Religion and development: The rise of a bibliography

This article endeavours to evidence the extraordinary rise of religion and development as a subject field by presenting a chronological bibliography of the literature that has been published, especially since the early to mid-2000s. By way of introduction and orientation, the authors firstly touch upon existing explanations for the extraordinary new interest in religion and development as a subject field; secondly they comment briefly on the ongoing scholarly endeavour to develop the subject field; and thirdly provide a more pertinent statement about the meaning and purpose of compiling the bibliography and the selection criterion applied towards this endeavour. It is argued that the bibliography constitutes a comprehensive resource that could strengthen and inform ongoing research in the subject field across topical issues and themes, from a religious, social science and theological perspective.

Introduction

In their important review article some years ago on the extraordinary rise of religion and development as a subject field, Ben Jones and Marie Juul Petersen meaningfully took as their starting point an article published in 2000 by the sociologist Kurt Alan Ver Beek in the journal Development in Practice (Vol. 10, No. 1). For Jones and Petersen, the significance of Ver Beek’s thesis somewhat about religion as a ‘development taboo’ during the period that he selected for review, that is, given the way in which evidence is provided of some limited literature on religion and development, ‘the absence of religion from development studies’ was something of the past. ‘A decade on’, they concluded, ‘Ver Beek’s taboo’ had been broken. This was to the extent that it had in fact ‘become overly fashionable to talk about religion in development’.

However, by upholding Ver Beek’s article as an important landmark, Jones and Petersen’s (2011) important own thesis was that ‘the absence of religion from development studies’ was something of the past. ‘A decade on’, they concluded, ‘Ver Beek’s taboo’ had been broken. This was to the extent that it had in fact ‘become overly fashionable to talk about religion in development’. ‘Religion’, they further commented, had become an important part of ‘the agenda of the major donors and NGOs’, whilst an increasing number of researchers had also taken up the topic – as evident from ‘the growing number of conferences, seminars, articles, reports and books dealing with religion and development’ (Jones & Petersen 2011:1292).

Against the backdrop of Jones and Petersen’s (2011) important observations, in this article we want to give evidence of the extraordinary rise of religion and development as a subject field by presenting a chronological bibliography of the literature that has been published in the field, especially since the early to mid-2000s. As this bibliography suggests, we find scope for relativising Ver Beek’s thesis somewhat about religion as a ‘development taboo’ during the period that he selected for review, that is, given the way in which evidence is provided of some limited literature production in the field in the period from 1980 to 1999. At the same time, however, our bibliography also presents a very clear manifestation of the ‘broken taboo’ that Jones and Petersen lay claim to.
and how we today encounter a literary corpus that has grown into extraordinary proportions, that is, not least in the years that followed the publication of Jones and Petersen’s article.

Because of the magnitude of the bibliography, this article does not present the opportunity for a lengthy introductory text and orientation. Despite this limitation, we nevertheless, by way of introduction and orientation, find it important to (1) touch upon existing explanations for the extraordinary new interest in religion and development as a subject field; (2) comment briefly on the ongoing scholarly endeavour to develop the subject field; and (3) provide a more pertinent statement about the meaning and purpose of our undertaking and the selection criterion applied towards this endeavour.

Towards explaining the new interest in religion and development

Amongst the existing corpus of literature on religion and development, we view two review articles as worthy of special praise for helping us to identify a more comprehensive set of reasons for the rather dramatic ‘turn’ from what was, until recently, an an almost topical ‘taboo’ to what now appears to be a flourishing scholarly interest in the topic of religion and development. The first is the already referenced article by Jones and Petersen and the second is an article that was published in 2011 by development scholars Séverine Deneulin and Carole Rakodi reference in the journal World Development.

Whilst this cannot be the place for an extensive recollection of the explanations and finer nuances of argumentation given by these two pairs of scholars, it is nonetheless significant to observe the striking overlap between their respective argumentations. Thus, for both pairs, a stage has been reached whereby scholars of development have started to come to terms with the reality of the continuing, if not increased, importance of religion in the lives and identities of people in large parts of our contemporary world. This recognition has led to a train of thought that has more and more started to challenge the conventional secular view that religion would withdraw to the private sphere, if not completely disappear, when societies advance towards modernity and technological progress. To the contrary, this assumption of secularisation and secularism has not materialised in large parts of the world (particularly in the global South), where the path of religion has not followed its institutional decline in Europe and where its public influence has in fact increased as integral part of the manifestation of a new kind of identity politics (Deneulin & Rakodi 2011:46–47, 49–50; Jones & Petersen 2011:1291–1292).

