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is manifest, however, must, be continually revised. Salvation should be recognized as a dynamic process within a particular context ([Philp. 2:12, 13](#)). As people appropriate God's Word in their own lives, they can encourage others to accept the salvation God has offered through Jesus Christ, the light of the world and the end of the post-modern search.

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The Relationship Between Development and Religion

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*Reprinted with permission from Together July–September 1997,
(abridged)*

This paper was given at a workshop on Churches and Development held April, 1997 in Toronto, Canada and sponsored by the Strategy and Christian Mission agency of World Vision International. It gives a good analysis of the theological and practical issues faced by churches, missions and development agencies in development programmes among poorer communities and the relationship of evangelism and church planting to them. It earths the issues of Christ, modernity and post-modernity for millions of people who struggle daily to survive. The four models outlined challenge evangelical agencies to critique their own mission statement and practice. Excerpts from the round table discussion at the workshop follow on from the paper. Editor

THE NATURE OF THE RELATIONSHIP

What is the nature of the relationship between development and other religious activities, such as evangelism and church development? Can religious activities be separated from development? How compatible are they in practice? Does the implementation of one enhance or hinder the effectiveness of the other? What models of this relationship are most likely to result in effective development?

The key purpose of this paper is to promote discussion by offering definitions on various concepts in the relationship between development and other religious activities, and by identifying alternative models of the relationship.

Two contexts relevant to the topic should be noted before proceeding.

1. The ongoing impact of western colonialism and the beliefs that motivated it. The western cultural tradition (essentially, the indigenous European tradition), including its Christian components, has become a focus of considerable criticism and even embarrassment over against non-western traditions. Fear of repeating past mistakes haunts the relationship between development and activities such as

evangelism and church planting. While acknowledging this criticism, the paper also recognizes the past contribution and future potential of western culture in the global development process.

2. The changing nature of Canadian [or western] society, particularly its growing multi-cultural and multi-religious composition, and the appropriate role for government in this context.

How we respond to these two factors tends to influence heavily how we address this topic.

We want to show that some of the distinctions we make between religion, development and evangelism are not as clear as we may have thought. More importantly, we believe it is critical that our definition of some of the terms in this consultation be broadened in order to effectively discuss the issues at hand.

RELIGION: SEPARATE OR FUNDAMENTAL?

Religion in the western context has generally been equated with Christianity. Religion has been understood as belief in God, or at least, acknowledgement of the existence of a transcendent deity. Traditionally, people who were 'religious' were Christians; others were simply not religious. In the twentieth century especially, religion has increasingly been compartmentalized as a private, subjective matter wholly separate from scientific or public matters.

For many, religion is still associated with tradition, with the past. They assume that, with progress and modernization, the importance of religion will diminish. Religions in non-western societies are assumed to be obstacles to development and barriers to modernization. As in the West, it was assumed that these cultures would abandon their religion as modernization occurred.

These traditional assumptions have been fundamentally challenged by various developments, including:

- The failure of economic and political modernization to eradicate religion. In fact, in parts of the world, the reverse is true.

- The decline of the belief that science and public life are based on objective, rational assumptions that have nothing to do with personal beliefs.

- The emergence (or recognition) in Canada of religious communities such as Judaism, aboriginal religions, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, which have different views of the relationship of religion and culture.

- The emergence of holistic concepts of development and concern with sustainability are changing our view on religion in a development context. 'Spirituality' or religion cannot any longer be isolated from the development process.

Through all this we have begun to notice that the separation of religion from culture, from science and other areas of life is a Euro-American concept. For non-western cultures, religion is completely integrated with the rest of their life.

In his book *No Life Without Roots*, Thierry Verhelst writes: 'For most cultures in Third World countries, religion underlies every aspect of life: family, law, politics, land ownership, agriculture, technology, food, and so on. These elements are not autonomous but complement each other.'

Western culture is unique in separating religion from the rest of life. In fact, the assumption itself is a statement of belief and reflects a particular cultural reality.

The failure of traditional western concepts of religion to explain various phenomena and trends creates considerable ambivalence about the distinction between religion and culture or religion and development. Even most dictionaries offer two definitions of

religion. One essentially Eurocentric, emphasizes private, subjective beliefs in a transcendent being. The other deals more broadly with fundamental beliefs about the meaning and purpose of human life and the world.

