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Religion: Help or Hindrance to Development?



RELIGION: HELP OR HINDRANCE TO DEVELOPMENT?

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RELIGION: HELP OR HINDRANCE TO DEVELOPMENT?

Edited by Kenneth Mtata



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PREFACE

Martin Junge

From its founding in 1947 to the present day, the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) has been faithfully living out its commitment and vocation to accompany those in need and distress as a result of natural or human-made disasters. What then distinguishes the LWF's involvement in the world from that of other actors undertaking similar activities? As a communion of churches, the LWF's engagement is informed by its theological resources and its values to love God and serve the neighbor.

The essays included in this book were first presented at an international conference on religion and development, organized and hosted by the Lutheran World Federation and Mission EineWelt in 2012 and attended by some seventy academics, heads of churches, development practitioners and agencies. One of the aims was to help the LWF and its partners further to reflect on and deepen their understanding of the value of religion and religious orientation with regard to the overall well-being of humanity and creation.

Authors from Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin and North America not only reflect on the many ways in which religion has positively influenced development, but candidly assess some of religion's negative aspects which need to be addressed. These include, among others, the fact that certain religious concepts, institutions and practices inhibit the broader participation of women and young people in society.

Case studies from Costa Rica, Liberia and Zimbabwe provide vivid examples of the positive impact of religion on development such as encouraging the participation of women and men in peace building, awareness raising and development. Spiritual resources continue to provide horizons of hope and foster resilience in difficult times. Especially in situations of political instability, religious institutions provide orientation for the communities as well as basic services in the areas of health and education.

I commend this publication to theological seminaries and faculties, churches and individuals interested and involved in development who seek to relate their faith resources to the betterment of the world.

INTRODUCTION

Kenneth Mtata

This publication is a result of the international conference on religion and development organized by the Lutheran World Federation in partnership with Mission EineWelt. About seventy participants—academics, heads of churches, development practitioners and agencies—met at the mission center in Neuendettelsau, Germany, 21–25 October 2012, with the aim of deepening their understanding of the relationship between religion and human development in order to help faith-based organizations (FBOs) working in development to strengthen their self-understanding and increase their cooperation in development.

The participants' personal expectations were taken into account and influenced the discussions following the presentations. Participants expressed the desire to find ways of helping churches to be (a) involved in development and development work; (b) participate in public space; and (c) establish a clear relationship between proclamation (mission) (gospel) and development. Moreover, ways were to be sought to bridge the gap between professional development services and church development activities, and many participants were eager further to develop their understanding of the relationship between religion and development, especially regarding leading contemporary ideas, the ultimate goal of development and how different contexts influence the development agendas. For some participants—especially those coming from Asia and Africa—the relation between religion and development in the context of plural faiths was critical. All participants saw the diversity of participants as an opportunity for networking and the exchange of ideas, experiences and good practices, which would in turn help establish and strengthen partnerships and networks in development among related FBOs. Such cooperation also ensures the accountability between and among faith-based development actors. Ac-

countability became a controversial issue between funding agencies in the global North and their implementing partners in the global South, although it was quickly observed that such stereotyping could curtail valuable exchange and honest engagement. Some participants explicitly asked how rich countries could be convinced to share the burden of the poor countries without creating a dependency situation and compromising the dignity of the recipients of aid. The conference sought to explore alternatives to the contemporary development paradigm—informed by the MDGs—which will come to the end in 2015 and possibly to come up with some concrete ideas for strengthening their work back home.

METHODOLOGY

In order to address the participants' questions and expectations, case studies from different contexts complemented theoretical and practical presentations on specific subjects, including religious, theological and economic concepts. The case studies from Costa Rica, Liberia and Zimbabwe by Carlos Bonilla, Lindora Howard-Diawara and Ambrose Moyo respectively address some of the ways in which religion contributes positively to the well-being of society. Moreover, panel-discussions allowed for an in-depth analysis of the presentations, and group discussions provided the opportunity to enhance the discussions.

