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RELIGION AND THE ETHICS OF DEVELOPMENT

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1. Introduction

Do religions aid or bar development? Well, they do both: they assist and obstruct development. Faith-based organizations (FBOs) and religious groups champion development with rare commitment and passion. At the same time, role of religious actors and dogmas behind intolerance, authoritarianism, gender inequality, passivity, fund consumption, and obstruction of development work is well known. On account of an inflated understanding of religion as an impediment to development, sometimes, religion is suggested to be kept out of development practice, forgetting the fact that religion and development have had an intimate relation whether for good or ill.[1] Sociological studies of religion, like Max Weber's path-breaking *The Protestant Ethic* (1905-06), point out that even for a purely economic conception of development, religion has been a definitive inspiration. Weber writes referring to the Protestant ethic:

> ... the *summum bonum* of this ethic, the earning of more and more money, combined with the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life, is above all completely devoid of any eudaemonistic, not to say hedonistic, admixture.[2]

Religion, as a social phenomenon, is inseparably tied with the processes, programmes, ideologies, assumptions, and workings of the development act, as Leah Selinger rightly asserts: "... religion, as a central and definitive element of culture, has to be addressed if development is to be both successful and sustainable."[3]

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[1]Sabina Alkire, "Religion and Development," in *The Elgar Companion to Development Studies*, ed. David Clark, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2006, 502.

[2]Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1976, 53.

[3]Leah Selinger, "The Forgotten Factor: The Uneasy Relationship between Religion and Development," *Social Compass* 51, 4 (2004), 524.

In this article we look at the intimate relationship between religion and development from a 'development ethics perspective', beginning with a very brief account of what this ethics is.

2. Development Ethics

Taking inspiration from the early twentieth century critics of development understood as economic growth, industrialization, modernization and, most of all, westernization, like Mahatma Gandhi, Denis Goulet (1931-2006),[4] an American existentialist thinker with tremendous field experience in Latin America and Sri Lanka, pioneered the interdisciplinary field of study called 'development ethics'. Let us begin with his own understanding of the field of study he virtually founded.

> ... [T]he task of development ethics is to assure that the painful changes launched under the banner of development do not result in antidevelopment, which destroys cultures and individuals and exacts undue sacrifices in suffering and societal wellbeing – all in the name of profit, some absolutized ideology, or a supposed efficiency imperative.[5]

In his tour de force, *The Cruel Choice* (1971), Goulet notes:

> Although development can be studied as an economic, political, educational, or social phenomenon, its ultimate goals are those of existence itself: to provide all men with the opportunity to live full human lives. Thus understood, development is the ascent of all men and societies in their total humanity.[6]

Development ethics comes across as a critique of development, or rather, of what masquerades as development. It is an effort at pointing out what a morally defensible development is. In *The Cruel Choice*, Goulet shows the 'dialectic process of development' as leaving good as well as bad effects, construction as well as destruction. A common, defiant and resigned interpretation of this dialectics given by 'development experts' (whom

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[4]A fresh biographical article on Goulet's contribution to the field of development ethics is: Des Gasper, "Denis Goulet and the Project of Development Ethics: Choices in Methodology, Focus and Organization," Working Paper, No. 456, The Hague: Institute of Social Studies, 2008.

[5]Denis Goulet, "Development Ethics: A New Discipline," *International Journal of Social Economics* 24, 11 (1997), 1169.

[6]Denis Goulet, *The Cruel Choice: A New Concept in the Theory of Development*, New York: Athenaeum, 1978, x.

Goulet calls 'one-eyed-giants'[7]) is 'you cannot have your cake and eat it'. If you want to go for development, then you better be prepared for some of its ill effects. But development ethicists think otherwise. They think that 'development' is a dynamic human engagement and is not something like a stone set in motion from the hilltop, which could stop only at the foot of the hill. They believe that human agents can work upon the processes of development, change their direction, and plan them ethically for liberating humans from their unfreedoms, if they so will.

Growth in the field of development ethics has been modest,[8] but steady. Theoretically, it has been strongly influenced in recent times by Amartya Sen's capability approach. But the tendency to identify this inquiry entirely with the capability approach is presently resisted, and this resistance is said to be an attempt at deepening development ethics.[9] Several introductory treatments of development ethics are now available,[10] as well as specific issue-based studies.[11] Of the latter, an example would be Goulet's study of "Value Conflicts in Technology Transfers to the Third World" in his *The Uncertain Promise* (1977).[12]

Goulet points out two major ways in which development ethics is practised: an inductive practice-to-theory approach of development policy planners and experts articulating ethical dilemmas and their solutions, and a deductive theory-to-practice approach of ethicists elaborating normative

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[7]Denis Goulet, "Development Experts: The One-Eyed Giants," *World Development* 8, 7 (1980), 481-489.

[8]For a somewhat comprehensive and annotated bibliography of the literature related to the broad area of development ethics, see: David Crocker and Stephen Schwenge, *The Relevance of Development Ethics for USAID*, Washington, DC: Management Systems International, 2005, 31-38.