Given the limitations of a western, compartmentalized view of religion and the ongoing viability of the holistic view of most non-western nations, the latter definition is most useful for the purposes of this dialogue. The Eurocentric definition simply creates two solitudes: religion and development. Not recognizing fundamental linkages between the two makes understanding of key cross-cultural issues nearly impossible. More specifically, it makes difficult an effective understanding of the key issues of this discussion and of development itself.

Therefore, this paper will adopt a broad definition of religion. It is: 'a belief system which expresses a fundamental allegiance or is held to be of ultimate significance; that which relates to the basic commitment of a person, community or institution'.

A clear implication of this definition is that perspectives and values about development, whether Christian or not, constitute a belief system. Thus all development, including the process by which it occurs, reflects an inherent religious paradigm.

CHANGING DEVELOPMENT PARADIGMS

Definitions of development have undergone considerable change in the past few decades. As society's beliefs have changed, so have concepts of development. The development experience has also offered many new insights into the meaning of effective development.

Changing definitions of development are reflected in three main historical periods. *The colonial* era tended to impose a *Eurocentric* view of development and religion on other cultures. This view distinguished between social and economic progress, but deemed them mutually reinforcing.

The *post-war years* are characterized by *modernization* theory which assumes that development occurs through successive stages of economic growth. This theory separated traditional religious activity (e.g.: church missions) from economic development, even though the theory itself reflects fundamental western beliefs about the inevitability of 'progress' and the primacy of the pursuit of economic growth and material well-being.

The separation of economic, technical and financial considerations from culture and religion has come under considerable criticism. In a discussion of the role of religion in development, in his book *Getting to the 21st Century: Voluntary Action and the Global Agenda*, David Korten writes, 'Development has long been treated as primarily a financial and technical problem. The importance of values has been generally neglected. This neglect contributes to many of the current global crises, in particular a high incidence of communal violence, the destructive use of natural resources, drug abuse and social injustice.'

The emerging view *today* is one of *sustainable development* which seeks to integrate economic, social and ecological aspects into the change process. The religious and cultural dimensions of sustainability are also beginning to be recognized.

The shifts from colonial to modernization to sustainable development reflect changes in underlying assumptions about the relationship between development and religion. Virtually all participants in development, governments, churches and other NGOs, have themselves undergone these transitions.

For our purposes, two changes in definitions of development are most relevant:

1. Development is now being understood more holistically. We now see that past development has often been one-sided, focusing only on economics or, in the case

of many churches, focusing only on changing the beliefs of individuals. Generally, definitions of development have become more inclusive and more sensitive to the full range of cultural and societal realities.

2. Development is gradually being uprooted from the nineteenth century concept of inevitable economic, technological and social progress. Its claims to scientific objectivity are now generally dismissed. More and more effective development is being understood as the development of indigenous cultures and as a process of change rather than a specific level of achievement. We now recognize that development presupposes a definition of what is good, how society ought to be structured and change. The result is a growing diversity of views on the content of development, within a common framework of mutual respect and tolerance.

As development is being understood more holistically and in less objective terms, the role of beliefs and of religion in development is becoming more prominent.

One of the key questions set for this paper—What constitutes effective development?—needs to be understood against the background of changing definitions of development.

OTHER RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES

The background information for the paper offers several examples of such activities: ‘evangelism and the propagation of the Christian faith, and efforts to encourage and build Christian faith communities’.

The use of ‘other’ to describe these activities implies that development itself is a religious activity. Many church-related NGOs would concur, particularly in regards to the motivation that inspires it.

Although all of the ‘other religious activities’ listed are relevant to our discussion, that of *evangelism* or proselytizing is perhaps key. For most churches, evangelism refers to intentional efforts to convert non-believers to acceptance of a particular faith and beliefs.

Within this definition, we must distinguish between programmatic and personal evangelism. The former refers to an organized and systematic programme including staff, resources and budgets with explicit and overt evangelistic goals and the means to achieve them. Personal evangelism focuses on personal conversations between a development worker and a community member about personal beliefs which may or may not convert the other to a specific faith.