THE PUBLICATION

All but two of the essays in this collection were first presented at the conference. In his opening remarks, Eberhard Hitzler outlines the context and raises some of the questions that the conference was to explore. Michael Martin's opening sermon is based on Nehemiah, the book around which all morning devotions were organized. Martin refers to the reconstruction of Germany in the aftermath of WWII and clearly shows how outside support and internal focus informed by a rich Christian tradition supported the reconstruction process. Kenneth Mtata's essay, "Religion and Development: Friends or Foes," provides an overview of the relationship between religion and development through the ages and emphasizes the crucial role of religion in thinking and implementing development today. Religious ideas and practices shape development ideals and practices. Vítor Westhelle demonstrates this on the basis of Luther's views on usury, while Andreas Heuser looks at how some contemporary African Pentecostal Churches conceive of and get involved in development. Of importance here

is how certain theological ideas among these groups influence their vision of the world. Karel Th. August raises numerous challenges with regard to the contemporary development models and proposes one that is ingrained and sustained by local cultural and religious resources. Michael Biehl investigates the concept of religion in Western thought and investigates how different academic traditions influence the understanding of development. Muriel Orevillo-Montenegro focuses on the quasi-religious nature of capitalism, while Theresa Carino gives an overview of the prominent public role of religion in China in light of the rapidly growing Chinese economy. Samuel Ngun Ling and Johnson Mbillah explore the complexity of development in the context of religious pluralism showing that, coupled with ethnic and political power struggles, religion can potentially play a negative role if care is not taken to highlight its positive values. Madipoane Masenya ngwan'Mphahlele demonstrates how certain interpretations of religious and cultural texts can marginalize women from development, while Lindora Howard-Diawara, who herself played an important role in the women's peace movement in Liberia, shows how women can become a force for peace. In countries that are undergoing transition, peace-building and conflict management are important tools whose religious roots can be easily identified. Ambrose Moyo describes how the Ecumenical Church Leaders' Forum in Zimbabwe has been working to restore peace in the volatile political situation in Zimbabwe. Much of the international development work is now being run by FBOs. What distinguishes FBOs from other development actors? Rebecca Larson tries to answer this question using the case of ACT Alliance, while Kjell Nordstokke, gives an overview of FBOs and demonstrates their distinctive contribution to development. Many FBOs are being restructured in order to help them better to implement their programs. In her presentation, Claudia Warning explains how this is playing out among FBOs in Germany and what implications this has for development.

While the contributors do not point to a homogenous way of looking at the relationship between religion and development, they concur that religion is central to the way in which development work should be conceived of. Since its presence cannot be denied, it is imperative that development thinkers and/or practitioners investigate the possible implications of religion on their work.

OPENING REMARKS¹

Eberhard Hitzler

To talk about religion and development is quite a challenge since neither of these words, religion or development, is clearly defined. As a result, most of us most probably have our own understanding and interpretation of, history with and stories about religion and development.

The first story that springs to my mind might not be significant, even banal, but it might illustrate the many-sidedness of religion and development.

Walking around Geneva or Amsterdam, many German visitors notice one obvious difference in lifestyle: there are almost no curtains. Passersby can freely look into people's living rooms, kitchens and even bedrooms while, in Germany, curtains or shutters prevent the passerby from looking into people's houses. This small, maybe rather insignificant, cultural difference goes back to Calvin who profoundly influenced Geneva. He had ordered the removal of all curtains from the citizens' homes in order to enhance transparency and ethical discipline. He was of the opinion that good people have nothing to hide and that therefore they did not need curtains or shutters. The German reformers never intended to exercise such strict control over the believers' private sphere and hence this difference which one notices still today, almost five hundred years later.

Religion and development is an important topic, far beyond the issue of curtains. I am very glad that Mission EineWelt and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) have jointly organized this conference, which has attracted so many participants. I am especially glad that participants come from many parts of the world and different areas of expertise—academics as well as practitioners, representatives of churches as well as development and mission organizations.

¹ Introduction to the international conference on religion and development, Neu-endettelsau, Germany, 2012.

The topic religion and development has become increasingly important. Since it is impossible to cover all aspects at one conference, the LWF Communion Office decided to address this topic with a comprehensive three-year program. We hope that all of you as well as other organizations and individuals will continue to contribute to this program beyond this conference.

To make adequate and meaningful introductory comments is a difficult task. I shall, nonetheless, attempt to do so since I like challenges and difficult tasks. Moreover, as a theologian, I am used to talking about things that I do not fully understand. I would like to make a few remarks which I hope can guide the discussions over the next days.

