LOCATION: WILHELM LÖHE**

While most people probably do not even know the small village of Neuendettelsau, for some it is almost the center of the world since, over the past 150 years, it has significantly impacted religion as well as development.

When, in the first half of the nineteenth century, many Germans tried to escape poverty and hunger, Johann Konrad Wilhelm Löhe, pastor of the Lutheran Church in Neuendettelsau, started in 1841 to train some of the emigrating farmers as pastors for the emigrants to the so-called new world, America, Australia and, later, missionaries to Brazil, New Guinea and Ukraine. Many Lutheran congregations in Michigan, Ohio and Iowa were either founded or influenced by missionaries sent by Löhe. This was the beginning of what today is Mission EineWelt.

In addition, Löhe continued to be concerned about domestic social matters. He was especially troubled by the terrible situation of many unmarried girls and young women in the rural areas, who were underprivileged and lacked education. In this spirit, he founded the first Deaconess Mother House in 1849, which became a place for delivering social services and learning by hosting schools, hospitals and other social agencies.

In light of this tradition, which greatly influenced both religion and development, Neuendettelsau seems a most appropriate location for this conference on religion and development.

## **WHERE DO WE START—FROM RELIGION OR DEVELOPMENT? MAX WEBER AND KARL MARX**

There is no doubt that religion influences the development of individuals, societies and nations. Many of you will be familiar with Max Weber's book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which he proposed that

Protestantism was one of the major “elective affinities” associated with the rise of market driven capitalism in the Western world and the rational-legal nation state. Contrary to Marx’s “historical materialism,” Weber emphasized the importance of cultural influences embedded in religion as a means for understanding the genesis of capitalism.

The opposite is described by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: economic and social status and interest shape religion and its teaching and preaching. “Religion is the opium of the people” is one of Karl Marx’s most frequently paraphrased statements.

I am glad that this conference is conceived in such a way that both starting points are critically examined:

- The power and influence of religion on development—for better or for worse
- The power and influence of the development thinking and the Western based development industry on religion, its institutions, dogmata and leadership—for better or for worse.

### **RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT—STRANGERS TO EACH OTHER OR MEMBERS OF THE SAME FAMILY?**

Those who live in secular societies are used to the fact that religion is relegated to the private sphere. In light of a history of religious dominance over all areas of society, experiencing religion as a source of conflict and war, and religious leaders exercising authority and control over societies and individuals, most Europeans regard the reappearance of religion in the public sphere with skepticism. Religion—despite the fact that globally almost all people are religious—is not at home in the think-tanks of development organizations or in the praxis of development projects. The development industry is highly competitive and, time and again, representatives of faith-based development organizations have to respond to the question, what is the added value of a faith-based organization to development? Are they simply Oxfam with hymns?

Since 9/11 and in view of the growing influence of radical Islamists in the Maghreb countries, we feel deeply disturbed by the forceful, even violent, reappearance of religion in the public sphere. Many who come from the so-called “underdeveloped countries” and are exposed to, or the so-called “beneficiaries” of the development industries and its projects, are suspicious of “development.” They see “development” as a clearly “Western” enterprise that enhances Western economic and social dominance and serves

a Western political agenda, even if some of its actors have religious roots and are faith-based organizations. Even church leaders in the global South, despite welcoming the fact that development has the potential tremendously to improve the financial situation of their churches, are worried about the efforts of development agents: who sets the agenda and what and whose values are being pursued? Even church-based development cooperation seems to mirror a Western development agenda and Western domination rather than challenging them.

Despite the undisputed fact that religion and development belong together, that they influence each other and are members of the same family so to speak, they seem not to be very much at home in each other's houses. Therefore, this conference might be a good opportunity to get to know, understand and become more familiar with each other and even to feel at home in each other's home.

### **SEEKING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING— BUILDING A COMMON HOME**

If we share a common understanding that religion and development have a tremendous influence on each other, and acknowledge that both aim to enable and empower people so that they may have life, and have it in abundance (Jn 10:10), then what we have to explore is how this is best achieved.

We must identify how both religion and development can put people at the center and critically analyze what hinders us from doing so. "Uphold the rights of the poor and oppressed" (cf. Ps 82) is the LWF's Department for World Service chosen motto. With this biblical motto, World Service tries to underline the rights-based approach, by which the most disadvantaged in society and their rights are the focus of its work. Nonetheless, World Service is fully aware that it is often not successful in its attempt.

### **REDISCOVERING RELIGION IN DEVELOPMENT WORK—REEMPHASIZING DIAKONIA**

It is interesting to note that today many secular organizations and governments involved in humanitarian and development work clearly recognize the importance of religion. Religious organizations play a significant role in society—locally, nationally, regionally and globally. Religion shapes the attitude and values of individuals and societies in terms of social behavior, economic activity and political involvement, to mention but a few areas. Increasingly, various governments and UN organizations are pursuing dia-

logues with religious leaders and organizations so as better to understand their critical role in civil society. Furthermore, more and more faith-based development and humanitarian organizations from the Islamic world and other religions seek to contribute to the welfare of people in need of assistance while churches, especially Lutheran churches, are emphasizing their “holistic mission” in the sense that diaconal work and commitment constitute one of their core tasks.

As Christian organizations we are therefore challenged more deeply to reflect on our own identity as well as to ask ourselves a few critical questions:

- How can we ensure that both religion (churches in our case) and development organization really put the people at the center and are not driven by organizational, political or economic interests?
- Must we distinguish the need of the people from the need of the churches?
- How “churchy” are faith-based development agencies and how “diaconical” are churches?
- How do we see the roles of religion and the churches in society?
- What is the aim of our development work or our diakonia?
- Is there a difference between diakonia and the common understanding of development work?

I look forward to an interesting conference, the beginning of a journey into a land full of mystery, adventure and many new discoveries that will help us better to understand each other, the world of religion and the world of development. I wish you joyful and interesting days in this village of Wilhelm Löhe from which until today important impulses go out into the whole world.

I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Claudia Jahnel and her staff as well as Mission EineWelt for hosting and organizing this conference and for the excellent cooperation with the Lutheran World Federation. It sets an example for how the LWF Communion Office—with its small staff and limited resources—can in future work in a meaningful way.



# SERMON

*Michael Martin*

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They replied, "The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire." When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven (Neh 1:1-4).

In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was served him, I carried the wine and gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before. So the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This can only be sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, "May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors' graves, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" Then the king said to me, "What do you request?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. Then I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors' graves, so that I may rebuild it" (Neh 2:1-5).

Dear sisters and brothers,

"The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire." As we read in the Book of Nehemiah, the situation in Jerusalem was disastrous and the people who had returned from captivity in Babylon were living in a devastated city.

The account of the city of Jerusalem and its residents in 5 BC reflects the reality of many people in our time. Many are living in ruins, without prospects and lacking the basic human needs. No roof over their heads, no clean water, no medical care, not to mention securing a means of existence, healthcare, or good education. Everything is in ruins. The walls have broken down and the gates have been destroyed by fire.

Not so very long ago, this was the situation in Germany. When one walks through Nuremberg or Munich today, one cannot imagine that these cities, its houses and churches, were lying in ruins less than seventy years ago. The people living in the ruins were hungry. Hundreds of thousands of refugees from eastern Europe came to live among those whose houses had been destroyed and who had nothing to eat.

The walls have broken down and the gates have been destroyed by fire. This was the situation here in Bavaria after 1945.

In this situation, the Germans received help. Just like Nehemiah, many people across the world thought: come, we want to rebuild the cities there. We want to help make it possible for people to live there again and for the people of Germany to have a future.

Beautiful letters from people across the world who helped rebuild Germany attest to this. Food packages were sent, medical support was provided and helpers came into the country. There was indescribable support, especially from churches across the world. From its beginning in 1947 until the establishment of the Department of World Service in 1952, in just five years, the Lutheran World Federation alone delivered aid supplies in the amount of DM 23 mio to Germany.

Germany also received considerable help in order to reestablish church life. Churches were rebuilt, welfare institutions created and schools established. Because the destruction of Germany was not just external or material, also the people themselves had to start all over again. This did not only concern bread and clean drinking water, medical care and education, but also the need to deal with the great guilt from which the Germans were suffering following the Nazi regime and World War II. In other words, since rebuilding Germany was not only a question of bricks and mortar, but one of internal healing, it also concerned religion. Rebuilding and reflecting on God who creates new life in spite of guilt and failure are inseparable from another.

This is what Germany experienced after the war—in particular through the help of churches in other countries and on other continents, because many said, just like Nehemiah, “Come, we want to rebuild the cities there.”

Today’s situation in Germany is completely different. We are today in a position to give something of what we have and offer help there where the walls have broken down and the gates have been destroyed by fire. Today, we can help to rebuild houses and mend broken people; we can ensure

that those in urgent need receive medical aid and support others as they operate training centers and welfare institutions.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria has an extensive network of partner churches in many countries: from Australia, Papua New Guinea and Southeast Asia, via Africa and Europe to Latin America. These partner relations involve much more than merely delivering aid. Rather, the prevalent spirit is one of mutual learning, exchanging experiences and true cooperation and one can experience how closely development tasks and religion belong together. Many of the church's partners repeatedly emphasize the inseparability of faith and active aid and, hence, the inseparability of religion and development.

How can the relationship between development and religion be evaluated? What do we mean by "holistic mission?" How are development processes affected by religious beliefs? Are they often unsuccessful precisely because spiritual and religious frameworks are not taken into consideration?

While our partner relations contribute to holistic development, the focus of our Christian faith is always more than the church. It is always the whole *oikoumene*, e.g., the whole inhabited earth. Unlike Nehemiah, we cannot only look after those who belong to us. We must keep an eye on society as a whole. Therefore, it is right to direct the provision of aid and rebuilding efforts to all people in a region, regardless of race, creed, color or national origin. Therefore, it is right that the Lutheran World Federation does not only take care of the troubles of Christian refugees or Christian victims. We are not bound to ourselves as Christians; our mission is to the whole world. The Gospel according to Matthew tells us to "Go to all nations" and if we consider our mission today as companionship, then this applies to all people on earth: all people in their variety and diversity, their hopes and fears, different religious beliefs and expectations, needs and challenges.

Thus, religion and development is not a specifically Christian topic. It goes far beyond our congregations and churches and addresses how we can together renew cities and people after terrible devastation. How can we, together, help to create living possibilities for all people, and how can we rebuild that which has been destroyed?

We could also ask, How can we overcome destruction, suffering and war? How can we share goods entrusted to us so that all people can live? How can we live together in our one world?

This leads us to the question of a fair exchange and "just development." How can rebuilding be designed in such a way that it benefits the people in an appropriate way? How can we contribute to establishing a fair society? Is there a "just development" at all? What exactly is just? What exactly is fair? Is it fair that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? Is it fair that good education is reserved for those coming from wealthy families? Is it fair that 25,000 people die of hunger

every day and, at the same time, mountains of food are destroyed? Is it fair that we consume so much more energy in Europe than, for example, in Africa?

What exactly is fair? This question was discussed with great passion when I was a student. We were looking for quick, simple solutions and rejected them just as quickly. One of our teachers told us his personal story. He had three children. Of course, he loved all three of them and supported every one of them. He wanted them to grow up well and for them to be able to take advantage of the many opportunities life offered. He wanted them to go their own way, both protected and in freedom. It was much harder for one of his children, let us call him Klaus, than for the other two. Klaus had a disability. The other two children often complained that their parents spent so much time on Klaus. They were always there for him and he was always the focus of their attention. The other two children felt that they were being treated unfairly and neglected. But the parents explained to the two of them that it was fair to take care of the person who most needs the help. It is fair to pay more attention to Klaus than to the two of them. It is fair to divide attention differently, even though all are loved the same.

This story made me realize that fairness is not about giving the same to everybody, to treat everybody in the same way and treat everybody like the other one. Rather, fairness is to give what the other one needs. It is fair to pay more attention to a person who is more in need of support. It is fair to act according to the situation and not according to the same principle. Therefore, when we talk about building a fair society and just development we must bear in mind that the weak need more support than the strong. Whoever has more can also contribute more.

Just development requires solidarity. Broken down walls and gates destroyed by fire must be rebuilt. Development will only be there where we are willing really to share and not only give something of our wealth. Of course, this not only applies to material goods, but also to other gifts such as time, communion, knowledge and skills, experiences and insights. Sharing concerns our whole humanity: our material goods and also our hopes and expectations; our money and also our songs and rituals; our possessions and also our religion.

Yes, we can contribute to a just development in our world. We can rebuild broken down walls and gates destroyed by fire. But we must consider all facets of life, treat all human beings in a holistic way and not separate development and religion.

When hope emerges in the midst of fear and need it becomes clear that life is stronger than death. After 1945 in Germany and today in many places in the world, there where the walls are broken and the gates destroyed by fire, life is stronger than death.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

# RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT: FRIENDS OR FOES?

*Kenneth Mtata*

In many primal cultures, religion was and still is the organizing principle of life. It was not called “religion” as such since it did not belong to a separate realm one could distance oneself from or reflect on objectively. Religion was the belief and knowledge system around which all reality was organized. Such a system revolved around the ubiquitous presence of the gods who tended to manifest both malevolent and benevolent powers. Such a worldview comprised specific practices carried out within known institutions associated with such beliefs. As such, individual and community well-being was not conceivable outside this religious system. Life was assumed to be enabled by divine agency, assisted by special human agents acting on behalf of the gods. The gods gave victory in war, success in hunting, guaranteed rainfall and the fertility and productivity of the land and human beings. The mutual obligations of this covenantal relationship remained intact only as long as human beings acted within known boundaries of harmony and treated other created things as sacred as well as appeased the gods through certain rituals.

To a certain extent, such was also the world presupposed by the Old and New Testaments and remains the dominant worldview in many communities in countries toward which most of the development efforts are directed. Even though some religious ideas have become more established and institutionalized and religious practices more organized, the basic assumption remains that God directly intervenes in the welfare of humanity and that it is in human beings’ best interest to cooperate. Divine and human agency were seen as complimentary rather than contradictory. Even though God had put human beings in the garden to till it, without God’s

help their toil was pointless (e.g., Psalm 127). The bottom line was that God intended that all human beings live in peace and joyful relationship with one another.

In practice, the religious systems tended at times to manifest excesses of power and its abuse. In the Old Testament, God would raise prophets to challenge such systems by calling people to repentance and to the restoration of justice in order for God to do God's part of guaranteeing general well-being. This was particularly true when the system neglected the most vulnerable members, the widow and the orphan. So we hear,

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever (Jer 7:5-7).

The understanding that God desires the well-being of human beings seems to have continued throughout the New Testament. According to the gospels, Jesus had come that "they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). This abundant life required putting in place systems of managing and caring for those in need (Acts 4:34). This system of care for the needy was inherited from the Jewish religious tradition that continued in early Christianity, although with some caveats, charging believers to do nothing with selfish intent (Mt 6:2). The churches established in the Gentile world were mandated to maintain this tradition of primarily caring for the poor, "[t]hey asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do." (Gal 2:10).

The model for addressing human well-being described above is that of charity whereby the church collects resources from its members in order to meet the immediate needs of those in need. This model did not involve long-term planning nor address the root causes. When a need arose in a Christian community in one part of the world, Christians in another part of the world dispatched gifts to alleviate the challenges. So we read, "for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem" (Rom 15:26).

## **LUTHER'S CONTRIBUTION**

The charity model continued to influence the church throughout the ages. Religiously inspired actions for the well-being of the then known world continued with such generosity being accorded different forms of recogni-

tion within the church. That such actions of mercy would merit God's favor was assumed not only at an individual level but slowly came to be part and parcel of the institutional church. It was understood that giving to the needy and/or to the church would in return ensure God's favor. Among the many issues raised by Martin Luther and the other reformers was this concern for merited favor. For Martin Luther, all acts of charity were supposed to be an outflow of gratitude toward what one had already received from God, namely the gifts of salvation. One's abundant resources were supposed to be used in service of the needs of the neighbor. This was not necessarily meant to encourage the neighbor's laziness. All human beings were supposed to work as if before God. Every engagement in life was supposed to give glory to God and support one's needs and those of the neighbor.

Beyond this individual charity model, Martin Luther believed in a more comprehensive systemic approach to the scourge of poverty characterizing the society of his day. Even before the Reformation, in addition to its responsibility to maintain church buildings and pay for pastoral work, the church depended on the "income-producing foundations or properties, endowments of altars at which special masses were celebrated, compulsory tithes, and fees for ministerial acts, especially those performed for the souls of the departed"<sup>1</sup> to care for the poor. As noted above, during the Reformation, some of these income generating methods were rejected for theological reasons. This, in turn, had negative implications on the church's income and its ability to provide for those in need. Some princes, who had always coveted the property of the church, saw this chaotic Reformation period as a window of opportunity to try and confiscate church property such as land. In the name of their newly found reformation "freedom," some lay people decided not to pay their tithes and offerings.<sup>2</sup> In light of the resulting meager resources, the evangelical churches were not able to address the needs of their poor members and poverty in society in general. The habit of begging that had become common practice among the many poor who constituted a large percentage of the population increased, even though this was condemned by the reformers.

It was in this context that Luther's models of development were fomented. He preached his long "Sermon on Usury" in 1520 based on Deuteronomy 15:4, in which he refuted the charging of interest on money borrowed in situations of desperation. For Luther, it was, in the first place, immoral for Christians to let anyone live in so much need that they needed to beg.<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>1</sup> Martin Luther, "Ordinance of a Common Chest, Preface 1523," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 45 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 161.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

1521, Luther also wrote his “Open Letter to the Christian Nobility” encouraging all the cities to “take care of its own poor, and that an organized system of poor relief be set up to replace the current haphazard system.”<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther’s challenge to the churches led to the restructuring of the church’s finances and a rethinking as to how to address poverty in society.

Different reformers had different approaches to economic development in response to the immediate concerns. In one way or the other, their theological ideas or proposed church economic models have informed the church’s involvement in development until today. In Europe, Christianity continued to play a very prominent role in addressing human needs well beyond Luther and the Reformation. But as economics and politics grew to become realms independent of religion, the role of Christianity became ambivalent. Reformers such as Martin Luther had lost their credibility among ordinary people as far as their economic ideas were concerned, especially there where he was seen to be siding with ruling classes. In other situations, the church was seen as working hand-in-glove with the aristocracy to dispossess the poor through religion.

## THE DECLINE OF RELIGION

Even though not always related to each other, the European wars in the period immediately following the Reformation (1524–1648) are generically called the religious wars of Europe. This and the following period, also called the Age of Enlightenment or the Age of Reason (approximately 1620–1781),<sup>5</sup> were very fruitful in terms of the development of new thought paradigms in Europe. Such a mixture of fortunes created a slow but lasting assault on the church as a legitimate actor in the public space. Such negativity tended to be structured into a single metanarrative that saw religion as the main contributor to the destruction of society. The cruelty of religious persecution, the barbarism of the crusades and the burnings at the stake of those accused of witchcraft and heresy, the wars between Roman Catholics and Protestants, the complicit relationship between religious leaders and the aristocracy, the marginalization of women, the alleged undemocratic nature of the church, the fundamentalism of the church, the endorsement

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 161–62.

<sup>5</sup> There are different ways of categorizing these epochs. The 1620–1781 periodization is based on the publication of Francis Bacon’s *Novum Organum* in 1620 and Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. Others see the Renaissance as beginning in 1500–1650 and the Enlightenment starting in 1650–1800. See Ronald T. Michene, *Engaging Deconstructive Theology* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 19.

of racism and apartheid and other such ideologies, the killings by religious extremists etc., all these were forged together into a single narrative to paint a picture of religion as a threat human well-being.

Apart from these negative effects, the decline of religion was also the result of intellectual developments that engendered views of life and all reality within scientific rationalism and empiricism. Only that which could be proven scientifically or measured was to be considered “true” and worth pursuing. As the truthfulness of religion and its gods were pronounced from the authority of some sacred books and some religious institutions, they were not to be taken seriously since they could not be proven through scientific objectivity. In actual fact, religion and religious institutions were seen as inhibiting scientific inquiry and therefore a sign of backwardness and underdevelopment. Religion denied human beings to reach their full potential, the argument went. Thinkers such as Marx saw religion as a drug meant to delude the masses so that they could not revolt against the ruling classes.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the general mood in Europe was that God was dead, as it was put by the German philosopher, Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900). Human beings had developed to such an extent that religion and gods had become redundant. The God who directed human relations through God’s laws was now replaced by the autonomous human being. According to Karl Marx (1818–1883), the God who had been created by the bourgeoisie in order for them to control the proletariat, was no longer needed. Religion had been used to promise the poor heavenly rewards in order to lower their expectations of earthly satisfactions. According to Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), religion was a major factor contributing to mental problems as individuals lived under the illusion perpetrated by religion that their natural instincts were evil. For him, religion was simply a cop-out.

The view that religion was dead and no longer had any space in public life was generally shared across the Western world, where scientific progress was seen in opposition to the retrogression of religion into the private space. The secular implied civilization and religion backwardness. In the mid-twentieth century, sociologists worked on the understanding that industrialization and technological development would mean the end of religion. In his celebrated book, *The Secular City*, Harvey Cox put it this way, “The age of the secular city, the epoch whose ethos is quickly spreading into every corner of the globe, is an age of ‘no religion at all.’ It no longer looks to religious rules and rituals for its morality or its meanings.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Harvey Cox, *The Secular City* (London: SCM Press, 1965), 3.

**'RETURN OF THE GODS'**

But this situation was soon to change. Even though religion was partly blamed for the unrest and wars in the Western world, there remained the nagging question as to why, if Europeans were rational and scientific people, they used science to make bombs that could annihilate the whole world? If civilization was tantamount to scientific development, how come the Western world was on the brink of decimating itself through wars and atomic bombs? Was equating scientific progress with human development exaggerated? How could scientific development be guaranteed to offer human life and peace? Without religion providing the universal ethics, how could human beings be united to live in peace? Could development of one part of the world be sustainable if the majority of the world was living in poverty?

Furthermore, the role played by many religious leaders in the aftermath of WWII in the formation of the United Nations and other instruments of peaceful coexistence once again brought religion to the fore. The churches were involved in providing the material and spiritual support for displaced persons and refugees after the war. The drafting of the UN Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human rights was heavily influenced by the contributions from the then Commission of the Church on International Affairs, which later became a part of the World Council of Churches.<sup>7</sup> Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), many of whom were led by religious people, made important contributions during the formative stages of the UN. Indirectly, religion had returned to the public space. The part played by religious ideas, religious institutions and actors in the civil rights movement in the United States of America was evident for the whole world to see.

While religion earned its way back in the public space, its role remained unclear since the separation of church and state in many Western countries meant that the part the church was to play was not clearly defined. This was further complicated by the growing presence in the Western consciousness of the plurality of religions and especially the vivid presence of fundamentalist religiosity. In the Western world, the climax was 11 September 2001 when Islamic fundamentalists orchestrated the blowing up of the Twin Towers in New York by forcing two airplanes to plunge into them. This did not only bring religion to the public space but, for religious skeptics, it reinforced the understanding that religion was a negative force in society. However, as is well known, in the midst of all the pain, it was the religious communities that embraced the bereaved and encouraged the fearful. It was the Christian and Muslim leaders who spoke with one voice

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<sup>7</sup> *Religion and Public Policy at the UN* (Religions Count Report, April 2002), 13.

against such barbarism. So, even in the face of terror caused by religion, religion has proved to be indispensable as its antidote.

## **RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT TODAY**

Churches have continued with this tradition of addressing systemic poverty. In particular, the missionaries who left Europe to go to Africa, Asia and Latin America felt pressed to address the challenges of hygiene, malnutrition, superstition and other issues that inhibited the fullness of life. While the missionaries sometimes sang from the same hymnal with the oppressive colonizers, many times they addressed the various challenges that prevented local populations from living life to the full. In addition to the churches, the missionaries built hospitals and schools. Initially the schools served to help natives read so that they could read the Bible for themselves. The educational system did, however, not only serve this basic literacy function. It also increased the ability for critical and abstract thinking. The acquired critical tools became handy for natives in their fight against colonialism, an outcome which some of the missionaries had not intended. The Christian education the natives received from the church also gave them ammunition to challenge missionaries in their complicity with colonizers in discrimination. Vaccination programs at mission hospitals greatly improved the life expectancy of natives. Of course, the newcomers did not only bring medicine but also some new diseases that challenged the immune system of the native people.

The process of decolonization saw most of the schools, hospitals and other properties in the hands of the missionaries being taken over by the new local governments. The locals also assumed greater control over the running of the churches and the role of the church or religion in development became increasingly ambivalent. At one level, the missionary churches' ambivalent (and sometimes even supportive) relationship with the colonial regime disempowered it from playing any public role in the aftermath of the colonial period. In other cases, the underlying impotent theological ideas that saw the church as a place of preparing people only to go to heaven weakened the church's role in society. Yet, in other cases, it was the practices inherited from the missionaries, mixed with certain cultural practices, which weakened the testimony of religion and religious institutions as life-giving.

The role of religion in the well-being of humanity and the planet has taken different routes today. Religious institutions participate in local interventions to alleviate the needs within their own religious communities or society in general and it is common to see local churches coming up

with short-term responses to situations of suffering and need. This may include the church organizing prayers to console the bereaved or visiting the sick or those in prison or making a collection to send orphans for medical treatment. Local religious institutions are also involved in longer-term engagements such as running schools or hospitals. Most of these services, especially in the global South, have been taken over from the missionaries.

Another important relationship between religion and development is the growing professionalization of development work carried out by FBOs, many of which are funded by Western donors (a few are locally funded). A third form of religious engagement in development is seen there where public statements on matters of public concern are made individually or collectively by religious authorities. These are made in the context of existing professionalized advocacy or the ordinary engagement with the local community from the pulpit or through Bible studies. Churches have the opportunity to raise development consciousness and capabilities among their members. This creates a myriad of ways in which religion directly influences development since individual actors, influenced by religious ideas, structures and practices, act in certain ways that promote the well-being of society.

This underlines the basic affirmation that religion remains central to development efforts for a number of reasons.

- First, religion and faith remain resources of inspiration and motivation for the welfare and humanitarian engagement of many FBOs. Churches are running hospitals, schools, orphanages and protection centers for vulnerable populations in obedience to their faith values. Many faith communities, despite the abuses of religion among some sectors, are using religion as the foundation for making claims for justice and equitable living. In Africa and many other countries of the global South, in the absence of credible political institutions, many see the church as the only local institution around which they organize their lives. The church provides guidance, preaches peace and reconciliation and awakens the desire for progress.
- Second, religion remains one clear option for mobilizing people in the global South to restrict cultural abuses and excesses that marginalize and oppress other members of society. The church is the place where men, women, young and old meet more than fifty-two times a year to share common aspirations. These people come together voluntarily, willing to listen to the “religious authority” that can have a tremendous influence on how they think about life and how they live their lives. Religious institutions such as churches or mosques remain the most

structured establishments where community can be strengthened to raise legitimate questions and expectations.

- Third, religion provides the basic frame of reference for many people, particularly in Africa and many other countries in the global South. One wonders how any development effort can be conceived without taking into account the basic self-understanding of the recipients. Unless it is meant to perpetuate dependency and foster inferiority among the recipients of development efforts, development must be adapted to the thought systems of the local populations, which is religious. This sounds superficial because, at its root, development implies change—change in the direction of modernization as it happened in the Western world, which, according to the secularization thesis, entails the rejection of religion. The problem here is the failure to learn from history. Modern development has sometimes led to the disintegration of societies, the weakening of the family unit, the monetization of relationships and the commodification of all forms of service. Without taking seriously the religious worldview of the local populations, development remains an alien endeavor.
- Fourth, religion is not always homogenous, rigid and resistant to change, despite some positions that remain evident in religion such as the exclusion of women from leadership, the resistance of some religious communities to using modern medicine such as vaccines for children, the rejection of modern forms of contraception, etc. The emancipatory power of religion has been operating within religion itself. We have seen, for example, Christianity being used in the case of South Africa to buttress the segregation of black people by the apartheid system and, yet, it was in the same religion that liberation and black theology emerged. In this dual function of religion lies the power of hermeneutics or the science of meaning making. One major value of religion in development is that people are not only taught to address their material needs, but to learn new ways of interpreting their realities. This “literacy” function of religion turns recipients not only into appropriate implementers of development projects but articulate and clear thinkers regarding their plight in a broader context. They learn not only to read project plans, but to “read” the whole world in light of the various levels of systemic injustices that contribute to poverty.
- Fifth, if, as statistics show, religion is here to stay, then anyone in development has no choice but to embrace it as one factor in their work. Statistics show that even though formalized religion is declining in

some parts of the world, religious ideals remain and religion is still thriving in other parts of the world, especially those towards which most development efforts are directed. The so-called “secularization thesis” or what Weber called the “decline of the ‘magical garden’ of religion and superstition in the face of rationalism and science”, is no longer tenable.<sup>8</sup> Christianity and Islam are on the increase and spreading rapidly globally through proselytization, evangelization, migration, intermarriage and, above all, procreation. The only other phenomenon that recently has shown comparable record growth is digital technology. It is therefore ludicrous to develop a vision for this world without a clear understanding of how religion will be managed or what role it is going to play in as far as it does not make sense to think of the future without thinking about the maze of modern media technology. What is important here is not how one can “use” or “instrumentalize” religion. Like modern digital technology, merely superficial acquaintance is not sufficient. Religion provides important lenses through which reality can be perceived. Religions provide the language to address the ultimate concerns of humanity. It is in religion that the organic connection of all created things is perceived beyond the consumption ecosystem that considers the rest of creation as suitable only for satisfying the insatiable appetites for human beings. Religion exudes the ethical values that protect human dignity beyond mere formal individual rights, important though these may be. Religion provides that holistic perspective that everyone today seeks in the context of such fragmentation.

We can therefore observe that religious ideas, institutions and practices have a major role to play in achieving the fullness of life we all aspire to. This is in spite of the other negative consequences these may have. In pursuing religion and development, we are making a deliberate effort to show that, among other things, the effectiveness of religion in society largely depends on the efficacy of religious leadership or the main shapers of the dominant opinion. The kind of education these have is therefore vital. This implies two things. Theological education should be nuanced towards the development of society. NGOs must therefore take a keen interest in the curriculum that forms religious community leaders. Secular development agencies need to see religious leaders and religious institutions as potential partners in development. On the one hand, putting money into development initiatives in society gripped by retrogressive religious views is a waste

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen Hunt, *Religion and Everyday Life* (New York/Abington: Routledge, 2005), 19–20.

of resources and, on the other, to wish religion away as a means towards development is simply unhelpful. Religion is here to stay. Churches form the most resilient social institutions in the global South. In the absence of credible political institutions, religion plays a central role in society. What role that will be will depend on how resourceful the leadership is.

Is there any place where religion has informed development paradigms and did it work?

## THE CASE OF MAKONI DISTRICT

We have local success stories from the past missionary era. During the 1920s and 1930s, popular Christianity became a major influence on the development of the communities under the guidance of the Methodist, Anglican and Catholic missionaries in the eastern region of the Makoni district of Zimbabwe. This is well recorded in the work of the social historian Terence Ranger.<sup>9</sup> Ranger observes how African Christians of that era attracted fellow Africans to the Christian faith and their adoption of “entrepreneurial plough agriculture” thereby transforming their village into centers of “civilization.”<sup>10</sup> How did the missionaries achieve this?

### FOCUS ON THE RURAL AREAS

This focus of development used rural folk religion as its starting point. Even the business practices remained couched in traditional African cultural texture no matter how successful the African business person became.

Abraham Kawadza was one of the richest men of the time. He had a lot of property. To give but a few examples, he had cows, goats, sheep, horses and wagons... Though he had many workers he could not allow them to go for work before they had a prayer...Since he had a lot of cows he fed his workers on milk and meat...<sup>11</sup>

During the missionary era and still today, the majority of Africans live in rural areas. It is unfortunate that many development policies are informed by urbanization and industrialization.

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<sup>9</sup> Terence Ranger, “Religion, Development and African Christian Identity,” in Kirsten Host Petersen (ed.), *Religion, Development and African Identity* (Uppsala: Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1987).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

**PROVIDING A THEOLOGY THAT DID NOT SEPARATE  
THE SPIRITUAL FROM THE MATERIAL**

These early missionaries emphasized the holistic approach to the gospel as seen in the religious culture they produced among their followers. “Baba Johan had the conviction that one could not lead a proper holy life unless he [sic] could fend for himself.”<sup>12</sup> Without tying development ideals to the proclamation of the gospel, it becomes only an appendage to the Christian faith and not part of the faith itself.

**EDUCATION FOR DEVELOPMENT**

Some missionaries, such as Canon Edgar Lloyd, returned to England with his wife to learn Peasant Pottery at the Camberwell School of Arts and Crafts. Apart from attaining the relevant education themselves, the missionaries also observed that certain African traditions curtailed the development potential of the African people and these beliefs had to be removed through education. Two such aspects were fear and superstition. The missionaries observed that “economic betterment cannot take place until fear and superstition are removed from agriculture and health...The church is seeking to make the abundant life in Christ available for all, through spiritual transformation, social reformation and economic betterment.”<sup>13</sup> Superstitious religious practices still inform economic aspirations in many parts of Africa as is evinced by some Pentecostal views on prosperity. Teaching people that by giving to the pastor one is going to be blessed and be promoted at work is based on the deep indigenous superstitious fear of the “holy man.” Without developing a clear work ethic of honest living which can be derived from the Christian tradition, corruption and seeking wealth through shortcuts can easily become a habit that cripples development as we are seeing in many countries. Challenging superstition is in no way denigrating local cultural heritage since the global South does not have a monopoly on superstition. Nonetheless, superstition can curtail progress and creative freedom, both of which are prerequisites for development.

**EMPOWERMENT OF LOCAL LEADERSHIP**

The local native priest or pastor also served as a teacher and village leader. In addition to teaching the villagers to read and write, he was himself a

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 44.

successful farmer who had learnt to use the plough and sold his products to the urban areas. The local leaders were family men who were

well educated, and of more than usual intelligence. At each station there is a well-built church...It was also evident that some attempt was made to keep the native kraals...clean and tidy. The men and women were better dressed than is usually the case in kraals far removed from centers of European occupation.<sup>14</sup>

The general frame of thought has not changed much. In many parts of the global South, local pastors still wield considerable power and influence in society in general and among the congregants in particular. So if they are properly empowered one would expect to see them contribute to their localities. Religion and development will seek to empower these agents of change to effect positive transformation in their constituencies.

## CONCLUSION

This paper sought to give a general overview of the relationship between development and religion in general and Christianity in particular. It traced this relationship from the primal religions, the Old and New Testaments. What was evident was that it is not possible or meaningful to think of development among people whose worldview is religious without taking religion seriously. As such, since most of the populations towards whom most of today's development efforts are directed are deeply religious, it follows that religious ideas, institutions and practices must be taken seriously in development thinking. A case study has been used to demonstrate where this has worked in the past and hopefully shows that it can also work elsewhere today.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 46.



# WHAT ASPECTS OF LUTHERAN THEOLOGY CONTRIBUTE TO A HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT MODEL? OR, IS THERE SOMETHING TO BE LOOKED AT?

*Vítor Westhelle*

Clothes go in and out of fashion. Sometimes we keep our old clothes at the back of the wardrobe so that we can wear them again once they come back into fashion. The same happens to some concepts, ideologies and philosophies which, after a while, are taken out of the wardrobe, aired, given some sunlight and “worn” again. The concept of development was definitely out of fashion when I was studying sociology and political economy in the mid-1970s in Brazil. The military regime had just completed a decade in power and would remain in control for another decade. It sustained itself with an ideological construct put together around the notion of development called “developmentism” (*desenvolvimentismo*). The notion was associated with an artfully constructed political coalition, designed by General Golbery do Couto e Silva, which brought into alliance the two main powerful classes in Brazil since colonial times, an agrarian and a clumsy, but innovative, emerging urban bourgeoisie, all to the exclusion of the vast majority of the Brazilian population. At the time, Antonio Delfin Netto, the powerful Finance Minister, said of development, “We need to let the cake rise before we bake it to be divided.” That was development by exclusion. Holistic was the capital that prospered, not the citizens. The Brazilian version of the infamous adage attributed to Marie Antoinette in response to the plea of the poor for bread, “let them eat cake,” was “No need to worry that they don’t have bread, they will eat cake in the future after we have developed.”

I would probably be mentally derailed if I were waiting for the time when the notion of development would once again be unfashionable. I must confess that even to my ears the word development has a sweeter ring now than it did then. I nurture some expectations and see signs of the time when development is redefined in a way that it sustains all. In other words, that it is holistic; a time when the adjectives “sustainable” and “holistic” used in connection with development would be redundant. I do that in a Lutheran verve, with its enigmatic apocalyptic overtones that simultaneously put no hope in the order of this world and yet invest it simultaneously with abundant expectations. The orders of this world should be erected on the idea of love and happiness for it is in this world, “according to the flesh,” insists Luther, that the Christ is present, as in the now and here that Christ chooses, and that is his *parousia*, which means “presence.”<sup>1</sup>

There is no doubt that Luther significantly impacted economy and politics. It is not by chance that Karl Marx called him “the first German economist,” Heinrich Heine referred to Robespierre as the “Luther of the French Revolution,” and Engels said of Adam Smith that he was “the Luther of political economy.” While this certainly is anecdotal, it is still significant for a theological thinker whose theology is drenched by apocalyptic storms.<sup>2</sup> How can one whose thought is guided by the impending end of the world contribute something to the advancement of the secular orders? Commenting on Johannes Weiss’s and Albert Schweitzer’s theses that the message of Jesus was an imminent, consistent (*konsequente*) eschatological vision, the Lutheran theologian and phenomenologist of religion Rudolf Otto draws attention to a problem that could also apply to Luther. Making the following observation regarding Schweitzer’s attributing of a “marvelous ethics” to Jesus, Otto writes: “In doing so he seems not to realize that these two understandings [imminent eschatology and ethical responsibility],

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<sup>1</sup> When Walter Benjamin writes, “The order of the profane should be erected on the idea of happiness,” (Peter Demetz [ed.], *Reflections* [New York: Schocken, 1978], 312) he had the Apostle Paul in mind (particularly Rom 8), argues Jacob Taubes (Jacob Taubes, *The Political Theology of Paul*, trans. Danna Hollander [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004], 72f.). I would add that he could have also had Luther in mind.

<sup>2</sup> See e.g., Heiko Oberman, *Luther: Man between God and the Devil* (London: Yale University Press, 1989). For the view that the apocalyptic motif in Luther is only a dependent variable in the Reformer’s theology, see Bernard Lohse, *Martin Luther’s Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1999). The position championed by Obermann among others has generally prevailed.

when put together, reveal something inconsistent, if not an irrationalism inherent to a genuine eschatology.”<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, it would be an unintelligible rationality if, but only if, the eschatological reality is conceived as a chronological *telos*, mysteriously scheduled for a specific day. Nevertheless, it is not inconsistent if eschatology is understood as an event that comes into time as an indentation, an intervention that consumes time in itself and in it cannot be inscribed except narrated retrospectively (Mount Horeb, the Jabbok river, the Transfiguration event, the gathering in the Upper Room, Pentecost, the Road to Damascus, the Tower Experience and so on down to our own personal experiences in the life of prayer, meditation, reading and trial). These are *kairotic* events that took place in a given setting (a mountain, a river, a room, a road), which means that these events happened in liminal places, under *choratic* circumstances, which take place in sites that are neither in nor out, yet both at once (this is what the word *chōra* in Greek means: a place between places). Hence, the apocalyptic attitude toward a decaying world is seen as the result of the work of the apocalyptic naysayer, the apostate, the enemy, the Antichrist, against whom the messianic presence, the *parousia*, is an event that intervenes in the order of the world, revealing things for what they really are. But how is this then related to the betterment of the world, to the achievement of a good life, happiness and contentment (*eudaimonia*)? We must search for the answer to this question first in Luther’s concept of the two regimes, normally referred to as the “doctrine of the two kingdoms” (*Zwei-Reiche-Lehre*).

Luther’s teachings on the two regimes, the worldly and the spiritual, is something that he eventually shared with other reformers such as Zwingli, Melancthon, Bucer, Calvin and others. It has been interpreted in several ways. For example, in German theology, in response to its abuse during the Nazi period, there was tendency to read it as an extension or even foundation of the law/gospel distinction. In the USA, with its indebtedness to the Hobbesian/Lockean type of liberalism, it has been almost equated with the separation of church and state. With the publication in 1970 of Ulrich Duchrow’s seminal work, *Christenheit und Weltverantwortung*,<sup>4</sup> an amazing amount of research on the topic since the 1930s was put to rest. Some of its lessons have been ignored, others have been learned. Among them is that the spiritual regime (or kingdom, regiment) is not a symmetrical figure of the earthly, in which the earthly would be the shadowy Platonic projection of the spiritual. It is also not Augustine’s two divergent roads offering

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<sup>3</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man: A Study in the History of Religion*, trans. Floyd Filson and Bertram Lee-Woolf (London: Lutterworth, 1943), 59.

<sup>4</sup> Ulrich Duchrow, *Christenheit und Weltverantwortung* (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1970).

the pilgrim a choice of which to follow, to bliss or to gloom. Neither is it a distinction between content and form as the “Barthian” Lutherans would frame it. It is even less in any sense a direct expression of the relationship between church and state (a penchant of US interpreters). Finally, it is also not what post-Vatican II progressive Roman Catholic theologians consider it to be: a post *corpus christianum* revision of the two planes theory, the natural and the supernatural. In sum, it is not as if two vectors ran parallel to each other to meet only in the future eschatological horizon and were occasionally related through the ministry (*Amt*), proclamation, sacraments and charity. Positively stated, the two regimes describe asymmetric dimensions that do not concur, but where the spiritual produces incidents in the earthly order and is subjectively apprehended (this is what Luther called the “experience that makes a theologian”) as something that happens and breaks through the order of things and, in that, reveals the masks under which the divine is hidden. Through these masks shines the light that convicts the world and promises a good life in the midst of the ordeal of a perennially decaying world.

But how does this happen? How this happens is concretely predicated on a peculiar Lutheran teaching and interpretation of the Chalcedonian *communicatio idiomatum* as the union and not mixing of the two natures in Christ. Luther’s interpretation of one of its propositions, which was later dubbed the *genus maiestaticum*, started to mark the difference between the Lutheran and the Reformed traditions as early as the dispute with Zwingli at the Marburg Colloquy of 1529. A year before, Luther, who thought that he did not have much time left in life, decided to write his theological “Confession Concerning the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>5</sup> The text is better known for setting up the argument that at Marburg would be the only point of discord between Zwingli and Luther after agreeing on fourteen out of fifteen theses. But, in this earlier text, he goes even further than affirming the real presence. He presents three modes of Christ’s presence. The first is the historical Jesus; the second the sacramental presence in the visible elements entailing a promise. But then he presents a third mode of presence, “which constitutes him as one person with, far, far beyond things created, as far as God transcends them; and, on the other hand, place it as deeply in and as near to all things as God is in them. For he is one indivisible person with God, and wherever God is, he must be also, otherwise our faith is false.”<sup>6</sup>

This is the crucial aspect of Luther’s theology. Christ is present there where the right hand of God is (to use the creedal metaphor discussed at

<sup>5</sup> WA 26, 261-509; LW 37, 151-372.

<sup>6</sup> WA 26, 336, 15-19; LW 37, 223.

Marburg), that means: everywhere! Yet, in a clothed or masked way which is the outward matter we see and our senses detect. Luther expressed this wrapping of God with a series of metaphors: mask (*larva*), cloth (*vestitus*), wrapping (*invocrum*), which are the external manifestation of God's presence in Christ, according to the flesh, that means in nature, in "majestic matter," as Luther qualified it. This third mode of presence should not surprise those familiar with his "Sermon on the Sacrament" of 1526 where, presupposing the real presence in the sacrament, he states, "If it were possible and I should measure all creatures and describe them in words, you would see wonders just as great, nay, even greater, than in this sacrament."<sup>7</sup>

But how is this to be conceived? Here Luther appeals to ordinary experience ("I am not speaking now from Scripture"<sup>8</sup>), as he often does. He suggests the analogy of a crystal with many facets that display a spark or a bubble inside the crystal even as it appears in every one of the many facets to be there at the surface of the facet, when, in fact, it is in the middle of it. So he applies the analogy:

If Christ also sat at one place in the center of the universe, like the bubble or spark in a crystal, and if a certain point in the universe were indicated to me ... by the Word, should I not be able to say. "See there is the body of Christ ...," just as I say, when a certain side of the crystal is placed before my eyes, "See, there is the spark in the very front of the crystal?"<sup>9</sup>

Indeed it looks to be on the surface of the facet while in fact it is at its core. Here Luther plays with words in his spelling of crystal as *Christall* (modern German *Kristall*), which a strict transliteration would render as Christ-All in English.<sup>10</sup> (When asked to address in this lecture "aspects," that means the "facets" of Luther's theology for holistic development the answer would and should be: the theology of facets is this facet that contributes.)

But before we fall into a soteriologization of nature, we need to pause, because now comes Luther's apocalyptic move. As in early Jewish apocalypticism, the presence (*parousia*) of the Messiah is accompanied by the manifestation of the Anti-Christ, an entity that does not come from above

<sup>7</sup> WA 19, 487; LW 36, 338.

<sup>8</sup> WA 26, 337; LW 37, 224.

<sup>9</sup> WA 26, 337; LW 37, 224.

<sup>10</sup> See the excellent reflection on this passage, even as he borders with good reasons a "panchristism," in Niels Henrik Gregersen, "Natural Events as Crystals of God—Luther's Eucharistic Theology and the Question of Nature's Sacramentality," in Viggo Mortensen (ed.), *Concern for Creation: Voices on the Theology of Creation* (Uppsala: Tro & Tanke, 1995), 143–55.

but is at work in the midst of the “orders of creation,” or institutional spheres, the economy, politics and the church. As sin is a universal condition (*peccatum originale originatum*), it is also always at work (*peccatum originale originans* “because all have sinned” Rom 5:12). And what does sin accomplish? To use Luther’s allegorical motif (yes, he used a lot of allegory despite his criticism of it when it bypassed the literal sense of the Bible), the work of the devil is the one that cracks the mask, tears the clothing, rips the wrappings of the divine, effaces the facets of the crystal; that means: destroys nature and corrupts the institutions ordered for its protection. And this protection, the mask, the clothing, the wrapping shields us from the exposure to the *deus nudus*, the ominous *tremendum* of Otto. At this point, Luther’s disconcerting paradoxes again throw us off balance, because this is precisely also the point in which messianic presence is at hand. The *parousia* of Christ becomes manifest showering us with faith, love and hope. And for what? To rapture us to heaven? Or, put differently, to throw us into the abysmal black hole of a naked god? No, but rather to darn the ripped clothing, to mend the mask, to restore the wrapping. This he expresses in theological concepts, but in paradoxical terms: *ad deum contra deum confugere*, “to flee from and find refuge in God against God.”<sup>11</sup>

Let me illustrate this with a specific case. I specifically chose the last of Luther’s three writings against usury (in 1519/20, 1524 and 1540) because, first, the language exemplifies Luther’s use of apocalyptic verbiage and imagery, channeling at times motifs not unlike the description of the Beast of the Sea (i.e., the market<sup>12</sup>) of Revelations 13.

Further, Luther does not abandon the concrete ground of addressing socioeconomic problems; he is adamant in not allowing a “spiritualization” of the issue. And last, but of decisive importance, he is tackling what he regards as a superlative manifestation of evil at the time the practice of usury, the main tool in the implementation of the emerging financial capitalism; the usurer is the primate of the contemporary *homo pecuniosus*. I should also make clear that the choice of this text was not made on the basis of its moral implications as if it could provide us with anachronistic criteria to pass judgment on late-modern capitalism. The treatise is entitled “An Admonitions to Pastors to Preach against Usury” (curiously this is one of Luther’s texts that to my knowledge has not been translated

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<sup>11</sup> WA 5, 204, 26f.

<sup>12</sup> For the use of the imagery as an allegory for the market, see Vítor Westhelle, “Revelation 13: Between the Colonial and the Postcolonial, a Reading from Brazil,” in David Rhoads (ed.), *From Every People and Nation: The Book of Revelation in Intercultural Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress), 183–99.

into English, at least it is not part of the most complete English edition of the Reformer's works).

Luther starts by exposing misconceptions regarding the practice of usury, namely, the presumption that by lending money the usurer is actually providing a service to the people. Foreshadowing the modern criticism of ideology he writes:

Whoever takes more or better than he gives is doing usury and this is no service at all, but wrong done to his neighbor as when one steals and robs. All is not service and benefit to a neighbor that is called service and benefit. For an adulteress and adulterer do one another a great service and pleasure. ... The devil himself does his servant inestimable service.<sup>13</sup>

To make his case, the Reformer does not appeal to dogmatic or ecclesial authority. He draws on classical philosophy (Seneca, Aristotle, among others) to demonstrate his point: "We must spare our theology hereupon."<sup>14</sup> At the court of reason and for the sake of equity,<sup>15</sup> he pleads his case that usury is an unnatural (*wider die Natur*, i.e., not part of the relationship of humans with the rest of nature) mode of producing value.<sup>16</sup> This would not be a problem in itself were it not for the fact that usury cannot create value without (mis-)appropriating "alien labor."<sup>17</sup> And the verdict is peremptory:

Even if we were not, Christian reason alone would tell us all the same that a usurer is a murderer.<sup>18</sup>

After having argued so far without appealing to theology he starts to address Christian folk:

The heathen were able by the light of reason, to conclude that the usurer is a double-dyed thief and murderer. We Christians, however, hold them in such honor, that we fairly worship them for the sake of their money.<sup>19</sup>

And the attack goes on with apocalyptic zest:

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<sup>13</sup> WA 51, 338, 32-339, 25.

<sup>14</sup> WA 51, 344, 30f.

<sup>15</sup> WA 52, 344, 25f.

<sup>16</sup> For Aristotle's argument, see *Treatise of Government*, Book I, ch. 10, trans. William Ellis (London, J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd.; New York, E. P. Dutton & Co., 1912).

<sup>17</sup> WA 51, 351, 21-27.

<sup>18</sup> WA 51, 361, 34-361, 17.

<sup>19</sup> WA 51, 261, 30-32.

Therefore is there on this earth, no greater enemy of man (after the devil) than a gripe-money, and usurer for he wants to be God over all men ... a usurer and money-glutton ... he may have the whole world to himself, and every one may receive from him as from God and be his serf forever. ... the usurer wants to condemn the whole world to hunger, suffering and misery.<sup>20</sup>

What are we to do? The language becomes shocking and appalling: “And since we break on the wheel, and behead highwaymen, murderers and housebreakers, how much more should we break on the wheel and kill ... hunt down, curse and behead all usurers.”<sup>21</sup> Luther refuses to make the spiritual leap (so common in some Lutheran theology) from the concrete political order to the universal condition of human sinfulness as a palliative by which sin is denounced while the sinner is justified. Is this not a problem to be solved by sincere repentance alone, knowing that, after all, justification is for the sinner *qua* sinner? The response resounds clearly and coherently:

They say that the world could not be without usury. This is certainly true. For so strong and stiff can no government in the world ever be and has never been. ... and even if a government could prevent all sin, there would still be original sin. ... But if with this [argument] they think they are excused, let them see.<sup>22</sup>

Preachers who fail to raise their voice from the pulpit against usury and usurers and even associate with them “make a comedy of their preaching office ... and turn themselves against the truth. ... Such people cannot promote the gospel.”<sup>23</sup>

Sin is not to be fought in a disembodied piety, but it is always to be fought where it appears: in the flesh, in matter because that is where the gates to condemnation as well as redemption open themselves, Or Luther again:

If our gospel is the true light, then it must truly shine in the darkness. ... If we do not want suffering, if we want to transform the world [*die Welt anders haben*] then we must go out into the world [*zur Welt hinaus gehen*] or create [*schaffen*] another world which will do whatever we, or God wants.<sup>24</sup>

And Luther adds: “God’s marvelous power and wisdom must have its signs [*Spuren*] and must be grasped herein [*hierin*].” And what are these traces,

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<sup>20</sup> WA 51, 396, 28–397, 19.

<sup>21</sup> WA 51, 421, 24–26.

<sup>22</sup> WA 51, 353, 32–354, 28.

<sup>23</sup> WA 51, 409, 19–22.

<sup>24</sup> WA 51, 409, 27–32.

these signs that may be grasped in here? The answer is straight forward in the same text: “earthly peace to increase and sustain [*mehren und nehren*] the human race.”<sup>25</sup> And this peace that promotes development and sustainability is concretely undermined by the practice of usury, which for the Reformer at the time rated with singular highest prominence among the manifestations of sin.<sup>26</sup>

However, there remained a logical inconsistency in the Reformer, the same one that Otto denounced in Schweitzer, who maintained a “marvelous ethics” alongside a thoroughgoing (*konsequente*) eschatology, which is indeed echoed by Jesus’ saying, “Occasions for stumbling are bound to come, but woe to anyone by whom they come!” (Lk 17:1; Mt 18:7). How to explain this combination of an apocalyptic stance (the world is going to hell in a handcart) and a vigorous defense of justice, reason and fairness for the promotion of the common good?