Personal evangelism often tends to spring naturally from the development context. Many development workers are asked by those they work with why they are involved in development. If the motivation is explicitly Christian, a personal form of evangelism takes place. Given the critical importance of relationship building, both personal and organizational, evangelism of this kind is a common occurrence in relationships between church-based NGOs and development participants. The integrative nature of non-western cultures means that participants willingly engage in this type of evangelism.

EVANGELISM AND DEVELOPMENT

In their essay ‘Evangelism and Social Responsibility’, Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden state: ‘Historically, no missionary society before the twentieth century stated its goals by declaring that its only legitimate activity was verbal proclamation. In its practice of mission, the missionary church introduced literacy, education, medicine, [and] technology.’

However, the experience and aftermath of colonialism in the North and South has led to an association of evangelism with westernization, imperialism and the imposition of beliefs on other cultures.

Concerns about the content of evangelism programmes include the perception of western superiority, the exclusivity of Christian beliefs, and the equation of western cultural values and customs with Christian beliefs and practices.

Christian churches in the North and South have responded in a variety of ways to the colonial experience. An emphasis on indigenous evangelism, theology and practices is perhaps the most significant one. For some northern churches, this has meant complete withdrawal from evangelism in the South. For others it has meant working only through southern partner churches. For most, it has involved a new emphasis on respecting local beliefs and cultures in evangelism programmes.

An often-ignored but well-known fact needs to be noted in this context. Christianity has a long history in many southern countries. 'Indigenous values' for many individuals and communities, in fact, reflect Christian beliefs. Strongly Christian countries include Ethiopia, with its ancient Christian traditions and, more recently, Zambia, which is 80 percent Christian. Certainly, southern Christianity, in its many forms, is in no way dependent on western mission work for its viability.

EVANGELISM AND SECULAR BELIEF CHANGE

A final issue related to a definition of other religious activities includes the relationship between Christian evangelism and secular efforts to promote specific beliefs in a southern context. It is not clear whether or how evangelistic efforts of Christian agencies differ fundamentally from attempts by secular agencies to affect the belief systems of the cultures in which they work or even other religious agencies in their work. Evangelism does not necessarily differ in method from other educational efforts of a 'non-religious' nature by northern agencies in the South.

For example, do efforts by northern agencies to protect southern natural environments reflect an environmental ethic based on traditional knowledge and oral cultures or a western one? Do family planning groups advocate means consistent with indigenous values about life and birth control or western views?

Certainly, some of the issues surrounding evangelism are not fundamentally different from many others which promote particular ideas. Concern with imposing values and respect for local culture or beliefs are shared among all engaged in the transmission of ideas cross-culturally.

A broad perspective on the issues relevant to this paper suggests that a simple separation of development and religion or other religious activities cannot be maintained. A sharp separation only obscures or avoids some of the critical questions this discussion must address. In fact, some of these issues lie at the heart of the entire development enterprise.

THE ROLE OF BELIEF CHANGE IN DEVELOPMENT

The role of belief change in development may be the most fundamental issue in our discussion of the relationship between development and other religious activities. It is directly relevant to the issue of cultural sustainability.

There is a growing recognition that belief change is inherent in development. Development is about change. Since culture cannot be isolated from development, some degree of belief change tends to occur in the development process.

All development agencies, including indigenous partners, bring particular beliefs to the development process. Even the best community development processes, by virtue of their methodology alone, may challenge indigenous beliefs. This is true for church-based NGOs, as well as for others.

For example, a public health agency combatting the spread of AIDS may advocate 'safe sex', which reflects specific views of sexual behaviour. A church-based NGO may reflect another set of norms. Either organization, or both, may confront and change indigenous sexual norms held by the target group.

Whether external beliefs are explicit or implicit, they are likely to influence existing belief systems in development processes.

A recognition that belief change occurs in all development activity creates tensions with a commitment to respect or protect indigenous cultures. This tension is, of course, inherent in all cultural exchanges. Ideally, it should be a source of creativity for both partners in the development process. But where imbalances of power exist, the indigenous belief system is most likely to be undermined.

The *fact* of belief change needs to be distinguished from *how* it is addressed. A variety of criteria or cautions regarding the acceptability of belief change have emerged in the development community to deal with this tension. These include respecting and maintaining continuity of traditional culture, general sustainability of the development effort, and the involvement of local leadership in the development process.