[9]See Des Gasper and T. D. Truong, "Deepening Development Ethics: From Economism to Human Development to Human Security," *European Journal of Development Research* 17, 3 (2005), 372-384.

[10]See David A. Clark, "Development Ethics: A Research Agenda," *International Journal of Social Economics* 29, 11 (2002), 830-348; David A. Crocker, "Development Ethics," *Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Digital Version 1.0, London: Routledge, 1998; Denis Goulet, *Development Ethics at Work: Explorations 1960-2002*, London: Routledge, 2006; Des Gasper, *The Ethics of Development: From Economism to Human Development*, New Delhi: Vistaar, 2005.

[11]Gasper and Truong, "Deepening Development Ethics."

[12]Denis Goulet, *The Uncertain Promise: Value Conflicts in Technology Transfer*, New York: IDOC/North America, 1977.

ethical solutions to development dilemmas from their ethical stances.[13] Crocker points out several agreements and contestations prevailing in development ethics. He contends that there is a wide range of consensus among development ethicists on the need to bridge the inhuman gap between affluence and poverty, the recognition of the ethical and value dimension of development and growth, the multidimensionality of development as a discipline, the need for theory-practice interaction, the role of rich nations in reducing abject poverty in the developing world, the realization that economic growth has also created grave problems, the global canvass upon which their work needs to be placed, the need for development work to be context-sensitive and the usual rejection of extremes like conspicuous consumption, marked inequality, authoritarian egalitarianism as in totalitarianism. Among contentious issues is the scope of development ethics (ethics of third world development or international development?), status of the moral norms to be applied for critique (universal, particularistic or both?), pattern of distribution of the benefits of development as championed by globalization (utilitarian, Rawlsian, libertarian, socialistic, capability approach?), pattern of resolving moral dilemmas (majoritarian democratic means or use of expert opinions of judges, development experts, etc.?), ambiguity about the teleological goal of development (creation of wealth, wellbeing, human development?), dilemma about the agency/institution responsible for global destitution (World Bank or UNO), etc.[14]

The usually quoted sources of development ethics are a series of historical activists and theoreticians on the biggest canvass, who challenged the idea of development as economic growth. For Goulet, the precursors of development ethics are (i) M. K. Gandhi (1869-1948), a staunch critic of colonial economy and the father figure of Indian freedom movement, (ii) Louis-Joseph Lebret (1897-1966), a French Catholic priest, advocate of economy in the service of human being ('human economy') and founder of the magazine *Économie et Humanisme* in 1940 and *Developpement et Civilisations* in 1960, and (iii) Gunnar Myrdal (1898-1987), a Swedish economist, political scientist and winner of 1974 Nobel Prize in economics, known for diverging from his early pure economics concerns to social and political angles of economics.[15] Gasper gives a list

[13]Goulet, "Development Ethics: A New Discipline," 1166.
[14]Crocker and Schwenge, *The Relevance of Development Ethics for USAID*, 7-15.
[15]Goulet, "Development Ethics: A New Discipline," 1161-64.

inclusive of Goulet's three sources and much more: John Locke (1632-1704), Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832), John Stuart Mill (1806-73), Karl Marx (1818-1883), Mao-Tse-Tung (1893-1976), Julius Nyerere (the first prime minister of Tanzania and advocate of peaceful change [1922-1999]), the international human rights movement, the championing of a religious global ethic by dissident Catholic priest and theologian Hans Küng, Denis Goulet (1931-2006), American sociologist and Lutheran theologian Peter Berger, English economist and founder of Intermediate Technology Movement E. F. Schumacher (1911-1977), and Amartya Sen's decisive contribution to human development and capability approach.[16] Crocker includes in his list of influences on development ethics, the Anglo-American applied ethics debates on the responsibility of citizens of rich nations to relieve poverty in poor nations and the Catholic theological movement originated in Latin America, liberation theology, championed by the Peruvian Dominican priest, Gustavo Gutiérrez.[17]

At the outset, the reader may notice a definite way in which religion, non-religion, freedom struggle, economics, social sciences and, truly, a singular thought for destitute humanity in the midst of abundance, have given rise to the field of study called development ethics. Now, from the perspective of development ethics, let us try to see the engagement between religion and development.

3. Religion and Holistic Development Vision

Religion, when understood from its spiritual core, usually provides a much broader concept of development than economic progress. In most of the noticeably successful interchanges between religion and development work, such a broader conception has been visible. "For them, the debate about development is a deeper one, related to an understanding of what it means to be human."[18] Referring to cases of faith-based development work like the Buddhism-inspired Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka, Hinduism-inspired *Swadhyaya* movement in India, Muslim organizations in Africa and the Middle East, and instances of Christianity-inspired development works all over the developing world, Wendy Tyndale comes to the above conclusion. Scriptures as well as spiritual

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[16]Gasper, *The Ethics of Development*, 16-18.

[17]Crocker and Schwenge, *The Relevance of Development Ethics for USAID*, 2.