The grounds for the so-called inconsistency can be elucidated either by some circumstantial peculiarities or deeply felt theological convictions. Although Luther had said that there was no saint that was not well versed in politics and economy, his temperament (notwithstanding his “sainthood”) did not thrive in those fields, even if his impact on them has been colossal. His base remained in theology, with frequent incursions into those other fields, but never on their own autonomous grounds. To put it differently, if the young Luther would be placed in the second half of the twentieth century, alas, he would be a dismal failure in realpolitik and would not be admitted to study monetarism at the Chicago School of Economics. In spite of having been exposed and influenced by the nominalism of the *via moderna*, his understanding of the exchange value of merchandise was that of a realist. He followed the prevailing medieval Aristotelian theory of the sterility of money and saw value determined and imbued in merchandise by labor. In that he was even less refined than the late medieval Roman moralists who, under the spell of money’s sterility, could come up with a justification for a quasi-interest principle of charging a fee for a loan on account of depreciation due to currency handling.

He was light years away from his younger reformation colleague Jean Calvin, who recognized the economic validity of earning interest for lending money. The interest rates charged would have to be subject to strict and reasonable regulation. As Richard Tawney remarked when comparing Calvin to Luther, “The significant feature in his [Calvin’s] discussion of the subject [of usury and interest] is that he assumes credit to be a normal

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<sup>25</sup> WA 51, 354, 29–31.

<sup>26</sup> See Ricardo Rieth, “*Habsucht*” bei Martin Luther (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1996).

and inevitable incident in the life of a society.”<sup>27</sup> Max Weber, who begins his *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* with the importance of Luther’s understanding of vocation (*Beruf*) for the ensuing development of a worldly asceticism, has hardly anything to say in favor of Luther as far as his contribution to development of capitalism is concerned: “... it is hardly necessary to point out that Luther cannot be claimed for the spirit of capitalism in the sense in which we have used that term above, or for that matter in any sense whatever.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, Luther’s home base was theology. If, however, he did not contribute much to capitalism as such, it is because his sway in economics, politics and society was grounded in a theology not subjected to political negotiations or economic calculations. I turn to this in order to examine another reason for the inconsistency between an apocalyptic attitude and a call for world responsibility; this inconsistency will show itself as a misplaced diagnosis.

In the essay on usury we have examined that Luther’s scathing attack on usury is due to the misery it engenders, thus disturbing the earthly peace necessary for the pursuance and advancement of the common good. And this good is predicated on the result of labor which, for Luther, was the source of earthly, material value for the promotion and sustenance of life sustained by God’s promise to Adam before the Fall.<sup>29</sup> If we consider what Luther has written about the “third mode of presence” of Christ, “according to the flesh,” labor, as the human engagement with nature, plays a critical role. The disregard for and exploitation of labor undermines a “metabolism”<sup>30</sup> that takes place when the *adam* cultivates *adamah* producing and reproducing herself, participating and transforming human beings and the rest of nature in which the majestic presence of God in Christ/matter dwells. Therefore, Luther describes the labor performed in the three institutional spheres (*ecclesia, oeconomia, politia*) as bringing forth “God’s gifts,” adding “These [gifts] are masks of God, behind which He wants to remain concealed and do all things.”<sup>31</sup> The use of the “mask” motif is significant in the imagery that the metaphor evokes. Usury (or sin

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<sup>27</sup> Richard H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New York: New American Library, 1954), 95. It should be noted that later in his career, Luther admitted some flexibility on the question of regulated interests as insurance for a debtor’s insolvency. See Karl Heinz zur Mühlen, “Arbeit,” in *Theologische Realenzyklopädie* 3 (Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1978).

<sup>28</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958), 82.

<sup>29</sup> See Rieth, op. cit. (note 26), 217f. Oswald Bayer, “Nature and Institution,” in *Lutheran Quarterly* 12/2 (Summer 1998): 125-59.

<sup>30</sup> *Stoffwechsel*, metabolism, is how Karl Marx explains labor in *Das Kapital*.

<sup>31</sup> *WA* 31/1, 434, 7-11; *LW* 14, 114f.

in general) destroys the dignity of labor and damages the masks of God, exposing thus the reality of the abyss of the *deus nudus*. This is why labor itself—and the peace, protection, sustenance and procreation it provides—is of no soteriological import, it goes without saying: *sola fide*. But labor is the means through which the promises embedded in the earthly divinely instituted orders come to fruition: protection, sustenance and growth (*wehre, nehre, mehre*). This is why if we say *pax mundi non speranda* we also must add, *pax mundi exspectare est*. The peace of the world is not a function of hope, but it is a longing for, a looking forward to what can be attained herein.

What aspects of Luther's theology contribute to a holistic development model? I have argued that, at best, Luther triggered a chain of events to which, if compared to Calvin for instance, he contributed preciously little in terms of how to control and administer political and economic affairs with realistic programs and viable projects. Even if the light of the gospel is not spiritualized but must leave its imprints in this material world, what these signs look like and how they are to be discerned remains vague. The Reformer denounced with prophetic incisiveness what he considered the most pervasive manifestation of sin at his time, but when he was arguing not as a theologian ("We must spare our theology hereupon") his appeal to the classic Aristotelian notion of "sterile money" sounded like anything other than an informed political and economic analysis of the inception of the capitalist system and market economy.

Before I finish with a sophism in saying that the helpful aspect of Luther's theology is his theology of aspects, allow me to add a final point. When Ernst Troeltsch wrote his influential essay, "The Historical and Dogmatic Method in Theology" (1898), he raised three criteria by which to evaluate the reliability of a historical claim. The first was criticism (a claim should be judged by its internal consistency and independent corroboration), analogy (if an event should find correspondence with contemporary attested events) and, thirdly, correlation. This last one is the most intriguing, for it does not want to establish the objective factuality of the event itself, but of its effect in a constellation of interconnected events achieving measurable outcomes even if the originating cause is beyond critical inquiry. Ernst Käsemann relied on this criterion to launch the "New Search for the Historical Jesus." Looking at the way in which the event of Christ is reported—clothed in embarrassment and debasement of a convicted criminal and executed by crucifixion—there must have been something there that was enough of an objective ground to produce the historical chain of effects that shaped the history and culture of a significant part of the world.

My suggestion is to follow a similar search for the significance of Luther and Lutheranism in defining economic and political programs that

surfaced out of a Lutheran religious ethos, even without explicit help from Luther's works. Until recently, works on the religious roots of modern societies have focused on the contrast between Roman Catholicism and the Reformation heritage. Such is the theme of the classical studies by Max Weber and Richard Tawney. Luther appears only to set the stage for Calvin, Calvinists and the Puritans. The method was to establish the theoretical sources of social practices. Recently, the sociologist Sigrun Kahl embarked on a different approach. She decided to do a comparative study not on the progress of the capitalist spirit, but to look at the religious roots of modern poverty policies in countries, whose major religious constituencies belong to three distinct confessional families, the Catholic, Lutheran and Reformed Protestant traditions.<sup>32</sup> She warns against the temptation of generalization, particularly of different religious formations in Western societies due to the progressive admixture of traditions and, rejecting the claim that the religious factor is the independent variable of sociopolitical diversity in Western modernity (although she gets very close to such a claim), she provides a relief of profiles in countries shaped more typically by each of the three traditions. These are some of her conclusions after an exhaustive documentation pertaining to poverty policies.

Catholic social doctrine continued to view the beggar as closest to Christ. Therefore, so poverty did not carry stigma, and good works, especially almsgiving, guaranteed salvation; in Calvinism it is a mark of lacking grace; and in Lutheranism poverty itself says nothing about one's state of grace. ...

Catholic poor relief remained a responsibility of the hospitals and private charity. Lutheran poor relief was predominantly organized as outdoor relief, to be financed out of the common chest and later on a poor tax. Reformed Protestant poor relief for the able-bodied was institutionalized in the workhouse. ... Catholic subsidiarity and Reformed Protestant individualism and voluntarism both attribute a negative role to the state. ... In countries under Catholic or Reformed Protestant dominance, poor relief was not secularized as early and as comprehensively as in the Lutheran countries. ...

The fundamental tension in poor relief is that between granting economic support *and* ensuring that everybody who can work in fact does. Each tradition has solved this goal conflict differently. ... Each strategy creates particular problems within the work-welfare trade-off: integration strategies historically rooted in Catholicism provide social assistance benefits or other local support but permanently exclude the long-term unemployed from work. Integration strategies rooted in Lutheran-

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<sup>32</sup> Sigrun Kahl, "The Religious Roots of Modern Poverty Policy: Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed Protestant Traditions Compared," in *Archives Européennes de Sociologie (European Journal of Sociology)*, vol. XLVI, 1 (2005), 91-126.

ism prevent economic hardship and provide work but institutionalize an inferior kind of work outside the labor market. Integration strategies historically rooted in Reformed Protestantism promote (low wage) labor market integration at the expense of guaranteeing an economic and social minimum.<sup>33</sup>

After several disclaimers regarding some generalizations she concludes, “Despite the immense changes the welfare state brought about, much of the national continuities in attitudes towards, and policies against, poverty can be traced back to religious roots.”<sup>34</sup>

To presume a direct causality between facets of Luther’s theology and his theology of facets would be an inappropriate affectation. But conjectures are justifiably elicited. And one wonders with a certain amount of perplexity whether the distinctive course that poverty policies took in predominantly Lutheran countries might be somehow, at the end of the day, related to the crystal, the Christ-All, grafted in the social, political and economic masks of God. This should provide an interesting point of departure, but only a point of departure, for a comparative evaluation of the importance of each tradition for contributing toward an equitable developmental paradigm.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 120-23.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.



# TRAJECTORIES INTO THE WORLD: CONCEPTS OF “DEVELOPMENT” IN CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN PENTECOSTAL CHRISTIANITY

*Andreas Heuser*

Considering the relationship between Pentecostalism and development is somewhat like negotiating a mysterious and obscure terrain. Toward the turn of the millennium, an episode, euphorically referred to as “one of the biggest events in global Christianity,”<sup>1</sup> captured the South African public’s imagination. In February 1999, South African national newspapers reported on a miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit. During a worship service at the middle- to upper class Hatfield Christian Church in Pretoria, ministered by the Canadian “charismatic hero” John Arnott of Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, congregants observed their mouths being filled with golden teeth, crowns or inlays. The news about this “golden teeth miracle” was followed by public theological disputes over miracles and, of course, included a debate on possible techniques in dentistry. The most vivid debates were staged in the charismatic and Pentecostal mass media worldwide, but predominantly in Africa, the Americas and Great Britain. The discourse instantly reached charismatic circles within the historic churches, too. “I believe this is a sign to make people wonder,” remarked a member of an Anglican church in Bergvliet, South Africa. The gold, he said, is “an outward and visible sign

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<sup>1</sup> David Chidester, “African Christian Communities,” in Mark Juergensmeyer (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Global Religions* (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 349–56, here 354.

of an inward and spiritual grace”<sup>2</sup> and he wanted his church carefully to discern the divine message of the gold teeth miracle.

Several aspects of the miracle of the golden teeth are remarkable. First, it illustrates the different streams in contemporary global Christianity. It testifies to the international prestige of the transnational media network of present-day Pentecostal Christianity and illustrates the crossing over of theologies and blending of beliefs, irrespective of denominational traditions, precepts and boundaries, a fusion commonly known as the “charismatization” of historic Christianity.<sup>3</sup> As a consequence, we can loosely speak of an experiential form of Christianity in which believers count on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, evidenced in ecstatic experiences such as speaking in tongues, prophecy or divine healing, all expressions of faith which, to varying degrees, can also be easily detected in the African historic and independent churches. Finally, it demonstrates the characteristic linkage between Christian faith and wealth, widely proclaimed as the “gospel of prosperity.” Pronounced by the “Word-of-Faith” movement in North America, this promise of miraculous wealth by the grace of God has become a trademark of what many call neo-Pentecostal or third-wave churches. Since the 1980s, this movement has evolved into one of the hallmarks of the African charismatic and Pentecostal movement.<sup>4</sup> Prosperity theology connects an elevated religious stature with social status represented by material well-being. In other words, it suggests spiritual potency as emerging from an aura of prosperity. The message spread in a context of economic crisis, caused by corrupt élites and exacerbated by macroeconomic Structural Adjustment Programs. Initially, closely attached to the so-called “charismatic heroes,” whose self-confident habitus pays tribute to a Western lifestyle, the promises of material and inner-worldly wealth have meanwhile mesmerized the entire landscape of Christian churches. Its parameters, once most visible in

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in an article by Elizabeth Moll Stalcup, “When The Glory Comes Down,” at [www.cesnur.org/testi/goXgold\\_01.htm](http://www.cesnur.org/testi/goXgold_01.htm). This miraculous event was covered by the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Telegraph* and is traced back to similar events in Chile and in Brazil in the early 1970s, from where in the mid-1980s it spread to Central and North America. Cf. an insider’s view by Tricia Tillin, “Gold Dust and Gold Teeth,” at <http://newsletters.cephasministry.com/gold8.99.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Cephas N. Omenyo, *Pentecost Outside Pentecostalism: A Study of the Development of Charismatic Renewal in the Mainline Churches in Ghana* (Zoetemeer: Uitgeverij Boekencentrum, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> Next to and interrelated with the message of prosperity comes “deliverance” as the most outstanding ritual practice in African Pentecostal Christianity. This aspect of Pentecostal practice is closely connected with a “devil-complex,” cf. Andreas Heuser, “‘Put on God’s Armour Now!’: the Embattled Body in African Pentecostal-type Christianity,” in Sebastian Jobs/Gesa Mackenthun (eds), *Embodiments of Cultural Encounters* (Muenster/New York/Munich/Berlin: Waxmann, 2011), 115–40.

“one-man (or one-woman) churches” that depend on the stature of the founding personality, not only transgress church boundaries but also social milieus.<sup>5</sup>

Given the charismatic and Pentecostal emphasis on material wealth, the prosperity gospel is all but a peripheral factor in African societies. Combined with a fascination with new mass media and the use of modern technologies of self-presentation, some observers would consider the gospel of prosperity a highly significant innovation in the effort to enchant society. They believe that African prosperity preaching, which offers God’s blessings to transform an individual’s life, to have mutated into a vision to transform society. By surveying recent sociocultural strategies related to the prosperity gospel, the social anthropologist Birgit Meyer now talks about the “pentecostalization of the public sphere”<sup>6</sup> in African contexts.

Such readings of cultural hegemony are not undisputed. For Jean and John L. Comaroff, the prosperity gospel “account(s) for the current spread of occult economies and prosperity cults.” As early seismographers of this global phenomenon, they regard promises that equate material well-being with God’s favor as celebrating consumption rather than production. Furthermore, and one is reminded of the golden teeth miracle, prosperity theology praises the immediacy of desire; it assures immediate material gain as an outward sign of divine blessing. Thus, the Comaroffs perceive the prosperity gospel as “sacral consumption,” “so that the instant accumulation of wealth becomes synonymous with the unmediated power of God.”<sup>7</sup>

What, then, do we do with such a polarity of notions about the prosperity gospel: the tremendously influential “pentecostalization of the public sphere”

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<sup>5</sup> Moreover, prosperity doctrine is virtually inundating the African religious landscape in general; cf. Stephen Ellis and Gerrie Ter Haar, *Worlds of Power: Religious Thought and Political Practice in Africa* (London: G. Hurst & Co. Publishers Ltd., 2004), 114–40. The theme was introduced in Africa by the leading African evangelist of the time, Benson Idahosa of Nigeria, whose influence on the younger generation of African charismatics and Pentecostals was immense. For a theological critique of prosperity theology, cf. Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu, *African Charismatics: Current Developments within Independent Indigenous Pentecostalism in Ghana* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 201–32.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Birgit Meyer, “Going and Making Public: Pentecostalism as Public Religion in Ghana,” in Harri Englund (ed.), *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 149–66, here 158.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Jean and John L. Comaroff, “Privatizing the Millennium: New Protestant Ethics and Spirits of Capitalism in Africa, and Elsewhere,” in David Chidester, Abdulkadar Tayob & Wolfram Weisse (eds), *Religion, Politics, and Identity in a Changing South Africa* (Muenster: Waxmann, 2004), 24–43, here 37; 35. For a recent assessment of prosperity teachings put into an explanatory neoliberal scheme, cf. Jean Comaroff, “Pentecostalism, Populism and the New Politics of Affect,” in Dena Freeman (ed.), *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2012), 41–66.

on the one hand and the expression of “occult economies” of late capitalism on the other? At the time of the Pretoria miracle, the French philosopher Jacques Derrida, in a rather helpless mood regarding the reemergence of religion as such in public life, asked the question, What is going on here? Seeking for plausible interpretations why religion, thought to have been marginalized in the processes of modernity, resurfaces with vigor in the fabric of global politics, Derrida desperately adds a flood of questions such as, What is going on there? What is happening and so badly? What is happening under this old name? What in the world is suddenly emerging or reemerging under this appellation?<sup>8</sup>

Derrida is desperately looking for explanatory tools in order to grasp the relevance of religion in a globalizing world. The road to rediscovering religion as a constitutive element within the secularist milieus of the social sciences and development politics has been a long and winding road. Paraphrasing Derrida, Are we already sufficiently well equipped with vocabularies to catch up with the interventions of pentecostalizing theologies on crucial terms of “development” or “social change”? Development itself is also a confusing subject, even if we narrow it down to meaning processes of social change that “benefit the people concerned in a holistic way.”<sup>9</sup> The urgency of such questions is underlined by additional complexities within global Christianity. From a mainline or “Northern” Christian perspective, we have most probably not yet digested the ever-growing impact of African Christianities alongside the shifting of global Christianity to the global South; even more perplexing are imminent trajectories toward Pentecostal Christian expressions. What is going on there, we ask, with the “reframing of the political economy of the sacred?”<sup>10</sup> What is the impact of Pentecostal players on the social and political fields? How is the engagement with the old concept of “development” reshaped by the charismatic and Pentecostal perspectives on society?

While the miracle of the golden teeth may sound mysterious or strange to some, various scholars have remarked on a theological affinity between prosperity doctrines and African religious worldviews in general that link

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<sup>8</sup> Jacques Derrida, “Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of ‘Religion’ at the Limits of Reason Alone,” in Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (eds), *Religion* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 1–78, here 38. Quoted in James R. Cochrane, “Reframing the Political Economy of the Sacred: Readings of Post-Apartheid Christianity,” in Klaus Koschorke (ed.), *Falling Walls: The Year 1989/90 as a Turning Point in the History of World Christianity/Einstürzende Mauern: Das Jahr 1989/90 als Epochenjahr in der Geschichte des Weltchristentums* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 95–116, here 95.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. J. J. Kritzinger, “The Development of African Independent Churches,” in Gerhardus C. Oosthuizen and Irving Hexham (eds), *Empirical Studies of African Independent/Indigenous Churches* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen, 1992), 291–312, here 291.

<sup>10</sup> Cochrane, *op. cit.* (note 8).

deities with abundant life. “Related to this is an emphasis on achievement, progress and prestige, where status and moral standing in the community are associated with symbols of success acquired through religious power.”<sup>11</sup> Thus they constitute continuity in the religious aspirations for material wealth which facilitated the wide resonance of prosperity theology in Africa.<sup>12</sup>

The correlation between Christian faith and prosperity is also deeply enshrined in African mission history. During the nineteenth-century mission, Christianity firmly promoted economic prosperity to redeem Africa. Missionaries linked the “religion of the Whites” with industrious labor; conversion meant becoming a believing member of self-reliant, prospering, agricultural and commercial communities.<sup>13</sup> The “civilizing mission” twinned the “message” and a new work ethics. In short, next to the Bible, African converts revered the “plough” as the sacred object of Christianity.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, does the “plough,” which had appeared in African mission history in the nineteenth century, not carry a different symbolic meaning than the new, sacred symbol of Christian prosperity, the “golden teeth”?

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<sup>11</sup> Richard Burgess, “Freedom from the Past and Faith for the Future: Nigerian Pentecostal Theology in Global Perspective,” in Véronique Altglas (ed.), *Religion and Globalization*, vol. 2: *Westernization of Religion and its Counter-trends* (London/New York: Routledge, 2010), 103–32, here 116 (originally published in *PentecoStudies* 7/2 [2008], 29–63). Haynes even goes one step further. Referring to Jean-Francois Bayart’s “politics of the belly,” he characterizes prosperity as an imminent/immanent feature of African religion in general, thereby copying the consumptive orientation known from African politics. “Material prosperity ... is a significant, if not the most important, political virtue; it is not something that ordinary people see as reprehensible. Religious figures need to share this aura of prosperity if they wish to gain converts; the figure of the Indian ascetic, personified in Mahatma Gandhi, has no place in African cultures. Successful figures in whatever field, including religion, are of necessity materially prosperous.” Jeffrey Haynes, *Religion and Politics in Africa* (London/Nairobi: Zed Books Ltd., 1996), 208. I consider this an “essentializing” generalization of religious complexities in Africa, underrating for instance ascetic lifestyles of itinerant prophets who initiated the African independent church movement.

<sup>12</sup> Yet, Pentecostal prosperity doctrine has been critically interrogated by its breaking of obligations of reciprocity, i.e., the redistribution of wealth to the wider community. The emphasis on individual needs and one’s own blessing mark a discontinuity with classic religious concepts. The new face of prosperity theology that insists on social action and welfare projects (see below) may be read as a means to regain the redistributive quality of wealth.

<sup>13</sup> This is a well-established fact in mission history. Cf. in view of the Basel Mission in Ghana, Robert Addo-Fenning, “Christian Mission and Nation-Building in Ghana: An Historical Evaluation,” in James L. Cox and Gerrie ter Haar (eds), *Uniquely African? African Christian Identity from Cultural and Historical Perspectives* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 2003), 193–212.

<sup>14</sup> An expression by Robert Moffat, cited in Chidester, op. cit. (note 1), 351.

Bearing the epithet of “occult economy” in mind, is it not legitimate to ask whether the advancement of a Protestant work ethic cultivated in a new community of converts has not been replaced by expectations of individual and instant material wealth through spiritual modes of production?

In the following, I shall describe some variations in African Pentecostal notions of development by outlining prosperity theology in different social contexts. The breakthrough of prosperity preaching is that it brings forth existential matters in precarious socioeconomic and often fragile political contexts. One sees billboards advertising prosperity teachings in rural and impoverished urban settings as well as urban middle-class contexts. It is in these volatile settings that Pentecostal theologizing of prosperity presents a new interpretation of the world at large, of “what is Caesar’s.” I shall basically look into this theological domain of prosperity in Pentecostal churches in Africa.<sup>15</sup>

### **SPIRITUAL CONTROL OVER MONEY, OR DE-SPIRITUALIZING POVERTY**

A book on good financial practice, *Financial Breakthrough: Discovering God’s Secrets to Prosperity*, by Apostle Michael Kwabena Ntumi, then chair of the Church of Pentecost in Ghana, which represents a classic Pentecostal denomination, is evidence of a recent paradigm shift in Pentecostal milieus in connection with material wealth. Ntumi’s book is crucial because he represents the biggest Protestant church in Ghana and was the national president of the Ghana Pentecostal Council, an umbrella organization for over 188 charismatic and Pentecostal denominations. Ntumi encourages his church to envisage financial abundance as an ecclesiological prerogative for acting in this world.

Contrary to common knowledge, the subject of finances is a very spiritual one. ... Unfortunately, in many Christian circles, a wall has been made around the subject. It is either not mentioned at all or else given a very negative connotation. Poverty is considered and mistaken for “spirituality” and the very few rich brethren of the church are considered “worldly.”<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In addition, and from the perspective of poverty reduction, see also Andreas Heuser, “‘Refuse to Die in Poverty!’ Armutsüberwindung und Varianten des Wohlstandsevangeliums in Afrika,” in *Theologische Zeitschrift* 1–2/69 (2013), 146–71.

<sup>16</sup> Michael K. Ntumi, *Financial Breakthrough: Discovering God’s Secrets to Prosperity* (printed by Pentecost Press), 9. The book dates from the early 2000s. I received a copy in 2004 from the author.

Ntumi seeks to reorient his church from opposing prosperity toward managing financial resources for the benefit of “world evangelization.”<sup>17</sup> He urges his church to develop permanent economic strategies to alleviate poverty. In order to ease social misery, he identifies the “provision of schools, hospitals, church buildings and a host of other services for the benefit of mankind [sic].”<sup>18</sup> “God ... wants our money to GROW, INCREASE and MULTIPLY because enough is really not enough.”<sup>19</sup> The preferred way to increasing resources is to use interest rates offered by banks and then to use the surplus to support the church. Citing congregants who became rich, Ntumi advises his readers to pay tithes faithfully and give extra offerings. As a result, God would then also “bring the increase.” “This is our secret of keeping the breakthrough waters constantly flowing.”<sup>20</sup>

Ntumi’s insistence on financial planning indicates the dramatic shift in Pentecostal social analysis based on the prosperity gospel. In the past, Pentecostal theology promoted the retreat from worldliness, thereby advocating an escapist motive to build up counter-societies, immunized against the vicious operations of the devil in society. Today, material wealth is no longer located in spheres infested by satanic power. Money is neutral; the handling of money is decisive as it can be used for both, good and bad, for individual enrichment only or for the advancement of church life through individual prosperity. Ntumi encourages financial responsibility in the discourse on prosperity. Believers should identify inner worldly success as a legitimate desire with a capacity for good. This capacity for good is expressed in social duties, strategized around church growth. Ntumi aims at engendering a sense of social service in areas of education and health that were historically linked with mission-derived Christianity. In a way, the infusion of the church with prosperity thinking stands for a new, ecumenically minded vision. Only if material desire predominantly constitutes love of money without serving God and the community, then the spirit of Mammon has taken control. To sum up, metaphorically speaking, prosperity stands for a “theology of winning” Caesar for divine purposes.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid, 102 (emphasis in original).

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 75; 78. Ntumi does not advise his church to build up a bank of its own. This, for instance, is being done by Efata Ministry, one of the biggest charismatic-Pentecostal churches in Tanzania.

<sup>21</sup> A comparison with a pre-prosperity gospel worldview underlines this dramatic theological shift in Pentecostal and charismatic churches. In his survey of this spectrum of churches, Haynes stated as late as in the 1990s that their followers “should keep out of politics,” because what happens on earth is all part of the continuing battle between the Devil and God for dominance.” Haynes, *op. cit.* (note 11), 204.

## THEOLOGY OF SURVIVAL IN RURAL/ IMPOVERISHED URBAN SETTINGS

At the grassroots level, the Pentecostal “theology of winning” may not always be clad in euphoric garb. Prosperity takes the shape of a much less spectacular message in insecure local environments. In rural settings and impoverished townships or slums, it is a “quest for security rather than for prosperity” that “animates the Pentecostal imagination.”<sup>22</sup>

Studies of Pentecostal churches in rural areas and the mushrooming, informal settlements or African slums are rare.<sup>23</sup> Yet, many Pentecostal leaders have rural roots and Pentecostal churches are in many respects a phenomenon of urban migration. Rural as well as Pentecostal slum Christianity are represented by rather small churches; they do not fit in the Pentecostal megachurches’ numbers game and may consist of twenty to thirty members. In their theology, church members vouch to stand firm in faith and righteousness in the midst of life’s trials, trusting God for a solution. As can be expected from Pentecostal believers, the source of trials and tribulations, sorrow and misery is frequently the devil, demons or evil spirits. References to witchcraft also feature prominently. Holiness and continuing to be saved are seen as the route to physical, spiritual and material benefit. The “prosperity” aspired to is modest. In their testimonies and prayers, church members seek a job, healing, a trading stall or help with paying school fees. Many a member lives from a small-scale business, supporting only one household and covering a very restricted geographical area. They are shop owners, many of them women, running single worker’s units because it is often easier to start such small businesses than to find a job. On the job market, however, Pentecostals have a certain comparative advantage, especially the impoverished congregants: they have embraced a sense of discipline and hard work and combine it with a modern sense of time and an ascetic lifestyle. This kind of Protestant work ethic helps them to seek jobs.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Harri Englund, “Introduction: Rethinking African Christianities. Beyond the Religion-Politics Conundrum,” in Harri Englund (ed.), *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2011), 1-24, here 17.

<sup>23</sup> See Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya* (London: Hurst, 2009), 103-105. He gives a summary of Colin Smith’s PhD on “A Missiological Study of Pentecostal Churches in an Informal Settlement in Nairobi, Kenya,” University of South Africa, 2007.

<sup>24</sup> In this vein, David Martin, a senior British sociologist, interprets the Pentecostal success story from a theory of modernity. In summary, he identifies Pentecostal adaptations to modernizing processes for instance in the area of economy and industrialization; cf. David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2002). A critical voice against Martin’s interpretation comes

In a way, these churches replicate this small-scale scheme of economic activity in their church structures. Collections are low because much of the income from informal trading will be needed to pay the monthly rent. Religious entrepreneurship, the idea of making a living from church activities, is out of the question. However, some churches form new social networks. They provide support groups such as funeral societies, bursary funds for the education of their children, or welfare committees responsible for addressing the needs of destitute members in terms of feeding, clothing or housing.<sup>25</sup> They are creating neighborhood networks of solidarity, helping migrants to get settled in complex urban contexts. In rare cases, a church tries to open a private school. In conclusion, this prosperity message of small Pentecostal congregations in the slums and at rural grassroots levels is a silent theology of survival.

### **PROGRESSIVE PENTECOSTALS, OR URBAN MIDDLE-CLASS THEOLOGY OF TRANSFORMATION**

Surveying global Pentecostalism from a bird's-eye perspective, Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori have identified a specific category of churches that emphasize active social ministries. These progressive Pentecostal churches are located within middle-class and urban-based Christianity. Its members are upwardly mobile and rather well educated. They construct churches and undertake mass evangelization mostly in urban areas, using modern mass media and the latest technical equipment. Some churches are linked to or own radio stations and broadcasting networks. Their pastors write spiritual books that can be found in the bookshops in town. The selling of books and, more importantly, of recorded church music belongs to the economy of the churches. It is here that we find the religious entrepreneur, an entirely new class of religious professional. These churches raise enormous funds and rely on their member's voluntary labor. According to Gifford, it is typical of middle-class Pentecostal churches that they strive for

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from Gifford. Gifford suspects that "hard work" is just used as a rhetorical code that obscures the essential belief in God's miraculous favors. Cf. Paul Gifford, *Ghana's New Christianity: Pentecostalism in a Globalizing African Economy* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2004), 154.

<sup>25</sup> These features are characteristic of small urban congregations and have been empirically substantiated in research history. Cf. C. Cross, G. C. Oosthuizen, S. Bekker, J. Evans, *Rise Up and Walk: Development and the African Independent Churches in Durban* (unpublished report by the Rural Urban Studies Unit and NERMIC for the Department of Development Aid, Durban, 1992, 21-27); Allan Anderson with Samuel Otwang, *Tumelo: The Faith of African Pentecostals in South Africa* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 1993), 61.

diversified ministries and structures that are “properly constituted”<sup>26</sup> and want to prove their organizational strength to face issues of social importance. Progressive Pentecostals are “addressing the social needs of people in their community”<sup>27</sup> and are involved in outreach programs to the poor.

We can test the progressive Pentecostal churches’ aspirations regarding social responsibility in the “new” South Africa. Formerly “considered to be socially irrelevant and politically naïve,”<sup>28</sup> contemporary South African Pentecostal Christianity seeks to prove its newly found social relevance at both the national and communal levels.

## NATIONAL LOBBY POLICIES OF “BIBLICAL” PRINCIPLES

At a national political level, Pentecostals move into lobby politics to act as a transformative player in society. In a corporate response to social challenges, Pentecostal churches in South Africa have recently started to address national challenges with one voice. In a National Initiative for Reformation of South Africa (NIRSA, 2008), they issued a lengthy, twenty-four paragraph resolution touching on the most pressing policy areas. Basically, this common initiative seeks to promote good governance, in particular fighting corruption, just management of the land reform, improved housing schemes, etc. With what appears to be a general agenda, NIRSA is issuing “a prophetic and urgent call” to churches, the government and society at large. The strategy paper identifies certain key areas in which to put into political practice a “biblically” oriented framework. Keeping “true to biblical principles” is seen as an exit strategy from poverty and the moral decline which, according to Pentecostal social analysis, has befallen South African society. Education is identified as one such key policy area. Education should strictly follow the precepts of “biblical sexuality, religious education and moral instruction.” However, such principles are not spelt out but are to orient people. The “prophetic call” may be no more than a determined

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<sup>26</sup> Paul Gifford, *Christianity, Politics and Public Life in Kenya* (London: Hurst & Co., 2009), 111.

<sup>27</sup> Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism. The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley/Los Angeles/London: University of California Press, 2007), 2. Miller and Yamamori travelled to twenty different countries in Asia, Africa, Latin America and Eastern Europe within four years. This “research odyssey” took place for two months in each year in which they visited at least three countries.

<sup>28</sup> Ezekiel M. K. Mathole, “Beyond Common Stereotypes about the Pentecostal-Charismatic Evangelicals in South Africa,” in Helga Dickow and Andreas Heuser (eds), *Religion on the Move: Exploring Passages in South African Christianity* (Lettres de Byblos, 2008), 59–75, here 62.

declaration of intent, whose practical political impact remains ambiguous. The only policy strategy mentioned is “to lobby” at governmental levels “for the application of biblical principles to current and future issues in all sectors of life.”<sup>29</sup> Yet, what seems to be decisive here is the kind of self-awareness that creates a desire to make a contribution to the sociopolitical arena. The self-perception as active players on sociopolitical grounds is so strong that those churches that do not embrace “social action” are termed “few dissenters” and a “dying voice in the dawn of change.”<sup>30</sup>

The Pentecostal commitment to social development and transformation can be backed up by a recent empirical study which substantiates the claims of Progressive Pentecostalism. A survey on the attitude toward politics, society and religious themes reveals that members of Grace Bible Church, a new Pentecostal megachurch, have an above average social consciousness. The church, located in Soweto and Gauteng province, represents a young and urbanized generation of black South Africans.<sup>31</sup> The survey established that in relation to other Christians from the same urban region, members of this church are “more compassionate towards the poor and needy” than the comparison group.<sup>32</sup> The awareness of the social problems facing South Africa is clearly articulated. The members of Grace Bible Church identify unemployment and crime as burning issues, but see poverty as the most pressing burden. Members of the church “consider the gap between rich and poor to be far wider than any other difference in South African society, including racial, religious and ethnic ones.”<sup>33</sup> They stress that education, skills training programs and hard work are important factors to alleviate poverty.

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<sup>29</sup> The NIRSA declaration is documented in Mathole, *ibid.*, 67–71.

<sup>30</sup> Mathole, *ibid.*, 73.

<sup>31</sup> The survey, commissioned by the Arnold Bergstraesser Institute in Freiburg/Br., was conducted in 2007. Grace Bible Church was founded in 1983 with a membership of around 11,000 congregants today. Cf. Helga Dickow and Valérie Møller, “Let’s Face the World! Comparison between Members of a New Pentecostal/Charismatic Church and Other Christians in Gauteng,” in Dickow and Heuser, *op. cit.* (note 28), 77–98. A more extensive analysis and collection of data is presented in a recent publication by Helga Dickow, *Religion and Attitudes towards Life in South Africa: Pentecostals, Charismatics and Reborns* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2012). This study correlates data on attitudes of a representative sample of South Africans in general with a focus group of members of Grace Bible Church. See also Helga Dickow, “Strebsam und Gemeinschaftsorientiert. Neue Pfingstkirchen in Südafrika,” in *Herder Korrespondenz* (65), 2011, 475–79.

<sup>32</sup> Dickow and Møller, *ibid.*, 85, for the following, see 85–91.

<sup>33</sup> Dickow, *op. cit.* (note 31), 192.

## COMMUNAL MINISTRIES TO THE POOR

How does this potentially high social capital materialize in concrete initiatives of church life? Referring to the various activities at the local community level, Ezekiel Mathole, a high ranking pastor of Grace Bible Church, suggests that nowadays “ministering to the poor is evolving to become an essential part of life and work” of the Pentecostal churches.<sup>34</sup> He defines social ministry as neighborhood projects and enumerates a range of concrete church run projects that vary in scope depending on the resources of respective churches or local congregations. Most of the projects mentioned are charity projects (from food distribution to the poor to the care for the elderly and HIV-Aids related projects); others are more diaconal ranging from literacy programs to the rehabilitation of ex-prisoners and pastoral care of abused women and children, etc.<sup>35</sup> Whether the implementation of such projects is successful or not, is left open.<sup>36</sup>

According to Miller and Yamamori, Progressive Pentecostals are showing a “heroic intensity” in handling this diverse range of projects. By this, they describe the vigorous motivation of Progressive Pentecostals to social action, even if they cannot fully count on organizational routine.

This leaves enough space for interpretation. Miller and Yamamori state that, in a number of cases, the efforts made in social outreach programs still rely on individual authority. “Because this expression of Pentecostalism is relatively new, many of the programs are somewhat vulnerable in that they are highly dependent on the creative drive of the founding leader.”<sup>37</sup> The vulnerability or instability of social ministries in prosperity churches in Africa is subject to different interpretations. Miller and Yamamori, for instance, suggest that the Progressive Pentecostals’ social projects are still managed by trial and error. Nigerian sociologist Asonzeh Ukah’s analysis is rather harsher. Contrary to Gifford’s assumption of administrative efficiency, mentioned above, Ukah deplores the “monetary turn” of Nigerian Pentecostal churches as the root cause for dysfunctional processes in gathering organizational experience. He accuses them of turning into mere “business empires” that lack accountability and financial transparency. Relating to incidences

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<sup>34</sup> Mathole, op. cit. (note 28), 73.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> The same applies to a survey of charity related church projects run by Ghanaian megachurches, Lighthouse Chapel International and Royal House Chapel International. Cf. Michael P.K. Okyerefu, “The Gospel of Public Image in Ghana,” in Harri Englund (ed.), *Christianity and Public Culture in Africa* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2011), 204–16.

<sup>37</sup> Miller and Yamamori, op. cit. (note 27), 128.

of fraud, he singles out the “sacred secrecy” surrounding finances in a hierarchy dominated by founding leaders or their representatives.<sup>38</sup> If Ukah addresses the nontransparent management of financial resources generated in affluent megachurches, other researchers comment on similar problems envisaged in smaller Pentecostal churches. Concerning the practical outline of the theology of prosperity identified in urban and rural smaller Pentecostal churches in South Africa, social scientists consider the lack of institutional control as most problematic. “Perhaps the greatest concern is that some of the entrepreneurial pastors in smaller community churches are enriching themselves at the cost of devout but naïve followers.”<sup>39</sup> This criticism looks into internal arrangements of power relations and points to possible areas of internal conflict and debate among theological leaders and their “innocent” followers when it comes to accountability and modes of financial operations.<sup>40</sup>

However, the social outreach of prosperity oriented Pentecostal churches seems to be limited, too. By way of general assumptions, Dena Freeman argues that Pentecostal churches are apparently “more successful in bringing about change that is effective, deep-rooted and long-lasting” than mainline Christianity and even NGOs.<sup>41</sup> Freeman’s sympathetic conclusion relies on a comparative view of secondary sources on Pentecostalism. She considers the Pentecostal shaping of a theological ethic that is characterized by features of the individual transformation of believers and a greater reliance on participation, usually expressed in spiritual terms as evidence of “born-again” consciousness. Her optimistic perception seems to be a rather idealistic construction of a Pentecostal ethic of development. It stands in contrast to recent empiri-

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<sup>38</sup> Asonzeh F.-K. Ukah, “Those Who Trade With God Never Lose: The Economics of Pentecostal Activism in Nigeria,” in Toyin Falola (ed.), *Christianity and Social Change in Africa: Essays in Honor of J.D.Y. Peel* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), 253–74, here 272.

<sup>39</sup> The Centre for Development and Enterprise, “South Africa, Under the Radar: Pentecostalism in South Africa and Its Potential Social and Economic Role,” in Katherine Attanasi and Amos Yong (eds), *Pentecostalism and Prosperity: The Socio-Economics of the Global Charismatic Movement* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 63–85, here 72. Among the authors are Tony Balcomb, Phil Bonner and Tshepo Moloi, to name but a few. The project to review South African Pentecostal churches in their effects on social change was advised by Peter L. Berger and James Hunter.

<sup>40</sup> So far, research does not sensitize the crucial question why—to paraphrase the last quotation—the flock simply follow their guide, a classical question in the sociology of power that would point for instance at the aura of charismatic leadership, suggested by Max Weber.

<sup>41</sup> Dena Freeman, “The Pentecostal Ethic and the Spirit of Development,” in Dena Freeman (ed.), *Pentecostalism and Development: Churches, NGOs and Social Change in Africa* (Basingstoke/New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1–38, here 24.

cal findings in South African contexts. Empirical evidence has shown that Pentecostal social projects do not have a measurable effect on local contexts. Grassroots initiatives in diakonia do “not show a high level of trust in their social environment.” Therefore, “they tend to feel closest to their co-religionists” in the church.<sup>42</sup> Consequently, Pentecostal social ministries might still lack professionalism and coordination with other secular and religious networks to improve social life. Their inner-church orientation might not really impact structural parameters that create poverty. Obviously, the discourse on a Pentecostal social ethic is opened up, and it certainly deserves more empirical research done on a broader scale and at different levels. A more comparative analysis might help to diversify Pentecostal concepts of development, shaped either by single churches adapting to diverse socioeconomic contexts, or shaped by different Pentecostal churches operating in a same such context. Rather than identifying a systematically coherent concept of a Pentecostal social ethic, comparative analyses of the social impact of Pentecostal churches might support the plurality of Pentecostal social ethics, an argument favored in this article as well.

What is remarkable in the Pentecostal churches is the sensitive approach to issues of social development. For Mathole this is reason enough to assume that there is a theological drift toward the historic churches. Whether such far-reaching claims are indeed realistic remains to be substantiated through more empirical studies at the grassroots level. In fact, the sociopolitical design to address poverty by initiatives to lobby the political élite in South Africa may point in different directions. The literal interpretation of the Bible, which renders a dualistic reading of political processes that distinguishes between right and wrong,<sup>43</sup> or the social analysis of moral decline, defined as the deviation from “biblical principles” as the root cause of misery, can be regarded as highly controversial. The political agenda to revise the country’s constitution and allowing for same-sex marriage and permitting abortion may prove to be irreconcilable with the ethical standards of the “ecumenical” churches.

Mathole is aware of this. He claims that even though Pentecostals “would not use the more radical expressions” of social analysis and action associated with the historic churches, they would essentially concur with the direction taken by the historic churches.<sup>44</sup> Despite all skepticism regarding Progressive Pentecostal policies, Pentecostal churches obviously take “ecumenical” Christianity as a positive point of reference, specifically in the question of directing the social aspirations of Pentecostal Christianity. Coming back to Apostle Ntumi’s assessment of the good use of money in

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Dickow, *op. cit.* (note 31), 193.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>44</sup> Mathole, *op. cit.* (note 28), 72.

church life mentioned earlier, and considering Mathole's tacit, yet affirmative interpretation of the "social gospel" as profiled by historical churches, we are facing a remarkable turn towards "ecumenical" Christianity. Consequently, in what has been termed the "dialogue of life" in interreligious dialogue, namely to find ways of practical cooperation between people of faiths otherwise divided by theological perceptions and ritual praxis, can be applied to the competitive field of Christianity. It seems possible to bridge inner-Christian cleavages between ecumenical and Pentecostal Christianity at least in parts of their social praxis.

One aspect that is based on empirical data is quite striking. It corrects some long-standing assumptions regarding the social capital of the Pentecostal movement in Africa. In his pioneering research, British sociologist Paul Gifford already in 1991 identified its "fundamentalist" disregard of boundaries as the key aspects of change. On the contrary, Gifford assumed a resolute opposition to social development intrinsically connected with prosperity teaching. Prosperity doctrine would undermine any vision "to promote self-help, self-reliance, self-esteem, self-determination, responsibility, and autonomy."<sup>45</sup> Although, based on later in-depth studies of the Pentecostal movement in different African countries, Gifford revised some of his earlier opinions, he remains skeptical of the Pentecostal movement. The regional example of the Soweto Progressive Pentecostals contradicts his view. In comparison with other respondents in Soweto, members of Grace Bible Church "feel less powerless, are less afraid of the future, and are more willing to accept change."<sup>46</sup> Such a sense of self-esteem may indeed lead to renouncing the apolitical traditions within the sphere of the Pentecostal churches and gradually translate into politicization. Having confidence in their potential and mobilizing social ambition, urban South African Pentecostals are accumulating a social capital much needed in sociopolitical transitions as well as development studies.

## TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION

Miller and Yamamori give several reasons for why this movement of Progressive Pentecostals has gained momentum over the last two decades. One argument points to the influence of certain socially minded evangelical churches, this time not the ecumenical churches mentioned above, that have helped promote this shift in Pentecostal orientation from a classic posture of non-involvement

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<sup>45</sup> Paul Gifford, "Christian Fundamentalism and Development in Africa," in *Review of African Political Economy*, 19/52 (1991), 9-20, 10.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Dickow, op. cit. (note 31), 193.

in worldly affairs to a power gospel aiming at impacting the directions of social policies. In fact, in an earlier survey of evangelicals and Pentecostals in different countries, Paul Freston had already envisaged the possible interaction of certain strands of Pentecostals and evangelicals. Pentecostals discovering themselves as apt performers and reflective actors in the sociopolitical field could result in a closer cooperation among churches. “Perhaps the increasingly ‘social’ discourse of prosperity teachers,” Freston envisions, “... may in future find common ground with movements of the ‘evangelical left.’”<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, recent attempts by American megachurches to develop transnational cooperation with African Progressive Pentecostals verify Freston’s vision. Given the networks of transnational crusading and established media connections, it seems plausible for North American megachurches and Progressive Pentecostal social ministries to become involved in outreach projects in Africa. This applies specifically to those churches that are less interested in short-term charity and more dedicated to long-term development projects.

According to Miller and Yamamori, Progressive Pentecostals are successfully discovering partnerships with (generally faith-based) non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Such relationships depend on both, on NGO policies and on capacities of churches and congregations. Areas of partnerships target education and funding, especially of primary schools, support of medical clinics and agricultural projects. Other partnerships are dealing with microloan activities focusing on poverty reduction and income generating businesses, often run by churches.<sup>48</sup> One main area of interest is leadership training and church management. North American megachurches, asserts Paul Gifford, “are increasingly involving themselves, especially in strategies of church organization and management.”<sup>49</sup> An example is the so called PEACE program initiated in 2005 by Rick Warren of Saddleback Church in California. Warren is author of two bestsellers, *The Purpose Driven Life* and *The Purpose Driven Church*, in which he advocates ideas of modern management studies to be implemented in church structures. This has developed into a “Purpose Driven Church Seminar” to be taught at theological seminars and conferences in Africa. The course material contains components

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Freston, *Evangelicals and Politics in Asia, Africa and Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 315.

<sup>48</sup> In this respect, they make mention of World Vision Tanzania. Cf. Miller and Yamamori, *op. cit.* (note 27), 123. In general, in most countries, social projects initiated by evangelical and Pentecostal churches can only operate as NGOs seeking to serve the whole community. Another example from Tanzania is Pamoja Ministries, located in Tengeru and run by Canadian and American Assemblies of God.

<sup>49</sup> Gifford, *op. cit.* (note 26), 171. For the following, cf. 146–59. Similar programs are organized by African migrant churches in Europe who invite successful African businessmen to hold seminars. Cf. Richard Burgess, *op. cit.* (note 11), 120.

of marketing strategies and public relations borrowed from multinational business corporations. It explains principles of administration and financial accounting, debt management and investment, delegation principles and coordination as elementary parts of church structures etc. The general idea is to promote organizational efficiency, personal know-how and techniques of purpose realization which are also considered useful in marketing their message in a religiously highly competitive public sphere. Seminars have a widespread impact as every participant should teach the course content several times to at least 100 others. A further impact is through networking by attending seminars and similar conferences. PEACE stands for plant a church or partner with an existing one; equip local leaders; assist the poor; care for the sick; educate the next generation. Warren insists that only a viable global network of churches can solve the problems of “spiritual emptiness, selfish leadership, poverty, disease and ignorance.”<sup>50</sup> East Africa has been selected as pilot area to implement the PEACE program.

Progressive Pentecostals seek to transfer entrepreneurial skills into congregational life to support organizational development and inner-church stratification. Churches connect these skills with schemes of evangelism and missionary strategies to set up new congregations in different local contexts and relate them to the management of social projects run by churches. This interaction between the religious and economic spheres is sometimes referred to as “business management Christianity.”

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

So far, not much research has been done on the connection between the Pentecostal movement and development. Given the heterogeneity and diversity of the charismatic and Pentecostal movement, we have opted against taking a generalized view. By mapping out different social contexts and strands we have seen multifaceted Pentecostal perspectives on society and practical efforts in development. Reviewing the social dimensions of the popular prosperity message, we shifted from a rural and township based ethics of survival to the success oriented urban and middle class “business management Christianity.” Churches within the range of prosperity teachings increasingly gained means to establish “broad-based social programs whereas previous generations of Pentecostals tended to be more sectarian, confining their social welfare efforts to members of their own community.”<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Quoted in Gifford, *op. cit.* (note 26), 149. Warren qualifies these problems as the five “Global Goliaths.”

<sup>51</sup> Miller and Yamamori, *op. cit.* (note 27), 3.

However, the actual effects of progressive Pentecostals on development are in need of closer investigation. More often than not we are dealing with claims of social action and with intentional strategies of lobby politics.

Yet, Pentecostal discourse on material wealth and poverty alleviation draws attention to religious repertoires in development theory and praxis without taking refuge in a hypothesis of deprivation. Pentecostals claim betterment of life. Within contexts of deprivation, they offer ethical codes to avoid destitution; within contexts of social upward mobility, they seek means to adapt to modern lifestyles. In any case, they do not act as victims but as creative agents of the gospel. Very recently, Ruth Marshall identified this social potential as the heartbeat of Pentecostal self-perception. She describes a “political spirituality” in southern Nigerian Pentecostalism. In a systematic move toward a revolution in public life, the Pentecostal movement would aim at the transformation of Nigerian society, politics and economy.<sup>52</sup> In my view, we still miss more empirical accounts to scrutinize the Pentecostal self-image as a political actor in the public sphere.<sup>53</sup> We still need it to answer the question of African Pentecostalism and development in a nuanced manner.

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. Ruth Marshall, **Political Spiritualities: The Pentecostal Revolution in Nigeria** (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). Marshall is a Canadian scholar in political and religious sciences with long-term research experience in Nigeria. On a discussion of the Pentecostal move towards notions of political theology. Cf. Andreas Heuser, “Eine Politische Theologie der afrikanischen Pfingstbewegung? Oder: ‘Vom zähen Ende einer Grossen Erzählung,’” in *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Religions- und Kirchengeschichte* 106 (2012), 281–303.

<sup>53</sup> For a survey on politicized Pentecostal theologies within the last decade and with special reference to West Africa, cf. Andreas Heuser, “Encoding Caesar’s Realm—the Pentecostal Movement and the Political in Africa,” in Martin Lindhardt (ed.), *African Pentecostalism* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), in press.

# HOW DEVELOPMENT ETHOS EMERGES AND IS ENGRAINED AND SUSTAINED IN CONTACT WITH LOCAL CULTURE AND RELIGION

*Karel Th. August*

## INTRODUCTION

In the following presentation, I shall seek to explore an understanding of development and culture by reviewing definitions and developing a concept of endogenous development that presupposes a development initiated by the local people. An in-depth understanding of the relationship between development and culture is central to a holistic approach and response from a theological perspective that is guided by the paradigmatic framework of endogenous development.

I shall aim to pull culture out of the shadows,<sup>1</sup> arguing that culture is, and always has been, central to the understanding of development processes across the globe.<sup>2</sup> Culture and development have always moved hand-in-hand.<sup>3</sup> The centrality of culture and its interconnectedness with economic, political and social change have become increasingly apparent

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<sup>1</sup> I am referring to the modernization theorists in which Western culture was portrayed as the dominant culture at the cost of other cultures.

<sup>2</sup> Susanne Schech and Jane Haggis, *Culture and Development: A Critical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), xi.

<sup>3</sup> J. Andrew Dearman, *Religion and Culture in Ancient Israel* (Peabody: Hendrikson, 1992), 3.

in events such as the emergence of indigenous rights' movements and the rise of ethno-nationalism. Newly emerging fields of research, such as cultural studies and postcolonial studies, as well as the impact of postmodern thought have provided us with new analytical tools that enable us to take a new look at the relationship between culture and development.<sup>4</sup>

Cultural factors are dominant in the process of development and culture should at all times be respected in the way in which we conduct the study and process of development. All models of development are essentially cultural in that they reflect perceptions of and responses to the problems faced by society.<sup>5</sup> In what follows, I shall attempt to explore an understanding of development and culture that is both holistic and central to endogenous development. I will argue that all models of development are cultural as they reflect certain perspectives on how to respond to problems faced by society. Culture is a means to understand and achieve forms of development from which people can draw meaning and fulfillment in life.

