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The Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities (JLI) is an international collaboration to develop and communicate evidence on local faith actors’ roles and contributions to development and humanitarian action for community well-being.

www.jiiiflc.com

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The views contained in this report do not necessarily reflect those of JLI Members.


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I am pleased to introduce the Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities’ debut issue of the State of the Evidence. Given the expanding breadth of evidence regarding faith activities in development, humanitarian, and peacebuilding, it can be challenging to find an overview for those newer to the subject, or even for those familiar with the topics to stay abreast of the field. As such, we offer this accessible and user-friendly resource.

We invite you to share this report widely. As a learning platform, accompanying seminars for local faith actors who seek better understanding of evidence and how to speak to it are also available. The seminars support our focus on what we are calling “evidence-enabled leadership” - itself a component of our fair and equitable approach that seeks to address asymmetries of knowledge in this field.

As always, JLI acknowledges the work of its members, many of whom generated the evidence included in this report and who are also cited. We are grateful for support from Templeton Religious Trust and Trinity Philanthropy.

Enjoy the material!

Kirsten Laursen Muth
JLI CEO
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ACRONYMS

- CDC - US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- CNNV - Churches’ Network for Non-Violence
- COEFEM - Coalition of Feminists for Social Change
- CREID – Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development
- DfID – Department for International Development (former UK department, now Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office – FCDO)
- EVAC - Ending Violence Against Children
- FBO – Faith-Based Organization
- GBV - gender-based violence
- GPP - Global Philanthropy Project
- HIV/AIDS - human immunodeficiency virus/ acquired immunodeficiency syndrome
- HTS - HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies journal, previously also known as Hervormde Teologiese Studies
- IDS – Institute of Development Studies
- IHP - Interfaith Health Program
- IRHAP - International Religious Health Assets Programme
- JLI – Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities
- LGBTIQ+ - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Intersex and Queer
- MHPSS – Mental Health and Psychosocial Support
- NGO – Non-governmental Organization
- OECD - Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
- PaRD - Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development
- PEPFAR - President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief
- RSD - Refugee Status Determination
- SAGRaS - South African-German Research Hub on Religion and Sustainability
- SDG – Sustainable Development Goal
- SRHR - Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights
- UK – United Kingdom
- UN – United Nations
- UNEP - United Nations Environment Programme
- UNFPA - United Nations Population Fund
- UNHCR - United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
- UNICEF - United Nations Children’s Fund
- UNRISD - United Nations Research Institute for Social Development
- US(A) – United States of America
- VAC – Violence Against Children
- VAWG - violence against women and girls
- WCC - World Council of Churches
- WCED - World Commission on Environment and Development
- Women in Development (WID) to Gender in Development (GAD)
- World Health Organization (WHO)
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

AUTHORS: OLIVIA WILKINSON, SUSANNA TROTTA, KATHERINE MARSHALL, EZRA CHITANDO, AND EMMA TOMALIN
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION
AUTHORS: OLIVIA WILKINSON, SUSANNA TROTTA, KATHERINE MARSHALL, EZRA CHITANDO, AND EMMA TOMALIN

Setting the scene: The state of evidence in religions and development
This introduction orients readers to essential information in religions and development to avoid having to read through hundreds of other articles and reports. In essence, we have summarized the state of evidence in religions and development for practitioners and policy makers in what follows.

Why a “state of the evidence”?
As a joint learning network focused on evidence in religions and development, we (i.e., JLI) are often asked to summarize the “evidence” on religions and development. While that may seem like a simple request, it is, in fact, a complicated question due to the diversity of evidence in the wide-reaching area of religions, humanitarianism, development, and peace, which is the full scope of this report.

While JLI has published multiple scoping studies over the years,¹ these studies were not meant to provide a complete picture of the “state of the evidence” in religions and development in one place. A state of the evidence in religions and development is needed, therefore, because:

- The amount of evidence for faith activity and contributions in the development and humanitarian spheres has increased over the last decade. It is increasingly difficult for newcomers to understand the breadth and depth of the evidence base, and for those already in the field to stay on top of new developments.
- There is a frequent demand from governments, international agencies, and international NGOs for evidence on religions and development, especially relating to examples of replicable and scalable projects with faith actors. It is commonly stated in meetings and consultations on religions and development that there is a need for more evidence. While further research is always needed, we believe that the perceived evidence gap is more about the accessibility and use of evidence rather than a lack of it. Providing a state of the evidence will allow policymakers and practitioners to understand more fully the breadth and depth of available information.
- There is an evidence imbalance. A balanced picture of the evidence is needed, including successes and failures, the positive and challenging aspects of faith engagement in religions and development, as well as a diversification of the evidence base. JLI is working to correct this evidence imbalance through its Fair and Equitable Initiative.²

We aim to re-package, re-frame, and add to our previous evidence work to make it concise, accessible, and available in one place. A “state of the evidence” is intended to give a summary overview of the reliable evidence in our field to provide an insight into major debates and themes without the need for deep dives. It is akin to a “state of the art” in that we will cover the latest developments in the field, but we use the term “state of the evidence” to also convey that we will provide some history on the evidence base and contextual understanding of how stakeholders in religions and development have used (or not) the evidence.

The JLI will update the state of the evidence every two years to keep it current. We do not claim that this report comprehensively cites every article or report relevant to religions and development, but we do highlight the major papers that are shaping the field and trends for the future of the field.

¹ All JLI scoping studies can be found here: https://jliflc.com/about/learning-hubs/.
² Information on JLI’s Fair and Equitable Initiative can be found here: https://jliflc.com/jli-fair-and-equitable-initiative/.
What is “evidence”?

Defining “evidence” is difficult as there can be many different sources and standards for what counts as good evidence and what should be included in an evidence base. Some may cite randomized control trials as the “gold standard” for evidence, but these are expensive and not common in religions and development research (they have also been criticized for other reasons). Others may see that peer-reviewed journal articles are the standard for evidence, but much of the research on religions and development has been published as grey literature (e.g., NGO research reports) and uses equally valid and reliable methodologies. Multiple experts often review these reports before publications. There are also debates about the methods used, with disagreements about the comparable validity of qualitative and quantitative methods.

The JLI therefore understands evidence and research as follows, recognizing that there are interlinkages and overlaps between these categories and widespread fuzziness regarding the use of language:

- **Evidence** is the overarching umbrella term that encompasses all "the available body of facts or information indicating whether a belief or proposition is true or valid." For JLI’s purposes, evidence is all the information available on religious beliefs and practices as they relate to humanitarian and development work - this is the evidence base.

- **Research evidence** is rigorous, explains its methods, and undergoes review. As the Alliance for Useful Evidence states, “the conduct and publication of research involves documentation of methods, peer review and external scrutiny. These features contribute to its systematic nature, and they provide a means to judge trustworthiness of findings.” Research evidence can use many different quantitative and qualitative methods, but researchers must explain the methods they have used so that there is the possibility to replicate the study and test the results the research puts forward.

- According to the Standards of Evidence from the Alliance for Useful Evidence, some evidence will be stronger than other types of evidence, i.e., research evidence, particularly evidence that uses randomized samples and has control groups (randomized control trials). The evidence hierarchy tends to privilege some groups (not least those with finance and expertise to achieve higher standards of evidence), potentially unfairly disadvantaging organizations with a strong impact but inability to demonstrate it according to the standards of evidence.

- In humanitarian and development sectors, "evidence of impact” is seen as a gold standard of a sort. Researchers can use evidence of impact to refer to evidence that demonstrates causality (e.g., the direct result of a development intervention can be demonstrated as a significant percentage change in a community’s behavior or practices) and comes from randomized samples and control groups. However, “impact” is also understood in a wide variety of ways that can lead to confusion. For us, “evidence of impact” refers to the demonstration of causality from a development intervention to change, but "impact" can more broadly refer to any long-term effect of development work.

What this "state of the evidence" will not offer

If you are seeking the definitive piece of evidence that ultimately proves or disproves whether religions are necessary or important for development, you will not find it in this report. No such evidence exists – no statistic proves religions are conclusively, always, and everywhere, either more or less effective in development interventions. The state of the evidence in this field demonstrates the complexity of religions around the world. Even the application of randomized control trials can only show how religion works in development in a specific place or in a handful of places. The evidence base shows the diversity of religions in development with the evidence base established through many multiples of context-specific examples, from which we can observe key trends.

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4 Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “evidence.”
What is “religions and development”?

We use the term religions to refer to all religious (reference to a divine, transcendent, or spiritual concept) beliefs and practices that can form, influence, and hinder social transformation. We use “religions” in the plural because we are referring to the multiple and different types of religious beliefs and practices that people hold and participate in, in countries and cultures around the world.8 We understand that religions are not monolithic, nor are they static, but religious beliefs and practices change over time and are embedded in their context.9 Likewise, there are many forms of religious beliefs and practices that do not have overarching institutions and therefore do not fit into a concept of “religion” as large-scale religious institutions alone. Religions and development studies, for example, have only scantily addressed indigenous/traditional “religions.”

Frequently, people use the term “faith” interchangeably, e.g., for faith-based organizations, faith communities, or faith leaders, or to refer to spiritual traditions that are not as institutionalized as “religions.” Actors in the development sector use the term “faith” again as an umbrella term to refer to anything related to religions. It is not wrong to use the term “faith,” but we refer to the religions and development evidence base because, in research and academia, religions and religious beliefs and practices are the more widely used and appropriate terminology. We use the term “faith” to refer to faith actors because it is broad enough to encompass a wide range of actors and does not limit us to religious institutions alone. We offer a typology of faith actors in a later section.

We use the term “development” as shorthand for all the socially oriented work that religions might undertake to improve or protect human dignity, society, and wellbeing. In the language of international affairs, the evidence base spans broad thematic areas including humanitarism and peace. More fully, we could call it the religions, humanitarism, development, and peace evidence base, but that is lengthy. From the perspective of faith actors themselves, it might be truer to call it the “religions and community transformation” or the “religions and social change or social justice” evidence base, because faith actors tend to frame their work in more holistic ways than according to the silos of humanitarism, development, and peace. The religions and development evidence base spans many types of activity and topics of debate, for example, increasingly including action on climate change. The rest of this report includes overviews of religions and development as they relate to key thematic areas, from children to gender, to refugees.

What are the main publications from over the last 20 years of religions and development evidence and what do they tell us?

Focused attention given to religions and development evidence during certain periods

Several articles trace the history of the religions and development evidence base over the last 20 years or so.10 This section provides a summary of major publications that mark the field’s progression.

Pre-2000: Avoiding/ignoring religions in development

We use the last 20 years as our time marker because that is when most religions and development evidence was published, but it is also useful to include some information on what happened before then. Very little was written or researched specifically about religions and development until the early 2000s. A special issue of World Development in 1980 was ahead of its time; there, Denis Goulet referred to development experts as “one-eyed giants,”11 suggesting inter alia their ignorance of religious influences. An article from Ver Beek12 in 2000 marks the start of more publishing in this area. Ver Beek analyzed prominent development journals from 1982-1998 and found that there were no religion-focused articles in any journals during that time, except for the 1980 special issue.

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While the 80s and 90s were largely devoid of religions and development publications, there were some indications that religion was beginning to become a topic of interest for international affairs. In the 90s, examples such as Huntington’s much critiqued argument about the Clash of Civilizations and the publication of “Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft” alerted those in international affairs to the “religions’” gap. The events of 9/11 marked a paradigm shift, largely towards a securitized focus on religion and discussions of countering and preventing violent extremism, with a subsequent upswing in the amount of research and number of publications on that topic.

2000-2010: Making the case that development should pay attention to religions

As documented by Nell and Swart’s bibliography of religion and development publications, more research started to be published around 1999–2000 and the number of publications have grown year on year since then. In Bompani’s analysis of publications in the field, she states that “it is clear that 2005 and 2006 are the years in which, given the rise in the number of publications and the debates sparked, we can really discern the establishment of the sub-discipline [of religions and development].”

Markers around 2000 include the Voices of the Poor studies from the World Bank that asked over 60,000 people in 23 countries about their experiences of poverty and noted the roles of religious institutions, trust for religious leaders, religious coping mechanisms such as prayer, and social groups within religious institutions. While the research demonstrated that religion was an important factor in people’s lives, it also underlined that religious institutions can be “limited” and “non-inclusive.” The World Bank also published the 2003 book, “Faith in Conservation,” which explored how religious perspectives could help shape environmental policy, in connection with the work of the Alliance for Religions and Conservation to bring the major world religions together to understand how they could work on environmental issues.

In 2000, Appleby’s “The Ambivalence of the Sacred” made the case for understanding the diversity of religious dynamics – there is a full spectrum of potentially positive, negative, and neutral influences of religions. This nuanced point is still reiterated over 20 years later and makes this book a foundational text for many.

Between 2000 and 2010, several major projects and activities resulted in a fuller base of evidence in religions and development, with case study examples from around the world. Notable projects include:

- Emerging from work at the end of the 90s and into the early 00s, the World Bank’s religions and development work led to the formation of the World Faiths Development Dialogue. Early publications from this group include two major works in the 00s: “Mind, Heart, and Soul in the Fight Against Poverty” and “Development and Faith: Where Mind, Heart, and Soul Work Together.” Both works offer numerous examples from around the world of religions in development projects, from the World Bank’s engagement with the Jubilee 2000 Debt Campaign to Sarvodaya’s Buddhist approach to tsunami response and development in Sri Lanka. They demonstrated the widespread nature of religions and development work and how religious influence can be found in every sector of development work.

- The UK’s then-Department of International Development (DfID) funded the University of Birmingham to conduct a project on Religions and Development (2005-2010). This project resulted in a large number of publications such as “Religion and Development” and “Religion and Development: 172.”

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15 Jeffrey Haynes, “Religion and International Relations: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?”, Religions 12, no. 5 (May 2021): 328, https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050328.
16 Nell and Swart, Religion and Development.
17 Bompani, Religion and Development, 172.
19 Narayan and Petesch, From Many Lands.
24 Marshall and Keough, Mind, Heart, and Soul, 35.
25 Marshall and Saanen, Development and Faith, 117.
of working papers and journal articles, with a special double issue in the journal Development in Practice devoted to religions and development. A 2009 book "Religion in Development: Rewriting the Secular Script" argues for the idea that "religion is not to be considered only as a significant force in development – the position adopted in the existing development studies literature – but has to be engaged with in its entirety and not only to the extent that it is conducive or detrimental to pre-defined development goals."29

2010-present: Challenging and exploring the complexity of religions in development

- In the 2010s, publications increased considerably. Several edited volumes and special issues in academic journals laid out the shape of religions and development work more concretely by bringing different authors together and demonstrating the types of research and thinking that added to knowledge. They also demonstrate the growing range of scholars able to publish in this field and the variety of topics that can be tackled. Annex 1 lists edited volumes, special issues, and country studies/case studies on religions and development since 2010.
- To take "The Routledge Handbook on Religions and Global Development" as a good example, the handbook approaches a diverse number of topics including research methodologies most appropriate to examine religions and development, religions and development in broader development theory, religions across different development goals from education to health, and religions in development in major world regions from Latin America to Southeast Asia. Efforts have also aimed to provide a landscape of religions and development at country level. Notably, the World Faiths Development Dialogue has a series of country papers that have provided contextual information for Bangladesh, Cambodia, Guatemala, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, and Tanzania.
- With the launch of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, much research started to investigate both how faith actors were (and were not) involved in the consultations leading up to the formalization of the goals and how faith actors were beginning to use the framework of the goals to shape their work.30
- Scholars in the field started to take a more critical approach, contesting the state of the evidence as driven by either development or faith-based agendas. Jones & Petersen’s 2011 article "Instrumental, Narrow, Normative" has become a particularly well-known article and summarizes many of the current frustrations with religious engagement in development. They make the case that the literature on religions and development up until then had been
  1. instrumental in its interest “in understanding how religion can be used to do development ‘better’”,
  2. narrow in that it had a “focus on faith-based organizations, which is in many ways a consequence of the need to understand religion instrumentally,” and
  3. normative in that it makes normative assumptions about religion as “apart from ‘mainstream’ development” and development as “that thing that development agencies do.” The critique is that development organizations’ interests and agendas had driven some of the evidence building.
- Likewise, a later critique of the evidence base focused on what was seen as an undue focus on faith-based organizations’ interests to promote religious engagement in development. Olivier noted that there had been a rush to advocacy about religions in development from faith-based organizations that was, in fact, based unduly on the limited evidence then available.34

27 See Development in Practice 22, no. 5–6 (2021), https://www.tandfonline.com/toc/cdjp20/22/5-6.
29 Deneulin and Bano, Religion in Development, 6.
There are now several university centers that work on topics of religions and development, such as the Unit for Religion and Development Research at Stellenbosch University, the World Faiths Development Dialogue at Berkley Center for Religion, Peace, and World Affairs, Georgetown University, the Centre for Religion and Public Life at the University of Leeds, the Centre for Religion, Conflict and Globalization at the University of Groningen, and the Religion and Public Life program at Harvard Divinity School looks into religious literacy and humanitarism. Likewise, research groups such as the JLI add to the evidence base in this field and work with university centers on research efforts.

