

Digital Summer School on Religion and Development (2020)

Seminar, 20 July 2020

Working Group on Jones and Petersen Text

Presenter: Ignatius Swart

Jones & Petersen, “Instrumental, narrow, normative? Reviewing recent work on religion and development,” *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 7 (2011), 1291-1306.

1. A landmark article by Kurt Alan van Beek, “***Spirituality: A development taboo***” in *Development in Practice* (2000) as point of departure:
 - Survey of **three prominent journals** revealed that development theory and practice basically avoid the issue of spirituality and religion
 - In the period 1982 – 1998 **no article** in which religion or spirituality was the main theme, but only rare reference – vis-à-vis entire issues dedicated to issues such as gender, population and the environment
 - A review of the **policies of several major development agencies**, including USAID and CARE, also revealed that none had policies that referred to religion or spirituality

- **Interviews** with staff of CARE and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) also revealed that discussions of religious beliefs and practices of staff or programme participants were not part of the programming efforts
- **Table from article (ver Beek):** Number of articles with references to the listed keywords, by journal:

	Keywords				
Journals: 1982-1998	Environment	Gender	Population	Spiritual and spirituality	Religion and religiou s
<i>World Development</i>	83	85	89	0	5
<i>Journal of Development Studies</i>	19	46	38	0	1
<i>Journal of Developing Areas</i>	18	32	43	0	10

2. Ignorance of religion explained by reigning ideologies of **secularisation** and **modernisation**, which however no longer holds.

However, as evident from the literature - **Ver Beek's taboo has been broken:**

“Today, a decade on, ver Beek's taboo has been broken. In fact, some would even say it has become overly fashionable to talk about religion and development. Religion is on the agenda of the major donors and NGOs, and **an increasing number of researchers have taken up the topic**, witnessed by the growing numbers of conferences, seminars, articles, reports and books dealing with religion and development.” (p. 1292)

3. **My own literature research** and compilation of a bibliography manifesting Jones & Petersen's claim – Swart, I. and Nell, E. 2016. Religion and development: The rise of a bibliography. *HTS Theological Studies* 72(4), a3862. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3862>

Table from Swart & Nell: Growth of religion and development as subject field (2003-2015)

Category or mode of publication	Publications in the period 2003-2005	Publications in the period 2006-2015	Total number published in the period 2003-2015
Journal articles	31	140	171
Journal special issues	1	7	8
Monographs & co-authored books	4	12	16
Anthologies	3	15	18
Book chapters and independent units in book chapters	35	214	249
TOTAL	74	388	462

4. Some LANDMARKS

A few key works:

Clarke, M. (ed.), 2013c, *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion*, Edward Elgar, Cheltenham. doi/10.4337/9780857933577

Tomalin, E. (ed.), 2015d, *The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development*, Routledge, New York, NY.

Ter Haar, G. (eds.), *Religion and Development: Ways of Transforming the World*, London: Hurst & Co.

EE

Handbook of Research on Development and Religion

Edited by **Matthew Clarke**



ROUTLEDGE
ROUTLEDGE
INTERNATIONAL
HANDBOOKS



The Routledge Handbook of Religions and Global Development

Edited by Emma Tomalin



RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT

WAYS OF TRANSFORMING
THE WORLD

Gerrie ter Haar

Karam, A. (ed.), 2014, *Religion and development post-2015. Report of a consultation among donor organizations, United Nations development agencies and faith-based organizations, New York, 12-13 May 2014*. New York, UNFPA.

Karam, A. (ed.), 2012, *Religion, Development and the United Nations*, Brooklyn, NY, SSRC

And ongoing articles and books:

Bompani, B. 2019. “Religion and development: Tracing the trajectories of an evolving sub-discipline. *Progress in Development Studies* (2019): 1-15.

Offutt, S., Probasco, L. & Viadyanathan, B. 2016. Religion, poverty, and development. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 55(2): 207-215.

Tomalin, E., Haustein, J. & Kidy, S. 2019. Religion and the sustainable development goals. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 17(2):102-118.

P. Öhlmann, W. Gräb & M.-L. Frost (eds.), *African Initiated Christianity and the decolonization of development: Sustainable development in Pentecostal and Independent Churches*. Routledge Research in Religion and Development. Routledge.