## DEVELOPMENT—REPRESENTATIVE PERSPECTIVES

Development is a complex term. In order to come to a broader understanding of the term, I shall refer to discussions on the term among scholars from different disciplines. The term development seems to synthesize the aspirations of humanity for more human living conditions. Development is thus a blanket term used to cover a whole range of interdependent concepts such as liberation, humanization, growth, unfolding, renewal, transfiguration, as well as the more religious concept of transformation. It also takes its place in a cultural tradition, which has a past, is progressing, evolving and pointing to some change.<sup>6</sup>

Kothari and Minogue<sup>7</sup> claim that the term development is in itself paradoxical and thus allows for a variety of definitions. Seen from an economic perspective, development is synonymous with economic growth; however, as an overall social process, it includes economic, social, political and cultural aspects.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 25.

<sup>6</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez Merino, "The Meaning of Development" in G. H. Dunne (ed.) *In Search of a Theology of Development*. A Sodepax Report (Geneva: Sodepax, 1969), 116–179, here 121.

<sup>7</sup> Uma Kothari and Martin Minogue, *Development Theory and Practice* (New York: Palgrave Publishers, 2002), 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 123.

The aim of development is to provide a better life and is therefore based on human well-being.<sup>9</sup> The underlying anthropological position is that everybody has the ability to become more than they are at any particular stage. It provides the mechanism for people to become more than they are. Carmen<sup>10</sup> goes further and adds that development is another word for human agency, the undoing of envelopment. Development is that which exists there where people act as subjects and are not acted upon as objects, targets and beneficiaries, nor manipulated as participants in designs and projects that are not of their own doing. Development is there where there is space for the flourishing of human creativity and the right to invent one's own future.

The origin of the term is negative and came into use in opposition to the term underdevelopment, which expressed the condition and the anguish of poor countries compared to rich ones. According to Davids,<sup>11</sup> the body of knowledge we call development is relatively new, and the scientific enquiry into the theory of development began shortly after the Second World War, during the 1950s and 1960s, which were dominated by the modernization theory.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> H.C. Marais, Y. Muthien, N.S. Jansen van Rensburg, M.P. Maaga, G. F. De Wet, G.F. & C. J. Coetzee (eds), *Sustainable Social Development: Critical Issues* (Menlo Park: Network Publishers, 2001), 122.

<sup>10</sup> Raff Carmen, *Autonomous Development: Humanizing the Landscape* (London: Zed, 1996), 2.

<sup>11</sup> Ismael Davids, Francois Theron and Kealeboga Maphunye, *Development in South Africa: A Development Management Perspective* (Paarl: Van Shack Publishers, 2005), 4.

<sup>12</sup> In the history of development as expounded by modernization theorists from the global North, the culture of the indigenous people of the global South has largely been neglected and ignored. Since the modern industrial and technological era ushered in unparalleled economic growth and prosperity for the global North, the altruistic notion of making its fruits available to the rest of the world has motivated governments, intergovernmental institutions and private voluntary organizations (e.g., churches and mission societies) to engage in development. Modernization theorists sought to spread the fruits of prosperity by attempting to replicate the Western process of industrialization and technological growth in other parts of the world. In the words of Francis Perroux, "Modernization is the combination of mutual and social changes of a people which enable them to increase, cumulatively and permanently their total production." Rostow saw the process of development as a succession of natural stages from "traditional" to modern in which societies develop from a "backward" stage through the evolutionary process until the "take off" into sustained economic growth. According to the theory, this process accelerates through the transfer of knowledge, technology and capital from the "advanced" to "less-advanced nations...until it reaches the final stages of high production and mass consumption." Wayne G. Bragg, "From Development to Transformation," in Vinay Samuel and Christopher Sugden, *The Church in Response to Human Need* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 20-51, here 22, 48.

According to Heymans,<sup>13</sup> perspectives on growth and development have markedly shifted over the past forty years and the concept of development has undergone significant changes since the end of the Second World War.<sup>14</sup> Thus, during the 1950s and 1960s, development was equated with growth in Gross National Product (GNP), Gross Domestic Product (GDP), or per capital GNP (income per capital) being the preferred indexes. However, when it became apparent that economic growth did not necessarily lead to reduction in poverty and a better quality of life for the population at large, the concept of development was reexamined.<sup>15</sup>

Development, as it has developed, also encompasses better education, high standards of health and nutrition, less poverty, a cleaner environment, better opportunities, greater individual freedom and a richer cultural life.<sup>16</sup> It also focuses on individual freedom, self-esteem and freedom from ignorance, human usury and servitude. These determine the quality of life. Heymans,<sup>17</sup> like Burkey,<sup>18</sup> Carmen<sup>19</sup> and Korten<sup>20</sup> further maintains that development is about people and its ultimate aim is to improve the quality of people's lives, especially that of the poor, in a sustainable manner.

Subsequently, we want to pay attention to the dictum "development is about people," which is the central and basic ethos of endogenous development thinking.

### **DEVELOPMENT IS ABOUT PEOPLE (PEOPLE-CENTERED DEVELOPMENT)**

David Korten,<sup>21</sup> the director of the people-centered development forum contrasts what he calls people-centered development<sup>22</sup> with the economic

<sup>13</sup> Christ Heymans, *Infrastructure: A Foundation for Development Report* (Midrand: DBSA, 1998), 4.

<sup>14</sup> Damien Kingsbury, Joe Remeny, John Mickay and Janet Hunt, *Key Issues in Development* (Hampshire: Palgrave, 2004), 22.

<sup>15</sup> Heymans, op. cit. (note 13), 4.

<sup>16</sup> *The IGD guide to the Southern African Development Community* (Johannesburg: Institute for Global Dialogue, 2001); Heymans op. cit. (note 13), 4.

<sup>17</sup> Heymans, op. cit. (note 13), 5.

<sup>18</sup> Stan Burkey, *People First* (London: Zed Books, 1996).

<sup>19</sup> Carmen, op. cit. (note 10).

<sup>20</sup> David C. Korten, *Getting to the 21st Century. Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1990).

<sup>21</sup> David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (Sterling: Kumarian Press/San Francisco: Berret-Koehler publisher, 2001), 15.

<sup>22</sup> Also Davids et al, op. cit. (note 11), 23, express the notion that development is about people. This implies that people should be at the center of development efforts, and that development efforts should be meaningful to them. Moreover, the idea that develop-

growth-centered development promoted by many Western governments. Korten believes that at the end of the twentieth century the world was suffering from a threefold crisis, namely poverty, environmental destruction and social disintegration. He defines development as “a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.”<sup>23</sup> This (continuing) process, driven by the three principles of sustainability, justice and inclusiveness, entails that development has to be consistent with people’s aspirations, meaning that people should decide for themselves what improvements are needed and how they are to be created.<sup>24</sup>

This development process is directed at improving standards of living and self-reliance. It is a process whereby groups, communities and individuals are enabled to be responsible for their own livelihood, welfare and future.<sup>25</sup> According to Dawood,<sup>26</sup> this is especially true for African people and governments striving for empowerment and self-reliance.

It is important to note that development is about people, and this must help us understand the core values of the meaning of development in context. Development acts as a vehicle for the transformation and betterment of people’s lives.<sup>27</sup> August<sup>28</sup> furthermore also states that the participation of people in their own development is an essential part of human growth and a process whereby people themselves become aware of and understand their problems and the social reality within which they live in order to affect lasting solutions for themselves at the grassroots level.

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ment is about people obliges us to accept that development involves millions of people who live in poverty and who experience inequality as far as access to the economic, political and symbolic power is concerned. These people must be made the focus of development action and intervention. It is important to note that development is about people, and this must help us understand the core values of the meaning of development in context. Development acts as a vehicle of transformation towards better life for people. Ibid. 106. Karel Th. August, *A Curriculum for Community Development in Practical Theology*. Unpublished master’s thesis (Stellenbosch: University of Stellenbosch, 1999), 24, also states that the participation of people in their own development is an essential part of human growth and a process where people themselves become aware of and understand their problems and the social reality within which they live in order to affect lasting solutions for themselves at the grassroots level.

<sup>23</sup> Korten, op. cit. (note 20), 97.

<sup>24</sup> Bryant L. Meyers, *Walking with the Poor* (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 97.

<sup>25</sup> Kingsbury, op. cit. (note 14), 22.

<sup>26</sup> Zora Dawood, *The New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD)*, at <http://osf.org.za/wp/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/NEPADINPLAINLANGUAGE1.pdf>, 17.

<sup>27</sup> Davids et al, op. cit. (note 11), 105.

<sup>28</sup> August, op. cit. (note 22), 24.

Whereas people have the potential and ability to improve their own lives, the goal to reach is humanness, which means to strive for social justice, full participation in decision making, alleviation of suffering and sustainable development.

Development initiatives should stress the principle that progress depends on continuous affirmation of meaning—the will to lead a meaningful life. Therefore, development is more likely to succeed if people are allowed to incorporate the specific meaning of their social reality (as they themselves give meaning to it) into their desire to improve their situations.<sup>29</sup> Thus, development initiatives that accommodate these sensitive issues and contexts will most probably be more legitimate and successful than others.

In line with this thinking, Speckman<sup>30</sup> argues that development is integrally linked to the release of human potential. There can be neither successful economic growth without human empowerment and motivation, nor can there be human empowerment without it being translated into economic advantage. There is a clear link between economic and human development.

Finally, to argue that development is about people is to acknowledge that development is fundamentally about relationships. Human relationships are one of the determinants of human development. From a normative point of view, these relations have to be embedded in an ethos of equity, justice, human dignity, cultural fit, participation, freedom, hope, sustainability, reciprocity, ecological soundness and spirituality.<sup>31</sup>

For Anderson,<sup>32</sup> development is essentially about change and continuity. He argues that for change to take root, it must have something in common with the people and be in line with their values and their capacity. Development must therefore be appropriate, i.e., culturally, socially, economically, technologically and mentally relevant. Therefore, let us take a look at the local development environment.

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<sup>29</sup> Davids et al, op. cit. (note 11), 106.

<sup>30</sup> McGlory T. Speckman, *Biblical Vision for Africa's Development* (Pietermaritzburg: Clusters Publications, 2007), 243.

<sup>31</sup> These principles are what Bragg, op. cit. (note 12), calls characteristics of transformational development.

<sup>32</sup> Mary B. Anderson, *Development and Social Diversity* (UK: Oxfam, 1996), 63, at [www.developmentinpractice.org/sites/default/files/DiP%20Reader%20SocDiv%20text.pdf](http://www.developmentinpractice.org/sites/default/files/DiP%20Reader%20SocDiv%20text.pdf)

## THE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT ENVIRONMENT

Communities organize and carry out projects locally. The local context influences development while, at the same time, it is being influenced by development taking place within its borders. As the development environment consists of or presents itself in a number of different environments, it is of strategic importance to acknowledge that these types of environment have a profound influence on communication and thus on development.

On the basis of De Beers and Swanepoel,<sup>33</sup> I hereby propose seven types of environments in my attempt to clarify the concepts “development” and “local.”

### POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT

The political environment consists of leaders and political groups with political activities such as meetings and marches. Political communication consists of messages regarding political orientation and policy preferences. Political forces are at work in all communities. In rural areas, traditional leaders still play an important role in reorganizing and deciding events and activities within the community.

### SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

According to De Beer and Swanepoel,<sup>34</sup> the social environment consists of institutions such as the primary institution of the family and secondary institutions such as schools, the church, clubs and interest groups. There are also informal institutions such as friendships. Families are represented in many of the secondary institutions and tend to communicate with one another. All communities are well organized; they have, for instance, power structures, schools, interest groups and civic organizations. The actual structure of the organizations is important as is how they relate to one another as they form the social environment within which community development takes place.

### CULTURAL ENVIRONMENT

The cultural environment consists of the values and morals of society. These values and morals are often referred to as the traditions of the people. With

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<sup>33</sup> Hennie Swanepoel and Frik de Beer, *Community Development. Breaking the Cycle of Poverty* (Lausdowne: Juta and Co. Ltd., 2006), 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*

tradition, people have a place in society and certain obligations toward society while they can expect society to guide them and provide a living environment for them as long as they are true to the traditions.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, culture creates or contains taboos and provides a framework according to which people act and react to daily life. In most communities, cultural practices are beneficial to the success of development efforts.

### **ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT**

Every community has its own economy which, to a large extent, is manifested in the informal system, but also in employment in the formal system. The economic context refers to rate of employment and the presence and activity of commerce and industry. Society is also layered in terms of the economy such that one finds very poor people, poor people and those who are better off. The economic environment is very important in community development and the management of scarce resources.

### **NATURAL ENVIRONMENT**

The natural dimension such as the availability of natural resources and disasters represents contextual elements that could affect development.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL ENVIRONMENT**

The psychological dimension differs from one society to another, e.g., the psychological dimension of a rural area is different from that of an urban area. It is important to know people's histories because past experiences are part of their ecology of ideas and will influence their perception and understanding of development, if and how they participate in development activities.<sup>36</sup>

### **RELIGIOUS ENVIRONMENT**

In the global South, the religious factor has become an acknowledged and strategic dimension in development thinking and practice. The South African government has emphatically stated that "[i]n striving for political and economic development, the ANC recognizes that social transformation

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 12.

cannot be separated from spiritual transformation.”<sup>37</sup> When using the inclusive concept “religion” we include the church which, in the global South, is a dominant force. In South Africa, eighty percent of the population belong to the church. Statistics show that in the global South the church is an acknowledged institution which is close to the poor and, in most cases, the church of the poor.<sup>38</sup> It therefore stands to reason that the religious dimension is of strategic importance for the development debate in the global South when we refer to context.

## CULTURAL FIT

Development must be appropriate to the culture that is to be transformed. Nonetheless, modernizers have all too often ignored customs and social patterns in an attempt to bring material benefit to those who were regarded as “backward.” They regard local tradition as an obstacle to change and technology without understanding the rationality of society’s accumulated wisdom. The results have been cultural imperialism and the destruction of indigenous values and even entire cultures. We can deduce, therefore, that no form of social transformation can be achieved without culture, and if any culture is destroyed, a part of creation and humanity dies.<sup>39</sup>

In this context, Davids<sup>40</sup> argues that the focus of development initiatives should be prompted by people’s own experience. Intervention at the microlevel should incorporate indigenous knowledge systems and appropriate development technology based on the specific cultural environment. Awareness plays a major role in this context. People must be both the target of development and the tools (subject) with which to attain it. In becoming the tools to shape their own development, people create a world of meaning that enables them to understand their social reality. For this reason, development should focus on people’s aspirations and needs as defined by them. Development grounded in consciousness implies that people confronted with development should have the right to make decisions for themselves.

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<sup>37</sup> Quoting Mandela, the African National Congress made this statement in *The Moral Renewal of the Nation* in 1998, [www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2666](http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=2666) .

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Karel Th. August, *Equipping the Saints: God’s Measure for Development* (Bellville: The Print-man, 2010), xiii.

<sup>39</sup> Samuel and Sugden, op. cit. (note 12), 45.

<sup>40</sup> Davids et al, op. cit. (note 11), 106–8.

## PERSPECTIVES ON CULTURE

According to Bell,<sup>41</sup> cultural systems organize and reproduce the material forces of production (labor, natural resources, technology) without which they are merely a set of physical possibilities and constraints lacking order or integration. The cultural system determines the kinds of goods produced, the way in which work is organized and labor is apportioned between men and women.

Moreover, in tribal cultures<sup>42</sup> economy, polity, ritual and ideology do not appear as distinct systems nor can relationships be easily assigned to one or another of these functions. Society is ordered by a single consistent system of relationships, which should be mapped out at the level of social action.

As Dawood<sup>43</sup> emphasizes, culture is a core part of development in Africa. We need to protect and effectively use indigenous knowledge and share it for the benefit of humanity. Indigenous knowledge includes tradition based literacy, artistic and scientific works, invention and scientific discoveries, designs, names and symbols, genetic resources and knowledge and all other tradition-based creations from intellectual work in the fields of industry, science, literature and art. Speckman<sup>44</sup> warns that when tradition is discarded or reformed, interference with the basics of the community begins. This warning is of great value for the identity and human dignity of a community. It therefore stands to reason that those who abandon their cultural practices in favor of foreign cultures do not only upset the living but they also change the appearance of what was known to the dead when they were alive.

## THE CONCEPT OF CULTURE

The concept of culture is at the center of modern thought and practice. Since the eighteenth century, the definition of culture has undergone considerable changes. It is used here in the sociological and anthropological sense to denote a process that shapes specific and distinct ways of life. It therefore subsumes the arts and all systems of meanings and values associated with inner development.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Morag Bell, *Contemporary Africa: Development, Culture and the State* (London/New York: Longman, 1986), 53.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>43</sup> Dawood, *op. cit.* (note 26), 46.

<sup>44</sup> Speckman, *op. cit.* (note 30), 42.

<sup>45</sup> Bell, *op. cit.* (note 41), 53.

Moreover, used in this sense, culture challenges the Marxist tendency to reduce culture to the super-structural—a realm of mere ideas, beliefs, arts and customs—determined by basic material history while the anthropological concept of culture has been one of the most important and influential ideas in twentieth-century thought. The use of the term culture has made a profound impact on other fields of thought.<sup>46</sup>

Culture as used in anthropology does not of course mean cultivation in the arts and social graces. It refers, rather, to learned, accumulated experience. Structured and cultural features are in fact closely intertwined and, while structured interest group analysis is relevant to our understanding of social processes, so too are the patterns of loyalties and cultural norms, which influence the response of the people in the global South to changing circumstances and which, in turn, condition the means by which social change is achieved.

Therefore, it is important to emphasize that when we speak about culture, we are not just referring to customs, beliefs, attitudes, values, art, but also to the whole way of life of a people, which also embraces a complexity of economic and political activities, science and technology.<sup>47</sup>

According to Baker,<sup>48</sup> culture is therefore the lived experience, texts, practices and meanings of all the people as they conduct their lives. Such meanings and practices are enacted on the terrain not of our making even as we struggle to shape our lives creatively. Culture does not float free of

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<sup>46</sup> Roger M. Keesing and Andrew J. Strathern, *Cultural Anthropology. A Contemporary Perspective* (London: Harcourt Brace, 1998), 14.

<sup>47</sup> Cf. Anderson, *op. cit.* (note 32), 47. Culture has been understood in different ways. First, culture has been used to refer to the pattern of life within a community—the regularly recurring activities as well as material and social arrangements that are characteristic of a particular human group. In this sense, culture refers to the realm of observable phenomena, of things and events out there in the world. Second, culture has been used to refer to the organized system of knowledge and beliefs where people structure their experience and perceptions, formulate act, and choose between alternatives. This sense of culture refers to the realm of ideas (Keesing and Strathern, *ibid.*, 16). Deborah Eade, *Development and Culture* (Oxford: Oxfam, 2002), 10, in turn speaks of the three “dimensions” of a given culture: first, the symbolic which includes values, symbols, archetypes, myths, spirituality, religion or often several different religions; second, the society, which includes organizational patterns for family and community linkages and support, system for management, and political systems for decision making and conflict resolutions; and third, the technological dimension which includes the skills, expertise, technology, agriculture, cooking and architecture. Often these dimensions overlap; for example, in the fields of art, law, and language.

<sup>48</sup> Chris Barker, *Cultural Studies: Theory and Practice* (New Delhi: SAGE Publication, 2000), 40.

the material conditions of life; on the contrary, whatever purposes cultural practice may serve, its means of production are always unarguably material. The meanings of culture are to be explored within the context of their conditions of production, thus forming culture as a whole way of life.<sup>49</sup> In this case, culture may be seen as consisting of the following:

- The sum total of knowledge, attitudes and habitual behavior patterns shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society
- All the historically created designs for living, explicit and implicit, rational, irrational and non-rational that exist at any given time as potential guides for the behavior of human beings
- The learned and transmitted motor reactions, habits, technologies, ideas and values and the behavior they induce
- Patterns—explicit and implicit—of behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, consisting of the distinctive achievements of human groups including their embodiment in artifacts.

In this essay, I shall operate strategically with a broad definition of culture. This means that culture is not viewed as being in opposition to development, but as something that is continually changing and being created in step with changing social processes while, at the same time, constituting a common point of reference in global development.

Culture can therefore be broadly defined as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by individuals as members of a society or community.<sup>50</sup> In short, we can summarize and define culture in relation to development as the complex of spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize society. Culture is mental structures, the general patterns of understanding prevalent in a given social group, i.e., conceptions of the world, religion, gender role patterns and the management of resources. However, culture also comprises more specific forms of expression through works of artistic/cultural value.

Operationally, this twofold definition means that work with the cultural dimension involves (i) culture as the sum of social practices in the form of, for example, religion, language, education and social family practices; and (ii) culture as an artistic expression in the form of, for example, literature,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 40.

<sup>50</sup> Keesing, *op. cit.* (note 46), 14.

dance, music and films. The cultural dimension offers especially good opportunities for genuine partnerships in that it holds out more prospects for cooperation on an equal footing than does the economic dimension. The link between development and the cultural dimension will often initiate a process by which all parties exert an ongoing influence on one another.

## THE CULTURAL DIMENSION OF DEVELOPMENT

According to Serageldin and Taboroff, the “cultural dimension of development is a concept that has emerged gradually over a long period of time, and to a large degree as a consequence of studies carried out by UNESCO and some others in the interface of culture and social affairs”<sup>51</sup> and of culture and development. The concept is ultimately linked to the wider anthropological definitions of culture, which includes “the whole complex of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group.” It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being’s value systems, traditions and beliefs.

The planners of UNESCO’s World Decade for Cultural Development Spanning (1988–1997) came up with the following four objectives:

- Acknowledging the cultural dimension of development
- Affirming and enriching cultural identities
- Broadening participation in culture
- Promoting international cultural cooperation.

One of the reasons for the failure of various development strategies was that the cultural dimension had been a long neglected aspect of development.<sup>52</sup> People do not commit themselves to a development undertaking unless that undertaking corresponds to their deeply felt needs.<sup>53</sup> People should be able to derive the means for and motivate their development from their own cultural roots.

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<sup>51</sup> Ismail Serageldin and June Taboroff, *Culture and Development in Africa* (Washington DC: The World Bank, 1994), 545.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>53</sup> Eade, *op. cit.* (note 47), 169.

## **CULTURE AS A LIFE PATTERN: LOCAL CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT**

People in the global South are rarely consulted on the kind of development they would want. They have been subjected to various models of development which have only rarely increased their supplies of food or improved their state of health. They have been the people others would like to see changed, whether through Christianity, civilization, research, or development projects. They are seldom regarded as having a religion, culture or trading system of their own. Rather, it is assumed that have to be initiated into all of these and need to be helped, assessed and given aid.<sup>54</sup>

In contrast to this degrading approach to the culture of the global South, Anderson<sup>55</sup> views development from the perspective of Christian transformational development as a process by which indigenous people are given the opportunity to upgrade their own way of life, challenging the physical and social environment in which they find themselves. This is so because local communities and people have their own concept of development.<sup>56</sup> It is also a process which provides access to the resources required for removing such constraints and acknowledges their right to plan and control their destiny in accordance with the resources available to them. People do not need others to define their needs for them; they can do it for themselves.

Anderson<sup>57</sup> further cautions that because people are not developed but develop themselves, they have to be convinced that the changes envisaged will not merely experiment with their lives but actually mean change for the better.

It is important to note that people participate in what they know best. Practically, all rural communities still cherish their culture as manifestations of their traditional knowledge, skill, values, customs, organization and management systems and institutions. These are what have enabled them to survive as communities in a specific physical and social environment. Thus, for people to participate in decisions that affect their lives, they must start from where they are and with what they know. What most people know is their own culture and values.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 168

<sup>55</sup> Anderson, *op. cit.* (note 32), 69.

<sup>56</sup> Eade, *op. cit.* (note 47), 168.

<sup>57</sup> Anderson, *op. cit.* (note 32), 69.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 71.

Integrating the cultural dimension into development can lead to the adoption of a less reductive and a more comprehensive approach.<sup>59</sup> This means that development partners, especially the people affected, have to make special efforts to integrate culture from the earliest stages. For the purpose of development work, it is useful to look at culture as both an aid and a coping strategy with negative influences and pressures as well as a creative and joyous response to people's relationship with themselves, others, the community and the environment.<sup>60</sup>

Moreover, culture does not only belong to the past. It evolves in response to outside influences and to the fact that people innovate and create new cultural traits. In a given culture, therefore, some elements are inherited while others are adopted and created. Culture is therefore the whole complex of knowledge, wisdom, values, attitudes, customs and multiple resources which a community has inherited, adopted or created in order to flourish in the context of its social and natural environment. It contains the local perception of the meaning of life and of what constitutes the good life for a local population. Culture gives meaning and direction. Any development process must be embedded in local culture or development will simply not take place. Culture plays a significant role in people's lives as it provides the means to understand and interpret the meaning in human society.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, such cultural trends as cooperation in the community, participation, inclusiveness and consensus need to be taken into consideration. When development builds on indigenous values it extracts lower social costs and imposes less human suffering and cultural destruction than when it copies outside models. This is because indigenously rooted values are the matrix from which people derive meaning in their lives, a sense of identity and cultural integrity.<sup>62</sup>

A more authentic engagement with theology, development and culture should determine what development that brings transformation should be like. It must recognize that the value system of local communities has

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<sup>59</sup> Eade, *op. cit.* (note 47), 9.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 10

<sup>61</sup> Philip N. Cooke and Luciana Lazeretti (eds), *Creative Cities, Cultural Clusters and Local Economic Development* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2008), 48, note that culture provides a specific way in which a community understands the world and defines reality. Furthermore, good development must therefore take into account the cultural values held by the community. Cultural beliefs harbor within them dynamism which when properly respected, can serve as the spring board for models of development which are more humane than those drawn from outside paradigms. Matthew Clarke, *Development and Religion: Theology and Practice* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011), 10.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

inherent God given strengths that can be harnessed to achieve sustainable development. Local values provide a dynamism that supports new ways to approach development.

## PROMOTING CULTURAL IDENTITY IN DEVELOPMENT

Serageldin and Taboroff<sup>63</sup> state that regional cultural manifestations strike deep responsive chords in the people. This occurs partly because they draw upon an authentic heritage that helps define the shared image of self and society which creates a collectivity. The clarity of cultural identity and its evolving continuity are essential to create an integrated and integrating cultural framework, which is the *sine qua non* for relevant, effective institutions, rooted in authenticity and tradition, yet open to change and modernity.

Cultural identity is essential for the self-assurance that society needs for (endogenous) development. Without such institutions, no real development can take place.

This is especially evident in economic development the principal engine of which is people's work and creativity.<sup>64</sup> What induces them to strike and invent is a climate of liberty that leaves them in control of their own destiny. If individuals feel that others are responsible for them, their efforts will ebb. If others tell them what to think and believe, the consequence is either loss of motivation and creativity or a choice between submission and rebellion. Submission leaves a society without innovators, and rebellions divert energies from constructive efforts to resistance posing obstacles and causing destruction. To trust the individual, to have faith in the individual, is one of the elements of a value system that favors development.

## GOALS FOR CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT

The goals for a conscious and systematic incorporation of culture in development cooperation can be summarized as follows:

- **Promotion of the cultural dimension as an important component of poverty reduction.** An awareness of the cultural context is necessary in the planning and implementation of all development cooperation. To achieve this result, culture must be incorporated as a resource rather

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<sup>63</sup> Serageldin and Taboroff, op. cit. (note 51), 19.

<sup>64</sup> Lawrence E. Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington, *Culture Matters. How Values Shape Human Progress* (New York: Basic Books, 2000), 47.

than be allowed to function as an obstacle to the process. At the same time, local culture and knowledge must be taken into account as integral components of development programs, both for the benefit of local communities and as a contribution to continued global cultural diversity.

- **Promotion of culture as an active instrument in strengthening the very poor.** Cultural projects, in general, can be used as an active instrument for developing the understanding of such values as social justice, equality of opportunity and sustainability and to promote the identity and dignity of poor people and hard-pressed population groups. As part of this process, special attention must be devoted to the situation of women and indigenous peoples.
- **Promotion of cultural diversity on the basis of human rights and tolerance.** The keener focus on the cultural dimension in endogenous development cooperation must contribute to the preservation and development of cultural diversity, and an active effort must be made to strengthen mutual cultural respect. Tolerance and respect for human rights and for different cultures must be promoted as an important element in securing the cultural identity of the global South.

## ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT

This section discusses endogenous development, its difference to other development approaches and its meaning. Endogenous development is based on local people's criteria of development and takes into account people's material, social and spiritual well-being.<sup>65</sup>

The importance of participatory approaches and of integrating local knowledge into development interventions has become broadly recognized. However, many of these approaches run into difficulties in attempts to overcome an implicitly Western bias. Endogenous development seeks to overcome this bias by using people's worldviews and livelihood strategies as the starting point for development. Many of these worldviews and livelihood strategies reflect sustainable development as a balance between material, social and spiritual well-being.

The main difference between endogenous development and other participatory approaches is its insistence on the inclusion of religious (spiritual) aspects in the development process in addition to the ecological, social

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<sup>65</sup> Antonio Vázquez-Barquero, *Endogenous Development: Networking, Innovation, Institutions and Cities* (London: Routledge, 2002), 73.

and economic aspects. Endogenous development is mainly based on local strategies, values, institutions and resources. Therefore, priorities, needs and criteria for development may differ in each community and may not always be the same as those of the development worker.

Key concepts within endogenous development include local control of the development process, taking cultural values seriously, appreciating worldviews and finding a balance between local and external resources. The aim of endogenous development is to empower local communities to take control of their own development process.

### **THE BACKGROUND AND VALUE OF ENDOGENOUS DEVELOPMENT**

The most striking feature of “another development” is its emphasis on endogenous development. The concept is rooted in the global South’s experiences and it arose as an antithesis to the dependence syndrome. According to Bragg,<sup>66</sup> experiences in Ghandi’s India, in pre-1900 Japan and, more recently, in Tanzania,<sup>67</sup> China and Sri Lanka and other places point to the way to self-reliance. Endogenous development proponents consider self-reliance as an important political strategy against domination and exploitation by the West. The search for a new international economic order required a reformulation of the basis for the overall system of relationships between the global South and the international system.

However, Carmen<sup>68</sup> states that to transform dependence into autonomy requires deep structural changes in the relationship between the state and civil society in the global South. Thus, the global South cannot become self-reliant by imitating the global North, but by being able to set its own agenda and using its own forces including economic ones. Moreover, it entails, in essence, the empowerment of people to involve themselves effectively in creating the structures and in designing the policies and

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<sup>66</sup> Bragg, *op. cit.* (note 12), 34.

<sup>67</sup> In 1967, the TANU party met in Arusha, Tanzania, to develop strategies for the recently independent country. The Arusha Declaration spelled out the Ujama ideal, “In order to maintain our independence and our people’s freedom, we ought to be self-reliant in every possible way and avoid dependency on other countries for assistance.” Tanzania wanted development on its own terms and by its own initiative. President Julius Nyerere considered withdrawing from the world capitalist system as the only way for the country to act autonomously and develop on its own terms. Cf. Samuel and Sugden, *op. cit.* (note 12), 34.

<sup>68</sup> Carmen, *op. cit.* (note 10), 84.

programs that serve the interest of all as well as to contribute effectively to the development process and share equitably in its benefits.<sup>69</sup>

Thus, endogenous development is a means for achieving the social, cultural and economic transformation of society based on the revitalization of traditions, respect for the environment and equitable relation of production. This makes room for turning natural resources into products which may be used, distributed and exported to the whole world. Endogenous development aims at incorporating people and communities, previously excluded from the educational, economic and social system, by building productive networks with easy access to technology and knowledge. It is through endogenous development that organized communities are given the power to develop the potential of every region in the areas of social, economic, cultural and spiritual well-being.<sup>70</sup>

Endogenous development aims at improving the quality of life and the creation of a new economic and social model of development in which the neglected aspects of development by other development models are considered. The collaboration of many institutions also dedicated to the principle of solidarity with local communities is encouraged. Endogenous development policy is based on the process of change and it promotes the active participation of the entire population in the destiny of the nation, the democratization of resources, the creation of a fair society and the improvement of living standards for neglected communities. People's participation in the formation, execution and control of public negotiation is the necessary means to achieve complete development.<sup>71</sup>

Above all, in the words of the Cocoyoc Declaration, this autonomous capacity means "trust in people and nations, reliance on the capacity of people themselves to invent and generate new resources and techniques, to increase their capacity to absorb them, to put them to socially beneficial use, to take a measure of command over the economy, and to generate their own way of life."<sup>72</sup>

Endogenous development entails a type of development that originates from the heart of each society without any outside interference and imitation. In other words, the society, community or individual defines in sovereignty its values and its vision of the future.<sup>73</sup> The same idea is expressed by Carmen<sup>74</sup> when he states that development is not something done to people in

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<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>70</sup> Vázquez-Barquero, *op. cit.* (note 65), 73.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Samuel and Sugden, *op. cit.* (note 12), 35.

<sup>73</sup> Burkey, *op. cit.* (note 18), 30.

<sup>74</sup> Carmen, *op. cit.* (note 10), 31.

the usual interventionist mode by outside agencies and self-proclaimed experts, but is and can only be the product of an ever-present inventive, creative, autonomous human agency.

Linked to the above, development ought to become a project of people's own autonomous agency. People, as subjects, need to be free of the process of change, inventing their own future as authors of a culturally embedded, gender-permeated, economic and political process of transforming and humanizing the landscapes they inhabit.

Thus, the endogenous approach to development is a strategy for more appropriate development, based not on external constraints and political dependency, but rather structurally on internal needs and criteria. Endogenous development equalizes and distributes power among nations as well as among people.

The concept of endogenous development within a nation involves the decentralization of power, which would allow the concerned at every level of society to exercise all the power they are capable of. It also allows for the participation of all members of society, equal opportunities and the right to control one's own destiny.<sup>75</sup>

The philosophy of endogenous is crucial to people-centered development as it forms the non-negotiable foundation for the whole method and process of development in the global South. My argument is based on the premise that meaningful development is endogenous by nature because it is born out of local initiatives, and people themselves become the drivers of their own development agenda in their own cultural context and situations.<sup>76</sup>

Finally, theories of development born out of the modernization paradigm as discussed above have been a letdown as far as promoting a kind of development that is local people driven. In the interest of enriching the élites, most individuals, societies, communities and especially the global South have been adversely affected in one way or the other. Any plan for transforming human existence must provide adequate life sustaining goods and services, which most models of development have failed to address.

Bragg<sup>77</sup> notes that in other development models such as modernization, dependency and global reformism, issues of participation, dignity, freedom and justice are alienated from the people. Endogenous development, on the other hand, seeks to promote especially the idea of encouraging people to participate in their own development agenda. People at every level are encouraged to participate in events and generate new resources

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<sup>75</sup> Bragg, *op. cit.* (note 12), 35.

<sup>76</sup> Samuel and Sugden, *op. cit.* (note 12), 36.

<sup>77</sup> Bragg, *op. cit.* (note 12), 44.

and techniques to increase their capacity to absorb them and shape their own way of life.

Endogenous development stresses the need for culture and development to move together but, too often, modern theorists have ignored customs and social patterns in an attempt to bring material benefits to the fore.<sup>78</sup> Local traditions are often regarded as an obstacle to change and technology without understanding the rationality of society's accumulated wisdom. Proponents of the New International Economic Order also tend to view merely the benefits of increased wealth. According to Samuel and Sugden,<sup>79</sup> they sacrifice the cultural heritage of their own people for the progress of industrialization and extractive economies. We need to bear in mind, therefore, that if any culture is destroyed, a part of creation and humanity dies.

Transformational and endogenous development theory acknowledges the vital importance of the cultural heritage and creativity of all people as a biblical (theological) concept. In this kind of development, any change must be appropriated because it would endogenously arise out of the culture. Therefore, this gives a justifiable reason to explore endogenous development in context as an alternative approach to doing development which values multidimensional, transformative and sustainability over time.

## **THE HOW OF DEVELOPMENT ETHOS**

If one were to ask how a development ethos emerges, engrains and sustains in contact with local culture and religion, the following would serve as trailblazers:

### **ENDOGENOUS AND SELF-RELIANT DEVELOPMENT**

In the words of the Cocoyoc Declaration, autonomous capacity means trust in people and nations, reliance on people's capacity to invent and generate new resources and techniques, increasing their capacity to absorb them, put them to socially beneficial use, take a measure of command over the economy and shape their own way of life.<sup>80</sup>

One of the most remarkable features of endogenous development is that it promotes self-reliance and human development there where individuals

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<sup>78</sup> David Reid, *Sustainable Development. An Introductory Guide* (London: Earthscan, 1995), 71.

<sup>79</sup> Samuel and Sugden, *op. cit.* (note 12), 45.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

and communities become subjects of their own development process. Self-reliance is doing things for oneself, maintaining one's own self-confidence, making independent decisions either as an individual or in the context of a collective group with which each member has voluntarily allied themselves.<sup>81</sup>

Self-reliance comes from within but it is directed outwards. It is based on social relationships in which like-minded individuals or people with the same core values come together and voluntarily pool their efforts and resources in small groups, ally themselves with other small groups working toward the same goals. Accordingly, decisions and actions taken at all levels are based on self-confidence and self-determination. Self-reliance in this sense is not intended to lead to complete sufficiency such as the ability to manage completely one's own resources without interacting with others. Rather, in the economic sense, self-reliance is the ability of the family, community or nation to produce its basic needs as well as surpluses with which to trade for those commodities and services which it does not produce effectively.<sup>82</sup>

Moreover, no development activity, whether initiated by outsiders or by the indigenous people themselves, can hope to succeed unless it contains a strong element of human development. Human development involves the strengthening of the personality and the acquisition and internalization of knowledge and information.<sup>83</sup>

If the indigenous people are to manage and control their own development, then they must gain self-confidence, learn to be assertive, have faith in their own abilities and learn to discuss among themselves and with others. The discussion will involve what they already know, especially about development activity, what skills individual members of the group have and how these can be utilized most productively. In addition, the aspect of self-confidence is crucial in the whole process of self-reliance. Although self-confidence cannot be taught, it must be acquired through positive experiences such as small successes. Self-confidence therefore can be promoted through expressions of confidence and encouragement.<sup>84</sup>

Thus, the self-reliance approach to development is a strategy for more appropriate development, based not on external constraints and potential dependency but, rather, on internal needs criteria. This would equalize and redistribute power among nations and development at both the macro and microlevels. The concept of self-reliance within a nation involves the decentralization of power, which would allow those concerned at every

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<sup>81</sup> Burkey, *op. cit.* (note 18), 50.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

level of society to exercise that power which they are capable of exercising. Thus, self-reliance is sought in order to promote the participation of all members of society.<sup>85</sup>

### **RECLAIMING OWNERSHIP AND CONTROL**

Endogenous development empowers people to regain ownership and control over the resources that were originally theirs, and those that are a result of own invention and creativity.<sup>86</sup> Initiatives for development and endogenous sustainable development can be sustained through more systematic and comprehensive societal dialogues between scientists, policy makers, development agencies and local actors, which include differences in values, worldviews and ways of knowing.

Reflecting on the relationship between the different worldviews and the related forms of knowledge allows people jointly to learn that in principle no form of knowledge is universal or *a priori* better than other ones. Knowledge is a human product and thus fallible and never complete. Experiences and insights from local people all over the world show the great diversity of values, worldviews and ways of knowing that have relevance for development and the sciences.

Carmen,<sup>87</sup> quoting Manfred Max-Neef, a classical economist and exponent and spokesperson of what came to be known as ecological economics,<sup>88</sup> states that people are as they have always been and ought to be, namely the real protagonists of their own development and future. In this sense, development cannot be built on impositions, transfers, plans or interactions. The essence of development is creation and not just preplanned and pre-targeted economic growth, and people are full of unreleased potential waiting for an opportune time to be birthed.

In its actual sense, development indicates growth, but also, and above all, invokes creation, culture and everything involving autonomous human agency.

### **LOCAL PARTICIPATION**

Participation is an essential part of human growth, that is, the development of self-confidence, pride, initiative, creativity, responsibility and cooperation. Without such development within people themselves, efforts

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<sup>85</sup> Samuel and Sugden, op. cit. (note 12), 36.

<sup>86</sup> Carmen, op. cit. (note 10), 83.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 139.

<sup>88</sup> Manfred Max-Neef (1999) is also the designer of the Basic Human Needs approach.

to alleviate their poverty will be immensely more difficult. This process whereby people learn to take charge of their own lives and solve their own problems is the essence of development.<sup>89</sup>

The meaningful participation of the indigenous people in the process of development is concerned with direct access to the resources necessary for development and active involvement in and influence on the decisions affecting resources. To participate meaningfully implies the ability positively to influence the course of events. Thus, participation in this context leads to greater control by the indigenous people over their situation. Through the acquisition of knowledge and awareness, they are able better to understand the causes of their poverty and in a better position to mobilize and utilize the available resources to improve their situation.

A key element in this process by which the indigenous people gain control over their own lives is a collective effort such as organizing activities in like-minded groups. It is generally accepted that participation is meaningless outside the collective context. People must come together and pool their human and material resources (capital) in order to attain the objectives that they set for themselves. Participatory development implies a collective process of self-improvement.<sup>90</sup>

Participation is a continuous educative process, a process of progress in conscientization (based on Paulo Freire's theory). Through collectively reflecting on their personal experiences and problems (PLA),<sup>91</sup> people become increasingly aware of the different aspects of their reality and of what they can do to transform it. They decide upon and take collective action and analyze its results to promote their awareness further and thus move on with a better knowledge of their evolving reality.

## SUSTAINABILITY

According to Chambers, "Sustainability means that the long-term perspectives should apply to all policies and actions, with sustainable well-being and sustainable livelihood as objectives for present and future generations."<sup>92</sup> Any plan for transforming human existence must provide adequate life sustaining goods and services to the members of society. When a society

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<sup>89</sup> Burkey, op. cit. (note 18), 56.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 59

<sup>91</sup> Participatory Learning and Action (PLA) moves the external (change) agent to ascribe to the principles and the learning that takes place in the process of the peoples' own reflection and praxis. Cf. August, op. cit. (note 38), 9-11.

<sup>92</sup> Robert Chambers, *Whose Reality Counts?* (London: Intermediate Technology Publications, 1997), 11.

has minimal goods and services, existence, especially from a religious perspective, becomes sublimation, distorting God's provisions for humanity's well-being.

Samuel and Sugden<sup>93</sup> note that the provision of life—sustaining necessities and an overall increase in wealth—provides a qualitative change. This is so because sustainable development is seen as a development strategy that manages all assets, natural resources and human resources as well as financial and physical assets for long-term wealth or well-being. Sustainability deals with the continuous flow of benefits.<sup>94</sup>

Moreover, from a religious point of view, most communities are already sustainable in some manner because God has been and is at work among and through them. This implies that the community's understanding and vision of sustainability must include physical, material, social and spiritual well-being.<sup>95</sup> Physical sustainability means enabling the poor to create wealth but mental sustainability implies that they must come to believe in themselves. With social sustainability, people need to develop a sense of belonging and with spiritual sustainability everyone would need not only to depend on, but also to acknowledge God for sustenance.

## EMPOWERMENT

August<sup>96</sup> views empowerment as the process that makes power available to communities in order that they can use it for the manipulation of access to and use of resources in terms of achieving certain development goals. Empowerment enables people to express and assert what development is to them.<sup>97</sup> The empowerment approach also places emphasis on local decision making, self-reliance, participation in democratic processes and social learning. This perspective further stresses the participation of individuals and communities in defining and solving their own problems without outside interference.<sup>98</sup>

Other characteristics of empowerment include capacity building and evaluation, as the community is empowered to anticipate and influence change, make informed decisions, attract resources, manage resources, review performance, make an impact and make appropriate assessments.

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<sup>93</sup> Samuel and Sugden, op. cit. (note 12), 40.

<sup>94</sup> August, op. cit. (note 22), 27.

<sup>95</sup> Bryant L. Myers, *Walking with the Poor* (New York: Orbis Books, 2003), 128.

<sup>96</sup> August, op. cit. (note 22), 27.

<sup>97</sup> Myers, op. cit. (note 95), 141.

<sup>98</sup> Davids et al, op. cit. (note 11), 40.

## **GENDER, WAD/WID AND DEVELOPMENT<sup>99</sup>**

Today, when we speak of integrated, participatory development in the context of the global South, gender is an integral part of the debate on the emergence, engraining and sustainability in development. Gender relations in development can be defined as the social (cultural) construction of roles and relationships between women and men.<sup>100</sup> Especially in the global South, these socially constructed roles are usually unequal in terms of power, decision making, control and freedom of action and ownership of resources. For this reason, gender is fundamentally about power, subordination and inequality and therefore also about ways of changing these to secure for women greater equality in all its manifestations, especially within development.

Traditionally, women have been excluded from development discourse and practice; there where they came into the picture, it was mainly for training and indoctrinating as if they were empty slates, devoid of culture or understanding. Although the gender approach recognizes the vast diversity of relations between men and women across cultures, it nonetheless asserts the lessening (eradication) of the social inequalities experienced by women as an overriding goal.

## **CONCLUSION**

The type of development I am advocating can only emerge in local communities in relation to local culture and religions. In view of our critique of modernization theorists' views of the "backwardness" of the culture of the global South, I acknowledge that in the practice of all development projects and programs the conviction (meta-theoretical framework or policy) and approach (method) of the theoreticians and practitioners are informed by Eurocentric principles and values (ethos). However, when we speak from the context of local communities in the global South, I base my convictions on two related and integrated systems, viz. the Christian transformational

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<sup>99</sup> The history of development in the 80s reveals that the debate developed from the topic of women and development (WAD) to the involvement of women in development (WID). Today the debate is about gender and development, which acknowledges that women are an integral part and equal partner (if not the most prominent) of the development process in the global South.

<sup>100</sup> Frank Ellis, *Rural Livelihood and Diversity in Developing Countries* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 139. Cf. the discussion on gender in (and) development by August, *op. cit.* (note 38), 70–86.

and the participatory people-centered integrated development approaches, which are both endogenous in nature and directed at human well-being. This means that development has to be consistent with people's aspirations, ensuring that it is contextually and culturally relevant. In other words, people should decide for themselves what improvements are needed and how they are to be created.

From this conviction with its values we find the ethos that suits development best and which will engrain that same ethos to sustain development imbedded in endogenous development principles as spelt out above.

We are proponents of an ethos of which the basic tenants are human dignity and quality of life and is aimed at outcomes of improved standards of living that will create the capacity for self-reliance and, ultimately, contentment. This is a time-consuming and expensive exercise but then again our ethos is informed by a normative position from within the theology of the cross—Christ sacrificed his life so that people may have life and life in abundance (cf. Jn 10:10).

I conclude with the well-known quote from James Yen, which corresponds to our incarnational (cross-form) perspective (Phil 2:5–8):

Go to the people; live with them  
 Love them  
 Learn from them; work with them  
 Start with what they have  
 Build on what they know  
 And in the end when the work is done  
 The people will rejoice:  
 "We have done it ourselves!"<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Y. C. James Yen was the founder of a movement to combat illiteracy, poverty and hunger in developing countries on three continents. In 1960, Yen, a Chinese-born and Yale-educated teacher, founded the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction, a network that coordinates his program to promote self-help for the poor in dozens of countries. "We do not offer relief to the poor, but release," Yen said when he was awarded a People to People Eisenhower Medallion recognizing his more than sixty years of work with the world's destitute.

Yen was born Yen Yang-ch'u on 16 October 1893, in the province of Sichuan, then a remote region, to an aristocratic family whose members were traditionally scholars and officials. He was taught English as a child and became a Christian at the age of 12. Unable to enter Hong Kong University because he was not a British subject, he was sent to Yale University, where he supplemented a scholarship with earnings as a choir singer and added the name James to his Chinese initials.



# RELIGION, DEVELOPMENT AND MISSION

*Michael Biehl*

I begin this essay by looking into the debate on different understandings of religion and the implication this has for development. I engage in this discussion in the full awareness of the context of religious plurality, in which the self-understanding of the Christian faith and churches is that of being one religion among many, even though this position is not shared by all theologians. In this light, we have to define our relationship to those other religions from an explicitly theological position and not from the philosophy of religions. I will argue that such a theological approach can be understood as a dimension of mission theology. In a last section of the paper I relate this discussion to the two recent ecumenical documents on mission and a matrix of Christian assets of development/transformation as an attempt to spell out the opportunities and challenges of this approach for churches and congregations. With the help of a case study from Tanzania I shall show how religion works practically in development.

## **WHAT IS RELIGION?**

The discussion on what constitutes religion has a long history. In the following, I shall highlight two aspects. First, as one dimension of culture and society, the inquiry into religion is part and parcel of Western societies' attempt to understand themselves. It also reflects an understanding how society functions based on common convictions. To see religion from the perspective of philosophy and sociology or law is part of the way in which societies that understand themselves as secular societies function today.

I am convinced that in Europe the term religion could arguably be understood as having been coined in an attempt at "exorcism"—in the sense

that much of the violence and oppression that has occurred throughout history has been attributed to Christianity. There is undeniably a dark side to Christianity—violence, oppression, persecution—and that has to be taken seriously. Yet, sometimes there seems to be a tendency to believe that the moment one rids oneself of Christianity these dark periods will be over. Development was once conceived in the sense of modernizing and secularizing society, of freeing the mind from religion. One may find a faint echo of such perceptions in the highly critical attitude toward religion in some development discussions where religion is predominantly held responsible for more traditional worldviews which seem to impede development. So there is some suspicion regarding the positive role of religion in the development of societies. I here refer to traditional perceptions of patriarchal roles and other gender stereotypes. Religions have to prove that they something positive to contribute to development.

The second aspect I wish to highlight is that numerous scholars of social and religious studies and cultural anthropologists have reflected on religion in their attempt to understand non-Western societies such as Africa, Asia or Australia. As Hans Kippenberg reminds us in his wonderful book,<sup>1</sup> theories of religion have been part of a European attempt to construct “others” and to explain the difference between various types of societies. Some theories have identified Christianity as the explanatory variable why Europe and the Western world developed and why societies in other regions of the world have not.

There are essential and functional definitions of religion.<sup>2</sup> Essential definitions try to define what religion is and work with elements such as belief in gods, spirits, a transcendent world and institutions such as priests and religious bodies thus mirroring Western concepts of religion. Functional definitions describe what religion does by studying the actual effects of religious ideas and rituals in a given context. They display an underlying critical thrust since the functional approach insinuates that it is not religious beliefs *per se* that count but what they accomplish. For instance, religious rituals are believed to enhance the social cohesion of a given society. Functional approaches therefore sometimes tend to posit that people actually do not know what they do if they believe and act in a religious way.

In the following, I shall approach religion with the metaphor of the map. “Map is not territory,” as Jonathan Z. Smith reminds us in his book

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<sup>1</sup> Hans G. Kippenberg, *Die Entdeckung der Religionsgeschichte. Religionswissenschaft und Moderne* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1997). Also, Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994).

<sup>2</sup> Klaus Hock, *Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2002).

on religion, but a map helps us to define the space and to navigate the terrain.<sup>3</sup> A map is different from territory insofar as it always presents a choice of elements and obscures others and, in addition, changes the scale of those items represented for a given purpose. The metaphor of the map reminds us that a map represents what we choose to observe. A map helps us to define our own position and to bear in mind where we come from and hints at where we are possibly heading.

To approach religion with the metaphor of the map is a way of determining the status of the term religion: the claim is that “religion” as such does not exist and that it is always the result of a defined and defining choice of “facts” that are considered to be relevant to religion. So one does not so much examine religious ideas or concepts but observes practices, social and spiritual ones, systems of symbols, attitudes and discursive strategies and how the actors reflect on these. The approach is less interested in ideas than in convictions shaping attitudes and highlights the agency of the actors in the field. The metaphor thus highlights that our map of religion has a constructive dimension, not only one of representation. What religion is or what is religious may therefore differ widely.

The metaphor of the map may also be a helpful way of describing the use of the term religion. If we understand religion as a map then we focus on the orienting function of religion. The chosen elements to be represented on the map of my own religion explain who I am and who the “others” are and how my position is related to other relevant elements represented, including human beings, believers and the environment, culture and nature and the cosmos. Looking at the map of a given religious tradition or community may help to discern a certain choice of deep-rooted convictions, persuasions and values which guide the followers and motivate them in their practice, all the more so if I use the map of my own religion as a vantage point for defining the positions of others on my map. I shall later propose that one perspective of mission is to draw such a Christian map of other faiths and religions.

Religion as a map draws on the functionalist approach in so far it regards religion as being practically oriented: we should not only decipher beliefs, ideas and values but also analyze what kind of attitudes they motivate and how they instigate action. Religion is one perspective, maybe the most compelling one, telling me what to do and what not to do and how I should lead my life and why so. The functionalist approach also underlines that religion is community oriented. Even in the highly individualized Protestant tradition from which I come and in which personal faith and spirituality

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<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Z. Smith, *Map is not Territory. Studies in the History of Religions. Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity*, 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1978).

are greatly valued the community of believers is part of religious life and itself an object of faith.

## **RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT**

### **DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS AND RELIGION**

The renewed interest in religion and development has recently led to a series of consultations and publications. Interestingly, one such initiative focusing on religious communities, e.g., faith-based organizations as actors in development processes, has been sponsored by the World Bank. In 2004, the DEZA in Switzerland and Kerk in actie/ICCO started a series of workshops on “Religion and Development” dealing with the possible influence of religious persuasions and ideas on development, both positively and negatively. They observed that development organizations on the whole regarded religion as oriented toward traditional beliefs that are opposed to the ideas of development organizations, asked themselves why some activists in the field of development had certain reservations about religion and spirituality, including those working in church-based organizations<sup>4</sup> and recommended that their own attitudes to spirituality and religion be examined and to open up to faith-based groups and religious communities as partners in development projects.