On these matters there appears to be little difference of opinion among most development agencies. The criteria of respect for other beliefs is not only seen as right, it is also generally accepted as critical for effective development.

CONFLICTING VIEWS OF BELIEF CHANGE

There remain differences on how agencies deal with belief change. One issue is the order of change in a development process. Is belief change ideally the first step of development or is it a consequence of a broader development process?

Some believe religious change precedes effective development. They would say acceptance of the gospel and a complete religious conversion is necessary, because this empowers people to achieve levels of health and sustainable economic activity not possible within the context of their traditional religion. Biblical views of personal conduct and responsibility are viewed as prerequisites to good health and a productive livelihood.

Others would want any religious change to be a product of the change process itself. While accepting the likelihood of changing beliefs, they place greater emphasis on ensuring that any new beliefs are rooted in a community's traditions and experience, building on indigenous foundations. When issues of belief emerge out of the broader development process, they would view such community-based changes as most likely to be sustainable.

Still others do not want to engage in proselytizing because they do not want individual belief change to be isolated from a broader development process.

In each case, there are differences of opinion on what makes development sustainable: fundamental belief change, political and structural change, ownership of the change process, or economic well-being.

Different experiences with missions and different views of sustainability have led to various responses by church-based NGOs.

Many churches with a long history of mission involvement in southern countries are concerned not to repeat mistakes they made in the past. They are concerned about insensitive or intolerant evangelistic activities that view the world as a culturally 'clean

slate' inhabited only by individuals needing conversion. They fear another wave of 'imperialist Christianity'.

Some have declared a 'moratorium on missions' because the idea of western Christians evangelizing southern countries, many of which already have substantial Christian populations, is inappropriate in post-colonial times.

In contrast, evangelistically inclined church-related NGOs do not believe that Christian evangelism—when offered in a voluntary, non-conditional manner—should be differentiated from the introduction of other ideas of a social, political or economic nature. Some have suggested that attempts to change the patriarchal nature of some societies is potentially as much an imposition as Christian evangelism. They argue that economic changes introduced in the development process may be as or more disruptive of local culture than the introduction of new religious ideas.

According to one agency contacted for this paper, the assumption that holistic development includes a spiritual component has led several Scandinavian governments to require that NGOs involve a local church in their development efforts. (How funding occurs in that context is not clear.)

WHAT IS EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT?

Some questions on the issue of belief change in development need to be addressed in the consultation process. These could include:

- Are some externally directed belief changes acceptable while others are not?
- Should 'religious' ideas be distinguished from other fundamental ideas about what societies ought to be like, such as human rights, the role of women and population control?
- Are claims about the exclusivity of Christianity any more different in a development context than more secular concepts?
- On what basis should the impact of Christian belief changes be evaluated?
- Does evangelism undermine effective development any more than the introduction of other foreign ideas?
- Is the disagreement among church-related NGOs based on *how* 'religious' ideas are introduced, or is the concern with the ideas themselves?

All these questions are relevant to one of the key concerns for the dialogue: What constitutes effective development?

FOUR MODELS OF DEVELOPMENT

The various approaches to development and other religious activities among church-related NGOs can be summarized in separate models.

These models refer only to the beliefs or approaches underlying specific development efforts. They do not refer to the *motivation* or the specific *methods* used in the development process.

Although the models represent distinct approaches to the relationship between development generally and other religious activities, some church-related NGOs may recognize themselves in more than one. A church agency may also participate in different models in different locations, as well as shift from one model to another over time. However, one model will typically predominate and reflect the agency's basic approach.

It should be noted that the models are not distinguished on the basis of *whether* belief change or spiritual issues are part of the development process. As discussed above, we assume that beliefs and spiritual matters are inherently involved in development. The

models are, however, distinguished by *how* their proponents view the role of beliefs in the development process.

Model 1: Development without religious activity

Agencies who have adopted this model believe that development activity, whether accompanied by specific spiritual changes or not, is important on its own merits. No attempt is made to convert or support activities leading to conversion or church development. Belief change may occur under this model, but no effort is made to determine a particular outcome.

While no proselytizing takes place, church-related NGOs that adopt this model would claim to be motivated by Christian commitment.

Different views of the role of Christianity in development are possible under this model. The activities of some church-related NGOs may be indistinguishable from those of non-Christian agencies with no claims to a specific Christian character for the development effort. Others may claim a distinctively Christian approach to development. However, in neither of them is any effort at church-planting or evangelism included in the development process.

