

A New Journal for a New Space: Introducing *Religion & Development*

Introductory Article

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Abstract

This article introduces *Religion & Development* as a new transdisciplinary journal focusing on the nexus between religion and development. It outlines the motivation for establishing the new periodical along three central themes: the move towards sustainable development as dominant development paradigm; the reinvigoration of the post-development debate; and the emerging academic, policy and practice field of religion and development. The discussion proceeds to highlight the envisaged task of the journal as well as its transdisciplinary and collaborative span. Moreover, it delineates *Religion & Development's* core editorial policies, before setting the scene for the contributions of the journal's first issue.

Keywords

religion – development – sustainability

The global development discourse has seen fundamental reconfigurations in recent years, which bear the potential to bring about substantial paradigm shifts in the development space and which call for new and innovative approaches in the study of development. At the same time, the world is seeing a revision of the “secular discourse” (Berger 2014) and an increasing debate about the “resurgence of religion” (Thomas 2005; Wariboko 2014). Indeed, religion is displaying a continued and increasing relevance in the public spheres

1 The authors of this inaugural editorial are the founding editors of the journal. After the name of the executive editor, author names are placed in alphabetical order and as such this order does not reflect the degree of contribution.

across the globe (Casanova 1994) and religious communities are playing a fundamental transformative role in many societies (Cox 1995; Eisenstadt 1968a). The confluence of these seminal reconfigurations constitutes the motivation for establishing a new, transdisciplinary journal focusing on the nexus of religion and development.

The rationale for *Religion & Development* is informed by three central themes presented in the first section of this editorial: the move towards *sustainable* development as the present dominant paradigm; the reinvigoration of the post-development debate; and the emerging academic, policy and practice field of religion and development. Against this background, the second section of this editorial outlines the task of the journal. The third section introduces *Religion & Development's* disciplinary and collaborative span, while the fourth section spotlights key elements of its editorial policy. Lastly, the fifth section sets the scene for the articles to follow this editorial, which constitute the inaugural issue of *Religion & Development*.

1 Motivation for *Religion & Development*: Three Central Themes

1.1 *Contextualising Development: from Development to Sustainable Development*

On 25 September 2015, the United Nations General Assembly unanimously approved the resolution “Transforming Our World: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (United Nations 2015), replacing the Millennium Development Goals as the international frame of reference in development politics with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). With this change, the concept of sustainability moved to the centre stage of global development policy. The 2030 Agenda constitutes a significant conceptual reconfiguration in international cooperation. Development ceased to be an affair of so-called “developing countries” in the global South, which, in old-school development thinking, needed to develop themselves or even “be developed” to reach Western levels. It is clear that the challenges of the (post-)crisis age, such as climate change, global health, increasing inequalities, conflicts and shrinking spaces for civil society, just to name a few, are not unique to specific contexts but necessitate action across the globe. Consequently, development under the conditions of comprehensive sustainability as outlined in the 2030 Agenda refers to all countries of the world. The core assumption underpinning the SDGs is that all countries and societies must undergo profound transformations in at least part of the realms delineated in the Agenda. A fundamental implication is hence that the countries of the global North have themselves become “developing countries” (cf. Stierle 2020). While this realisation might yet be a long way

from replacing the dominant paradigm in development policy, practice and scholarship, at least conceptually it constitutes a major stride away from the colonially influenced dichotomy of “developed” and “developing” countries. It thereby resonates with Dipesh Chakrabarty’s call of “provincializing Europe” (Chakrabarty 2008) in that it deviates from development’s earlier unidirectionality towards the Western model of economic, social and cultural evolution of global society and points towards contextual, situated and therefore different conceptual frameworks – without losing sight of normative issues of sustainability. This constitutes a significant shift and necessitates new approaches when thinking about questions of development. Essentially, this means a reconfiguration not only to what or to whom development applies and how it can be implemented but also a reconfiguration of what development means.