### **RELIGION AND MODERNIZATION**

The debate on religion and development is not new. A convenient and telling entrance point into the debate is Max Weber’s sociology of religion. In the early twentieth century, Weber posed the question why the economy of the predominantly Protestant northern part of Germany was more developed than that of the predominantly Catholic South. He believed to have found one explanation in religion or, more precisely, in what, in terms of wealth and economics, the two major denominations, Catholics and Protestants,

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<sup>4</sup> See for instance Katherine Marshall, “The Ethics of Hunger: Development Institutions and the World of Religion.” Paper prepared for workshop on “Ethics, Globalization, and Hunger: In Search of Appropriate Policies,” Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, November 2004. See D. G. R. Belshaw, Robert Calderisi, Chris Sugden (eds), *Faith in Development. Partnership between the World Bank and the Churches of Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2001); Anne-Marie Holenstein, *Rolle und Bedeutung von Religion und Spiritualität in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit. Ein Reflexions- und Arbeitspapier* (Bern: DEZA, 2005); CORAID, Religion: A Source of Human Rights and Development Cooperation, at [www.religion-and-development.nl/.../bbo-rapport-180406\\_def.pdf](http://www.religion-and-development.nl/.../bbo-rapport-180406_def.pdf).

deemed to be morally and ethically correct and subsequently imposed on their followers. According to Weber, while Catholicism did not sanction the enjoyment of wealth as such and only permitted the occasional feasting on the income from economic activities and thus to consume it, such a behavior was not endorsed by the Reformed Protestant traditions. Protestants considered it more ethical not to enjoy the acquired wealth and to resist any temptation by reinvesting the acquired wealth. In Protestant areas, more financial capital was therefore available and invested leading to a more developed economy and affluence. According to Weber, this attitude, combined with some other characteristics, established a kind of elective affinity (*Wahlverwandtschaft*) between what Weber called the “spirit of capitalism” and the ethics of a specific brand of Protestantism.<sup>5</sup>

As a result of his study of Asian religions, Weber later developed the theory that other religions (Confucianism, Taoism, Hinduism) promoted this worldly attitudes and other activities differently to Protestantism.<sup>6</sup> Based on these comparisons, Weber attempted at the turn of the twentieth century to explain his observation that modernization, industry and social wealth originated in the West and not in Asia’s much older cultures where modernization seemed to have been hampered.

For decades, scholars have argued about his explanation without coming to a conclusion as to how religion and development are actually intertwined<sup>7</sup> and how to explain the different developments in East and West. The debate was concluded with the observation that, over the last decades, Japan, South Korea, India and China have developed capitalist economies and have become highly modernized, with and not against their own religions and the attitudes promoted by them. The solution to this riddle lies partly in the

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<sup>5</sup> Max Weber, “Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus,” in *Religion und Gesellschaft. Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie* (Frankfurt/M.: Zweitausendeins Verlag, 2006), 11–183. Weber by the way never claimed that this type of Protestantism is the origin of capitalism. He posited that the specific type of Protestantism he had been studying defined religiously and selected ethical attitudes through which a certain rationality and a corresponding habitus in life were strengthened which went especially well with capitalist economic behavior. These Protestant entrepreneurs then, in turn, helped to promote capitalism by their actual success.

<sup>6</sup> See Max Weber, “Die Wirtschaftsethik der Weltreligionen I. Konfuzianismus und Taoismus,” in *ibid.*, 291–532.

<sup>7</sup> The studies of the American sociologist Robert Bellah, who opposed Weber’s view with regard to the role of religion in South East Asia development, were very influential. Robert N. Bellah, “Analogien zur protestantischen Ethik in Asien?,” in Constans Seyfarth and Walter M. Sprondel (eds), *Seminar: Religion und gesellschaftliche Entwicklung. Studien zur Protestantismus-Kapitalismus-These Max Webers* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1973), 179–89.

chosen approach: attempting to define the “spirit” or ethos of a religion and to explore how this is applied to the economic activities of believers focuses on normative teaching. If, however, as was proposed earlier, we study how convictions and reflections of actors result in practices and attitudes a different map can be drawn.<sup>8</sup> In this way, we find more recent examples, especially in the Pentecostal movements among poorer social groups, where a change to a religiously motivated more methodical way of life—such as working regularly, abstaining from drinking and leaving the family behind—helps indirectly and directly to reach a modest level of affluence.

According to Weber’s explanation of the world, religion thus serves as a map of the world: on this map “West” is distinguished from “East” and religion is the variable to explain why the “West” is like it is and, at the same time, why it is different from the “East.” To Weber and many other sociologists or scholars of religion it is quite obvious that the development of the terminology of “religion(s)” is a Western construct: a theoretical concept under which Western scholars grouped very different worlds and phenomena (Hinduism in India, Confucianism and Taoism in China) to the extent that all of these became -isms and that these -isms became comparable. On this basis, one can explain why Hindus, Buddhists etc. did not develop like the observers who mostly hailed from a Christian background.<sup>9</sup>

Although the debate on religion has advanced and shifted after the so-called cultural turn we can see that ideas about religion and development

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<sup>8</sup> Sigrun Kahl recently made such an attempt by “mapping” how European societies actually dealt with those considered to be poor and how these (15-18.c) acquired attitudes—although they changed over time—are still reflected in the welfare systems of today’s societies, even there where they have become detached from their religious origins. Sigrun Kahl, “The Religious Roots of Modern Poverty Policy: Catholic, Lutheran, and Reformed Protestant Traditions Compared,” in *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 46 (2005), 91-126.

<sup>9</sup> A sociologist interviewed a young Brahman woman from India for a study on “Religion and Modernization in Singapore.” The young woman, living in Singapore, came from a rich Hindu tradition. At the end of the interview, the young woman said, “You have asked me to tell you how I understand myself as a Hindu. I have responded to this request to my very best. But, please, do not understand all that as if I have talked to you about my ‘religion.’ I have passed through a Western system of education here in Singapore and I think that I know quite well how you Western people are used to think about human beings, God and ‘religion.’ So I talked to you as if Hinduism were my religion so that you may be able to understand what I mean. If you were a Hindu yourself, I would have talked to you in quite a different fashion, and I am sure both of us would have giggled about the idea that something like Hinduism even exists. Please, don’t forget this when analyzing all the stuff you have on your tape.” Anne-Marie Holenstein, *Rolle und Bedeutung von Religion und Spiritualität in der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit. Ein Reflexions- und Arbeitspapier* (Bern: DEZA, 2005), 8.

along this line are still deeply rooted in our explanations of the world. Some observers believe that the Hindu caste system or the alleged backwardness of Islam explain why certain societies shaped by these religions do not advance or develop in the sense of modernization.

## DEVELOPMENT DEBATES

A second aspect of our topic “religion and development” is the concept of development itself. With his theory on religion, Weber opposed the Marxist theory which explained the class struggle as an unavoidable consequence of capitalism. Instead of criticizing religion as the “opium of the people,” as did the Marxists at the time, for Weber religion became a crucial factor for explaining development or the lack thereof. In the post-war era and during the Cold War, development, in the sense of modernization like in the West, became an ideological concept and, under this banner, the Western capitalist countries fought against the influence of Marxism and the Communist states on Asian and African nations striving for independence. Development was to develop other societies and the programs of development help people and nations to “catch up.” The idea and promise of development was to provide immunity against the revolution virus.<sup>10</sup>

World religions did not play a role in the program “develop not revolutionize.” Instead it focused on ideologies: Capitalism or Marxism, market economy or planned economy, industry or agriculture. Since the seventies, the focus on fighting poverty entered the development debate and, still later, what is called the rights-based approach, which nowadays is so important for faith-based development engagement.

Since the economic and political breakdown and the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s, one can observe that the classical ideological boundaries have become increasingly fluid. Religions are once again in the limelight, but this time mainly as the reservoirs of fierce politics of identity,<sup>11</sup> fertile environments for fundamentalisms, as well as the possibility to rediscover

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<sup>10</sup> Gerald Faschingeder, “Entwicklungsproduktive Religiositäten und Entwicklung als religiöse Idee. Zu den zahlreichen Möglichkeiten, das Verhältnis von Religion und Entwicklung zu denken,” in Gerald Faschingeder und Clemens Six (eds), *Religion und Entwicklung. Wechselwirkungen in Staat und Gesellschaft* (Wien: Mandelbaum Verlag, 2007), 16–59, here 18.

<sup>11</sup> In her study on the so called “new wars,” Mary Kaldor analyzed how in wars such as in the Balkan, violence is ultimately unleashed deliberately against civilians and not against combatants. See Mary Kaldor, *Neue und alte Kriege. Organisierte Gewalt im Zeitalter der Globalisierung* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2000), 81f. This type of warfare within states and nations fuels nationalisms and uses religion for the identification and differentiation of opposing groups. In these constellations, religion and faith groups lose the capacity to guard the memory of times of peaceful coexistence.

one's "own" religion: not as reason for an alleged backwardness and economic underdevelopment but, to use it boldly and proudly to turn away from the Western model to a different model of development. So it was for instance a shock for the West that in Iran, which had been on the way to being developed according to a Western model, a revolution took place in the name of Islam!

## CONCLUSION

I would like to highlight the following points: first, the difference between religions as a factor to explain development (modernization) or the lack thereof in different parts of the ideological map of the world; second, the role of development in the modernization of those beyond the North Atlantic realm; and third, at least one religion, Protestant Christianity, was considered to have played a major role in the West's economic well-being. Later, when the debate on development became decidedly ideological, it was customary to speak of "religions" from the perspective of secularization. Still later religion (!) returned to the scene, but this time mostly identified with "backward" attitudes and ideas of some specific religious traditions (!) that allegedly kept people in the obscure world of sorcery, archaic traditions and role models that impeded the development of society.

When reviewing this evolution of concepts it is not really surprising that the debate on religion and development largely subscribed to the distinction between so-called higher religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam and Hinduism or Buddhism, and other so-called primal religions, whose attitude toward economics and money has not really been in the focus of these debates. This may change in future for instance with the concept of "Buen vivir" through which cultural and religious concepts and attitudes of indigenous peoples reach out beyond the indigenous context into the political discourse of larger societies.<sup>12</sup>

## WHY HAVE RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT BECOME A TOPIC TODAY?

In a first approach, I could name the following points that speak against such a combination:

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<sup>12</sup> Politicians of the German Green Party are studying the concept and asking to what extent it can foster political debates in Germany, Ute Koczy, *Das Gute Leben! Modebegriff oder steckt mehr dahinter*, at [www.thilo-hoppe.de/fileadmin/media/MdB/thilohoppe\\_de/thilohoppe\\_de/Lateinamerikakonferenz/Dokumente/12-11-15\\_Ute\\_Koczy\\_Das\\_gute\\_Leben\\_Version\\_LA\\_Konf\\_plus\\_Korrektur.pdf](http://www.thilo-hoppe.de/fileadmin/media/MdB/thilohoppe_de/thilohoppe_de/Lateinamerikakonferenz/Dokumente/12-11-15_Ute_Koczy_Das_gute_Leben_Version_LA_Konf_plus_Korrektur.pdf). *Her mit dem Guten Leben! Gegenentwürfe zur Globalen Krise*, Wuppertaler Süd-Nord Kolloquium (nahua Script, 14), ed. by Informationsbüro Nicaragua e.V. (Wuppertal, 2011).

The discussion on religion has stepped out of the shadow of the discussion about secularization in the industrialized states in which modernization was assumed to result in the disappearance of religion or *Entzauberung* (disenchantment) of the world (Weber). Since religion is back we can now talk about a re-enchantment. Religion was associated with claims of absoluteness and supremacy and the threat fundamentalism. The underlying basic equation seems to be that religion is a strong political force, difficult to cope with where it is intolerant, fundamentalist and violent and that it is “soft” there where it propounds liberal ideas. In these cases, it is a weak political force because it mirrors ideas that also other actors promote: human rights, justice and liberation.

At the same time we can see that the center of gravity of religions is shifting to the global South. Today, two thirds all Christians live in the global South and churches in Africa, Asia and Latin America are continuing to grow.<sup>13</sup> Predominately the charismatic Pentecostal churches, suspected of relapsing into pre-enlightened positions such as the belief in spirits, demons and exorcisms and to propagate and produce patriarchal and oppressive structures and thus to lead to further dependence, are expanding rapidly. They are reproached for being apolitical, socially uninterested, unenlightened and sects rather than churches. Does development have a chance there where these churches are located? Furthermore, religion is blossoming in those areas dominated by Islam.

The discussion on Islam in Germany is another example of how religion is being assessed. Migrants are being reproached for importing “backward” traditions from their Islamic countries of origin that pose obstacles to integration. Allegedly religiously grounded patriarchal models, the alleged oppression of women and lenience towards violence serve as indicators. The logical conclusion of this essentialist view of Islam is that only breaking the power of religion in society leads to justice, gender justice and peace in the community.

A further example is Huntington’s definition of societies in his famous book *The Clash of Civilizations*.<sup>14</sup> Huntington defines societies as cultural entities and attributed a key-role to the various religions in defining their identity as cultures. He believes religions to incorporate the identity of a

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross (eds), *Atlas of Global Christianity* (Edinburgh: University Press, 2009).

<sup>14</sup> Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998). There are interesting historical and also theoretical reasons why in German literature the term of culture has been preferred to that of civilization. See Elias, Norbert, *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen*. 1. Band, “Wandlungen des Verhaltens in den weltlichen Oberschichten des Abendlandes” (stw 158) (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1978), 6.A., 1–64.

cultural region and, as a consequence, steer the level of development of the area. In addition, since these religions at the core of the cultural regions are in opposition a clash must occur between these civilizations: The West is Christian and therefore faces the Middle East, which in turn is “Islamic.”

Development should help reduce scandalous differences, empower the poor to help themselves, serve peace and justice and transcend borders rather than creating new ones. Development has to be intercultural and interreligious. If, for instance, European churches provide aid to churches say in Africa but not the Islamic communities or other believers in the same area, then they are easily suspected of manipulation and assisting in changing the balance of power in the region. According to Hindutva, which teaches that only a Hindu can be a true Indian, Christians and Muslims cannot help but are only trying to convert and, therefore, development projects are always poisoned gifts.<sup>15</sup>

According to this view, there seems to be good reason for religion to be kept out of development cooperation. What would be the benefit of connecting the two areas and the respective actors?

Religious communities formulate an ethics of aid, compassion and commitment. To assist the neighbor, responsibility for the poor and advocacy for justice are strong motivations for development activities, at least for the three monotheistic communities.<sup>16</sup> For Buddhists and Hindus, this may have to be spelled out differently, but they also engage in relief projects and have religious relief organizations.<sup>17</sup> In addition, all religious traditions offer concrete ethics and a basic formation in many areas relevant to development such as nutrition, reproduction and sexuality, intergenerational relations, economies and even politics.

Religious communities are communities that are very active in development. According to a 2008 survey, the Catholic and the Protestant churches organize between forty to sixty percent of social development depending on the county.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See as an instructive example the article by Dayanand Saraswathi, “Conversion Destroys,” in *The New Indian Express*, Monday, 21 January 2008, 9.

<sup>16</sup> See, for instance, the contributions on different religions in Jürgen Wilhelm and Hartmut Ihne (eds), *Religion und globale Entwicklung. Der Einfluss der Religionen auf die soziale, politische und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung*. Mit einem Vorwort von James D. Wolfensohn (Berlin: University Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, Miriam Weiberg-Salzmänn, “Die Rolle des Buddhismus in Entwicklungs- und Transformationsprozessen,” in Wilhelm and Ihne, *ibid.*, 64–88. Clemens Six, “Hinduismus und Entwicklung. Sozioökonomische Auswirkungen eines religiösen Habitus,” in *ibid.*, 52–63.

<sup>18</sup> On the occasion of their conference, 23.–25.5.2008, in Nairobi, on the efficacy of development cooperation both Catholic and Protestant churches in Africa agreed for instance that they offer—depending on the country—between forty to sixty percent of services for social development. See *Entwicklung wirksam gestalten. Ein Beitrag zur Debatte über die Effektivität der Entwicklungszusammenarbeit* (Bonn: EED), 5.

The so-called world religions are transnational actors in the area of civil society. Being part of a transnational community present in many places on the globe will be an increasingly important asset in a globalized world. Furthermore, development is not the sole reason for these communities to exist, and they are thus able to approach development issues with a broader agenda. Moreover, all of them have local and indigenous organizations in various places around the globe.

The three aspects mentioned above are quite similar to those cited in the papers of the World Faith Development of Dialogue as reasons for the dialogue between the World Bank and religious communities.<sup>19</sup> This dialogue, which began in 1998, was by 2004 regarded with some hesitation by other forces within the World Bank. They weighted political questions about the different relationships of the religious communities with their nation states differently and, in addition, were confronted with groups within the religious communities that had severely criticized the World Bank and projects supported or imposed by them.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> See Katherine Marshall, "The Ethics of Hunger: Development Institutions and the World of Religion," paper prepared for a workshop on "Ethics, Globalization, and Hunger: In Search of Appropriate Policies," Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, November 2004, 1. She cites the following reasons for such a dialogue: (1) a common theme for development actors and religious communities which offers space for cooperation; (2) it helps to draw on the teachings of faith-based communities on food and on hunger; (3) to fight hunger globally demands new strategic partnerships. "This brings us to the role of religion and faith. Compassion for fellow human beings, a commitment to human dignity, and concern for the downtrodden and outcast, are central tenets of many if not most faith traditions. A core teaching of many religions is concern about hunger, and countless traditions call for people who have the means to feed those who are hungry. Other traditions (including fasting for example) remind those who are sated of what it is like to be hungry and in need. These traditions and the impulses that flow from them have been and remain a vital asset in the global struggle against hunger. They also, though, can be 'part of the problem,' in two senses. First, they often involve some sense that poverty and hunger are a norm, or inevitable, and thus speak more to the impulse to alleviate the problem rather than to go for change at the roots. And second, there can be a tendency to focus on traditions and ancient ideas or wisdom that may not reflect the wisdom of our times and scientific advances. The fight against hunger in 2005 calls for a blend of traditional wisdom and compassion and modern wisdom and compassion informed by what is possible today and our understanding of contemporary roots of poverty and malnutrition."

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 14. See also Deryke Belshaw, Robert Calderisi, Chris Sugden, *Faith in Development. Partnership between the World Bank and the Churches of Africa* (Oxford: Regnum Books 2001), to which Wolfensohn, then President of the World Bank and George Carey, former Archbishop of Canterbury wrote a foreword.

## RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT: TWO SIDES OF ONE COIN—AND THE PLACE OF MISSION?

So far, I have dealt with the role of religion and religions. To associate religion predominantly with rationalism or pre-enlightened thoughts and with the threat of fundamentalism and hostile claims of absoluteness draws a map that lacks many aspects. It encourages us as Christians and churches to reflect on the extent to which we find ourselves on this map drawn by others and how to cope with it.<sup>21</sup> Further, recent reflections draw world maps locating certain theologies considered as more conservative or even fundamentalist, predominantly in the global South, and these maps have to be studied critically.<sup>22</sup> And last, to what extent and how are we placing other faith-based communities on our map of religion and development.

However, a map that identifies religions primarily as being in need of developing themselves instead of being agents of development obscures the fact that development itself is not an innocent and clear-cut concept. As we have seen, development, in a broad sense, has aspects of an ideological construction, is entrenched in geopolitical interests and is not at all free from economic interests. Such concepts of development stand first for the interests of the developers and then of those whose development is to be promoted. Therefore churches and also other religious communities have to critique such concepts of development and bring in their perspectives and insights. The basis for such a critique is their faith and their critical reflection on how they perceive the world to be and how it could be.

Building on the constructive aspect of the drawing of a map of religions and development I understand that such maps have to be drawn from a Christian perspective. Such a critical approach to development concepts and a self-critical approach to religious communities as agents of devel-

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<sup>21</sup> I recall here for instance an article by the well-known German sociologist Ulrich Beck "Religion ist gefährlich" [Religion is a threat] which was published on the eve of Christmas 2007 in a major newspaper, *Die Zeit*, 19.12.2007, Nr. 52. In 2010, EED (German Development Service), Bread for the World and EMW organized a conference that looked at tendencies within African Christianity usually considered to oppose development such as spiritual warfare, prosperity Gospel, charismatization. *Encounter beyond routine. Cultural roots, cultural transition, understanding of faith and cooperation in development*. International consultation, Academy of Mission, Hamburg, 17-23 January 2010 (Hamburg 2011).

<sup>22</sup> See especially Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity. Believing the Bible in the South* (Oxford: University Press, 2006). As one critical voice, see Ustorf, Werner, " 'The Beast from the South' und das 'Ende des liberalen Christentums,'" in *Transformationsprozesse im globalem Christentum und ihre Auswirkungen auf Europa*, BThZ 27 (2010), 39-69.

opment could be a dimension of mission theology: God sending Godself into the world and shedding the dazzling light of the gospel in which we as Christians recognize the world as it is and have, at the same time, a glimpse of the promise God made to the whole world (*oikoumene*) and all creation (*missio Dei*).

Therefore, behind the question of religion and development lingers a very practical question, Which religious communities are agents of change and can therefore become partners in development? What are the criteria for discernment between those communities and those which impede development? On the other hand, it is a theoretical assessment. Which ideas and visions about a dignified and just life do religious traditions provide? Where do we find compelling and activating motivations for unselfish behavior, to serve the neighbor, to fight for others, even against one's own interest? But also, where do convictions which oppose development concerns originate from?

From a Christian perspective one could say that the following aspects are a dimension of a Christian understanding of development: Development activity lives from strong motivation and the capacity to create convincing and motivating images of "life in abundance," to strengthen contra-factual convictions and especially to engage patiently and long term with others to fight injustice and hunger there where a reality of denying and threatening life reigns. Paradoxically, the capacity for development lives also from the capacity to deal with failure, disappointment, low and slow output of some of the projects, dispiritedness and despair and is fuelled by unnecessary and untimely death. A good example is what is called "compassion fatigue." The question is how people suffering from this can be strengthened again.

## CASE STUDIES

Before I explore this perspective of a holistic understanding of mission further, I wish to look closely at three cases of interaction of religion(s) and development.

Cultural and religious perceptions and practices provide the frame within which people react to development projects. I remember an example from rural Tanzania in the nineties where, with the support of congregations in Northern Germany, the water supply with tubes and pumps had been built in a village.<sup>23</sup> The idea was to secure the water supply and, at the same time,

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<sup>23</sup> See Rolf and Sibylle Wassermann, *Lupila. Die Entdeckung des Dorfes in Afrika. Neue Wege in der Ökumenischen Partnerschaft* (Christlicher Glaube in der einen Welt, 2) (Hamburg: E.B. Verlag, 1996), 2. A.

to release women from the burden of carrying the heavy water pots from far away. Young men were trained to maintain the system of pipes and pumps. The system stopped working very quickly. There were two reasons: (1) the local people ultimately did not regard the rather simple, small technical device as relief from a burden but, rather, as shifting the task of supplying water from being the business of women to that of men; (2) the technical device affected the rules of power and decision making in the community, which were based on the respect for the elders and their power in the community. With the new devices, decision making was now associated with those that had acquired knowledge, with the younger ones. Since the elders did not let them make decisions according to the knowledge of the maintenance cycle of the machines but, instead, applied other criteria like how much money should be spent, the system eventually stopped working.

The example is instructive in several regards. To my knowledge the planning of the system had been done with local people who themselves seem not to have been aware of the secondary impact of the new technology. Moreover, it illustrates the far reaching cultural consequences such a rather simple technical device can have. The example also illustrates that cultural and religious concepts might actually prevent progress which had seemed meaningful to the local people in the first place: to secure their water supply.

I am convinced that what happened here is already reflected in the planning of development projects although it may still be the case there where people just start from the assumption: we have to do something about it! From the perspective of holistic mission, I take it as a reminder that first we have to be conscious that we cannot foresee all the effects our decisions may have, especially on other dimensions of community life. Secondly, it is important that the learning community is the social community that continues to exist locally and is not a community created through the project for a limited time. In the case referred to it was a church congregation which had done this in partnership with a church congregation in Northern Germany.

Lastly, it is part of our mission to bring in such learning experiences and a holistic perspective to development projects that either impose one-sided models of modernization or ignore cultural consequences of the projects. I highlight this aspect because without a clear understanding of religions in some areas of the development debates where religion and culture are seen as impeding development, unnecessary changes may be imposed that do not necessarily improve development.

In order to explain this point further I wish to review the case of the *Adivasi*, the first inhabitants of India. Their communities dwell in certain areas and live according to religious traditions and a culture system based on the extensive utilization of the land and forest. Relatively little of the

land is privately owned and the groups require a lot of land in order to sustain a relatively small community. This importance of land and forest for the sustenance of life is reflected in their religious ideas as values which demand respect and a corresponding ethics of life. In many areas, there are disputes over land rights since the *Adivasis* do not have any formal contracts. From their perspective, land is basically a gift to be used and does not belong to anyone. From the government's perspective, the land belongs to nobody and thus to the state. As a result, *Adivasis* are expelled and compulsorily resettled so that the land and forests can be used for mining, lumber, dam building or other large industries exploiting the resources.

The point here is that in the fight over their land and the rights to a sustainable life, the *Adivasis* have rediscovered their cultural and religious heritage as ecological concepts: speaking of the necessary harmony between nature and people, of soft cultivation and sustainable economy.<sup>24</sup> In this case, religion is renewed in conflict and becomes a cultural resource that evokes critical questions and nurtures resistance. Thus religion turns into a critique of a form of development that is planned one-sidedly or conceived as large scale technology.

Finally, there is also somewhat of an ideological battle. At first sight, development seems a universal, more reflected and less problematic concept than religion, which is thought to be problematic and partisan to certain worldviews which often contribute to conflicts. As an example to this I quote from a lecture of the Islamic scholar Farid Esack who, at a symposium on Religion: A Source for Human Rights and Development Cooperation, stated,

I come from a country [South Africa] where, at the end of 2003, an estimated 5.3 million were infected with HIV, the largest number of individuals living with the virus in a single country. In 2005, 1034 times the number of people who dies [sic] on September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001, dies [sic] of AIDS ...

And this on the other [hand]... The human rights and Islam project has acquired a feverish desperation after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> 2001... I am astounded that, notwithstanding my own commitment to working with those living with HIV and dying with AIDS, that it is not the reality of millions of deaths on this continent and millions more dying that gets me speaking invitations from all over the world. I am instead overwhelmed with invitations to address the wounds and fears of the empire and the desperation to turn the Muslim world upside down-inside out to make it more "decent" more compliant with "civilization."<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> See *Adivasis. Indigene Völker in Indien* (Weltmission heute. Studienhefte, 58) (Hamburg: EMW, 2005).

<sup>25</sup> Farid Esack, "Islam, Human Rights and Development—Some Underlying Issues," in CORAID (ed.), *Religion - A Source for Human Rights and Development Cooperation*, 54-63, here 57.

The Muslim liberation theologian Esack<sup>26</sup> accuses Westerners of construing Islam as a combination of a lack of human rights and violence. Then, as a critical Muslim, he is invited as a speaker but not to explore common areas of engagement but to appease and comfort the troubled minds of those who live under the impact of 9/11. That HIV is also a killer, leading to more deaths than terrorism, that alliances could be forged with Muslims in fighting HIV and AIDS, is completely ignored on that occasion.

## CONCLUSION

These case studies show that not only aspects of interaction of the two spheres of religion and development but also the religions in question—Christian, indigenous, Islam—take a position and work constructively and critically with their own tradition. Therefore, I would like to recall that, within the churches, attitudes toward development and the nature of change they evoke have recently become more radical. In the Confession of Accra<sup>27</sup> churches, predominantly from the global South, state that the market and corresponding institutions must be overthrown because the global market constructs empires and contributes to exploitation and thus reinforces poverty. The paper suggests that the result of more than fifty years of commitment to development is modest. Some churches from the North-Atlantic region regard this attitude as being too radical and propose to reform and to humanize the market and alleviate and counter the damage done by development projects. In this debate, concepts of development and the economy, on justice, climate-justice and ecological rights interact. This dispute is also a theological confrontation—can religious ideas be taken as criteria for action or not?<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> See, for instance, Farid Esack, “In Search of Progressive Islam Beyond 9/11,” in Omid Safi (ed.), *Progressive Muslims on Justice, Gender, and Pluralism* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2003), 78–97.

<sup>27</sup> “This process resulted in the Accra Confession, adopted by the 24<sup>th</sup> General Council in 2004. Equally the World Council of Churches (WCC) launched the Agape process searching for a ‘Globalisation Addressing Peoples and Earth’ (AGAPE), which will be one of the main topics of the forthcoming Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre (February 2006).” See CEC (ed.), *European Churches Living their Faith in the Context of Globalization* (Brussels, 2006), 5–6.

<sup>28</sup> I think it is one consequence of the professionalization of the work of the church-based development organizations that this aspect is often omitted. In the EKD’s “committee on sustainable development” document on the Millennium Development Goals of the UN, the churches’ engagement is based on a theology of creation and focused on fighting poverty and ensuring health and food security. The German government is challenged to accept its responsibility in this process. That other religions or faith groups such

## MISSION, RELIGIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

I understand development as a call for transformation and thus as an expression of the mission of the church and part of its witness in word and deed. However, this mission is not targeting others as converts but mission with the people. Experiences in some countries indicate that the suspicion alone that aid is part of a conversion project may lead to attacks and violence. I agree with the ecumenical document “Christian witness in a multi-religious world” that the invitation to the Christian faith should not go hand-in-hand with gifts or promises of advantages and that help and assistance should be offered as an expression of Christian motivation and not as coercion or luring to conversion. On the contrary, it means that there is a mission for the transformation of life and communities which is fostered by a Christian motivation, independent of conversion. I take this document as proof of the capacity of mission theology to cope with these problems and to offer reflection on the difference between conscious attempts to evangelize and the offer to be one partner among others in the development of the society one shares with others.

Under the theme of transformation, the 2002 affirmation on mission, “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes,” by the CWME of the World Council of Churches reflects on many issues and concerns which may be objectives of development projects: justice, liberation, reconciliation, health and healing, human rights, climate justice, just sharing of resources, fighting poverty and oppression, etc. The threats to life and promises of God culminate in a theology of life based on the biblical promise of life in abundance.

§ 4 God did not send the Son for the salvation of humanity alone or give us a partial salvation. Rather the gospel is the good news for every part of creation and every aspect of our life and society. It is, therefore, vital to recognize God’s mission in a cosmic sense, and to affirm all life, the whole *oikoumene*, as being interconnected in God’s web of life. As threats to the future of our planet are evident, what are their implications for our participation in God’s mission?

§ 77 Advocacy for justice is no longer the sole prerogative of national assemblies and central offices but a form of witness which calls for the engagement of lo-

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as Muslims in Germany could contribute to the realization of these goals is not even mentioned. See Kirchenamt der EKD, (ed.), *Schritte zu einer nachhaltigen Entwicklung. Die Millenniumsentwicklungsziele der Vereinten Nationen*. Eine Stellungnahme der Kammer für nachhaltige Entwicklung der EKD zur Sondervollversammlung der Vereinten Nationen im September 2005, EKD-Texte, 81 (Hannover: EKD-Kirchenamt, 2005).

cal churches. For example, the WCC Decade to Overcome Violence (2001–2011) concluded with a plea in the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation that: “Churches must help in identifying the everyday choices that can abuse and promote human rights, gender justice, climate justice, unity and peace.” Their grounding in everyday life gives local churches both legitimacy and motivation in the struggle for justice and peace.<sup>29</sup>

By defining these attitudes and issues as responsibilities of local congregations that are members of a transnational network, the document’s understanding of mission transcends a conception of development with a clear-cut distinction between those who are the developers and those who have to be developed. Transformation through mission is taking place everywhere and every community is in need of being transformed. My point is not that this is something church development agencies have to learn from mission but, on the contrary, that mission and churches have learned this lesson together in their engagement for transformation with their development departments. But I am convinced that many congregations in Germany still regard development in the sense of “we have to help them” and then they may end up with well-meant projects like the one mentioned in Tanzania.<sup>30</sup>

This dimension of Christian mission also incorporates a conception of dialogue with those of other faith.

§ 93 In the plurality and complexity of today’s world, we encounter people of many different faiths, ideologies and convictions. We believe that the Spirit of Life brings joy and fullness of life. God’s Spirit, therefore, can be found in all cultures that affirm life. The Holy Spirit works in mysterious ways, and we do not fully understand the workings of the Spirit in other faith traditions. We acknowledge that there is inherent value and wisdom in diverse life-giving spiritualities. Therefore, authentic mission makes the ‘other’ a partner in, not an “object” of mission.

§ 94 Dialogue is a way of affirming our common life and goals in terms of the affirmation of life and the integrity of creation. Dialogue at the religious level is

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<sup>29</sup> CWME, “Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes” (Geneva: The World Council of Churches, 2012), at [www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes.html](http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-commissions/mission-and-evangelism/together-towards-life-mission-and-evangelism-in-changing-landscapes.html)

<sup>30</sup> To develop the development work and projects of congregations is the concern of several institutions. The “Center for World Mission and Ecumenism” of the Lutheran Church in North Germany recently published a handbook to conscientize congregations for and in their development activities. See Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche in Norddeutschland, *Zukunftsfähige Partnerschaften gestalten. Handbuch für ökumenische Partnerschaftsarbeit in der Nordkirche* (Hamburg, 2013).

possible only if we begin with the expectation of meeting God who has preceded us and has been present with people within their own contexts.<sup>31</sup> God is there before we come (Acts 17) and our task is not to bring God along, but to witness to the God who is already there. Dialogue provides for an honest encounter where each party brings to the table all that they are in an open, patient and respectful manner.<sup>31</sup>

## CHRISTIAN ASSETS FOR TRANSFORMATION

According to this perspective, mission and dialogue are also about the cooperation with people of other faiths in development and a common engagement for transformation. It is my conviction that churches and theology should have an explicit grounding in theology in their perspectives on other faiths and religions and their communities of believers. They should not use a theological definition of themselves and an objectifying theoretical definition for other religions. A theological position of this kind would not offer a map of the others and thus impose one's own explanation on others but would be an offer for dialogue and even dispute with the others.

I would like to present one possibility of mapping the assets of Christian communities for development and transformation as a dimension of the holistic mission of the churches. Below an adaptation of a matrix developed in a study by the German Institute for Medical Mission (DIFÄM) and WCC on Religious Health Assets.<sup>32</sup> I think that the dimensions of the matrix are helpful to remind us of the multifarious ways in which Christians and churches can advocate for development or engage in transformation. I understand it as an expression of Christian mission as developed in the Lutheran World Federation's mission statement "Mission in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation and Empowerment" and also in the WCC's mission statement "Together Towards Life" with its emphasis on the local congregation.

The proposed matrix organizes into four fields the combinations of material and immaterial resources local congregations or, for that matter, churches can potentially tap into with some reflections on the direct and indirect effects their allocation may have. Its main objective is not to give an exhaustive overview but to demonstrate that Christian faith and community

<sup>31</sup> Op. cit. (note 29).

<sup>32</sup> This matrix was originally developed by Jim Cochrane, *Religious Health Assets (RHAs)—Conceptual and Theoretical Framework*, and is here quoted from a document of DIFÄM. Peter Bartmann, Beate Jakob, Ulrich Laepple, Dietrich Werner (eds.), *Gesundheit, Heilung und Spiritualität. Zur Zukunft des heilenden Dienstes in Kirche und Diakonie*. Ein Grundsatzpapier aus ökumenischer, diakonischer und missionstheologischer Perspektive (Tübingen: DIFÄM, 2008), 129.

life can be conducive to fostering development and transformation as a part of the churches' mission and that this has more dimensions than often seen.

Congregations or, for that matter churches, have material resources for transformation. They can develop projects in their context, support projects elsewhere, or support development services. They can provide medical assistance either themselves or support such assistance elsewhere. They can engage in mediation and peace work in their own context or assist others in providing such services. They can promote rights and act against exclusions.

However, the point this asset oriented matrix tries to make is to conscientize congregations or churches that they also have immaterial resources for transformation. They celebrate liturgies that may transform the community into a reconciling and healing community and are an offer to the wider community. They may be places or may offer times for nurturing resistance and strengthening resilience by coming together and reading the Bible and celebrating. They may develop attitudes of wisdom and patience and foster prophetic voices to support themselves and others in their struggles. They may be the ones remaining and enduring where and when catastrophes hit, when violent clashes occur or development projects fail. Faith and caring for another can be vital sources to survive and to cope with life.

All of this has or can have direct and indirect effects. Congregations may be or become agents of transformation in their immediate contexts and in civil society, even at a global level. And they may be or become those who out of sensibility and an awareness nurtured by their faith and liturgy do theology publicly or give a voice to the voiceless.

## **CHALLENGES**

The matrix highlights that local congregations and churches potentially have a lot of assets for transformation but that they may be not conscious of them or may feel overburdened by the many challenges. So they can fail and remain or even become communities that do not promote justice, peace and the integrity of creation and instead promote self-sufficiency, conflict and the exhaustion of resources for one's own group. Entering into dialogue and engaging in transformation will however challenge the communities and help to counter these threats and other negative aspects of religion which have been brought forward in the debate on religion and development.

A second challenge is that churches and congregations need theological expertise to develop these many dimensions of their mission. They certainly also need expertise and professionalism in their work for transformation which may lead to the creation of specialized ministries. Organizations

<p>The matrix does not claim that each and every congregation has to do all of the above. On the contrary, the resource oriented approach could help them to discover more and other charismata than those they have been aware of and also to search for what the context needs and how they could respond in different ways to that.</p>	Resources		
	Immaterial resources	<p>Praying/caring for others                      Reading the Bible                      Liturgies of reconciliation and healing                      Vulnerability and sensitivity for people                      Coping with trauma resulting from situations of loss, suffering, effects of damages                      Sensitivity for issues (violence, suffering, justice, climate etc.)                      Attitudes like wisdom, patience, compassion, long term perspective                      Insights from an education for justice, peace, integrity of creation</p>	<p>Awareness of being part of creation/nature                      Visions of a “better world”                      Awareness of ones’ charismata                      Awareness of ones’ own finitude                      Feeling responsible toward God and human beings/humanity                      Holistic life perspective                      Awareness of being “commissioned”                      Lifestyles which are conducive for transformation                      Helping the public to cope spiritually with disastrous events                      Transforming and critiquing one’s own traditions in the light of the gospel</p>
	Material resources	<p>Partner groups/One world shops                      Organizing development projects in the local congregation/region                      Financial resources for development projects                      Development agencies                      Assisting those who suffer from marginalization or underdevelopment                      Relief work                      Mediation/peace work                      Medical assistance                      Education and awareness programs</p>	<p>Doing public theology                      Assuming social and political responsibility                      Religious community as an actor in civil society                      Transcending the borderline between “actors/experts” and “beneficiaries”                      Integrating issues of transformation in nurturing services and rituals</p>
	Direct effects	Indirect effects	
<b>Effects</b>			

are always in danger of living a life on their own, while congregations may feel that transformation is difficult and needs so much expertise that they forget about other aspects of transformation they could engage in. In the wake of the founding of the new organization in Berlin, a merger of EED, Bread for the World and Ecumenical Diakonia, we heard some voices which called for a still clearer distinction between mission and development mandates. But, what in fact is one asking when one suggests that mission bodies should leave development to specialized agencies? One ends up dismembering the concept of holistic mission.

In Germany, there are some programs that help raise awareness about various aspects of development. These seminars often do not really engage in theological reflection and participants are sometimes hesitant to address the issue of religions and dialogue, fearing that such a debate among the targeted students who study in Germany but are from different countries and have different religious affiliations—Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists, atheists, etc.—would lead to conflict. There are definitely other examples, but this reluctance could be one piece in the puzzle of another issue that has been identified. How can development and transformation be promoted and be a part of the congregations' and churches' Christian orientation? And how can the transformation and development orientation within congregations be related to the large scale projects of the specialized ministries? If we fail here, we fail to think of transformation in the sense that we all have to be transformed and that development issues are issues to be addressed together if we claim to live up to the promises and the challenges of the gospel. This is one of the lessons mission theology has learned.

The last challenge I would like to name here is the one of the relation to other religions. The matrix is deliberately not a matrix of religion but a Christian one for the orientation of congregations that should engage in dialogue with other religious communities. Hans Jochen Margull, an ecumenical thinker and educationist, once said that interfaith dialogues have to heal wounds that religious communities have inflicted upon each other and avoid inflicting new ones.

Margull reported about the 1974 multireligious encounter at Colombo organized by the dialogue desk of the WCC. The objective was to share the contribution of the different religious traditions to the world community. Margull vividly describes how the speakers did not talk about their specific religion's contribution but presented their religion as the solution for all: claims of absoluteness clashed. Margull's sobering message is this: In the end, even the category of religion, which offered the criteria for whom to invite—representatives of religious communities and not, for instance, political parties—and was the common ground for the dialogue was ultimately not undisputed when the participants attempted to go beyond the ostensible

fact that all of them are human beings. He concluded that at this moment it became clear that it had been naïve to assume that all participants can share experiences which they understand as religious experiences and that this common assumption serves as a bridge to talk to one another.<sup>33</sup>

This is almost forty years ago. However, the issue of a theology of religions is very pertinent and if we wish to come to a well-defined relation between religion, development and Christian mission this is one task to pursue.

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<sup>33</sup> Hans Jochen Margull, "Der Dialog von Colombo. Ein weiteres Kolloquium zwischen Hindus, Buddhisten, Juden, Christen und Muslimen," in *ÖR* 23 (1974), 525-34, here 533-34.



# CAPITALISM AS RELIGION: WHEN DOES THE CYCLE END?

*Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro*

## INTRODUCTION

Capitalism has been extensively discussed in various forums and contexts. In this essay, I shall briefly explore the question of development as the “inevitable” twin of capitalism, capitalism as a religion and the question of how religion and the churches can further or hinder development.

In the Philippines, one cannot talk about capitalism without connecting it to the experience of colonization and Christianization. Until today, the Philippines continue to bear the heavy burden of neocolonial governance and neoliberal capitalism. Historically, the Philippine experience of capitalism has been closely associated with religion.

I live in Negros Oriental, a part of the island where most of the land is owned by less than one hundred families. The gap between rich landowners and tenants has turned the island into a social volcano. Poverty and insurrection are just a few of the symptoms that point to the social cancer afflicting the nation. This cancer is rooted in the Philippine experience of colonization and Christianization. The first wave of Christianization—the Spaniards came with the sword and the cross—occurred barely three years after Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door of Wittenberg castle.<sup>1</sup> While the colonizers’ ostensible aim was to spread Christianity, their real aim was to pursue their

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<sup>1</sup> John Dillenberger (ed.), *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* (New York: Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1962), 490–500.

mercantilist interests and political power.<sup>2</sup> The *conquistadores* claimed and named the islands for their king, turning the land and people into Spanish property, ritualized by giving people Spanish names through baptism.<sup>3</sup> The twentieth century brought a new wave of colonizers who, armed with Bibles and rifles, offered a new brand of Christianity. Their aim was to liberate the “heathen natives” from the evils of paganism and to pacify the people’s anti-colonialist resistance movements.

The coming of the colonialists marked the beginning of the native people’s sufferings; they became squatters on their own land. The “*hacienda*” system, maintained by the few rich landowners and the capitalist politicians’ control over business and governance perpetuated the vicious cycle of poverty, hunger and violence. The Filipinos experienced anthropological poverty, as the late Engelbert Mveng (1930–1995) of Cameroon called it. Not only do the colonizers’ descendants own vast tracts of land and palatial homes, foreigners—individuals and corporations—have acquired huge swathes of land for agribusiness, real estate, beaches and resorts. The government boasts of these as “development” with the slogan, “It is fun in the Philippines.” In the midst of all this, many missionaries from abroad flock to the country to preach the salvation of the soul. These are just some of the experiences many people in Asia make, except for those from the so-called tiger economies.

## DEVELOPMENT: A SHADOW OF CAPITALISM?

Capitalism is in the air; people breathe it in and ignore the pollution it causes. It shapes people’s values, dreams and visions and has had a significant impact on developmental processes and the lives of people both in the global North and global South. In the Philippines, development is equated with progress. Rice no longer needs to be pounded with a pestle; a milling machine is used instead. Development has come to mean changing to a more convenient life, a life of “instants”—instant coffee, instant marriage, instant everything.

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<sup>2</sup> Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* (Quezon City: Tala Publication Services, 1975), 16–25. See also M. D. David, “Introduction: The Nature of Western Colonialism—A Handicap to the Growth of Christianity in Asia,” in M. D. David (ed.), *Western Colonialism in Asia and Christianity* (Bombay: Himalaya Publishing House, 1988), 1–19. Jean-Marc Éla of Cameroon and Native American George E. Tinker share the same observation. See Jean-Mark Éla, *African Cry* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1986). See also George E. Tinker, *Missionary Conquest: The Gospel and Native American Cultural Genocide* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1993).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

In the comedy *The Gods Must be Crazy*,<sup>4</sup> San Xi and his people lived comfortably in the desert. They were happy and content because the gods provided for their needs. One day, a Coca-Cola bottle fell from heaven. Thought to have been sent by the gods, Xi's people enjoyed exploring the many ways that the Coca-Cola bottle might be useful. Since there was only one bottle to go around, they were eventually confronted with the concept of property. It did not take long for the people to experience something they had never felt before: jealousy, envy, anger, hatred and violence. Thinking that the Coca-Cola bottle was evil as it had brought them unhappiness, Xi journeyed to the end of the world to get rid of it. Xi thought the gods must be crazy for sending something that had destroyed community life.

I resonate with this film. I lived with the Aetas,<sup>5</sup> one of the indigenous peoples in the Philippines, and I remember introducing them to things that were unfamiliar to them. I sometimes wonder if those things only created a false need for unnecessary things. While some regard the film as politically incorrect since it does not accurately depict the life of the contemporary San people, I see the film as a metaphor for how people's lives are changed by the flavor of capitalism: Coca-Cola. It demonstrates the surmised development brought about by capitalism. The peaceful San community was disturbed by the arrival of the Coca-Cola bottle, and the heavens of "divine" capitalism began charting the destiny of individuals and communities toward disaster. As the film shows, the Coca-Cola bottle ruined the community's economic and spiritual life. The values of mutuality, cooperation, simplicity, contentedness and caring for one another were destroyed.

A highly contested term, development generally refers to changes in the economic, social and cultural life of the global South. Progress has been equated with the global South copying the West's evolutionary ways. This concept was debunked by anti-dependency groups and, in protest, feminists argued that women were ignored in the gender blind development processes. Nevertheless, the dualistic classification of "developed/"

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<sup>4</sup> *The Gods Must be Crazy* 1, a South African film produced by Jamie Uys, released in 1980. Like the people portrayed in the film, our ancient Filipino ancestors first thought the Spanish colonizers were gods whose sticks (rifles) spat fire.

<sup>5</sup> "The Aeta (pronounced as "eye-ta,"), Agta or Ayta are an indigenous who live in scattered, isolated mountainous parts of Luzon and Visayas, **Philippines**. They are considered to be Negritos, who are dark to very dark brown-skinned and tend to have features such as a small stature, small frame, curly to kinky afro-like textured hair with a higher frequency of naturally lighter hair color (blondism) relative to the general population, small nose, and dark brown eyes. They are thought to be among the earliest inhabitants of the Philippines, preceding the Austronesian migrations." Cf. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeta\\_people](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aeta_people).

underdeveloped” (read superior/inferior) countries continued and the roots of gender inequalities were not truly addressed.<sup>6</sup>

By taking the new pill called “development,” governments in the global South, such as that of the Philippines, tried to follow the ways of the West. They borrowed significant amounts of money from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank (WB) for development projects, not only to create infrastructure (such as highways, cultural centers, tourist destinations, golf courses and irrigation dams for vast tracts of lands owned by multinational corporations), but also to buy military hardware. Consequently, the citizens had to carry the burden of an enormous foreign debt. Many people were displaced; the majority of them remained marginalized and poor. Mountains vanished and rivers disappeared, and one wonders: what is this development for? Who are the true beneficiaries of development?

### CAPITALISM AS AN IDEOLOGY

The phrase, “If the price is right,” indicates that the worth of anything, be it people, resources, objects, culture, or even nature, is determined by its market value. This signals that the spirit of capitalism has seized the human psyche. Capitalism is an economic system that thrives on private ownership of the means of production and free competition, “the markets make decisions on how much to produce and at what price.”<sup>7</sup> The two important elements of production are capital (materials, machines, money) and labor. At the core of capitalism is the understanding that the workers are separate from the means of production and their labor power is reduced to a commodity<sup>8</sup> that is sold to the owners of the capital at the prevailing market price. The system ensures that the owner of the capital keeps the “surplus value” or profit, as wages are much below the value of the products the workers have created. Because these workers, especially

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<sup>6</sup> See Alison Blunt, “Development,” in Linda McDowell and Joanne P. Sharp (eds), *A Feminist Glossary of Human Geography* (London, New York, Sydney, Auckland: Arnold, 1999), 56–58. Gender blind development ignored women. Yet, the approach of Women in Development (WID) and Women and Development (WAD) failed to address the roots of male-dominated structures. Although Gender and Development’s (GAD) approach claimed to be holistic, from a the standpoint of empowerment, critics have argued that WID, WAD and GAD all come from Western feminist perspective, have ethnocentric biases and use essentialist and universalist categories.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Lewis Taylor, “Theology and Global Empire Today,” in *Reformed World*, vol. 56, no. 4 (December 2006), 415.

<sup>8</sup> Linda McDowell, “Capital/Capitalism,” in McDowell and Sharp, op. cit. (note 6), 23–24.

in Asia and in the global South, must work in order to survive, labor is cheap. Generally, the workers cannot afford to buy the products they have produced. They have difficulty making sense of the system that does not allow them freely to negotiate for just wages. This system compounds the poverty, suffering and exploitation that have been their lot as a result of their countries' history of colonization.<sup>9</sup>

Today, capitalism has been further strengthened by being intertwined with a system of political control over other nations, exercising power over other sovereignties. New empires have emerged. Critics such as Fredric Jameson call the political-economic reality of this late stage of capitalism, a "prodigious expansion of capital into hitherto uncommodified areas."<sup>10</sup> It is the new "colonization of nature and the unconscious."<sup>11</sup> This expanded capitalist system is evident in today's globalized, neoliberal capitalism, the system of organizing wealth (investment, lending, trade, etc.) that ensures that the transnational élite such as the affluent, mostly Western, G8 countries continue to control wealth. As a consequence, aid and the funding of projects are subject to the directives and in the interest of the powerful countries: if the price is right! Thus, the powerful countries are enriched "at the expense of a global majority's impoverishment."<sup>12</sup>

## CAPITALISM AS A RELIGION

Capitalism is both an economic ideology and a religion. After all, only a very thin line, if any, differentiates ideology from religion. It would, therefore, not be surprising to see that people easily mix religion and capitalist ideology. Capitalism certainly behaves as a "civil religion of global modernity,"<sup>13</sup> and inevitably has an impact on worldwide economies and ecologies.

What are the religious characteristics of capitalism? In Fragment 74, Walter Benjamin, a German Jewish literary critic,<sup>14</sup> viewed capitalism as a kind of extreme "pure religious cult." It does not only push for mechanis-

<sup>9</sup> Manuel Ossa, "Capitalism," in Virginia Fabella and R.S. Sugirtharajah (eds), *Dictionary of Third World Theologies* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 34.

<sup>10</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 36.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>12</sup> Taylor, *op. cit.* (note 7), 430.

<sup>13</sup> Francis Ching-Wah Yip, *Capitalism as Religion? A Study of Paul Tillich's Interpretation of Modernity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press for Harvard Theological Studies, 2010), 11.

<sup>14</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Capitalism as Religion," at [www.rae.com.pt/Caderno.../Benjamin%20Capitalism-as-Religion.pdf](http://www.rae.com.pt/Caderno.../Benjamin%20Capitalism-as-Religion.pdf).

tic acquisition and keeps one trapped in the system; it knows no ethical accountability. Capitalism forces itself into and embeds itself within the human psyche, instilling its cultic permanence and making effective its mercilessness. Humanity accepts that every day is a work day, a day to worship and praise capitalism. In this cult of acquisition, people develop a love hate relationship with the system that produces a world of guilt and despair. The more one plunges into the depths of despair, the more capitalism offers healing and salvation through its system.

Benjamin's outline of capitalism's religious structure is thought provoking and useful. I will, however, look at the religious character of capitalism beyond Benjamin's outline and view it from Rudolf Otto's classic concept of the numinous or the holy. The concept of the *numen* is a lens through which we look at the basic elements of religious practices and worship. Otto regarded the numinous as *tremendum, mysterium et fascinans*.<sup>15</sup> According to him, the numinous experience has, in addition to the *tremendum*, the tendency to invoke fear and trembling, a quality of *fascinans*, the tendency to attract, fascinate and compel. As such, it offers a window to view religion as a sense of power beyond the human that can be approached both rationally and emotionally, individually or corporately. This power is celebrated through words, rituals and symbols, and passed on to generations as doctrines or traditions in a set of forms, creeds and theological explications of the experience. It further offers a view of one's existence and provides a direction as to how one must live one's life in this world.<sup>16</sup> In light of this, we can see that capitalism has cultivated the religious structure and, eventually, became a religion in itself.