THE LOCATION: WILHELM LÖHE

While most people probably do not even know the small village of Neuendettelsau, for some it is almost the center of the world since, over the past 150 years, it has significantly impacted religion as well as development.

When, in the first half of the nineteenth century, many Germans tried to escape poverty and hunger, Johann Konrad Wilhelm Löhe, pastor of the Lutheran Church in Neuendettelsau, started in 1841 to train some of the emigrating farmers as pastors for the emigrants to the so-called new world, America, Australia and, later, missionaries to Brazil, New Guinea and Ukraine. Many Lutheran congregations in Michigan, Ohio and Iowa were either founded or influenced by missionaries sent by Löhe. This was the beginning of what today is Mission EineWelt.

In addition, Löhe continued to be concerned about domestic social matters. He was especially troubled by the terrible situation of many unmarried girls and young women in the rural areas, who were underprivileged and lacked education. In this spirit, he founded the first Deaconess Mother House in 1849, which became a place for delivering social services and learning by hosting schools, hospitals and other social agencies.

In light of this tradition, which greatly influenced both religion and development, Neuendettelsau seems a most appropriate location for this conference on religion and development.

WHERE DO WE START—FROM RELIGION OR DEVELOPMENT? MAX WEBER AND KARL MARX

There is no doubt that religion influences the development of individuals, societies and nations. Many of you will be familiar with Max Weber's book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, in which he proposed that

Protestantism was one of the major “elective affinities” associated with the rise of market driven capitalism in the Western world and the rational-legal nation state. Contrary to Marx’s “historical materialism,” Weber emphasized the importance of cultural influences embedded in religion as a means for understanding the genesis of capitalism.

The opposite is described by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: economic and social status and interest shape religion and its teaching and preaching. “Religion is the opium of the people” is one of Karl Marx’s most frequently paraphrased statements.

I am glad that this conference is conceived in such a way that both starting points are critically examined:

- The power and influence of religion on development—for better or for worse
- The power and influence of the development thinking and the Western based development industry on religion, its institutions, dogmata and leadership—for better or for worse.

RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT—STRANGERS TO EACH OTHER OR MEMBERS OF THE SAME FAMILY?

Those who live in secular societies are used to the fact that religion is relegated to the private sphere. In light of a history of religious dominance over all areas of society, experiencing religion as a source of conflict and war, and religious leaders exercising authority and control over societies and individuals, most Europeans regard the reappearance of religion in the public sphere with skepticism. Religion—despite the fact that globally almost all people are religious—is not at home in the think-tanks of development organizations or in the praxis of development projects. The development industry is highly competitive and, time and again, representatives of faith-based development organizations have to respond to the question, what is the added value of a faith-based organization to development? Are they simply Oxfam with hymns?

Since 9/11 and in view of the growing influence of radical Islamists in the Maghreb countries, we feel deeply disturbed by the forceful, even violent, reappearance of religion in the public sphere. Many who come from the so-called “underdeveloped countries” and are exposed to, or the so-called “beneficiaries” of the development industries and its projects, are suspicious of “development.” They see “development” as a clearly “Western” enterprise that enhances Western economic and social dominance and serves

a Western political agenda, even if some of its actors have religious roots and are faith-based organizations. Even church leaders in the global South, despite welcoming the fact that development has the potential tremendously to improve the financial situation of their churches, are worried about the efforts of development agents: who sets the agenda and what and whose values are being pursued? Even church-based development cooperation seems to mirror a Western development agenda and Western domination rather than challenging them.

Despite the undisputed fact that religion and development belong together, that they influence each other and are members of the same family so to speak, they seem not to be very much at home in each other's houses. Therefore, this conference might be a good opportunity to get to know, understand and become more familiar with each other and even to feel at home in each other's home.

SEEKING A COMMON UNDERSTANDING— BUILDING A COMMON HOME

If we share a common understanding that religion and development have a tremendous influence on each other, and acknowledge that both aim to enable and empower people so that they may have life, and have it in abundance (Jn 10:10), then what we have to explore is how this is best achieved.