Major themes emerging from the evidence over the last 20 years

- **Religions matter and faith actors have important assets.** A major line of argumentation in the first years of religions and development evidence was that “religion matters” – arguments made the case that religions should not be ignored in development and that religions had a vast array of advantages that should be recognized as aiding development overall. Some commonly noted advantages of religions for humanitarian, development, and peace work include:
  - **Access and networks:** In the Philippines, the research found that national non-governmental organizations that worked closely with communities, particularly local faith actors with extensive networks and community cohesion roles throughout an affected area, had better access to areas considered off-limits either for reasons of security or because they were located some distance from access roads. Access to areas off-limits to NGOs because of security offers a key advantage to local faith actors in South Sudan. However, access cannot be assumed and information will not necessarily “cascade” through religious structures to hard-to-reach areas and populations. Instead, it is important to understand how access and information flows in certain religious groupings and tailor programs appropriately.
  - **Trust and authority:** The intangible qualities of trust and authority in communities is something external actors value but hard to achieve within short timelines and histories of mistrust and exploitation from outsiders. Religious leaders are seen as trusted insiders and this trust and authority can lead to strong results when the aim is to change knowledge, attitudes, and practices on a topic. Surveys, such as those from Afrobarometer, demonstrate common widespread trust in religious leaders in certain countries and regions, although others also note how understanding data on religious affiliation can be problematic in countries where censuses are politicized, for example. Nevertheless, the influence of religious trust and authority was clear in Ebola response in 2014-2015, where “exposure to religious leaders’ messages was associated with a nearly twofold increase in the intention to accept safe alternatives to traditional burials” and in decreasing vaccine hesitancy, such as in Northern Nigeria with polio, and with randomized control trials showing effects of training and including religious leaders in childhood vaccines uptake and other health interventions.


measures.\textsuperscript{53} However, a community's trust of a religious leader is not guaranteed. Some higher-level leaders are distanced from communities, religious leaders may selectively use their trusted position for some topics and not want to use it for others (e.g., family planning\textsuperscript{46} or responses to sexual violence\textsuperscript{47}) or there may be a history of mistrust for other reasons. It is crucial to know the dynamics of the religious landscape and which faith actors hold authority in different areas and on different topics.

- **There is a secular bias/avoidance of religions.** The literature speaks widely of the avoidance of religions in many humanitarian, development, and peace discussions, and an avoidance of faith actors, particularly those that are deemed too expressive in their faith identity, by international organizations. As Bompani puts it in her analysis of the religions and development evidence base, "it was repeatedly argued that the lingering secular, western, neoliberal biases in development thinking fostered an approach that neglected religion and tried to apply ill-fitting, ethnocentric concepts globally."\textsuperscript{48} This topic has been much discussed in development\textsuperscript{49} and somewhat discussed in humanitarianism, with a focus on how the humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality have inadvertently fostered an avoidance of religions.\textsuperscript{50} Studies show that, in fact, avoidance of religions makes humanitarians seem less impartial and neutral as it affects their knowledge of a context.\textsuperscript{51}

- **Instrumentalization.** This term is often repeated in debates on religions and development. It refers to the observation that development actors can "use" faith actors to meet their goals or push their agendas.\textsuperscript{52} This happens when development actors do not work with faith actors as equal partners in developing goals and agendas.\textsuperscript{53} It is apparent in processes of subcontracting faith actors to implement pre-defined work rather than partnering with them to develop projects. Similar arguments have been made in localization debates in terms of international actors working with local actors.\textsuperscript{54} Development actors are interested in faith actors because of the resources faith actors' assets (e.g., their infrastructure, their human resources in forms of large volunteer networks, their influence in communities) and essentialize "religion" as a solution to a development problem.\textsuperscript{55} However, this can lead to fatigue, burnout, and an unwillingness from faith actors to engage with international actors again.\textsuperscript{56}

\begin{itemize}
\item Olivia Wilkinson and Joey Ager, "Scoping Study on Local Faith Communities in Urban Displacement: Evidence on Localisation and Urbanisation" (Washington, D.C.: Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities, 2011); 21: Roux and Valencia, Partnering with Local Faith Communities, 246.\textsuperscript{55}
\end{itemize}
Defining faith-based organizations (FBOs). The 2000-2010 period often saw efforts to sort organizations and types of religious denominations into categories and typologies to run through world religions to analyze what each one might have to say about development. Typologies of faith actors are discussed in the next section. While it is important to understand all the types of actors that can be described as linked to “faith,” publications focused on typologies are less frequent now. These typologies were written early in the field’s development when more definitional work was needed about what constitutes a faith-based organization. We should not forget that religious influence has been present in development throughout its history. Many articles and books highlight the pros and cons of the work of missionaries at the start of international development and humanitarian activities. In the “quiet” period between World War II and the 90s where religions were not widely spoken of in development, large faith-based organizations were founded and grew, wrestling with their religious identity continuously throughout these decades. Some recent histories of FBOs reveal more about the shaping of religious identity and practice within FBOs, including World Vision and Tearfund, demonstrating an increased interest in FBOs evaluating and stating their faith identity.

Major topics with the most evidence. Some thematic areas have developed the most evidence over the years due to varying factors such as their prominence in global development trends, the influence of these trends on FBOs, and the amount of research funding available in that area. Religions as related to health and HIV/AIDS have strong evidence bases. While more will be covered on these topics in this state of the evidence’s thematic sections, we highlight two review articles here that summarize much of the evidence in these fields:

- **Health**: Olivier et al. published in The Lancet that while faith-based healthcare providers in sub-Saharan Africa are widespread, their prevalence is not as high as sometimes assumed, varies greatly by country and region, and shows promising results in patient satisfaction but weaknesses in integration and adaptation. They warn against making generalizations about faith-based healthcare providers, hence why we do not give a statistic on the percentage of faith-based healthcare providers among all providers (which is a number often sought out and misquoted). The article does offer some estimated percentages for different countries in the region.

- **HIV/AIDS**: Olivier and Smith summarize the evidence on faith and HIV/AIDS to show that there has indeed been a concerted faith-based response to HIV/AIDS with a clear trend from "the late 1990s, when there was a major surge in the quantity and scope of response" but concluding that the surge had since stopped. They summarize that faith actors are involved in several innovative mechanisms for HIV response across advocacy and campaigning, community-based service delivery, community-based research, and community financing.

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61 Dena Freeman, Tearfund and the Quest for Faith-Based Development (New York: Routledge, 2019).


Theological positions and human rights. Some handbooks have offered chapters that summarize how theologies understood development, such as the Handbook of Research on Development and Religion,66 which covered Muslim, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Daoist, Confucian, and African Traditional Religions approaches to development. Indeed, theologians debate poverty and injustice at length, making this area a field of its own and only sometimes relevant for the religions and development evidence base when it leans towards practical, rather than abstract, discussion. The Ecumenical Review67 or HTS Theological Studies68 are examples of journals that publish on theology but often also with practical articles that are relevant for religions and development. Evidence on theological debates and divides in development programming have emerged too. For some secular development organizations, the fact or perception that theological positions can overrule and or/be in contrast with human rights is one of the main obstacles in engaging with faith actors.49 This is especially common with respect to gender, where there have been fears that the "religious turn" in development might affect the struggle for gender equity that had been building up for decades.70 Scholars of religion argue that human rights and religions are not mutually exclusive and can be supportive of one another (also see section below on FoRB).71 Likewise, there are well documented cases of faith actors being involved in social movements to advance issues of justice, such as the Jubilee campaign for debt cancellation.72 Some evidence has also begun to show how faith-based perspectives can effectively interpret rights-based approaches to humanitarian and development work.73

Proselytism. Faith actors have been perceived, and have at times acted, as proselytizing actors in humanitarian and development processes, offering conditional assistance in exchange for the chance to convert the recipient to their religion. This has hampered collaboration with other stakeholders, including donors,74 who require assistance to be unconditional in line with principles of impartiality.75 Yet, authors in this field have pointed out how complex the proselytization debate can be. For example, some argue that all aid is value laden and there can be secular forms of proselytization just as much as religious.76 Likewise, within religions there are different approaches from pro- to anti-proselytizing stances and a spectrum of options that also allow for a middle ground of “voluntary witnessing” (e.g., speaking of one’s religion without tying assistance conditionally to recipients engaging in those religious beliefs or practices).77 Finally, evidence has also shown how proselytism is just as much a contested area for local faith actors as it is for donors. For example, in Turkey, Muslim faith actors reportedly increased their engagement in education for displaced Syrian children to counter what they perceived as proselytism by Christian missions that would have led to “exploitation and assimilation by Western values.”78

Faith and Finance. Exploration of religious influence in economic history has recently seen a growing evidence base79 and much of this intersects with development issues. Marshall identifies four major trends: (a) new theoretical models that include spatial models of religious markets and evolutionary models of religious traits; (b) empirical work addressing causal influences on religious behavior; (c) examination of the economic history of religion taking religious as an independent, rather than a dependent, variable; and (d) studies of religion outside

66 Clarke, Handbook of Research on Development and Religion.
67 For more information about The Ecumenical Review, see https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/17586623.
68 For more information about HTS Theological Studies, see https://hts.org.za/.
72 Marshall and Keough, Mind, Heart, and Soul.
78 Marshall and Keough, Mind, Heart, and Soul.
79 For more information about The Ecumenical Review, see https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/journal/17586623.
80 For more information about HTS Theological Studies, see https://hts.org.za/.
84 Marshall and Keough, Mind, Heart, and Soul.
the Western world (where the great majority of current work has been concentrated).80 Some of the debate specific to religions and development has explored Islamic financing and there are increasingly articles making the case that Islamic social financing regularly assists in everything from “mitigating humanitarian crises”81 to women’s empowerment.82 However, there is some skepticism about the interest in financial resources from faith actors,83 in line with the instrumentalization argument above.

Some current trends in religions and development evidence

Trend 1: Localization, decolonization, and local faith actors

Broad discussions on localization of aid and decolonization of development are occurring alongside a shift away from an interest in evidence from international FBOs to evidence about and with local faith actors in the religions and development evidence base. Evidence on local, less formal engagements by faith actors is still quite fragmented and limited,84 although several studies have addressed these issues in the last years. Such studies demonstrate local faith actors’ crucial roles in peacebuilding in particular;85 their ability to work with voluntary networks and access remote locations (as discussed above), the roles of social movements in volunteerism that respond to social issues,86 and their connections to communities and role as first and last responders with an ability to fill social protection gaps.87 Yet, studies also show local faith actors’ continued marginalization from donor engagement, with some difficulties similar to other local actors, while others point specifically to their faith-affiliation,88 amid their own concerns about the NGO-ization of their activities.89

In terms of decolonization, experiences, and perspectives of religious communities from the Global South can be key in re-framing notions of development, moving away from Western- and Northern-centric, towards more equitable approaches, and beyond functional, institutional engagements of local faith actors.90 Nevertheless, there remains a dominance of white, Western researchers in this field. Development Studies and Religious Studies in themselves are disciplines created by and for Western academic institutions. For example, the major “Development Studies” and “Humanitarian Studies” centers in universities are based in the Global North. The very concept of “religions and development” is not universally relevant. However, some academics from around the world are picking up on this field and re-interpreting it. Special issues on Asia focus on religious philanthropy91 and disasters,92 and other articles have argued for a re-framing of how secular and religious notions of humanitarianism and development are employed in non-

84 Marshall et al., What Impact Does It Have.
89 Wilkinson et al., Faith in Localisation?
Western contexts, such as Sri Lanka. Recent handbooks from Africa and Southern Africa offer a range of critical interpretations of religions and development through theological, historical, economic, missiological, educational, feminist, and health perspectives. They deal with potentially contentious issues from xenophobia to LGBTIQ+ rights and broader perspectives of what should be the evidence "story" of religions and development, demonstrating that many of the major themes examined above (e.g., defining FBOs, instrumentalization, proselytization) come from a particularly Western and donor-oriented lens of concern.

**Trend 2: Faith-sensitive psychosocial support**

Emerging as a distinct interest in the last five years or so, faith-sensitive psychosocial support has seen a growth in guidance documents, online learning, systematic and literature reviews, and original research. Some other terms used include "trauma healing/awareness," "spiritual care," and "spiritual first aid." The evidence points towards the need for greater consideration of how people's spiritual lives and religious coping mechanisms are part of their experiences of crisis and healing from trauma. In existing psychosocial support, spirituality is rarely included as a potentially sensitive topic and rarely within typical mental health training from a Western perspective. The pastoral and spiritual support from faith actors and communities therefore runs in parallel without integration. While care is needed to broach questions of spirituality, research documents that people widely use positive and negative religious coping mechanisms during and recovering from crises and so this area cannot be ignored in any work that aims to help people overcome trauma. A sub-area arising on this topic is the use of religious coping among aid workers themselves to deal with the stressors of the work (secondary trauma). Studies so far show that religious coping can help aid workers, including international, national, and local, to destress, but that these same actors can also use religious coping strategies negatively, which can harm their mental health as a result.

**Trend 3: Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB), recognizing intersectionality, and the effects of multiple vulnerabilities on religious minorities**

As an international human right enshrined in Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Freedom of Religion and Belief (FoRB) is relevant to development work as a right to be upheld to assure internationally understood definitions of human dignity. FoRB is not a new trend – there has been a "Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief" at the UN's Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights since 1986, for example. Yet it has gained in significance in recent years, with much cited figures from Pew Research Center seeming to indicate that 83% of the world’s population experiences "religious restrictions," with their 2019 figures...
still indicating the highest levels of government restrictions on religions worldwide. However, as Birdsall and Beaman have noted, the figures are misleading, not least because the definition of “religious restrictions” is not the same as the legal definitions for violations of FoRB. Likewise, the measurement of FoRB violations worldwide is a complex area with many different measurement approaches taken, which can be influenced by politicized agendas and show “differing understandings of the nature and relative significance of violations and their comparability.”

“International religious freedom” has risen in prominence as a somewhat synonymous but contested term driven by religio-political agendas from the US. This has led to what Hurd calls “religious freedom promotion,” which politicians use to focus attention on certain religious populations and justify foreign policy goals.

Petersen and Marshall summarize the four major positions that those linked to FoRB often take:

1. “Religious discrimination is really about something else,” which is associated with secular human rights organizations who are skeptical about FoRB and its potential to act as a barrier to other human rights promotion, such as women’s rights.

2. “Persecution of Christians is the most pressing concern,” associated primarily with conservative Christian organizations and focused on persecuted Christians often in the Middle East.

3. “The real victims of discrimination today are the Muslims,” with Islamophobia in Europe and North America as one of the most pressing topics of concern.

4. A human rights approach to FoRB, which underlines that “FoRB is about the protection of all individuals’ right to believe and practice their religion (or not),” and is mostly taken up by progressive organizations with rights-based agendas, from FBOs to human rights groups.

The fourth approach that “anchor[s FoRB] in a broader human rights framework” is ultimately encouraged, with the authors clarifying that “there is no conflict between FoRB and women’s rights. The right to FoRB is about the protection of all individuals and their right to interpret and practice their religion... Furthermore, FoRB can never be used to justify discrimination, inequality, or violation of other people’s rights – including women’s rights.”

Recent reviews have found very little evidence that FoRB or analysis on religious inequalities and religious minorities are integrated into development approaches. The Coalition for Religious Equality and Inclusive Development (CREID) project has brought religious inequality and FoRB debates into closer conversation with religion and development debates. The project critiques previous religions and development work by examining how and why religious inequalities are ignored. If religions and development efforts only seek to understand and work with majority religious traditions and their representative faith actors, then they purposefully blind themselves to the experience of religious minorities and the inequalities they face. This highlights the need to properly understand power dynamics between majority and minority religions in any context and how the faith actors engaging in humanitarian and development work mirror these dynamics.