[18]Wendy Tyndale, "Idealism and Practicality: The Role of Religion in Development," *Development* 46, 4 (2003), 23.

leaders have time and again upheld the spiritual ideal of development. Pope Paul VI wrote in 1967: "Development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man."[19] Development institutions' resistance to involve religious personnel and organizations in development is attributed by Tyndale to the unsupported fear of resistance to change, and mainly to the different, more holistic and qualitative rather than quantitative vision of development religions have. However, realizing the effectiveness of the type of change that an involvement with religion can bring about, UN agencies, the World Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank and such other organs of development have recently begun development dialogues with religions. A monumental achievement that asserted the complementary role of religion in development was the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), set up in 1998.[20]

A spiritual vision of development is certainly more holistic and looks at the entire human person and the quality of her life. Schumacher writes: "The quality of life – not the quantity – yes, that's what matters. GNP, being a purely quantitative concept, bypasses the real question: how to enhance the quality of life."[21] A characteristic aim of development ethics, as a subject matter that arose from certain disenchantment with the way development was pursued, was to champion qualitative and holistic development. Since religion, when it is interpreted from its core rather than its peripherals, is supportive of this goal, and since religion has contributed to development practice in the twentieth century, development ethics does not look at religion as a necessary evil that might be tolerated.

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[19]Paul VI, "Encyclical Letter *Populorum Progressio*" (26 March 1967), cited in Gregory Baum, "Solidarity with the Poor," in *The Lab, the Temple and the Market: Reflection at the Intersection of Science, Religion and Development*, ed. Sharon M. P. Harper, Bloomfield, USA: Kumarian Press, 2000, 83.

[20]Visit http://www.wfdd.org.uk/. The website has useful material on religion and development, and case studies of successful faith-based practice of development. In 1980, the journal, *World Development*, dedicated a special issue on the question of development and religion: Charles Wilber and Kenneth Jameson, eds., special issue entitled "Religious Values and Development," *World Development* 8 (1980), 7-8. For the religious vision of development, a more holistic vision, especially in Hinduism, Islam, and Roman Catholicism, see, Harper, *The Lab, the Temple and the Market*.

[21]E. F. Schumacher, *Good Work*, New Delhi: BI Publications, 1979, 126.

For Goulet, the problem of development experts' and modernizers' assumption that religion is detrimental to development is based on their uncritical acceptance of secularism, which he contrasts with secularization. For him, secularism is the philosophy of reducing the world of values to secular matters, whereas secularization is recognizing the values of the world, the secular values, as decisive in human affairs and accepting them, not anymore as trivial matters in comparison to eternal matters, but wholeheartedly as matters that call for the complete dedication of all members of the society. Hence, Gandhi and other leaders of the developing world, readily accepted secularization, a practical step, but not the philosophy of secularism, which, for them is untenable. But the development experts, often, conduct themselves as though secularism is an essential ingredient of development, and this enrages a lot of people in the developing world. "Local communities, and occasionally whole nations, can turn against power-wielders whom they perceive as coercively secularistic, and not merely secularizing."[22]

For Goulet, the treatment of religious values by development experts is only symptomatic of how the whole pack of traditional wisdom, which together makes up a person's/community's 'existence rationality'[23] – a rationality that is not so much scientific but pragmatic enough to solve the existential dilemmas of life – which is treated with scant respect by the technocrats of modernization. For him, calculative rationality can never yield a satisfactory relationship between humans and nature, even in the midst of an ecological crisis, but a traditional vision, enmeshed in a religious worldview, can and it already is. Hence, why it needs to be disrupted, torn asunder and disfigured, in order to cultivate development? Thus, he defends both indigenous knowledge and the religious worldview. Referring to Sri Lanka's *Sarvodaya Shramadana* Movement, Goulet shows how its Buddhist philosophy of the four noble truths helps it to build a holistic development philosophy:

> In Sri Lanka, there is indeed a problem; underdevelopment, with its train of ills – poverty, disease, inertia, lack of self-confidence, hopelessness. And this evil has a cause: social exploitation which

[22]Denis Goulet, "In Defense of Cultural Rights: Technology, Tradition and Conflicting Models of Rationality," *Human Rights Quarterly* 3, 4 (1981), 11-12.

[23]It is a "*process* by which a society devises a conscious strategy for obtaining its goals, given its ability to process information and the constraints weighing upon it." Goulet, *The Cruel Choice*, 188.