We must identify how both religion and development can put people at the center and critically analyze what hinders us from doing so. "Uphold the rights of the poor and oppressed" (cf. Ps 82) is the LWF's Department for World Service chosen motto. With this biblical motto, World Service tries to underline the rights-based approach, by which the most disadvantaged in society and their rights are the focus of its work. Nonetheless, World Service is fully aware that it is often not successful in its attempt.

REDISCOVERING RELIGION IN DEVELOPMENT WORK—REEMPHASIZING DIAKONIA

It is interesting to note that today many secular organizations and governments involved in humanitarian and development work clearly recognize the importance of religion. Religious organizations play a significant role in society—locally, nationally, regionally and globally. Religion shapes the attitude and values of individuals and societies in terms of social behavior, economic activity and political involvement, to mention but a few areas. Increasingly, various governments and UN organizations are pursuing dia-

logues with religious leaders and organizations so as better to understand their critical role in civil society. Furthermore, more and more faith-based development and humanitarian organizations from the Islamic world and other religions seek to contribute to the welfare of people in need of assistance while churches, especially Lutheran churches, are emphasizing their “holistic mission” in the sense that diaconal work and commitment constitute one of their core tasks.

As Christian organizations we are therefore challenged more deeply to reflect on our own identity as well as to ask ourselves a few critical questions:

- How can we ensure that both religion (churches in our case) and development organization really put the people at the center and are not driven by organizational, political or economic interests?
- Must we distinguish the need of the people from the need of the churches?
- How “churchy” are faith-based development agencies and how “diaconical” are churches?
- How do we see the roles of religion and the churches in society?
- What is the aim of our development work or our diakonia?
- Is there a difference between diakonia and the common understanding of development work?

I look forward to an interesting conference, the beginning of a journey into a land full of mystery, adventure and many new discoveries that will help us better to understand each other, the world of religion and the world of development. I wish you joyful and interesting days in this village of Wilhelm Löhe from which until today important impulses go out into the whole world.

I would like to express our sincere gratitude to Claudia Jahnel and her staff as well as Mission EineWelt for hosting and organizing this conference and for the excellent cooperation with the Lutheran World Federation. It sets an example for how the LWF Communion Office—with its small staff and limited resources—can in future work in a meaningful way.

SERMON

Michael Martin

Grace be with you and peace from God, our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The words of Nehemiah son of Hacaliah. In the month of Chislev, in the twentieth year, while I was in Susa the capital, one of my brothers, Hanani, came with certain men from Judah; and I asked them about the Jews that survived, those who had escaped the captivity, and about Jerusalem. They replied, “The survivors there in the province who escaped captivity are in great trouble and shame; the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire.” When I heard these words I sat down and wept, and mourned for days, fasting and praying before the God of heaven (Neh 1:1–4).

In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was served him, I carried the wine and gave it to the king. Now, I had never been sad in his presence before. So the king said to me, “Why is your face sad, since you are not sick? This can only be sadness of the heart.” Then I was very much afraid. I said to the king, “May the king live forever! Why should my face not be sad, when the city, the place of my ancestors’ graves, lies waste, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?” Then the king said to me, “What do you request?” So I prayed to the God of heaven. Then I said to the king, “If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor with you, I ask that you send me to Judah, to the city of my ancestors’ graves, so that I may rebuild it” (Neh 2:1–5).

Dear sisters and brothers,

“The wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates have been destroyed by fire.” As we read in the Book of Nehemiah, the situation in Jerusalem was disastrous and the people who had returned from captivity in Babylon were living in a devastated city.

The account of the city of Jerusalem and its residents in 5 BC reflects the reality of many people in our time. Many are living in ruins, without prospects and lacking the basic human needs. No roof over their heads, no clean water, no medical care, not to mention securing a means of existence, healthcare, or good education. Everything is in ruins. The walls have broken down and the gates have been destroyed by fire.

Not so very long ago, this was the situation in Germany. When one walks through Nuremberg or Munich today, one cannot imagine that these cities, its houses and churches, were lying in ruins less than seventy years ago. The people living in the ruins were hungry. Hundreds of thousands of refugees from eastern Europe came to live among those whose houses had been destroyed and who had nothing to eat.

The walls have broken down and the gates have been destroyed by fire. This was the situation here in Bavaria after 1945.