In connection to international cooperation, the 2017 Beirut Declaration launched the “Faith for Rights” framework used by the UN and its faith-based partners to discuss and find common ground on religious and human rights. FoRB is also relevant throughout the SDGs framework, as a recent series from the Danish Institute of Human Rights highlights with briefing papers on FoRB and the SDGs, covering women’s rights, education, health, freedom of expression, and climate change.

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112 Petersen and Marshall, Sketching the Contours, 6.

113 Petersen and Marshall, Sketching the Contours, 17.


Trend 4: COVID-19, religion, and development

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on how researchers and practitioners think about religion and development. In many regions, religious institutions and facilities play significant roles in health-related service delivery and policymaking. Since the start of the pandemic in 2020, there has been a growing focus on different aspects of the intersections between faith actors, religion, and COVID-19 in academic research. Using both quantitative and qualitative methods, many studies have surveyed the role of religious coping mechanisms and spiritual support as part of broader responses to mental health exacerbated by COVID-19. As part of their gender-related development engagements, FBOs have issued advocacy and guidance documents on the rise of domestic violence, for example, during the pandemic. More generally, there is increasing evidence that faith actors have mobilized resources to assist vulnerable groups in their communities who were disproportionately affected by the pandemic. The influence of faith actors, in general, and of religious leaders in particular, has been at the center of debate, especially as regards the helpful dissemination of public health information, on one hand, or the spread of false information and conspiracy theories about the virus, on the other hand. In terms of vaccines, the debate, especially in the US, has often focused on religious liberty debates as a possible ground for exemption from requirements geared to public health. The JLI, the World Faiths Development Dialogue, and the Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs at Georgetown University have set up a repository of resources covering religion and COVID-19 that can be accessed online and searched by development-related thematic areas and geographical region.

Who are the faith actors?

We use the term “faith actors” to allow for a broad understanding of a diverse group of actors who are commonly referred to in different ways, including local, national, and international faith-based organizations (FBOs), religious communities, and religious leaders. In this section, we summarize the key trends and debates that have formed among academics and in grey literature on the definition of faith actors over the last two decades. We then explain our own understanding of who faith actors are (see diagram below).

Most reflections on the definition of faith actors in development, particularly until the mid-2010s, have used the term “Faith-Based Organizations.” This reflects in part the fact that Christian traditions, especially Catholicism and mainline Protestantism, had the longest history of partnering with other development actors. It also reflects the rapid expansion of civil society organizations and especially organized non-government organizations, many with an explicitly development and humanitarian vocation. The structure of Christian communities is conducive to establishing formally registered organizations that are like those of other NGOs and acceptable to other NGOs in

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their separation from, while remaining affiliated to, religious institutions. Using the term "FBO" to refer to all types of faith actors from many different religious traditions, however, has shortcomings. For example, in some Muslim contexts, the role that religion plays in an organization’s ethos and formal institutional ties may be more implicit than overt, acknowledged in the identity of most charitable organizations, and need not be designated as a separate “faith-based” identity (further, some reject the label in part because of perceived political disadvantages).

The boundaries of the terms “Faith-Based Organizations” have been widely discussed. Many have argued, for instance, for or against the inclusion of informal actors such as congregations, Sunday schools, and varieties of groupings arising from religious communities. In addition, local faith actors might have very different characteristics from formal FBOs, such as whom they chose to partner with. Some scholars have observed that local faith actors in the Global South might be reluctant to engage with international donor governments due to compliance measures that would require them to distance themselves from their religious identity. Likewise, the evidence points towards the reality that international development actors are more likely to want to engage with formalized faith actors that operate in the same ways as NGOs.

Much of the debate on the definition of faith actors has focused on comparisons between FBOs and other NGOs, and between FBOs from different religious traditions and within traditions. In Tanzania, for example, Pentecostal and Charismatic churches were perceived to be more engaged in evangelization activities, while Lutheran churches appeared to be more focused on development work. In the same context, study participants perceived Muslim organizations as more fragmented, less hierarchical, and less supported by international donors, and Catholic FBOs as more active and influential in advocacy. Context and tradition-related factors can greatly influence the positions and roles that different FBOs take up, especially in relation to other actors.

Aside from single groups and denominations, there are also many interreligious bodies that form useful networks with which international actors engage. Religions for Peace (RfP) is an international coalition of nationally and regionally based interreligious bodies around the world and regularly engages with major UN and other development initiatives. Many scholars have documented the potential for interreligious cooperation in humanitarian, development, and peace work and there are also many guides and programs on interfaith engagement, such as Learning to Live Together from Arigatou International.

More recent contributions have increasingly moved away from an exclusive use of the term “FBOs.” For example, some have suggested “faith-inspired organizations,” or others have suggested the use of a range of terms to reflect the diversity of actors at local levels and across traditions (e.g., “national/local faith-influenced organization,” some have suggested “faith-inspired organizations,”


126 Emma Tomalin, “Religions, Poverty Reduction and Global Development Institutions,” Palgrave Communications 4, no. 132 (November 6, 2018), https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-018-0167-8; Olivia Wilkinson et al., Faith in Localisation?


"informal local faith and worship communities," "faith networks," and "local faith figures.") Others have defined faith actors according to their main purpose. According to this view, for example, groups that share worship practices are labeled as "congregations," while those who are engaged in providing aid and support are defined as "local associations, charities and faith networks."

As key trends and debates on the terminology used to describe faith actors show, there is no single typology that applies to each context of analysis. We suggest the use of "faith actors" as a broad category and offer guidance on how to use more specific terms through this diagram. This diagram is organized according to the actors’ context – i.e., international, national, and regional, and local – due to the common organizing levels of humanitarian and development activity. The use of more specific terms should consider context- and religion-specific types of faith actor.

- **Religious leaders** are present at every level. It is important not to generalize or to use the term "religious leaders" to refer to all "faith actors." In fact, there are many different types and roles of leadership, considering internal hierarchies and levels of formality and informality. For example, research has shown that the role of pastors’ wives, i.e., informal leaders, on child protection, is particularly important. Some religious leaders can be very influential in the international humanitarian and development realm, while others, who are active at national or local level are key to engage with to advocate for better legislation or to achieve change at community level.

- **International FBOs** often present high degrees of formality (i.e., recruitment processes, fundraising, internal structure, etc.), are affiliated with a religious tradition that influences their mission and vision to various degrees, and engage with other international actors, both religious and secular, as well as with smaller organizations at national and/or local level. They take part in international development and humanitarian programs together with other international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), donors, and UN agencies.

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137 Thaut, Christian Faith-Based Humanitarian Agencies.
National and regional faith actors often engage with other country-wide organizations, including governmental actors. Through their connections, e.g., with wider networks within their religious affiliation and/or interreligious organizations and councils, they may also participate in international humanitarian and development processes involving other INGOs, donors, and UN agencies. They can also function as mediators between such international processes and local faith actors.

Local faith actors include grassroots FBOs and more informal actors, which are often linked to a place of worship, such as Zakat committees and congregations. While these are often involved in humanitarian responses and development processes, they are less likely to have direct links to international humanitarian and development actors. In the last decade, local faith actors have been increasingly looked at as potential and actual partners in development and humanitarian interventions. For example, the Global Compact on Refugees refers to the importance of both "local actors" and "faith-based actors" as part of its multi-stakeholder approach and, indeed, local faith actors are critical in responding to refugees. The focus on localization emerges from the aim to be "as local as possible, as international as necessary" in humanitarian response. Research has shown that partnering with local faith actors can increase the effectiveness and suitability of context-specific interventions. However, there is still a long way to go to achieve effective, fair, and equal collaboration between international actors and local faith actors in humanitarian and development work.

Explaining the structure of the report

The rest of this report is divided into six thematic areas covering health, the environment, violence against children, gender, peace and conflict, and forced migration. Each thematic area is co-authored by two experts and includes an overview of the main debates within the scholarship over the last 20 years. It is not necessary to read this report from start to finish. We encourage readers to look at the thematic chapters that are most relevant to their work. These chapters are not intended as an exhaustive illustration of all discussions taking place in religions and development scholarship, but rather as a guide to understand the main areas of focus and to point to relevant resources for more detailed information. They are also understood as a resource for researchers, secular development practitioners, and faith actors, including religious leaders, to appreciate the main changes in religions and development debated over the past two decades and quickly get up-to-speed on new subject areas.


139 Wurtz and Wilkinson, Local Faith Actors.


CHAPTER 2

RELIGIONS, HEALTH, AND DEVELOPMENT

AUTHORS: JOHN BLEVINS AND ESTHER MOMBO
This chapter describes the varied influences of religions on health and development initiatives, places those influences in historical context, summarizes influential research on this topic over the last two decades, and points to current and emerging issues that are central to understanding religion's current impact on the field. Readers unfamiliar with religions' influence on health and development initiatives can better understand recent research in the field by reflecting on these two concepts:

- **Religious health assets**—This term comes from a series of groundbreaking initiatives in the early 2000s to understand religion's influence on public health programs. A 2005 study funded by the World Health Organization (WHO) as part of these initiatives defined an asset as "range of capabilities, skills, resources, links, associations, organizations, and institutions, already present in a context." A religious health asset is "an asset located in or held by a religious entity that can be leveraged for the purposes of development or public health."

- **Beliefs and behaviors**—Beliefs and behaviors are central to understanding religion's influence on health. People of faith may experience contradictions between the teachings of their faith tradition, their own personal beliefs or actions, their worldviews about the phenomenon of health, and the health impact of their actions. This chapter points to the power dynamics that generate those tensions.

**History of health, religions, and development**

The historical influences of religion on global health and development practice have been significant. The earliest documented Muslim medical facilities were built in Baghdad in the 9th Century C.E. and over the next 500 years, Muslim hospitals were established across the Middle East, North Africa, Turkey, and Spain. In 1640, Roman Catholic missionaries established the first medical facility on the African continent and the first Protestant Christian missionary arrived in Cape Town in 1795. Into the early 20th century, Christian missionary facilities offered the only clinical medical services anywhere on the continent and by 1910, these facilities were providing medical care to millions of people across Africa. Today, faith-based health facilities are the largest non-governmental provider of health care across sub-Saharan Africa. What remains unknown, however, is the specific scope of their contributions as debates regarding which metrics are most important to consider—numbers of people served, number of beds in inpatient facilities, reach to the poor, etc.—are ongoing.

During the 19th century, Christian medical missionaries from Great Britain established facilities in British colonies across Africa, South and East Asia, Australia, and South America but by the start of the 20th century, American medical missionaries outnumbered their British counterparts and American Christian denominations were supporting over 1,000 health facilities (including 379 hospitals). Direct medical care was not the only focus of such missionary endeavors as 94 colleges, and over 20,000 primary and secondary schools were also established. Throughout the 19th century, the American Tract Society published millions of tracts for distribution around the world. While the majority of the tracts focused on religious instruction, over 40% of the titles addressed topics related to health and hygiene; in 1838 alone, the Society published over 13,000,000 copies of 418 separate titles.
in 32 different languages across 18 different countries.\textsuperscript{152} All of these efforts were carried out with an uncritical acceptance of Western cultural, religious, and intellectual superiority and medical missions provided a religious rationale not only for the development of global health and development institutions but also for colonialism up through the mid 20th century.\textsuperscript{153}

By the latter decades of the last century, the secularization of public health and development fields had largely relegated religion to the margins. Most health and development professionals from Western societies minimized the influence of religious beliefs on the health of the people to whom they provided services,\textsuperscript{154} overlooked the importance of partnerships with faith-based health and development programs,\textsuperscript{155} and assumed religious belief was merely a private matter that should have no bearing on their programs or on governmental policies.\textsuperscript{156}

William Foege voiced an exception to this commonly held perspective. Foege served as Director of the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) between 1977 and 1983. In 1992, as Director of The Carter Center in Atlanta, Foege founded the Interfaith Health Program (IHP) to support collaboration between public health and religious leaders. In 2002, IHP convened two conferences that expanded its work to global contexts. The meetings put forth the claim that faith communities possess extensive and powerful assets in support of health, arguing that these “religious health assets” are both tangible and intangible.\textsuperscript{157} Tangible assets include health ministries, faith-based health facilities, or nongovernmental organizations founded and supported by faith communities. Intangible assets include trust, longevity, motivation, commitment, and sense of purpose.

These initial conferences were a watershed in raising awareness of religion in the field of global health. They led to the creation of the International Religious Health Assets Programme (IRHAP),\textsuperscript{158} an international consortium of religious, health, and development practitioners and researchers, which helped to coordinate a groundbreaking study with funding from the WHO in 2005.\textsuperscript{159} Researchers affiliated with IRHAP have subsequently influenced other efforts to build collaborations between health and development leaders and faith leaders and communities in areas such as:

- **health systems** strengthening in which partnerships between local faith communities and health systems have been developed\textsuperscript{160} and stronger national networks of faith-based health providers supplement the coverage of Ministries of Health;\textsuperscript{161}
- **development** in which faith communities and faith-based organizations provide resources for those in extreme poverty,\textsuperscript{162} and fill the gaps where governmental policies have limited access to health services for those living in informal settlements;\textsuperscript{163}
- **adolescent sexual health** where religions may not be particularly successful in encouraging abstinence, but they are identified as resources for making healthier choices and creating healthier relationship by young people,\textsuperscript{164} and

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\textsuperscript{153} For a fuller discussion of this history, see John Blevins, To Save the Empire of the World: Christianity’s Role in United States Global Health and Development Policy (New York: Routledge, 2019), 56-107.


\textsuperscript{157} The first meeting entitled the “Global Religious Health Assets Initiative” was held between April 29-30, 2002 at The Carter Center. See http://ihpemory.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/Global-Religious-Health-Assets-Initiatives.pdf for the proceedings of the meeting. The second meeting was held between December 1-3 at the World Council of Churches. See http://ihpemory.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/African-Religious-Health-Assets-Program.pdf.

\textsuperscript{158} For more information on the International Religious Health Assets Programme, See http://www.irhap.uct.ac.za.

\textsuperscript{159} See ARHAP, Appreciating Assets.

\textsuperscript{160} One example of such efforts is the Stakeholder Health Initiative. See https://stakeholderhealth.org/promising-practices-mapping/.


health and development policy where changes in bilateral and multilateral funding mechanisms rock the financial stability of faith-based organizations and where such organizations nonetheless retain similar levels of funding relative to civil society organizations.

This generation of researchers, many of them affiliated with IRHAP, published a groundbreaking special issue of The Lancet on Faith-Based Health-Care in 2015. The Lancet issue provided a benchmark on research in the field to date on topics such as:

faith-based health service delivery, noting the substantial contributions of faith actors but also laying out gaps in the literature and describing programmatic and methodological challenges related to an analysis of health services data;

controversies in faith and health care in an article that surveyed points of tension between religions and health in certain topics such as sexual and reproductive health; and

the importance of partnerships across governmental, faith, and civil society sectors in an article that surveyed trends pointing to the importance of such partnerships and offered recommendations for strengthening them.

Current trends and challenges in health, religions, and development

Religion as all positive or all negative for health and development

All the efforts summarized above have reminded leaders in health and development that religions are a powerful social force; they have also contributed to controversies. One controversy relates to a perceived bias about religion’s influences on health and development. Those advocating for religion’s contributions had to make their case to a field that had relegated religion to the margins; in doing so, they did not always interrogate the tensions between religion and health and development as rigorously. For example, the 2005 WHO study report mentioned above enthused that “religion is so overwhelmingly significant in the African search for wellbeing, so deeply woven in the rhythms of everyday life, and so deeply entwined in African values, attitudes, perspectives and decision-making frameworks that the inability to understand religion leads to an inability to understand people’s lives.” In short, the report implied that religion’s powerful effects always contribute to better health.

Not everyone was convinced. For example, in 2010 the former global director of the US President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) argued that while PEPFAR had saved lives, “its positive impact has been limited due to program requirements in the law that are based largely on a conservative religious ideology, rather than a sound, scientifically driven strategy.” Unbiased research into religion can be difficult to carry out in the field of health and development when strong and vocal camps articulate all-or-nothing perspectives that religion is either the essential scientific driven strategy.”