In the Philippines, it used to be said that the dollar sign signifies the cunning snake that climbs up the tree, tempting individuals and nations to take the capitalist bait. The "almighty" Dollar and the powerful Euro have replaced God as the universal power. This makes capitalism a material religion indeed, but not without creeds and doctrines as, following Benjamin, Philip Goodchild claims.<sup>17</sup> Capitalism has no conscience and instills the attractive doctrine of consumption, salvation and life abundant with money. It imparts the doctrine of unquenchable desire to acquire and accumulate. It reversed the Golden Rule with the adage: "those who have the gold rule."

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<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (London: H. Millford, Oxford University Press, 1923). Some scholars claim that Otto does not offer an exhaustive articulation of *fascinans*.

<sup>16</sup> Willard Oxtoby (ed.) *World Religions: Eastern Traditions*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2002), 454.

<sup>17</sup> Philip Goodchild, *Capitalism and Religion: The Price of Piety* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 85. He sees capitalism as a "purely cultic religion without dogma."

Human rights are simply ignored by those who have money. Gordon Gekko, the corporate executive in the 1987 film *Wall Street*, who made millions in the midst of massive job losses, declared the creed of capitalism:

Greed, for the lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge, has marked the upward surge of mankind [*sic*] and greed, you mark my words, will not only save Teldar Paper, but that other malfunctioning corporation called the USA.<sup>18</sup>

Although Gekko is a fictional character, he became a cultural symbol of capitalism's ruthless face.

In the Philippines and other so-called developing countries, the commodification of everything is seen in the conversion of prime land into theme parks, golf courses and resorts and the scouring of the earth's bowels by big foreign mining companies. It is evident in the commodification of the bodies and labor of overseas contract workers, especially domestic helpers and entertainers sacrificed at the altar of capitalism. Such sacrifice involves collateral damage in the form of the loss of an individual's self-worth, broken families and the degradation of the earth. Goodchild refers to this condition as "economic reductionism," a situation when "the world is interpreted through the economic eyes . . . [it] is deprived of color, variety, fecundity, vitality, change and nuance."<sup>19</sup>

The delirious, influential social practice of consumerism, stimulated by the religion of money, is manifest in the phenomenon of the super shopping mall, the symbol of globalized capital. The shopping mall as a temple, whether located in Manila, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Singapore, the USA, or Europe, has the same primary purpose: the worship of money. All elements of liturgy are found there: the call to worship through advertisements; the sighs and songs of praise of the consumers as they look at the gigantic billboards and posters; the missionaries in the form of sales staff preaching the good news of the new arrival of a product line; and vendors and consumers alike praying to Mammon to respond to their desires to have, "Money, money give me some more; Money, money give me some more."<sup>20</sup> The

<sup>18</sup> Oliver Stone, *Wall Street*. Available at [www.imdb.com/title/tt0094291/](http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0094291/). See also Gordon Gekko (Character) Quotes at [www.imdb.com/character/ch0012282/quotes](http://www.imdb.com/character/ch0012282/quotes).

<sup>19</sup> Goodchild, op. cit. (note 17), xv.

<sup>20</sup> I-toh Loh (ed.), *New Songs of Asian Cities* (Tainan: Urban Industrial Mission Committee of the Christian Conference of Asia, 1973), 62. This is the first line of the song "Pollution—More and More," composed by Hiroshi Kinugasa and Taku Izumi, translated by Johnny Walker.

mall, whether real or virtual, provides the venue and occasion for economic, cultural and even political interaction, as well as for the cure of multifarious “dis-eases.” The God of the scriptural religions, revered in the shaping of culture and spirituality, becomes obsolete and, so, is replaced by Mammon. At the ritual at the mall, consumers make their offerings to capital—one pays for the product that satisfies one’s desire, an act of “at-one-ment” with the capitalist system. Globalized capitalism seeks to create uniformity in culture and presents itself as the only available path to an economic and social life, in effect dictating how people must live their lives. As Goodchild rightly stated, “The deed of the murder of God was effected by the emergence of the self-regulating market as the organizing principle of the social order.”<sup>21</sup> Certainly, more than one’s belief in the providence of a compassionate God, money is the element and force that unites people and institutions around the world. Gone are the values of the barter trade, formerly practiced in Asian communities. Rather than people’s humanity as a basis of unity, money becomes the common bond. A song in Cebuano that was adapted to a popular tune of the 1970s, *Homeward Bound*, sung by Cliff Richards, laments this situation: “*Wa na gyo’y molingi kay pobre na man!*” “Nobody pays attention anymore because [I] am now poor.” Goodchild rightly points out, “People are no longer united by a common love, a common image, but by a common price. In the place of God in the commonwealth, we now find being speaking to us through money.”<sup>22</sup> This situation brings utter despair to many people, and despair leads them on various destructive paths.

## CAPITALISM AND THE IMPETUS OF CHRISTIANITY

The trajectory of exploring the impetus of Christianity on capitalism, albeit very briefly, is helpful for the self-critique of the churches and faith-based, non-governmental organizations involved in development work and projects. A closer look might shed some light on the ethos of development work that has tended to behave along pseudo-capitalist lines. Perhaps this may also bring to the fore our explicit and implicit complicity with the system, and move us to repent, make amends and find ways to install restitution. Ultimately, it may lead us to theorize and formulate steps to end the devastating cycle of capitalism.

It has been claimed that Protestantism has provided the stimulus for the expansion of capitalism from the earlier, simple family entrepreneur-

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<sup>21</sup> Goodchild, op. cit. (note 17), 29.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 79.

ship. Scholars call our attention especially to the work of Max Weber.<sup>23</sup> In his work, Weber suggested that modern capitalism required the spirit that was provided by Protestant religious doctrine and practice, particularly Calvinism and Anabaptism. Luther's justification by faith was interpreted with a twist that underpinned the teaching that it was not against God's will to lend money at interest (though not to fellow believers). After all, this is how Protestants interpret the Parable of Talents until today (Mt 25:14-30; Lk 19:12-28). Moreover, Protestants also highlight the missionary task of doing God's will, an orientation toward work. A better life, measured by material evidence, was understood as God's reward and blessing for hard work. This becomes the basis for modern corporation ethics. The Anabaptist tradition of consensus became the foundation for the concept of democratic governance and the practice of adult baptism elicited a mature perspective and accountability, truthfulness and integrity.

Weber, however, noted that the spirit provided by the Protestant tradition for the growth of modern capitalism was not enough to sustain it. Weber assented to Marx's view that the required conditions of the established banking and monetary systems, legal limits, technology, inventions and stable government are needed to maintain the capitalist economy. Indeed, these elements are present in the construction of today's empires.

## **WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE? WHEN DOES THE CYCLE END?**

In its new form, capitalism as a religion has become a more vicious circle. Is it possible for us to go back to the pre-capitalism era?

We may gain some insights from Jameson's reading of Marx. He pointed out that Marx challenges us to do the impossible: to realize that capitalism is, all at once, the best thing and the worst thing that has ever happened to humanity; at the same time catastrophe and progress.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, we need to identify some "moment of truth" within the obvious moments of falsehood of this late capitalism. Yet, he also asked how we harness the energy in order not to be paralyzed and surrender to helplessness by ignoring, if not ruling out, the possibilities of resistance.

This question is indeed compelling and worth reflecting on. In the Philippine context, some activists in the past two decades have given up.

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<sup>23</sup> Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, transl. Talcott Parsons (London and New York: Routledge, 2001). Available at [www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/jhamlin/1095/The%20Protestant%20Ethic%20and%20the%20Spirit%20of%20Capitalism.pdf](http://www.d.umn.edu/cla/faculty/jhamlin/1095/The%20Protestant%20Ethic%20and%20the%20Spirit%20of%20Capitalism.pdf).

<sup>24</sup> Jameson, *op. cit.* (note 10), 47.

Some faith-based organizations and non-government organizations (NGOs) carry out social work projects and have entirely abandoned the analytical and theorizing dimensions of alternative development work. Certainly, it is no longer possible to go back to old times. Yet, as Jameson suggests, the challenge is to recognize the existence of late capitalism and find a way out, a “breakthrough to . . . yet unimaginable new mode of representing this last stage.”<sup>25</sup> It is important for people to understand the positions they can take as individuals and collective subjects and to reclaim the power to act, struggle and resist the grip of capitalism and empire. This is crucial because many of us are neutralized by our social space and confusion.

This space is also the arena where religion and churches could ponder on whether to further, or hinder, alternative development without serving the interest of the empire. In broad strokes, let me share a brief outline of principles that will hopefully stimulate more reflection and actions to address the challenges that confront the church and development work in the face of capitalism.

- First, identify the life-giving, life-affirming and life-sustaining elements of the existing capitalist system, if any. This norm must apply to human and non-human life on this planet. This means installing a biocentric principle as a platform to remove anthropocentrism, androcentrism and sexism from the system.
- Second, harness the resources of one’s religion to support any life-giving, life-affirming, and life-sustaining efforts for the well-being of the community, especially for those who are poor and marginalized, women, homosexuals, the disabled, elderly and those afflicted with illnesses, among others. This requires a rereading of the sacred texts, revisiting theologies and reformulations of structures toward a biocentric community. For Christians, it is crucial to reclaim the concept of humanity as created in God’s image and to treat human beings not as a “dis-embedded mechanistic machine for accumulating wealth and power” but as “living organisms in relationship”<sup>26</sup>
- Third, cultivate a spirituality of firm commitment to the values of justice and righteousness for all humanity and nature. Resistance to Mammon demands a spirituality that values relationships of loving and caring, mutuality and reciprocity and solidarity in community. This

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 54

<sup>26</sup> Ulrich Duchrow, “An Ecumenical Vision for a Community of Life in Europe,” in *Reformed World*, vol. 56, no. 4 (December 2006), 391–403.

means resisting the temptation to exercise power over the physically, socially, economically and culturally weak.

- Fourth, lift up the liberating elements of religions and engage in interreligious collaboration towards a just and peaceful world. The churches cannot remain complacent and stay within their respective denominational worlds, or in religious bigotry. Let the church create a space for community peace building and a nurturing environment where people learn to be truly human.
- Fifth, if the globalization of capitalism is possible, let the church vigorously and concretely pursue the vision of agape and the envisioned Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth (AGAPE)<sup>27</sup> that pleads for an agape economy of life, just trade, just finance, transformative action and alternative lifestyles. This must, however, start with each and every individual practicing and being committed to an alternative lifestyle. This means shifting from the paradigm of the steward of the earth to the example of *oikodimos* (v. οἰκοδομέω), of building up and strengthening the household, the planet, by helping improve each member's ability to function responsibly and effectively. I hold this concept as an alternative to the model of *oikonomos*, the manager or steward who controls the affairs of a large household on behalf of the master. This is because we have seen how the world has been messed up by managers and stewards of God's household who play god and abuse the power entrusted to them.
- Sixth, one must take into account and practice the ethics of truth telling. Capitalism is sustained by making its lies appear like the truth, of making people believe that it is the answer to all their dreams and the fulfillment of their very being. As someone told me, capitalism will not survive with too much honesty. Yet, this is the challenge we need to face.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

I believe that the principles outlined above will help us to resist the grip of capitalism. They will serve as guideposts along the road to ending the

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<sup>27</sup> World Council of Churches, *Alternative Globalization Addressing Peoples and Earth* (AGAPE), at [www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wccassembly/documents/english/agape-new.pdf](http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wccassembly/documents/english/agape-new.pdf).

cycle of exploitation, violence and despair that capitalism brings. It is up to each one of us to struggle to end the cycle and to reinvent it for the sake of a better and just world. This is a challenge for all well-meaning people around the world. Big things come from small things. Thus, we should not be discouraged, as a popular song says:

Maybe you and I can't do great things,  
We may not change the world in one day;  
But we still can change some things today,  
In our small way.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Michael Jackson, "In our Small Way!" at [www.metrolyrics.com/in-our-small-way-lyrics-michael-jackson.html](http://www.metrolyrics.com/in-our-small-way-lyrics-michael-jackson.html).

# STATE, RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT IN CHINA

*Theresa Carino*

## **STATE AND RELIGION: FORMALIZING AND MODERNIZING RELIGION**

In China, religion is generally regarded as a modern concept and equated with Western domination, the creation of the modern nation state and the result of late nineteenth-century colonial interactions.<sup>1</sup> Religion, as it was brought by Western missionaries, separated state and religion; the state held the political authority, while religion belonged to the private realm. For the enlightened élites in non-European countries, “being modern” called for the reform of indigenous practices and the institutionalization of religion as a category within the state’s constitution and administration.

This understanding of religion misses the point because, before the contact with the “outside” world, the context in Asia and, in particular China, was a very religious one. The only difference was that religion was regarded as something that was not to be objectively thought about but, rather, as something that needed to be lived out. As Richard Madsen puts it,

It was because of competitive dialogue with Western Christian nations that Chinese reformers at the turn of the twentieth century developed categories for thinking about the relationship between the world of material forces and the world of spiritual forces. It was at this point that they developed the category of “religion”

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<sup>1</sup> Yoshiko Ashiwa and David L. Wank (eds), *Making Religion, Making the State* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 2.

itself. The word used was *zongjiao*, derived from Japan, which in turn had gotten it from European scholarship.<sup>2</sup>

The most modern forms of religion (as expressed in the writings of European liberal theologians) would in fact go far beyond traditional religion by subtracting all belief in divine forces and retaining only core moral teachings. Confucianism fitted in well with these. In other words, religion was quite different from superstition or belief in the divine and supernatural.

Since its rise to power, the Chinese Communist Party's goal has been scientific development. Popular religious practices were regarded as superstition. The simple interpretation of Karl Marx's famous dictum, "religion is the opium of the people" was the cornerstone of the party's religious policy. It led to extreme policies during the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) when religion was systematically suppressed and efforts were made to eradicate it. At the time, many observers thought that religion would not survive the Cultural Revolution; miraculously, it did. In fact, since 1978, when China adopted the Four Modernizations, there has been a phenomenal resurgence of religion.

## **THE RISE OF THE MARKET ECONOMY AND RELIGIOUS RESURGENCE**

Today, China has the world's largest Buddhist population, rapidly growing Catholic and Protestant congregations, expanding Muslim communities and active Daoist temples.<sup>3</sup> According to official statistics, in 1997, there were more than 13,000 Buddhist temples; 1,500 Daoist temples; 30,000 mosques; 4,000 Catholic churches and 12,000 Protestant churches in China (Office of the State Council, 1997). In October 2012, a press release by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) indicated that there were nearly 5,500 religious groups, about 130,000 sites for religious activities, 360,000 clergy and over 100 million religious believers in China. As we can see from these, generally conservative, official figures the numbers have doubled in the last fifteen years. Some academics estimate the actual number of religious believers in China to have reached 200 million. No one contests the fact that there is a religious resurgence; there is only disagreement over its extent.

There are various reasons for this significant increase. In the case of Christianity, one of the fastest spreading religions in China, the burgeon-

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<sup>2</sup> Richard Madsen, "Signs and Wonders: Christianity and Hybrid Modernity in China," unpublished paper (2010).

<sup>3</sup> Ashiwa and Wank, *op. cit.* (note 1), 1.

ing of rural congregations, especially during the 1980s and 1990s, has often been associated with miracles and healing experiences. With the breakdown of health cooperatives and poverty, the rural population sought healing and comfort in religious practices.

At the same time, as Madsen points out, Pentecostal Christianity found especially fertile ground in the “enchanted garden of Chinese culture.” He observed that the Chinese version of popular Christianity is infused with the magical aura of a god and ghost saturated world.

In the 1980s and 1990s, cults spread and traditional forms of exercise, including qigong, acquired religious dimensions. The rise of these cults and the growing number of followers caused consternation and anxiety in official circles. As a result, these cults were banned, outlawed and driven underground. In more recent years, there have been fewer reports of cults and sects and the pace of growth, at least in Christianity, seems to have slowed down in the countryside.

Instead, the latest statistics indicate the flourishing of religion in wealthy, coastal areas such as Fujian and Zhejiang. Rural farmers, who migrated and settled in urban areas, brought their religion with them. In Kunshan, Zhejiang province, a favored destination for migrant workers from western China, over eighty percent of the congregations are migrants, many of whom were baptized in their villages.

Migrant workers are not the only ones contributing to the rapidly rising church attendance. Churches in urban areas in China also are drawing in university students, professionals and intellectuals, many of whom seek meaning in an aggressively materialistic world.

Yang Fenggang of Purdue University has argued that the resurgence of religion in China can be seen as a response to the rise of the market economy.

In the process, industrialization is mixed with the information revolution, urbanization is accompanied by suburbanization, market transition coincides with globalization, and rapid modernization concurs with post-modernization. Amid these rapid, dramatic, and profound changes, social norms and bonds are broken down, conflicting moral values are chaotically entangled, and corruptions have become rampant. These social currents are disturbing and bewildering for many people, which may prompt individuals to seek a theodicy, or a religious worldview, to bring sense and order to their lives... Struggling in the wild market with existential anxieties, many people begin to seek peace, security, and meaning in religion. Some people find salvation in Christianity.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Yang Fenggang, “Lost in the Market, Saved at McDonald’s: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China,” in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (2005) 44 (4), 423–41.

Religion, then, provides a haven from the anxieties, uncertainties and insecurities of the market economy. For Chinese converts, Christianity is a faith that provides peace, certainty and liberation amid bewildering market forces and a stifling political atmosphere.

The market economy has also given rise to the phenomenon of “Boss Christians,” Christian entrepreneurs who constitute an influential group in Christian congregations. They see themselves as evangelists and church builders, distribute Bibles to their staff and workers, organize worship services at the workplace and try to convert employees to Christianity. These Christian entrepreneurs, who often are quite successful and donate generously to the construction of churches, are members of a special “fellowship” of people from similar backgrounds and sit on church committees. They contribute significantly to congregational growth and the building of churches.

As a result of the swelling urban congregations, large, multistory megachurches that are attended by several thousand worshippers every Sunday are being built. Chinese congregations and church leaders prefer to use Western architecture for church buildings: the grander it looks the better it is. These Chinese urban megachurches have become symbols of modernity (associated with the West) and prosperity.

For Western oriented Chinese, Christianity is not something traditional, conservative, or restrictive. Rather, it is perceived as progressive, liberating, modern and universal.<sup>5</sup> In China’s market economy, urban Christianity is associated with wealth, prosperity and modernity.

## **GROWING RESOURCES AND SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT**

Official attitudes toward religion vary widely from county to county and province to province. While there are centralized policies, their implementation differs from place to place. Very often, the ability of temples, mosques and churches to flourish largely depends on the relations between religious leaders and local authorities. For Christians, there is a considerable gray area between churches that are officially recognized and registered and those that are not. In this gray area religious groups have flourished.

Given the growth in numbers and the popular, irrepensible interest in religion, the Chinese authorities have shifted from measures designed to contain religion to those designed to “manage” religion, encouraging the registration and institutionalization of religious groups.

In the context of the market economy, the authorities have begun to take into account the increasing economic strength of religious organizations

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

and their ability to deliver social services. They recognize that religions can be a source of revenue and service delivery. Temples attract worshippers and donations. Churches have attracted both domestic and foreign donations for charitable causes.

In recent years, donations from the religious sector have been rising noticeably and religious charities have substantially contributed to disaster relief. According to data provided by SARA, within two weeks after the Sichuan earthquake in May 2008, religious groups had donated a total of 400 million Yuan in cash and kind; and in the two months following the April 2009 Yushu earthquake in Qinghai Province, religious groups gave nearly 100 million Yuan in cash and kind.

According to September 2012 SARA statistics, cash donations for charitable purposes from the religious sector amounted to three billion Yuan (USD 475 million) over the last five years. This is a very significant amount for the religious sector in China.

In February 2011, the Mount Putuo Buddhist Association in Zhejiang Province donated 450 million Yuan (USD 71 million) to the Zhoushan city government for the construction of the Zhujiajian bridge, setting the record for the highest single donation by a religious group. More importantly, this donation also helped to change the public's perception of religious charities as being widely scattered and ineffective.

Beyond relief work, temples receive offerings and donations from the rich and the poor and engage in social services. Christian churches in urban and peri-urban areas run kindergartens, homes for the elderly and orphanages. They work with disabled children and those with leprosy, providing HIV and AIDS education and raising awareness of the need for environmental preservation.

Statistics published by a Catholic research institution show that by the end of 2009, a total of 422 charitable and cultural Catholic organizations existed in China, including more than 220 clinics, 81 nursing homes, 44 kindergartens, 22 infant hospitals or rehabilitation centers and 35 regional or parish social service agencies. Large, highly-specialized institutions include Jinde Charities of Hebei Province, Shengjing Ren'ai of Liaoning Province, and the Xi'an Diocese Social Service Center of Shaanxi Province.<sup>6</sup>

In the case of the Amity Foundation, a Christian-initiated NGO that now counts as one of the largest genuine NGOs in China, officials have seen how with its network of overseas Christian partners it has been able to bring to China teachers, professional social workers, doctors and experts, i.e., personnel who can contribute significantly to improving professional standards in healthcare, education and social work.

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<sup>6</sup> Zuo Lin and Bai Yajing, "New Regulations Open the Door for Religious Charities," at <http://english.caijing.com.cn/2012-03-27/111778619.html>.

In the last few years, authorities have been more forthcoming in acknowledging the contributions of religious organizations. This acknowledgment was expressed in a recent SARA press release, according to which

They [religious organizations] have gradually transformed from simply meeting material needs of service targets to paying full attention to psychological, spiritual and social needs; from a scattered, spontaneous and monotonous state to a systematic, organized and diversified situation.<sup>7</sup>

In February 2012, the government announced that certain preferential measures would apply to religious groups and that they would be given the same recognition and preferential treatment as other NGOs. Six ministries and commissions, including SARA, the United Front Work Department of the CPC Central Committee, the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Civil Affairs, the Ministry of Finance and the State Administration of Taxation jointly issued a document encouraging religious groups to engage in charitable activities.

The new regulations define the forms, principles and preferential measures available for religious groups to carry out “charitable” activities.

This was followed by SARA’s official launching of the “Week of Religious Charity” on 17 September 2012,<sup>8</sup> at which approximately 200 representatives of government recognized Buddhist, Catholic, Islamic, Protestant and Taoist groups as well as officials and scholars were present. These religious groups were encouraged to collect donations from members and congregations for charitable causes. Some observed that the various religions were already engaged in social services and what was needed was the further relaxation of regulations in order to improve the work that was being done rather than to entice people to give more. According to a study conducted by SARA’s research center, since most social welfare agencies run by religious groups cannot meet the requirements of the Interim Measures for the Administration of Social Welfare Institutions, they are unable to obtain legal status and must operate in a gray area. The law states that as long as these institutions adhere to a non-profit model and find a competent business unit that separates religious activities from charitable undertakings they should be given equal treatment. But, in reality, the sensitive topic of religion has caused the civil affairs department to remain cautious. One consequence of the difficult registration process

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<sup>7</sup> Cited in “State Launches Religious Charity Campaign: Faith Groups Urged to Provide ‘Standardized Support,’” in *UCA News* (Union of Catholic Asian News), 18 September 2012.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

is that charitable religious organizations do not enjoy tax breaks, government subsidies and other benefits.<sup>9</sup>

It is clear that the government is keen to harness the religious sector's resources for social service delivery, relief work and helping to mitigate some of the "social disasters" caused by rapid economic growth and urbanization.

## **THE MARKET ECONOMY AND ITS CONSEQUENCES**

The world is preoccupied with China's thriving economic and military power. It is perhaps less obvious to many, especially to those outside the country that its economic development over the last few decades has been achieved at great social and environmental expense. Many of China's rivers and lakes have suffered enormous degradation due to industrial and agricultural pollution. Its forests have been denuded and it is only in the last few years that some of these have been gradually restored. China's rapid economic growth has been achieved at an enormous cost to the environment, led to the displacement and migration of hundreds of millions of farmers and the breakdown of traditional rural communities.

More and more people are being relocated from the mountainous regions or areas near the encroaching deserts because of severe water shortages. Farmers in Beijing's neighboring provinces have been asked to grow corn rather than rice because more water needs to be available for the capital's exploding population (close to 20 million). In fact, there is an ongoing south to north water project that will bring water from south of the Yangtze River to Beijing in the north. This mammoth project surpasses the size and cost of the Three Gorges Dam and could cause extensive environmental damage.

The ever widening wealth gap that is becoming a source of social unrest is of great concern. At least 100 million people in China are considered millionaires, while 150 million farmers living in poverty still cannot access clean drinking water. The Gini coefficient stood at 0.47 in 2005 and 0.438 in 2010. Government critics claim that it is closer to 0.5, making China one of the most inequitable societies in the world.

## **BUILDING A HARMONIOUS SOCIETY**

Over the last decade, the Chinese government has been made acutely aware of the explosive growth in economic and social disparities in Chinese society. Surging social discontent and unrest has hit many towns and cities.

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *ibid.*

In its response, the government highlighted the need to put more emphasis on building a harmonious society and human centered development. China's eleventh Five Year Plan (2006–2010) stressed the importance of the environment and social development of the country. Not only has China bought into the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) but it is actually making efforts to reach some of these goals before 2015.

The government recognizes that it cannot achieve the goals without the public's participation and support. Over the last five years, local governments have been encouraging and funding the development of Chinese NGOs as service providers: for the disabled, the elderly and orphans. In recent years, the NDRC, with funding from the World Bank, has provided funds to city governments for the establishment of NGO development centers in order to raise their capacity for service delivery.

Many of these, however, are government organized non-governmental organizations (GONGOs): neighborhood committees or organizations originally funded by the government in the process of being spun off NGOs. Local officials have neither the experience nor the desire to run an NGO but are under pressure to do so. Meanwhile, the political environment for genuine NGOs is still very restrictive. Registration fees remain high and stringent registration requirements deter their proliferation. Despite this, many grassroots NGOs have sprung up independently and spontaneously. Many are registered at the grass roots as enterprises rather than as non-profits.

For the past decade, both the business sector and NGOs have increasingly called for the development of "civil society" in China. Wealthy entrepreneurs are setting up private family foundations that support charitable work, providing scholarships and funds for orphans and disadvantaged children. A few are even willing to support the development and capacity building of NGOs as well as social enterprises.

## **RELIGIOUS IDENTITY**

Now that the space for NGOs or "civil society" is growing, how do religious organizations handle their identity in the midst of their social involvement? The government is very clear that religious organizations must separate their charitable work from their religious practices. They are not allowed to proselytize or to use their charitable work as a channel for evangelization.

Churches do not hide their religious identity but, at the same time, they do not proselytize while engaged in social work. While Christianity is today widely accepted as one of many Chinese religions, religious identity is still a rather sensitive issue in China. Chinese media have a mixed attitude toward religion and look to the government for cues. In the aftermath of the Sichuan

earthquake, a few Christian evangelical groups tried to use the distribution of relief goods as a channel for proselytizing. They were not only sent out of the area but also caused problems for other religious groups.

Amity does not hide its religious background but sometimes staff feel that work can be more effectively accomplished by not attracting attention to its religious links. Occasionally Amity's religious affiliations can be a disadvantage. Its name in Chinese, *Ai De* (Love and Virtue), has religious connotations. In certain cases, the Chinese media have avoided citing Amity's name in public, even though its work is highly praised. For instance, some years ago, Amity's work in HIV and AIDS education was widely publicized but the organization's name was not revealed.

### **DO CHINESE FBOs CHALLENGE THE DEVELOPMENT AGENDA?**

In China, most, if not all, NGOs cooperate with the government in so far as they support the government's policies. NGOs have been tolerated and even welcomed. Amity has tried to work within the political boundaries, creating "space" for rather than promoting "alternative" development strategies. In the present Chinese context, Amity's collaboration with the state sector, particularly at the grassroots level, provides opportunities to introduce new approaches and attitudes toward development. Amity's contribution includes its insistence on participatory management, gender equality, leadership development and the sustainability of projects. Successful projects can become models for replication, have a multiplier effect and eventually impact policy formulation.

Amity's bottom-up, participatory approach has been challenging for officials accustomed to a top-down style of working. Commenting on the partnership with Amity, a local official, who had been in poverty alleviation work for thirteen years, praised Amity's participatory approach. In 2000, Yu Wen Youyu, then Director of the Poverty Alleviation Office of Jinzhong Prefecture in Shanxi, admitted that much of his previous efforts had failed because of the top-down approach and the lack of consultation with villagers. When Amity organized a Participatory Rapid Appraisal (PRA) workshop, involving technical support staff, administrators, researchers and farmers, Yu Wen could not imagine how such a mixed group of people could be trained together. He changed his mind after the experience, acknowledging that "Even the farmers who were illiterate raised good questions!"<sup>10</sup>

From the beginning, Amity has articulated the need to raise democratic consciousness and encourage participatory management. For Amity, education in

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<sup>10</sup> Theresa Carino, "Big Push for Participatory Development," in Amity Newsletter ANL 52/1 (2000), 1-3.

democratic citizenship is part of development work, and project management is a learning process toward community administration and participatory government.

## DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

Promoting values through cooperation rather than confrontation has been the favored path for most NGOs and religious organizations in China. The conflict model or a confrontational approach does not work there where power relations are seriously skewed. Moreover, balance and harmony are concepts very much embedded in Chinese culture. The concept of building a harmonious society was not invented by President Hu Jintao. Confucianism is deeply ingrained in China and the fear of political and social turbulence considerable. Having gone through the upheaval and turbulence of the two world wars in the twentieth century, decades of Chinese civil war, the extremes of the Cultural Revolution and the seminal changes brought about by the shift to the market economy, the Chinese population is adverse to the idea of *luan* (upheaval, turbulence and extreme change).

The Chinese government, remains wary of “foreign interference,” but has become increasingly receptive of international NGOs or non-profits. The scope of cooperation between foreign non-profit organizations and Chinese NGOs has expanded tremendously over the last twenty years. The range includes environmental and wildlife protection, emergency relief and social development, assistance to the disabled, public health and professional training. The Chinese government is particularly interested in programs that involve the transfer of scientific and technological know-how and the ability to build stronger non-profit organizations in China.<sup>11</sup>

In many ways, the Chinese government continues to apply the *ti-yong* concept to learning from the West. This implies learning for practical application but preserving the Chinese essence. In the nineteenth century, Chinese reformers believed they could adopt science and technology from the West and apply them to China without necessarily importing Western institutions and values, which they felt were inappropriate and less developed than Chinese ones. That is one reason why the insistence on human rights as a social and political benchmark is treated with such strong resistance by the Chinese state.

In her book, *Civilizing Missions: International Religious Agencies in China*,<sup>12</sup> Miwa Hirono observes that in the nineteenth century, Christian

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<sup>11</sup> Zhang, Ye, *China's Emerging Civil Society* (Beijing: Asia Foundation, 2003.)

<sup>12</sup> Miwa Hirono, *Civilizing Missions: International Religious Agencies in China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

missionaries saw themselves as undertaking a “civilizing mission” that aimed not only to evangelize and export European culture, but also to facilitate colonial and economic expansion.

By the 1920s, the secularization of Christian missions had begun with the further involvement of missionaries in education and healthcare. However, technology, medicine and science actually helped to reinforce the superior status of the Christian missionaries with respect to the members of the ethnic communities they sought to evangelize.

Hirono also points out that two types of “civilizing missions” were simultaneously taking place in China: one emanating from the Chinese state directed towards its people and the other originating in the West and directed at China. However, while the Chinese state separated religion from its civilizational identity, the Christian missionaries merged the two.

While nineteenth-century style imperialism no longer prevails, it has been suggested that a new form of “civilizing mission” is emerging through the activities of development agencies. As champions of development, NGOs tend to spread their values and beliefs, based on a view of their own superiority, juxtaposed with a view of the inferiority of those on the receiving end. Hirono argues that today, regardless of whether NGOs are secular or not, they are still promoting a civilization ideology based on the combination of the material aspects of civilization and Christianity.<sup>13</sup> Whether this is good or bad and how international NGOs should navigate their way in China is open to debate.

## CONCLUSION

The context of development work in China has changed considerably over the last twenty-five years, when it would have been inconceivable that churches, temples and mosques would be actively involved in social development work and be encouraged to do so by the government. The resurgence of religion might be interpreted as a critique of the disruptive consequences of development but the growth of the religious sector has given it more visibility and respect in society.

State driven philanthropy and volunteerism provide religious organizations with more public visibility. Whereas they used to be “hidden,” they are now more visible and this has moved religion from the private into the public sphere.

Among Christian organizations, both Protestant and Catholic, it has been the support and cooperation by international FBOs that have helped

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

them reach higher levels of achievement and professionalism in their social development work.

It has been recognized that the involvement of international NGOs in China has helped expand the scope of work and political space for both foreign and Chinese NGOs. Constant exchanges with foreign partners, travel and training overseas have challenged Amity to develop cutting-edge projects, be they in community-based rehabilitation work, the use of volunteers, HIV and AIDS awareness education, or rural development.

In a sense, the Amity Foundation as a Chinese NGO with international Christian partners plays a mediating role in combining the values shared with partners and working in tandem with the Chinese government in closing the poverty gap. Despite and perhaps because of China's increasing wealth and power, development cooperation needs to continue. More than ever, the West should regard China as a dialogue partner rather than an adversary.

# MULTIRELIGIOUS CONTEXT AND DEVELOPMENT

*Samuel Ngun Ling*

## CONTEXTUAL REALITIES

The Asian continent was colonized by Western imperial powers and Asians themselves. Bitter memories of and painful wounds and scars resulting from past colonial experiences linger on in the minds and souls of the Asian peoples. Asia's history is one of suffering, militarization, intrusion, oppression, subjugation and failure. Over the centuries, Asia has suffered discrimination, marginalization, alienation, exploitation and cultural imperialism. As a result, the Asian people have lost their self-esteem, their feeling of self-worth, their human dignity and their cultural distinctiveness.

Asia is a multireligious continent. Peoples and communities are deeply divided on the basis of their belief, religion, culture, tradition, language, race and gender. With the exception of the Philippines, Christians are in the minority accounting for about three percent of the total Asian population. Over decades, the people were subjected to violence or conflict based on religion/belief, ethnicity/race, caste, color, class and gender. As a result, the Asian people have lost security, peace, harmony and freedom.

Geographically, Asia is a vast continent with rich natural resources. Its people and communities continue to experience the deterioration of their native lands, resources and environments and indigenous peoples have been unjustly and forcibly evicted from their villages and ancestral lands. The poor have been deprived of their means of livelihood and devastated by various diseases. In light of the emergent global economic and political forces, indigenous Asians are facing oppression and marginalization.

Moreover, their lives are being threatened. The Asian poor have become victims of systemic exploitation in the name of development projects such as big reservoirs, irrigation projects, dam construction, wild life sanctuaries, mining, logging and many other development projects. The majority of them have been deprived of the basic necessities such as food, shelter, clean drinking water, land, opportunity for employment and education.

In sociopolitical terms, Asia is a highly populated continent which produces and exports cheap labor. This has resulted in migrant workers, human trafficking and many other human rights violations, including the drug trade. Due to the impact of the global free market system, some Asian countries are being rebuilt. However, most Asian democracies remain fragile and large-scale military build ups and nuclear capacities are being developed at the expense of people's day-to-day needs. The so-called internal colonization or geopolitical domination inside Asia accelerated significantly during the past decades, severely affecting the weaker nations in Southeast Asia such Myanmar and threatening national security and social integrity. China's influential role and colonizing mentality in neighboring Asian countries is something that will need to be observed very carefully in the years to come.

## **THE IMPACT OF GLOBALIZATION**

Globalization is an organic economic power that systematically promotes new social values. It can widen and deepen the gap between the rich and the poor and leave behind the poor countries vulnerable to unpredictable breakdowns in nation building and democratic structures, economic life and community relations.<sup>1</sup> Despite the rapid economic growth that has largely benefitted the so-called developed countries, globalization negatively impacts developing nations and their environments.<sup>2</sup> In other words, while the global economy promises prosperity to all citizens of the world, it benefits only the rich and powerful countries of the global North while the poor and weak nations of the global South remain vulnerable to its negative effects. The negative effects of globalization are closely related to the ethical and moral issues of global justice and peace, both nationally and internationally. The multireligious situation is a reality of our time. As Stanley J. Samartha stated,

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang R. Schmidt, "Globalization—Universality—Utopia," in *Theology and Cultures*, vol. 1, no. 1 (Tainan: Chung Jung Christian University and Tainan Theological College and Seminary, 2004), 11.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

To reject exclusivism and to accept plurality, to be committed to one's faith and to be open to the faith communities of our neighbors, to choose to live in a global community of communities, sharing the ambiguities of history and the mystery of life—these are the imperatives of our age.<sup>3</sup>

Religious pluralism is part of the fabric of Asian culture; it enriches common life, communal relationships and global solidarity. Globalization, which is solely built on the capitalist economy—the capitalist value of privatizing one's own space and property and zealously guarding it—stands in stark contrast to the multireligious and multicultural Asia that remains critical of globalization. In the multireligious context of Asia, the other is invited into one's private space, where one jealously guards God or religion or culture. It requires a totally new orientation and creates an atmosphere that is open to freedom and equality and affirms life and the dignity of all. Those Asian value systems that serve as the powerful religious and cultural contexts for people's identities are very critical of global capitalist systems.

The vision is not to construct a new religion for Asia but, rather, to build a new world—a world in which persons matter more than systems, doctrines and traditions; a world where there is equality, peace and justice. The rich multireligious context of Asia has inspired distinctive spiritual and moral values and powers to make Asians culturally rich, relational and cooperative. The capitalist concept of economic power is not only about selfish having, consumerism and domination, but also the economic promises of globalization that rival the promises and hopes of religions.

Globalization, “the religion of market”<sup>4</sup> to borrow the words of the Indian theologian M. P. Joseph, has lost its human face, creating the gap between the rich and the poor, between the powerful and the oppressed, between the social classes and immediate neighbors. In this context, the rich no longer care for their poor neighbor. While globalization brings us closer to one another in terms of information technology, it has also created an unbridgeable gap between friends or neighbors. In contrast to such emerging global trends of the market religion, many religious traditions affirm the power of life—the power to encounter the forces of the market religion and to dare to challenge, resist, live and share with others. Religions can empower people to face the hard realities of life. Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet in the Bible is a symbol of the dynamic religious power that enables peoples to serve the needy. Likewise, Gotama the Buddha

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<sup>3</sup> Stanley J. Samartha, “Globalization and its Cultural Consequences,” in M. P. Joseph and Daniel D. Chetti (eds), *Ethical Issues in the Struggle for Justice* (Tiruvalla: CSS/BTTBPSA, 1998), 193.

<sup>4</sup> M. P. Joseph (ed.), *Theologies and Cultures* (Tainan: Chang Jung Christian University & Tainan Theological College and Seminary, 2004), 3.

taught that even “the morsel in the beggar’s bowl should be shared.” The Buddhist philosophy of sharing is the basic criterion for a liberated life.

### **THE HISTORICAL AND MULTIRELIGIOUS SETTING OF MYANMAR**

When talking about Myanmar, formerly Burma, one cannot avoid referring to the three Bs—Burma, Baptist and Buddhism. Burma, renamed Myanmar in 1989, is considered a nation of extreme poverty, a country that for many decades has been crying for freedom, justice and peace, a Baptist mission field and a great Buddhist land that practices the Theravada form of Buddhism. Being “backward” in all sectors of life, Myanmar is often described as a hermit nation, a forgotten peninsular and a lonely planet in Southeast Asia. Myanmar’s previous political system, the so-called Burmese way to socialism, was succinctly described by Kosuke Koyama, a Japanese theologian, as “the Burmese way to loneliness.” Predominantly a Theravada Buddhist country, the multicultural situation of Myanmar can be described as a melting pot where 135 different languages and cultural groups coexist. Out of an estimated population of 60 million, the Christian population is estimated to be only six percent, the majority of whom are Baptist, making Myanmar one of the largest Baptist countries in the South.

Myanmar has undergone five stages of political development: First, monarchical rule from the early eleventh century until the British colonial period of the late nineteenth century. Three Anglo-Burmese wars took place between 1824 and 1885, when the last Burmese King, King Thibaw, was dethroned. The Protestant mission, particularly the American Baptist mission under Adoniram and Ann Judsons, reached Myanmar on 13 July 1813, that is six years after the British Baptist mission under Felix Carey, son of William Carey, started its mission work in Myanmar in 1807.

Second, Myanmar experienced colonial rule under the British Indian Empire from 1824 until 1947. The Buddhist nationalist movement was born out of this long suffering under colonialism, which later gave rise to a strong anti-Christian voice. The long history of the Buddhist nationalist movements’ opposition to minority ethnic Christians in Myanmar is rooted in the colonial period. Christianity is regarded as a remnant of Western political domination and cultural expansion.

Third, Myanmar enjoyed a brief parliamentary democracy between 1948 and 1962, during which time the then Prime Minister U NU tried to replace parliamentary democracy with a theocratic system. The attempt to make Buddhism the official state religion was strongly resisted by ethnic Christian groups such as Karen, Kachin and Chin.

Fourth, General Ne Win introduced the “Burmese way to socialism.” This was practiced from 1962 until 1988. The socialist system completely failed to maintain the country’s economy, as a result of which Myanmar soon became one of the poorest countries in the world.

Fifth, since 1988 successive military regimes have controlled the country under military capitalism. Social and political restrictions, economic repression and religious oppression have become common in the daily lives of the people and the church.

Today, Myanmar continues to struggle with two major political issues: the establishment of democratic institutions and the restoration of national reconciliation and the promotion and protection of ethnic minority rights and freedom. Decades of fighting, political repression, human rights violations, the economic crisis and lacking healthcare and education have already caused immense suffering, most notably among minority religious peoples. These have consequently led to huge problems of internally displaced peoples within the country, and externally misplaced refugees/asylums outside the country.

## **SOCIALIST ECONOMY**

Myanmar enjoyed relative economic prosperity for a short period under the parliamentary rule following its independence (4 January 1948). Until the military took power in 1962, Myanmar was known as the rice bowl of Asia, the world’s leading rice exporter. Since 1962, the serious economic mismanagement of General Ne Win’s Burmese way to socialism with its isolationist economic policies has gradually turned Myanmar into one of the most impoverished countries in the world today.

The underlying motto of this socialist economy was,

In Burmese socialist society, equality is impossible. Since people are not equal, either in physical or intellectual terms or the quantity and quality of service they render to society, differences are bound to exist. But, at the same time, social justice demands that the gap between incomes is reasonable, and correct measures will be taken to minimize these gaps. When building up an economy according to a socialist plan, every able individual will have to work according to their ability. The material and cultural values that accrue will be distributed in accordance with the quantity and quality of labor expended by each individual in social production.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> The Burma Socialist Program Party, the Union of Burma, *The System of Correlation of Man and His Environment: The Philosophy of the Burma Socialist Program Party* (Rangoon: Sarpay Beikman Press, 1964), 46.

This socialist economic system failed miserably in implementing its policies and ideologies after three decades of political mismanagement under Ne Win. Especially since 1988, the mismanaged economic policy and virtual economic breakdown—banking crisis, poor infrastructure and communication systems, lacking economic expertise and skilled labor, shortage of electricity and petrol, inflation, etc.—have resulted in a series of conflicts and demonstrations and riots against the central government.

## **ECONOMIC SITUATION POST 1988**

Many people, especially those who are poor, powerless and marginalized, have experienced considerable economic hardships throughout decades of economic repression under military rule. These economic hardships, combined with corrupt moral, social and political repression, have kept many people in fear. In order to survive, people have developed a coping mechanism, which is referred to as “corruption-adapted common way of life.” Consequently, economic hardship has dampened peoples’ moral obligation to uphold truth and justice.

Myanmar’s potential can be tapped into for the development of Asia and the global economies. In the past, the international economic sanctions that were imposed on Myanmar had forced the country to limit foreign investment and export of commodities to developed countries, especially to the West. Because of these economic sanctions, Myanmar had faced numerous sociopolitical and economic problems, pushing out a growing number of young people into neighboring Asian and to Western countries as illegal immigrants and undocumented workers. However, recently, these economic sanctions were lifted.

At present, Myanmar is on the road to rebuilding itself and facing numerous political changes. Today’s slogan is the “Burmese way to democracy.” In 1989, during the previous military government, the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), introduced a market-oriented economic policy with four economic objectives: (1) development of agriculture as the economic basis as well as development of other sectors of the economy; (2) proper evolution of the market-oriented economic system; (3) development of the economy inviting participation in terms of technical know-how and investments from sources inside the country and abroad; and (4) ensuring that initiatives to shape the national economy be kept in the hands of the state and the national peoples.<sup>6</sup> Based on these four objectives, the

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<sup>6</sup> Dr Thet Lwin and Daw Khin May Aung, “A Population Profile of Myanmar,” in *Human Resource Development and Nation Building in Myanmar*. Papers presented at the Symposium at the International Business Center, Yangon, 18–20 November, 1997 (Yangon: Office of Strategic Studies, Ministry of Defense, 1998), 41.

government tries to implement all-round national development in various economic sectors such as agriculture, mining, manufacturing, construction, electricity, trade, communication, hotel, tourism and various social services.<sup>7</sup>

Economic sanctions on Myanmar, affecting about one hundred foreign trading companies, have been in place since March 2002.<sup>8</sup> Full foreign ownership of companies operating in Myanmar is prohibited and hence most foreign investment is being carried out through joint ventures with the military government. Economic sanctions have had the most detrimental effects on the poor while the élite has been largely spared. In response to the West's sanction, Myanmar has turned to neighboring countries such as China, Thailand, Singapore, Malaysia and India for regional economic cooperation. The economic crisis is the major challenge facing the newly formed democratic government today.

## BUDDHISM

In Myanmar, Buddhist philosophy and thought forms are profoundly amalgamated with primal religions and Hindu elements. Typically, Buddhists in Myanmar still practice *nat* (spirit) worship to protect themselves against the harm of evil spirits, and ask their Hindu Brahmin priests for economic or business advice as well as direction for their future. Primal and Hindu religious thought continues to dominate the mindsets, ideologies and moral behavior of Myanmar Buddhists. Historical records show that, in the past, Hindu Brahmin priests served as political and economic advisers (*gurus*) at the royal court so that such a centuries-old mixed religious tradition continues to dominate modern society, particularly the ruling and working classes. Hindu Brahmin priests are sometimes secretly consulted when people want to choose the auspicious date and place for certain business transactions or holding significant religious ceremonies, or even for conducting the state's affairs. Merchants, traders and entrepreneurs seek secret advice, first of all from Brahmin astrologers, if they wish to conclude a successful business deal, while ordinary citizens take their horoscope to an astrologer for consultation. The fact that the great majority of Myanmar Buddhists bear astrologically auspicious names clearly shows that, from the cradle to the grave, the Hindu cultural influence consciously or unconsciously governs the daily lives and business of Myanmar Buddhists.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>8</sup> See *Burma: Country in Crisis: Foreign Investment*, Open Society Institute, Burma Project, 2001, at <http://burmaproject.org>

<sup>9</sup> Dr Khin Maung Nyunt, "Myanmar Culture, Human Resource Development and Nation Building in Myanmar," in *op. cit.* (note 6), 164.

## BUDDHIST PHILOSOPHY OF KAMMA AND ITS IMPACT ON ECONOMIC LIFE

The majority of Myanmar Buddhists invest more in religion and culture than in business. Their generous donations go toward various religious and cultural activities such as celebrating novice-hood, sponsoring special festivals, feasting of monks and the construction of pagodas. The reason for this is the belief that religious spending is more meritorious than economic investment. Another reason is the impact of Buddhist *kamma* philosophy on human consumption and behavior.<sup>10</sup> As noted by Melford E. Spiro,<sup>11</sup> a well-known American anthropologist and one of the authorities on Burmese Buddhism, Burmese *kammic* Buddhism provides incentives for worldly action (economic and political), since economic success is a necessary means for Buddhist soteriological action which, in turn, has important worldly consequences—social and economic alike. In *kammic* Buddhism, a pleasant rebirth is considered the result of excellent *kamma* that has been accumulated as a result of meritorious actions. Therefore, Burmese Buddhists are greatly concerned with increasing their store of merits. *Kammic* Buddhism, hence, views worldly action as soteriologically neutral. Since Buddhist salvation is believed to be attained through merit, merit has to be acquired through worldly action. Buddhism strongly resists evil human desires (*ta-hna*) believed to be derived from the attachment to worldly possession, fame and lust. In other words, the soteriology of *kammic* Buddhism neither encourages nor discourages worldly action. While economic action is indirectly an indispensable condition for salvation, it is only through this action that one can hope to acquire the most soteriologically valuable merit (*kutho*)—a merit that can be achieved through giving (*dana*) and morality (*sila*). This Buddhist belief in *kutho*, *dana* and *sila*, the primary means to salvation, provides a powerful motive for economic action.

In Burmese Buddhist culture, wealth is regarded as the harvest of good deeds from a previous existence being converted into reality in the present life. It represents *kammic* rewards for merits accumulated through *dana* in previous existences through giving. A Buddhist who is wealthy is therefore viewed as a person of great virtue with multiple merits—the merits that have been earned by virtue of a person's past rebirths being converted into the prestige of wealth in their present rebirth. Again, economic wealth can continue to accumulate merits in actions in the present

<sup>10</sup> Dingrin La Seng, "Kammic Buddhism and Economic Action in Myanmar: A Christian Perspective," in *WAYS MIT Journal of Theology*, vol. 7 (January, 2006), 24–28.

<sup>11</sup> Melford E. Spiro, *Buddhism and Society: A Great Tradition and Its Burmese Vicissitudes*, 2<sup>nd</sup> expanded edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 453–54.

life in order to ensure better rebirths in the future existence. The greater the merit one accumulates the greater one's chances of spiritual salvation. The merits being acquired through giving is the means *par excellence* for spiritual salvation and, hence, the quest for merit as a noble path to the attainment of spiritual salvation provides the most powerful motivation for economic works and improvement of wealth.<sup>12</sup>

## DONATION VERSUS INVESTMENT

For a typical Myanmar Buddhist, acquiring merit through *dana* is one of the noblest religious acts. Religious works such as giving alms, building a pagoda or monastery, sponsoring the initiation to the novice-hood and the ordination and feasting of monks are usually public events that involve conspicuous public display, consumption and the sharing of wealth. The more the donor or sponsor spends on such religious acts, the greater the prestige. Accumulating merit and earning social prestige are the most essential religious acts and social virtues. Both require economic investment and provide a powerful motive for economic action (work and saving).

This Buddhist tradition of merit through *dana* reinforces the differences in the standard of living in Myanmar since the rich can spend more on religious consumption (giving). In this sense, the Buddhist tradition of merit through *dana* seems to put people on different levels. It is unclear whether or not the Burmese Buddhist concept of *dana* helps strengthen economic action. Spiro, for instance, wrote, "... it is probably safe to predict that...the continuation of this soteriological pattern of merit-through-*dana* will continue to pose a serious obstacle to the future economic growth in Burma."<sup>13</sup> Spiro points out that even though Myanmar Buddhists need material wealth to accumulate their merits through giving, such wealth may not lead them to capitalist investment that can produce more wealth. In support of this idea, Mya Maung argued that Myanmar Buddhist cultural values, together with its political and economic policies and traditionalism, resisted the economic progress of the country and affirmed the great influence of Buddhism on the economic activities of the vast majority of the population, especially the rural peasants.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 454.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 463–68.

<sup>14</sup> Mya Maung, "Culture Value and Economic Change," in *Asian Survey*, vol. 4, no. 3 (March, 1964), 757–64. For further information about factors affecting the poor economic performance of Myanmar, see Mya Maung, *The Burma Road to Poverty* (New York: Praeger, 1991), 205; 210–15; 275; 292–99.

In light of the above, one can conclude that although economic activity can be stimulated by one's desire to make a profit, the typical Burmese Buddhist culture of "giving" does not lead a Burmese Buddhist to capitalist investment. This might be so because, instead of investing their daily earnings and economic profits in profitable enterprises, Buddhists spend them mainly for religious purposes in the expectation that they will accumulate good deeds (*kamma*) and merits (*kutho*) which determine a happy rebirth in the future.<sup>15</sup> Looking back on the economic behavior of Burmese Buddhists in pre-British Burma, Manuel Sarkisyanz argued that in pre-British Burma, Burmese Buddhists did not save for economic security and that in the Buddhist tradition the accumulation of wealth is only permissible when related to works of merit. Thus, the culture of giving rather than investing developed within Burmese Buddhism that is characteristic of the poorest of the poor. "Out of little one should give little, out of what is moderate, a moderate amount. Out of much one should give much," so a Buddhist maxim.<sup>16</sup> While works of merit to some extent continue to serve as a motivation for economic activity, Buddhist teachings on the accumulation of merits are considered an obstacle to economic growth and capital investment in Myanmar.<sup>17</sup> U Tin Soe identified two major causes for the economic crisis in Myanmar: one is the Buddhist concept of *kamma* and the other is *lawba* (greed or avarice). He explained that, in Myanmar, Buddhists believe that one's good fortune, high authority and elevated social status in this life are givens and bound to the merits that had been accumulated in one's previous (past) life so that all life issues, including economic prosperity and even poverty, are caused first of all by *kamma* and followed by *lawba*.<sup>18</sup>

In contrast, Padmasiri De Silva proposed another aspect of the positive effects of *kamma* on the economic actions of the people in Myanmar. In contrast to the idea of Max Weber (1864–1920), who understands Buddhism as the otherworldly, monastic ideal, which requires absolute abandonment of the world and its drives, De Silva strongly emphasized the significance of Buddhist social ethics and, hence, denied any rational action which impedes the activity of concentrated contemplation. For Weber, there is no path leading from this "world rejecting" religion to "any economic ethic

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<sup>15</sup> Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhist Ethics: Foundations, Values and Issues* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 192–93; 206–207.