In light of climate change, environmental degradation and increasingly severe natural catastrophes in nearly all world regions, it has become ever more apparent that ecological sustainability is relevant across the globe and that it is highly interdependent with economic, social, cultural and political dimensions of sustainability. While recognising this, the 2030 Agenda does not resolve the inherent tension of achieving its economic and social aims within the planetary “Limits to Growth” (Meadows et al. 1972). In fact, some of its goals and targets delineate diverging aims, making “transformation to sustainability [an] inherently ... conflictual process” (Arsel 2020, 4). Fundamental socio-ecological transformations are needed to create pathways into a sustainable future and to achieve the SDGs – even more so if one takes the inherent tension between ecology and economy into account. This process necessitates not only appropriate policies but also radical paradigm shifts and fundamentally changed mindsets (Parry 2007). Religion has a fundamental relevance for such paradigm shifts, as it has the potential to form social and cultural values and to reshape worldviews. In the words of Eisenstadt (1968b, 10), it has a “transformative capacity ... to legitimise, in religious or ideological terms, the development of new motivations, activities, and institutions”. Religious actors can therefore be crucial stakeholders on pathways to sustainability due to their ability to act as agents of social change and to function as sources of alternative knowledge. At the same time, however, they can be influential opponents of such transformations (Taylor 2016; White 1967). In other words, precisely because of its transformative potential, religion can also de-legitimise new motivations, activities and institutions.

Against this background, it is important to note that the role of religion is largely ignored in the SDGs. There are only two minimal references to it, as religious freedom (Paragraph 19) and religious non-discrimination (Target 10.2), in the context of several other individual freedoms. Thus, the Agenda for Sustainable Development fails to adequately take into account the increasing

global relevance of religion (and its fundamental importance in and influence on the lives, worldviews and actions of people across the globe) and the major work of religious organisations in the development and humanitarian sectors. This neglect of religion is a crucial point for engagement.

1.2 *A Critique to Development: The Post-Development Debate*

A second reconfiguration in the global development debate is the recent reinvigoration and increasing influence of postcolonial critique and the post-development debate (cf. Escobar 2012; Mbembe 2001; Mignolo 2011; Sachs 2005; Ziai 2016). The post-development debate has criticised development's modernisation-theory-influenced universalism of implying Western economic models and social structures as the normative basis and ends of the transformation of non-Western societies. It has pointed to the hierarchies created by development discourse, policy and practice: between a Western, desirably developed centre and an underdeveloped periphery (to borrow the terminology of dependency theory). Development, hence, can be seen as a highly problematic construct, which, as noted by Rist (2019), has such strong ideological dimensions that it has quasi-religious aspects and can in some ways be considered a "global faith". The post-development debate has hence fundamentally challenged the term, the concept and the practice of development, called for its abandonment and brought to the fore alternative and pluriversal normative notions of society and economy (cf. Kothari et al. 2019). The concept of "buen vivir" emerging from the Latin American context (Acosta 2015) and the philosophy of Ubuntu in the African context (Metz 2011; Taringa 2020) are among the prominent examples of such alternative notions emerging from the margins and moving towards the centre of the discourse. Many of these notions and concepts have religious origins, religious connotations or make reference to religious worldviews, beliefs and practices. Kothari et al.'s recent post-development dictionary (Kothari et al. 2019), for example, mentions several such religious concepts in the framework of its pluriversal approach, from "Liberation Theology" and "Christian Eco-Theology" to "Islamic Ethics" and "Buddhism and Wisdom-based Compassion". Notions of development (understood in a broad sense) in religious communities or alternative normative concepts of society, economy, ecology etc. emerging from religious communities often stand in contrast to and challenge conventional development thinking's inherent secularism (cf. Bowers Du Toit 2019). There is a crucial, critical potential of religion in this respect. The notions of development and of alternatives to development brought forward by religious communities thus bear a fundamental potential to decentre and decolonise the development space and debate (cf. Öhlmann, Gräb and Frost 2020b).

1.3 *Religion in Development: Moving from Ignorance towards Integration*

A third significant reconfiguration is the “resurgence of religion” (Thomas 2005; Wariboko 2014), the increasing relevance of religion in the public sphere (Casanova 1994). As Laurie Zoloth pointed out in her presidential address at the American Academy of Religion in 2014,

[w]e live in a time, we teach at a time, when religions are in center stage of history, have marched into the center stage and, in the center of the stage, enact and speak.