Focus on tangible faith-based health assets has left out intangible factors

A second controversy is seen in the focus among many funders of health and development programs on the tangible contributions of faith partners, limiting our understanding of intangible factors. For example, because faith-based health facilities can be counted and their service quantified in terms of patients seen, their contributions as religious health providers were prioritized. In contrast, qualitative and intangible factors are minimized. However, in the past decade research on intangible factors such as trust has risen in response to pressing health challenges. Sustained efforts to address HIV-related stigma and respond to pandemics have pushed researchers and policymakers to think more broadly about religion.

168 Olivier et al., Faith-based Health Care Provider, 1765-1775.
171 ARHAP, Appreciating Assets, 1.
Progress in the global HIV response has not been equal for all communities, due in large part to stigmatizing attitudes toward key populations. While religious messages have been tied to HIV-related stigma, efforts to challenge such attitudes can be more effective when they are carried out by faith communities and religious leaders.174 The 2015 Ebola outbreak in Western Africa and the global COVID-19 pandemic have both demonstrated the distinctive ways in which religion can draw on deep reservoirs of trust. The initial public health Ebola response, calling for religious burial practices to be suspended without any input of religious leaders, was ineffective but when collaboration led to modified practices that allowed for safe burial while maintaining spiritual significance, infection rates dropped dramatically.175 We have seen similar ways in which the authority of religious leaders has affected vaccine acceptance or hesitance during the COVID pandemic.176

Emerging areas of interest and questions for future research

Moving into the future, a new generation is pushing the field into new areas of inquiry. Efforts to identify, amplify, and align religious health assets continue, with an effort to understand whether those assets in fact offer distinctive advantages: do they provide essential services in areas with weak health infrastructure? Do they reach the poorest and most vulnerable members of society? Does the care provided result in improved health outcomes?177 At the same time, there is a growing movement to consider religion’s influences in other ways. Scholarship into the frameworks that people employ to make sense of life helps us to understand the relationship between beliefs and behaviors, quickly opening lines of inquiry in religion and health.178

Examples of such scholarship include: negotiations in the health behaviors of people of faith when daily actions are in tension with teachings and moral principles championed by their faith tradition;179 the alignments and tensions between religious and scientific frameworks for making sense of health;180 the similarities and differences in teachings across various religious traditions that inform health beliefs and behaviors;181 and the differences between the cultural frameworks that inform the grounding assumptions of the health and development field and those frameworks that inform very different assumptions in the societies in which health and development programs are carried out.182

Each of these topics is conceptual but when we use such concepts to reflect on real-world practice, pressing ethical questions about power arise. Who has the authority to articulate “right” and “wrong” ways of believing or behaving? How do we guard against uncritically interpreting religious and cultural systems through our own frameworks? How can we interrogate the grounding assumptions not only of religious traditions but also of the tradition of scientific inquiry grounded in evidence-based practice that is the foundation of health and development research?


177 Jill Olivier, director of ARHAP and a global leader in the field of religion and public health, is asking such questions in relation to faith-based health systems. See Olivier and Wodon, Faith-Inspired Health Care, 2012; The Lancet special issue.

178 In fact, researchers affiliated with IRHAP contributed an important concept to help us understand the relationships between beliefs and behaviors and how both help us think about religion and health. See Paul Germond and Jim Cochrane, “Healthworlds: Conceptualizing Landscapes of Health and Healing,” Sociology 44, no. 2 (2010): 307-324, https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038509357202. This chapter makes the case for further scholarship to broaden our conceptualizations beyond healthworlds alone.


These critical questions unsettle some of the earlier work described above. For example, Christian researchers and practitioners have examined “religious health assets.” Yet, we must ask: How do their own backgrounds bias what is seen or overlooked when considering what are tangible health assets? Do we pay particular attention to faith-based health facilities across sub-Saharan Africa, for example, because these health systems are largely Christian and reflect a Western emphasis on clinical medicine? If we considered the religious health assets supporting the practices of zakat among Muslims worldwide, what organizational structures would we see and privilege? Similarly, white men from the US, Europe, and South Africa led much of this earlier research. How did their personal and collective experiences—experiences influenced by race, nationality, and gender—affect the ways in which they framed this research? Would women from East Asia, Central Africa, or East Africa have described those assets in the same way and would they assume that religion is always aligned with wellbeing, or would they remind us that it can also be used to provide a divinely ordained justification for sexual and gender-based violence?

Questions of power also have political implications, of course. For example, how do we account for the political dynamics involved in an appeal by HIV advocates (most often from Western societies) appealing to human rights in calling for African nations to abolish laws that target LGBTIQ+ people, people who inject drugs, or sex workers? Further, how do we understand resistance to such appeals from religious authorities within those nations who frame their objection in religious perspectives and in a refusal to continue the colonialist imposition of Western cultural norms to dictate the moral standards of their communities? 2183

These are some of the complex questions facing us as we seek to understand religion’s varied influences on health and development in the 21st century. Efforts to understand those influences must attend to cultural, political, and religious power, not only in the nations where programs are implemented but also in those nations that fund them. 40 years ago, researchers, health and development practitioners and policy makers rarely considered religion in relation to health and development practice; a generation ago, the concept of “religious health assets” put religion back on the map. Today and for the foreseeable future, efforts to understand religion’s influences on health and development must not only focus on those assets but also address to complex questions about the power dynamics involved.

CHAPTER 3

RELIGIONS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

AUTHORS: PHILIPP ÖHLMANN AND IGNATIUS SWART
Religion has a crucial role in the environmental dimensions of sustainable development. Achieving ecological sustainability, combatting climate change, and adopting environmental protection measures "requires not only appropriate policies [and] scientific knowledge but necessitates radical paradigm shifts and changed mindsets and behaviour."  

- The environmental crisis is a spiritual and moral crisis: As Sponsel argues, "ultimately the environmental crisis as a whole is a spiritual and moral crisis and ... it can only be resolved by radical transformations in the ways in which industrial capitalist and consumerist societies, in particular, relate to nature...". This directly points to religion.

- Religious communities can play a fundamental role in such societal and cultural transformations: "[R]eligion shapes social imaginaries, and people's values and religious communities have the ability to act as agents of social, cultural, economic, political and ecological change." Consequently, policy makers have increasingly recognized faith actors as crucial actors for ecological sustainability. One of the most prominent examples is the United Nations Environment Program's (UNEP) Faith for Earth Initiative, which seeks to "encourage, empower and engage with faith-based organizations as partners, at all levels, toward achieving the Sustainable Development Goals and fulfilling the 2030 Agenda."

Against this backdrop, fundamental questions on the role of religion for the environment emerge. This concerns, first, what kind of values and attitudes faith actors bring forward in relation to the environment, climate change, and ecological sustainability. Second, it so far remains unclear whether religions' theological engagement is reflected in environmental action (e.g., advocacy against climate change) – and whether such theological engagement propels environmental activism by their membership.

A rapidly growing body of evidence has engaged with these questions, focusing on different religious traditions as well as approaching the field from different perspectives. Providing an overview of key strands of the literature is the purpose of this chapter. The chapter is structured into two thematic sections. Section II provides an overview of selected religious traditions, tracing an ecological turn across different religions, while Section III pays closer attention to the religion-environment nexus in recent literature, showing how it provides evidence of an ongoing and intensifying scholarly and strategic interest in this area.

### 184 Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, University of Botswana & University of Pretoria. Philipp Öhlmann gratefully acknowledges funding from the German Research Foundation through the International Research Training Group 2706 "Transformative Religion: Religion as Situated Knowledge in Processes of Social Transformation."

### 185 University of the Western Cape. Ignatius Swart's contribution to this chapter draws from his research work for the project consortium "South African – German Research Hub on Religion and Sustainability" (SAGRaS) (2022-2025). SAGRaS is funded by the National Research Foundation (NRF) and forms part of the South African–German Collaborative Research Programme (SAG-CORE) on "The Interface between Global Change and Social Sciences – post-COVID-19". Reference: SAG201111573377.


### 188 Stork and Öhlmann, Religious Communities as Actors. i.


An overview across different religious traditions
The role of religion and ecology has been debated for several decades and is considered an emerging field.  

Is Western Christianity responsible for the environmental crisis?
A core point of contention was White’s assertion, in the 1960s, that the human-focused nature of (Western) Christianity laid the ground for the global environmental crisis. “Christianity,” in his view, “not only established a dualism of man (sic) and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man (sic) exploit nature for his (sic) proper ends.” White attributed a core responsibility of ecological destruction to Western society’s anthropocentrism, which he considered to be shaped by its Judeo-Christian religion and culture. Consequently White argued that, as the root of the ecological crisis lies in religion, it can also play a significant role in its remedy: “More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one.”

Christian engagement with the environmental crisis
Since then, there has been considerable dynamic and theological debate, leading to the emergence of discussions on eco-theology and sustainability. One of the more recent examples of this engagement is Pope Francis’ encyclical Laudato Si, which has become a cornerstone frame of reference on the need for socio-ecological transformation from a religious point of view far beyond the context of the Catholic Church.

There is also widespread ecological engagement in other religions, for example Islam and Buddhism.

Islamic engagement with the environmental crisis
Islam has seen the development of an eco-theology and engagement with the environment since the 1960s. These approaches draw on the Islamic concepts of Tawhid, highlighting the unity of all creation, and Khalifa, highlighting Islam’s engagement with the environmental crisis from a religious point of view far beyond the context of the Catholic Church.

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194 White, our ecologic crisis, 1206.
196 Pope Francis, Encyclical Letter Laudato Si.
198 Koehrsen, Muslims and Climate Change.
199 Koehrsen, Muslims and Climate Change.
201 Koehrsen, Muslims and Climate Change.
202 Koehrsen, Muslims and Climate Change.
203 Kowanda-Yassin, Öko-Dschihad.
Buddhist engagement with the environmental crisis

There has also been a substantial development of eco-Buddhist thinking and activism, in the context of the wider movement of “engaged Buddhism.” Buddhist perspectives on environmental protection and climate change – deriving from an emphasis on the interdependence of humans and the natural environment – were prominently brought forward in the global statements “Buddhist Climate Change Statement to World Leaders” and the Time to Act is Now: A Buddhist Declaration on Climate Change (both in 2015). A concrete example of Buddhist ecological activism is that of Buddhist monks in Thailand, who in the 1980s, began ordaining trees to prevent them from being felled and to raise awareness on environmental destruction.

Hindu engagement with the environmental crisis

Looking at Hinduism, a key document emerging in the runup to the 2015 Paris Climate Conference, as in other faith traditions, was the “Bhumi Devi Ki Jai! A Hindu Declaration on Climate Change.” While it is difficult to speak of “one” Hinduism in a general way, as is the case with many religions, Chapple highlights that “India, the birthplace of Hinduism, boasts the world’s largest environmental movement.” Chapple and Tucker’s volume and the articles by Dwivedi and Haberman provide further insights into Hinduism’s relationship with the environment. A concrete initiative is the Bhumi Project, which seeks to “engage, educate, and empower people and communities to address the triple crisis of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution … based on Hindu principles of environmental care.”

Are religions becoming green?

In light of these developments, Gottlieb argues that “world religion has entered into an ‘ecological phase’ in which environmental concern takes its place alongside more traditional religious focus on sexual morality, ritual, helping the poor and preaching the word of God.” Recent scholarship has described this as the “greening of religion hypothesis,” although recent empirical studies have painted a more ambivalent picture. The comprehensive review by Taylor et al. identifies “many themes and dynamics that hinder environmental understanding and mobilization by religious individuals, whether Abrahamic or involved in religions that originated in Asia.” However, there seems to be substantial ecological dynamic at a more local level, with indigenous traditions fostering “pro-environmental perceptions and behaviors.” This resonates with the findings of recent studies from African

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contexts on African Traditional Religion, Spirituality and Philosophy216 and African Initiated Christianity,217 which highlight a tension between different approaches to the natural environment from "dominion" over creation to "communion" with the natural environment.218

The recent reinvigoration of the sustainability debate, propelled by youth engagement in the Fridays for Future movement, has led to an "ecological turn" in many religious communities. In the wake of the global debate on climate change, environmental degradation and its local effects, concerns with questions on environmental sustainability seem to be on the increase in religious communities. In the survey "Religious Leaders’ Perspectives on Corona" conducted by the Research Programme on Religious Communities and Sustainable Development at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, 77% of religious leaders worldwide who responded considered "strengthen[ing] environmental protection" as highly important for a post-Covid-19 future – environmental concerns thereby constituting the overall highest priority.219 Even during the height of the pandemic, nearly 50% of the respondents agreed with the statement that "environmental destruction is of greater concern than the coronavirus."220 A religious leader from Kenya elaborated on the need for fundamental transitions towards sustainability: "A different model for economic development that is green and inclusive. Build back better by adopting sustainable solutions to environmental challenges."221

The religion-environment nexus in recent literature

A survey of the literature from the last five to six years (2016–2021) that falls within the religion-environment nexus provides noticeable evidence of an ongoing, intensifying scholarly and strategic interest in this issue area. While it is not possible to do justice to the sheer volume of publications that emerged during this period, it seems helpful to distinguish between two strands of scholarly development that substantiate this ever-growing interest. The first consists of debates in the now established field of religion and development222 and the second of a broader range of debates of inter- and multidisciplinary scope falling outside religion and development as its explicit disciplinary placing.

Environmental debates specific to religions & development

The United Nations’ launch of the “Sustainable Development Goals” (SDGs) as the new framework for development policy worldwide in 2015 provided important momentum to the religion and development field to use the conceptual apparatus of “sustainable development.” A large segment of recent and current scholarship in the field has not only directed its focus to the SDG Agenda, but strategic think tanks such as the Faith 4 Earth initiative at the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Environment, Water, and Climate focused workstream at the International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD) demonstrate the growth of the environment as a focus area.223


218 Amanze, From ‘Dominion’ to ‘in Communion.’


221 Sonntag, Frost, and Öhlmann, Religious Leaders’ Perspectives on Corona, 6.


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Yet, while "sustainability and environmental issues, including the threat of global warming, are at the core of the...Sustainable Development Goals," they have not been at the forefront of religions and development debates as they intersect with the SDG Agenda. The focus on the environment has so far remained a secondary concern in post-2015 religions and development discussions around the SDG Agenda. This is of course not to say that the political and social aspects prevalent in the discussions are not of considerable importance, but instead that limited attention has been given in comparison to the integrated discussion of the three pillars of the SDG Agenda – environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability.

Nevertheless, we can begin to give due recognition to a number of publications that have contributed to a more concerted environmental related focus in the post-2015 religion and sustainable development/SDGs debates. This has included two World Bank researchers’ use of World Values Survey data to study the (positive) correlation between religious affiliation, religiosity and environmental concerns, a reflection on animal rights/animal-inclusive sustainability as a pertinent religious concern, a Catalan case study of the practical contribution of religious organizations to “integral sustainability” (i.e. sustainability inclusive of the environmental, social and economic concerns of the SDG Agenda), a consideration of religion as a potential driver of sustainable consumption (with specific reference to SDG 12) as well as Christian theological reflections on the challenge of environmental justice and wholeness in the context of Africa.

**Laudato Si’, integral ecology, and Catholic teachings**

However, a far more consolidated picture emerges with the growing body of literature around Catholic social teaching and engagement with the SDG Agenda. At the center of this inspiration is Pope Francis’ encyclical *Laudato Si’,* which was issued in the same year (2015) as the SDGs but in the growing body of literature is also contrasted with the SDGs. Whereas scholars from this body of literature see the SDGs as trapped within the paradigm of global economic development, they praise *Laudato Si’* for its far-reaching conceptual paradigm shift from “integral human development” to “integral ecology.” This implies nothing less than a vision for “a post-capitalist era, based on a cultural shift towards eco-solidarity.” At its core is an integral approach that recognizes the cry of the earth with the cry of the human poor. The idea of development no longer seems to play a role and there are no longer targets to achieve, such as the SDGs. The emphasis falls instead on a call for “ecological conversion,” which is seen to inspire a new worldwide movement of “religious environmentalism on the ground, as well as the field of religion and ecology in academia developing new ecotheologies and ecojustice ethics.”

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225 Tsikpo and Wodon, Faith Affiliation, 51–64.


232 See e.g., Freston, *Religion and the Sustainable Development Goals,* 160–161; Sachs, *The Sustainable Development Goals and Laudato Si’.*

233 This does not mean that the concept of integral human development is not still used in Catholic social discourse, but integral ecology has now become the guiding concept that also assumes the former concept. Cf. Deneulin, *Religion and Development,* 2288.


