

Development cooperation and Religion

A Prisma contribution to reflection and policy



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Earlier versions of this document are commented by directors of Prisma members, by some partners and, several times, by the staff of Prisma.

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Introduction

The member organizations of Prisma see their work as an expression of God's wholesome intentions with this world. They understand their work in the international diaconal work and DC cooperation as rooted in the Christian mission to demonstrate mercy and justice in a world where these values are so often blatantly violated.

This means that the work of Prisma members is based on a view that in many ways affects their work (Jochemsen 2010; Westerveld 2011). Prisma members almost always work together with partner organizations in developing countries. These are in the vast majority of cases, but not always by all members, churches or Christian organizations. Those organizations and people also find their motivation, inspiration and morality in their religion. At the same time, these partners meet and collaborate with people who adhere to another religion and hold other views.

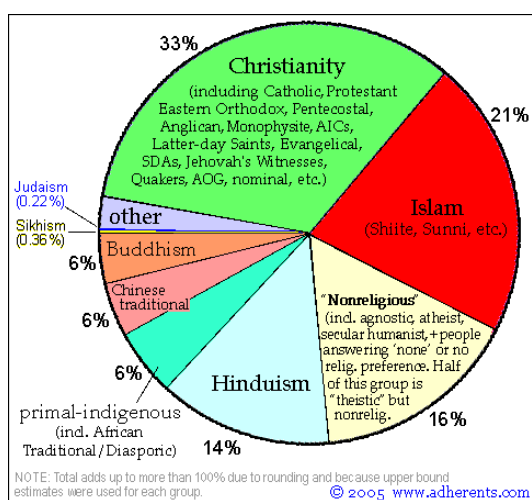


Figure 1: Percentage of world population that adheres to a religion; see

http://www.adherents.com/Religions_By_Adherents.html

Figure 1 shows that the vast majority of the world population understands itself as an adherent of a religion or a worldview. The supporters of a secular, explicitly atheist or non-religious worldview constitutes a small minority, not only historically but also today. Development cooperation, therefore, inevitably entails an encounter between people of different religions. What does this mean for cooperation in development in general and Christian development cooperation¹ in particular? This is the subject of this paper. It is structured as follows.

The paper consists of two main sections. The first looks at the way in which faith, as a function, relates to DC. This section discusses religion as an anthropological structure, i.e. as a phenomenon that characterizes people, even though this structure manifests itself very

¹ In the Dutch discourse the usual term is 'Development Cooperation' (DC); in English this is often shortened to just 'Development'. But development is a process that always takes place in one form or another, whereas Development Cooperation (or assistance) is an activity that consciously tries to influence and improve the developmental process. This requires a view on the desirable development. Therefore, for the sake of clarity in this paper we will refer to 'development cooperation' with the acronym DC and when the word 'development' is used the process is meant, not the activities to influence development.

differently in different people. The section begins with a discussion of the relationship between culture and religion; with culture, which undoubtedly is of great importance in DC, religion appears on the stage. This leads to a discussion of the cultural movements of modernity and postmodernity in their relationship to DC. It is argued that the character of modernity has stamped DC and constitutes an important background of the phenomenon that, seen from the secular 'North', religion is pushed to the margin of public discourse, also about DC. In the following section we demonstrate, using a philosophical analysis of the practice of DC, that in this practice inevitably a form of religion-as-anthropological-structure is functioning. Each performance of that practice starts from a certain vision of the world, man, society and the good life, to which one is committed, and that functions as a religion. Constructing a contradiction between supposedly neutral, evidence based professional practices exercised by non-religious people on the one hand and subjective religion-informed practices performed by 'believing' people, is a just that: a construction that itself expresses a specific world view. This is also the main conclusion of Part I of the paper.

Part II mostly deals with religion as the organized worshipping of higher powers with respect to its manifestations in society and therefore also in the work of DC, and to its content. Key elements of the Christian religion that are of direct significance for DC are briefly presented. The last section of this second main part discusses three ways in which Christians and Christian organizations can be active in society and can contribute to it. This section will argue that it is good practice in DC to distinguish between churches and civil society organizations (NGOs).

This paper does not necessarily reflect the views of the Prisma members, but intends to stimulate and feed the reflection on these themes by the members and their partners as well as broader in the development sector.

Part I: Religion as anthropological structure

1.1 Culture and religion

In cultural anthropology we constantly encounter the phenomenon of religion. Kühn typifies why people whose archaeological remains have been found as 'homo religiosus': "... never people have existed without religion exist ... Already in the Ice Age religion is the driving force and leads to the creation of artwork. Also in the Neolithic era religion fulfils a central role ... "[Kuhn, 1959 (translation from the Dutch, HJ); Visscher, 1911]. Man is (also) a religious being. Throughout history mankind has realized that its existence depends on the blessing from the spiritual world. Therefore in most cultures mankind has sought a relationship to the spiritual world. This was and is embodied in various forms and religious rites, as prayers and sacrifices. Experiences of guilt, reconciliation, healing, harmony, play an important role in this regard.