ZOLOTH 2016, 21

The new relevance of religion is not unique to the development sphere but is clearly reflected in it. Until a few decades ago development policy, practice and research paid only marginal attention to religion. “Spirituality”, as Kurt Ver Beek observed, was a “development taboo” (Ver Beek 2000, 31). Influenced by the remains of modernisation theory paradigms, religion was often considered a dwindling phenomenon, losing its relevance in the course of secularisation. But this has changed substantially. The development field has witnessed a “turn to religion” (Tomalin 2020, 1) and the emergence of a new, dynamically growing research field on religion and development (Swart and Nell 2016; Bompani 2019). This turn is driven by a recognition of the important role of religious actors in the development field (cf. Marshall 2013) and the realisation that religion plays an “ambivalent” (Basedau, Gobien and Prediger 2018, 1106) yet undeniably important role regarding development. In terms of Thomsen’s integrated perspective:

[R]eligion, beliefs and ideas can promote change, but religion, beliefs and ideas can also block change ... However, the fact that religion is ambiguous just proves that it is important: it can either be conducive to development or block development, but it is never irrelevant to development.

THOMSEN 2017, 28

Several major research initiatives have engaged in this field and a plethora of books, articles and reports have begun to explore the manifold entanglements and interdependencies of religious beliefs, religious practices and religious communities with economic, social, ecological, political and cultural dimensions of development. The interest in religion and development today cuts across the humanities and social sciences, which significantly includes the fields of theological and religious studies. In their survey of the literature, Swart and Nell conclude:

Clearly, our bibliography gives evidence of a subject field that ... extends to a broader transdisciplinary interest. This noticeably includes scholarship from a range of social science disciplines that are produced in various interdisciplinary fora for debate and modes of scholarly outlet offered by these disciplines (such as anthropology, international studies, political studies, cultural studies, environmental studies, geography and economics). Not least, however, it also involves in addition to, and as part of, this wider scholarly production a significant development in which the combined and separate fields of religious and theological studies have become spaces for pursuing the debate on religion and development.

SWART AND NELL (2016, 3)

Consequently, the field is characterised by a diversity of methodological and theoretical approaches, ranging from discourse analysis and ethnography to quantitative approaches and covering a broad range of religious actors in different contexts across the globe (see Hefferan 2015; Rakodi 2012a).

Research about religion and development is at the same time moving in a highly transdisciplinary space, in which governments, international organisations, development agencies, non-governmental organisations and religious communities and organisations engage in the generation of knowledge on the subject jointly with academic actors. There is an increasing interest from development policy and practice actors in religion as a factor relevant to their work (Garling 2013). The foundation and continuous expansion of the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (Nitschke and Gabriel 2016) and the establishment of the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Development (United Nations 2019) are recent foremost cases in point. These initiatives were preceded by several initiatives by governments and international organisations, such as the World Bank, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, the British Department for International Development and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (see Petersen 2019 and Tomalin, Haustein and Kidy 2019 for more comprehensive overviews). Another important initiative in this regard is the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, which brings together UN agencies, governments, development agencies, religious communities and organisations, seeking to function as a bridge between research, policy and practice in religion and development (JLIFLC n.d.). Even religious development organisations (“faith-based organisations”, FBOs), which are positioned within the field by definition, conceptually engage with the religion and development nexus. Examples are the Dutch Knowledge Centre Religion and Development founded by several religious development organisations (van Wensveen 2011; van der Wel 2011) and ACT Alliance’s Community

of Practice on Religion and Development (van Zeeland 2016; Werner and van der Ven 2016).

While religion and development is a dynamically evolving field, it so far lacks a primary periodical for the publication of research and reflections on policy and practice. Numerous excellent special issues and edited volumes have been published in relation to religion and development, for instance the issues on “Religion and Development” in *World Development* (1980) and *Development in Practice* (Rakodi 2012b), the two issues of *Gender & Development* on “Gender, Religion and Spirituality” (1999) and “Working with Faith-based Communities” (Greany 2006), *Religion’s* issue on “Religions, Natural Hazards, and Disasters” (Gaillard and Texier 2010), the *Journal of Refugee Studies’* special issue “Faith-Based Humanitarianism in Contexts of Forced Displacement” (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh 2011), the *Canadian Journal of Development Studies’* issue on “Religion and International Development” (Levy 2013), the special collection in *HTS Theological Studies* on “Engaging Development: Contributions to a Critical Theological and Religious Debate” (Swart and Adogame 2016), the *Handbook of Research on Development and Religion* (Clarke 2013), the *Routledge Handbook on Religions and Global Development* (Tomalin 2015) and many important edited volumes – to just name a few, non-exhaustive (!) examples: Adogame, Adeboye and Williams 2020; Ammah, Ossom-Batsa and Gatti 2018; Belshaw, Calderisi and Sugden 2001; Carbonnier, Kartas and Silva 2013; Chitando, Gunda and Togarasei 2020; Clarke and Jennings 2008; Clarke and Tittensor 2016; Deneulin and Bano 2009; Fountain, Bush and Feener 2015; Freeman 2012; Heuser and Köhrsen 2020; Köhrsen and Heuser 2020; Khan and Cheema 2020; Kraft and Wilkinson 2020; Mtata 2013; Öhlmann, Gräß and Frost 2020a; Ter Haar 2011; Venter 2004). Inter alia Bompani (2019), Jones and Petersen (2011) and Swart and Nell (2016) provide excellent and more comprehensive overviews of the field. Moreover, Routledge has taken the initiative to pioneer the excellent and vibrant book series *Routledge Research in Religion and Development*. However, thus far no periodical dedicating itself to the field exists and therefore establishing a journal for this purpose constitutes a fundamental desideratum.