In this situation, the Germans received help. Just like Nehemiah, many people across the world thought: come, we want to rebuild the cities there. We want to help make it possible for people to live there again and for the people of Germany to have a future.

Beautiful letters from people across the world who helped rebuild Germany attest to this. Food packages were sent, medical support was provided and helpers came into the country. There was indescribable support, especially from churches across the world. From its beginning in 1947 until the establishment of the Department of World Service in 1952, in just five years, the Lutheran World Federation alone delivered aid supplies in the amount of DM 23 mio to Germany.

Germany also received considerable help in order to reestablish church life. Churches were rebuilt, welfare institutions created and schools established. Because the destruction of Germany was not just external or material, also the people themselves had to start all over again. This did not only concern bread and clean drinking water, medical care and education, but also the need to deal with the great guilt from which the Germans were suffering following the Nazi regime and World War II. In other words, since rebuilding Germany was not only a question of bricks and mortar, but one of internal healing, it also concerned religion. Rebuilding and reflecting on God who creates new life in spite of guilt and failure are inseparable from another.

This is what Germany experienced after the war—in particular through the help of churches in other countries and on other continents, because many said, just like Nehemiah, “Come, we want to rebuild the cities there.”

Today’s situation in Germany is completely different. We are today in a position to give something of what we have and offer help there where the walls have broken down and the gates have been destroyed by fire. Today, we can help to rebuild houses and mend broken people; we can ensure

that those in urgent need receive medical aid and support others as they operate training centers and welfare institutions.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church in Bavaria has an extensive network of partner churches in many countries: from Australia, Papua New Guinea and Southeast Asia, via Africa and Europe to Latin America. These partner relations involve much more than merely delivering aid. Rather, the prevalent spirit is one of mutual learning, exchanging experiences and true cooperation and one can experience how closely development tasks and religion belong together. Many of the church's partners repeatedly emphasize the inseparability of faith and active aid and, hence, the inseparability of religion and development.

How can the relationship between development and religion be evaluated? What do we mean by "holistic mission?" How are development processes affected by religious beliefs? Are they often unsuccessful precisely because spiritual and religious frameworks are not taken into consideration?

While our partner relations contribute to holistic development, the focus of our Christian faith is always more than the church. It is always the whole *oikoumene*, e.g., the whole inhabited earth. Unlike Nehemiah, we cannot only look after those who belong to us. We must keep an eye on society as a whole. Therefore, it is right to direct the provision of aid and rebuilding efforts to all people in a region, regardless of race, creed, color or national origin. Therefore, it is right that the Lutheran World Federation does not only take care of the troubles of Christian refugees or Christian victims. We are not bound to ourselves as Christians; our mission is to the whole world. The Gospel according to Matthew tells us to "Go to all nations" and if we consider our mission today as companionship, then this applies to all people on earth: all people in their variety and diversity, their hopes and fears, different religious beliefs and expectations, needs and challenges.

Thus, religion and development is not a specifically Christian topic. It goes far beyond our congregations and churches and addresses how we can together renew cities and people after terrible devastation. How can we, together, help to create living possibilities for all people, and how can we rebuild that which has been destroyed?

We could also ask, How can we overcome destruction, suffering and war? How can we share goods entrusted to us so that all people can live? How can we live together in our one world?

This leads us to the question of a fair exchange and "just development." How can rebuilding be designed in such a way that it benefits the people in an appropriate way? How can we contribute to establishing a fair society? Is there a "just development" at all? What exactly is just? What exactly is fair? Is it fair that the rich get richer and the poor get poorer? Is it fair that good education is reserved for those coming from wealthy families? Is it fair that 25,000 people die of hunger

every day and, at the same time, mountains of food are destroyed? Is it fair that we consume so much more energy in Europe than, for example, in Africa?

What exactly is fair? This question was discussed with great passion when I was a student. We were looking for quick, simple solutions and rejected them just as quickly. One of our teachers told us his personal story. He had three children. Of course, he loved all three of them and supported every one of them. He wanted them to grow up well and for them to be able to take advantage of the many opportunities life offered. He wanted them to go their own way, both protected and in freedom. It was much harder for one of his children, let us call him Klaus, than for the other two. Klaus had a disability. The other two children often complained that their parents spent so much time on Klaus. They were always there for him and he was always the focus of their attention. The other two children felt that they were being treated unfairly and neglected. But the parents explained to the two of them that it was fair to take care of the person who most needs the help. It is fair to pay more attention to Klaus than to the two of them. It is fair to divide attention differently, even though all are loved the same.