235 Martins, *Laudato Si’.*


Religion-environment/ecology nexus (not specific to religion & development)

Research in this area in the last five to six years provides evidence of a proliferation of scholarly output that resonates well with recent claims from the literature that it has now become possible to speak of the "emerging field of religion and ecology." Accordingly, as the coinage of "religion and ecology" indicates, "ecology" has become the preferred term in the preoccupation with the religion-environment nexus although, as an exploration of the literature suggests, this does not cancel out that "environment" continues to be used in other instances.

It follows that the emerging field of religion and ecology today is typified as a multi-disciplinary field that is wide-ranging in scope. According to one source, it can be described as "an emerging area of study, research, and engagement that embraces multiple disciplines, including environmental studies, geography, history, anthropology, sociology, and politics." This description certainly fits well with another recent identification, namely the "environmental humanities" as "a growing and diverse area of study within humanistic disciplines." At the same time, however, it falls short of recognizing the natural sciences and the fields of theology and religious studies as contributing disciplines. In the fields of religion and theology, a review of the most recent literature for instance brings to the fore new engagements with the issues of climate change, sustainability, and religious environmental activism.

There are emerging key concepts in religion and ecology that can help with our understanding of this field. One idea is the distinction between three methodological approaches that are shaping the field in terms of scholarship, debate, and practical consideration: retrieval, reevaluation and reconstruction. Another is the identification of three phenomena that are driving novel thematic developments in the field: climate change, technology, and space/place. Finally, a concept that is also gaining ground and shaping the field is that of "spiritual ecology." According to one source, it can be described as "an emerging area of study, research, and engagement with recent claims from the literature that it has now become possible to speak of the "emerging field of religion and ecology." Yet, as suggested by the following quote from the literature, this concept is just one of a range that tie religions and spirituality to ideas of nature, the environment, earth, and ecology.

As an umbrella term, spiritual ecology may be recognized as a vast, complex, diverse, and dynamic arena of intellectual and practical activities at the interfaces of religions and spiritualities with nature, ecologies, environments, and environmentalisms. It embraces other narrower fields, such as dark green religion, deep ecology, earth spirituality, earth mysticism, ecomythicism, ecopsychology, ecospirituality, ecotheology, green religion, green spirituality, nature mysticism, nature religion, nature spirituality, religion and ecology, religion and nature, religious ecology, religious environmentalism, religious naturalism, and sacred ecology. The qualifier spiritual is used instead of religious, because it is far more inclusive. Religion usually includes the spiritual, but some spirituality is not associated with any particular religion... Even some atheists are spiritual.
Conclusion

In summary, there seems to be a substantially increasing interest in the relationship of religion with the environment, climate change, and ecological sustainability as evidenced by a rapidly growing corpus of literature. At the same time, increasing engagement by faith actors is visible both at the ideological level as well as in concrete environmental action and advocacy. However, this often seems to be a partial movement in religious communities. Speaking of a unanimous “greening of religions,” in the sense that ecological concerns constitute a major focus throughout seems to be premature, perhaps with some pioneering exceptions. A more fitting term might be to speak of an ecological turn in religious communities throughout the globe, indicating increased ecological awareness without this becoming a central element in theological tenets and religious activities. While this ecological turn varies across religions and world regions, the literature suggests that considerable untapped potential for promoting values conducive to environmental protection and socio-ecological transformation exists in traditional and indigenous spiritualities beyond the main religious traditions. However, what clearly emerges from recent reviews is that more research is needed, particularly with respect to the effects of the ecological turn in religious communities on their members’ attitudes, values, and environmental action. Several research initiatives are pursuing a research agenda in this field. Examples are inter alia the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, the Laudato Si’ Research Institute at Oxford University, and the South-African German Research Hub on Religion and Sustainability (SAGRaS), which emerged from a partnership between the University of Pretoria, the University of the Western Cape (South Africa), and Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin (Germany).

251 Cf. Koehrsen, Blanc, and Huber, How ‘Green’ Can Religions Be?.
252 Yale University, “Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology – About the Forum,” Yale School of the Environment (New Haven: Yale University), accessed March 5, 2022, https://fore.yale.edu/.
CHAPTER 4
FAITH ACTORS AND VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN
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Introduction

Violence against children (VAC) is a global problem, with at least one billion children (defined as those under the age of 18) experiencing violence every year worldwide. VAC is defined as all forms of physical, sexual, and emotional violence, including neglect, maltreatment, exploitation, harm, and abuse, which can take different forms such as child labor, child marriage, corporal punishment, and sexual violence. Prevention and response to violence, exploitation, and abuse of children regardless of the context are referred to as child protection.

Faith communities can play a crucial role in ending VAC. For example, many individuals across different countries draw their beliefs around child rearing from religious sources.

The End VAC Report in 2020 shares some statistics on the scale of the problem:
- Every year, at least one billion children experience violence – that’s half of the world’s children
- One in two children experience violence every year
- Every seven minutes, an adolescent dies because of violence
- Children with disabilities are almost four times more likely to experience violence than non-disabled children
- Over one million children are reported missing every year
- Globally, the cost of VAC adds up to US$7 trillion a year
- Three out of four young children are regularly subjected to violent discipline by their caregivers
- One in every four children is living in a country affected by conflict or disaster
- Only 12% of children are fully protected from corporal punishment – by law – across the world (or alternately: 88% of the world’s children are not protected by law from corporal punishment
- Worldwide, close to 130 million (more than one in three) students from age 13-15 experience bullying.

Source: End Violence Against Children 2020

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255 Unit for Religion and Development Research, Stellenbosch University.
256 Institute for Global Health and Development, Queen Margaret University.
258 End Violence Against Children, Key Messages & Statistics.
This section discusses the state of the evidence on faith actors and VAC over the past two decades. Over this period, global faith actors have made two important public declarations on ending violence against children, namely, the Kyoto Declaration (2006) and the Panama Declaration (2017).262

Overview of literature

A recent scoping study on faith actors’ involvement in the prevention, elimination, and perpetuation of VAC by Palm, Rutledge, and Eyber provides a comprehensive overview of existing literature on this topic over the past two decades (1999 – 2019).263 The study identified and analyzed 172 relevant sources. It highlighted that grey literature264 dominates the evidence base with internal NGO reports, working papers, and newsletters, etc., making up 60% of the research. Academic articles and books only make up 40% of this research, underscoring that it is a highly practice-focused area of evidence in comparison to some of the other thematic areas under religions and development. Half of the literature focused on two geographic areas - the US (23%) and sub-Saharan Africa (27%). Fifty-three percent of the sources referred to solely one religion, with most concentrating on Christianity, followed by Islam and traditional beliefs. The study found that three main types of evidence are dominant on faith actors and VAC:

- **Emphasis on training and guides:** Thirty-nine percent concentrated on the prevention of VAC with a strong emphasis on mobilization and education that mainly included “the provision of training and developing guides for faith actors to engage in particular subject areas related to a range of child protection issues.”265
- **Focus on child sexual abuse:** Another area emerging and discussed in 23% of the sources, was the perpetuation of violence in relation to faith, mostly focused on child sexual abuse (frequently related to the Catholic Church), and the issue of child sacrifice in folk religions (e.g., witchcraft) which was seen to have a specific research focus.
- **Intersection with research on gender, religions, and development:** A significant amount of the literature on harmful practices is situated within the violence against women and girls field where girls (but not boys) are the focus of research and in programming approaches, forming a significant crossover with the gender theme in this volume.266 To avoid duplication with other themes, this body of literature has been excluded here, but it is noted that there has been an increased focus in recent years on the complex intersections and shared root causes between violence against women and violence against children.267

Evidence on the involvement of faith actors in child protection has increased since the 2010s.268 Robinson and Hanmer are among the most cited authors who have argued that faith communities should be recognized as key actors in the local communities and involved in child protection activities.269 A multi-religious study by Arigatou International in 2019 also explored child rights through the lens of different faith traditions.270 At the same time, however, literature highlights concerns around the problematic role of some faith actors in legitimizing community level forms of VAC such as child marriage.271

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265 Rutledge and Eyber, Prevention, Elimination, and Perpetuation of VAC.


267 Le Roux and Palm, What lies beneath.


271 Le Roux and Palm, What lies beneath.
Main trends identified in literature

International actors’ perspective predominates

Most literature discusses the engagement of faith actors in ending VAC through the prism of international organizations’ interventions.²⁷² Experiences of international organizations in working with faith actors are commonly reported, where faith actors are frequently recognized as key stakeholders for formal collaboration to address child protection issues.²⁷³ However, evidence on local faith actors’ more organic, informal, and self-initiated work has been identified as needing better documentation and dissemination.²⁷⁴

Overemphasis on positive examples

Overall the majority of this literature generally discusses the positive contributions of faith actors to ending VAC through activities such as pre-violence prevention, advocacy, direct intervention, service provision, and survivor support.²⁷⁵ Faith-based organizations are also identified as having a stronger ability to reach and influence civil society in many contexts than governments or NGOs due to their pre-existing social capital and alignment with the worldview and culture of many communities.²⁷⁶ However, the outcomes and impact of faith actors’ initiatives are rarely measured adequately. Most evaluations focus on only quantitatively measuring certain changes such as the transformation of faith leaders’ attitudes to reduce harmful traditional practices.²⁷⁷ For example, evaluations in Ethiopia and Nigeria that assessed the outcomes of the intervention involving faith leaders in reducing harmful traditional practices found positive changes in faith leaders’ attitudes in support of eliminating female genital cutting and stopping child marriage.²⁷⁸ However, the literature points out that evaluations should also measure reductions in harmful traditional practices due to faith leaders’ work.²⁷⁹

Further research and analysis on negative examples

Only a small percentage of the literature focuses on the perpetuation of violence by faith actors.²⁸⁰ A few sources also discuss interpretations of religious scriptures that support some forms of VAC, such as corporal punishment and child marriage. For example, Bible verses such as “He who spares the rod, spoils the child” (Bible, Proverbs 13:24) have been repeatedly cited by parents/caregivers and faith actors in various studies as a reference point to legitimize physical punishment.²⁸¹ The literature identifies a need to further analyze the perpetuation of, or condoning of, certain forms of violence by faith actors and as a result of underlying faith beliefs to effectively counter these entrenched social norms.²⁸²

Major current debates in the last five years

Corporal punishment

Corporal punishment in both homes and schools has been raised in recent years as a primary intersection of concern and controversy amongst faith communities with regard to the task of ending VAC. Experts across six faiths highlighted this as a key current site of religious contestation where some faith actors still seek to normalize and condone this as a key current site of religious contestation where some faith actors still seek to normalized and

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²⁷² D’Agostino, D’Sa, and Boothby, What’s Faith Got to Do with It?: Palm, Scoping Study.
²⁷⁴ Rutledge and Eyber, Prevention, Elimination, and Perpetuation of VAC.
²⁷⁵ Rutledge and Eyber, What’s Faith Got to Do with It?: Palm, Scoping Study.
²⁷⁷ D’Agostino, D’Sa, and Boothby, What’s Faith Got to Do with It?: Palm, Scoping Study.
²⁷⁹ D’Agostino, D’Sa, and Boothby, What’s Faith Got to Do with It?: Palm, Scoping Study.
²⁸⁰ Rutledge and Eyber, Prevention, Elimination, and Perpetuation of VAC.
²⁸² Rutledge and Eyber, Prevention, Elimination, and Perpetuation of VAC.
justify this practice, often using diverse sacred texts. A gap has been identified between global pronouncements condemning this by selected religious leaders such as in Panama in 2017, and grassroots realities in many local faith communities where corporal punishment practices often continue. Religious voices globally clearly remain divided on this issue of corporal punishment. At the same time, several organizations have recently developed some positive resources to seek to address this issue.

Child sexual abuse

Child sexual abuse also emerges as a second area of significant recent concern in relation to faith communities, both as perpetrated by individual faith leaders, and within religious institutions of care and education with recent high profile media revelations on this issue in places including but not limited to Ireland, Australia, South Africa, and the US leading to a number of in-depth investigations. Generally, in the child protection sector, this issue is receiving increased attention, which the global #metoo movement has also facilitated. Beyond perpetration alone, experts have highlighted a wider religious silence on these realities within families and communities, often due to issues of sex and sexuality, which continue to be viewed as taboo within religious settings. Breaking the silence on this issue in faith settings is an emerging focus for practitioners. New initiatives are also developing internal child protection systems and programs to ensure that faith institutions are safe spaces for children and are not exempt from legal requirements.

Influence on faith actors on social norms at multiple levels

Third, faith actors are increasingly identified as playing important roles at the level of the child directly, the family (often viewed as sacred in many faiths), the wider community, and at national and international policy levels. Due to this influence at multiple levels of the socio-ecological system surrounding a child, faith systems can offer significant social capital to the task of ending VAC. However, at the same time, faith beliefs often play a cross-cutting role in all these systems, indirectly influencing them in ways that need further in-depth engagement and research. Wider global strategies such as the 2016 World Health Organization’s INSPIRE package of seven strategies for ending VAC have gained currency in this field in recent years and point in-depth engagement and research. Wider global strategies such as the 2016 World Health Organization’s INSPIRE package of seven strategies for ending VAC have gained currency in this field in recent years and point to transforming social norms and those who influence them as a key factor for change.

283 Palm, Scoping Study.
289 Palm, Scoping Study. See also Stiebert, Rape Myths; Hilary Jerome Scarsella and Stephanie Krehbiel, "Sexual Violence: Christian Theological Legacies and Responsibilities," Religion Compass 13, no. 9 (2019), https://doi.org/10.1111/rec.12337; Caroline Blyth, Emily Colgan, and Katie B. Edwards, eds., Rape Culture, Gender Violence, & Religion: Biblical Perspectives (Cham: Springer Nature, 2018); Miryam Clough, Shame, the Church and the Regulation of Female Sexuality (London: Routledge, 2017); Le Roux and Palm, What lies beneath?
Need to capture informal as well as formal faith actor responses

Fourth, at a practical level, faith communities play a number of roles in wider child protection systems, through informal undocumented responses, semi-formal interventions often around prevention, and through their formal involvement in social systems of care.²⁹³ The unique role of faith communities is also gathering more attention through increased recognition of the need to engage more directly with faith’s spiritual capital such as its core beliefs, sacred texts and spiritual rituals, especially, but not only in relation to harmful practices, parenting approaches, beliefs about children, and core values of love and dignity.²⁹⁴

Gaps and cross-cutting themes

Gaps identified in current evidence

There are several gaps in current faith engagement around ending VAC²⁹⁵

- First, few faith organizations address the specific risks to children of diverse sexual orientation, gender identity and expression and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), and this silence can even perpetuate violence, often shaped by underlying religious beliefs.²⁹⁶
- Second, practitioners have raised concerns that boys’ vulnerabilities are invisible due to a global focus on girl children and issues that affect them only, with extra attention and funds given to girls due to the VAW/G movement. Faith actors may need to take a nuanced gender-lens on childhood that also avoids reinforcing gender stereotypes.
- Third, the rise of digital VAC is a new concern, emerging as a more prominent issue under COVID-19, and this is an area where faith actors need their own capacity developed.²⁹⁷
- Fourth, witchcraft and child abuse are a focus in academic literature but often remain taboo topics within local communities with practitioners rarely raising these issues.²⁹⁸
- Finally, faith actors identify several structural forms of violence that affect many children’s lives, such as trafficking and commercial sexual exploitation, armed conflict, child labor, migration, and homelessness. In general, these issues were not the primary focus for most local faith communities, possibly due to their complexity. However, some the larger, formalized faith-based organizations focus on the intersections of these areas.²⁹⁹

Emerging cross-cutting issues of significance

One cross-cutting issue receiving increased attention in many faith settings is the importance of age-appropriate child participation for ending VAC. This is seen as a promising development as evidence suggests that if a child is positioned as socially inferior to adults, this may form a key driver for patterns of adult/child violence.³⁰⁰ However, many faith traditions inherit beliefs about the need for silent obedience from children with various formulations of the idea that children should be ‘seen and not heard’ common and in need of transformation. Some promising institution-led approaches are emerging, such as the World Council of Churches ‘Placing Children at the Centre’ initiative³⁰¹ and Arigatou International’s multi-faith series in 2020 which focused on the importance of children being both seen and heard in faith spaces, an issue also presented at global child protection conferences.³⁰²

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²⁹³ Palm and Colombo, Case Studies.
²⁹⁴ Eyber and Rutledge, Prevention, Elimination, and Perpetuation of VAC; Palm, Scoping Study.
²⁹⁵ Palm and Eyber, Why Faith?
²⁹⁶ Eyber and Rutledge, Prevention, Elimination, and Perpetuation of VAC; Palm, Scoping Study.
Another cross-cutting issue is a rise in attention to practical forms of interfaith engagement around ending VAC. This has led to promising academic and practitioner collaborations to build shared messaging across faiths which has been effective on certain issues, such as child marriage, especially in contexts where more than one faith is substantially present. However, practitioners note that working across faiths also comes with challenges and more research is needed in this area. Faith actors and institutions also need to be embedded into, and accountable to, wider child protection systems and not separated from them. This has implications for both secular and faith actors in terms of building constructive ways to work together.