Not unrelated to the above explanation, for both pairs of scholars, the upsurge of the so-called ‘political Islam’ has also become an important factor in explaining the new interest in religion and development. Whilst this phenomenon has a complex history, it is nevertheless clear that the increasing international political dimension of Islam has profoundly changed the global geo-political context and made the issue of religion inevitable in the study of international relations and politics. This includes the fact that as part of the new global ‘war on terror’ and the resultant concern with international foreign and security policy, the role of Islamic development NGOs has obtained new strategic relevance. This would be the way in which they might be instrumental in their support of international terrorist networks, and in their more ‘moderate’ guise (particularly in the eyes of Western donors) the way in which they serve as potential bridge-builders to reach out to the Muslim world (Deneulin & Rakodi 2011:46; Jones & Petersen 2011:1293).

For both pairs of scholars, yet another explanation for the new interest in religion and development could be found in the striking increase in the number and visibility of faith-based organisations (FBOs) world-wide. Whilst it is emphasised by both pairs that this is in the broader sense not a new invention, as religious bodies have always made their presence felt in areas such as health and education, they otherwise point out how it is through their contemporary role as ‘development NGOs’ that FBOs have gained new prominence in development circles. In particular, this new appreciation (which in the world of development practice has led to dramatic increases in funding support) relates to the way in which FBOs have, in the absence of state actors, become prominent deliverers of social services in many societies (such as in the areas of health and education in sub-Saharan Africa). But it also relates to their increasingly visible role as advocacy agents across the national and international spectrum, whether for more morally conservative causes or for addressing more radical issues of social justice (e.g. the Jubilee campaign and international collaboration in supporting achievement of the Millennium Development Goals) (Deneulin & Rakodi 2011:47–48; Jones & Petersen 2011:1293).

Finally, for both pairs of scholars, changes in development thinking over recent decades could also be upheld as an important factor leading to a new appreciation of religion and religious actors. More specifically, these changes could be referred to as ‘an opening of the development space’ (McDuie-Ra & Rees in Jones & Petersen 2011:1294) caused by the simultaneous fragmentation and conceptual broadening of development studies in recent decades. This has not only led to a growing acceptance of the shortcomings of conventional theories of development related to modernisation theory and state-led and market-led approaches to development but also to a recognition of broader people-centred and holistic understanding of development associated with concepts such as human development, social capital and participation. As a result, one important consequence of these developments is that it has given new acknowledgement to religion and religious actors as an important dimension in many people’s lives, especially

3. Jones and Petersen (2011:1293) in this regard mention the fact that some of the largest NGOs today are faith-based, such as World Vision, Aga Khan Foundation, Christian Aid, Caritas and Catholic Relief Services.

An ongoing scholarly endeavour to develop the subject field

Against the backdrop of the aforementioned explanations, we want to uphold the chronological bibliography on religion and development in this article as presenting evidence of an ongoing scholarly endeavour to develop the subject field. As we in fact have already observed, whilst this development has by and large only gained momentum in the last one and a half decade or so, it is not as if no attempts were made (prior to this period and albeit scattered over two decades) to bring religion into the international development debate. However, despite the earlier attempts, our bibliography indicates that it is only since around the year 2003 that the new focus on religion and development really took off. From the vantage point of this identification, we want to acknowledge Jones and Petersen’s (and others’) important analysis of how a new, more concerted scholarly interest in development only gradually grew from an initial new international policy interest in religion and development. Thus, in chronological terms, it was international NGOs and donor agencies that first showed such an interest, especially from the late 1990s onwards. And it was because of this new interest that university departments and their academics followed suit by taking up ‘religion and development’ as a research topic and publishing their research (Jones & Petersen 2011:1294–1296; see also Deneulin & Rakodi 2011:45–46; Tomalin 2015a:2–3).