For some agencies, a strongly Christian motivation and an emphasis on the Christian character of development workers is critical, even though no specifically Christian development approach or activity is sought. Proponents may speak of an 'incarnational' or 'presence ministry'.

While the relevance of Christianity to local communities may not be evident in a formal programmatic manner, informal connections to Christian beliefs may occur. This occurs, for example, when development workers are asked, as often happens, what motivates their involvement.

In addition, many church-related NGOs have counterparts or have identified compatible churches in the development context. While these churches may have no formal or even informal link to the development project, they are available to respond to basic belief concerns that arise out of the development process.

The challenge to basic belief systems may also occur more formally. At some points, indigenous spirituality may be perceived, either by the local community or the development agency, as in conflict with a specific development need. Different Christian agencies will respond differently. Some will seek solutions that reflect the local belief system. Others will respond in terms of a Christian belief, often through an invitation to local churches or mission agencies to establish an evangelism programme.

Whatever the case, a specific religious or basic belief issue is at stake. The discussion that occurs will reflect the basic beliefs of the community and the basic beliefs of the community and western development workers, regardless of their specific persuasion: Christian, Muslim, Animist or secular.

Model 2: Development and evangelism as integral tasks

This model is adopted by Christian agencies whose objectives are development, but which believe that genuine development includes a change in spiritual circumstances as well as physical, social and political ones. Further, the desired outcome of spiritual change is acceptance of the Christian faith. The agency sees its approach of including spiritual change as inherent in a holistic development initiative.

For some church-related NGOs, evangelism and church planting are part of a development ministry, part of a process of holistic change process. They would see various kinds of change: physical, social, political and spiritual, as aspects of a total change process toward a specific Christian view of humanity and human life.

This model differs from the first in that specific belief changes are seen as desirable and are an *explicit* rather than *implicit* part of the development program.

This approach makes a strict separation of development and other religious activities difficult. However, because of the agencies' commitment to holistic development, their health, agricultural and other activities are not secondary to their evangelism and church-related activities.

Model 3: Development and evangelism as separate tasks

This model is consistent with much of traditional Christian mission activity. In fact, this model is probably the original development model, given the role Christian churches have played in the history of development efforts.

Agencies that adopt this model undertake an integrated approach, combining distinct elements into one overall programme. But there is no intrinsic connection between development activity (social, economic, health) and other religious activities, such as evangelism and church development.

The model of development used in this approach may be very similar to ones used by non-Christian agencies, even though the development programme may be motivated by Christian convictions. Its practitioners see development and evangelism and church planting as distinct and separable tasks of the church. One does not require the other to have validity. Even in cases where agencies would see conversion as the ultimate success of their work, non-spiritual development is seen as having basic intrinsic value.

Practical reasons may also be used to justify a separation of activities. Agencies may want to ensure that no one will convert to Christianity as a means to benefit from development activities. Or the priority of development or proselytizing may be purely contextual: What is the need of the particular individual or community? Or they may simply want to meet Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) requirements that government funds not be used for activities of a 'religious nature'.

This model may also be a step on an agency's road to holism. It may reflect an incomplete effort to combine aspects of development that western society tends to separate. It may also reflect an organizational distinction within a church between 'mission' or evangelism efforts and 'relief and development' initiatives.

Model 4: Development as pre-evangelism

Agencies that use this model believe the real mission of the church is to 'preach the gospel' with the aim of making converts. Development begins with converted individuals. Once people abandon their traditional religions they are more likely to sustain a process of development. As one agency representative said, 'Traditional religions are antagonistic to change', therefore, religious change is a necessary precondition for sustainable development.

Some agencies that use this model view their development work as 'pre-evangelism'. Development work (or often relief activities) may be minimal and serve only to prepare people to accept the gospel. Others will have a more extensive development programme which in most ways comes to resemble model 3 in character.

Advocates of this model also consider their approach holistic, but the process of change is understood differently from others claiming a holistic approach. In fact, the separation of development from 'other religious activities' may be seen as entirely artificial.

Historically, this model has been associated with the establishment of hospitals and schools, although this is rarely done today. Agencies using this model have also adopted

more community-based approaches to health and literacy. Nevertheless, these programmes exist as a means to reach local people for the Christian faith.