2 The Task of the Journal

Religion & Development positions itself within the broad realms opened up in the previous section. The journal’s scope and overarching bracket is the intersection of the two broad concepts of religion and development at the micro, meso and macro levels of society from historical as well as contemporary

perspectives (cf. Hefferan 2015; Rakodi 2012a). Both of these contested concepts are understood in a deliberately wide sense, with the intention to foster critical debate on each of them and their explicit and implicit relationships. In line with the approach of the Agenda for Sustainable Development implying that all countries are “developing countries”, the geographical scope of the journal is not limited. Contributions can focus on the global North and South and importantly also engage in their entanglements. The following paragraphs sketch the notions of religion and of development that underpin *Religion & Development's* scope, followed by an outline of possible directions of inquiry published in the journal.

Religion encompasses all forms of institutions, organisations, communities, networks, movements, scenes, cultures, practices and activities that can be described as religious (cf. Bergunder 2014), including those which take up the function of religion or which espouse similar normative, ideological claims. An important social function of religion is to provide meaning through the closure of ultimate indeterminacy and to affirm the purpose of life through the interpretation of contingency (Luhmann 1977). The functional notion of religion therefore includes the possibility of analysing and describing actions, organisations and movements not explicitly marked as religious by the actors involved through references to a religious discourse identifying these phenomena as religious. The concept of religion can thus refer to a cultural programme that makes it possible to recognise what is important for people in life, what a good life is for them and to what they are committed (Matthes 1992).

Importantly, the scope of the journal includes notion of “lived religion” (Gräb 2018). Relating to Geertz (1973), this approach views religion as “an integral part of culture producing a net of symbols and rituals, which articulates and embodies the significance of worldviews, meaning production and life orientations” (Gräb 2020, 4). It conceptually serves to “understand the practices within a community with respect to the symbolic order these practices embody, the rituals people do, the social, political, cultural commitments they show” (Gräb 2020, 4). An important area is the organisational level of religious communities’ and religious organisations’ concrete actions. However, contributions focusing on the social level of interaction within religious contexts and the individual level of beliefs, worldviews, attitudes and behaviour are equally encouraged. *Religion & Development* thereby has a multi-religious scope. Its focus is not limited to any specific religion. On the contrary, contributions focusing on non-mainstream religious actors and new religious movements, such as Pentecostalism (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013), are particularly welcome.

Development, meanwhile, is taken as a marker for manifold processes of social, economic, ecological, political and cultural dynamics, change and

transformation. Within this framework, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and all their 169 targets are one important point of reference. The marker “development” hence serves to encompass all the realms covered by the SDGs and includes contributions relating to one or more of the dimensions of the SDGs. This can, for example, include contributions with thematic foci on gender, ecology, economy, inequality, social services and any of their sub-dimensions or adjacent fields. References to development can be explicit or implicit.

As pointed out above, development is a contested term. The journal therefore invites contributions that critically engage with the ideological prerequisites and concepts of development, for example in the framework of post-development thinking and discourse and the theorising and conceptualisation of alternatives to development. This implies that the notion of development itself is not considered as a priori ideologically neutral, but can constitute a value-laden ideology itself (Ziai 2016). Lastly, development stands for a policy and practice field in which international organisations, governments, development agencies, humanitarian agencies, private enterprises, non-governmental organisations, religious communities and organisations, individuals and other actors engage in numerous practices, activities, projects, programmes and so forth. These actors, policies and practices and their respective motivations are well within the scope of the journal, both from emic and etic perspectives.