<https://www.routledge.com/African-Initiated-Christianity-and-the-Decolonization-of-Development-Sustainable/Ohlmann-Grab-Frost/p/book/9780367358686>

And see also for a recent undertaking closer to my own home:

Swart, I. & Adogame, A., 2016, 'Special Collection: **“Engaging development: Contributions to a critical theological and religious debate”**, *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(4), 4382. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.4382>

<https://hts.org.za/index.php/hts/issue/view/122>

RETURNING TO JONES & PETERSEN

5. Under the first main heading answering the question: **Why now? Why this extraordinary reversal / turn of events** – from the development taboo to a topical interest that has become “overly fashionable”?

FOUR REASONS given for “**the religious turn in development studies**” (pp. 1292-1294):

- i. **The persistent if not increased importance of religion in most of the world.** This reality is challenging narratives of modernisation and secularisation. Religion has not disappeared and has not even withdrawn to the private sphere. Noticeably, it has become part of the rise of a new kind of **identity politics**.

ii. **The dramatic increase in the number and visibility of faith-based organisations (FBOs), esp. the category of ‘FBO as NGO’.**

This development has coincided with a remarkable increase in funding for religiously oriented forms of civil society / religious organisations operating in the broader sphere of civil society and welfare and development work.

An important case in point: The World Bank’s estimation that in Sub-Saharan Africa 50 per cent of all health and education services are provided by FBOs.

iii. **The rise of political Islam** (with 9/11 attacks on New York and Washington as a special landmark).

In this regard we can say that Islam has obtained an increasing international political dimension that is profoundly changing the global geo-political context and is making the study of religion inevitable in the study of international relations and politics.

Besides the “war on terror” this has included intensified efforts on the part of Western donors to co-operate with “moderate” Islamic NGOs, seeing them as potential bridge-builders in their attempts to reach out to the Muslim world.

What was the 11 September 11 attacks?

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/September_11_attacks

iv. **The simultaneous fragmentation and conceptual broadening of development studies.**

This has not only led to a growing acceptance of the shortcomings of conventional theories of development related to modernisation theory and state-led and market-led approaches to development, but also a recognition of broader people-centred and holistic understandings of development associated with concepts such as **human development, social capital** and **participation**.

As a result, one important consequence of these developments has been “**an opening of the development space**” that among others has also given new acknowledgement to religion and religious actors as an important dimension in many people lives, especially in the so-called ‘developing’ countries

5. The above explanations are followed by a discussion of where the new interest in religion and development more specifically comes from – i.e. under the heading:

RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT: FROM POLICY TO RESEARCH

- ❖ This section more specifically explains where the new interest in RaD has come from
- ❖ Important thesis = the new interest has derived primarily from development organisations and not academics. ***“In chronological terms donors and large international NGOs have shown more interest in the subject than university departments.”*** (p. 1294)
- ❖ At the time when Ver Beek published his thesis on religion as a development taboo, organisational initiatives already started:

- ✓ **Development Dialogue on Values and Ethics** initiated in 1998 by James Wolfensohn, then president of the World Bank and George Carey, then Archbishop of Cantenbury

Aim was to establish a wide-ranging international and national dialogue among faith and development institutions, with the effort to combat world poverty.

- ✓ **World Faith Development Dialogue** – which involved from the DDVE

- ✓ Establishment of **Religion and Development Programme** at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and world Affairs (2001)

- ✓ Conference organised in 2002 by the **Swiss Agency for Development Co-operation**: “Religion and Spirituality: A Development Taboo?”

- ✓ **Department for International Development** (DFID, UK) initiation of a 3.5 million research programme, “Religion and Development” in 2006, which became hosted at the University of Birmingham

- ✓ Establishment in 2007 of the **Knowledge Forum for Religion and Development Policy** by 5 Dutch NGOs
- ✓ Numerous other initiatives – see Jones & Petersen, p. 1295.
- ✓ SEE ALSO BOX 1, TOMALIN ET AL, “Religion and the sustainable development goals”

- ❖ **A growing corpus of academic writings and research undertakings** emerged from and followed these initiatives – see further examples Jones & Petersen; Swart & Nell.