This story made me realize that fairness is not about giving the same to everybody, to treat everybody in the same way and treat everybody like the other one. Rather, fairness is to give what the other one needs. It is fair to pay more attention to a person who is more in need of support. It is fair to act according to the situation and not according to the same principle. Therefore, when we talk about building a fair society and just development we must bear in mind that the weak need more support than the strong. Whoever has more can also contribute more.

Just development requires solidarity. Broken down walls and gates destroyed by fire must be rebuilt. Development will only be there where we are willing really to share and not only give something of our wealth. Of course, this not only applies to material goods, but also to other gifts such as time, communion, knowledge and skills, experiences and insights. Sharing concerns our whole humanity: our material goods and also our hopes and expectations; our money and also our songs and rituals; our possessions and also our religion.

Yes, we can contribute to a just development in our world. We can rebuild broken down walls and gates destroyed by fire. But we must consider all facets of life, treat all human beings in a holistic way and not separate development and religion.

When hope emerges in the midst of fear and need it becomes clear that life is stronger than death. After 1945 in Germany and today in many places in the world, there where the walls are broken and the gates destroyed by fire, life is stronger than death.

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT: FRIENDS OR FOES?

Kenneth Mtata

In many primal cultures, religion was and still is the organizing principle of life. It was not called “religion” as such since it did not belong to a separate realm one could distance oneself from or reflect on objectively. Religion was the belief and knowledge system around which all reality was organized. Such a system revolved around the ubiquitous presence of the gods who tended to manifest both malevolent and benevolent powers. Such a worldview comprised specific practices carried out within known institutions associated with such beliefs. As such, individual and community well-being was not conceivable outside this religious system. Life was assumed to be enabled by divine agency, assisted by special human agents acting on behalf of the gods. The gods gave victory in war, success in hunting, guaranteed rainfall and the fertility and productivity of the land and human beings. The mutual obligations of this covenantal relationship remained intact only as long as human beings acted within known boundaries of harmony and treated other created things as sacred as well as appeased the gods through certain rituals.

To a certain extent, such was also the world presupposed by the Old and New Testaments and remains the dominant worldview in many communities in countries toward which most of the development efforts are directed. Even though some religious ideas have become more established and institutionalized and religious practices more organized, the basic assumption remains that God directly intervenes in the welfare of humanity and that it is in human beings’ best interest to cooperate. Divine and human agency were seen as complimentary rather than contradictory. Even though God had put human beings in the garden to till it, without God’s

help their toil was pointless (e.g., Psalm 127). The bottom line was that God intended that all human beings live in peace and joyful relationship with one another.

In practice, the religious systems tended at times to manifest excesses of power and its abuse. In the Old Testament, God would raise prophets to challenge such systems by calling people to repentance and to the restoration of justice in order for God to do God's part of guaranteeing general well-being. This was particularly true when the system neglected the most vulnerable members, the widow and the orphan. So we hear,

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly act justly one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will dwell with you in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your ancestors forever and ever (Jer 7:5-7).

The understanding that God desires the well-being of human beings seems to have continued throughout the New Testament. According to the gospels, Jesus had come that "they may have life and have it abundantly" (Jn 10:10). This abundant life required putting in place systems of managing and caring for those in need (Acts 4:34). This system of care for the needy was inherited from the Jewish religious tradition that continued in early Christianity, although with some caveats, charging believers to do nothing with selfish intent (Mt 6:2). The churches established in the Gentile world were mandated to maintain this tradition of primarily caring for the poor, "[t]hey asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do." (Gal 2:10).

The model for addressing human well-being described above is that of charity whereby the church collects resources from its members in order to meet the immediate needs of those in need. This model did not involve long-term planning nor address the root causes. When a need arose in a Christian community in one part of the world, Christians in another part of the world dispatched gifts to alleviate the challenges. So we read, "for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem" (Rom 15:26).