Religiosity in this anthropological sense can be interpreted as a broad structural feature of human existence, namely as the commitment to that what human beings see as ultimately defining reality.² The human being is a religious being in the sense that he is looking for a framework from which he can interpret reality and his life and can experience meaning. This includes not least the interpretation of his vulnerability, of suffering and death and dealing with it.³ This search for survival and meaning is guided by the deepest, ultimately religious, beliefs in a culture, communities and individuals. From this perspective also atheists are 'religious' in this anthropological sense and a secular-humanist worldview is not a kind of religiously neutral position from which one can 'independently' judge the religions, but, that worldview itself embodies a 'religious' position among others.

In culture people express and give shape to religious beliefs in institutions, customs, written and unwritten rules and in shaping their environment.⁴ In the latter technology fulfils an important role. As a cultural being, man is always 'homo technicus'. Human beings not only 'have' a culture but human existence 'is' embodied culture [Bürki, 1975].

Culture and religion are very closely related to each other. On the one hand, culture can be briefly described as 'religion made visible' (where religion can still be interpreted broadly in the anthropological sense explained above). On the other hand, culture provides religion with the 'material' to manifest itself, not only in typically religious rituals but also in ordinary life that is lived and shaped from deeply religious and philosophical beliefs and motives and motivational symbols. Here man is not only the product of his ancestry and culture ('nature and nurture'). Man is also an active entity that responds to incentives and threats, opportunities and challenges that the environment confronts him with and with which he deals in a certain way. In such culturally formative activities, the natural environment is interpreted and somehow given shape with the use of techniques. Technology is always closely linked to culture and its guiding religious orientation.

² According Clouser religiosity relates to what is seen as 'Unconditionally independent reality' [Clouser 1995: 23].

³ Viktor Frankl emphasized that the will to meaning is a characteristic of human existence, not just a wish or an opinion. Frankl 1988.

⁴ A relatively simple but helpful descriptive definition of culture is "the totality of acquired, socially transferred behavior (lifestyle)-including the related material and conceptual (e.g. values, Institutions) achievements. ([Http://www.thefreedictionary.com/culture](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/culture)). For a more normative elaboration, see text.

In this shaping and transforming of the available reality, including their own physical existence, human beings are actively seeking to secure their existence and experience of meaning. In these activities the human being responds as it were to the call he perceives in the concrete situations of life. Fundamental changes in the culture, in thought, art and technique therefore always are connected with changes in the religious concerns people have in a particular culture. The history of philosophy is not the history of the *thinking* of people who respond to each other's thinking. In their work philosophers -as well as artists- reflect the historical situation of a culture regarding the relationship to the spiritual, or if you like, the numinous, world (Guardini, 1963).

We see that shaping culture and bringing about development can be understood as a response to the call that every day's life presents to mankind. But that response gets its *direction* from That or from Him who is seen as a ultimately determining reality and *takes form* in the opportunities and materials that are offered by the culture, including its physical dimension.⁵

Precisely because responding, i.e. relating actively and consciously with the surrounding reality, is characteristic of the human being, man *cannot* help but respond. In other words, he cannot *not* answer. Each way of shaping life is to be considered as a response and consequently also as a message to others. But the way in which human beings respond and hence the content of people's lives communicate, may vary enormously. And different religions have led to very different answers and thus to different cultures.

But does it matter *how* human beings respond? Are all responses good as any? Before we examine this, from a Christian point of view, we want to first ascertain what understanding of reality inspires the predominant response that is embodied in our culture. And subsequently what this insight means for the place of religion (in the common sense) in our culture.

1.2 Modernity and postmodernity

For an understanding of the place of religion in our Western cultural situation, we first look back in history posing the question how this situation has evolved.

European culture (from which the current North American culture is derived) has been a religious culture until well into the Middle Ages, like most -not to say all- other cultures in world history. In particular for African cultures, but also in many parts of Asia, this is still the case. In the pre-modern European culture a historic form of Christianity was central, influenced and often distorted by other religious influences. In that culture reality and life were understood and shaped taking into account the spiritual reality. Spirit and matter, 'natural' and 'supernatural' were not separated but experienced as interrelated. This view entails a recognition of a certain order in reality. A consequence of this view is the belief that human action rests on given orderings that reality harbours. It is, in short, the notion that *order and meaning of things precede the (individual) human existence*. In Christianity that has been dominant in Europe for many centuries, that order is not a predetermined rigid structure or rigid fate, but primarily a finality that should be developed in life and in history. That order has no independence from the Creator (herein lies a difference with Greek thought), but rests in God's sustenance of the universe. This vision implies that human beings may and even should intervene in creation to restrain the evil in the world and to continue to pursue the realization of the finality of creatures

⁵ "Now, culture is our positive response to a fully generally knowing about the pristine order of a human life". "In culture, God and man are linked together"; Kruyswijk, 1957: 59, 62, respectively.

and creational structures as a way to honour the Creator. But that work and those interventions should be based on an understanding of creational structures and aim for the realization of their finalities, recognizing that we cannot easily grasp them because of the disturbances and the disorder we encounter in reality and because of limited insight. This also applies to various forms of care for human life and livelihood.