**6. However, also THREE CRITICISMS OF THE RaD LITERATURE:
INSTRUMENTAL, NARROW, NORMATIVE (pp. 1296-1300)**

i. Too instrumental in their approach

- ✓ religious organisations are seen as having strengths and qualities that secular organisations do not have;
- ✓ thus too much of a concern with the positive and practical contribution religion makes or can make; arguments are developed in support of this instrumentalist emphasis at the cost of other more complex aspects of the nexus / link between religion and development
- ✓ religion is in other words used in instrumental fashion to serve the agendas of secular development actors without questioning that agenda

“... there remains an emphasis on the utility of religion to development work ... the relationship between religion and development is aligned with an instrumentalist interest in the positive role of religion or religious organisations can play in donor-funded development efforts, thus overlooking other, more complex, aspects of the nexus between religion and development.” (p. 1297)

ii. Too narrowly focused on FBOs / formalised religious actors

- ✓ there is as a result little concern with religious expressions outside the formal and organised;

issues such as ritual, traditions and inner belief are rarely referenced in the literature
- ✓ Moreover, within the focus on FBOs the emphasis has been predominantly on Christian organisations. ***“There is less discussion of world faiths.”*** (p.

“The majority of FBOs with consultative status in the UN, for instance, are Christian organisations.” (p. 1298)

- ✓ Importantly, in addition, has been the way in which “faith-based organisation” has been taken to be a relatively unproblematic category.

“Very little research seemed to open itself up to the question of exploring the different ways in which faith or religion is signified and practised in these organisations, something that requires micro-level ethnographic or sociological work.” (p. 1298)

iii. **Too normative**

- ✓ religiously inspired development work is categorised **as somehow better than other forms of social action** (in the secular sphere), different from mainstream development and more radical and alternative;
- ✓ religious organisations possess of **values** and **norms** that secular organisations do not have;

in the process a narrow '**developmentalised**' **version of religion** is presented – religion is instrumentalised in terms of development categories and is seen as **simply better and more ethical / normative** than other actors

“Jenny Lunn, for instance, talks about the ‘positive values’ of major religious traditions, including: ‘charitable and sacrificial giving, respect for fellow human and other living beings; compassion for the poor and needy in society; the pursuit of equity and justice; and care of the natural environment’, while she pays little attention to these traditions’ gender inequalities and social hierarchies.” (p. 1300)

“The agendas of development agencies and NGOs – if not the results of development – are understood positively. The concern is simply to bring religion in to better serve these agendas.” (p. 1300)

7. Finally proposals are offered on how to overcome the criticisms under the heading **WAYS FORWARD** (pp. 1300 – 1302)

Four proposals presented to overcome the criticism – i.e. **opening up research to agendas that are less obviously useful to development agencies and NGOs**

- i. **Shift to a focus that would not so much focus on how religion informs development work, but on how the development industry informs and impacts on religion and religious organisations.**

“We found no evolved discussion on how the development sector’s new-found interest in religion has had an impact on religious organisations.”

“What does it mean for a church to be incorporated into a

“What changes in terms of practices, meanings or beliefs come about when religious organisations work with donors?” (p. 1300)

- ii. **A greater focus on individual cases** and their complexities, with less interest in relating the findings directly to the interests of development agencies and NGOs – a **case-by-case approach** (Berger).

Example upheld of a study by Erica Bornstein of a protestant NGO in Zimbabwe, ***The Spirit of Development*** (2003)

“Bornstein shows how faith frames the way development is conceived and practised in multiple ways.” (p. 1301)

“Bornstein shows how involvement in development shapes the religiosity of staff, prompting the emergence of distinct ‘theologies of development’” (p. 1301)

- iii. A conceptual focus that would open up things by **looking at (secular) development policy and practice through a religious lens**

Hence, exploring the symbols, signs and ceremonies that sustain development as a set of institutions, practices and meanings – thus studying **development as a form of “religious discourse” itself**; development as “religion” with its own “quasi-religious” views

- iv. Learning from the **sociology of religion field** (and other disciplines) and how its studies of congregations and FBOs brings to the fore valuable conceptual understandings and issues that may be more authentic to what religion and religious organisations are – issues and concepts such as **volunteering, altruism, trust, care, social policy and citizenship**