The issue of 'rice Christians', or development being conditional on conversion, is of concern to agencies that give priority to evangelism, as well as to others. They are concerned with a weak and artificial church developing that cannot last beyond the agency's presence. A veteran missionary has referred to the prospect of creating 'rice Christians' as 'the bane of church-planting in poor areas'. They are also concerned with the potential for division in communities that conditional development activities could cause. There is a general consensus that any suggestion of conditions for development participation produces neither effective development nor genuine Christians.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE FOUR MODELS

In the context of our subject, it is critical that we view the selection of criteria for effective development in an appropriate light. Although some may argue that conversion is an important component of development, as either a first step or a consequence, success or effectiveness in evangelism cannot be equated with development. The criteria adopted to evaluate effectiveness must be broadly developmental and not limited to a possible aspect of development, however critical it may be to some.

This paper takes the position that it is not possible to isolate belief change in any form from a total development process, even when no evangelism programmes are involved. Change cannot be isolated into one aspect of a person's or community's life. Therefore, criteria to determine the effectiveness of a model must be broadly developmental in nature, rather than focusing on the absence or presence of an evangelism programme.

This paper is not the appropriate context in which to discuss the details of effective development scenarios. However, it appears that all four models can be effective approaches to development. Each has its success stories, as well as failures.

Sustainable development projects have occurred in which development entirely reflected local beliefs and traditions. There are also cases in which entire villages converted to Christianity, and through this process undertook a successful, broader development process. Effective development can occur within various religious frameworks. *Neither the inclusion or exclusion of evangelism and church planting in a development programme necessarily determines its effectiveness.*

The evidence suggests that the key to successful development lies less in the model or end goals (as described above) adopted, than in the means or methods used to achieve success. Effective development is more probably dependent on the process of change than on particular outcomes. In addition, consistent with the growing recognition of cultural diversity as an ongoing global reality, dictating particular outcomes is becoming less acceptable throughout the world.

CRITERIA FOR EFFECTIVE DEVELOPMENT

There is now a broad consensus on the methods that are likely to lead to effective development. It includes previously discussed criteria, such as a holistic approach, community empowerment, and ownership of the development process as a means to sustainability, a partnership approach by outside agencies and others. Specifically, current development approaches seek to:

—Ensure voluntary acceptance of new ideas, beliefs and the development process itself.

—Root any new beliefs, methods, and organization in the experience and culture of local people.

—Reject use of acceptance of specific beliefs as conditions for development participation.

—Avoid creating or heightening divisions in communities through the development process.

—Ensure that social change is not dependent on outside agents for its sustainability.

—Recognize the implications of change in one aspect of a community's life for other areas.

Criteria such as these must be used to evaluate the effectiveness of models outlined.

We need to revisit the issue of belief change in the context of effective development. How does religious change measure against other changes in terms of criteria of effectiveness? It cannot be convincingly argued that belief change necessarily violates criteria of effective development any more or less than economic or political change. Concerns such as disruption of traditional culture, sustainability, and local control can be addressed in the context of evangelism and church planting. The issue is not *whether* belief change is an acceptable part of the development process, but *how* belief change occurs. Is it imposed? Is it a condition of development participation? Are those affected by development participating in the change process?

These criteria, of course, apply to all development agencies, northern and southern, Christian and non-Christian.

ASSESSING THE FOUR MODELS

One of the more significant areas of potential weakness for agencies which incorporate evangelism into their programs in any way has already been discussed. This is the issue of conditional development or the potential to create 'rice Christians'. Any indication of non-voluntary or conditional development undermines the entire process. Community ownership of a development process is not possible when this occurs.

Agencies for which evangelism has primacy over development (*model 4*: development as pre-evangelism), and even those which incorporate evangelism as a separate portion of their overall programme (*model 3*), must confront the issue of conditionality of aid directly, from the point of view both of effective evangelism and effective development. If Christianity must be voluntarily accepted and genuinely believed, as all would agree, then serious efforts must be made to ensure that no conditions—material, social, political or any other—are attached to its acceptance.