> roots poor and powerless people in passivity. Nevertheless, there exists a hope of improving: not by awaiting favors from well-disposed politicians or benefactors, but by getting organized to solve problems collectively. Finally, there are ways of acting effectively: tools, instruments, techniques, work plans which are to be tried out in concrete experience, translated into training curricula, and then widely disseminated in ways accessible to all.[24]

Goulet refers to the Sri Lankan movement as one that "promotes a non-elite people's development which subordinates material improvement and technological modernization to a larger vision of human well-being in harmony with the Buddhist notion of full awakening."[25]

From a 'development ethics' perspective, it needs to be noted that the disenchantment felt over the narrowly economistic understanding of development, does show the relevance and the perennial vibrancy of the spiritual vision of development. In another lively discussion, Goulet notes that people in developing countries still find in religions their primary source of meaning and value. Doing without these in development work is a bad choice for Goulet. He concludes:

> A growing chorus of voices, in rich and poor countries alike, proclaim that full human development is not possible without regard for essential religious values. These voices assert that achievements in political, social, economic, technical, artistic and scientific realms do not exhaust the creativity, beauty or triumphs of which human beings are capable. Development's pressing imperatives will doubtless oblige religious practitioners to change many of their ancient symbols and practices. And conversely, it is to be hoped, the resiliency of critically tested religious value systems will invite development experts to enrich their own diagnoses and prescriptions for action. Both categories of one-eyed giants may perhaps come to acknowledge that they need each other if they are, jointly, to gain a wisdom to match modem sciences.[26]

Mahatma Gandhi, working from a deeply spiritual vision, strove to merge his vision of a developed free India with his religious values rather than separate the two in the western model of secularism: separation between

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[24]Goulet, "In Defense of Cultural Rights," 14.

[25]Goulet, "In Defense of Cultural Rights," 13.

[26]Denis Goulet, "Development Experts: The One-Eyed Giants," *World Development* 8, 7 (1980), 488.

state and religion. At the same time, he was a true cosmopolitan who believed in the genuine toleration of all faiths and in the moral unity of humanity across all boundaries.[27] A lot of research efforts analyzing the association or dissociation of the orthodox development ideal with Hinduism are available. But, in an interesting analysis, Oommen points out that all religions and particular sects may have elements both favourable and unfavourable for economic development, and Hinduism, broadly construed, also has both these elements. This he posits against the Weber thesis that Hinduism, with a certain version of fatalism enshrined in the theory of Karma, its rigid classical social stratification, and its other-worldly orientation, may not contribute much to economic development, just like Catholicism did not.[28] Promilla Kapur's study points to the positive force of Hinduism for a new development vision:

> The present generation, I think, can do little more than lay the groundwork of an ultimately 'united' world. It is exactly in this process that the Hindu religion, for me, offers such valuable resources: its syncretic and pluralistic history and its concept of an ultimate Oneness provide an alternative outlook and an important balance to the divisive effect of modern systems and materialistic mindsets.[29]

The Human Development Reports, brought out by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), with its popular indexing of countries according to their human development and not their GNP, is a recognition of the broader development vision. Philosopher Aristotle noted that wealth was not the true end of our endeavour but something beyond wealth. Similarly, for Immanuel Kant, in all our endeavours, we ought to treat humanity, whether it is in our person or in another, as the end and never merely as a means. These philosophers, religions, and traditional wisdom had a broader vision of development than the narrow view of

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[27]I have argued this point in my paper, "Porous Frontiers, Porous Faces: The Self as Opening towards the World," to be presented at the Second Biennial Conference of the International Global Ethics Association, 26-28 June 2008, at Deakin University, Meldbourne. See also, David Hardiman, *Gandhi in His Time and Ours*, New Delhi: Permanent Black, 2003.

[28]T. K. Oommen, "Religion and Development in Hindu Society," *Social Compass* 39, 1 (1992), 67-75.

[29]Promilla Kapur, "The Principal of Fundamental Oneness," in *The Lab, the Temple and the Market*, 9.

economic growth. Human development was defined by the very first HDR of 1990 as enhancing people's choices so that they could live a fulfilling human life, as befitting the dignity of human persons. The very first paragraph of that report says:

> People are the wealth of a nation. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment of people to enjoy long, healthy, and creative lives. This may appear to be a simple truth. But it is often forgotten in the immediate concern with the accumulation of commodities and financial wealth.[30]

Amartya Sen speaks of enhancing the freedoms people have reason to value as the goal of development. His human development philosophy has been understood by his interpreters in a holistic fashion. For instance, Sabina Alkire writes: "By *human development*, I will mean human flourishing in its fullest sense – in matters public and private, economic and social and political and spiritual."[31] Amartya Sen himself also alludes to the same in saying that all varieties of lives and freedoms people have reason to value should be taken to consideration in the capability approach. For example, he points out, among two people fasting, one is a destitute with no choice but to fast, and the other is a religious faster who exercises her choice to undertake the fast. He writes:

> Thus, the capability approach, broadly defined, is not concerned only with checking what set of bundles of functionings one could choose from, but also with seeing the functionings themselves in a suitably rich way to reflect the relevant aspects of freedom. The constitutive plurality of the capability approach to living standard has to take note of this as well.[32]

Although the originator of the capabilities approach, Sen shied away from making it a prescriptive paradigm and so never spoke definitively of what these capabilities are (of course, tentatively and descriptively, yes). Is spiritual life a capability that people have reason to value? But Martha Nussbaum, a classicist, feminist, and a capability theorist along with Sen, does give a list of central human capabilities. One of them is 'senses,

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[30]UNDP, *Human Development Report 1990*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, 9.