<sup>16</sup> Manuel Sarkisyanz, *Buddhist Backgrounds of the Burmese Revolution* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1965), 142.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> Tin Soe, "An Economic Interpretation of Some Myanmar Traditional Concepts in the Context of Globalization," in *Traditions of Knowledge in Southeast Asia*, part 3, published by Myanmar Historical Commission, Ministry of Education, Union of Myanmar (Yangon: University Press, 2005), 147–48.

or even any rational social ethic.”<sup>19</sup> De Silva therefore criticizes Weber for asserting that Buddhism is not a source of this worldly social ethic. He argues that Buddhism has a genuine social ethic and hence plays a vital role in social change, even though it is directed toward the other world. In addition, he argued that the Buddhist doctrine of “no-self” (*anatta*) does not weaken a healthy drive for integration, social reform or even nation building. Instead, Buddhism has enhanced cooperation and social integration by reducing one’s self-centeredness, self-manipulation and greediness.

In view of De Silva, Weber’s theory ignored the significance of the interrelationship between lay Buddhism and monastic Buddhism.<sup>20</sup> Again, Manuel Sarkisyanz believes that Weber’s view on Buddhism tends to be too narrow, because it is confined only to canonical Theravada Buddhism and Weber does not fully understand “Asokan political Buddhism.”<sup>21</sup> It was this Asokan political Buddhism that motivated the India of the time to create a prosperous nation as a precondition for the support of the *sangha* and for “the escape from suffering and the realization of moral law (the *dhmma*) in this society as a whole.”<sup>22</sup> Frank E. Reynolds asserts that the Buddhist law of *kamma* ensures that piety, moral behavior and wealth are “mutually supportive,” and that a large store of merits gained through giving is believed to ensure pleasant rebirths in the future.<sup>23</sup> Hence, Buddhism is not completely devoid of the motive of capital investment, but it emphatically teaches, “an ethic of diligent work” for the laity and, hence, to support entrepreneurial energy directed toward investments and reinvestment.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, trans. Ephraim Fischhoff (Boston: Beacon Press, 1963), 267.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> La Seng Dingrin, “Kammatic Buddhism and Economic Action in Myanmar: A Christian Perspective,” in Samuel Ngun Ling (ed.), *RAYS MIT Journal of Theology*, vol. 7 (January 2006), 12–36.

<sup>22</sup> Manuel Sarkisyanz, “Buddhist Backgrounds of Burmese Socialism,” in Bardwell L. Smith (ed.), *Religion and Legitimation of Power in Thailand, Laos and Burma* (Chambersberg P.A: Anima Books, 1978). See also Stanley J. Tambiah, “Buddhism and This Worldly Activity,” in *Modern Asian Studies*, vol. 7, no.1 (1973), 5.

<sup>23</sup> Frank E. Reynolds, “Ethics and Wealth in Theravada Buddhism: A Study in Comparative Religious Ethics,” in Russell F. Sizemore and Donald K. Swearer (eds), *Ethics, Wealth, and Salvation: A Study in Buddhist Social Ethics* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1990), 59–76.

<sup>24</sup> Harvey, *op. cit.* (note 15), 207–209.

## SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Myanmar society is a typically Buddhist society where any attempt to understand the economic trends and motives of the country is impossible unless the basic knowledge of traditional Buddhist cultures, customs, moral concepts and social behavior are seriously taken into account. Traditionally, Myanmar society is composed of five social classes:<sup>25</sup> (1) farmers (or cultivators); (2) merchants (or traders); (3) entrepreneurs; (4) well-informed and reputed *hmu-matts* (royal officials); and (5) learned reverend monks. Four out of the five classes were considered as economically productive classes and therefore the main sources of wealth, prosperity and welfare of the state.<sup>26</sup> In order successfully to conduct business in Myanmar, one will need to understand the significance of social values and know what constitutes a healthy social environment in Myanmar. There is a Burmese proverb, “*pokko-khin hmah, taya mein*,” literally “a person is regarded accountable only when he or she is socially highly esteemed.”<sup>27</sup> This explains the significance of social relationships in constituting communal accountability in Myanmar’s religious and cultural society.<sup>28</sup>

The heads of companies are highly respected as guardians or parents of a family group and fraternal relationships, social care and interpersonal respect are integral parts of business life in Myanmar. In Myanmar culture, frankness, openness and criticism can only be done in moderation while this is common in Western culture.<sup>29</sup> A successful business transaction is always preceded by a healthy interpersonal social relationship. In this regard, the “human face” plays a vital role when negotiating any type of business deal. In summary, sociality is fundamental to doing better and greater business in the Myanmar Buddhist context.

## CONCLUSION

Myanmar is in a state of transition, moving toward a free and democratic society where economic development is a major concern. The entire context

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<sup>25</sup> Hman-Nan Yazawin, *The Glass Palace Chronicle of the Kings of Burma*, trans. Pe Maung Tin & G. H. Luce (Rangoon: University Press, 1960).

<sup>26</sup> Maung Htin (ed.), *Raja Dhamma Singaha Kyann* (Yangon: 1992), 138.

<sup>27</sup> Hla Thamein, *Myanmar Proverbs* (in Myanmar and English) (Yangon: Padamyau Mauk Sapye, 2000), 88.

<sup>28</sup> Samuel Ngun Ling, *Communicating Christ in Myanmar: Issues, Interactions and Perspectives* (Yangon: ATEM, 2005), 228.

<sup>29</sup> Saw Myat Yin, *Culture Shock: A Guide to Customs and Etiquette, Burma* (Singapore: Time Books International, 1994), 188–89.

is being challenged by the new forces of democratization and economic globalization. While traditional Buddhism is believed to lack the capitalist motivation for economic development, economic options should not be underestimated. Future success will depend not only on the potential of capital investment but also on one's understanding of Myanmar cultural and values, on how effectively one establishes basic social relationships with local people and one's cultural investment prior to doing business in Myanmar. It is important to understand that business cannot be successfully carried out in Myanmar unless one is willing to integrate oneself into the religious, cultural and social context of the people.



# RELIGION, CONFLICT AND DEVELOPMENT IN A MULTIRELIGIOUS CONTEXT

*Johnson Mbillah*

## INTRODUCTION

Africa is the second largest and second most populous continent in the world. With a religiously, linguistically and culturally pluralistic population of 1 billion,<sup>1</sup> it covers six percent of the earth's total surface and 20.4 percent of the total land area.<sup>2</sup> Different religions regard Africa as a breeding ground: a place where converts can be made easily. Over the years, this perception has led to the proliferation of various denominations on the continent to the extent that almost all religious systems in the world exist in Africa in one form or another. As result, the continent has become a mosaic of religions or a "religious zoo" as a student of religion chose to refer to the situation in Ghana.<sup>3</sup>

In spite of the presence of many religious systems on the continent and barring the specifics of religious figures which are sometimes politicized, it is generally accepted that over 400 million Africans profess to be Christian and over 400 million to be Muslim. These figures confirm that the social fabric of Africa is a religious one and clearly show that Christianity and Islam currently wield the largest following on the continent's religious landscape.

As a result of the growing religious plurality on the African continent, the African has multiple identities. In the past, for example, one talked

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<sup>1</sup> At [www.worldometers.info/world-population](http://www.worldometers.info/world-population).

<sup>2</sup> At <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Africa>.

<sup>3</sup> *Trinity Journal of Church and Theology*, vol. 1, no. 1 (June 1991), 8.

about ethnic identities or what some people chose to call tribal identities. In the present situation, however, one might say I am a Nigerian, an Ibo and a Catholic, just as one might say I am a Nigerian, a Hausa and a Muslim of the *ahlus-sunnah wa al-jama'a* reformist tradition. This maze of the African personality is not particular to a specific country. On the contrary, it is a phenomenon spread all over sub-Saharan Africa and therefore requires cooperation, collaboration, tolerance and constructive engagement between Christians and Muslims so as to enable the continent to see itself and its people as united in diversity and linked to the common humanity of the worldwide human family.

The presence of Christianity and Islam in Africa (among others) demonstrate that religious diversity has come to stay and will arguably remain with us until the end of time—“until Jesus returns.” The interesting aspect of religious diversity is that neither Christian nor Muslim theological thought regard this as an accident of religious history that took God by surprise. The Christian theological understanding of God as all knowing renders it impossible to conceive of religious diversity as having come about without God’s knowledge. While Christians will definitely not claim that God brought about religious diversity, they will affirm that diversity came about with God’s knowledge—at best with God’s permission and at worst against God’s will. Islam, on the other hand, states that if God had so wished, God would have made us one community but that God did not wish that to be the case. The Qur’an recognizes the reality of differences in religion when it says “to you your religion, to me mine” (Q. 109:6).<sup>4</sup>

In light of the Christian and Muslim theological perspectives on religious diversity one could posit that it would seem to be theologically and existentially absurd for any individual or religious group to be impatient with the existing religious pluralism since, arguably, religious plurality will remain the lot of Africans until the end of time. The question is not how to eradicate religious pluralism—doing so would mean attempting to eradicate human beings’ God-given freedom to choose their religion and be responsible for the choices that they make—but, rather, to ask how we can constructively relate to religious diversity so as to enable religious peoples and their societies to live in peace and, in so doing, work toward their spiritual, moral, physical, and environmental development.

A number of challenging issues will have to be considered and dealt with by Christians and Muslims in Africa and worldwide if we are to live in an environment of mutual tolerance and in peace and not in fragmented communities.

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<sup>4</sup> See Abdullah. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an: Text Translation and Commentary* (Leicester, Islamic Foundation, 1975).

## UNETHICAL RELIGIOUS EXPANSIONIST POLICIES

In light of the fact that Christianity and Islam are the two great missionary religions in the world today that seek to make converts but dread being converted to another religion, the two religions compete over membership and space to practice their respective faiths. Sub-Saharan Africa appears to be the region where the two religions are growing faster than anywhere else in the world. The methods employed to make converts, however, are without a guiding ethic and, therefore, leave room for some preachers from both sides of the religious divide to use inconsiderate and, in some cases, offensive language to propagate their religion.

Negative perceptions of each other's religion that draw on medieval polemics between Christians and Muslims are reinforced by provocative preachers. This breeds conflict which, in many cases, degenerates into violent confrontation. In some parts of Africa, itinerant preachers pit the Bible and the Qur'an against each other in public preaching, while others simply condemn the other religion. Such provocative preaching creates animosity, poisons relations and leads to violent conflicts. In some places, religious radio stations openly condemn the other religion and employ preachers who, rather than praising their own religion, condemn the other religion. If we want to prevent conflict and promote peace and development, Christian and Muslim leaders and all those who profess either faith cannot turn a blind eye. Christian and Muslim leaders in countries such as Kenya and Tanzania, where public disputations, debates and discourses of this nature—*Mihadhara* in Swahili—take place, have time and again been told by PROCURA to consider ways and means of censoring their own provocative preachers and to outline to them a code of conduct that allows them to speak about the good of their religion and not the bad of the other person's religion.

The tendency for Christian and Muslim leaders to say that those who indulge in provocative preaching are extremists and therefore uncontrollable is unacceptable on at least two counts: In the first place, if such provocative preaching produces a violent reaction, both the guilty preachers themselves as well as their innocent co-religionist suffer the consequences. In the second place, the poisoned relations will be very difficult to repair.

There have been instances where foreign preachers have provoked violence through their preaching and quickly left the country once violence had erupted. In such situations, Christian and Muslim leaders are usually called upon to restore peace. The question that remains on the lips of many is why Christian and Muslim leaders cannot be proactive in preventing actions that produce strife and violence rather than being reactive to bring about peace once violence has erupted.

## **THE CHALLENGE OF TRANSLATING GOOD PRECEPTS IN RELIGION INTO GOOD PRACTICE IN EVERYDAY LIFE**

In matters of conflict prevention and peace, priests, pastors, sheikhs and imams are always at pains to convince all others that Christianity and Islam are religions of Shalom and Salaam (peace) respectively. Christianity, for example, argues that the advent of Christ was announced with the angels' song "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (Lk 2:14), thus indicating that the Christ who was born brought peace to human beings. In fact Jesus is referred to as the "Prince of Peace" (Isa 9:6).

Muslims, on the other hand, have always passionately explained that the word Islam, which translates as submission, also has in it *salaam* which means peace. They argue that the normal routine greetings of Muslims *as salaam aleikum* (peace be upon you) with the response *aleikum salaam*, which literally means unto you also peace, denote this.

It is frequently remarked that if the two religions with the largest following in Africa are religions of peace, then one would expect the continent to experience peace and development to take place without violent conflicts interrupting it. This is certainly not the case as conflicts flare up in many parts of Africa. This suggests that the precepts of peace embedded in Islam and Christianity have failed to influence the lives and leadership of the church and mosque and, by extension, Christians and Muslims have not been doing enough to ensure that the ideals of their religions are not mere theoretical concepts but practiced in everyday life.

## **GLOBALIZATION/INTERNATIONALIZATION/ IMPORTATION/EXPORTATION OF CONFLICTS**

The universality of Christianity manifests itself in the fact that Christians are spread throughout the globe. In a spiritual sense, however, the universality of Christianity is visible in the Christian understanding that all Christians belong to the body of Christ—the church. As a result, all Christians belong together in a mystical union, a Christian solidarity that transcends national and political boundaries, color, or race. In Christ there is no east, no west, no north, no south, no white, no black, etc.

The universality of Islam manifests itself in the fact that Muslims are spread throughout the globe. The unity of Muslims, however, is seen in terms of the Islamic concept of the universal *ummah* (community) to which all Muslims belong. This form of unity is understood to be both temporal and spiritual and thus transcends established geographical and political

borders. In the *ummah* there is no east, no west, no north, no south, no white, no black, etc.

The Christian understanding that all Christians belong the body of Christ and the Muslim understanding that Muslims belong the Muslim *ummah* have in Africa (as in many parts of the world) led to what we often refer to as negative solidarity.

## NEGATIVE SOLIDARITY

An upsurge of religious particularism, influenced by the concept of Christians belonging to the body of Christ and Muslims belonging to the universal *ummah*, have militated against the unity of nations and the quest for common citizenship that would enable neighbors to live together in peace. The perception that the European West is Christian and the Arab East is Muslim has created a situation where conflict between the West and East is perceived to be conflict between members of the body of Christ (Christians) and members of the *ummah* (Muslims).

This was more pronounced and almost became the norm in some parts of Africa during the 1991 Gulf War, the 2003 invasion of Iraq, the 2006 Danish cartoon crisis and, more recently, the 2012 US film about Muhammad the prophet of Islam, which is offensive to Islam and therefore to Muslims. The Danish cartoon saga pitted Muslims and Christians against each other in Nigeria, leading to the burning of places of worship. In some parts of Africa, Muslim communities demonstrated against America during the Gulf War and, more recently, the film on Muhammad.

Negative solidarity is exemplified by the fact that Christians and Muslims are at each other's throats over incidents that took place outside the continent and which they have not been part of. Being in solidarity with a person who is wrong, simply because one shares the same religion, ethnicity, etc., is an example of negative solidarity. Being in solidarity with one's own to the extent of fighting one another's borders is absurd to say the least since, by doing so, adherents of the two religions import conflicts from outside Africa into the continent. If this negative solidarity were to become the norm, any conflict could be exported to or otherwise imported into countries geographically far removed from the conflict zone. This is surely not an incentive for the development agenda.

The rise in violence between Muslims and Christians raises critical questions regarding the ultimate identity of Africans vis-à-vis their religious affiliation. The critical question often posed in this context is whether Christians and Muslims in Africa see themselves as African Christians and African Muslims or Christian Africans and Muslim Africans. We need to

conceptualize this when it comes to our own countries. Are we, for example, Kenyan Muslims or Muslim Kenyans and, for that matter, are we Kenyan Christians or Christian Kenyans?

Although there are deep theological considerations at stake here, the question remains whether we are Africans who happen to be Christians and Muslims or Christians and Muslims who happen to be Africans. In the broader sense, we have to ask the question whether we are Christians and Muslims who happen to be human beings or human beings who happen to be Christians and Muslims. The way in which Christians and Muslims answer these questions will definitely help them consider what they have in common as they seek to talk, live together and prevent violent conflicts and promote peace with one another and society at large. Are religions expected to transform lives for the better rather than to deform lives for the worse?

We need a deeper understanding of religious differences in order to appreciate that it is possible to be truly African and truly Muslim or Christian just as we can be truly Kenyan and truly Christian or Muslim. Taking this seriously will enable us to live in peace with one another and collaborate in conflict prevention and development.

The fallacy of the emerging trend of religious particularism that sets Africans against their own kind in the name of the body of Christ and the *ummah* is that, in the West, Christians have fought wars against fellow Christians (the body of Christ against the body of Christ) as evidenced by the two world wars, and Muslims have fought wars against fellow Muslims (the *ummah* against the *ummah*) as evidenced by the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s.

Christians and Muslims leaders in Africa need openly to discuss the universal nature of their religions so as to ensure that Africa is not accused of importing conflicts and fighting proxy wars—we need to de-globalize conflicts.

## **ETHNICISM: FINDING AN ALLY IN RELIGION**

Ethnicism is known to militate against the unity of nations and communities. While efforts are being made in Africa to minimize ethnicism or “tribalism” and to promote national cohesion, the current situation in Africa suggests that there is an emerging monster which PROCURA refers to as “religious tribalism.” Religious tribalism is described as that form of religious sectarianism that only recognizes one’s co-religionists as “good neighbors” and all others as “bad neighbors” who one does not like to have dealings with, except to convert them to one’s religion or form of religious ideology. If they cannot be converted, then something has to be done to demonize them and turn them into enemies—enemies that only deserve subjugation and annihilation.

In Africa, the majority of Christians tend to be from a specific ethnic group. The same applies to Muslims. The reasons for this is an accident of history so to speak. Islam entered one territory and dominated the area and Christianity entered another territory and dominated that area. For instance, the Hausa in Nigeria, the Mandingo in Liberia and the Yao in Malawi are mainly Muslim, and the Igbo in Nigeria, the Lorma in Liberia and the Chewa in Malawi are mainly Christian. If communal violence breaks out between groups, the conflict is easily referred to as a Christian and Muslim rather than an ethnic conflict—even though the right labeling would perhaps be ethno-religious. Ethnicism, combined with religious fervor, usually produces violence of great proportions. This has been most detrimental to the economic development of the affected countries.

### **POLITICAL MANIPULATION**

African heads of states tend to be categorized according to their religious affiliations. This is a dangerous trend which can easily entrench “religious tribalism.” If entrenched, as it seems to be the case in some countries, adherents of one religion or the other will vote for a certain presidential or parliamentary candidate because they share a religious affiliation and not because the person is competent and will serve all peoples fairly and equally.

The forefathers of the continent identified themselves as Africans, irrespective of their religious affiliations. For instance, Leopold Senghor, a devout Catholic, was elected president of Senegal, a predominantly Muslim country. In recent times, President Bakili Muluzi was voted president of Malawi, a predominantly Christian country. If this noble trend is to continue, Christians and Muslims need to embark on education that emphasizes unity of purpose and development in spite of belonging to different faith communities. Politicians, on the other hand, should be cautioned against religio-partisan politics which appear to be on the ascendency in some parts of the continent.

### **THE WAY FORWARD**

Violent religious conflicts are often analyzed in order to find appropriate solutions. Christian and Muslim leaders join politicians in order to assess the causes of the conflict. Social, economic, ethnic and political factors as well as the struggle over resources are often at the core of any such conflict. Christian and Muslim leaders should not shy away from asking the question why such conflicts sometimes assume a religious coloring leading to

Christians and Muslims fighting against each other and, in some places, setting mosques and churches ablaze. It is imperative that we recognize that religious differences are often among the causes of such conflicts. We need to be objective and frank since the identification of the real causes of any given conflicts is part of the solution.

There is the danger of stereotyping, demonizing and criminalizing a whole religious community. This can become a source of conflict. "See what the Christians are doing...", "See what the Muslims are doing..." The perpetrators represent only a small segment of the religious groups and their actions may not necessarily be motivated by their religious beliefs or shared by other members of their religious group.

### **GLOBALIZATION OF OUR ACTIONS**

The universal significance of Christianity and Islam, as exemplified by Muslims and Christians being spread all around the globe, coupled with the theological and ideological statements of all Christians belonging to the body of Christ and all Muslims belonging to the *ummah* means that conflicts anywhere could lead to conflicts everywhere. In practical terms, this implies that actions, which individuals and nations need to take, have to be looked at globally before we act locally since our local actions could have global consequences.

### **ADVOCACY FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT PREVENTION BY EXAMPLE**

Working towards peace as Muslims and Christians requires that there is peace among the two religious groups before other actors, for example state actors, can be engaged. For instance, in the late 1990s a conflict was simmering in Ghana between the ruling party of the former president, Jerry John Rawlings, and the opposition led by John Agyekum Kufuor. At the same time, itinerant polemical Christian and Muslim preachers created violent confrontations between Christians and Muslims in some parts of the country. The political situation in the country was so tense that the Christian Council of Ghana and the Ghana Muslim Representative Council invited the political leaders to broker peace between the feuding political factions.

In his opening remarks, Jerry John Rawlings asked the religious leaders whether they and their membership were themselves at peace with one another. He asked the religious leaders to go back and reconcile themselves and their followers who engaged in violent confrontations and then to come

back to teach the political leaders about peace. Unless they did that, he argued, they had no moral authority to broker peace between politicians.

This example suggests that unless Christians and Muslims consciously talk and live peace they have no moral authority to broker peace between politicians and feuding factions. In other words, unless and until Christians and Muslims are at peace with one another as religious communities, they have no right to engage in peace building and conflict transformation with other actors.

## CONCLUSION

In many African countries, concerted efforts will have to be made by all sectors of society in order to create an environment of peace and harmony; only then can development be sustainable. The importance of the contribution of religious leaders and religious groups with specific development agendas teaming up with governments and civil society to work toward achieving that goal cannot be overemphasized.

It is well known that in a number of countries in Africa the political class listen to and sometimes even consult religious leaders. Religious leaders are also often urged to contribute to the socioeconomic development agendas of nations. At the first African Union (AU) interfaith dialogue forum held in Abuja, 15–17 June 2010—the general adviser of PROCURA was a member of the steering committee that helped to plan the forum—the AU emphasized the importance of involving African religious leaders in the continent’s peace and development agenda. This recognition informed the AU’s choice of the forum’s theme “Advancing Justice, Peace, Security, and Development: Harnessing the Power of Religious Communities in Africa.”

The declaration issued at the end of the forum reemphasized the importance of the role of religious leaders and communities in accelerating the pace of integration and development of Africa and the need for them to join hands with the political élite and civil society to continue to work for justice, peace, security and development.

The forum reiterated the responsibility of religious leaders as moral and ethical guarantors of peace and societal transformation. Citing numerous examples, the forum referred to situations where religious leaders have served as agents of change in the prevention, mitigation and transformation of conflicts using the enormous spiritual, moral and social assets that religious leaders and religious communities have. There was a commitment at the forum to form a permanent steering committee of religious leaders that would help to develop an agenda for mutual engagement with the AU to enhance and strengthen the quest for sustainable peace, security and development.

Religious leaders are indispensable agents of peace and environmentally friendly development. All that is needed is for Africa to harness its religious institutions to become partners in a holistic development framework that will add value to development.

It is the spiritual, moral, economic and environmental development of the African continent that informs PROCMURA's second operational principle of constructive Christian engagement with Muslims for peace and peaceful coexistence towards the holistic development of the human family.

# THE FUTURE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

*Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'aMphahlele)*

Development is a process by which the members of a society increase their personal and institutional capacities to mobilize and manage resources to produce sustainable and justly distributed improvements in their quality of life consistent with their own aspirations.<sup>1</sup>

“Development” is not just a matter of reducing poverty and eliminating hunger. It is a question, rather, of building a world where everyone, no matter what his social status, can have a full human life, freed from servitude imposed on him or her by other men [sic], a world where freedom is not an empty word.<sup>2</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

In the book that opens the Christian Bible, the Book of Genesis, one gets a sense that according to the biblical narrators/authors/editors, a human being, (cf. the use of word 'ādām [human being] in the Hebrew text of Genesis 1:26,27), irrespective of the color of their skin and gender, was

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<sup>1</sup> David C. Korten, *Getting to the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda* (West Hartford: Kumarian Press, 1990), 67.

<sup>2</sup> Francis Gichia, “Christian and Human Liberation,” in Jesse N. K. Mugambi (ed.), *Christian Mission and Social Transformation. A Kenya Perspective* (Nairobi: NCKK, 1989), 94–102, here 100.

charged with the responsibility to “develop.”<sup>3</sup> The object of development, at least according to the narratives of creation, was not other human beings, but the earth (cf. Gen 1:28; Gen 2:15). Even the mandate given to human beings to “develop” the earth was not given within the context of exploitation for one’s own selfish gain (Gen 1:28), but of stewardship, whereby the stewards were charged with the responsibility to nurture earth. The latter, like human beings, is also a member of God’s household. In Genesis 1:26–28 we thus read:

Then God said, “Let us make humankind (*’ādām*) in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth.” So God created humankind (*’ādām*) in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”

All humans were and are, irrespective of their ethnicity, race and gender, created in the image of God. According to Bourke and Elliot, the biblical story of the beginnings of humankind shed light on this sameness (equality). They reason:

The biblical story of creation tells us that God created one couple who became the parents of all people on earth. In striking contrast to other creation stories in the ancient Near East, no kings, no thrones, no walled cities appear “in the beginning.” Not only do the first people bear no mark of ethnicity—the Bible affirms that all peoples come from a single origin—but they are without nationality. In the Acts of the Apostles, Paul will later declare that God has limited the times and boundaries of all nations (Acts 17:26); all rise and fall in history, and none is eternal. While the royal imagery of other ancient Near Eastern cultures depicted the gods in kingly regalia, seated enthroned and giving commands like monarchs, in Genesis, the image of God is borne by two people who stand naked and defense-

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<sup>3</sup> I am indebted to Rev. Dr Hulisana Ramantswana for bringing the notion of development to bear on the theme of creation as it is revealed in the Priestly account of creation. In his view, “In the Old Testament, the proto-Israel-Adam and Eve as God’s vice-regents were commanded to ‘subdue’ which implies that creation ‘was not fully developed, that there was not a once-for-all givenness’ at the end of the creation process.” See Terence E. Fretheim, *God and the World in the Old Testament. A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 14.

less in a garden. How fitting that a prominent Israeli human rights organization has chosen the name *B'tselem*—"in the image."<sup>4</sup>

In the following paragraphs, I shall refer to my interactions with grassroots Christians in three Africana<sup>5</sup> contexts, namely Ghana, Kenya and Jamaica as both a working framework and a context within which the theme of the paper is presented.

### **THE AGENCY OF THE GRASSROOTS CHURCH: SELECTED AFRICANA (PENTECOSTAL) CONTEXTS**

John Mbiti's claim regarding the incurable religious nature of Africans continues to interest scholars of religion, including Mbiti himself. In 2000, a group of eighteen Africana scholars of religion<sup>6</sup> set out to investigate the interrelationships between African-ness, religion and poverty in five Africana contexts—Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, Jamaica and the USA. To achieve their main research objective they had to spend two weeks for five consecutive years in a specific Africana context. During this period, they not only listened to and engaged with local experts on the research theme, they also, and more importantly for the purposes of this essay, engaged with grassroots faith communities (mostly Christian). Their engagement with the latter was done with a view of establishing how, informed by their religious convictions, people of faith dealt with the challenge of poverty.<sup>7</sup> This can be reformulated as follows, How do poor people of faith empower themselves in order to survive the undesirable conditions they face? The words of Ellis and ter Haar come to mind here:

Moreover, it has become common in development cooperation to emphasize the importance of true partnerships in fostering a cooperation whose binding forces are said to be "solidarity and mutual respect" (Commission for Africa, 2005: 89). If

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<sup>4</sup> David G. Burke and Neil Elliot, "Study Notes on Genesis 2," in *The People's Bible Commentary, New Revised Standard Version with Apocrypha* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 135.

<sup>5</sup> The adjective "Africana" is used in this textual context to refer to contexts inhabited by African-descended people both on the African continent and in the African diaspora.

<sup>6</sup> The preceding claim was revealed during John S. Mbiti's presentation at the meeting of the African Association for the Study of Religion in Edgerton, Kenya, July 2012.

<sup>7</sup> The end product of the scholars' work is the book edited by the main coordinator of the project, Peter Paris, *Religion and Poverty: Pan African Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

this is indeed so, it implies taking seriously people's world-views and considering their potential for the development process as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

Nürnbergger seems to endorse the preceding notion of the poor's agentic nature when he argues:

Far from helping the poor to get out of their misery, the continued contact between such unequal partners, including the so-called "development aid", can only worsen their position. That is why the poor should sever ties with the rich and start to develop on their own lines, using their own resources...<sup>9</sup>

Having been part of the "Pan-African Seminar on Religion and Poverty," some of the insights that I gathered from my interactions with some of the local African Christians in selected contexts are included in this essay. The latter are Christians whose locales/contexts until today are been viewed as objects of development by those from outside the context. Not only their contexts, but the people who inhabit those contexts, are deemed to be in need of being developed. In my view, this is a problematic term and notion.

## RUMINATING ON MY GHANAIAN EXPERIENCES

In my interaction with some Pentecostal Christians in Ghana, I was fascinated by the observation that the pastors did not have to struggle with basic resources for survival. Congregants shared the harvest proceeds with their pastors, an exercise which reminded me of the African corporate mentality.<sup>10</sup> Maleke Kondemo also observes that, in the Democratic

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<sup>8</sup> Stephen Ellis & Gerrie ter Haar "Religion and Development in Africa," at <https://openaccess.leidenuniv.nl/bitstream/handle/1887/12909/ASC-071342346-174-01.pdf?sequence=2>, 353; See also Ignatius Swart, "Church, Mission and Development: Revisiting the Pragmatic Debate," in *Missionalia* 31:3 (Nov. 2003), 405–26.

<sup>9</sup> Nürnbergger as quoted by J. Kritzingger, "Church and Development," in *Scriptura* 39 (1991), 15–24, here 18.

<sup>10</sup> When attending the wedding of Rev. Dr Lechion Peter Kimilike, one of my former doctoral students in Njombe Tanzania, in July 2012, I was fascinated, but also embarrassed (comparing the socioeconomic situation of Tanzania to that of South Africa) about the many gifts that were given to the bridal couple by the cheerful and singing company of the attendees. A revealing experience considering the fact that Tanzania is (one of) the poorest countries on the African continent. Two African proverbs come to mind: One hand washes the other and the Northern Sotho/ Pedi proverb: *Go fa ke go fega*, literally, to give is to store, meaning, giving, cannot be a wasteful exercise. Even in the midst of poverty, poor African people

Republic of Congo (DRC), the churches play a significant role in addressing the needs of those who are poor. She reasons,

The local church is often itself composed of the poor, and its members share the same suffering. It meets the physical needs of the poor and brings them together spiritual support, which restores their self-esteem, dignity and hope.<sup>11</sup>

Two practical examples of the Ghanaian churches' response to poverty that I was privileged to witness during my visit to an Assemblies of God church are in order at this stage. The youth had raised funds to purchase computers for the church. The three computers were presented to the church on the Sunday of my visit. The computers would enable the unemployed church members to acquire skills necessary for finding employment. On the premises of the same church there was a dressmaking school for the training of needy church members. These projects remind us of the contention of some of the development advocates that "...efforts are better spent allocating resources that will inculcate the skills needed to be economically active."<sup>12</sup>

Similarly, in his biblical model of human development, Mc Glory Speckman commends Peter and John on what they did to the physically challenged man at the Beautiful Gate (cf. Acts 3:1-10). Because of the apostles' deliberate choice not to give him alms (read, "development aid" or "handouts"), but healing him by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the apostles enabled the one whose life had been characterized by the shame of begging to rise up and join the crowd. As a result, the man was able to use his legs, to work and to earn a living. Speckman reasons,

The man has been healed, therefore he will no longer depend on handouts. He will have to use his hands to earn a living. The apostles restored the use of his limbs instead of giving him a handout. Significantly, he is not elevated as the most important person thereafter. He becomes part of the active and "well-organised" crowd.<sup>13</sup>

My encounter with some Ghanaian Christians revealed not only the ability of poor people of faith to be agents of positive changes in their lives, but

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have a way of successfully navigating through their situations. Could one argue that they have a way of developing themselves?

<sup>11</sup> Maleke M. Kondemo, email conversation, 16 October, 2012, 1.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. James Midgley, "Growth, Redistribution, and Welfare: Toward Social Investment," in *Social Service Review*, vol. 73, no. 1 (1999), 3-21, here 9. Available at [www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/515795](http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/515795).

<sup>13</sup> McGlory T. Speckman, *The Bible and Human Development in Africa* (Nairobi: Acton Publishers, 2001), 241.

also brought to light an important shift from the traditional Pentecostal church's emphasis on peoples' spiritual lives to channeling energy to the material needs of the needy congregants. The tendency to focus on the spiritual needs of congregants is not only a weakness of the traditional Pentecostal churches. In my view, it is a general "sickness" of the universal church. The church in apartheid South Africa is a perfect example of the tendency of the powerful to focus the attention of the oppressed on heavenly riches in the *eschaton*, while the preachers are themselves enjoying the earthly riches here and now.<sup>14</sup> In the process, the harsh realities of the oppression of the weak can be perpetuated in the name of God, through the use of the Bible. Another example is the fact that in the midst of the death-dealing situations and harsh realities caused by HIV and AIDS the church still has not effectively integrated the discourse on HIV and AIDS into its sermons, Bible studies and practice.

## ENCOUNTERING THE MATHARE CHRISTIANS IN KENYA

Situated in one of the slum areas on the outskirts of Nairobi, an area in which the harsh reality of extreme poverty stared us in the face, we received a warm welcome from the church members in Mathare village. We found ourselves in the midst of lively, joyful people, whose way of worship barely revealed the reality of poverty all around them. What I found intriguing and revealing in terms of the agency of poor Christians was the fact that the same shack which was used as a church, served as a crèche for orphans and children from poor families during the week.

Like in many a Pentecostal church on the African continent and elsewhere on the globe, the centrality of the Bible in worship is evident. It is clear from the members' testimonies about Jesus Christ's involvement in their lives that the Bible (and the God proclaimed in the Bible) is viewed as a powerful spiritual resource in their daily struggle for survival. We cannot rule out the positive effects of the received sermons and Bible studies

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<sup>14</sup> According to Ramantswana, the idea of development cooperation best comes out in the judgment scene as pictured by Jesus in Mt 25:32-46. The economic aspect of development is foregrounded by the preceding text because the fact that resources should be channeled toward addressing the needs of the poor, the sick, the prisoner and the stranger is considered. Ramantswana continues: "The church cannot be said to be fulfilling its role in the development of creation for as long as her concern are simply spiritualized – the longing for personal salvation, the desire to go to heaven when we die, etc. The church that will be realized in the future is one which is evidenced today by her involvement in the human and social affairs" H. Ramantswana, email conversation, 16/10/2012.

in such settings. Perhaps such communities might be further empowered by the Old Testament story of the two widows, the narrative of Naomi and Ruth, to which we will return later. What about an African context in the African diaspora? We now turn to my encounters with Christians in Jamaica.

## **REVIEW OF SOME OF THE PAN-AFRICAN SEMINAR EXPERIENCES IN JAMAICA**

Jamaica is a beautiful island with more churches per square mile than any other country in the world.<sup>15</sup> The neo-charismatic churches, most of which have American roots, account for thirty percent of the ecclesiastical landscape and it is not clear whether or not the church in Jamaica has the capacity to address the needs of grassroots Christians. How does the church fare in terms of development related issues? Or, put differently, how helpful is Christian spirituality to the overall life of Jamaicans, particularly poor Jamaican women? According to Roper, in Jamaica faith is not translated into social action because it remains privatized. The church is not contextual because it remains an imported plant.

Elsewhere Speckman warns, "If development were to be undertaken on a general assumption that 'Africans' need to be developed, implementation would be a problem. Each cultural group has specific ways of doing things and different priorities; these need to be taken cognisance of."<sup>16</sup>

One speaker captured the Jamaican situation by noting that Jamaica had beautiful churches but suffering communities.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Ian Boyne reprimands Christianity (the church) in Jamaica for its failure to address the nation's needs. It has failed to live up to the standards of a balanced gospel message because the "prosperity" gospel has taken the upper hand, particularly in charismatic and Pentecostal church settings. The Jamaican church is detached from the needs of the people. I also witnessed such detachment on my visit to the United Pentecostal church or Bethel Tabernacle United Pentecostal church in Ocho Rios. During the Bible study session, the teacher presented a "woman-enslaving" Bible study on the text of 1 Corinthians 11:1-16. She did this despite the affirming words on the board which stood on the front wall of the church "Let my people go."

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<sup>15</sup> M. Evans, "The Church's Responsibility in the Struggle for Sustainable Development." Paper read at the Pan-African Seminar on Religion and Poverty in Kingston, Jamaica.

<sup>16</sup> Speckman, *op. cit.* (note 13), 288.

<sup>17</sup> Simpson-Miller, unpublished paper presented at the session of the Pan African Seminar on Religion and Poverty, Ocho Rios, Jamaica, 2003.

Can these kinds of churches—typical not only of the Jamaican, but also the (Pentecostal) African Christian landscape and Africa in the diaspora, be helpful in our human development efforts?

The preceding examples of my personal encounters with people of faith have hopefully revealed that religion, spirituality and the church have the capacity to prepare fertile ground for all people—in particular the vulnerable—to empower themselves and to achieve sustainable levels of development. As has been noted previously, the centrality of the Bible and Jesus appears to help Christians, individually and corporeally, to persevere when the going gets tough. On account of the centrality of the Christian Bible in such settings, it would not be an exaggeration to assume that Christians take their cues from some of the biblical texts.

### **A MYRIAD OF READINGS, BUT ONE STORY: THE BOOK OF RUTH**

The Book of Ruth continues to enjoy various readings by female authors. It has been read as a narrative that reveals the cooperation of two women in an unfriendly and empty environment.<sup>18</sup> It may be read as a story of Ruth's independence,<sup>19</sup> as well as the proclamation of God's faithfulness revealed in human actions.<sup>20</sup> The Scroll may be read through the African cultural lens to disclose the points of resemblance between the narrative events and comparable events within African cultures.<sup>21</sup> The Book was read as a story in which

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<sup>18</sup> Cf. Denise Lardner Carmody, *Biblical Woman: Contemporary Reflections on Biblical Texts* (New York: Crossroad, 1998), 32–37; Judette Gallares, *Images of Faith: Spirituality of Women in the Old Testament* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1994), 77–111; Renita J. Weems, *Just a Sister Away: A Womanist Vision of Women's Relationships in the Bible* (San Diego: Lura Media Carmody, 1988), 23–24; Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978), 166–99.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Sarojini Nadar, "A South African Indian Womanist Reading of the Character of Ruth" in Musa W. Dube (ed.), *Other Ways of Reading: African Women and the Bible* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2001), 159–75; Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'Mphahlele), "For Better, For Worse?," in *The (Christian) Bible, Women and Africana Reality. Old Testament Essays*, 22 vol. (2009), 126–50.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Katherine Doob Sakenfeld, *Ruth: Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville: John Knox, 1999); Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'Mphahlele), "A Commentary on the Book of Ruth," in Daniel Patte et al (eds), *Global Bible Commentary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2004), 86–91.

<sup>21</sup> Musimbi R. A. Kanyoro, *Introducing Feminist Cultural Hermeneutics: An African Perceptive* (New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2002), 35–57; Madipoane Masenya (ngwan'Mphahlele), "Ngwetši (Bride): The Naomi-Ruth Story from an African-South African Woman's Perspective," in *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol. 14, no. 2 (Fall 1998), 81–90.

women affirm their inherent power to fight poverty and emptiness in their lives<sup>22</sup> and as a tale of women who have been abducted into marriage.<sup>23</sup> For the purposes of this essay, the Book of Ruth will be read as a story of “powerless” women who have the agency to make things happen. They remind us of the agency of poor Christians who I encountered in Accra and in Nairobi and their counterparts elsewhere on the African continent and its diaspora.

## THE AGENCY OF THE TWO WIDOWS

The Book of Ruth relates the narrative of two widows who refused to be pulled down by factors such as their gender, which ordinarily might have challenged their will or desire to empower themselves.<sup>24</sup> They were women in a patriarchal world where, until today, female power is not legitimated and their success and ability to “develop” things or themselves was always closely linked to a male patron. At the time, a woman was either a virgin in her father’s household, or a wife in the house of her *ba’al* (read “husband”). Naomi’s words in Ruth 1:8–9 to her husbandless daughters-in-law make sense against the preceding background:

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and

<sup>22</sup> Cf. Madipoane Masenya (ngwana’ Mphahlele), “A Commentary on the Book of Ruth,” in Patte, op. cit. (note 20), 46–59.

<sup>23</sup> Wilda C. Gafney, “Ruth,” in Hugh R. Page et al (eds), *The Africana Bible: Reading Israel’s Scriptures from Africa and the African Diaspora* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2010), 249–54, here 250–52.

<sup>24</sup> Speckman’s remarks on the significance of developing human beings are noteworthy: “The apostles’ dealing with the crippled beggar is a lesson to the church and other Christian charity groups, that material relief is not an end in itself. Nor is it a permanent solution to the problem of poverty. *Developing the person might be a long term solution, but it has more permanency than occasional hand-outs*” (op. cit. [note 13], 268; author’s own italics). Swart holds a more or less similar view when he opines that the churches’ role in development ought not to be so much in the execution of projects than in effecting a profound change in people’s inner orientation, in the institutions of power as well of those systems of power that govern society (Ignatius Swart, “Church, Mission and Development: Revisiting the Pragmatic Debate,” in *Missionalia* 31:3 [Nov. 2003], 405–26, here 418). Also, ter Haar and Ellis support the notion of holistic development when they argue: “Neither economic growth nor even state-building should be thought of as goals in themselves, although both are crucial aspects of a better future for Africans. Any development enterprise must begin by considering how peoples’ full range of resources, including their spiritual or religious resources, can be used for their general well-being. Op. cit. (note 8), 1–11.

with me. The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.” Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud.

Since their social, religious, economic and cultural life was tied to those of the men in their lives, it made sense that the institution of heterosexual marriage was critical for women, particularly younger ones. It is therefore no surprise that widows were poor. The main protagonists in the Book of Ruth are female, widowed and poor. The women, in particular Ruth and Naomi, whose story is known to the reader, would have had every reason to continue to feel bitter toward Yahweh, wallow in despair and self-pity, and perhaps impatiently await their fateful futures. Not so with Naomi and Ruth though. Possibly motivated by their God-given spirit of resilience, their faith in God, who is initially viewed with distaste by an embittered Naomi (Ruth 1:20–21), the two ended up not only managing to “develop” themselves spiritually, socially, culturally, politically and economically, but to “develop” Boaz himself. One is here reminded of Swart’s words: the need for development is not one-sided.

The pragmatic debate, to a larger extent still the radical account, challenges such a one-way direction and asks for a *double movement* to be established. In terms of this new understanding, the imperative of renewal, of change, is no longer reserved for the poor and foreigner “out there” but is fundamentally *redirected* to the rich (or privileged) and their life worlds, of which those Christians and churches involved in development are very much a part. Development is no longer regarded as a problem or issue exclusively of the poor but fundamentally also of the rich and privileged. What is asked from the latter is nothing less than an alternative consciousness.<sup>25</sup>

Boaz ends up being “developed” socially, materially and politically not by his peers nor by those more powerful than him. The man of substance, is eventually “developed” by two widows, one a foreigner in Judah, a Moabite woman, and another, an elderly woman.

As readers of the story of the two assertive single women—single not by choice—we are presented with Ruth, a Moabite childless widow, who chose, against all odds, to *davaq* (cling) not to a man, but to an elderly mother-in-law, Naomi (Ruth 1:15–17). The young woman’s powerful words of commitment to an elderly widow could not have come from someone with low self-esteem. The words came from an independent woman, who chose to assert herself (even against the wishes of her mother-in-law) in a precarious situation.

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<sup>25</sup> Swart, *ibid.*, 418–19.

But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!”(Ruth 1:16-17).

Ruth chose to leave the comfort zone of Moab, her home country, which was probably more developed than Judah. She went to an unknown country which was most probably first introduced to her by her deceased husband. It is noteworthy that the two women’s innovative moves to leave Moab for Judah were not motivated by the deity (cf. the visitations by the deity in the case of Abram for example). Naomi and Ruth are presented by the narrator as acting on their own initiative. Precarious as Ruth’s position was, as a sonless widow, a foreigner, a Moabite to boot, Ruth did not hesitate to propose marriage to Boaz, a man of substance (Ruth 3:9). She eventually managed to renew her life, Naomi’s, as well as Boaz’s. The widow-friendly “development” system in Israel (cf. the system which allowed widows to be spared a share in the fields), enabled Ruth to display her *botho/ubuntu/hesed* to her mother-in-law, initially through what she gleaned from the fields (Ruth 2). Later on, she revealed her commitment to the “development” of Naomi by bearing a son to her (Ruth 4:14). In the same way, encouraged by a tenacious, unstoppable daughter-in-law, Naomi held on to the plan to seek security for Ruth (read, “developing” Ruth) through marriage (Ruth 2:20; 3:1-2). The two women succeeded to navigate their patriarchal context and eventually empowered themselves. By getting what they wanted, their lives became transformed for the better.

## **DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION: LESSONS FOR THE CHURCH?**

### **SELF-DEVELOPMENT: WHEN THEY ARE WEAK, THEY ARE STRONG**

According to ter Haar and Ellis,

Most policymakers today accept that sustainable development can be achieved only if people build on their own resources. Logically, these assets should be considered to include not only intellectual and social resources, but also spiritual ones, if and when these are available.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Stephen Ellis & Gerrie ter Haar, “The Role of Religion in Development: Towards a New Relationship between the European Union and Africa,” in *The European Journal of Development Research*, 18:3 (2006), 351-367, here 353.

The above examples of my interaction with various African Christians have hopefully shed some light on the fact that many poor people sitting in the pews of our churches are neither helpless, nor powerless or hopeless. They, like Ruth and Naomi, refuse to be overwhelmed by any precarious situation in which they find themselves. As previously stated, all human beings, irrespective of how they might have been categorized by others, are equally created in the image of God. It could be argued that for the many who constitute the membership of our churches, such a sense of self-worth, a confident self-image, is also nurtured by their faith in the same God.

Lunn opines

It is in the process of self-determination that communities will find emancipation from current conventional development models and engage with development which is appropriate and sustainable. Such development alternatives will be locally relevant, community-based and bottom-up as opposed to the *dirigiste* and top-down development of the past. It is in this context that I would suggest that religious organizations, religious values and religious worldviews all hold significant potential for emancipation and an alternative future for development.<sup>27</sup>

The poor have the capacity to contribute to their own empowerment. Clergy and various church leaders are responsible for tapping into such human resources in their efforts to contribute to the poor's individual development ventures and those endeavors that are conducted by the wealthy in their churches. As they do that, they will be taking a step in the right direction toward the elimination of the shame of begging typical in many African contexts. To that end, there is a need to affirm biblical hermeneutics and/or God-talk

#### **OFFERING AFFIRMING/EMPOWERING BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS AND/OR GOD-TALK**

In order to tap into the resources of its membership—people of faith, particularly those members who are at the margins of communities of faith—the church leadership needs to proclaim a liberating, transforming God talk and/or biblical hermeneutic. For instance, in a context of spousal infidelity, it cannot be development friendly for preachers to preach the unquestionable subordination of women. In a cultural context (cf. both the ancient Israelite and African contexts) in which the control of the sexuality of married women remained/s the male prerogative, could the emphasis

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<sup>27</sup> Jenny Lunn, "The Role of Religion, Spirituality and Faith in Development: A Critical Theory Approach," in *Third World Quarterly* 30 (2009), 937–51, here 948.

on male headship and female subordination (cf. Eph 5:22–29) by pastors/counselors be found to be helpful? In light of the deadly HIV and AIDS pandemic, how useful is a theology that idolizes marriage—a theology that seems to convey to single women that the only way to holistic development is through acquiring a Boaz? Similarly, an anthropocentric theology/biblical hermeneutic, one which elevates humans above all other members of God’s household, one which sets great store by hierarchies, may not be helpful in our attempt to be ecologically sensitive.

### **THE FALLACY OF A ONE-SIZE-FITS-ALL APPROACH**

The Ghanaian and the DRC church settings, in which the churches take care of the needy, as well as the generosity of poor Tanzanians, can be attributed to the positive influence of African culture on Christians. This was something that I missed in my encounters with Jamaican Christians. The way in which the church interacts with childless women and the unique challenges facing single mothers should be different from how it engages with married women who have children. The churches’ development strategies employed in war-ridden contexts would not necessarily be the same as those used in relatively peaceful contexts. If the church were to respond to the unique needs of its members, with the agenda being set by the marginalized themselves,<sup>28</sup> the church would be on the right path toward the renewal of the lives of the people of faith.

Rather than pursuing a one-size-fits-all approach, the church has the responsibility to come up with development strategies that will prioritize the challenge of youth unemployment. In South Africa for example, the figure is a staggering 3.2 million. In light of this, is it not high time that churches put youth in the forefront? Perhaps churches need to heed the questions raised by Mabotja, Mangalaza, Mdluli and Ramphalile,<sup>29</sup>

- In the context of continued global instability, what would an alternative inclusive model of development that avoids the problems of an overly capitalistic model look like?
- In as far as the youth have been disproportionately affected by the crisis, to what extent can a youth driven model provide solutions that

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<sup>28</sup> In the pragmatic model, argues Swart, the rich are asked to prioritize the interests of the poor from the perspective of the poor themselves. Swart, *op. cit.* (note 24), 419–20).

<sup>29</sup> The four researchers are attached to the Human Sciences Research Council, Pretoria, South Africa.

move us from a consumerist model to one that places the environment at the center of development?

### THE CHURCH'S AND SOCIETY'S CONSCIENCE

Every government is responsible for protecting the needs of its members and to provide services. The African proverb, *lešaka la pelo ga le tlale*, literally translated “the kraal of a heart never gets full,” underscores the human inclination towards greed. The more powerful people become the more power they crave and power usually corrupts. Corruption and political power have become bedfellows in many a context today. Corruption is not an unlikely guest in some church development projects. With members of both the African (and global) communities daily witnessing the truth of the proverbial heart's kraal, the church has a responsibility not to lose sight of its prophetic mission, that is, to speak truth to power. The words of the late Mzee Jomo Kenyatta about the church's role of conscientization spring to mind:

...The church is the conscience of society and today society needs a conscience. Do not be afraid to speak. If we go wrong and you keep quiet, one day you may have to answer for our mistakes.<sup>30</sup>

### CONCLUSION

As I conclude, what comes to mind is the Northern Sotho/Pedi proverb: *serokolwana se sennyane, se ikoketšaka go nkgā*, “a small (but effective) herb increases its impact (influence) by releasing a strong odor.” Those who might be deemed “weak” in our midst have effective ways of surviving in hostile, life-denying contexts. However, does that exonerate the powerful members of our churches, that is, both from within and without, from taking responsibility? Can the latter simply ignore the responsibility to be their sister's and brother's keeper? In case they think the latter is the case, let me remind them of the words in James 2:14–17:

What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, and one of you says to them, “Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,” and yet

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<sup>30</sup> As quoted by Francis Gichia, “Christian and Human Liberation,” in Jesse N.K. Mugambi (ed.), *Christian Mission and Social Transformation. A Kenyan Perspective* (Nairobi: National Council of Churches, 1989), 94–102, here 100.

you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

A faith that is alive will enable its bearer to seek righteousness and justice. Persuaded by such a faith, we are continuously reminded that for as long as there is a section of God's humanity which is oppressed (in one way or another), we are all oppressed. As a common humanity who came from the same source, we need to seek and bring life (to the best of our abilities) to our predominantly life-denying contexts. The words of the Reverend Samuel Kobia, written more than two decades back, still hold water today:

In the early work of the church, mission encompassed almost everything that the church did—evangelization, formal education, health work, social work, agriculture and industrial work. That approach was interrupted in the early 1960s in the wake of development as a discipline and profession. We need to revisit the earlier concept and method of mission work. *The concept of life or, better still, fullness of life will best help us to describe the mission of the Church. It is in search of fullness of life for everybody that the question of justice and sustainability come in.*<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Samuel Kobia , "NCKK as Enabler for Church Mission, in Mugambi, *ibid.*, 9–25, here 14. Author's own italics.