Conclusion and recommendations from recent evidence

In the last two decades, increased documentation has emerged around the role of faith actors in relation to the task of ending VAC. Much has focused on the practical work of faith-based organizations (often large international organizations). Expert practitioners suggest however that there may be a gap between global narratives and the local realities of many faith communities whose work with children often remains informal and undocumented. Evidence shows that all religions contain protective elements for children and can offer important contributions to ending VAC due to their often-trusted position in communities. However, in the last five years, revelations around child sexual abuse in faith settings and diverse views around corporal punishment have raised questions about this role. More local research is needed to both amplify their positive potential as well as engage explicitly with harmful beliefs. Religions can offer unique spiritual capital to help end VAC.

Recent evidence has summarized and highlighted several important key messages around this area that shape key recommendations. There are four main points to highlight here:

1. Faith communities include and influence many important actors who can play roles in ending VAC and require constructive, but critical engagement within a wider system of care.
2. Faith leaders provide regular support to many families including children and can also engage formal child protection systems locally, nationally, regionally, and internationally.
3. Engagement with the specific mechanisms and spiritual capital of diverse faith structures, offers a unique contribution to the elimination of VAC in their potential to promote positive beliefs and action towards ending violence against children.
4. There is an urgent need to re-interpret all religious beliefs and practices that may contribute to VAC, and its silencing, particularly those with a spiritual basis in religious texts.

Faith actors have crucial roles to play in the prevention and referral of child abuse cases. However, at the same time, evidence shows that faith communities can be complicit in, and even perpetrate, certain forms of VAC and they have an urgent responsibility to publicly acknowledge and challenge this in all its forms. Some faith communities may assign children to a position of inferiority in comparison to adults, with fewer social rights and less legal protections, which is seen as a root cause of much VAC. The faith sector itself must recognize and challenge the contributions of faith communities in perpetuating these harmful norms. Across the evidence, child participation forms an emerging mechanism used for sustainably changing harmful social norms about children. This requires faith responses to move towards child-centered approaches that link protection and participation, by equipping children as agents.

VAC also changes and takes on new forms, and the interrelated nature of these forms means faith communities need to be equipped to engage with hidden and emerging forms of VAC, if they are to be effective actors in the wider shared tasks of both prevention and response.

Most faith traditions often mandate practical social action and service in relation to children as part of faith, especially within the areas of education, care, and social support and that protective religious beliefs around the care and protection of children in faith traditions can be harnessed to accelerate the shared task of ending VAC. However, there is also a concern that faith leaders deal explicitly and constructively with entrenched harmful faith beliefs which are still used to justify or indirectly underpin abusive adult/child hierarchies of power. Faith leaders must also work to break the culture of silence and secrecy on hidden practices of child abuse and maltreatment within religious institutions and families and take steps toward preventative action. Finally, faith actors should seek, where

303 Palm and Colombo, Case Studies; Palm and Eyber, Why Faith?
305 Palm and Colombo, Case Studies; Palm and Eyber, Why Faith?
appropriate, to work with intra-faith, interfaith, and broader child protection systems to prioritize the best interests of the child together.

This evidence summary highlights the need to engage with religious belief systems more deeply, and not just with faith leaders alone. Many diverse faith actors internalize and pass on systemic beliefs and values about children and families intergenerationally. Faith plays a significant role in many people’s lives around the world. Because of this reality, it holds significant cross-cutting influence in the lives of children, families, communities, and even in national legislation and politics. This influence and power can be harnessed to either end, or to perpetuate, VAC and it should not be ignored.

CHAPTER 5

RELIGIONS, DEVELOPMENT, AND GENDER

AUTHORS: ELISABET LE ROUX AND NORA KHALAF-ELLEDGE
Introduction

Gender and religion have been deeply intertwined in societies across the globe and throughout history, but the development sector has only recently recognized this trend. Traditionally, gender discourses in development have been religion blind.\(^309\) The conceptual shift from Women in Development (WID) to Gender in Development (GAD) in 1995 promised to address not only women as individuals but also the structural inequalities they experience. However, development practice today still struggles to engage with the complex ways in which religions and other social forces can shape gender relations. Recent decolonial feminist perspectives challenge the narrow knowledge production of traditional development discourses\(^310\) and could pave the way for a more nuanced discussion when it comes to religions and gender.

The intersection of gender and religions is relevant to several development issues, including ensuring sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) and eliminating violence against women and girls (VAWG).\(^311\) Both are part of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and a priority for many development organizations. Yet, despite the deep entanglement of these issues with religious politics around the globe, the role of religion in GAD issues is routinely overlooked or understudied. A focus on gender and religions would also call out the false developing-developed country dichotomy: the intersection of gender and religions is relevant across the globe and should thus prompt practitioners to consider development issues on a global level.

In the following, we present an overview of the research to date and the inclusion of the religion-gender intersection into development discourses. The first section addresses the major discussions from the last two decades and the second section elaborates on the most important trends and debates of the past five years.

Major discussions from the last two decades

Within development, both gender and religions have a history of being ignored. Prior to the 1970s it was believed that development processes affected men and women in the same way,\(^312\) while prior to the 2000s religions were a neglected area of study within development, often dismissed as being irrelevant.\(^313\) However, there has been increasing recognition within the development community that both gender and religions impact development processes. In terms of gender, Esther Boserup’s seminal “Women’s Role in Economic Development” (1970)\(^314\) emphasized that development processes affect women differently and, over time, WID approaches evolved into GAD approaches, reflecting an increasing appreciation of the role of gender in development. This increased recognition

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\(^{308}\) Goldsmiths, University of London.


\(^{311}\) Some feminists prefer the term VAWG over gender-based violence (GBV), as the latter fails to reflect the problems of “male privilege and women’s oppression within the prevailing patriarchy.” See Coalition of Feminists for Social Change (COEFS), “Reframing language of ‘gender-based violence’ away from feminist underpinnings,” Feminist Perspectives on Addressing Violence Against Women and Girls Series, no. 2, (2017): 2. The idea that GBV encompasses violence against all genders and social groups might falsely suggest that everyone suffers equally. The general and more neutral term GBV could also hamper efforts to provide specialized attention to the needs of women and other distinct groups. See COEFS, Reframing Language.


arguably culminated in the 1995 Fourth UN World Conference on Women and the Beijing Platform for Action.\textsuperscript{315} In terms of religions, the increasing interest in religions and development is generally ascribed to the enduring popularity and importance of religions globally, the increase in religious radicalization and violent extremism, the role and impact of faith-based development organizations globally, and the championing of broader, holistic theories of development.\textsuperscript{316}

Nevertheless, many in the development community continue to consider religions and gender as controversial and sensitive. Each step in gaining recognition for the relevance of gender in development has faced considerable resistance, with the concept of gender equality consistently being challenged\textsuperscript{317} and deprioritized in development practice.\textsuperscript{318} ‘Religionophobia’\textsuperscript{319} continues within the development sector, with acknowledgement of the role of religions in development often not leading to meaningful engagement with religions.\textsuperscript{320} Gender has been a particular issue of concern in the context of faith-partnerships. Some have argued that practitioners have not sufficiently considered the gender implications of faith-partnerships and warn of the gender regressive effects of such efforts.\textsuperscript{321} For example, there are fears that faith engagement may be overly focused on male religious leaders and in the process further entrench their patriarchal authority and views. Meanwhile, minority-status women are propagating feminist views that challenge the tendency of some Western feminists to dismiss religions as inherently disempowering of women.\textsuperscript{322}

Nevertheless, there has been progress especially over the last ten years in further exploring this intersection between religions and gender in development. International faith-based development organizations, such as World Vision International, Tearfund, and Islamic Relief Worldwide, have a long history of developing and implementing faith-based programming promoting gender equality and non-violence in many different countries. While it is less common for governmental ministries and intergovernmental agencies to implement and/or fund such programming, there are notable exceptions. For example, the UN Trust Fund to End Violence against Women recently showcased the work done and lessons learnt from projects they funded that worked with faith actors on VAWG prevention,\textsuperscript{323} while the Spotlight Initiative, a global multi-year partnership between the European Union and UN, is funding several projects that engage intentionally with religions and faith actors to end gender inequality and VAWG. UN Women has recognized the importance of engaging with faith actors to achieve gender equality,\textsuperscript{324} while UNFPA has hosted several key events on the role of faith actors and reproductive health, family planning, and women’s rights.\textsuperscript{325}

This hopefully bodes well in terms not only of a change in global development attitudes and practice, but also in increased research and a growing evidence base. Three key discussions within the existing evidence base on the intersections between religions and gender in development are highlighted here.

First, the existing evidence recognizes the dual nature of religions in relation to advancing and hindering gender equality and VAWG. One the one hand, the patriarchal nature of most religious traditions influences how societies...
This means that religious beliefs and actors can be key drivers of gender inequality and VAWG, as documented by numerous studies. At the same time, religious beliefs and actors have also been shown to play a key role in promoting gender equality and non-violence.

Second, the influence and reach of religious leaders has been recognized. As they hold and leverage access, social and spiritual capital, they are considered a critical dimension of engaging with religions and religious communities around gender equality and non-violence. At the same time, intentional engagement with the various levels of religious hierarchies (formal and informal) can also be an important step in ensuring the promotion of SDG 5 (Gender Equality) within religious communities, especially where top-level religious leaders are all male.

Third, in terms of reflecting on approaches that are used in practice when working with religious leaders and communities to promote gender equality and non-violence, a scriptural/theological approach has emerged as an important tool in religious communities that abide by a central sacred text. Sacred scriptures are then re-read and reinterpreted in ways that promote gender equality and oppose violence, thus leveraging the authority of sacred scripture for the promotion of SDG 5.

It is important to highlight two issues around the existing evidence base. First, it is heavily skewed towards Christianity and Islam, with the vast majority of evidence on religions and gender emerging from engagement with these two religious traditions. Western development organizations in particular have traditionally had closer ties with members of the Christian faith. Second, the existing evidence does not appear to be influencing secular development practice, as many key so-called secular development institutions and practitioners continue to remain hesitant towards engaging with religions and with faith actors on gender specifically. The extent to which development practitioners consider religions and are willing to engage with it is closely related to their personal attitudes towards religion, with religions often seen as “unpredictable, uncontrollable, impulsive, operating outside of norms and civility, and capable of sabotaging development’s agenda.”

What we see is that, over the past 20 years, the relevance and importance of the intersections between religions and gender within international development have received increasing attention. Yet, it remains an emerging field of study.

Important trends and debates over the last five years

Today, SRHRs remain one of the most contentious subjects involving gender and religions. Conflicting religious viewpoints on SRHRs have become increasingly apparent since the 1994 UN Population and Development Conference in Cairo, which pushed reproductive rights to the center of discussions around family planning. Arguably, most of the opposition to reproductive rights has been in the context of abortion debates in the aftermath of the 1995 Beijing World Conference on Women and is particularly driven by conservative Christian voices.

331 Le Roux and Bartelink, Working Effectively With Faith Leaders
334 Khalaf-Elledge, It’s a Tricky One, 660-671.
The controversy surrounding SRHRs in the US illustrates how the religion-gender intersection is as powerful and prevalent in high-income countries as it is in low-income countries. Many of the conservative Christian voices opposing reproductive rights originate in the US\textsuperscript{336} and US politicians frequently base their opposition to abortion and contraceptives on religious arguments to appease these large conservative segments of society.\textsuperscript{337} Conservative views can be carried abroad via international NGOs, government aid policies, or other state funding. Rights organizations have flagged the “disastrous effects” of US aid policies on gender issues worldwide, specifically, the systematic censorship of information about human sexuality and risk reduction, the promotion of medically inaccurate information and “miracle cures” through charismatic faith, the undermining of sex education, and in some instances, the unintended consequence of encouraging early marriage.\textsuperscript{338} The dominance of conservative voices in recent years has arguably obscured internal dynamic debates of religions and more liberal standpoints when it comes to reproductive rights. Other high-income countries, for example in Europe, have also experienced a rise in conservative politics focusing especially on reproductive rights.\textsuperscript{339} Nevertheless, given the dominant role of the US in the global development sector and its influential religious political right, a conversation about religious pushbacks on gender equality must include US foreign aid policy, its restriction of SRHRs worldwide, and support of grassroots anti-choice initiatives.

The issue of LGBTIQ+ rights is subject to similar debates among religious voices. In the Global North, some countries have introduced so-called religious freedom or religious exemption laws legalizing the discrimination of LGBTIQ+ people.\textsuperscript{340} In the Global North and South alike, LGBTIQ+ people continue to be targets of discrimination and violence often driven by conservative groups using religious arguments. The 2018 report by the Global Philanthropy Project (GPP) found that while Christian and Muslim groups can be highly suspicious of one another when it comes to sexual politics, they unite in their fight to protect “traditional family values.”\textsuperscript{341} Other religious leaders attempt to counteract anti-homosexuality campaigns in the name of religions.\textsuperscript{342}

The diverse viewpoints between and within religious traditions are routinely overlooked since development organizations prefer to build religious partnerships over building their own religious literacy.\textsuperscript{343} Religious literacy, a relatively young discourse in development, highlights the context-specific nature of religious practices. It provides a useful analytical framework to conceptualize the diverse – and sometimes conflicting - roles faith actors play in advancing or hindering gender equality. Even though over the past decade, development organizations have been urged to promote a better understanding of religious discourses throughout their organizational structures, in practice the extent of engagement with religions rarely moves beyond partnering with faith actors. These partners are then expected to do the religious literacy work. This can be problematic, both because being religious does not equal understanding the way religions impact gender politics,\textsuperscript{344} but also because development organizations need a certain level of religious literacy to better design projects and form meaningful partnerships in the first place. In the absence of religious literacy, development organizations continue to generalize, misrepresent, or confuse concepts such as “social norms,” “cultural practices,” or “religious laws,” and use them interchangeably. New research suggests that most issues that are labeled or generalized as “religious” in development reporting, are in fact a function of patriarchal power structures that can be found across societies and are subject to change.\textsuperscript{345} For example, practices such as female genital mutilation, foot-binding, or child marriage are a result of patriarchal norms rather than divinely ordained rules.\textsuperscript{346} Most societies today are still patriarchal in practice.\textsuperscript{347} This might explain some of the continuous hesitance of development practitioners to engage with these subjects. Naturally, challenging one of the most deeply entrenched powers systems in the world will be controversial and generate backlash, which development organization rarely consider to be “politically expedient.”\textsuperscript{348}

\textsuperscript{336} GPP, Religious Conservation.
\textsuperscript{341} GPP, Religious Conservation, 36.
\textsuperscript{343} Nora Khalaf-Elledge, The Religion-Gender Nexus, 69.
\textsuperscript{345} Khalaf-Elledge, The Religion-Gender Nexus, 95.
\textsuperscript{346} Shamron Lynnette Monagan “Patriarchy: Perpetuating the Practice of Female Genital Mutilation,” Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences 2, no. 1 (2010): 160; Le Roux and Palm, What lies beneath?
\textsuperscript{348} Khalaf-Elledge, The Religion-Gender Nexus, 34, 142.
Any effort to build religious literacy within development organizations must begin by **overcoming the fear of engaging with issues connected to gender and religions**. Research with gender staff from major development organizations indicates that gender-related issues continue to be side-lined despite the requirements by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to mainstream gender. This emphasizes the need for a truthful implementation of GAD and tangible engagement with gendered power structures, including the roles of religions. Recent decolonial feminist discourses may help in this process. They call for development approaches to recognize their colonial roots to avoid repeating gender stereotypes and orientalist depictions of women and men. Abu-Lughod warned that Western simplified depictions of religious women in developing countries can have dangerous effects, pointing to the repeated portrayal of Muslim women as oppressed, which served as justification for the War on Terror and America’s invasion of Afghanistan while simultaneously covering up messy historical and political dynamics that have perpetuated inequality. Development policies, especially bilateral aid, are situated within the same political sphere and as such equally susceptible to prevalent Western-centric notions of gender and religions. New decolonization discourses also reframe development as a global project. They acknowledge that gender equality is not a Western invention, likewise, religious politics are not unique to the Global South. These discourses “highlight the shared experience of high- and low-income countries and seek to even the playing field, allowing marginalised voices to become the centre of development.” This was one of the key calls from the Beijing conference 25 years ago and may pave the way for understanding the religion-gender nexus as a global phenomenon.