[31]Sabina Alkire, "Dimensions of Human Development," *World Development* 30, 2 (2002), 182.

[32]Amartya Sen, *The Standard of Living: The Tanner Lectures*, Geoffrey Hawthorn, ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 37-38.

imagination and thought'. Here she includes the spiritual aspect of humans as well: "... producing self-expressive works and events of one's own choice, religious, literary, musical, and so forth ... and freedom of religious exercise. Being able to search for the ultimate meaning of life in one's own way."[33] Indeed, Nussbaum's list of capabilities is in no way meant to be final; it is 'a moral conception selected for political purposes only': "... the list remains open-ended and humble; it can always be contested and remade."[34] If we go through similar ends of human life in development literature,[35] spiritual need of humans is not universally considered as a dimension people have reason to value. However, a respected cross-cultural study of what the poor value, undertaken by the World Bank, showed that most of them value a spiritual dimension of life.[36] Thus, Sabina Alkire writes:

> If development aims to expand the freedoms people value and have reason to value, and if religion is so valued, then religious freedoms should be part of development (alongside tolerance and democratic practices), as the 2004 *Human Development Report* argued.[37]

Hence, while religion expands the development vision, it is the responsibility of the political organs of development like the State to provide religious freedom in a secular spirit of tolerance. This adds an important dimension of people's freedoms and an important dimension to the development vision, which is not a narrow vision any more.

It is not only in providing a more holistic ideology to the narrow economistic idea of development that religious visions have helped. Let us now turn to a brief look at the work of FBOs.

4. Faith-Based Development Organizations

The work done in the development field by persons and organizations with allegiance to religious values and religious communities or those who directly or indirectly claim inspiration from religious ideologies or figures

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[33]Martha C. Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, 79.

[34]Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 77.

[35]See Alkire, "Dimensions of Human Development," 181-205.

[36]See Deepa Narayan and others, *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* New York: Oxford University Press for the World Bank, 2004.

[37]Alkire, "Religion and Development," 503; see also UNDP, *Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1990, 54-57.

for the work they do is playing an important role in the development of peoples across the world, especially in the world's most destitute pockets. They may be located in a village with an informal structure or may be having a more formal structure with a national or international configuration. In all religions, development work, either organized or unorganized, forms an important aspect of its social orientation. While their earliest origins might have been based on religious virtues such as charity, compassion and almsgiving, today they have come a long way and have formally and structurally grown, although based on the same fundamental spiritual ideal. For a Christian development worker, the 'fullness of life' that Christ promised might become a constant inspiration for his/her development interventions.[38] Literature on the type of work done by FBOs abound.[39] The volume of development work and fund for the same generated by FBOs is no way marginal. In the developing world, it is bringing about substantial changes. One may think of the World Vision, Islamic Relief, Catholic Relief Services, Ramakrishna Mission, Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, etc.

The type of service delivered by FBOs may be of a great variety: education, healthcare, care of the elderly, orphans and the physically and mentally challenged persons, community development, relief and disaster work, care of refugees, etc. In a tremendously pluralistic context like that of India, while FBOs may exercise their freedom according to their discretion in staff selection, administration and financial management (subject to basic checks and balances of transparency), it is debatable whether they should also be selective in service delivery. That is, if a facilitating NGO, which is faith-based, has undertaken an area (say, a village) for community development, what happens if it chooses not to invite families that do not profess its faith to be part of the programme? Should it be exclusivist? From a development ethics perspective, especially in a pluralistic context, such situations are themselves anti-

[38]"I came that they may have life and have it abundantly." John 10:10.

[39]See Charles Leslie Glenn, *The Ambiguous Embrace: Government and Faith-Based Schools and Social Agencies*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000; Heidi Rolland Unruh and Ronald J. Sider, *Saving Souls, Serving Society: Understanding the Faith Factor in Church-Based Social Ministry*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005; Mary Lean, *Bread, Bricks, Belief: Communities in Charge of their Future*, Connecticut: Kumarian Press, 1995; Simon Zadek and Sue Szabo, *Valuing Organisations: The Case of Sarvodaya*, London: New Economics Foundation, 1994.

developmental and profusely fragmentary and divisive and, hence, not morally defensible. There is also a general accusation that development work of most of the FBOs is masked effort at proselytism. This provocative accusation calls for an independent and impartial study. But, as reason would suggest, the whole claim seems to be untenable. The volume of work put in by FBOs have not reaped as much proselytizing results as common sense would pass for a coherent and sustained link between the two. Schools run by religious organizations are the most fertile field for proselytizing. But do children sent to these schools change their religion inspired by their proselytizing efforts of school authorities? The link is more imagined than actual.