A weakness which may undermine the effectiveness of agencies which adopt *model 4* is the potential lack of attention to development theory, to thinking and planning practically about development. Even though actual practice may be to respond to physical needs as well as spiritual ones, the primary focus on spiritual change may lead to a relatively narrow development process which ignores other genuine needs among the local people. If development goals are secondary to evangelism and church development in a particular programme, they nevertheless must have their own integrity in order to be considered effective.

A 'pre-evangelism' approach to development, possible under *model 4*, is perhaps the most controversial one adopted by church-based NGOs. It has raised considerable concern in the development field generally and within CIDA and other NGOs. Critics say that with this approach, development (or relief) is not undertaken for its own sake, but to encourage or prepare people to be open to evangelism.

The two-pronged approach of *model 3* is vulnerable to concerns with mixed objectives or uncertainty among participants. For cultures that recognize no separation between religion and livelihood and other aspects of daily life, a separation of the two may lead to uncertainty and confusion. Which of the two is really the most important: development or evangelism? How do the two relate?

Agencies which incorporate other religious activities into an overall development framework (*model 2*) can also create false holisms. For example, attempts at conversion can be artificially merged into literacy or agricultural programmes so that the intent of the initiative becomes confusing. Despite the intentions of holism, agencies which adopt this model are bringing together activities which their western cultural background, and quite probably their church traditions, have separated. The likelihood for creating artificial or confusing initiatives may be high.

The approaches that place less or no explicit emphasis on belief change (e.g.: *model 1*) also have potential weaknesses. This approach often reflects the tradition of development which focuses on economic and perhaps social development and ignores the spiritual components of an indigenous culture. The importance of beliefs to the development process is often forgotten, as is the existence of the beliefs implicit in development concepts brought in by western agencies. It is also contradictory to assume that religious activity and beliefs are peripheral to an agency's own development paradigm, while insisting on its pre-eminence in a non-western development context.

Further, if religion or belief systems are viewed as matters of personal preference rather than as cultural necessities, their relevance to development activities will probably be ignored, despite claims to protect the indigenous culture.

Finally, the question of how the model applied to a specific development context is selected cannot be overlooked. How and by whom should the model be selected? Given the criteria of effective development, can it be determined only by the mandate of the agency? To what extent must a southern partner or the affected community be involved? How should the relevance of the specific development problem be considered in the selection process?

In summary, the weakness of most of the models used to address the issue of development and other religious activities are precisely those relevant to their entire western-sponsored development thrust. While some approaches may have particular strengths and weaknesses in relation to certain criteria for effective development, none is free from the risk of undermining an effective development process.

ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION ON DEVELOPMENT AND RELIGION

In April 1997, World Vision International's Strategy and Christian Mission division invited development practitioners and theorists from around the world to take part in a four-day think-tank to discuss development issues. One of the primary reasons for their meeting was to examine the role of religion in development.

Those taking part included Paul Hiebert, Bill Dryness, Augustine Musopole, Ravi Jayakaraan, Melisachew Mesfin, Sam Voorhies, Bryant Myers, Tom McAlpine, Bruce Bradshaw and William van Geest.

The editors of TOGETHER were interested in their perspectives on how religion contributes to effective development, and in what ways it may detract from it. What follows is an edited version of the discussion that took place.

Paul Hiebert: It is becoming increasingly clear to me that part of the problem in addressing the issue of development today is that our western world view has created a dichotomy between religion and development. I'm not suggesting we bring science and

theology side-by-side. But we need to re-examine our whole model. I would like to hear Ravi's comments, because he models some of the things that I think have been very helpful.

Ravi Jayakaraan: I am intrigued by the question: Does religion enhance, does it reduce, does it hinder development? One of the things that we are becoming conscious of is the strong belief in a supernatural realm among many of those people with whom we do development. That is a part of their world and, therefore, part of their world view. We once thought we could avoid this aspect, and deal with only the empirical aspects of development. That's been a mistake we've made often. We have to address both dimensions.

As we go to communities in India and elsewhere in Asia, I have seen that areas over which people feel they have no control are allocated to God's jurisdiction. The other areas remain within their control. Of course, we believe that these are areas that God also has control of. As we work with these communities, we need to be prepared to address both the empirical as well as the supernatural.