Indeed, it may still be appropriate to go along with Gerrie ter Haar and Barbara Bompani’s respective recent references to ‘Religion and Development’ as ‘a new debate’ (ter Haar 2011) and an emerging, new field (Bompani 2014), given the relative short period of more intensive scholarly production. At the same time, however, our bibliography gives striking evidence of a subject field that has grown into an impressive corpus over the span of 13 years (2003–2015), so much so that we in fact have already observed, whilst this development has by and large only gained momentum in the last one and a half decade or so, it is not as if no attempts were made (prior to this period and albeit scattered over two decades) to bring religion into the international development debate. However, despite the earlier attempts, our bibliography indicates that it is only since around the year 2003 that the new focus on religion and development really took off. From the vantage point of this identification, we want to acknowledge Jones and Petersen’s (and others’) important analysis of how a new, more concerted scholarly interest in development only gradually grew from an initial new international policy interest in religion and development. Thus, in chronological terms, it was international NGOs and donor agencies that first showed such an interest, especially from the late 1990s onwards. And it was because of this new interest that university departments and their academics followed suit by taking up ‘religion and development’ as a research topic and publishing their research (Jones & Petersen 2011:1294–1296; see also Deneulin & Rakodi 2011:45–46; Tomalin 2015a:2–3).

The same time, however, our bibliography gives striking evidence of a subject field that has grown into an impressive corpus over the span of 13 years (2003–2015), so much so that it needs to be taken seriously today for the increasing assertiveness by which the contributors have continued to address gaps and shortcomings and develop the field thematically, epistemologically and methodologically in more contextual but also more generalised ways. This article, for obvious reasons, does not allow space for a more pertinent identification and discussion of these developments, except for making reference to how the bibliography that follows gives evidence of the various modes of writing through which the subject field has been developed. This includes in clearly accelerated fashion (as our bibliography indicates from the year 2003 onwards) publication of an astonishing number of journal articles, journal special issues, monographs and co-authored books (i.e. by two or three authors), anthologies and book chapters (see Table 1).

We find it important to end this short section with a more specific comment on the disciplinary placing of our bibliography. In this regard, a closer look at the various references suggest that authors may have good grounds to locate the subject area within the field or discipline of development studies and identify it accordingly as ‘a sub-discipline’ within this discipline (Bompani 2014:312, 325, 329; see also Deneulin & Rakodi 2011; Jones & Petersen 2011). At the same time, however, we also find important scope (based on a closer scrutiny of our bibliography) to go beyond this location and along with Barbara Bompani (2014) emphasise the transdisciplinary nature of the subject field. But this is to the extent that we are also less inclined to go along with Bompani’s subsequent qualification that such transdisciplinarity always remains ‘within the broad rubric of development studies’ (Bompani 2014:327). Clearly, our bibliography gives evidence of a subject field that is not restricted to the confines of development studies scholarship and its modes of scholarly outlet (such as academic journals) but more accurately 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.

---

7. Two of the landmarks to date in the ongoing development and upscaling of the subject field are undoubtedly the recent publication of two international handbooks of religion and development. These two anthologies constitute, respectively, 37 chapters by 37 authors (see Clarke 2013) and 29 chapters by 31 authors (see Tomalin 2015b).

8. This category includes a limited number of what we want to refer to as independent units in a book chapter by separate authors. Such units are found in the 2006 published anthology edited by Wendy Tyndale, Visions of development: Faith-based initiatives (see the chronological bibliography).

9. This broader identification is particularly well illustrated by the following journals referenced in our bibliography: Africa Today; Annals of the Association of American Geographers; Anthropological Quarterly; Environment and Planning: Geoforum; Ghana Studies; Global Change; Global Networks; Human Welfare; Journal of Economic Behavior & Organization; NAPA Bulletin; Peace & Security; Social Indicators Research; Social Sciences in Ethiopia; The SAIS Review of International Affairs; Third World Quarterly; Tijdschrift voor economische en sociale geografie; Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities; Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems; and World Economic Development.

10. It could for instance be pointed out that four of the seven special issues on religion and development since 2010 (see Table 1) have been published in journals in the combined and separate fields of religious and theological studies: The Review of Faith & International Affairs (2010); Exchange: Journal of Missiological and Ecumenical Research (2011); International Journal of Religion and Society (2013); and Pentecostudies (2015).
A chronological bibliography on religion and development

Against the backdrop of the above introductory text and orientation, we will now proceed with the presentation of our compiled chronological bibliography on the subject field of religion and development. But before this is actually done, it would be important for us to make a few last comments: firstly, regarding the criterion for selection that we have applied to do the compilation and secondly regarding what we perceive to be the meaning and purpose of this undertaking.