**Conclusion**

“The religious politics of gender has become one of the most important issues facing humanity worldwide and is likely to remain an issue of increasing relevance for the foreseeable future.”

Concluding, we highlight three final points important to keep in mind when reflecting on gender and religions in development.

- First, ‘gender’ should not be viewed as a subsection, or specialized area of interest or approach, within religions and development. Gender affects all the issues around which religions and development meet. Whether the focus is on religions and poverty, environment, health or conflict, views on gender will be relevant to and impactful on the development process.
- Second, it is essential to constantly keep in mind that the challenges and controversies of gender and religions in development are not limited to the Global South – as the current reproductive health debate in the US has so aptly illustrated. The intersection between religions and gender affects development gains in the Global North, too, even to the extent of reversing such gains.
- Third, engaging on gender and religions remains challenging as it is subject to many different forces, including bilateral country relations, diplomacy, and personal biases and attitudes. This highlights that intervention focused on gender and religions in development will require awareness of and engagement at various levels, including international development staff and not only religious leaders and communities.

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349 Khalaf-Elledge, The Religion-Gender Nexus, 121.
352 Khalaf-Elledge, The Religion-Gender Nexus, 45.
CHAPTER 6

RELIGIONS, PEACE, AND CONFLICT

AUTHORS: SUSAN HAYWARD AND ERIN WILSON
CHAPTER 6: RELIGIONS, PEACE, AND CONFLICT
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Introduction

Research on religions’ entanglement with conflict and peacebuilding has gone through significant shifts in the past three decades. After years of neglect, in the late 1990s there was a marked surge in interest in religions, conflict, and peacebuilding. Yet, while attempting to address the lack of attention for religions, an initial over-correction occurred. For a time, research on religions, conflict, and peace overemphasized religions as the crucial element for understanding all conflict situations. This was coupled with a tendency to focus on the positive contribution of religions to peacebuilding and conflict transformation and downplay their place in violence and extremism. This was in part an effort to counterbalance negative normative assumptions about religions as irrational, chaotic, dangerous, and a threat to the modern secular state. In so doing, theory and practice inadvertently reinforced problematic conceptions of the idea of “religion” as a uniform, static, and autonomous dimension of human society.

The field is now experiencing a balancing in this respect. Research is increasingly moving away from the idea that “religion” is a distinct recognizable phenomenon or agent with specific characteristics that make it either violent or peaceful. Instead, new approaches seek to embed research on religions, conflict, and peace within specific contexts, paying attention to the nuances and complexities within different religious communities and traditions as well as the diverse ways that religions are entangled with gender, politics, economics, and culture. The result is contextually grounded intersectional analysis of the relationships among different aspects of the category of “religion” and conflict, violence, extremism, and peace. Peacebuilding practices and diplomatic action are increasingly pushed to operate with this more contextually based and nuanced approach.

Below we sketch the major developments and publications in the field over recent decades, noting how research has both shaped and been shaped by policy and world events. We conclude with reflections on potentially fruitful and new directions to be pursued in the coming years.

Major discussions and key references from the last 20 years

Theoretical backdrop: From lacuna to apologia

While different academic disciplines have long explored the relationship between religions, violence, and peace, a growth of scholarship and practice in the mid-1990s in the US spurred the development of a distinct field. The field emerged in response to a perceived gap in understanding religious factors and engaging religious actors in conflict resolution and diplomacy. Its emergence was also in response to a perceived secular bias against religions on the part of diplomats and those working for peace that led them to see faith actors as unidimensional and violent. The reasons for these blinders and biases were often described as a lingering legacy of the European Enlightenment project. William T. Cavanaugh, for example, has shown how in the process of shoring up the authority and power of the modern “secular” state, disentangling it from ecclesial authority, “religion” was presented as irrational, inherently violent, and absolutist, particularly during the Enlightenment period. The reality of the modern project thus led – and even continues to lead – scholars and others to see or overstate violence as a central dimension of “religion.”

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355 Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Groningen.
356 We use “religion” in inverted commas to signify dominant assumptions about the conceptual category of religion as a singular homogenous entity, i.e., the idea that while there are different religions, they all share essentially the same defining characteristics.
Given the (perceived and real) negative dominant assumptions about religions’ overwhelming contribution to driving violence and injustice in modernity, early scholars often sought to rebalance the scales by highlighting the positive contributions of certain religious ideas, practices, actors, and institutions.358 While most were careful to simultaneously acknowledge how these same dimensions have contributed to violent conflict and exclusionary nationalism, they were sometimes criticized as apologists for religions, or of advancing an understanding of “good religion” to replace “bad religion” in a manner that reified problematic understandings of “religion.”359 Other scholars in the 1990s sought to present a more complex understanding of the intersection of religions with violence and peace, and highlight the potential of religions to contribute to peacebuilding. For example, in The Ambivalence of the Sacred, Scott R. Appleby rejects an essentialist understanding of “religion” as being either violent or peaceful at root.360 Rather, he sees religion as something that is inherently lived and experienced, shaped by ongoing encounters with a transcendent, sacred reality. The responses of individuals and communities to that divine encounter are themselves diverse and paradoxical, resulting in an ambivalence and unpredictability in how religious institutions, individuals, communities, and organizations respond to conflict and peace. Interpretations of the sacred experience can lead some to discriminatory or self-sacrificial violent behavior, and others to pull their lives on the line for the cause of peace.

Some scholars sought to highlight resources within religions that could support work of just peacebuilding and diplomacy. In his Nonviolence and Peacebuilding in Islam, Abu-Nimer lists the various values, teachings, and practices within Islam that support peace.361 He is forthright in saying he does not want to assert that Islam is essentially peaceful (nor essentially violent). But he is driven by a practitioner’s approach to find Islamic tools that can be used to build peace in Muslim-majority communities. His work reflects theories by political scientists like Monica Duffy Toft who often analyze religions as tools wielded by political actors for political ends, including those that are violent.362 Similarly, Johnston and Sampson’s Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft, highlighted the blunders resulting from US diplomats’ lack of understanding of and appreciation for religious forces shaping political activities globally, arguing for the essential need for foreign policymakers to better understand religious dimensions and engage with them to advance their interests, including those related to security.363

While endeavoring to address the previous neglect of religion attributed to a secular bias, this scholarship left core elements of secular thinking in place. Analysis continued to focus on the characteristics of “religion” as a distinguishable and autonomous phenomenon, rather than recognizing that what “religion” is and how it manifests differs from context to context depending on a complex array of intersecting factors. More recent debates have emphasized the need to eschew pre-existing generic assumptions about the nature of “religion” in favor of contextually grounded intersectional analyses of conflicts and issues that focus on the specificities of religions in particular places.

### Practical results of debates in religions, conflict, and peace

The rise of this niche field, increasingly referred to as “religious peacebuilding,” tended to emphasize the positive contributions of (male) religious authorities as third-party conflict resolvers. Dialogue and relationship building across religious identity differences in the internal conflicts of the time (former Yugoslavia, Israel/Palestine, Sudan, and Sri Lanka, among others) was highlighted as critically important for reducing prejudice and “othering” that legitimated direct and structural forms of violence. These strategies also contributed to creating social cohesion among groups to support peace processes and reconciliation. Noting the limitations of purely person-to-person interfaith dialogue projects for reforming structural injustices, and the need to bridge conflict within religious communities, the field came to emphasize the relationship between dialogue and action for peace. It also shifted to

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363 Douglas Johnston and Cynthia Sampson, eds., Religion: The Missing Dimension of Statecraft (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994). Notably, these calls for greater attention to religion in conflict and peacebuilding were happening at the same time that James Wolfensohn, as president of the World Bank at the time, launched an initiative to explore the role of religion in development more broadly.
focus on intra- as well as inter-group dynamics to create broader mobilization. Major players in religious peacebuilding included non-governmental organizations with an explicit “faith-based” or religious engagement modus operandi, such as Religions for Peace (RfP), United Religions Initiative, and the International Network of Engaged Buddhists. Non-governmental peacebuilding organizations like Search for Common Ground began incorporating religious engagement into their efforts, appointing a new Director of Religious Engagement in 2017. At the same time, some government foreign ministries, notably that of the US, but also Switzerland and Germany, increasingly incorporated religious engagement into their efforts through new offices created for that purpose. Finally, international organizations, including the United Nations, sought to incorporate “faith-based engagement” across a range of activities, including peace efforts.

Following the events of September 11, 2001, the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the rise of the Islamic State, an overlapping but distinct set of conversations and action arose related to counterterrorism. Operating firmly within a security lens, religions, and particularly Islam, were perceived anew to be drivers of violence. This fueled new projects of ideological warfare that, once again, sought to supplant extremist/bad religion with moderate/good religion. As peacebuilding sought to reframe itself as countering violent extremism (CVE), driven by donor interests, these projects often exacerbated conflict dynamics. As one example, Western governments sometimes participated in CVE projects with Muslim-majority countries that encouraged the state to wield more control over religious expression, in ways restrictive of religious freedom and potentially counter-productive.

Within this context, promoting the right to Freedom of Religion or Belief (FoRB) took on new prominence in international conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts. FoRB has been explicitly linked with CVE policy agendas and projects, as a tool to counter religious intolerance, absolutism, and unwillingness to compromise that is assumed to characterize religiously-inflected extremism. In addition to the concerns about FoRB being seen as “Christianity by stealth” in some contexts in part because of connections to colonial era missionizing, there is also now the additional baggage attached to FoRB as part of its inclusion in the swathe of policies and tools utilized to “counter violent extremism,” policies and tools that, overall, have been directed towards Muslim minorities and Muslim majority countries over the last two decades.

Major current debates of the last 1-5 years

Gender Justice

New critical questions have emerged in the past 5-10 years that are shaping the still relatively young field of “religious peacebuilding” in important ways. Critiques of the gendered assumptions within earlier scholarship and practices of religious peacebuilding have highlighted how these interventions may have reinforced gender injustice. This insight has led to new standards emphasizing gender justice as an essential element of religious peacebuilding, recognition of the important roles that women hold in religious spaces to transform violence, including sexual and gender-based violence, and of the priorities of women in religiously informed peacebuilding. Specific attention has now been given to LGBTIQ+ actors’ and needs in religious peacebuilding. Case studies and attendant recommendations for gender-sensitive religious peacebuilding often disrupt assumptions about what constitutes “traditional” or orthodox...
religious positions and values worldwide. They emphasize how colonial projects sometimes displaced traditional norms affirming of gender minorities, even as this new attention raises criticisms from some corners globally about “foreign” or “Western” agendas. Moreover, these insights move analysis and engagement away from an exclusive focus on institutional religions, from which these actors may be marginalized.

Religious Literacy

Increasingly, there have been calls to enhance “religious literacy” to ensure more sophisticated consideration of religious dimensions and, when appropriate, for more effective and sensitive religious engagement in peacebuilding. What is meant by “religious literacy” is not always consistent; some call for greater understanding of different religious traditions – their basic practices, sacred calendars, institutions, and so on, even while emphasizing the internal pluralism and dynamism of religions and the need to understand them in context. Others call for greater understanding of religions as essential dimensions of human societies that intersect with economic, political, and social systems, sometimes in ways that are subtle. This advocacy for religious literacy has increased training offerings for foreign policymakers within the international system (for example in the European Union and United Nations), as well as in individual foreign ministries.

Advantages and disadvantages of formalizing faith networks

Considering the increased scale of religious peacebuilding initiatives, and engagement of religious actors in development and peace efforts, some scholars have raised concerns about the bureaucratization of faith-based networks and organizations. That is, the increased engagement of faith-based and non-formal networks and community-based organizations by big development and peace actors have led these bodies to become more formalized and to operate in ways deemed necessary to receive donor funding. The concern, based on observation, is that part of what makes these networks effective and legitimate, namely their “prophetic” and disruptive actions for the cause of justice, and their informal nature, is lost as they become forced to operate as traditional non-governmental organizations. They are seen by their communities as beholden to donors. Faith actors are often faced with choosing between increasing “professionalization” (often seen as code for increasing secularization and domestication) to access donor funding and be given a seat at the table with other major humanitarian and peacebuilding players; or retain their independence and their core religious identity and praxis.

“Right-sizing” and diversifying religion, conflict, and peace

Now that religious considerations and engagement in peacebuilding have become more common, there is an increasing call to ensure these efforts are not siloed as a “niche” field, but better integrated within larger projects, as part of multi-sectoral approaches. Indeed, some observers have become concerned that the increased attention given to religion has swung too far, resulting in an over-emphasis of religious dimensions both in defining conflicts and in designing peace responses. This has led many scholars and peace practitioners to urge for “right-sizing” religion in analysis of problems and solutions, neither over nor underemphasizing its contributions but noting its intersection with multiple factors as necessary for designing effective policy and practice solutions. Some scholars have gone so far as to call for de-emphasizing religion entirely as a dimension of foreign policy analysis and making.

An additional change is the increasing attention given to even more religious traditions and worldviews than previously commonly considered. The early emergence of the field in the 1990s tended to focus on Christianity, Islam, and Judaism, and then, increasingly, Buddhism, Hinduism. In recent years, there has been a greater intentional

turn toward indigenous traditions worldwide. This, coupled with greater appreciation for the internal complexity and dynamism of the so-called “major world religions,” has introduced far more complex understandings of the very category of “religion,” and power considerations operating in mainstream religious peacebuilding that have marginalized some voices over others, and so reinforced some forms of structural and cultural violence.

**Evaluation and evidence in religions, conflict, and peace**

There have been some efforts to enhance evaluation of religious peacebuilding efforts and to come up with a special rubric for evaluating these projects. This has been in response to concerns that earlier projects’ success had primarily been anecdotal rather than empirical.382 Some organizations, like Alliance for Peacebuilding, have sought to create specific rubrics for evaluating interfaith action in peacebuilding.383 These efforts, however, have resurfaced long unresolved debates about the very idea of “religion” being sui generis, requiring that evaluation of religious peacebuilding be done in some distinctive way from “secular” peacebuilding. Such approaches may also continue to subtly reinforce the separation of “secular” actors and activities from “religious,” and privilege the secular over religious, demanding that religious actors and approaches continuously demonstrate their “added value” to established secular peacebuilding frameworks.384

**Conclusion**

It is notable that the nuances and complexities of the intersection of religions with peace and conflict have not permeated beyond the circles of already interested and invested scholars and practitioners. Most governments and secular-defined NGOs continue to display little interest in, or knowledge of, dynamics connected with religions. Thus, a key task for scholars and practitioners is promoting more thoughtful attention for and engagement with religious traditions, communities, ideas, and practices, demonstrating their significance for holistic analysis of conflict settings and therefore also for developing peacebuilding strategies. Yet this must be done in a way that does not position religions as the central factor in conflict, but rather puts religions in conversation with other factors from the conflict context.

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382 As noted in USAID’s two-day Strategic Religious Engagement in Development Summit in October 2020. Research mapping the state of evaluation of the field of religious engagement in development broadly, which included, to a degree, peacebuilding specifically, noted that most evaluation was qualitative rather than empirical. Chris Seiple et al., “Strategic Religious Engagement in International Development: Building a Basic Baseline,” *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 19, no. 1 (2021): 1-11.