The greatest advantage of FBOs is the cooperation and rapport they enjoy with whom they work and the commitment they inspire and put in. Religion, however, also inspires an 'unquestioning' attitude in humans, who are otherwise questioning beings, on account of certain wonderment. This attitude can occasionally hinder development work. For example, if a development worker conscientizes people on women's empowerment, people may reject this philosophy if their respective religions hold other views. On the contrary, if FBOs themselves preach the philosophy of gender equality, there is little room for dissent and resistance. It is also seen, especially in the developing world, that development workers from religiously inspired NGOs are willing to put in services with greater commitment and comparatively lesser pay, than experts from secular and professional NGOs. Of course, this aspect needs to be studied with care. However, on the whole, one may generalize about the religiously inspired NGO personnel's zeal in development work, comparable with a missionary's proselytizing zeal. From a development ethics perspective, if an FBO's basic development philosophy is in line with current human rights and human development visions, the amount of zeal they are able to put in for development work is admirable. Below, I shall narrate the story of one such work, of which I was fortunate to be part of, albeit as an evaluator.

Phom Naga tribal community, one of the sixteen among the major Naga tribes of Nagaland, is also one of the smaller and most backward tribes – the last to give up the dreaded headhunting practice common among the gallant Naga tribes in 1952. Their traditional habitat is now a district of Nagaland – Longleng. 'Phom Community Development Project' (PCDP), funded by Kindernothilfe, Germany, through Holistic Child

Development India (HCDI),[40] a Pune-based organization, is implemented by the Phom Baptist Christian Association. As an external evaluator of the project, I visited the project villages in 2001 and 2004. The project is basically child-focused, but it aims to develop children by developing the community, which appeared to me a sensible and holistic goal. Speaking to a cross section of leaders from the community, I found a consensual opinion that PCDP is the biggest development programme that the Phom community ever had. Government's generic programmes have been scattered, wasteful, and purposeless. The project had four components: (i) *Community organization* is about educating and organizing the community for development. This component of the project mainly deals with training, awareness programmes, and get-togethers that foster community spirit, tribal celebrations, etc. (ii) Under the *education* component, several schools were built in Longleng, many of which were later taken over by the government midway through the project when they were made fully functional. (iii) *Healthcare* component also dealt with awareness programmes. Breaking the tribal resistance to family planning practices momentously, the project helped organize several vasectomy camps in Longleng. The project also trained and placed community health workers permanently in the villages. Reproductive and child health programmes are a central part of this component. (iv) As the project crossed over ten years of its tenure, the most important project component became *livelihood systems*. Better ways of hilltop cultivation, floriculture, livestock rearing, training in skills like carpentry and weaving, etc., make this component vital for the project's sustainability.

During my visits, I found the staff of HCDI, Pune, rather impatient with target achievement and the rather 'cool' attitude of the project staff and people. As an outsider having no stake in the project, I, however, marvelled at the way the Church could provide cohesiveness and vision to a people, left off by government machinery and the number politics among the tribals themselves. Change was gradually happening; capacity building had saved many young boys and girls from 'eternal' work in the ungrateful jhum fields; education was rejuvenated. Everybody, from old ill-clad tribal men and women to those looking more sophisticated in their jeans, spoke the language of development. Training terminologies came to them so naturally, as an effect of long hammering in. Their democratic practices were absolutely astounding. For a small decision to be taken about the

[40]See http://www.holisticchild.org

project, they used to meet countless times and discuss and chat, disagree and argue for long hours. Everyone, young and old, the comparatively better off and the worse off, women and men, were given chances to speak out their mind, though there still remained a hierarchy about who would speak first. It was an eye-opener for me regarding the power of FBOs and about the amount of cohesion they were able to bring to a development work. They did everything very religiously; for every meeting, a five-minute prayer and sometimes group prayer, where everyone prayed allowed very emotionally to God, was a compulsory feature.

FBOs make up with their intensity, what they seem to lack in professional expertise and neo-liberal ideologies. However, we should add here that the more prestigious among the FBOs do have very secular and liberal ideologies.[41] It is not only specifically registered development organizations that take up religiously inspired development work. The work of Ramakrishna Mission, the Catholic and Protestant Missions are diversified into other fields like education and healthcare. Hence, from a development ethics perspective, the work of FBOs is a valuable and decisive contribution to development work in general.

5. Human Rights and Religion-inspired Development Interventions

One great doubt about the involvement of religions and FBOs in development work is the conflict between religious orthodoxy and the modern international human rights movements. While human rights ethics is based on the idea of human dignity and freedom, much of religious ethical injunctions are from a different conceptual universe. Human freedom is not as much an ideal in religions as human necessity to conform to the will of God in the Abrahamic traditions and to the law of Karma in the dharmic religions. Moreover, the conflict seems to be one between modernity and its ideological schemata and the orthodoxy of religions. There has been consistent resistance to the supposedly western notion of human rights from non-western countries and religious traditions. I consider that interpreting religious morals from the perspective of their core values and granting an evolving understanding of human consciousness, we can still bridge the gap between religious values and

[41] See, for instance, the guiding principles of Catholic Relief Services: http://www.crs.org/about/guiding-principles.cfm, and the mission statement of World Vision: http://www.worldvision.org/about_us.nsf/child/history?Open&lid=history_by_decade&lpos=body.