Bill Dyrness: Tom [McAlpine] lead us in an excellent Bible study on [Psalm 104](#). We realized that the biblical world view is far more holistic than most of western Christianity's interpretation of those views. We realized that God is active and present in creation, causing the grass to grow and the animals to have a life that's full. That is God's work that God is presently involved in doing. So, when a development officer or practitioner comes into a community, God is already there, working, giving life and causing the grass to grow. God doesn't come in with the missionaries or practitioners. God is already there.

One of the things we have been discussing here is how to go about eliciting people's understanding of how God is present in their communities. We should first talk with them about how their spring works, and maybe hear what they have to say about the spirits that are there in the waters. We need to hear their story before sending a development practitioner into the experience.

Melisachew Mesfin: I also have come to realize that the practitioner should not compartmentalize and say: This is spiritual; this is physical. There has to be a holistic understanding. Otherwise, you do not have a total study. You need to understand the value systems of the people.

The practitioner does not automatically know what community members feel. The practitioner first must analyse the situation. I have come to realize that the practitioner must try to preserve the customs of the people. However, the gospel cannot be compromised in any situation.

Augustine Musopole: These two areas—the natural and supernatural, the material and spiritual—are really very complementary. The practitioner must recognize that it is only as communities recognize new possibilities that they will embrace development.

One has almost to graft the gospel on the spirituality found in the community. The problem is that those who bring the gospel and development often deny the spirituality that they find in communities. They come in and clear the area in order to plant new seed. This has caused problems for communities. It brings about what I call a schizophrenic spirituality. It disturbs their sense of identity. It tends to uproot them.

So, the aim of transformational development really has got to take into account the whole person and the environment in which they live. In that environment, in Africa, especially, religion is key, because life itself is religious. If you deny the religious element, you risk losing these people altogether. The development effort will be greatly hampered as a result. But, if you tune in to their spirituality, this is going to help them see new possibilities, without alienating them.

Bill Dyrness: The community, of course, has to be listened to and taken into account. But then there is another community that we also recognize, and that is the community of believers. Ultimately, it is the community of believers who will exercise discernment as to what the community's needs may be, whether they are spiritual, material or psychological. So, it's not some outside expert who would do that, ultimately—although they can be valuable resources. Rather, the community will be empowered to make these determinations and judgements on what needs to be done.

Augustine Musopole: Just to add to what Paul Hiebert has been saying, this is where [Psalm 139](#) becomes very helpful. I call him the effective scientist who looks at the world—especially at the way he is made—and wonders at the greatness of God. The psalmist's response is, 'I am wonderfully and fearfully made.' I think that is the proper attitude of a scientist who sees God at work in the world. I think that sense of God's presence has been lost. We have driven a wedge between the supernatural and the natural. The biblical view is that the natural really reveals the presence of God in the world. [Psalm 19](#) tells us about that. So do [Psalm 8](#) and [Psalm 24](#).

So, can we not speak of a spirituality of science? Is there not that sense of spirituality in which the scientist is able to see something and be awed by it? He may just remain at the level of awe, like an artist. Quite often, it is the artists who really speak to us about the greatness of God in the world.

The fact that science has got one realm and theology has got another hasn't helped us very much. I think we are seeing the need to bring these two things together. Where do human beings come in? Perhaps we can be the bridge between what is called the natural and the supernatural.

Bruce Bradshaw: In one situation, World Vision development practitioners went to a village and introduced some agricultural innovations that had the potential to double the yield of sorghum. As they introduced the idea, they talked about the seeds, the chemical content of the fertilizer, things like this, all scientific in nature. The villagers talked this over. It was hard for them to imagine that these innovations had no spiritual foundation. The agricultural innovators had said nothing about a spiritual basis for what they were proposing.

Most of the village farmers were reluctant to accept the innovations, but one farmer did. He took the advice and the instruction of the agricultural innovators and planted the seeds, and he got an increased yield. Now, the agricultural innovators thought that that would ensure their successes. They expected that the rest of the farmers would follow the example of this one particular farmer.

Unfortunately, this farmer's son died within a year. Now, in a culture where infant mortality could be 20 percent, this was not unusual. But the villagers interpreted the death of this farmer's son as an expression of witchcraft. They believed that the spiritual basis of the agricultural innovations was witchcraft. They concluded that the farmer had sacrificed his son through witchcraft in order to increase his yields. They felt the price was simply too big. The project did not catch on.

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