Regarding the scope of contributions published in *Religion & Development*, a strand of research will relate to the pointed questions raised in recent volumes such as *Religion: Help or Hindrance to Development?* (Mtata 2013) and *Does Religion Make a Difference?* (Heuser and Köhrsen 2020). How do religious communities contribute to processes of (sustainable) development? What is the (positive or negative) role of religion and religious communities for development in different contexts across the globe? Furthermore, following the critical approaches in the field (e.g. Carbonnier, Kartas and Silva 2013; Deneulin and Bano 2009; Jones and Petersen 2011), the journal seeks to provide a space to move beyond instrumental or functional approaches that ask for the contribution of religious communities to pre-defined development agendas (cf. van Wensveen 2011). As these scholars have argued, religion should not be essentialised as an “added” component to development but be considered as a dimension of life that is deeply embedded everywhere all the time. *Religion & Development* accordingly intends to challenge the dominant, secular development paradigms by exploring religious notions of development and juxtaposing them with those in the mainstream development discourse. What are the notions of development or alternatives to them brought forward by religious communities? How does religion influence notions of a good life, desirable

social and economic structures, a viable ecological order, gender relations and human diversity (cf. van Wyk 2019)? What is the stance of religious communities on inequalities in different realms, locally and globally? *Religion & Development* intentionally opens up a space for debating the arguments coming from a post-development perspective criticising and questioning the term, the notion, the policies and the practices of development altogether. Is development a “global faith” (Rist 2019)? What are the implications of the post-development discourse for the field of religion and development?

Moreover, the journal will serve as an important forum for the practical side of religion and development. This will include in-depth analyses of the work of religious communities and religious actors in the social, economic, ecological and political realms – covering their activities, their structures, their effectiveness and so forth. Questions will include, for instance: How do religious actors operate in the development field? In what ways are religious actors implementing development programmes with religious communities? How are religious communities involved in development cooperation? What are the tensions in the practical application of religions in development, from debates around proselytism to gender norms? What can we learn from good practices of religious engagement in development policy and practice (cf. Eggert)? The journal's *policy & practice* section will purposefully aim to contend with these practical debates and provide concise and accessible articles that will reach development practitioners.

At the time of writing this editorial, we are nine years from reaching the closing point of the Agenda for Sustainable Development. Looking ahead to the year 2030, the question naturally arises as to whether there will be a new global development agenda to replace or augment the Sustainable Development Goals and what the implications of the religion and development debate would be for such an agenda. *Religion & Development* therefore not only seeks to describe the world as it has been and currently is but to actively contribute to shaping the future of development or post-development alternatives by providing a space for discussing the implications of the religion and development debate for a possible post-2030 development agenda on the basis of sound academic research, evidence and argument. Looking ahead, key questions are: What will be the role of religious communities for sustainable development in the future? How do religious communities contribute to shaping post-development futures? Will the ‘religious turn’ in development policy and cooperation last beyond 2030? Taking the impact of religious communities on sustainable development seriously, how would a new development agenda or post-development agendas need to be shaped to reflect this impact? What alternative conceptualisations could emerge from the religion and development

debate, such as the concepts “Sustainable Integral Development Goals” and “Pluriversal Development Goals” recently brought forward by Obiora Ike and Lata Narayanaswamy at a deliberation on religion and development?²

3 Transdisciplinary and Collaborative Span

Religion & Development endeavours to establish itself as the primary periodical related to the nexus of religion and development, thereby aiming to become a key focal point of the knowledge production in this emerging field. The journal seeks to do this by publishing original, high-quality peer-reviewed research from across the social sciences and humanities as well as reflections from policy, practice and religious actors in this field.

Religion & Development has emerged from and is rooted in the collaborative structures of the International Network on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development (IN//RCSD n.d.). The IN//RCSD is a transdisciplinary network focusing on research, teaching and policy advice in the field of religion and sustainable development. As a global think-tank, it brings together scholars, policymakers, development practitioners and representatives of religious communities from various parts of the world. Originally founded by a group of scholars from Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (Germany), University of Lagos (Nigeria), University of Pretoria (South Africa), Trinity Theological Seminary Legon (Ghana) and University of the Western Cape (South Africa), the network is swiftly expanding and broadening its scope, inter alia collaborating with the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities in its research-to-practice work. As the journal of the IN//RCSD, *Religion & Development* editorial office is part of the IN//RCSD coordination office currently located at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin.