modern understanding of human rights. This is an important bridge that needs to be made for a more effective involvement of FBOs in development work.[42]

However, such bridge-building is not a mere utopia. Several efforts of the sort have been already made in this regard. In the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions, the "Declaration toward a Global Ethic" was singed. The language of this declaration is a modern human rights language, striving to connect the core of the world's religions with the universal core of ethics. For example, the declaration states: "Our involvement for the sake of human rights, freedom, justice, peace, and the preservation of Earth is absolutely necessary."[43] It declared that no new global order was possible without a global ethic, demanded that every human being must be treated humanely, and called for a culture of non-violence, solidarity, just economic order, tolerance, and a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.

Nonetheless, fundamental disagreements, for example, in the understanding of gender equity, remain and pose hurdles to religion-development work interface. The gradually dissolving disagreements regarding human rights are not the only obstacle facing this interface. In FBOs, there can be an unsaid ideology of hierarchy, authoritarianism and, of course, patriarchy, which are to be successfully resisted and thwarted for the sake of human development. With regard to the issue of hierarchy and authoritarianism, we may note that current development work thinks of itself as a method of facilitation and, hence, without participation development work cannot make any headway.[44] Very authoritarian structures have a minimal notion of participation. This can severely

[42]Abdullahi A. An-Na'im and Others, *Human Rights and Religious Values: An Uneasy Relationship?* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995; Amartya Sen, *Morgenthau Memorial Lecture: Human Rights and Asian Values*, New York: Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, 1997.

[43]Parliament of World's Religions, *Declaration toward a Global Ethic*, Chicago: Parliament of World's Religions, 1993, 4. http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/_includes/FCKcontent/File/TowardsAGlobalEthic.pdf

[44]For the notion of 'participation', see, Denis Goulet, "Participatory Technology Assessment: Institutions and Methods," *Technological Forecasting and Social Change* 45, 1 (1994), 47-61; Denis Goulet, "Global Governance, Dam Conflicts, and Participation," *Human Rights Quarterly* 27, 3 (2005), 881-907. On using rigorous monitoring tools that run the danger of objectifying the subjects of development programmes, see my essay: "Birth of the Subject: The Ethics of Monitoring Development Programmes," *Journal of Global Ethics* 4, 1 (2008), 19-36.

hamper genuine bottom-up approaches in development work. Patriarchy also needs to be successfully resisted in order to fight the feminization of poverty[45] and the injustice and violence involved in structures accommodating gender inequality. Interpretations of the ethic of development, motivated by the core ethic of religions, cannot tolerate gender inequality.

Martha Nussbaum, in her feminist analysis of religion interfering with modern development vision, points out the problem of interference in personal liberties, especially in gender matters. This can give rise to serious impediments in countries like India, where a large part of law – personal law – is monopolized by religions. There comes the real chance of an outright conflict between religious laws and human rights. Nussbaum agrees that India's concessions to religions manifest a remarkable incorporation of cultural pluralism, because in countries like the USA, religions have nothing to do with law. However, this system makes achievement of 'capability equality' difficult for people in general and women in particular. Her solution goes in line with a development ethics perspective: "to promote more public dialogue over norms of sex equality within the religious codes."[46] She speaks rightly about centring religious moral conceptions on their spiritual core rather than on the peripherals. She points out that much of the difficulties would come from a thin minority of conservative leadership who silence the liberal majority, as she concludes wittily:

> Respecting the freedom of religion does not mean giving a small number of religious leaders limitless license to perpetuate human misery, to inhibit the religious freedom of individuals, and to push the law around. It is not an assault on religious freedom but a deeper defense of its basic principles, to say that in such cases, the law indeed must 'come to the rescue' in order that 'society should move on'.[47]

Another questionable aspect of religion-inspired development work is the question of revolution and violence. Development ethics, as far as its

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[45]See Wendy Sarvasy and Judith Vanallen "Fighting the Feminization of Poverty: Socialist-Feminist Analysis and Strategy," *Review of Radical Political Economics* 16, 4 (1984), 89-110; Jeanne Vickers, *Women and the World Economic Crisis*, Women and World Development Series, London: Zed Books, 1991.

[46]Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 217.

[47]Nussbaum, *Women and Human Development*, 239-40.

consensuses are concerned, looks upon development as leading to human security and peace in a world of change and violence.[48] While religions can be inspiration for peace, both inner and outer, they can be used as tools for mindless violence in the hands of their wrong interpreters. The link between religious fundamentalism and terrorism need not be elaborated here. The explanation that religious fundamentalism is not in any way 'religious' is too circuitous and is not helpful in tackling the problem. A thorough introspection in the way religion is proclaimed and handed down to generations needs to be undertaken – not politically (notwithstanding the prevalence of political crackdown on fundamentalism), but religiously and spiritually. A thoroughly privileged (the teaching that 'my religion is the only truth') and exclusivist (my allegiance is to my religionists) understanding of religion can hamper not only development work but human security everywhere. It is the duty of religious leaders to 'spiritualize' the pursuit of religion and guide it through its core values. A dynamic evolving understanding of the peripherals of religious observation is a minimum prerequisite for an authentic encounter between religion and peace.