Concerning the first aspect, we have consciously followed the criterion laid down by Jones and Petersen in their review of the religion and development literature to only select writings ‘that proactively use the term “religion and development”’. Our bibliographic research thus likewise did not entail ‘a survey of everything that might be relevant to a religious studies scholar interested in development, or development studies scholars interested in religion’ (such as writings that for instance deal with the topical issues of religion and human rights or religion and civil society) (Jones & Petersen 2011:1294). Instead, like Jones and Petersen’s focus, our own selection is directed towards a very particular growing body of literature in which the different writings present themselves very clearly as dealing directly with the topical issue of religion and development or making a contribution to a larger collective scholarly undertaking (with specific reference to anthologies and journal special issues) devoted to the theme of religion and development.

As already recognised, we do not lay claim to be offering a complete bibliography on religion and development and in this regard could take comfort in the words that there is in fact ‘no such thing as a complete bibliography’ (Sargent 1999:138). Yet, we are confident at the same time that our bibliography gives evidence of an up-to-date account that will contribute towards raising awareness amongst scholars and students from the fields of religion, theology and the social sciences; more broadly speaking, it is about an extraordinary scholarly development over a relatively short period of time that is today engaging the whole idea and practice of development in a new way and in the process is turning the thesis about secularisation on its head. From this vantage point, we also want to go a step further by presenting our bibliography as a comprehensive source that could strengthen and inform ongoing research in the subject field across topical issues and themes, from a religious, social science and not least also a theological perspective. In our own case, for instance, we intend, with respect to our own context, to use our bibliography as the foundational source to undertake a closer examination of how and the extent to which African scholarship and the African continent and its multiple societies feature in and are making a contribution to the new corpus and its debates.

1980


---

11. This table strictly counts the publications that are listed in the chronological bibliography in this article. Whilst it may not reflect a hundred per cent full account of international scholarly production in the listed categories or modes, the stated numbers can nevertheless be taken as a very realistic indication of the growth of the subject field in the indicated period (2003–2015) (in this regard see also our comment in the next section).

12. See our qualification in footnote 11 that our bibliography may not reflect a hundred per cent full account of international scholarly production in the subject field.

13. Our bibliography, because of limited space, for instance does not include the magnitude of masters and doctoral theses and research papers that have been produced internationally in the covered period. Similarly, our bibliography also does not by any means give sufficient account of the reports and working papers that have been published on the topic over the years but only includes a selected few in this category that could be viewed as of particular significance. This noticeably includes published reports on consultations on religion and development undertaken within the organisational sphere of the United Nations in recent years (see Karam 2012, 2014).

14. Preliminary work in this regard has already been undertaken by one of us (IS) on the basis of an earlier draft of our bibliography. This preliminary work was presented at an international conference in 2015 (Swart 2015).


1983


1988


1996

1999


2000
Tyndale, W., 2000, ‘Faith and economics in “development”: A bridge across the chasm?’ *Development in Practice* 10(1), 9–18. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09614520052466


2001

2002


2003


2004


Bond, G.D., 2004, Buddhism at work: Community development, social empowerment and the Sarvodaya movement, Kumanian, Bloomfield, CT.


2005


2006


2007


Hefferan, T., 2007b, Twinning faith and development: Catholic parish partnering in the US and Haiti, Kumarian Press, Bloomfield, CT.


2008


2009


Hanson, J.H., 2009, ‘Modernity, religion and development in Ghana: The example of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community’, Ghana Studies 12–13, 55–75.


2010


**2011**


2012


2013


The articles published in French in this special issue are not included in the bibliography. This acknowledgment represents another qualification that our bibliography does not comprise a complete bibliography on the topic of religion and development.


**2014**


16 The chapters in this book were previously published as articles in the special issue on ‘Religion and Development’ in the journal Development in Practice (2012). The articles are included in this bibliography.


2015


Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no financial or personal relationships which may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Authors’ contributions

I.S. conducted the bulk of the bibliographic research, wrote the introductory text and devised the concept of the article. E.N. took responsibility for all technical aspects concerning the preparation and presentation of the bibliography in the article.

References