LUTHER'S CONTRIBUTION

The charity model continued to influence the church throughout the ages. Religiously inspired actions for the well-being of the then known world continued with such generosity being accorded different forms of recogni-

tion within the church. That such actions of mercy would merit God's favor was assumed not only at an individual level but slowly came to be part and parcel of the institutional church. It was understood that giving to the needy and/or to the church would in return ensure God's favor. Among the many issues raised by Martin Luther and the other reformers was this concern for merited favor. For Martin Luther, all acts of charity were supposed to be an outflow of gratitude toward what one had already received from God, namely the gifts of salvation. One's abundant resources were supposed to be used in service of the needs of the neighbor. This was not necessarily meant to encourage the neighbor's laziness. All human beings were supposed to work as if before God. Every engagement in life was supposed to give glory to God and support one's needs and those of the neighbor.

Beyond this individual charity model, Martin Luther believed in a more comprehensive systemic approach to the scourge of poverty characterizing the society of his day. Even before the Reformation, in addition to its responsibility to maintain church buildings and pay for pastoral work, the church depended on the "income-producing foundations or properties, endowments of altars at which special masses were celebrated, compulsory tithes, and fees for ministerial acts, especially those performed for the souls of the departed" ¹ to care for the poor. As noted above, during the Reformation, some of these income generating methods were rejected for theological reasons. This, in turn, had negative implications on the church's income and its ability to provide for those in need. Some princes, who had always coveted the property of the church, saw this chaotic Reformation period as a window of opportunity to try and confiscate church property such as land. In the name of their newly found reformation "freedom," some lay people decided not to pay their tithes and offerings.² In light of the resulting meager resources, the evangelical churches were not able to address the needs of their poor members and poverty in society in general. The habit of begging that had become common practice among the many poor who constituted a large percentage of the population increased, even though this was condemned by the reformers.

It was in this context that Luther's models of development were fomented. He preached his long "Sermon on Usury" in 1520 based on Deuteronomy 15:4, in which he refuted the charging of interest on money borrowed in situations of desperation. For Luther, it was, in the first place, immoral for Christians to let anyone live in so much need that they needed to beg.³ In

¹ Martin Luther, "Ordinance of a Common Chest, Preface 1523," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 45 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1962), 161.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

1521, Luther also wrote his “Open Letter to the Christian Nobility” encouraging all the cities to “take care of its own poor, and that an organized system of poor relief be set up to replace the current haphazard system.”⁴ Martin Luther’s challenge to the churches led to the restructuring of the church’s finances and a rethinking as to how to address poverty in society.

Different reformers had different approaches to economic development in response to the immediate concerns. In one way or the other, their theological ideas or proposed church economic models have informed the church’s involvement in development until today. In Europe, Christianity continued to play a very prominent role in addressing human needs well beyond Luther and the Reformation. But as economics and politics grew to become realms independent of religion, the role of Christianity became ambivalent. Reformers such as Martin Luther had lost their credibility among ordinary people as far as their economic ideas were concerned, especially there where he was seen to be siding with ruling classes. In other situations, the church was seen as working hand-in-glove with the aristocracy to dispossess the poor through religion.

THE DECLINE OF RELIGION

Even though not always related to each other, the European wars in the period immediately following the Reformation (1524–1648) are generically called the religious wars of Europe. This and the following period, also called the Age of Enlightenment or the Age of Reason (approximately 1620–1781),⁵ were very fruitful in terms of the development of new thought paradigms in Europe. Such a mixture of fortunes created a slow but lasting assault on the church as a legitimate actor in the public space. Such negativity tended to be structured into a single metanarrative that saw religion as the main contributor to the destruction of society. The cruelty of religious persecution, the barbarism of the crusades and the burnings at the stake of those accused of witchcraft and heresy, the wars between Roman Catholics and Protestants, the complicit relationship between religious leaders and the aristocracy, the marginalization of women, the alleged undemocratic nature of the church, the fundamentalism of the church, the endorsement

⁴ Ibid., 161–62.

⁵ There are different ways of categorizing these epochs. The 1620–1781 periodization is based on the publication of Francis Bacon’s *Novum Organum* in 1620 and Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. Others see the Renaissance as beginning in 1500–1650 and the Enlightenment starting in 1650–1800. See Ronald T. Michene, *Engaging Deconstructive Theology* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2007), 19.