# CASE STUDY I

## RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT: THE PRAXIS OF THE LUTHERAN COSTARICAN CHURCH

*Carlos Bonilla*

### **WHAT KIND OF RELIGION ARE WE TALKING ABOUT IN THE LUTHERAN COSTARICAN CHURCH?**

#### **THE NATIONAL CONTEXT: A DEVELOPING COUNTRY**

##### *Social movement in the 1940s*

Between 1940 and 1947, Rafael Angel Calderon Guardia, who had studied in Leuven, Belgium, and was the parliamentary candidate of the coffee grower's oligarchy, made a number of significant changes. He created the University of Costa Rica, the Caja Costarricense del Seguro Social, as well as the Code of Work, a very advanced and important piece of pro-workers legislation at the time. The Communist Party backed him in this important institutional process as did the Roman Catholic Church, led, at the time, by the socially aware bishop Mons. Victor Manuel Sanabria.

In those years, a group of young businessmen and intellectuals proposed changes to the prevalent economic model demanding an end to the *cafetaleros* [coffee growers] monopoly and space for new industrial activities. One of these young businessmen, Jose Figueres Ferrer, took advantage of an electoral fraud and declared a civil war against the government, seized power and made some savvy decisions. He dissolved the armed forces in order to avoid a military coup d'état. He banned the Communist Party (which had been accepted by the Roman

Catholic Church under the condition that it change its name to Vanguardia Popular [Popular Vanguard]; decided to maintain the social achievements obtained by the popular movement and the Calderon Guardia Government in the early 1940s; and promoted the creation of several institutions for fighting poverty, including institutions for housing, social welfare, land and colonization, electricity and energy and the national banking system.

Over the next thirty years, Costa Rica grew into a strong, socialist democracy and retained a clear alliance to the USA. This avoided an open intervention from the USA and allowed the country to grow up as a “developing” country.

### *A “deteriorating” country*

The 1980s and 1990s were years of structural adjustment and wars in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Nicaragua. The demise of real socialism in Europe and new demands from certain sectors such as smallholder farmers, women (feminist movement), environmentalists and others led to important legal achievements.

The years 2000 to 2012 saw rapid technological development, the creation of The United States–Dominican Republic–Central America Free Trade Agreement (CAFTA), the privatization and restructuring of institutions focused on fundamental human rights (health, education) and the emergence of new movements advocating for sexual diversity and the rights of the fourth generation.

### *A country in political and ideological reverse. Revitalizing the involvement of religion in politics*

**Justo Orozco and the Catholic bishops:** Justo Orozco, a Costa Rican congressman, was elected by the evangelical Christians. His “Christian” party, which is supported by the prosperity megachurches, is opposed to sexual diversity and in vitro fertilization. Orozco believes HIV and AIDS to be God’s punishment for homosexuality and is adamant that Costa Rica must remain a confessional state—even if that confession is Roman Catholicism. He opposed the Affectivity and Sexuality Program in the certainty that this would open the door to abortion, homosexuality and feminism. In mid-2012, he was appointed to the Legislative Committee for Human Rights. Publicly, this evangelical congressman is fully supported by the Catholic bishops of Costa Rica.

**MEP affectivity and sexuality program:** An unbiased reading of this program clearly shows that this program is based on values that we, as Christians, can share: respect for the other; responsible father and motherhood; love and tenderness in all human relations, not only sexual ones. Yet, the Roman Catholic and evangelical churches are trying to stop this program.

**Secular state/concordat:** Over the last years, there have been an increasing number of calls for Costa Rica to become a secular state. These calls have been backed by some priests close to the Vatican, under the condition that constitutional reform is accompanied by a concordat with the Vatican. Thus the Roman Catholic Church seeks to retain and even increase its privileges.

This is the context within which the Lutheran Costarican Church has developed its practice and accompanies persons and communities on their journey to God who loves us with the tenderness of a good father and the strength of a good mother.

## **WHAT KIND OF DEVELOPMENT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT IN THE LUTHERAN COSTARICAN CHURCH?**

### **HOLISTIC DEVELOPMENT: CULTURAL, POLITICAL, ECONOMIC, SPIRITUAL**

Inclusive development: providing for the rights of sexual minorities, indigenous peoples, migrants, women and excluded or discriminated groups (HIV and AIDS) with a strong ecological and agro-ecological component. Until now, even though the church does not use the word “development” in reference to its own work, it is clear that it is strongly influenced by the concept of sustainable development.

### **WHAT DOES RELIGION CONTRIBUTE TO DEVELOPMENT?**

- An ethical perspective: common good, inclusiveness, dignity and centrality of the human person; transparency and accountability (truth); stewardship (critical approach); relativity of achievements and failures; historical patience/patience of God: nonlinearity of the process; a utopian (teleological) perspective: kingdom of God—perspective that encourages hope and maximizes energy, a sense of life perspective, a systematic practice.

### **WHAT ARE THE RELIGIOUS RESOURCES FOR DEVELOPMENT?**

- Professionally trained staff, including lawyers, psychologists, sociologists, accountants, business managers, theologians, architects, agro-ecologists and musicians.
- Open houses, multipurpose rooms, access to social networks
- Leadership with moral authority.

*Is religion simply being instrumentalized for development work without taking seriously the religious criticism of the contemporary development paradigm?*

- Contrary to being instrumentalized, religion helps enable the encounter between knowledge and sensitivities—the dialogue between the deep culture of native peoples and concepts and alternative models of solidarity based on the Christian faith.
- The church takes seriously the critique of the contemporary development paradigm and links it to other critical trends from theology: anti idolatry in the context of capitalist development; the dignity of the human being; and the liberating rereading of Genesis about the relationship between human beings and nature.

*Are these important resources for professionals and the beneficiaries of development?*

“Beneficiaries” (we prefer to say partners) are mainly believers who live in poverty. Religion’s human and infrastructural resources provide the possibility for improving their situation not only in material terms but, more importantly, their spiritual and cultural well-being that contribute to a deeper and more holistic transformation.

In the case of the Costa Rican church, the professionals are mostly pastors of the church. In some cases, they are lay members of the church or people who are not members of the church but share the church’s principles and philosophy in relation to the values that should guide humans in their attempt to build more fair, inclusive and equitable social, political, community and ecclesial structures.

The relationship between the Costa Rican comprehensive vision regarding the pastoral function in developing faith communities and the diaconal function with projects that integrate faith communities does not take place without tensions and imbalances. The church is trying to adopt mitigating measures and necessary changes, without giving up the essence of its concept of integrated mission.

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE NEW CONCEPT OF RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT AND FORMER LINKS BETWEEN DEVELOPMENT AND CHRISTIAN MISSION**

New concept of religion and development	Christian Mission (traditional concept)
Respect the culture of the copartners	Mostly based on cultural impositions (pedagogical models, health models, architectural criteria, clothing)
Seek the transformation of reality, based on overcoming the causes of “non-development”	Seek to “help,” taking care of people in poverty and in ill health, without understanding the root causes of such needs and conditions
The copartners actively assume the struggle for life, and develop their gifts and talents	The “beneficiaries” are considered victims (without making clear who the agents are, with little chance of doing something for themselves)
Emphasis on collective approaches, through the community, not forgetting the individual dimension	Emphasis on serving the individual while setting aside the community dimension
Comprehensive and holistic in all its dimensions (spiritual, economic, ecological, political, cultural, etc.)	Limited comprehensiveness. Attention is usually given to “spiritual” needs and some “material” aspects that “the beneficiary” lacks
No proselytization. Pursuing equity and justice. Offers an open door to compromise and to share faith and life in the church community	Frequent proselytization: “witness of love for the recipient’s conversion”

**WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES OF THE DEVELOPMENT DISCOURSE?**

One of the challenges is to transcend “developmentalism” (including “alternative development”) and to seek alternatives and changing the focus of development, currently based on the separation of culture and nature. This leads to the exploitation of nature and the oppression of millions of people.

**“EL BUEN VIVIR” AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO DEVELOPMENT.**

This concept cannot be translated simply as “the good life” or “quality of life,” in the Western sense. Eduardo Gudyans and Alberto Acosta’s ideal vision of society is based on the underlying principle of *buen vivir* which implies that well-being and fulfillment can only occur in a community that is social but also encompasses nature. The concept of *buen vivir* could potentially be incorporated into a healthy and sustainable development model that replaces the current paradigm. In Bolivia and Ecuador, the concept of *buen vivir* has already attained constitutional rank.

Contemporary ideas about development were first formalized in the 1940s and reference is often made to the 1949 speech of President Harry Truman, who regarded the idea of development as successive developments in the linearity of progress

Development is also defined in relation to “underdevelopment.” The situation in the industrialized countries was the “gold” standard and its systems of government and cultural patterns were to become examples for the global South.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, Latin America and other regions in the global South should implement a certain set of policies, instruments and indicators to exit “underdevelopment” and enter the desired status of “development.”

Despite the fact that over recent decades, most countries have tried to follow the prescribed and often imposed route to development, only very few have succeeded. On the contrary, we can observe today bad development that is widespread, even in the global North.

According to José María Tortosa, today’s world system is a “bad” developer in terms of its own logic, since it is based on an idea of “trying to maximize efficiency and results, reduce costs and lead to the endless accumulation of capital.”<sup>2</sup>

Since the 1960s, different models have been emerging, due to the dissatisfaction with the linear process of development, carried out at the expense of the people and the environment.<sup>3</sup>

The objectives of and means to advance development differ significantly from one school of thought and author to another. Since the 1980s, these

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<sup>1</sup> Wolfgang Sachs (ed.), *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge as Power* (London: Zed Books, 1992) and Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (London: Zed Books, 2002).

<sup>2</sup> José María Tortosa, “Maldesarrollo inestable: un diagnóstico,” in *Actual Marx/ Intervenciones*, n° 7 (Santiago de Chile: Universidad Bolivariana/LOM Ediciones, 2008), 121–38.

<sup>3</sup> Koldo Unceta Satrústegui, “Desarrollo, Subdesarrollo, Maldesarrollo y Posdesarrollo. Una Mirada transdisciplinar sobre el debate y sus implicaciones,” in *Carta Latinoamericana*, 7, at [www.cartalatinoamericana.com](http://www.cartalatinoamericana.com).

have included, among others, the environmental and sustainable approach to development. While originally sustainability required a substantial reformulation of development, over time this idea diversified into many different streams, including those that were mere instrumental reforms attempting to relaunch development and economic growth.

In Latin America, the views on development vary significantly. This explains the fact that, in the region, positions have changed many times between a consistent economic reductionism and insistent claims of all other dimensions of social existence or, in the words of Aníbal Quijano, “between different power interests” and, Quijano adds, initial attempts were “eclipsed by increasingly elusive horizon and their bearers and followers were caged by disenchantment.”<sup>4</sup>

The region played an important role in generating critique of conventional development, such as Raul Prebisch’s well-known initial structuralism, the different emphasis on dependency theory, until more recently the neo-ECLAC’s structuralism. While these heterodox positions were of considerable importance, they also had certain limitations. On the one hand, their questions were unable to probe the core concepts of the conventional development paradigm expressed, particularly in terms of economic growth. Furthermore, whereas these questions generated a wave of critique, they failed to join together and shortly began to run out of steam and conventional ideas returned to the forefront.

This explains why, despite the emergence of various positions during the 1970s, the current, dominant development paradigms persisted and actually worsened under the neoliberal market reforms of the 1980s and 1990s. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, renewed warnings emerged regarding the environmental damage caused by Western patterns of consumption and the increasing signs of the earth’s exhaustion. The conventional development paradigm could not provide adequate answers to these alerts. As a result, the quest for alternative models, seeking to break with cultural and ideological foundations of contemporary development and appealing to other images, goals and practices, was resumed.

In this climate, certain ideas, rooted in traditional Andean knowledge, focused on people’s welfare and defending the relationship with the environment were quickly able to influence the development debate and propose alternatives to it. This is the space occupied by the ideas joined under the category *buen vivir*, which is a “concept under construction” and is influenced by a number of different ideas, ranging from those gener-

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<sup>4</sup> Anibal Quijano, “El fantasma del Desarrollo en América Latina,” in Alberto Acosta (ed.), “El Desarrollo en la Globalización. El resto de América Latina,” *Nueva Sociedad* (Caracas: ILDIS, 2000), 11–27.

ated by academia to the practices of social movements. Based in part on the recovery of indigenous “knowledges,” it departed from conventional Western ideas of progress and pointed to a different conception of the good life, including paying special attention to nature. Although *buen vivir* cannot simply be associated with what, in the West, constitutes the “good life,” it does not reject Western knowledge per se, especially not critical trends arising from environmentalism and feminism. Thus, it is not a form of indigenous mysticism or the aspiration to return to the past. Rather, it promotes the interaction, mingling and hybridization of knowledge and is influenced by alternative ethical positions, such as the recognition of the rights of nature, contributions of feminism and newly emerging concepts in the areas of justice and human welfare.

*Buen Vivir* constitutes the meeting place of different cultures, such as the sumac kawsay, feminists or biocentric trends. It is not a mere exercise or multicultural juxtaposition of cultures, but a cultural encounter, understanding the equality of different cultures, operating with anti-colonialist criteria and rejecting the concept of the superiority of the imposed hegemonic Western knowledge.

Hallmarks of the *buen vivir* concept include: an alternative relationship with nature; the decolonization of knowledge; another ethics to recognize and assign values; the rejection of the manipulation of the environment; a spirit of encounter, dialogue and interaction between different “knowledges.”

In respect to Lutheran Costarican Church, *buen vivir* allows us, first, to break the vicious cycle of *developmentalism* and, secondly, provides a biblical and theological approach founded on concepts such as the kingdom of God, stewardship of the creation and life in abundance. I think that it is very close to the biblical Shalom, in the sense of peace that arises from justice and reconciliation.

# CASE STUDY II

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIETY: THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN TO PEACE

*Lindora Howard-Diawara*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In challenging times such as these, when religion and development are gradually being contested at different levels of society as a result of current global changes and trends, including economic downturns, advances in technology and communication influence our values and ways of thinking. Religious institutions, just like other institutions, including government, need critically to reflect and strategize on repositioning themselves in order to remain relevant and steadfast in carrying out their mandate. In the following, I shall share with you an experience of the way in which women can be instrumental in transforming society.

### **ABOUT THE WOMEN IN PEACE BUILDING NETWORK (WIPNET)**

The WIPNET program of the West Africa Network for Peace building (WANEP)-Liberia was established in 2001 as a gender mainstreaming tool and aimed at promoting and increasing the involvement and participation of women in building peace. WANEP defines peace building as the process whereby social relations are developed and strengthened and functional structures are guaranteed so that people feel that their basic needs for security, relationship, love and freedom are being met.

The WIPNET program was launched in Liberia in July 2002. Its first program coordinator, Leymah R. Gbowee, was actively involved in the Lutheran church, serving as the president of the Women's Auxiliary of St Peter's Lutheran Church. Because of her commitment to and leadership in mobilizing women for peace in Liberia and the success of the non-violent and peaceful campaign, the "Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace," in helping to end the Liberian civil conflict, Leymah shared the 2011 Nobel Peace Prize with Liberia's president Ellen Johnson Sirleaf and Tawakkol Karman of Yemen.

The campaign brought together women from different backgrounds: rich and poor, traditionalists, Christians and Muslims, young and old. Between April 2003 and December 2005, in pursuit of its objective not to stop until hostilities had ceased, daily, twelve-hour, massive sit-in protests were staged across the country between 6 am and 6 pm.

## **THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND CURRENT TRENDS**

During the long drawn out Liberian civil war (1989–2003), Liberian women discovered their roles and responsibilities in society. Prior to the war, the multiple roles women played at different levels of society were not much discussed. Men were largely regarded as the breadwinners and decision makers. While the war did not lead to a complete shift in roles, it did lead to the discovery and recognition of the major contribution women had made to the transformation of Liberian society.

**Period of conflict:** These were times of massive destruction, the breakdown of the social fabric and disintegration of the family. For example, daughters and wives were being taken away as sex slaves or cooks while some husbands and sons were being forcibly conscripted into the armed forces and others were killed by the so-called freedom fighters, liberators, redeemers, etc. On all sides, there was a grave misuse of power. This brought about a shift in the roles of men, many of whom were either dead or could no longer ensure protection or had to hide in so-called safe spaces in order to survive.

As a result, numerous women and girls became the breadwinners thus ensuring their families' survival. In some cases, they tried to protect their husbands, sons and other male relatives from being killed. One way of doing this was to take the risk of befriending those from the opposition and to gain favor with them in exchange for the protection of their families.

Despite numerous peace talks, fighting continued leading to a seemingly endless cycle of violence and war. As a result, women, organized by such groups as the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), the Liberian Women Initiatives (LWI) and others, tried to do everything they could to advocate and

lobby for peace. Attempts to mend relationships at higher levels were only moderately successful. This, then, was the basis of the Mass Action Campaign in 2002 that brought together mostly grassroots women. Chanting the slogan, “enough is enough,” they demanded that (a) all parties attend the peace talks that were scheduled to be held in Accra Ghana in June 2003; (b) there be an immediate and unconditional ceasefire; and (c) an intervention force be brought in.

Despite some obstacles, their demands were met and all parties attended the talks. Initially, they were expected to last for a few weeks but, in fact, they continued for about three months. Once the agreement was signed, there was a gradual ceasefire. The United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is still in Liberia in the name of “keeping the peace.”

**Period of transition:** Whereas the killings had for the most part ceased, there was increasing sexual and gendered-based violence in addition to massive depression and deprivation since, through the signing of a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), those who had been the leaders of the destruction and considered themselves to be freedom fighters, liberators and redeemers were appointed as the country’s leaders. They were the ones who, with the help of international partners, were expected to develop and design policies, programs and processes in order to stabilize the country.

United under the banner of WIPNET, women played the following roles in terms of reorganizing society and advocacy:

- Advocates and lobbyists using slogans such as, “We want Peace not more War,” “Violence, Never Again”
- Trainers—capacity building through training such as confidence building for women by women, advocacy, etc.
- Informants and early warners<sup>1</sup>
- Agents of protection and security—linking “peace hut” initiatives to community policing initiatives
- Bridge builders (between fighters and communities)
- Educators—sensitization and awareness raising (women are powerful: we have control over our husbands, sons, relatives and, if we do not do it, no one will do it for us)

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<sup>1</sup> Early warners are those trained to monitor conflict trends and warn or give advice in advance so as to prevent violent conflict(s).

- Prayer warriors<sup>2</sup> and intercessors—“They had the guns, we had our God. And so we had nothing to fear!” This really is not a cliché as we believed in it.

**Post Conflict:** With the ushering in of a newly elected government by the transitional government in 2005, Liberia began and continues to experience the reign of its first female president, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the first female African president. For many women from within and outside Liberia, this indicated success and the beginning of an end to many of their problems. However, there were some who realized that a lot of work lay ahead because if the president failed the newly gained status of women in society would come under serious threat. WIPNET recognized the need to remain vigilant and continue to focus on its agenda and vision. Women were responsible for continuing to play a key role in society. There was no specific agenda as such. The initial agenda had been developed during the period of conflict on the assumption that once the guns had been silenced and hostilities had ceased, life would return to normal and women would continue to exercise their new roles and responsibilities. This, however, was not the case.

For example, as internally displaced women moved back home to their towns and villages, WIPNET began receiving renewed reports of communal violence, including sexual and gendered-based violence such as assault, battery and rape, with victims ranging from one-day olds to six-year olds. In Bong, in central Liberia, there were reports of women being killed and skinned or disfigured and dismembered. In light of these unbearable reports, WIPNET recognized that there was a need to go back to the drawing board to strategize and plan. In 2006, WIPNET organized its first national women’s conference to develop an agenda for peace, security and development. While the agenda was a political tool for engaging diplomatically, it needed constantly to be changed since the issues kept getting bigger and bigger with an increasing number of women and girls, in what had been assumed to be protective environments, being assaulted by the police and even their husbands and fathers. Advocacy therefore became the focus again while, at the same time, carrying out the specific mandates of the program as spelt out by WANEP. As a result, most of the roles mentioned above were carried out but with a different focus:

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<sup>2</sup> Although the phrase “prayer warrior” is not found in Scripture, a prayer warrior is generally thought of as a Christian who prays continually and effectively for others in the manner of praying taught in Scripture. [www.gotquestions.org/prayer-warrior.html#ixzz2Z7pc5sRi](http://www.gotquestions.org/prayer-warrior.html#ixzz2Z7pc5sRi)

- Advocacy and lobbying in order to influence policy on women's issues
- Capacity building through training such as confidence building, advocacy, peace building, leadership development, etc.
- Education and enlightenment (sensitization and awareness raising)
- Bridge building in order to link community women's groups for solidarity
- Prayer warriors and intercessors, etc.

## **GUNS KNOW NO RELIGION**

In the midst of fighting and throughout the whole sensitization process the question was raised as to why there should be a division between Christian and Muslim women. WIPNET embarked on the Peace Outreach Project (POP) which, over a period of six months, from Mondays to Thursdays reached out to schools and communities, on Fridays to mosques, on Saturdays to markets and on Sundays to churches. The slogan, Women Awake for Peace, was simple and addressed to all women, regardless of tribe or religion. In her capacity as president of the Women's Auxiliary of St Peter's Lutheran Church, the president used her influence to promote tolerance between Christian and Muslim women. This resulted in the birth of two initiatives, namely the Christian Women's Peace Initiative (CWPI) and the Liberian Muslim Women for Peace (LIMWOP), which collaborated on issues of peace, security and development during the period of conflict and transition. In predominately Muslim areas, Muslim women lead the meetings or engagement processes and vice versa. They prayed, sang and ate together during this period of learning and discovery. The foci were the influence in a male dominated context and women's contribution to sustainable development.

Seven years after Liberia's first postwar elections, numerous attempts have been made to ensure the sustainable development of society, especially that of women by women. For example, several programs and projects focus on livelihood support, specifically in the areas of agricultural development and access to finances and skills, including microcredit, business loans and business development training. Most of these are project based (short term) and not institutionalized and focus more on providing handouts rather than the development of skills and the transfer of knowledge. In my view, this creates more harm than good as it is not sustainable. One example is the area of microcredit. Interest is payable within a certain timeframe. The running time and interest vary and sometimes the creditor is unable

to repay the loan. Some lessons have been learned and there has been a shift from microcredit programs at the community level to village banking programs. Here women are taught important skills and introduced to saving or banking, financial management, accountability to one another, and leadership. Women appear to be excited about this program.

Although women have tried to speak out and push for success in the area of sustainable development, it is uncertain whether and how development can become sustainable in the midst of high levels of poverty, illiteracy, dependency, unemployment, corruption, power, greed, weak government structures and systems, the existence of limited institutional capacities, high influx of NGOs (national and international) with limited coordinated work and harmonized principles of development in Liberia and each wanting to take the credit for a job well done. How can there be sustainable development if Liberians have not yet really learned how to fish?

More women than before are in leadership positions and becoming policy makers and influencers. Unfortunately, the majority are political appointments and have very little “gender on their agendas.”

In light of this reality, WIPNET came to the conclusion that while it was good to consider peace activism and working toward transformation, it is a process and a burden that all Liberians have to carry.

#### **LESSONS LEARNED**

- Religion and development play a major role in and have a considerable influence on transforming society. The various processes initiated at both levels would need to be less political and contextualized for success to be assured.
- Having religious leaders or representatives from religious institutions play key roles in helping the government understand what the people want in a given context can be very helpful in the processes of developing national agendas.
- Women would not have been as powerful and active had it not been for the support of men and religious institutions. For example, the then Lutheran bishop, Sumowood Harris, attended many meetings and programs when called upon and also served as an advisor. Similar roles were played by the Catholic archbishop, Michael Francis, the Liberia Council of Churches as well as the Chief imam of the National Muslim Council. Religious leaders supported specific actions carried out by the women and allowed for the use of mosques and churches for programs. Imams and pastors alike used their preaching to join the process by

delivering peace messages and encouraging their members to get involved. Other churches and mosques sent representatives to join various fast and prayer sessions and programs since they believed the issue to be of concern to all Liberians and not only to one group of people.

- Gender roles change over time and according to place and situation.
- When the learning environment reflects the realities of women and they are supported to act, creative and innovative approaches to problem solving can be achieved, e.g., the WIPNET concept of “peace huts.”
- The transformation of society requires the transformation of all actors. Therefore, recognizing the important roles of each and every actor would enhance the process.
- Solidarity groups must not give up. Some politicians were supportive of women during the crisis, but once things had settled down, they withdrew their support for the women’s advocacy initiative. For example, a lawmaker once said during a period of advocacy, “These are not war or transitional times when we are organizing ourselves. Now that we have a legitimate government, women must learn to follow the rules.”

### **CHALLENGES**

- The challenges WIPNET faces include: limited communication and understanding of “The Women of Liberia Mass Action Campaign;” politicization; misunderstanding and misinterpretation of both religion and development when dealing with specific issues, i.e., gender, sisterhood; limited resources and capacities (human and financial) to implement specific programs; managing expectations; challenging male dominated systems and structures consistently; working with women with different perspectives; bringing on board younger women; very limited research and documentation regarding existing issues, experiences and work carried out; managing the link between building peace and economic development; managing perceptual and organizational conflicts regarding the operations of WIPNET and WANEP.

### **OPPORTUNITIES**

- The election for the first time of a female president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, now in her second term; strong national and international political will and increasing support for women’s empowerment; increasing global

advocacy for women's empowerment thereby leading to the creation of policies and mechanisms for implementation; the many platforms for dialogue on current issues and developing strategies for moving forward such as ACT Alliance, the LWF, Inter-Religious Councils; increasing awareness and knowledge of targets, sometimes referred to as marginalized groups on the development side and as brethren or members on the religious side; practical lessons learned regarding specific experiences of religion and development.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS, PREDOMINANTLY IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH NEED TO:**

- Get involved with and promote initiatives not only of conflict management and resolution but of general transformation, especially conflict prevention in light of large scale or deadly conflicts. The church, for example, needs to tackle structural issues and not just those at the surface.
- Reexamine educational programs and systems and ensure that programs become standardized, relevant to the changing context and stand out among many regarding impact and transformation. This, for example, would include the role of religious institutions in mainstreaming gender with specific reasons for providing more spaces or opportunities for the empowerment of women and youth.
- Further improve on existing leadership development initiatives or programs that not only promote leadership development within the existing institutions but include other life skills and program components that help prepare members or constituencies for leadership both in and outside religious entities.
- Become involved in research programs that help influence national policies and programs related to structural problems in society. This could limit the politicization of certain issues.
- Think outside the box and explore interreligious partnerships beyond borders aimed at promoting networking, external learning and exposure that could help to promote tolerance and peace and help in the repositioning process. In a nutshell, get to know and better understand each other.

- Explore every possibility of growth, development and sustainability with regard to becoming financially viable and relevant.

**DEVELOPMENT ORGANIZATIONS NEED TO**

- Recognize and fully understand that religion plays a key role in creating a conducive environment for the implementation of programs and projects, specifically as they relate to people who must accept, participate and play key leadership roles in the development of themselves and their communities
- Reexamine its “do no harm” principles and operational mandates and identify similar values shared by religion as a starting point for partnership engagement and dialogue. This can also refer to religious organizations and communities

Religion contributes significantly to giving meaning to life and sets specific traditional or cultural benchmarks for ensuring social order. Development that seeks to facilitate growth and progress is influenced by religion and vice versa. Hence, religion and development cannot be separated.



# CASE STUDY III

## RELIGION AND PEACE: REFLECTIONS ON THE ECUMENICAL CHURCH LEADERS IN ZIMBABWE'S PEACE PROJECT

*Ambrose Moyo*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over the past decades, Zimbabwe has seen the decline and collapse of all sectors of the economy as well as the moral, social and political fabric of the nation. The democratization of Zimbabwe has been accompanied by severe, politically motivated violence, most notably before, during and after elections. This has traumatized and embittered many individuals and communities. In addition, the culture of violence appears to have become endemic to Zimbabwean culture and urgent steps need to be taken to end this culture of violence.

In the face of such widespread pain, anger, bitterness and trauma it is imperative that the church reflect on its role in such a polarized society. During the tumultuous years following Zimbabwe's independence, the church has not been able to speak with one voice. It is no longer as visible as it was during the struggle against colonialism and has become increasingly irrelevant because of its failure meaningfully to engage with contemporary social, economic and political issues of concern to the ordinary Zimbabwean. A small group of church leaders resolved to challenge the entire leadership of the church in Zimbabwe constructively and positively to engage with one another, the nation and its leadership in resolving certain challenges.

In addition, the group recognized that, in order to become an effective instrument, the church in Zimbabwe has to undergo a paradigm shift in its understanding of church leadership. It must become inclusive of all persons in leadership positions in the church, both clergy and lay, rather than be limited to heads of denominations. Furthermore, they acknowledged the need to engage all members of the church in creating a just, peaceful and tolerant society and to motivate all church leaders, particularly the heads of denominations, actively to participate in such a process.

It is within this context that the Ecumenical Church Leaders' Forum (ECLF) was founded in October 2008 and officially registered as a trust in August 2010. It started as a small group of concerned church leaders from the major ecumenical bodies, including the Zimbabwe Council of Churches (ZCC), Zimbabwe Catholics Bishops' Conference (ZCBC), Union of the Development of Apostolic Churches in Zimbabwe and Africa (UDACIZA) and the Evangelical Fellowship of Zimbabwe (EFZ), who recognized the need meaningfully to intervene in contemporary social, economic and political issues. In 2009, the church leadership held several consultations to reflect on the church's practical role in the context of a critical environment whose political and socioeconomic conditions had left a hurting and traumatized nation.

The ECLF is a voluntary Christian organization and membership is open to church leaders from all Christian denominations, regardless of origin and background. The Forum recognizes that religion should be about real life, manifest through peace, justice, liberation, freedom, unity and righteousness in the land. It brings together Zimbabwean church leaders to reflect on issues of concern to the nation such as the role of the church in Zimbabwe in peace and nation building, and together to develop strategies and programs for social action in their churches. In their reflections, the church leaders became convinced that "Development without peace is not sustainable, and peace without development is not durable" (UNDP motto). With this in mind, the Forum resolved to focus its interventions on strengthening the capacity of the church and community leadership in negotiation skills for conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation (CPMRT) as well as in community dialogues.

The overall goal was not simply to establish an independent organization to compete with the umbrella ecumenical bodies but, rather, to amplify the church's prophetic voice and to augment, encourage, influence and serve as a catalyst from within the umbrella bodies and to enable them to take their prophetic and social responsibility seriously and speak with one voice on issues of common concern. The aim was to make those church leaders who were comfortable with the situation in the country uncomfortable and to encourage them to raise questions regarding the church's relevance in

Zimbabwe today. The ECLF was therefore born out of a need for contextual reflection and action by the church in Zimbabwe in order to make a positive and constructive contribution toward finding a solution to the challenges facing the nation. The group of concerned church leaders finally resolved to give priority to peace building as a critical project in nation building. Today, the Forum is active in all of the ten provinces of Zimbabwe, with churches and communities welcoming its long overdue message.

### **WHY WAS THE PROJECT NECESSARY?**

- Over the years, politically motivated violence had left many hurting and polarized communities and individuals waiting for an opportunity to retaliate. Something had to be done to defuse the tension and help the people of Zimbabwe move toward positive peace.
- Violence as a means of solving conflict, including domestic violence, gender based violence, violence against children, sexual violence, etc., had become endemic to Zimbabwean culture. There was a need for a serious education program at all levels of society involving all institutions in order to create a non-violent culture.
- The cycle of politically motivated violence before, during and after every election, which results in disputed elections and ineffective government such as the current inclusive government, needed to be broken.
- In the face of such widespread pain, anger, bitterness and trauma it became imperative for the church to reflect on its role in peace and nation building in such a polarized society and to take concrete action to remedy the situation.
- There was a growing paralysis among the key actors in society, i.e., church and civil society.
- The church had become increasingly irrelevant because of its silence vis-à-vis and lack of meaningful engagement with contemporary social, economic and political issues of concern to the ordinary Zimbabwean citizen.
- There was concern about the lack of sustainable community development despite the billions of dollars that have been invested in development projects by governments and donors since independence. Zimbabweans

were growing poorer and poorer. Development funds were dwindling at alarming rates because of conflicts which had undone most of the development initiatives since independence. This proves that development without peace is unsustainable. The small group of church leaders therefore felt that there was a need to engage the government, the church and donor communities and to reflect on the necessity to invest in peace and nation building for sustainable development.

- Some of the concerned church leaders had themselves been victims of political violence and therefore felt that the church must develop strategies to educate the people of Zimbabwe.

### **WHY MUST THE CHURCH BE INVOLVED IN ZIMBABWE?**

- The church is one of the most influential institutions in the country and present in every village or community. The vast majority of Zimbabweans are Christians and see the church as the only sign of hope. Ultimately, this means that most of the perpetrators and victims of violence are Christians. The church, therefore, must be involved in the creation of a non-violent society in Zimbabwe.
- The church is at the grass roots, on the ground, and therefore shares the experiences of pain, poverty and trauma daily as it ministers to a traumatized people.
- It has the potential to transcend the political divide and polarization by being a non-partisan player. ECLF has earned the respect of all and is seen as a credible peace building organization because of its non-partisan approach.
- Peace has a natural place in religion.
- Religion has the theological and spiritual resources necessary for peace building, i.e., the message of reconciliation, forgiveness, healing, transformation, integration, etc. Peace building is at the core of the church's mission.
- In light of what the country has had to endure, one can only conclude that the church itself must bear responsibility for some of the ills faced by the nation as well as its underdevelopment. It must therefore be actively involved in the search for a solution if it is to remain relevant in Zimbabwe.

## ACTIVITIES

- **Equip** church and community leaderships with mediation skills as a tool for conflict prevention, management, resolution and transformation (CPMRT) as well as conducting community dialogues
- **Train** trainers in order to multiply the number of community outreach facilitators to roll out the program nationally
- **Organize** and coordinate teams for the outreach program
- **Conduct** two- to three-day community outreach/rollout programs involving chiefs, headmen, councilors, local politicians, kraal heads, youths, men and women
- **Conduct** trauma counseling training sessions for facilitators and the traumatized
- **Conduct** sensitization workshops in CPMRT for some members of the security sector
- **Conduct** CPMRT workshops for political leaderships at the ward and district levels
- **Conduct** community dialogues
- **Mediate** in conflict situations
- **Conduct** ceremonies for the healing of memories in the outreach programs. Most participants break down when they write about and share their stories with others
- **Network** with other organizations and institutions involved in peace building and trauma counseling to help us train our own counselors
- **Conduct** retreats for facilitators for debriefing since they themselves are traumatized by listening to the stories of traumatized workshop participants
- **Conduct** sports tournaments preceded by a three-day training program for the administrators of the clubs at the zonal levels. These administrators then organize sensitization workshops on CPMRT for the players and their

communities and invite ECLF to facilitate. Most participants in these tournaments are youths, some of whom have been involved in politically motivated violence due to unemployment which leaves them vulnerable to exploitation

- **Engage** trauma counseling professionals during community outreach programs to offer counseling sessions for facilitators and traumatized members of the community
- **Sensitize** the security sector—Zimbabwe Prison Service (ZPS), Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP)—through the Christian community and police networks
- **Fundraise** for the program.

## TARGETS

### DIRECT TARGETS

- Church and community leaderships at all levels
- Traditional leaders (chiefs, headmen, village heads)
- State security agents (police and prison service officers)
- Community members who turn up for the sensitization/rollout workshops in CPMRT and community dialogue meetings and outreaches. These have included participants from other religious traditions, including Muslims (e.g., at St Mary's township). In one workshop one of the participants identified himself openly as a Satanist
- Women and youths as agents of change
- Political leaderships at all levels
- Civil servants.

### INDIRECT TARGET

- Communities benefitting from the results of the positive behavior and awareness gained by those trained in CPMRT and trauma counseling throughout the country.

## IMPACT

- The question, Where have you been? is frequently raised. This is followed by the contention: Had you been here earlier a lot of the violence could have been prevented.
- Some communities are now working together on various development projects such as improving infrastructure, the women's poultry project at Chikurubi, the brick making project for the youths at Kezi and building roads by the Fanson community in Nkayi. Some of these projects relate to community development while others, such as the poultry project, have to do with income generation for the beneficiaries of the peace building projects.
- Some politicians are beginning to come together to talk peace.
- Community members or neighbors are attending funerals of members belonging to a different party. This did not happen before this intervention.
- People are setting up local peace corners and committees, on which the different sectors of their communities and political parties are represented, and meet regularly to discuss and monitor the situation in their district.
- In some communities, individuals have come together in groups that call themselves "Peace Advocates." They go to schools and hospitals and carry out certain activities for the benefit of the particular community or institution. This includes cleaning the in- and outside of the institution. ECLF provides protective clothing, tools, cleaning equipment and other needed items.
- Victims and perpetrators can tell their stories in each other's presence and embrace one another as a sign of reconciliation and forgiveness.
- Reduction of violent domestic, community and politically motivated incidences.
- Reduction of criminal cases, confirmed by the local ZRP, in areas where there has been this intervention, e.g., Dakamela in Nkayi.
- Victims are able to tell their stories and offenders capable of confessing to their crimes.
- Because of the importance of the peace initiatives, communities have started funding their own peace building programs (workshops and community dialogues). ELCF has been invited to facilitate these.

- Other organizations and churches have also invited ECLF to train them in peace building (e.g., Voices in the Vision for Africa (VIVA) Zimbabwe, Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe (ELCZ), Brethren in Christ Church (BICC).
- Certain sections of the security sector have invited ECLF to train its officers in CPMRT. This has resulted in a decline in violence and suicides within such sections.
- Throughout the country, community leaders and different sectors of society demand these peace building workshops. Many workshop participants have urged ECLF to take the program into schools.
- Because of the impact, some politicians who believe in violence have tried to undermine this program but the communities defy them and come to ECLF workshops.

## **LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE INITIATIVE**

- The ECLF has learnt that some people harbor suspicions regarding the workshops and think that the ECLF is a front for the Movement for Democratic Change. Others believe it to be a front for the Western powers or agencies, or have accused ECLF of being the mouthpiece of the ZANU PF. The ECLF has learnt to stick to its professional task of peace building and never to align itself with any political party or ideology. Furthermore, it needs to rise above partisan politics to become a credible voice that speaks honestly and authoritatively on peace building and national healing in Zimbabwe. Ours is a non-partisan approach which has helped the ECLF to earn the respect of all political parties at the grassroots level and the security sectors that have participated in the program.
- The ECLF acknowledges that there are elements within Zimbabwe that are not happy with the peace building programs.
- The ELCF quickly recognized that peace building requires that all stakeholders, whether we like them or not, need to be included. It has worked with the Office of the President and Cabinet (OPC), the Organ for National Healing, Reconciliation and Integration (ONHRI) and the UNDP's implementing partners to get funding from the UNDP.

- The workshops have revealed the extent of the pain Zimbabweans suffer. It is vital that the causes of this pain, hatred, tribalism and other forms of social segregation are attended to.
- The ECLF understands that constructive engagement, rather than confrontation, produces positive results in peace building. The ELCF needs to build on what is there and support various processes that will bring change and create a peaceful nation.
- Sports (e.g., soccer, netball, etc.) can be used as a tool for peace building and is one of the most effective ways if reaching the youth, most of whom are unemployed and therefore most vulnerable and prone to being used to commit acts of violence.
- An inclusive approach, regardless of gender, political and religious affiliation, class or other status, can bring about social cohesion.
- A peaceful environment is the *sine qua non* for sustainable development. Donors and partners can pour billions of dollars into community development but as long as there is no peace development it is not sustainable. While conflict is normal, necessary and inevitable, positive management skills are needed there where two or more people come together in order for peace to prevail in the home, community, work places, the church and the nation. It is imperative that development initiatives in contexts such as Zimbabwe begin by investing in peace building because we have seen that once there is peace in the community, the people themselves will initiate development projects and will merely require that someone accompanies them.
- The ELCF knows that donor priorities may not be priorities of the targeted groups. Community development projects have failed because, in most cases, donors come from overseas with their own priorities and NGOs tailor their proposals to suit the donors' priorities. That is why when conflict arises and people have not been trained to manage their conflicts, the first casualties are the products of our development initiatives because they do not own the structures; they belong to the donor. I am convinced that what the people of Zimbabwe need today above everything else is peace and that "development without peace is not sustainable, and peace without development is not durable."
- The need for incentives in support of community peace development projects is critical in order to maximize the impact of the peace building project. After being sensitized, many communities engage in projects and work to-

gether as an expression of their unity, regardless of political affiliation, thus learning to tolerate one another despite political differences, e.g., in Nkayi, Kezi youths, women at the Chikurubi Maximum Prison near Harare. We need to counter the incentives used by the perpetrators of violence to lure the poor and unemployed youths and women to engage in acts of violence.

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS AND CHALLENGES**

### **SECURITY OF THE CHURCH LEADERS**

Because some politicians and some members of the security sector suspect the organization to be part of a regime change agenda inspired by the West, the police have denied clearance to conduct workshops in some districts. Even there where permission has been granted, workshops have been disrupted, participants instructed to leave for their homes immediately and the facilitators arrested. In one incident the church leaders involved remained in police custody for four days although at the end no charges were filed against them. Due to lack of funding, the ELCF cannot engage legal services. The issue of security for all those participating in the program has not yet been solved satisfactorily since some people in positions of power are not happy about the program and its impact on the people.

At a 2012 workshop for chiefs, political leaders, headmen and other community leaders, the war veterans in the area had arranged for the bishop and his team to be abducted, beaten, tortured and killed because they were suspicious of the ECLF's agenda. A team of youths was waiting for a signal from their leader who had gone into the meeting to find out what these church leaders were all about. At the end of the second day, he was convinced that these were genuine peace builders and confessed his intentions. To prove that he was speaking the truth, he blew a whistle and a group of youths came from the neighboring bush carrying logs and ready for action. The leaders of the war veterans asked the youths to explain what had been planned. Back in the workshop, the leader of the war veterans publicly confessed his original intentions, apologized to the community leaders for what he had done in the past and said that thanks to the lessons taught by the church leaders he was now a new person. He clearly stated that he wanted the program to be rolled into every home in his community and that he himself would like to become a part of the peace building team.

On another occasion we were not sure whether we were going to leave the venue of the workshop unharmed. This was a meeting of very influential community leaders, including chiefs, politicians representing different parties, war veterans, the police, village heads, etc. At the end of the workshop, the

political leaders confessed that they had come committed to deal with us if they had discovered during the workshop that we belonged to the other party. This was also the first time that they had attended a meeting where there were members of other political parties. The tension in the hall was palpable but the facilitators managed to defuse the tension by the end of the first day and the participants realized that our approach was non-partisan and we were nothing but peace builders and our programs dealt with real life issues related to conflict management. On the second day, the leader of one of the political parties confessed that he had a sleepless night because he was expected violently to evict one family from the homestead but because of the previous day's lessons he could not do it. He had realized that this approach does not build relationships. He said he had used the early hours of the morning to inform his superiors that they had to find a more peaceful way of dealing with the challenge. At the end of the workshop, the ELCF was inundated with requests by chiefs, war veterans and others for similar workshops in their constituencies.

### **PROGRAM FUNDING**

The ECLF program on management and resolution of all forms of conflict—domestic, politically motivated, within churches, at the chief's kraal, etc.—informs participants about the nature of conflict and the different types of and approaches and responses to conflict, as well as conflict analysis. Moreover, it shows how conflict is exacerbated, how by dehumanizing human beings it is possible to torture and kill others and deals with topics such as the use of power, communication and mediation. Examples taken from participants' daily experiences at home, in the community, the church, politics, government, etc. are used with the aim of empowering people with skills to manage their conflicts non-violently. The participants' enthusiasm encourages others to participate in the program. ECLF does not have the necessary funds to respond to the growing number of requests for workshops from communities in all the provinces, especially from those that have been most affected by politically motivated violence. Further funds are needed in order to train more facilitators, sponsor more sports tournaments to reach out to the youths, most of whom are school drop outs, unemployed, frustrated and angry and lack incentive. It is they who are used to commit acts of violence.

### **TRANSPORT CHALLENGES**

The ELCF has two vehicles, donated by the UNDP, to cover all ten provinces. Consequently, the ELCF has only been able to run an average of seven to ten

workshops nationwide. If funding were adequate, ELCF could easily conduct three to four workshops a week in each of the ten provinces. Using public transport has become a big challenge for the ELCF facilitators who have to carry teaching aids such as flip charts and stands, handouts, notebooks as well as their own cases. In many communities, public transport is not available and mini-buses go one way in the morning and return in the evening. Facilitators frequently have to disembark from the bus some five to ten kilometers from the venue of the workshop and walk the rest of the way. In one instance, they had to use a donkey cart provided by the community. This speaks volumes about the commitment of our facilitators. The two vehicles are constantly in use, servicing as many workshops as possible during the same week. With more vehicles the ELCF could maximize the impact of the program on the communities.

## **GENERAL REMARKS**

The ECLF's peace initiative is widely recognized and accepted. The ONHRI was very skeptical at the beginning but now recognizes the ECLF's contribution to peace building in Zimbabwe. It has several times referred groups that wish to be involved in peace building to the ECLF for training. In 2012, ONHRI contributed USD 70,000 through UNDP in support of the ECLF's community outreach program.

The ECLF has been lobbying the government to put in place a legal framework for the healing and reconciliation process. There are issues raised by affected communities related to restorative justice which the ELCF cannot deal with and require government legislation. The ONHRI has finally drafted a bill that seeks to address peace building issues by setting up a National Reconciliation Council (Commission) which has gone through parliament and is in the final stages of becoming an official act. In addition, the Parliamentary Select Committee (COPAC) draft constitution has included a clause on the National Peace and Reconciliation Council. If the draft is adopted, then peace building will be a constitutional issue in Zimbabwe. The ECLF has greatly contributed to this.

The ECLF has also learnt that constructive engagement, rather than confrontation, produces positive results in peace building. It believes that we have to build on what is there and support various processes that will bring about change and create a peaceful nation. Working in isolation will not produce the intended results. The ELCF appreciates the support of the UNDP without which it would never have seen the light of the day. To date, the UNDP remains the main funder of the ECLF and is very much impressed by the work of the Forum. However, their funds are limited and the bureaucracy involved in order to access funds has caused considerable frustration.

# CHALLENGES FOR RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE ACT ALLIANCE

*Rebecca Larson*

A number of years ago, a major bridge collapsed during rush hour in the city of Minneapolis in the USA. Thirteen people were killed and seventy-nine injured—some seriously. This incident shocked not only the city, but the country—bridges in large US cities are not supposed to collapse. One of the people killed was a woman, Sherry Engebretsen, a member of Incarnation Lutheran Church. The next evening, her husband Ron was interviewed on national television. The camera showed him sitting on a TV studio couch, his arms protectively around his two young daughters. The reporter said something like, “So, Mr Engebretsen, this must be very hard for you and your children. I am so sorry for your loss.” Then she waited for his response.

Mr Engebretsen did not strike me as one who is comfortable speaking in public or talking about his emotions. But, he took a deep breath, struggled for a bit while the muscles on his neck worked hard to keep control, cradled his girls closer to himself and said quietly, “We are Lutheran. We are saved by grace through faith. We will be ok. Others will take care of us and we will take care of each other.”

I was astonished and felt tears welling up in my eyes as I wondered what combination of childhood prayers and Sunday school lessons and confirmation studies and sermons and hymns and church suppers had shaped this grieving, emotionally reticent man, so that, when asked on national television how he was going to cope with this unspeakable tragedy in his life, his first response was, “We are Lutheran. We are saved by grace through faith. Others will take care of us and we will take care of each other.”

It is in our DNA as Lutherans—is it not—that we are saved by grace through faith by the unconditional love of a gracious God. And that we, in thankful

response, serve and love others, especially those who are most vulnerable. This is the faith that has been passed down to us by those who have gone before. And now it is our turn to ask, as did they, what does this mean for us as a Lutheran communion and an ecumenical family, at this historical moment? The relationship between religion and development is part of that question.

Answers to that question in the past have shaped the missionary movement, post-colonial church relationships, the churches' engagement in liberation struggles, economic justice, gender issues and development. In Neundettelsau, the very stones of the streets carry the astonishing witness of service that has spread, and continues to spread, from this place throughout the world. But, now, the question is for our generation, and it comes to all of us in the ecumenical family. How do we together, at this moment in history, love and serve others—in a world deeply broken by injustice, conflict and unshared bread. This question is of utmost importance for people of faith, and it is high on the agenda of the ACT Alliance. For ACT it can be answered only in conversation and relationship with the churches.

ACT Alliance is a network of 132 churches and church related organizations related to the World Council of Churches and the Lutheran World Federation. ACT members work in three areas: humanitarian response, development and advocacy. ACT is present in 140 countries, working through national forums of members together with local churches, people of other faiths, civil society, the UN system, governments and all people of good will. Together ACT members, seventy-seven percent of whom are in the global South, have a local presence and global reach that makes ACT one of the largest humanitarian and development organizations in the world.

Normally ACT members are churches or church-related organizations that have a development department that specializes in humanitarian response and development work, or those that are entirely devoted to humanitarian or development work. As an ACT member, they commit to serving people who are most vulnerable irrespective of race, gender, belief, nationality, ethnicity, or political persuasion. All ACT members commit to a number of key international and alliance codes and standards that determine the way in which ACT members do their work and ensure participation and protection for the people and communities with whom they work. This is an important part of our transparency and accountability and one of the ways in which we respect the dignity of all. ACT members are committed to working with local churches that are not ACT members, and there are many good examples of where that is happening through forums or in other ways; although we know that there are also situations in which that it not yet happening in the way that we trust it will in the future.

I shall turn to the challenges of religion and development for the ACT Alliance. First of all, for ACT the relationship between religion and devel-

opment is much more of a resource than a challenge—precisely because serving the other is a part of our DNA as churches and church-related agencies. We can do no other. It is our identity. This means that all that is done by ACT members emerges, not from economic or social or cultural or gender analyses—important as those are for our work—but from our faith commitment. And it is our faith commitment, not external sources, that determine how we work, the standards we have and our accountability to God and those we serve.

I was recently rereading the founding document of the ACT Alliance, which is only two years old although the shared experience of ACT members together makes up over 2,000 years. It is very significant to note that, when founding the ACT Alliance, it was important to its members, all of whom are development workers, to begin by affirming their theological beliefs and commitments, and only then deriving from those commitments what ACT will do and how together we will do it. This articulation of identity and values is very strong, and it moves me deeply.

This is what it says:

We believe that all persons are created in the image of God. Therefore, we will....

We believe that God the Father as known through his Son Jesus Christ and revealed through the Holy Spirit and Scriptures, is the God of love who stands beside the poor and oppressed. Therefore, we will....

We believe the church is called to manifest God's gracious love for all people and work towards a reconciled human community. This witness is more clearly communicated to the world when we work together as members of one body of Christ. Therefore, we will....

We believe that the earth and all it contains are God's gifts, given out of love and care for all created beings. Therefore, we will.....

We believe that the resources available to us are not our own, but are a gift from God, and our vocation to service call us to be faithful to principles of good stewardship. Therefore, we will....<sup>1</sup>

This is the identity of ACT, as articulated by its members. This is also the primary, inherent and indissoluble relationship between religion and development in the ACT Alliance.

What then do these theological values look like when translated into transformational development? ACT contends that the profession of faith requires the rejection of those conditions, structures and systems which perpetuate poverty, injustice, the abuse of human rights and the destruc-

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<sup>1</sup> At [www.actalliance.org/search?SearchableText=founding+document](http://www.actalliance.org/search?SearchableText=founding+document)

tion of the environment. Concretely, that means that ACT seeks to ensure the following:

- **Participation**—the right to self-determination for all of God’s children in every aspect of their lives
- **Empowerment**—individuals and communities overcoming unjust power relations to achieve their human rights; involving styles of relationships, strengthening of community institutions and building technical capacity
- **Capacity development**—the capacity of people and communities whose rights have been violated to determine their own future by increasing skills, knowledge and access to resources
- **Non-discrimination**—honors the God-given dignity of each person
- **Gender equity**—requires gender analysis of roles and relationships, including power relationships of and between men and women, leading to the full participation of both women and men in transformational development; ensures that women have access to and control over their share of resources
- **Cultural and spiritual sensitivity**—a holistic understanding of the human being, so that cultural and spiritual dimensions and practices of people and communities are recognized, respected, enhanced and incorporated into the development process; cultural and religious practices which are harmful to individuals and undermine their human rights to be challenged. ACT does not use any development assistance for the purpose of proselytizing
- **Reaffirming human rights**—ensures that governments fulfill their responsibility as duty bearers to make effective peoples’ rights; focuses on the rights of the most marginalized and discriminated rights-holders
- **Advocacy**—addresses the root causes and effects of poverty and injustice at the community, national and international levels; most effective when people advocate for themselves
- **Peace, reconciliation and right relationships**—requires analysis of causes of conflict and violence, advocates cessation of oppression and violent confrontation; incorporates prevention and reconciliation

strategies; empowers individuals and groups to cope with past traumatic events

- **Effective communication**—listens to, respects and uplifts the voices of those who are marginalized and whose rights have been violated; is inclusive of gender, race and culture; is transparent about power and finances; depicts people with dignity and respect
- **Environmental sustainability**—challenges policies and practices that threaten God’s creation; works to preserve, maintain and regenerate natural resources; draws on the knowledge and experience of people, including indigenous peoples
- **Overconsumption and lack of sharing**—promotes sensitization, changed attitudes and actions within communities with excess resources and the ability to effect change

In the day-to-day work of ACT members there are many examples of the intersection between religion and development. In some cases, ACT programs are carried out in predominately Muslim countries, such as Mauritania or Sudan. The former director of the LWF Department for World Service, Brian Neldner, tells the story of being invited to talk with the government of Mauritania and sharing the story of the Christian sacred Scripture of the Good Samaritan as a way of explaining the interest of World Service in beginning environmental projects in Mauritania. Thus began a long LWF presence in that country resulting in very effective programs run by skilled and committed Mauritians, many of them women. One particular project involved the negative impact of female genital mutilation on the health of young girls. Unable to address this problem without also addressing the religious aspects of the problem, the LWF staff approached the imam leaders about what they were seeing and their concerns. These religious leaders agreed to consider this problem and came back to LWF to say that they found nothing in Muslim sacred Scripture that calls for female genital mutilation and lent their support to the community program. In Eritrea, the Lutheran, Orthodox and Muslim communities have for many years cooperated in a kind of *diap Praxis* dialogue through working together with collaborative community projects throughout the country. A few years ago, when the LWF World Service program in Cambodia transitioned to an independent national entity, the Buddhist staff chose the name LWD (Life With Dignity) so as to continue the first two letters of LWF, and designed their new logo to show hands reaching out to the world from a stylized shape that they know to be a cross. In Jerusalem, the presence of the LWF

at Augusta Victoria Hospital, located on the Mount of Olives and serving a Palestinian population with Palestinian staff, has been both a symbol and a catalyst for peace in that suffering land. Many, many more stories exist of where religion and development intersect for members of the ACT Alliance, precisely because we live and serve in a world where people are of many different faiths and of no faith. ACT is there to serve wherever there is human suffering and we believe we have succeeded when people with whom we work experience that we are there to serve.