Modernity

During the Middle Ages a different attitude towards reality arises. The visible reality becomes to be considered independent from the spiritual reality. The relation between mankind gets the character of a subject – object relationship, the relationship that forms the root of modern science and technology. In that subject-object relationship, which is characterized by some form of abstraction, the spiritual reality and given meaningful structures no longer form part of the whole picture of reality (Schuurman, 1998, hs 4.2). *Instead of the understanding that meaning and destiny precede individual existence, the experience comes up that the individual human existence precedes the meaning of things and life.* This implies that mankind, and every individual again, is challenged to find meaning, not only to its own existence, but to the world in which he lives.

The human subject is defined as a rational. Reality consists of in itself meaningless objects in an 'accidental' constellation. Only by their benefit to human beings objects become meaningful and people give meaning to the world. Hence, reality is no longer seen as a value-bearing creation, but, certainly in the first instance, as an accidentally emerged whole which constitutes the rough material for the construction of a world, using the modern methods and techniques, according to mankind's preferences, and for its own gratification. The instrumental rationality that characterizes technology, and has a legitimate place within it, increasingly affected the mind-set in other areas of life and society.

This approach to reality led to the rise of modern science and technology and has resulted in an explosion of a certain kind of knowledge that in the course of modern history has led to a variety of ways to intervene in reality for mankind's benefit. But the success of science and technology resulted in its overestimation. In the course of modern history -so from the 16th century on- and especially during the Enlightenment, in European culture the scientific-technical approach to reality has become the decisive perspective on the world and society. The scientific-technical rationality became a decisive voice in public life. Other human functions as emotionality, morality and faith, were relegated to private life and their meaning was marginalized in public life. The split between subject and object was thus accompanied by a split between fact (as revealed by science) and value (which is subjectively established), and between body (which belongs to the world of 'facts') and mind (which belongs to the world of the subject). The philosophical and ethical pluralism has been a result of this development. In public life the scientific-technical rationality dominated, focusing on economic growth and material prosperity, in short 'progress'. Ethics is called upon to lead the scientific-technical development into the right direction. But in public decision making the predominant form of ethics is a narrow ethics with a strong emphasis on procedures and requirements of carefulness to reduce potential damage. In itself such an ethics is significant but in reality it generally adapted to the forging powers of culture, technology and economy as it did not part from a shared view of the good (social) life.

This critique of modernity does not deny this development entailed elements that we would not want to lose, such as greater freedom for the individual, equality of citizens, separation of the three powers of government (legislative, executive, and judiciary). Further, more attention to human rights, though that is certainly not just due to modernity, but also of a Judeo-Christian view of man (Aprodev, 2008). The contribution of religion, and in this case (certain types of) Christianity to 'DC' in the modern sense, according to a recent study was relatively significant (Woodberry, 2012). This study argues that especially certain groups of Protestants (not dependent on state or national church) have made a substantial contribution to the shaping of stable democracies in the world. Not by specific political activities but because they, through their teaching, literature production and dissemination and the formation of civil society, the cultural and social conditions have contributed to a stable democracy.

Modernity and DC

The modernist approach to reality is also reflected in DC. We could even say that the DC as we have had during the latest 60 years, can be seen as one of the major projects of modernity with its vision of development and progress. (Though there are also elements rooted in Romanticism and therefore nature-inspired beliefs). Think of anthropocentrism and the techno-centric approach entailing an idea of feasibility and manageability of life and society, focusing on tangible economic growth, and the dominant role of the market in it. Background of this is the idea of the value-free nature of existing structures and orderings in both the natural environment and social structures. Furthermore, the unresolved tension between economic growth and nature conservation and sustainability, and the emphasis on individualism and individual rights, even though in practice this was mitigated by the popularity of a participatory approach in DC. In this modern vision of cooperation in development little attention is paid to religion because religion is considered to be private.

