

Preface

The genesis of this book dates back to a thesis prepared for my first postgraduate degree nearly twenty years ago. The title of this thesis was 'Liberation Theology, Development and Latin America'. Its premise was that religion was an integral component of the social tapestry of Latin America but had been overlooked and excluded from consideration by the major development paradigms. The thesis gave accounts of various practical examples of how Christian religious beliefs and organisations in this part of the world were having positive effects on human well-being.

Since that time, I have been interested in how the world's major religions understood development in their sacred texts and social teachings and how this was put into practice by affiliated development-focused agencies. However, as is often the case, my desire to spend time researching these questions was scuttled by other tasks. Although these tasks precluded such research, they did conspire to keep my interest aflame. This included working in a large Christian faith-based organisation, planning, designing and evaluating development projects in primarily Buddhist countries, completing doctoral studies on human well-being indices that explicitly excluded religious beliefs, teaching 'development' at a secular university and undertaking evaluations of projects that were implemented in Pacific countries which were heavily reliant on Christian churches to bolster civil society. While undertaking these activities over the past two decades, it remained apparent to me that religion was still a thoroughly relevant but under-researched aspect of development. This book is my small contribution to what I perceive as a gap in the development literature.

As the writing of this book has unfolded, I have been pleased to discover that an increasing number (albeit it from a very small starting point) of researchers and practitioners share this desire to bring religion into the conversation of development. Slowly but surely the importance of religion and religious organisations is becoming noticed. A decade ago, the president of the World Bank co-hosted, along with the archbishop of Canterbury, a World Faith Development Dialogue to establish connections between the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund and various religious groups. Since then, other multilateral agencies have also initiated dialogue with religious groups. More recently there has been recognition in the development sector that there

is importance and synergy to be gained by being aware of and incorporating religion more purposely into the development domain. Indeed, this followed a number of international forums that have brought together religious leaders and large international donors to explore how to leverage the experience and expertise that both groups can bring to improving the lives of the poor. For example, 'spiritual development' was discussed at the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development, 'initiatives that require a spiritual vision' were discussed at the 1996 Habitat Agenda, the need for 'addressing spiritual needs' was recognised in the 1995 Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development.

This increased dialogue between religious institutions and their associated faith-based organisation and multilateral organisations has been accompanied by an increase in scholarly work that investigates the role of religion and development. The most substantial of these is located at the University of Birmingham (UK) and funded by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DfID). The research had three core themes:

- understanding how religious values and beliefs motivate the actions of both individuals and faith-based organisations;
- understanding how religious values and beliefs and religious organisations influence relationships between societies and states;
- understanding the ways in which religious organisations and faith communities interact with development agencies and practitioners and what outcomes occur as a result of this in regard to the achievement of certain development goals (see www.rad.bham.ac.uk)

Similar research is being undertaken in the United States at Georgetown University's Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs.

These research goals are of great import. But it is frustrating to note that these research questions were presciently raised in 1980 by Wilber and Jameson in their contribution to the special edition of the foremost development studies journal: *World Development*. This special edition on the relationship between religion and development might have been expected to 'convert' the field of development studies to believing and having faith in the importance of religion in development. Yet the stony silence that greeted this edition and the eschewing lack of interest suggests a failure in this regard. Perhaps this recent renewal of interest may result in a new faith in the importance of religion in development. This book will, I hope, add to this recent work by undertaking a review of how the world's five major religions understand and practice development.

I am very grateful to Anthony Ware for his assistance with this book. He has provided a critical review of each chapter and provided generous assistance with ideas and insights.

I am also grateful to Lindsay Rae, Rob Kilpatrick, Ted Vandeloo and Ashley Goode – all of World Vision Australia – with whom I have attended various meetings, prepared grant proposals and written conference presentations (particularly with Lindsay), all of which have strengthened the analysis of faith-based organisations presented in this book.

During the writing of this book, Professor Bill Logan helped me to say ‘no’ to many other pressing tasks, which gave me the time and space to focus solely on this work.

I finally wish to thank my wife, Gabrielle, and children, Sophie, Peter and Hannah, who have forgiven me for the time I have given over to this research.

This book is dedicated to all faith-inspired people – lay and ordained – who have dedicated their lives to working with the vulnerable and marginalised in our communities.

MC

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