Building on the transdisciplinary profile of the IN//RCSD and its collaborative activities, *Religion & Development* aims to be a transdisciplinary journal. By transdisciplinarity, we refer to the term as outlined by Jahn, Bergmann and Keil:

2 Panel Discussion “Towards a Post-2030 Development Agenda” at the International Conference Religious Communities and Sustainable Development: Points of Departure for a Post-2030 Development Agenda, 11 June 2021. See <https://youtu.be/FKACalopQIE>.

Transdisciplinarity is a critical and self-reflexive research approach that relates societal with scientific problems; it produces new knowledge by integrating different scientific and extra-scientific insights; its aim is to contribute to both societal and scientific progress; integration is the cognitive operation of establishing a novel, hitherto non-existent connection between the distinct epistemic, social – organizational, and communicative entities that make up the given problem context.

JAHN, BERGMANN AND KEIL 2012, 8–9

In relation to *Religion & Development*, this entails three major aspects: a focus on development as a major and complex societal question; cooperation across academic disciplines; and exchange between academic and other societal actors that transcends the borders of the academic space. The journal, while firmly rooted in academia, is thus not a purely academic endeavour but reaches into the trifold transdisciplinary space of academia, development policy and practice and religious communities, thereby fostering unique, equitable and highly productive channels of knowledge production and exchange. An important prerequisite for this is to ensure the immediate free accessibility of all the journal's content within and beyond academia at any place and time. The journal will hence be published in full open access.

Religion & Development strives to contribute to overcoming inadequate power structures in the academic space. This will involve international cooperation on equal footing and the promotion of diversity in the journal's structures. Particular emphasis is placed on involving early-career researchers as well as scholars from the global South by encouraging them to publish their research in the journal and to get involved in the journal's editorial processes. The journal is edited by an internationally and transdisciplinarily composed Editorial Committee determining the journal's strategic development in cooperation with an advisory Editorial Board. It is our pleasure to announce that in the run-up to the publication of this inaugural issue, a diverse group of scholars from different disciplines, countries and at different stages of their respective careers have accepted our invitation to join the journal's Board. Their readiness to contribute their time and expertise to this project is greatly appreciated.

We are delighted to be able to partner on this journal with a highly renowned and globally oriented publisher. It is a particular privilege to see *Religion & Development* published by Brill and their German subsidiary Schöningh from the outset. Special thanks are due to Izaak de Hulster of Brill Germany, who has worked tirelessly to make this possible and with whom the collaboration has been nothing but excellent.

4 Editorial Policy

Religion & Development will publish three types of contributions: *research articles*, *policy & practice notes* and *book reviews*. *Research articles* should typically have a length of 7,000 to 8,000 words and include high-quality, state-of-the-art contributions to the academic debate advancing the research in the field. We encourage articles based on empirical research in all its forms, as well as those with conceptual or theoretical focus. With the *policy & practice notes*, a key element of the journal's transdisciplinary approach, we pursue a more flexible and innovative route. They should be shorter (2,000 to 4,000 words) and their content should be of interest to both practitioners and scholars in the field of religion and development. The nature of a *policy & practice note* is relatively flexible. Contributions in this section can, for example, include reflections on and lessons learned from specific programmes, projects or interventions, scoping studies and thorough mappings of specific themes, contributions highlighting specific needs for research or action, essays of argumentative character and perspectives of local actors, religious communities or religious leaders. Manuscripts for *research articles* and *policy & practice notes* will undergo rigorous peer review. After a first screening by the editorial office and the journal's editors regarding formalities, academic quality and suitability, each submission is sent to at least two anonymous expert reviewers for their assessment of the article (double blind). Authors will be requested to revise their contributions based on the reviewers' comments as well as remarks by the editors. Moreover, *Religion & Development* is committed to ensuring transdisciplinarity, internationality and diversity in the review process. In terms of transdisciplinarity, it is the journal's policy that the reviews of an article are carried out from different disciplinary perspectives. One of these would typically be the same as the author's discipline. For *policy & practice notes*, there should be at least one reviewer with a policymaker's or practitioner's background. To ensure internationality, the journal aims to have the contributions reviewed by experts from different contexts. In terms of diversity, we inter alia aim to include both senior and junior scholars in the review process as well as ensuring diversity in terms of gender.

