

ABSTRACTS FOR WORKSHOP NO. 6:

DEVELOPMENT, RELIGION AND ETHICS

(in random order)

Development, Ethics and Theology

Kjetil Fretheim

In this paper I want to contribute to the ongoing engagement with religion and development by addressing the more specific relationship between Christian theology and development ethics. While the relationship between religion and development ethics has been addressed by a number of scholars, the role of Christian theology in this context is not often addressed.

Christian theology has reflected on the structural conditions for poverty and its societal consequences and implications for individual lives since its beginning. Development theology makes this its primary focus. Development theology refers to a theology that is consciously and critically reflecting on the meaning and implication of the Christian faith with regard to improving the lives of people living in poverty. This kind of theology is related to the better known and much discussed strand within modern theology called liberation theology. This is, however, a relationship of both continuity and tensions. Liberation theology grew out of, but also emerges as a reaction against, development theology. At the same time, liberation theology also turned out to become an important contributor to development ethics as an academic discipline. Liberation theology is in other words one link between the theology and development ethics, but also an ambiguous one.

In recent years there has been a return of development theology, and in this paper I will discuss contributions from academics and development practitioners to this theology of development. I want to highlight the main concerns of this revived version of development theology, and discuss how this way of doing theology can contribute to a fruitful, critical and constructive relationship between Christian theology and development ethics.

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Development and religion from a post-secular perspective

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ABSTRACT

In the last years, we see a growing interest in the role of religion in society, and one of the important aspects of this issue is the ambivalence within religious traditions to peaceful changes and global development. The “resurgence of religion” within the public sphere opens up for questioning how religion influences political and developmental processes in different types of societies, religious, secular and post-secular societies.

In modern, secularized societies, religion has been viewed as a hindrance for development and modernization. In this paper I will explore the concept of development within four different religious traditions, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Christianity. I will try to demonstrate the need for a nuanced view on the possible role of the religions, showing that the Holy Scriptures and traditions within each religion could be interpreted in many different ways, and that all religions have a potential for playing a positive role in local, regional and global development processes today. Today, it is important to realize how religious traditions still influence many people’s world views, both in ways that could be counterproductive to development and in supporting peaceful ways of cooperation and dialogue. Religions could play an important role in the transformation of conflicts, through different ways of facilitating and mediating, and they could serve as a legitimating institution in the implementation of peace and in the building up of a peaceful civil society.

In the paper, I will illustrate this main perspective with examples from different religious traditions showing the potential for positive contributions to development from religious groups and actors. The paper will therefore criticize the traditional sceptical attitude within modern secularism to the role of religion in development processes.

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The Rise of Islamic Militant Organizations in Bangladesh: An inquiry

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Abstract

Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world, on the brink of being a failed state, and that makes it a perfect target for al-Qaeda and its ever-expanding network of Islamist extremist organisations. Virtually unnoticed by the world at large, Bangladesh is being dragged into the global war on terrorists by becoming a sanctuary for them. A deep pocket filled by oil rich hands, virtually unrelenting access to arms, an insidious nexus with mainstream political parties and the government's blind eye to them - the deadly concoction that have made it possible for the religious terrorist groups to thrive in Bangladesh. The financial and other resources not only come from middle-east sometime they are generated though local investments. Mosques, religious schools (*madrasas*), sometimes colleges and universities are used as breeding grounds for the militants. In addition, remote forests or rural areas are used for training. Plagued by large scale poverty, a weak state like Bangladesh is finding it difficult to cope with this threat.

Between tension and harmony: religious subcultures in Latin America, ethics and development

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ABSTRACT

Catholicism is the largest religious denomination in Latin America. However, it would be wrong to say that all Latin American Catholics share a homogenous vision of their religion. Rather, the authors suggest, one need to address the plurality of Catholic religious subcultures by diversified social groups. These clusters may often have contrasting conclusions with respect to the relationship between religious ethics and development.

This work aims to look into the relations between *religion*, *ethics* and *development* as found in some of the Catholic subcultures, namely: Christian Base communities, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement as well as popular religiosity, all in the Latin American context.

According to Steigenga (2010), recent studies of religion in Latin America suggest a rather large religious pluralism at the continent. This is not only an (lesser than projected in literature from the 80s and 90s) escape from Catholicism to Protestant and Pentecostal movements, but it also includes changes in Catholicism as such. Perhaps most notably in the recent years are the Christian Base communities often associated with liberation theology, and the phenomenon of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal movement (De la Torre, 2006). Still, the largest number of Catholics share beliefs and practices of the so called popular religiosity, whose particular ethics has to be understood in order to understand people's conceptions of development and the associated practices.

As argued by the authors – in a work on the relation between religion and poverty in Latin America – “religion might be an obstacle to social change and development for the poor, but it could also serve as an inspiration and pressure in favour of revolution and change” (Zalpa and Offerdal, 2008: 12, our translation). Thus, the authors will also look at examples interfaith praxis in Latin America in the fight for social justice and poverty eradication.

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