Liberation theology, a potential source for violent revolution, has influenced Black theology, Asian theology, and Dalit theology in India. From a development ethics perspective, what is questionable is only the allusion to violent revolution. Liberation theology's kernel doctrine seems to be acceptable to that doctrine's mother church. For instance, in October 1971, the Synod of Bishops admitted that proclamation of justice is a constituent part of the preaching of the gospel.[49] In his study of potent violence and radicalism of liberation theology, Paul Sigmund discerns a marked turning away from Marxist rhetoric and concentration on grassroots movements and community building.

> In its more extravagant rhetoric, its original formulations seemed to emphasize the need for an anti-capitalistic and anti-imperialistic revolution more than the empowerment and participation of the poor. Today there is less emphasis on structuralist criticisms and more on participatory involvement.[50]

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[48]See Gasper, *The Ethics of Development*, 114-130.

[49]Peter Hebblethwaite, "Liberation Theology and the Roman Catholic Church," in *The Cambridge Companion to Liberation Theology*, ed. Christopher Rowland, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999, 181.

[50]Paul E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: Democracy or Revolution?* New York: Oxford University Press, 1990, 13.

He also points out that liberation theology should recognize that there are other forms of oppression than the oppression of the 'have-nots' by the 'haves'. There are also racial, sexual, religious, and cultural oppressions.[51]

In his preface to the paperback edition of *The Cruel Choice*, Goulet discusses liberation theology, pointing out that right from Gustavo Gutiérrez, liberation theologians prefer the term 'liberation' to development. Discussing the issue in 1973, Goulet pointed out that among the three notions of development critiqued by liberation theologians,[52] the third was considered the least objectionable. While agreeing that development should lead to liberation of peoples "from nature's servitude, from economic backwardness and oppressive technological institutions, from unjust class structures and political exploiters, from cultural and psychic alienation – in short, from all of life's inhuman agencies," Goulet warns of the violence hidden within: "Intellectuals who discuss revolution and violence often utter irresponsible words which place bullets in other people's guns."[53] As liberation theology unmasks 'the alienations disguised by the development lexicon', he suggests that it should also take up the self-transformative task of making itself a moral ideology, whereby everyone – the victims and the villains – can identify with it, rather than pitting one against another. Development ethics, as championed by Goulet, does have the unmasking and self-transformative potential.

6. Conclusion

From a development ethics perspective, the religious quest of humankind does add to the broadest possible conception of development. This is its strength and, hence, the inclusiveness of this aspect in development discourses and practice may be thought as central rather than peripheral. As for the actual practice of religion-development work interface, there is much to be desired, as there is already much happening. This interface can be thought of at least at four levels. Firstly, there can be target peoples who are religiously bent, and development workers, even if they are not religiously bent, may take advantage of the religious vision and its inclusiveness in development work. Religious vision can be integrated into

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[51]Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads*, 12.

[52]They are (i) development as economic growth, (ii) the then UN notion of development as economic growth and social change, and (iii) the efforts of the French School to thrust development into the arena of moral debate.

[53]Goulet, *The Cruel Choice*, xx.

development work for its deeper penetration into people's mindset. Secondly, development workers and their organizations, inspired by their respective religions, may deliver development services to a people, who are also so inspired. In this case, the integration of the practice of development work and its cohesiveness may seem complete. Thirdly, religiously inspired development workers may deliver development services to those who are not so inspired or inspired by other religious visions. Here, mostly the vision remains with the workers and it charges up their motivation and methodology. Fourthly, over-enthusiastic development professionals, trained in modern secularist development methodologies, may thrust upon a deeply religious people, a completely irreligious development vision. From a development ethics perspective, while the first three levels of religiously inspired development work and vision are morally defensible, the final one that strives to de-religionize development work is not so, because it attempts to deny something that people have reason to value in pursuit of a holistic development ideal.

In experimenting with the above mentioned first three levels of religion-development work interface, caution needs to be exercised in the possibility of using force or compulsion, and in the possibility of segregating and dividing communities in the name of religion. In both these instances, the development ethics perspective may not see religiously inspired development work as morally defensible. A development ethics perspective of the religion-development interface surely would look to see religious observance, laws and injunctions interpreted from their spiritual core rather than their peripheries.

Much recent interest in the religion-development work interaction seems to centre on the evil effects of a compartmentalized, divisive approach that allows no interaction. WFDD research and writings on the link between development and religion are apparently gripped by the fear of fundamentalism and terrorism (epitomized in the eyes of the western world in the events surrounding September 11, 2001), two evil faces of religious exclusivism. While this pragmatic aim need not be frowned upon, the link between development and religion needs to be established from the perspective of a broader development vision. This would be a development ethics perspective as well.