Establishing a new publication endeavour such as *Religion & Development* has two essential requirements. Most important is the commitment of the people involved. As a founding editors' group, we are privileged to have been able to convene an excellent and diverse group of scholars both in the journal's Editorial Committee and Editorial Board, volunteering their time and driving the journal's further development. Moreover, we have thus far been equally

privileged in being able to count on the support of numerous colleagues in reviewing articles for the journal. This deserves our deep appreciation.

In addition to this commitment, there is a second requirement to the long-term viability of *Religion & Development*. The journal needs to be economically viable in the long-term. To ensure a professional publication, some costs are unavoidable, inter alia for copy-editing and typeset. From the outset, we considered it non-negotiable to publish the journal in open access. To cover the journal's immediate publication costs, we hence have developed a solidarity model based on article processing charges. In some parts of the world, financing for open access publication is increasingly available, be it through specific open access funds, from project budgets or through institutional support. Those scholars that have access to such funding will be required to pay article processing charges for their articles. At the same time, it is the journal's firm policy that these costs should not be a hindrance for anyone wanting to publish in the journal. For those authors that are not able to pay the full article processing charges or who are not able to finance article processing charges at all, the article processing charges can be substantially reduced or waived. We are confident that this model will ensure the free dissemination of knowledge while at the same time facilitating the long-term economic sustainability of the journal.

5 Setting the Scene: Notes on the First Issue

Having presented the considerations guiding us in establishing *Religion & Development* as a new, transdisciplinary periodical, we now proceed to introducing: the contributions constituting the first issue. The five *research articles*, two *policy & practice notes* and two *book reviews* very much reflect the journal's transdisciplinary and diverse approach. The contributors are scholars and practitioners at different stages of their respective careers with different disciplinary backgrounds, inter alia in law, sociology and theology. We consider it an important contribution to decolonising the academic space that the majority of the contributors in this inaugural issue are early-career scholars. The issue is furthermore truly international: in terms of the authors' affiliations, there are contributions from nine countries on three different continents: Africa, Europe and Oceania.

Most of the contributions in this issue originally emerged in the context of the conference *Between Cosmology and Community: Religion and Sustainable Development* organised by the Research Programme on Religious Communities

and Sustainable Development at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin in July 2019. The theme *Cosmology and Community* highlights a field of tension and constitutes two important foci of the religion and development debate. On the one hand, religious communities are social entities, whose constitutive factor is the interaction among their members and with wider society. On the other hand, a distinctive feature of many religious communities is their reference to cosmology. They are agents of worldview production, identity formation and values synthesis. With respect to sustainable development, *Community* signifies contributions by religious agents to processes of social, economic, ecological and cultural transformation. *Cosmology* refers to the ideological dimension, the impact of the formation of mind-sets, belief and knowledge systems, attitudes and behaviour on these processes of transformation. Relating to the realm of *Community*, the contributions in this volume deal with the contribution of religious communities to processes of sustainable development in different contexts. Related to the realm of *Cosmology*, the contributions deal with notions of development both of (Western) development cooperation and of religious communities and their respective ideological presuppositions. As previously mentioned, the discourse on religion and development has thus far largely been taking place within a secular framework. This is challenged by perspectives of religious actors, for whom “development is part of religion, i.e. professional and academic experts’ notions of development represent only one dimension in a more comprehensive human and social transformation” (Öhlmann, Frost and Gräb 2020). Hence, under the theme of *Cosmology*, the contributions analyse notions such as Trinitarian Well-Being and Ubuntu in relation to dominant Western and secular notions of development and modernity.

In the first article, “You Are Blessed to Be a Blessing’: Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches and the Politics of Redistribution in Harare”, Simbarashe Gukurume investigates the role of new Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches in holistic development. The author draws on ethnographic field work conducted in Good Life Church in Harare. Relying on Bourdieu’s concepts of habitus and field, he describes these churches as “alternative spaces of welfare provision, redistribution and social security” in a context of multiple crises. At the same time, Gukurume makes out a field of tension between inclusion and exclusion and concludes that a “specific socialised Pentecostal habitus” plays a crucial role for sustainable development in Good Life Church.