How do we, at this moment in history, determine what we need to do to love and serve others in a suffering world? As one response, I want to share some of the thinking of the ACT Alliance as it experiences rapid changes in the world that have enormous consequences for the work that churches and church related organizations are doing in development. In ACT, the language that is used to talk about this phenomenon is the “changing development paradigm.” The analysis so far is both experiential and policy related and it is ACT’s intention to deepen and sharpen it, including at the 2013 WCC Assembly in Busan.

What do we mean by the “changing development paradigm”? There are two levels, both of which need to be considered simultaneously. The first has to do with what is happening in development given the existing paradigm that we know, the one which has shaped the work of the ecumenical family over the past years. Right now, at the global level, this includes especially two processes, both of which involve ACT as a faith-based organization working together with civil society, governments and the UN system.

The first is the question of what will happen after 2015, which is the end of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). ACT is deeply engaged with many others in civil society, through national consultations and the United Nations, in thinking through what happens now in light of the partial success, but stunning overall failure, of the MDGs. Related to this is the new global architecture for development effectiveness coming into being this month through the “Civil Society Organization (CSO) Partnership for Development Effectiveness” (CPDE). Bringing together thirteen civil society constituencies, one of which is the faith-based constituency, the CPDE is creating what has not previously existed: one global development platform for shared experience, policy development and advocacy. Of the fifty (final number still to be determined) seats on the CPDE governing council, four and, perhaps later, five will be for faith-based organizations (FBOs). Currently four seats are held by ACT, AACC, LWF and Caritas Internationalis. This constitutes a significant global and public recognition by the rest of civil society of the importance and effectiveness of FBOs in development processes.

These examples are indicative of the engagement of ecumenical FBOs through ACT at the global development policy level, which is made possible

only because of the legitimacy given to ACT and other FBOs by virtue of their extensive role in development at the community level. Unfortunately, not a lot of research has been done to quantify this involvement, although it is growing and providing important quantitative and qualitative data to support what is experienced in countries and communities around the world. The statistics vary across countries, regions and sectors. But, for example, in Africa alone and in relation only to the health sector, we know that through studies such as *Appreciating Assets: The Contribution of Religion to Universal Access in Africa* by the African Religions Health Assets Programme (ARHAP), FBOs play a much greater role in disease prevention, treatment and care than previously recognized; often about forty percent of health services are either owned or operated by FBOs. Such services usually operate outside governmental planning and therefore tend to go unrecognized or unsupported as critical actors in the health system. Related studies indicate that the FBO provision of national health services range from thirty to seventy percent across sub-Saharan Africa (though the higher range is in emergency settings).

For the second level of the changing development paradigm, however, we move to a very different paradigm, one that we do not yet know but which we know is coming. In ACT we are totally convinced that we are moving toward a profound change—or total paradigm shift—in how development is both understood at the policy level and practiced around the world and that this change will come in the very near future. We believe that we need to prepare ourselves for it even as we try to shape it. Below I shall list some of the factors known to contribute to creating radical change in the global development context as we know it.

- **Climate change:** climate change is rapidly influencing the lives of local communities and established global systems and patterns and we know people living in poverty are disproportionately negatively affected. We expect more natural disasters—sudden crises such as flooding and slow onset crises such as drought—of greater intensity, thus escalating humanitarian needs and with many, many more people on the move.
- **Global demographics, particularly of youth:** there is a sea change in the global makeup of the human family, especially with young people below the age of twenty-five. In South Africa alone, over 2 million youth are without jobs. We have also seen a new role played by youth in recent social and political unrest, including the Arab spring.
- **Global communication:** global communication is changing daily, with new patterns and technologies available in the remotest areas, doing away with power differentials and making possible instant social con-

nections and/or political networks. Directly linked to the changing demographics of youth, changes in technology impact global and personal communication with social, political and cultural effects, again as seen in the events of the Arab spring. From another perspective, state-of-the-art communications-related technologies also allow for new kinds of deadly drone warfare, making it possible to kill people across the world while drinking a coffee in your office and rendering existing international laws and protections for civilians technologically obsolete.

- **Shifting geopolitical/economic balance of governments:** middle-income countries such as Brazil, the Philippines and India are taking on political, economic and development roles in ways that are new, creating changed financial, economic and political influences and alliances, including in relation to development financing.
- **Changing commitments of governments in the global North:** governments in the global North no longer provide support and care for people living in poverty in other parts of the world, or in their own countries for that matter. Where the question used to be, “How much will we have to cut Official Development Assistance (ODA)?” we now see a new question determining budget allocations, “Why have ODA at all?” We already see how this is negatively affecting ecumenical funding patterns with the resulting impact on partners in the global South.
- **Emergence of new development actors:** the private sector (increasingly remaining development money is going to the private sector on the assumption that the private sector can deliver aid and development more effectively and with more impact accountability) and military actors (often sub-contracting the private sector) are becoming more and more involved in delivery of humanitarian response.
- **Interreligious opportunities and challenges:** these have political, cultural and economic implications. The work of the Women in Peacebuilding Network (WIPNET) in Liberia is a strong testimony of what can be achieved when people of different faith traditions work together. Also, the rise of new and influential religious actors is changing the religious and ecumenical landscape even as the global politicization of extreme religious positions from different faith traditions put such cooperation and the security of the human family at risk.
- **Shrinking space for civil society actors especially in the area of human rights:** ACT Alliance’s research into shrinking space for civil

society confirms what many development and human rights workers know from experience: that in many parts of the world the room for supporting marginalized people and ensuring the protection of their human rights is growing smaller and smaller. Case studies carried out by ACT members in Brazil, Columbia, Guatemala, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Malawi, Paraguay, Peru and Zimbabwe show that civil society organizations find it ever more difficult to fulfill their mandate.

- **Shift from North/South to multilateral analysis:** existing assumptions, reflecting a North/South analysis—which is predominately that used in the ecumenical movement—will become increasingly inadequate in its ability to assess or interpret global human interactions, particularly in relationship to the balance of power and distribution of resources.

These are only some of the factors that constitute a rapidly changing context, which is already affecting in significant ways patterns of development as we know them, with huge implications for all actors, including FBOs. We in ACT do not yet know what a new development paradigm will look like, but we are totally convinced—even as we move forward to strengthen policies and frameworks within the existing paradigm—that we need to be part of understanding and shaping this evolving future.

This is work that we in ACT cannot and should not do on our own. It is a task that needs to be taken up together by ACT, the whole ecumenical family, other civil society actors and all institutions and people of good will. It is the work of our generation to do it—in response to God’s love for us and a suffering world.



# FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR DISTINCT ASSETS<sup>1</sup>

*Kjell Nordstokke*

## INTRODUCTION

Over the last decades, the term faith-based organization (FBO) has become increasingly common in public conversation in the English speaking world. This is due to the growing recognition of the role of religious actors in society—nationally and internationally—and especially in relation to international aid.

In this article, I shall point to some of the reasons why FBOs are increasingly being recognized in international development work; refer to some of the critical remarks that various researchers have made regarding the use of this term; and list some of the attempts at setting up a typology that facilitates a better understanding of the diversity within FBOs. I shall briefly look at the FBOs' role as providers of healthcare and introduce the term RHAs (religious health assets), which in recent years has been used to document and analyze the distinctive character of faith-based health services, especially in sub-Saharan Africa where churches and missions are still responsible for maintaining over fifty percent of such services.

Although the main focus is international aid, and thereby the role of FBOs from the Nordic countries such as mission organizations and specialized agencies within international diakonia, e.g., Norwegian Church Aid, these considerations may nonetheless also be of relevance to the national arena. In Norway, there are around 150 diaconal institutions involved in

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<sup>1</sup> Also published in *Swedish Missiological Themes*, vol. 101, no. 2, Uppsala (2013).

health and social work.<sup>2</sup> Should they be described as FBOs? Is it meaningful to talk about religious or even diaconal assets in their work, for instance when referring to the City Mission? Would diaconal organizations in the Nordic region profit from applying insights from the discussion regarding FBOs and RHAs between scholars and practitioners in, for instance, Southern Africa?

## THE RETURN OF RELIGION TO THE PUBLIC ARENA

In February 1998, leaders of several world religions met at Lambeth Palace in London upon the invitation of the then Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, and James Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank. This meeting can be regarded as a sign of the reorientation that was about to take place in the relationship between international development actors and religious leaders. It implied a new understanding of religion and the role of religious actors in development and, with it, a growing interest in FBOs and their specific contribution.<sup>3</sup>

After the meeting in London, the dialogue was followed up in several arenas. In 2001, the World Bank invited religious leaders to contribute to the thinking behind the annual publication *World Development Report*. Katherine Marshall was appointed director of a new unit in the bank, Directorate on Faith (later renamed the Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics—DDVE). Similar initiatives were taken in a number of countries: the authorities in the Netherlands established the Knowledge Forum on Religion and Development Policy to which national leaders of FBOs were invited in order to explain the distinctive character of their actions. In Switzerland, the authorities elaborated a working paper on the *Role and Significance of Religion and Spirituality in Development Co-operation*. When the report was published in 2005, Walter Fust, director general of the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC), wrote in the preface:

Religion and spirituality are sources of world view and views of life: they constitute creative political and social forces; they are forces for cohesion and for polarization; they create stimuli for social and development policies; they serve as instruments

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<sup>2</sup> A presentation of diaconal institutions in Norway and their role as service providers within the public welfare system is found in Olav Helge Angell, "Institusjon-diaconien i den norske velferdsstaten," in Einar Aadland (ed.), *Kan institusjoner elske? Samtidssayer om diakonale virksomheter* (Oslo: Akribe, 2009), 31–49.

<sup>3</sup> Christopher L. Pallas, "Canterbury to Cameroon: A New Partnership between Faiths and the World Bank," in *Development in Practice*, vol. 15, number 5 (2005), 677–84.

of political reference and legitimacy. Development co-operation cannot afford to ignore religion and spirituality.<sup>4</sup>

There were various reasons for this sudden interest in the role of religion in development and FBOs as development agents. Many had come to the conclusion that decades of aid had not yielded the expected results because government run development work had proved to be ineffective and largely corrupt. Another critique was that Western aid too often focused on the transfer of knowledge, technology and capital, without sufficiently taking into consideration local cultural and religious conditions and ordinary people's worldviews. Critics argued that development aid was largely characterized by "secular reductionism" and "materialistic determinism"<sup>5</sup> without understanding the multidimensional character of processes of social change. For most people in the global South, existence is understood holistically: values are perceived not only as tangible, but equally as spiritual and, more importantly, the material and the spiritual are intertwined. Welfare therefore should be understood as well-being in the broadest sense.

This analysis is in line with a general critique of modernity and its secularization project. In many ways it reflects the phenomenon that is often portrayed as the "return of religion." Europe, where the religious had been mainly limited to the private sphere, was now experiencing what has been described as a "de-privatization" of religion,<sup>6</sup> a shift toward post-secular society with new space for religious actors in civil society. In other words, both new ideological trends and new social practices were introduced. Illustrative of this was the mood upon entering the new millennium, an event that many experienced as a transition into a new era. When the United Nations announced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), some observers commented that this was done "with quasi-religious or spiritual significance."<sup>7</sup> The church initiated Jubilee 2000 campaign for debt relief, formally established in 1996 and greatly inspired by the biblical notion of the Jubilee—when those enslaved because of debts are freed—set a whole world in motion with activities in more than sixty countries and collecting 24 million signatures. It also motivated politicians and aid bureaucrats to

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<sup>4</sup> Anne-Marie Holenstein, *Role and Significance of Religion and Spirituality in Development Co-operation* (Bern: Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, 2005), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Gerard Clarke, "Agents of Transformation? Donors, Faith-Based Organizations and International Development," in *Third World Quarterly*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2007), 77–96.

<sup>6</sup> José Casanova, *Public Religion in the Modern World* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> Katherine Marshall and Lucy Keough (eds), *Mind, Heart and Soul in the Fight against Poverty* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2004), 4.

renew their moral responsibility and engagement. The aforementioned dialogue in London was highly motivated by this commitment.

Also other events contributed to this development. In January 1980, President Reagan gave the green light for Christian aid organizations to have access to public aid funds, both nationally and internationally, and it was publically declared that the increased involvement of FBOs in the public sphere was politically desirable.<sup>8</sup> While this can be regarded as the revitalization of public religion in the USA, what was new is that conservative Christian groups are now taking a leadership role in the interaction with the authorities. In October 2004, the green light was given for FBOs to access funding from USAID, where a Centre for Faith-Based and Community Initiatives had already been established. The political instructions of the Bush Administration made it clear that there would be no restrictions regarding projects that promoted religious and moral views. FBOs managed to influence USAID policy with the result that certain restrictive criteria were imposed on efforts to combat HIV and AIDS as, for instance, not promoting the use of condoms.

The situation is somewhat different in Europe. Also here FBOs enjoy growing confidence on the part of the governmental development authorities, but here “mainstream Christian Churches” are the preferred partners<sup>9</sup> with clear requirements regarding their professional competence, which includes a commitment not to use public funds for the promotion of their own religious interests.

## **THE PRESUMED ADVANTAGES OF FBOs**

Today, the term FBO is widely recognized. Most FBOs are locally rooted, have many different organizational forms and operate in very diverse areas ranging from traditional health institutions to specialized ministries. Within international development work, agencies such as World Vision, Christian Aid and Norwegian Church Aid will frequently seek to partner with local FBOs. While these would be mainly Christian organizations, it should be borne in mind that the term FBO includes groups of other faiths, such as for instance Islamic Relief in the UK.

In international aid, FBOs are presumed to have a distinct identity that is expressed when implementing their work. Governmental funding

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<sup>8</sup> Gerard Clarke, “Faith Matters: Faith-Based Organizations, Civil Society and International Development,” in *Journal of International Development* 18 (2006), 835–48, here 837.

<sup>9</sup> Clarke, *op. cit.* (note 5), 84.

agencies will often ask NGOs to articulate this distinctiveness and the kind of professional competence this implies. They may, for instance, be asked to state what “added value” their work can provide. In this respect, some FBOs would prefer the term “core values,” values that reflect what is considered to be at the heart of the organization, rather than what is “added” to what they stand for. The term “value” may itself sound problematic to some, especially if it has economic connotations. It has, however, become more common to relate “values” to ethical reflection and moral action.

FBOs are believed to have a particular expertise when it comes to addressing religious traditions and religion’s role in promoting development. It is further presumed that their social character will keep them close to people at the grass roots, enabling them to communicate in a way that resonates with people’s basic worldviews and values when involved in projects and programs. FBOs are known to represent broad social networks, as is the case of churches that often are members of global ecumenical organizations. Their advantage is therefore both the ability to motivate and mobilize people for action at the grass roots and to be engaged in advocacy nationally and internationally. They often enjoy the trust and moral authority among the poorest, as well as political leaders. Their grassroots approach allows them to offer marginalized people a stable social framework for promoting their rights when struggling for a better life. In many places, the churches represent the only functioning local social structure that supports and sustains development initiatives. Isolated projects will often fail without such social and moral support.<sup>10</sup> In the complex tension between religion and development, FBOs can play an important role as bridge builders.<sup>11</sup>

Conflict intervention and peace building are other areas where FBOs can take a leading role in promoting processes of dialogue and reconciliation. Frequently, social and political conflicts have religious undertones. In such situations, religious leaders play a key role and FBOs often have the specific competence to call such leaders to responsible action. This has been crucial when dealing with moral issues related to the HIV and AIDS pandemic and efforts to eradicate harmful practices such as female genital mutilation. In these areas, one of the FBOs’ strengths is that they are not perceived as external actors, but rather as related ministries in the sense that they operate within the same horizon of interpretation as

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<sup>10</sup> Kjell Nordstokke, *Verdensvid tjeneste. En innføring i internasjonal diakoni* (Oslo: Verbum, 1994), 75–89.

<sup>11</sup> Gerard Clarke, “Faith-Based Organizations and International Development: An Overview,” in Gerard Clarke and Michael Jennings (eds), *Development, Civil Society and Faith-Based Organizations. Bridging the Sacred and the Secular* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 17–45.

the religious leaders. Their social rootedness in the context is likely to contribute to sustainability and continuity also after a specific project has been implemented. In other words, the effect can be expected to be lasting.

These alleged advantages have meant that FBOs have easier access to public development funds now than a few decades ago and that their prestige has increased significantly in political circles. NGOs (non-governmental organizations) in general and FBOs in particular are expected to be more flexible and efficient than public development actors, and it is considered easier to check how they spend the money they receive. At a time when the media are concentrating on failed development projects, aid bureaucrats look to fund NGOs they trust rather than projects implemented by public authorities.

Civil society is one of the focal points in development work. A strong and multiform civil society contributes to building democracy because horizontal structures of society are strengthened with the consequence that people can be mobilized and empowered in the struggle for better living conditions. Civil society can thus contribute to development from below and to social processes that foster participation and transparency in a way that is not expected to be the case when development projects are initiated from above, for example by government authorities. Civil society includes religious actors and local FBOs and it is assumed that religious leaders, when mobilized to act within the framework of civil society, will become more open-minded and dialogue oriented. This may also lead to local religious tensions being downplayed and extreme positions being abandoned. Religious leaders, together with local FBOs, are therefore considered to play a key role in development work. In governmental development policies, civil society and the importance of mobilizing its actors are frequently referred to.<sup>12</sup> It can therefore be argued that the popularity of FBOs is not only based on the outcome of their actual work, but on the expected achievement of their strategic goals regarding the building of a functional and sustainable civil society. For this purpose stable grassroots actors are most needed.

While politicians often unequivocally affirm the role of FBOs, especially in international development work, researchers have begun to ask critical questions, both about the term's applicability in general and whether it can really be documented that FBOs are more effective and value oriented than other agencies. Rick James, who works with INTRAC (International NGO Training and Research) in Oxford, argues that the term FBO is

highly problematic. For some people FBO smacks of right-wing American politics. For others it is the foreign language of the aid industry. For many, the term "FBO"

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<sup>12</sup> Jude Howell and Jenny Pearce, *Civil Society and Development: A Critical Exploration* (Boulder: Rienner, 2001), 2.

conceals much more than it reveals. It gives the impression FBOs are the same. Yet FBOs are extraordinarily heterogeneous in the ways in which faith identity plays out in their work.<sup>13</sup>

This evaluation confirms the assumption that there is a distinction between Europe and the USA in the understanding of FBOs, causing James to assert that

many FBOs in Europe, particularly Christian ones, have been reticent to articulate too close a connection to their faith identity. They have been anxious to portray their professionalism in development and understandably want to avoid the inherent dangers of a faith connection being abused to manipulate staff and exclude others of different faiths, or no faith.<sup>14</sup>

It has furthermore been questioned whether the term FBO can be used to analyze and evaluate development work. First, FBOs encompass a vast diversity of organizations. That also includes differences in the very way they express their “faith base.” Second, the understanding of “added value” varies to the extent that it is difficult, at least from a research point of view, to establish manageable methods and criteria to explain what makes FBOs one distinct group different from other actors engaged in development work.

Carole Rakodi, director of the Religions and Development Research Programme at the University of Birmingham, concludes that there is “no universally accepted definition of an ‘FBO’ and systematic data is lacking, so precise estimates of the share of development activities contributed by FBOs are impossible.”<sup>15</sup> Rakodi bases her opinion on research, for example in Tanzania, where the distinction between FBOs and other development actors is thought to be artificial. This sharpens the suspicion that the concept FBO is shaped by Occidental thought and that, in the first place, it expresses a reaction against secularized development work. It must therefore be asked whether the term makes sense in a context such as Tanzania, where faith marks the value system and practices of any organization. What ultimately determines whether an organization should be characterized as an FBO? Is it a matter of historical background and what motivated the founders and made them formulate the goals of the organization? Does it relate to wordings in statutes and planning documents that express a

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<sup>13</sup> Rick James, “What is Distinctive About FBOs? How European FBOs Define and Operationalise their Faith,” *INTRAC, Praxis Paper 22* (2009), 4.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>15</sup> Carole Rakodi, “Are Religious Organizations Different?” in *The Newsletter of INTRAC*, no. 46 (September 2010), 4.

religious foundation and purpose? Or can the distinctiveness of an FBO be verified in its praxis?

It is clear that the discussion on religion and development is greatly influenced by the context in which it occurs. In the global North, we normally understand religions theoretically, as well established systems with dogmata, rites and leaders. In other parts of the world, religion primarily manifests itself as religiosity, as shared practice, as the horizon for values, beliefs and attitudes, as a source of fear, but also of hope. This makes the religious or spiritual realm far more important in most areas of human life than would be the case in a secularized context. The religious experience may however express ambiguous attitudes, in the sense that it can both resist and promote social transformation. It is therefore evident that development work cannot ignore religion and spirituality, and that it is within this broader cultural and social framework that the work of FBOs should be understood.

## **TYPOLOGIES OF FBOs**

We have seen that researchers on development aid have asked critical questions regarding the term FBO. Such questions are raised as part of a more general discussion on religion and development, and we have seen that context plays an important role in the assessment of FBOs. It is important to bear this in mind in light of the fact that the concept of FBO is today frequently used in our part of the world, especially in reference to Christian organizations engaged in health or social work as service providers. This is most evident in the USA. In Europe, the term FBO still seems to be mainly reserved for agencies involved in international aid, but it is likely that the use will be widened and include actors on the national arena.

We have noted a correlation between political agendas and the way in which the term FBO is used. The problem with FBOs is not only sensitivity to what may be perceived as politically correct but, rather, the juxtaposition of the words “faith” and “organization,” the reason being that the first will be perceived by many as too open in the sense that it includes an endless variety of phenomena and social practices, while the second is a term that defines and points toward an intended activity. Nonetheless, it may be considered useful to have such a concept that seeks to hold together an open and a more limited perspective on social action. This view convinces many to conclude that FBO continues to be a helpful term, but that a further precision of its understanding is required. Therefore typologies have been developed in order to place different FBOs along a scale with different characteristics.

Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Rolland Unruh have studied hundreds of faith-based institutions providing education, health and social services in Philadelphia, USA. They have looked at a number of elements that indicate the faith-based identity of each of them: key documents such as statutes and strategic plans, ownership, board composition, criteria for appointing leaders, general employment policies, the space for religious practices and rites, the use of religious symbols, religious references in programs and reports. They ended up with five types of organizations.<sup>16</sup>

- **Faith-permeated organizations:** the connection with religion faith is evident at all levels of mission, staffing, governance and support
- **Faith-centered organizations:** founded for a religious purpose, remain strongly connected with the religious community through funding sources and affiliation and require most staff to share the organization's faith commitments
- **Faith-background organizations:** tend to look and act secular, although they may have a historical tie to a faith tradition
- **Faith-secular partnerships:** present a special case in which a secular (or faith-background) entity joins with one or more congregations or other explicitly religious organizations
- **Secular organizations:** have no reference to religion in their mission or founding history.

A decisive factor in this typology seems to be the extent to which the religious is expressed, from permeating the activities and programs at one end of the scale, to more or less being completely absent at the other. In their conclusion, the authors express the hope that this typology will provide greater clarity in understanding FBOs, and it seems that in particular they have in mind politicians, and also public and private donors, who “may end up overstating or understating the role of faith in program outcomes.”<sup>17</sup> The research clearly documents the complexity of FBOs and the many elements that must be taken into account in assessing their religious identity. On the other hand, this kind of typology is not entirely

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<sup>16</sup> Ronald J. Sider and Heidi Rolland Unruh, “Typology of Religious Characteristics of Social Service and Educational Organizations and Program,” in *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 33 (2004), 109–134, here 119–20.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 110.

convincing as it is elaborated according to a principle of seeing the religious element as something to be measured quantitatively, along the lines of much-less-little-nothing. It would be far more interesting to focus on the qualitative, trying to find out what difference the religious identity can make in the concrete performance of the work and what kind of energy it brings when realizing aims and goals. This approach may have resulted in another typology which would provide better insight into understanding FBOs, for example as providers of healthcare.

Gerard Clarke, who works at the Centre for Development Studies at Swansea University, has developed a typology of FBOs involved in development work. He lists five types.<sup>18</sup>

- **Faith based representative organizations or apex bodies:** religious entities or organizations in a broad sense that are engaged in relief work, as for instance the Church of Sweden. This type also includes organizations such as the World Council of Churches.
- **Faith-based charitable or development organization:** specialized development organizations such as Norwegian Church Aid. The largest single Christian organization within this group is World Vision International, based in the USA, which has a clear evangelical character. Another important agent is the ecumenical ACT Alliance (Action by Churches Together).
- **Faith-based sociopolitical organizations:** religiously inspired social movements and organizations appearing as political parties or action groups.
- **Faith-based missionary organizations:** mission work has traditionally included development work. It is wrong to think that this fourth type of FBO is about to disappear, even though their strength in Europe has been considerably weakened in recent decades. In the USA they play a considerable role. Only in 2001, 350,000 US citizens traveled overseas for a shorter or longer period under the auspices of Protestant missionary activities. They brought with them gifts worth 3.75 billion US dollars.<sup>19</sup>
- **Faith-based radical, illegal or terrorist organizations:** this last group includes extreme, sometimes illegal, organizations that have gained

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<sup>18</sup> Clarke, *op. cit.* (note 11), 25.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

considerable strength in some countries in recent years and which in some Muslim countries play an important role as social actors.

In addition to presenting FBOs in this way, Clarke emphasizes the need of taking into account how the religious substance is expressed and thereby its ability to create distinct characters in the performance of the work in which the organization is involved. The “faith” element is thus not perceived as a kind of “add-on” or sideline independent activity in development work but “[i]t is an essential part of that activity, informing it completely. This makes the FBO both distinct (to the extent that faith values imbue its very identity), and yet reflecting the broader non-governmental response to poverty and development, sharing many of the same values.”<sup>20</sup>

According to Clarke, this occurs along four main lines. “Four main ways in which FBOs deploy faith through social or political engagement or link faith to developmental or humanitarian objectives.”<sup>21</sup>

- **Passive:** faith is subordinated to common principles and plays a relatively modest role when it comes to motivating and determining the action
- **Active:** faith plays an important role as a motivator and in the choice of partners, but without non-believers being discriminated against
- **Persuasive:** faith has a clear role in partner selection and in the formulation of goals and objectives; converting people is perceived as part of the goal
- **Exclusive:** faith is essential as motivation and the basic point of reference in determining goals and means.

It is not difficult to see the similarities between the first list of types, elaborated by Sider and Unruh, and the four main lines here presented by Clarke. When looking at them together, it becomes easier to spot the strengths and weaknesses of FBOs in different contexts. An organization with a passive use of its religious tradition can have difficulties in communicating with partners in contexts where faith and spirituality play an important role. If the aim is to mobilize religious leaders in Africa to stand up against female circumcision, FBOs representing the third and fourth main line may turn out to be more credible and therefore more effective in their work. Clarke also comments that public authorities so far have had stronger sympathy

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 15.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 32–33.

for the first main line, but it seems that they are becoming more open to support the other three.<sup>22</sup> Yet, such support may contribute to strengthen actors that represent reactionary views, for instance regarding the role of women in society.

A more qualitative assessment of FBOs is found in Rick James's lists of "distinctive organizational features."<sup>23</sup>

- Structural affiliation and governance
- Values and staff motivation
- Mission
- Strategy and theory of development
- Selection of partners and choice of beneficiaries
- Faith practices and teaching in programming
- Staffing and leadership
- Organizational culture and decision-making
- Constituency and sources of funding
- External relationships.

Each of these features represents an area where the distinctive identity can be expressed as active competence and resources and thus help the organization to ensure its ability to meet contextual conditions to achieve its goals when performing its work.

## **FBOs AND HEALTH**

Health has become increasingly important in international development and poverty alleviation. In part this is due to the fact that global epidemics are given broad coverage in the media, as was the case with the swine flu, but mainly because of global initiatives to fight diseases such as HIV/AIDS,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 33–34.

<sup>23</sup> James, *op. cit.* (note 13), 12.

malaria and tuberculosis. It appears that in many political circles efforts related to health are less controversial than other issues, since it seems easier to expect verifiable outcomes within this field. It is therefore not surprising that the vast majority of the MDGs address health or include health components. Health projects will therefore often have an easier access to governmental funding.

FBOs have traditionally played an important role in promoting health and in running health institutions. This is especially the case in Africa thanks to the work for Christian missions; it is stipulated that at least half of all health institutions in sub-Saharan Africa even today are implemented by Christian FBOs. The situation for many of these institutions is, however, extremely difficult. While in the past they could count on financial and technical support from mission partners in the global North, over the last decades this support has dwindled over been brought to an end. After independence, most African countries developed ambitious plans of building public health systems, counting on international financial support. Today much of this funding has dried up and the quality of health services, especially for the poor, is alarming in many places. We also see that many health workers seek employment opportunities abroad, for example in the UK or in Australia.

This situation has renewed the discussion about the relationship between advanced and expensive medical institutions on the one hand and primary health care on the other. In most countries only the élite can afford to be treated in well-equipped hospitals; the majority of the population depends on more elementary service providers, such as the local clinic or dispensary run by the local church. In this context, FBOs often play an important role in providing both medical treatment and links to local networks that are mobilized for preventive measures and basic health care.

This has been clearly documented in relation to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. In many places, religious leaders have taken a leading role in “breaking the silence” about HIV-infection and its real causes and consequences, and many of them have given an example by taking the HIV test and encouraging others to do the same. They have spoken out against prejudices and tendencies to stigmatize people who are infected by the HIV virus. The ecumenical network has invested heavily in mobilizing FBOs to work with religious groups and above all with religious leaders, and there is no doubt that this work has had significant results, that mindsets and attitudes have been changed, and the social and moral environment has been enabled better to address this challenge.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> The Ecumenical HIV and AIDS Initiative in Africa (EHAIA), organized by the World Council of Churches, is a prominent example of such efforts.

When it comes to caring for those who have developed AIDS, religious networks and FBOs assume an important role. In contexts where it is unrealistic to expect health institutions to offer enough beds to accommodate the sick, home-based care is the norm. Very often such care is organized by local churches and FBOs. In many places they also support child headed households, whose numbers have increased dramatically lately because both parents have died of AIDS. These examples demonstrate the importance of active networks and that FBOs are trusted when it comes to mobilizing such networks.

## **RELIGIOUS HEALTH ASSETS (RHAS)**

With the above description in mind, we now turn to a different approach to this issue with the introduction of the concept RHAs. As we have noted, the term FBO seems above all to refer to the religious tradition and self-understanding of an organization, less to the “religious capital” that in various ways is expressed (directly or indirectly) in the work being carried out. The term RHA focuses on such assets, how they can be mapped and evaluated.

This can be seen in relation to the shift from a needs-oriented to an asset-oriented approach in development work, particularly in community development and to a parallel move from needs-based to rights-based development work. Today, a group or organization that presents a project is expected not only to describe the needs and challenges in a given situation, but also—and even more—point to assets they possess and that qualify them for taking an initiative. Experience, competence, infrastructure and, even more, human and material resources would count among these assets. When external funders are asked to support a project, the presentation of such assets is often decisive when its feasibility is being assessed. In addition, these partners are recognized as rights-holders able to take a leading role in the struggle for a better world for them to live in. It can therefore be argued that both approaches, the asset-oriented and the rights-based, can contribute to overcoming the traditional division of donors and recipients in development work and to a more honest understanding of the role of power in this relationship.

There has been some skepticism regarding the term asset, for instance related to its frequent use in economics and that it therefore may be interpreted foremost with reference to financial resources. But there is a clear tendency to use the word in a broader understanding, particularly for describing social and human resources. This use has been expanded to include the religious in the assumption that there are “religious resources”

or even a kind of “religious capital” that the religious actors must manage in a responsible and credible manner. The term thus has a broader meaning than values; assets may be tangible and refer to visible resources such as buildings and staff and to structures that organize different activities, for instance care groups, but also to intangibles elements such as ceremonies and rites that include prayer and blessing. In other words, when assessing what contributes to health and healing, a far greater variety of elements should be considered as assets than is normally being done.

Especially in Southern Africa, but also in the USA, researchers have been engaged in mapping and describing RHAs, mainly from the perspective of the social sciences. Several projects have been carried out under the auspices of ARHAP (The African Religious Health Assets Programme—now named IRHAP, African replaced by International) with the University of Cape Town (UCT), the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) and Emory University in USA as participants. The Carter Center in Atlanta has supported this program financially, which brings together scientists, NGOs (including FBOs), health practitioners and health policy makers.<sup>25</sup>

South African James R. Cochrane and American Gary Gunderson have undertaken the task to describe and analyze RHAs. In a recent book, they advocate a shift of language, from focusing on deficits to assets when speaking about health issues:

Before diagnosing what is *not* there in a person, family, local community, or society that should be—a “needs-based” approach—an asset-based approach asserts that it is important to understand what *is* there of crucial significance for the health of the public.<sup>26</sup>

Processing the vast research material made available by ARHAP, the two authors have elaborated what they call a RHA matrix built around two basic distinctions: tangible or intangible RHAs and proximate or distal health outcomes. The matrix, partly developed from a South African perspective, demonstrates the complexity of religion in the context of health and the diverse and widespread ways in which religion is part of the picture. Further, it alerts to phenomena normally not counted or measured in health data and points to the internal sources of belief and action. The RHAs matrix is presented as follows:

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<sup>25</sup> [www.arhap.uct.ac.za/](http://www.arhap.uct.ac.za/)

<sup>26</sup> Gary G. Gunderson and James R. Cochrane, *Religion and the Health of the Public: Shifting the Paradigm* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012), 48–49, here 12.

Intangible	Prayer Resilience Health-seeking behavior Motivation Responsibility Commitment/sense of duty Relationship: caregiver & “patient” Advocacy/prophetic Resistance—physical and/or structural/political	Individual (sense of meaning) Belonging—human/divine Access to power/energy Trust/distrust Faith—hope—love Sacred space in a polluting world Time—emplotment (story)
Tangible	Infrastructure Hospitals—beds, etc. Clinics Dispensaries Training—paramedical Hospices Funding/development agencies Holistic support Hospital chaplains Faith healers Traditional healers Care groups NGO/FBO “projects”	Manyano and other fellowships Choir Education Sacraments/rituals Rites of passage (accompanying) Funerals Network/connections Leadership skills Presence in the “Bundu” (on the margins) Boundaries (normative)
	Proximate	Distal

Here, assets are here mainly used heuristically, primarily as a method of investigation. It should, however, be noted that many of these assets are often ignored when health work is planned and evaluated and also in most research on health services. To uncover more knowledge about this matter is particularly important in sub-Saharan Africa where, as already mentioned, religious actors play a central role in health care. However, also in other contexts this approach will certainly give new insight into issues of health and healing.

### IN SEARCH FOR DIACONAL ASSETS

The question to be raised as we come to the conclusion of this article, is whether the term “assets” may be useful in other areas of action where

FBOs are engaged, as for instance in international development work. Some of these organizations understand themselves as diaconal, as is the case of Norwegian Church Aid (NCA), which is interpreted as an expression of its church-based mandate. It also functions as an explanation for its commitment to work with faith-based, mainly church-related partners in the global South. It remains rather unclear how the diaconal identity is expected to influence the work of the organization. Much importance is given to the professional quality, and the impression may be given that professionalism is conceived as secular competence that should not be mixed up with religious concerns and values. On the other hand, NCA and similar organizations are challenged by the “return of religion” in today’s world, and they are convinced of the importance of communicating their concerns and objectives in contexts where faith and spirituality are recognized as important elements in processes of transformation. The question therefore is then whether a clearer perception of the diaconal identity of these organizations can contribute to reformulating the understanding of the distinct role and capacity they represent, fostering a more holistic professional approach.

Within the ecumenical movement, “diakonia” is understood as the “responsible service of the gospel by deeds and by words performed by Christians in response to the needs of people.”<sup>27</sup> The Lutheran World Federation handbook on diakonia, *Diakonia in Context*, does not give a precise definition, but maintains that diakonia “is a theological concept that points to very identity and mission of the church” that implies “a call to action, as a response to challenges of human suffering, injustice and care for creation.”<sup>28</sup> Both references affirm the profound relation between what the churches **are** and what they **do** when involved in diaconal action. This clearly indicates that the way of **being** church will contain resources and assets that are at hand when **performing** diaconal work.

Little or practically nothing has been done so far in mapping and studying such diaconal assets. Better insight into this matter would give diaconal actors new knowledge and a better understanding of their distinct role and core values as agents of transformation, reconciliation and empowerment. It could also deepen the relationship with their partners, in the sense that they could discover shared assets and develop strategies of how to activate them.

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<sup>27</sup> T. J. White, “Diakonia,” in Nicholas Lossky et al (eds), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd. ed. (Geneva: WCC Publications), 305–10, here 305.

<sup>28</sup> The Lutheran World Federation, *Diakonia in Context: Transformation, Reconciliation, Empowerment. An LWF Contribution to the Understanding and Practice of Diakonia* (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 2009), 8.

Today, international diakonia is presented as faith-based *and* rights-based.<sup>29</sup> These two elements may be perceived as contradicting, as if the first refers to the internal motivation while the second points in direction of external factors such as human rights and political justice. From a diaconal point of view this is not the case. Both “faith” and “rights” are internally and externally based, and it belongs to the distinct nature of being church to be committed by faith to struggle for justice. The diaconal assets that express this view need however to be identified and mobilized. In many places this is already done in the being and doing of local churches and diaconal agencies. The task to develop a disciplined and systematic reflection on this practice still lies ahead of us.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 63.

# THE RECONFIGURATION OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS IN GERMANY: IMPLICATIONS FOR DEVELOPMENT

*Claudia Warning*

## **CONFIGURATION OF FAITH-BASED ORGANIZATIONS**

German mission societies have a long history. The forerunners of Mission EineWelt were founded in the mid-nineteenth century. Traditionally, mission societies have always carried out part of their work and mission in development programs, especially in health and education.

## **BREAD FOR THE WORLD**

As a result of the reconstruction work following World War II and the assistance Germany received from the international community, the German churches felt that it was time to give back to the world the love and assistance that they had received from the international community. This was true for both the Catholic and Protestant churches. In 1959, a movement of Protestant churches and Christians was founded under the name Bread for the World, which since then has legally been part of the ecumenical diakonia arm of the social welfare organization of the Evangelical Church in Germany (DW EKD). In 1962, the Protestant churches took a decision that was to determine Protestant development work in Germany for the next fifty years.

## **OFFER BY THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT**

1962 saw the beginning of the so-called *Wirtschaftswunder* (economic miracle) in Germany and liberation movements and decolonization in Africa and Asia were in full swing.

It was a time when Catholic and Protestant churches, congregations, religious orders and mission societies enhanced their activities with partners in the global South and played an active role in the momentous changes the world was witnessing. More and more faith-based organizations and religious persons approached the federal government for funds to support their development work with their partners. As a result, the German government set up a ministry for development at cabinet level, which was to work with partner governments in the global South.

The chancellor at the time, Konrad Adenauer, recognizing the churches' enormous potential to fight poverty, expressed great interest in collaborating with the churches in the struggle against poverty. In light of the churches' long history of partnering with churches in the global South and their considerable outreach and experience, the German cabinet decided in May 1962 to institutionalize the cooperation with the German churches in the field of development. The federal government was ready to support the churches in their development work with a fixed annual budget, provided that the churches match that fund with their own resources and use it together with partner organizations in the global South in poverty relevant sectors such as health, education, nutrition, etc. Moreover, while the churches were not allowed to use German tax revenue for mission work, they were otherwise free to run their own programs and choose their partners.

A special agency had to be set up to function as a single partner for the government. This agency was to receive and channel the funds to be transferred to the churches. The government did not and still does not want to speak to hundreds of church stakeholders but to one single organization and expects the church stakeholders to organize themselves.

In light of this challenge, the Catholic and the Protestant churches in Germany started to reflect on how best to institutionalize this cooperation.

## **THE CATHOLIC WAY**

The Catholic Church set up the German Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid (KZE) as the legal entity vis-à-vis the government which was to receive the money from the government, match it with church funds and then distribute it to church partners in the global South and collaborators in Germany via their institution Misereor.

## THE PROTESTANT WAY

This was not so in the case of the Protestant church. Bread for the World, an independent organization, was purely based on the solidarity of Protestants. There was the fear that mixing Protestant money and solidarity with governmental funds might be problematic. No one knew what conditions might be attached to government funds in the future. Could both sources be mixed up or might it not be better to separate both organizations and protect Protestant independence in Bread for the World?

### 1999: THE FIRST MERGER

The Protestant Association for Cooperation in Development (EZE) was looking forward to its fortieth anniversary. The cooperation with the government had run smoothly for nearly forty years and the churches had been guaranteed the right to take three major decisions regarding which country to work in; which partner to work with (the only condition was that the majority should be church based/church related partners); and which programs to support.

At the time, there were several Protestant development organizations working in other fields of development and with other instruments: academic scholarships providing seconded personnel, ecumenical support, etc. The churches decided to merge these organizations into one in order to supplement and streamline the work and, at the same time, save costs.

In 1999, the larger EZE (in terms of “approvals’ volume,” which at the time was around Euros 74 million), and the smaller Service Overseas (DÜ), Church Development Service (KED) and the Committee for Ecumenical Mission and Service (ÖMW) were brought together and EED (Church Development Service) was founded. Furthermore, the Secretariat of the Committee for Development Education and Publications (ABP), the Planning and Policy Desk (PGA), the Protestant Office of the Joint Conference on Church and Development (GKKE) and the editorial office of the journal, *Der Überblick*, were integrated into EED, followed by the Ecumenical Study Institute (ÖSW) in 2003. Prior to that, in 1998, the synod of the Evangelical Church in Germany had announced its objective to strengthen the development service of the Protestant churches and therefore agreed to build up a joint development organization, later to be called EED.

In the late 1990s, there were discussions as to whether Bread for the World should join this merger. Bread for the World was founded as a movement rather than a separate legal entity and had always been part and parcel of the DW EKD. It was strong, flourishing and well known with a turnover of donations of around Euros 53 million in 1999/2000. EZE had

also grown, but was not as well known by the German public because it did not collect private donations and therefore had hardly any publicity. It received government funds, matched them with church contributions and so achieved an “approvals’ volume” of Euros 74 million. In 1999, EZE was already larger than Bread for the World but by far not as well-known nor financially supported by the ordinary church members.

The decision as to whether or not Bread for the World, part and parcel of the DW EKD, should merge with the new EED was not an easy one. It risked losing its identity and constituency, and governance structure. New stakeholders would come into the picture, and DW EKD would have to give up one of its most appealing and strong fields of work. Therefore, Bread for the World decided not to join the new organization.

### **THE 2012 MERGER**

The churches and the synod of the *EKD* never gave up the dream to consolidate the Protestant development cooperation and merge the two big organizations, Bread for the World and EED. While certain reasons that had prevented Bread for the World in 1999 from merging with EED still remained valid, the working environment had changed dramatically.

First, globalization has changed and is changing the world. Churches and their related agencies face new challenges. Social services, the fight against poverty and development service have to be linked more closely. Major problems of our time such as climate change, the growing gap between the rich and poor, the scarcity of natural resources, migration and the financial crisis are no longer focused on a single country or region but affect people all over the world in different ways. With modern communication technologies and worldwide mobility, distances become relative and, with increasingly complex major problems, the need to find comprehensive solutions has become urgent. It is necessary to initiate and keep alive an ongoing debate in our society about the future.

Linking social and development work to national and international perspectives under one common roof prevented the concerns for the disadvantaged people in Germany from being played off against the concerns for disadvantaged people worldwide. Unfortunately there are people in need everywhere. What is needed is a network of solidarity and charity across national borders in favor of a coherent strategy in the national and international struggles against poverty. We believe that in an increasingly globalized world, social and human rights problems must be approached from a holistic and global perspective.

Second, in times of decreasing numbers of church members, prospects of shrinking funds and the growing importance of and higher standards

in terms of efficiency and accountability it is crucial that development organizations work in a complementary way and cooperate with other actors in the same field—even though that has always been an essential aspect.

Third, networks and alliances have become increasingly important among faith-based organizations and other actors. In addition, there seems to be a trend to found bigger and stronger actors by merging two or more smaller and weaker ones. Examples include the merger of ACT International and ACT Development into ACT Alliance or the governmental development organizations DED, GTZ and InWent into GIZ. On the Protestant side, some restructuring of the churches' landscape within Germany as well as of the Mission societies has also taken place.

In light of this, it is no longer an option to separate ecumenical diakonia (Bread for the World and the Diakonie Emergency Aid) from the social welfare organization DW EKD. Instead, the focus shifted to merging EED and the social welfare organization DW EKD, bringing together development and social services under the same roof. The idea was to be more comprehensive and efficient and effectively to represent the overall spectrum of Protestant ecumenical development work in Germany. The aim is to optimize cooperation and to strengthen the one Protestant development institution and its methods of lobbying and advocacy work in Germany and beyond. The merger enabled combining the strengths of both organizations and to bring together a wide range of support programs for its partners:

- **Financial support for development work:** small, medium-sized and large consortium projects
- **Personnel programs:** secondment of qualified professionals
- **Emergency aid:** represented by Diakonie Emergency Aid/DKH
- **Joint campaigning:** lobbying and advocacy work
- **Scholarship programs:** both nationally and internationally
- **Consultancy services:** capacity building and institutional strengthening.

In the context of our in-country program in Germany, church-based NGOs, parish groups and secular development initiatives are supported to foster development education and awareness building around specific issues. Public relations, lobbying and advocacy as well as fund-raising complete the picture.

In 2008, the Annual General Assemblies of the members of EED and the Social Welfare Organization of the Evangelical Church in Germany (DW

EKD) jointly decided to merge both institutions under one common roof. The merger was to be completed by 2012/2013. The years in between were shaped by a participatory and complex merging process. In 2011 the most important foundations for the new agency were laid with the adoption of the articles by the supervisory boards of EED and DW EKD, the drafting of the new organizational structure, the assignment of board responsibilities and the construction of the new headquarters in Berlin.

The merger was organized in a long-term, participatory and comprehensive way, taking into account the views of the members, partners and employees at different stages and levels of the process. A methodology was developed whereby the process was divided into three main phases and the work structured into “individual projects.” From 2008 onwards, there were joint meetings of the directors and the supervisory boards and annual general assemblies. All decisions regarding the merger were taken jointly. A “social plan” was developed as a result of which as many employees as possible could stay with the organization and offering support to those who could not or did not want to relocate to Berlin.

Initially, the majority of the staff had opposed the merger, especially the relocation to Berlin. There were endless debates and demonstrations but, in 2012, four years after the first announcement in 2008, seventy-five percent of the members of staff decided to work for the new organization, which now has a strong Employee Representative Committee.

After four long years, the process was finally brought to an end, although some pending tasks remain and some issues require more time. The period from 2008 to 2012 was interesting, but also difficult and stressful at times, filled with endless discussion; often complicated decisions needed to be taken. Nonetheless, I believe it to have been worthwhile and that we are moving in the right direction. This would not have been possible without the support and engagement of all actors involved in the process.

## **WHAT IS NEW?**

The Protestant Agency for Diakonia and Development is built on two pillars, namely Bread for the World–Protestant Development Service and Diakonia Germany–Protestant Federal Association. While each pillar functions as an individual organization, synergies exist at many levels and are supposed to be strengthened in order to fulfill the organization’s objectives. Each pillar has three directors, who have the same rights and one of whom is the president and as such the face of the organization; the two presidents take turns in holding the presidency for the whole agency. All six directors make up the executive board of the agency that is supervised and whose members are appointed by

a supervisory board made up of twenty people. The annual general assembly is called Diakonia and Development Conference, a delegates' assembly with up to 112 seats for member churches as well as diaconal ministry associations (*diakonische Verbände*); it elects ten members to the supervisory board from its own ranks. In addition, there are two committees, Development Service and Humanitarian Aid Committee and Diakonia Committee.

The organization itself has a three-tier hierarchy; below the directors' level there are departments, centers or units (*Stabsreferate*) and on the third level are the desks with about five to fifteen colleagues, sometimes organized in smaller teams.

The newly founded Bread for the World—Protestant Development Service incorporates development cooperation and humanitarian aid. It will continue to follow the principle of supporting the projects and programs planned and carried out by independent partner organizations, thus respecting and valuing local initiatives and responsibility for the work. It will continue to work in partnerships which hold the autonomy of each partner in high esteem, thus providing stability and continuity. From now on, there will be only one, strong Protestant development agency, the largest of its kind in Europe in terms of financial resources. Pooling fund-raising abilities and combining three different sources of income, namely church funds, government funds and donations, guarantees financial stability and sustainability as well as security for partners and project holders. By bringing together different methodologies, the organization can offer its partners a wide range of services suited to their needs.

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE UNDERSTANDING OF DEVELOPMENT, DEVELOPMENT AND RELIGION, DEVELOPMENT AND MISSION**

As a result of the merger the debate on mission and development has once again become more animated. There have been regular meetings and exchanges with the mission societies, and progress has been made regarding the differentiation between both terms. Representatives of the mission societies continue to be present on various bodies of the organization.

Bread for the World—Protestant Development Service, defines development as a process of liberation from hunger, poverty, illness and the unjust power structures that violate people's dignity, prevent them from exercising their rights and having access to the resources necessary in order to survive. Mission is about communicating the gospel and encouraging people to join the community of faith. Being holistic in its approach, mission was always linked to efforts to improve people's daily lives. Therefore mission societies have always focused primarily on the sectors of health and education.

Church development service has its theological basis in God's preferential option for the poor, regardless of their religion. It is rooted in the Christian faith and can be regarded as the practical implementation of the gospel into social and political work with the objective of reducing poverty in the world. It aims at improving social, political and economic structures; its objective is to empower the poor, weak, excluded, vulnerable and persecuted. We seek to make them aware of their rights and potential, to enable them to express their needs, participate in political and social life and to demand access to their rights. But it is neither our objective nor our task to found Christian communities.

Mission and development go hand in hand; they cannot be separated but, at the same time, they have to be differentiated from one another. In the practical implementation it means that we have to complement one another while each one of us focuses on their core areas.

Religion is an essential dimension in human life. While many Western societies have become more secular and religion plays a minor role in daily life, it is still very important in most parts of the global South. Church development service organizations have a special way of approaching the people, reaching out to the poorest of the poor in rural areas far away from the cities. Although this is not new, it is increasingly recognized by the German government as well as other development organizations. Recently we celebrated fifty years of cooperation between the German government and the Protestant Association for Cooperation in Development EZE (a subsidiary of Bread for the World—Protestant Development Service) and the German Catholic Central Agency for Development Aid KZE. For the past fifty years, EZE has received government funds for its work and, in comparison to many others, it has remained relatively independent in its decision making regarding where and for which project and with which partner organization those funds are used. This is an expression of the good relationship, based on mutual trust, with the responsible Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). This relationship was strengthened and deepened in August 2012 when EZE and KZE had the opportunity to invite the minister of development, Dirk Niebel, to visit some of their projects and partners in Kenya.

Not only faith-based organizations need to take the role of religion into consideration. Although there has been a long standing cooperation and exchange between churches and different Christian denominations, the relationship to other religions still needs to be improved.



The decline of religion in the Western world used to be regarded as a direct consequence of development, and it was assumed that this would also occur in the global South once the same levels of economic development had been reached. The current flourishing of religion in the global South and the increased awareness of its significance in the global North prove that religion continues to play a crucial role. In those contexts where religion frames reality, development cannot ignore religion. This collection of essays by scholars and development practitioners from Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin and North America explores the fascinating interface between religion and development as well as the negative and positive potential of religion in development.

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