CHAPTER 7

RELIGIONS AND FORCED MIGRATION

AUTHORS: SUSANNA TROTTA AND ELENA FIDDIAN-QASMIYEH
CHAPTER 7: RELIGIONS AND FORCED MIGRATION
AUTHORS: SUSANNA TROTTA\textsuperscript{385} AND ELENA FIDDIAN-QASMIYEH\textsuperscript{386}

Introduction
Over the last two decades, the intersections between religions and migration have increasingly been discussed in humanitarian and development circles. Initially, debates focused on religion as a cause of displacement. Subsequently, academics and practitioners started concentrating on the role of religions and religious networks at different stages of migrants’ experiences. Increasing attention has also been given to faith actors’ engagements in supporting migrants and refugees through material and immaterial resources. In the last five years, migrant and refugee communities have been increasingly acknowledged as being involved in, and leading, responses to migration, including through their religious networks. There are growing efforts to broaden the focus on religion to include non-mainstream traditions, such as traditional beliefs and communities other than Christian and Muslim. Studies on the power dynamics between new and more established migrant and refugee communities, including in terms of gender equity and relations, are becoming more nuanced.

In this chapter, we offer an overview of these key research areas and trends within religion and migration scholarship. The chapter is divided into four sections: Religion as a cause of displacement; Religion and experiences of migration and forced displacement; Transnational religion as a resource for migrant, refugee, and hosting communities; and Religion and faith-based responses to displacement.

Religion as a cause of displacement
Religious persecution has historically been one of the most common causes of forced displacement.\textsuperscript{387} It is therefore not surprising that religion is recognized as one of the main reasons for persecution by the Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees. At the same time, it is also arguably one of the most disputed issues in Refugee Status Determination (RSD) processes. Key legal questions in this area concern the boundaries between religious discrimination and religious persecution, the definition of religion as a cause for persecution, and how to determine an applicant’s credibility as regards their religious affiliation.\textsuperscript{388}

Challenges in assessing a claimant’s credibility regarding their religious identity
In 2004, UNHCR published guidelines for claims related to religion, which had previously only been regulated by paragraphs 71-73 of the 1992 (1979) “Handbook on Procedures and Criteria for Determining Refugee Status.”\textsuperscript{389} Despite these guidelines, UNHCR officers themselves have tended to lack a systematic approach, as in the case of Egypt, when UNHCR RSD officers have questioned Eritrean asylum seekers’ claims based on affiliation to Pentecostal Churches.\textsuperscript{390} In some cases, officers used religious knowledge quizzes, which relied on assumptions about what members of a religious group should know about their tradition.\textsuperscript{391}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{trotta} Humboldt Universität zu Berlin and Joint Learning Initiative on Faith and Local Communities.
\bibitem{musalo} Karen Musalo, “Claims for Protection Based on Religion or Belief: Analysis and Proposed Conclusions” (Geneva: Protection Policy and Legal Advice Section, Department of International Protection, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2002), \url{https://www.unhcr.org/protect/PROTECTION/3e5f6ad12.pdf}.
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The subjective nature of assessments and a lack of adequate religious literacy when examining religion-based claims are well documented in several countries, including the UK\textsuperscript{392} and the US.\textsuperscript{393} The issue of credibility assessment in religion-based claims is particularly crucial in cases of religious conversion.\textsuperscript{394} There is evidence that secular states are often not well-equipped to examine these cases without drawing on pre-existing ideas about migrants’ identities, as in the case of an asylum seeker from Iran who converted to Christianity after her arrival to Germany and was denied protection.\textsuperscript{395}

**Intersections between religion and other identities and practices**

Some of the main controversies when determining refugee status highlight the importance of the intersections between religion, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and other dimensions of refugees’ identities.\textsuperscript{396} For instance, RSD officials have often rejected people’s claims for asylum due to their assumption that it is not possible to be simultaneously LGBTIQ+ and, for instance, a practicing Catholic\textsuperscript{397} or Muslim.\textsuperscript{398} When LGBTIQ+ asylum-seekers self-identify as Muslim decision makers in the Global North have often dismissed their claims as implausible.\textsuperscript{399} As a result, many Muslim asylum-seekers are often and effectively forced to performatively renounce their Muslim identity, in order to meet the expectations of decision makers in Europe and North America.\textsuperscript{400}

Some recent studies have also explored the issue of how witchcraft is dealt with in asylum applications, both in terms of its inclusion in the “religion” category, and as regards the verifiability of claims regarding supernatural identity, in order to meet the expectations of decision makers in Europe and North America.\textsuperscript{400}

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Some recent studies have also explored the issue of how witchcraft is dealt with in asylum applications, both in terms of its inclusion in the “religion” category, and as regards the verifiability of claims regarding supernatural forces.\textsuperscript{401} The lack of adequate responses by institutions and practitioners, including RSD officers, to witchcraft-related claims bears particular weight, given the use of juju and other traditional beliefs to engage, control and silence women and girls, mainly from Nigeria, who are victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.\textsuperscript{402} In the context of broader discussions on current trends in refugee protection, religion remains a crucial ground for persecution and discrimination, not only in countries of origin but also in transit and settlement countries.\textsuperscript{403}

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Religion and experiences of migration and forced displacement

Religion and spirituality during processes of migration and displacement

The religious dimension of migratory experiences can be traced at all stages and in all types of migration in its spiritual and practical manifestations. In 2002, a special issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* traced some of the ways in which spirituality is mobilized throughout processes of displacement. It found that:

- Forced migrants resort to religious and spiritual coping when they experience displacement-related trauma and suffering.
- Religion and spirituality travel with migrants and contribute to identity- and community-making processes in displacement.
- It can be challenging for displaced people to keep their spiritual and religious practices alive due to societal and cultural factors in the country of settlement.
- The spiritual/religious and gender dimensions of forced migrants’ experiences are often intertwined, and displacement processes affect these links in multiple ways.

In another special issue, published by the *Refugee Survey Quarterly*, Mayer stressed how “religious factors may play a role in convincing or forcing people to leave their home country and to seek refuge.” When planning, and throughout their journeys, migrants often resort to prayer and specific rituals to ensure the safety of their travels and obtain the protection of supernatural forces.

Religion is also mobilized by people as they face barriers to migration, non-arrival (including death during transit), immigration detention, and the decision either to return or not return. For instance, internally displaced Machazians in Mozambique felt able to return to their homes only after rituals had been performed to disperse the loose spirits of soldiers who had died during the civil war and had not been buried. For Lao refugee communities in the US, the presence of a Lao Buddhist temple provided a sense of community in exile and of projection into its future. There is evidence that some communities engage traditional rituals to address immigration detention, as in the case of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands who asked their families in Ghana to participate in prayers and fasting camps and to donate to their religious community on their behalf, in an effort to solve their legal issues.

In Islam, Islamic Relief and others identify seeking asylum as not only a right, but in fact a religious duty. However, religious beliefs are also often at the core of individual and collective resistance to being forced to leave one’s place of origin. For example, Chinantecs and Mazates religious or traditional leaders in Mexico adapted traditional symbols as part of their fight against the threat of forced resettlement in the context of post-disaster displacement.

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Religion and coping with trauma

As further explored below in the section Transnational religion as a resource, religion can contribute to sense-making and coping mechanisms against displacement-related trauma. Health-related academic research provides wide-ranging examples of this. In the context of Kenyan internal displacement, Parsitau has described how Christian women who had experienced gender-based violence mobilized their faith using religious texts and practices to collectively rebuild an empowering narrative around their identity and "reclaim their place in society." Minorities who have experienced persecution and forced displacement often use religious practices as a source of resilience, as in the case of shamanic practices among Yezidis in northern Iraq. However, there is also evidence that religious coping might actually contribute to the exploitation of migrant communities in countries of settlement by "reducing their emotional cost," increasing their ability to endure adverse conditions, and shifting their focus from demanding better conditions to resorting to a higher power.

Religion and the quest to improve living conditions

In transit and/or settlement countries, religious beliefs and practices are often linked to migrants' agency, directed at fostering processes of empowerment and at improving their living conditions. For undocumented migrants in South Africa, strategically highlighting their Muslim religious affiliation, or even pretending to be Muslim, can be a key strategy to access support from Islamic humanitarian organizations and mosques. There is also evidence that unaccompanied male minors fleeing war in Sudan converted to Christianity while in refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, where Christian organizations developed a strong presence. Some, when they eventually returned to Sudan, contributed to the expansion of the Anglican Church in the country through evangelization activities. In a similar and yet opposite way, the Polisario Front - the political and military group representing Sahrawi refugees in their Algeria-based refugee camps - has strategically downplayed Islam in the Sahrawi camps to match the expectations of Western, secular donors. These examples show how the religious dimension of displaced peoples' experiences is deeply intertwined with their decisions and how they navigate their status and improve their situation in their specific contexts.

Transnational religion as a resource for migrant, refugee, and hosting communities

Transnational religious activities can constitute a source of belonging, of community-making, and of organizational tool with varying degrees of formality and of engagement for migrants. Religious networks, for example, provide connections and facilitate transit and arrival in the destination country, as reported in the case of Chin refugees seeking safety in the US. Among Kimbanguist communities in the diaspora and the DRC, remittances are interconnected with religious identities and practices; these dynamics have repercussions both in the country of origin and in places of settlement.


420 Zink, Lost Boys, Found Church.


Religion and identity-, community-, and home-making

Perhaps the most researched role of religion as a resource in migration processes is that of identity-, community-, home-, or place-making for displaced individuals and communities. Scholars have shown renewed interest in how transnational links contribute to the lives of diasporic communities.\(^{425}\) For example, studies have shown that Ghanaian Pentecostalists in the Netherlands used their transnational links and specific religious practices to retain control over and actively negotiate their identity, which was in different ways simultaneously close to and distanced from both the European and the West African contexts.\(^{426}\) Iraqi refugees in Syria mobilized immaterial resources to create a sense of home and belonging which does not rely on religious or state institutions, but rather on everyday religious practices facilitated by Islamic transnational networks.\(^{427}\)

At the same time, religious practices are often performed as part of migrant communities’ efforts to affirm their presence and negotiate their visibility in the country of settlement. In Italy, for example, the Filipino Catholic community’s Santacruzan procession serves to reinforce cultural and religious transnational ties and to affirm the fact that “Filipinos are here to stay and are asking to introduce and negotiate new religious practices in front of the Italian Catholic majority.”\(^{428}\) However, where there is public recognition of the presence of different religious groups within a multicultural society, celebratory and apparently inclusive approaches do not necessarily translate into actual engagement with and participation of religious minorities.\(^{429}\) These dynamics have gained particular attention within the academic field of urban studies, i.e. in discussions around how religious communities navigate their migratory experience in the city.\(^{430}\)

Religion and faith-based responses to displacement

Since the special issue of the *Journal of Refugee Studies* on faith and displacement in 2011\(^ {431}\) there has been growing attention to the diverse ways that religious communities and organizations support migrants. This has been partly reflected in the inclusion of faith actors as stakeholders in the UNHCR 2018 Global Compacts on Refugees and for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration. These engagements have deep historical roots and include advocacy, interreligious collaboration, and material and immaterial support.\(^{432}\) Faith-based private sponsorship resettlement programs to Canada\(^ {433}\) and humanitarian corridors to Europe\(^ {434}\) have long expanded access to protection through safe and legal routes to sanctuary. The history of sanctuary traditions in relation to asylum are intimately linked to religion, constituting the base for modern grassroots movements and initiatives.\(^ {435}\)

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426 van Dijk, *The Soul Is the Stranger*.


Religion, support for migrants and refugees, and the promotion of social cohesion

Faith actors can also directly and indirectly provide spiritual and psychosocial support to migrants, mobilize material and immaterial resources, and make use of trust, reach, and networks to respond to the needs of displaced people and to support social cohesion. For example, in Turkey, the Vaiz (city preacher) of Bursa used his influence to organize welcoming activities for Syrian refugees within the local community and to negotiate with the government for their access to healthcare, birth and marriage registration, and schooling. In Colombia, small Pentecostal congregations in Bogotá mobilized to support the re-socialization of desplazados (internally displaced Colombians). Multi-religious initiatives often focus precisely on building bridges across communities, as the case of the Swedish “Good Neighbours” program, a collaboration between the Stockholm Mosque, the Katarina parish, and Islamic Relief. At the same time, religious actors’ engagements, especially in their inter-religious dimensions, are often intertwined with power inequalities between the “host” and the “hosted” communities.

Religion and refugee-led responses to displacement

Migrants and people who have been displaced themselves often draw on religion in different ways to support other migrants and refugees. Before and during the holy month of Ramadan, long-term residents of Baddawi camp in North Lebanon collect zakat donations from other refugees to prepare and distribute iftar food baskets with which families ‘in need’ can break their fast. As documented by Grewal, members of the Afghan refugee community in Greece pooled resources to ensure that a young boy who had suddenly died in a camp would receive a proper religious burial in a Muslim graveyard that Afghan refugees had established. In turn, faith leaders who have themselves been displaced also often play key roles in providing material and immaterial support to members of their own and other displaced communities, as in the case of Muslim Syrian refugee faith leaders in Lebanon and Christian “refugee pastors” from DRC in “refugee churches” in Uganda.

Religion and the fight against modern slavery and trafficking

There is a growing focus on the role of religion to support the fight against modern slavery and human trafficking, including through the usage of scriptures and religious teachings. In the UK, around 30% of the organizations responding to modern slavery are faith-based. They often mobilize their networks to provide clothing, food, language courses, and shelter to survivors of various forms of modern slavery, including trafficking, in collaboration with the National Referral Mechanism. However, research shows that FBOs operating in this context are adapting to secular procedures and discourses when dealing with other institutions and the wider public sphere. Drawing on a review of over 200 resources and 14 interviews with practitioners, a JLI scoping study documented responses to trafficking and modern slavery by local faith actors in the Global South, highlighting their advocacy and

436 Ager and Ager, Faith in Humanitarian Engagement.
448 Lewis et al., Faith Responses.
awareness-raising initiatives, including prevention workshops with religious leaders. In Nepal and Thailand, there is also evidence that Buddhist nuns, in collaboration with Catholic nuns in the case of Thailand, engage in initiatives aimed at preventing young girls from becoming victims of human trafficking.⁴⁵¹

Religion and supporting social justice for migrants and refugees

Religious organizations often support migrants’ and refugees’ social struggles and their quest for social and economic justice,⁴⁵² although there are also documented instances of religious groups and faith-based organizations becoming complicit with the detention and deportation of migrants, asylum-seekers, and refugees.⁴⁵³ Several FBOs joined the London living wage and regularization campaign in support of migrant workers⁴⁵⁴ and many religious groups have been at the forefront of pro-refugee movements in several countries.⁴⁵⁵ For instance, La 72 in Mexico - a migrant and refugee shelter founded in 2011 by the Franciscan order in Tenosique, Tabasco - not only provides accommodation and food to migrants and refugees, but also promotes respect and support for diversity and inclusion across age, gender, sexual orientation and religious denominations.⁴⁵⁶ It has also established a School of Human Rights to support members of host communities along the Gulf Route who use their knowledge of human and legal rights to provide assistance and protection to migrants and refugees in transit.⁴⁵⁷

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an overview of key areas of research in religions and forced migration. The field has evolved rapidly over the last two decades and has established itself within humanitarian and development debates. Going forward, the main takeaways from this complex and growing evidence base can be summarized as follows:

- Religion is often a key dimension of migratory processes
- Faith actors, including transnational networks and refugee and migrant communities, are often involved in responses to displacement
- There is a need to further explore the nuances of religion-related power dynamics, including in terms of gender relations and of social justice
- Research and policy on religions and forced migration need to have a broader focus which includes non-mainstream religious groups and traditional beliefs

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⁴⁵² Elena Fiddian-Qasmiyeh et al., Religion and Social Justice.


⁴⁵⁷ Wurtz and Wilkinson, Local Faith Actors.
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Chapter 4: Violence Against Children


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Chapter 6: Peace & Conflict


Chapter 7: Refugees and Forced Migration


ANNEX
Edited volumes on religions and development published since 2010:

- 2011 - Religion and Development: Ways of Transforming the World, edited by Gerrie ter Haar
- 2012 – Sacred Aid: Faith and Humanitarianism, edited by Janice Gross Stein and Michael Barnett
- 2013 – Handbook of Research on Development and Religion, edited by Matthew Clarke
- 2013 – Religions and Development, by Emma Tomalin. This is not an edited volume, but it represents one of the first and only types of “textbooks” in this field that summarises all the major theoretical and practical areas of interest for students exploring the subject area.
- 2020 - International Development and Local Faith Actors: Ideological and Cultural Encounters, edited by Kathryn Kraft and Olivia Wilkinson
- 2020 - Religion and Development in Africa, edited by Ezra Chitando, Lovemore Togarasei, Masiwa Ragies Gunda
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