Jacqueline Service engages with ontological questions on the meaning of human well-being in the second article, “Contesting the Dynamics of Secular Development: An Ontology of Trinitarian Well-Being as Christian Rationale for Human Well-Being”. Service argues that the secular framework of the Western

development paradigm is to a large extent shared by religious development organisations. Taking this observation as a starting point, the author develops an ontology of Trinitarian Well-Being as a theological rationale for Christian engagement with development. She outlines implications of this concept for Christian development practice, *inter alia* referring to the importance of interpersonal relationality. Service's article thereby underlines the mutual interdependence of the realms of cosmology and community.

The third article engages with the theme of freedom of religion and belief. Under the title "Freedom by Regulation: A Legal Assessment of the CRL Commission's Report on the Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems", Cosmo Mapitsa critically engages with a recent debate in the South African context on whether there should be state regulation in the religious sector in light of cases of disconcerting activities taking place in some religious communities. Mapitsa scrutinises the Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities' *Report of the Hearings on the Commercialisation of Religion and Abuse of People's Belief Systems* (CRL Commission 2017) and identifies several shortcomings. He concludes that the commission should have taken a human rights approach that distinguishes "between individual rights to hold a belief and community rights to carry out religious practices", pointing out that "[t]he individual right to a belief and conviction is inviolable, while the communal right to practise one's religion is limited by other rights in the Bill of Rights".

The role of religion in general and neo-Pentecostal churches in particular with regard to sustainable development is discussed in the fourth article, "Religion and Sustainable Development in Africa: Neo-Pentecostal Economies in Perspective" by Ben-Willie Golo and Ernestina Novieto. The authors criticise the fact that religion has long been neglected in the development discourse and argue "for the centrality of religion to development." Drawing on interviews with church leaders in Ghana, Golo and Novieto investigate the important, yet not uncontroversial, contribution of neo-Pentecostal churches to economic development. Their findings show that neo-Pentecostal churches have become relevant actors in this area on different levels, offering business trainings, scholarships and employment to members (and non-members) and empowering people to become active themselves. While the authors stress the importance of these contributions to economic development, they also point to the criticism that this type of development might not be holistic with regard to environmental sustainability.

In the fifth article, "The Notion of 'Development' in Ubuntu", Raphael Sartorius turns to the African concept of Ubuntu in search of alternatives to the dominant, Western ideas of development. Taking post-colonial critique

and the post-development debate as starting points, the author uses discursive analysis of key texts to carve out the normative implications Ubuntu has on notions of development, such as the primacy of human dignity over wealth, the importance of social relations and empowerment as people's ability to provide for themselves. Furthermore, Sartorius highlights the contribution of Ubuntu to the development discourses and practices in the global North, recommending a departure from universalist perspectives and the need to acknowledge the importance of situated and religious knowledge systems and their normative views on society.

Engaging with the realms of cosmology and community with a focus on gender equality, Jørgen Thomsen writes on “Religious Actors for Gender Equality – SDG 5: A Reflection on the Side by Side Faith Movement for Gender Justice”. In his *policy & practice note*, the author analyses and critically reflects on the movement's practical work. He stresses the role of the religious dimension with respect to gender relations, which influences “how women and men see themselves and each other and how they thus practise gender equality – or not”. The author hence highlights the necessity of continued engagement with religious actors in order to achieve the aim of gender equality.

In the second *policy & practice note* of this issue, Ezekiel Boro, Tanvi Sapra, Jean-François de Lavison, Caroline Dalabona, Vinya Ariyaratne and Agus Samsudin focus on the role of religious actors in the corona pandemic. Their article, “The Role and Impact of Faith-Based Organisations in the Management of and Response to COVID-19 in Low-Resource Settings” looks at the work of three religious organisations in different contexts: Brazil, Indonesia and Sri Lanka. It analyses each organisation's response to the pandemic and the problems faced. The article concludes by providing recommendations for global public health and development actors as well as local religious organisations, highlighting the need for increased mutual engagement and partnership.

In the *book review* section, Bjørn Hallstein Holte introduces us to the recent volume by Corrie Decker and Elisabeth McMahon *The Idea of Development in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2021) – a volume that “will give those caught up in the jargon of development goals and other development fads space to reflect on the configurations of knowledge and power underlying their work, the history of these configurations, and what alternatives might look like”.

Finally, Paul Gifford provides a review of Séverine Deneulin's new book *Human Development and the Catholic Social Tradition: Towards an Integral Ecology* (Routledge, 2021), recommending it as “a remarkable introduction” to Amartya Sen and Catholic Social Teaching and as a “worthy contribution to reflection on the role of religion in comprehensive development”.

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