As indicated above this alleged split between the private character of faith and religion on the one hand and the public power of science and technical rationality on the other, is based on a fallacy. Because this separation itself also implies a certain view of human existence, namely a secular-liberal view. This belief does not take a kind of neutral position from which one can objectively evaluate the other religions; it is itself a specific position that rests on a choice of a certain faith.⁶

Postmodernism

Meanwhile, modernity has arrived in the late modernity or postmodernity. This has brought some changes in the picture presented above. In modernity, reason was seen as the source of truth and goodness. That faith was shot to pieces in the 1st and 2nd world wars. In postmodern thinking the subjectification of ethics and philosophy has been radicalized. But the understanding of science and technology as tools to secure our existence and realize our personal vision of the good life, is strengthened rather than weakened. The denial of objective truth and the stronger emphasis on experience given more space for individual religiosity and spirituality. All people must be able to be 'themselves'. In this context it is interesting to note

⁶ E.g. Szerszynski who sees the modern secular view of reality as a new 'ordering of the sacred' (Szerszynski 2010).

that during recent decades a globalization of religions took place, which sociologically can be interpreted as a globalization of pluralism.⁷

In the postmodern cultural climate religious experience is seen as a strictly personal view that can have no consequences in public life that would affect others because of the radical pluralism in public life. On the contrary, in the public sphere the "reasonable" standards and arguments based on scientific data, still prevail.⁸

Post-modernity and DC

The post-modernization has led to criticism of the until recently prevailing model of DC and also offers new opportunities. People are more inclined to "blame" the poor countries and their governments themselves for their poverty and less likely trust that aid really helps. Suggestions of the sector that OS would solve the problem of poverty have actually proved unjustified. In addition, post-modernization has come with a general distrust of (large) institutions such as the government and civil society organizations. People often rely more on what they themselves see and do. These factors constitute an important background of the rapidly rising number of 'private initiatives' in DC.

Meanwhile, in the DC sector for some time a reflection is going on that questions the 'traditional' modernist paradigm that has stamped DC for a long time and still does to some extent. Central elements of that paradigm are: poverty is mainly a problem of the poor countries: natural disasters, wars, lack of knowledge and technology, corruption and incompetence. The rich countries give aid to help the poor people to at least survive.⁹ Although civil society organizations working on structural DC for years, do no longer concentrate (only) on direct service delivery and humanitarian assistance, in the perception of the broader public that traditional paradigm still seems to predominate. Meanwhile in recent decades several shifts have taken place in the work itself. For example from emphasis on charity towards the realization of justice and rights, from aid to cooperation and partnership, from direct service delivery to society building and educating people, from the transfer of funds to common investments and creation of reliable financial services and developing markets and opening up markets in rich countries.¹⁰ In short, the input from the southern countries, particularly but not only the so-called emerging economies, is becoming stronger, in all areas. This is reinforced by the fact that in 2008 an overemphasis on some characteristics of modernity in the wealthy North resulted in a severe economic and financial crisis that deeply affected the economic and monetary dominance of these countries. What was, and still is called DC as a more or less independent sector, is becoming more and more a complex network of a large number of global to local actors, working together in different constellations to the realization of common objectives. DC is becoming less of a social sector and more integrated in other sectors of society

⁷ Thus Peter Berger in a lecture, held in Key West, Florida, December 4, 2006; see <http://www.pewforum.org/2006/12/04/religion-in-a-globalizing-world2/> (last accessed 30 June 2014)

⁸ Eq. the ban on ritual slaughter of animals (by Jews and Muslims) adopted in June 2011 in the Second Chamber of the Dutch Parliament.

⁹ There have also been other opinions on poverty, for example that poverty (also) is a result of exploitation of the poor countries by the rich, made possible by unequal power relations. This rough sketch of the 'traditional' paradigm does not want to deny the good motives and the enormous efforts of many who in any way have been involved in DC. But that discussion is beyond the main theme of this paper.

¹⁰ See, eg. Darnton and Kirk, 2011.

(trade, private sector development, cooperation between knowledge institutes, private initiatives). In any case, the influence of Southern actors becomes larger.

In the global Southern countries (organized) religions in general play a much larger role than in the global Northern countries (see Chapter 1). The post-modernization of DC and the shifting balance of power at the global level emphatically put the theme of religion on the table.¹¹ How do religion and DC relate to each other? Is religion only relevant to DC as long as the recipients are religiously active people whose position should be taken into account? Below, we argue that the relationship is much more structural.

1.3 Religion and practice performance

Can it be argued that religious beliefs have impact on the performance of the professional practice of DC? We think so. For a start it is good to recognize that in the modernist secular vision of professionalism the profession must be kept clear of world view and religion.

That view as briefly put forward above, holds an instrumental view of science, engineering and professions. Professionals are people who have special knowledge, skills and attitudes (in short, competences), which enable them to realize values important to society and thereby acquire a good position in society. Since truth, goodness and experience of meaning are subjective constructions, the professional must keep his personal convictions outside his professional activity. Here we see the split between professionalism and world view that so strongly prevails in our (post) modern culture and that makes it difficult for many to seriously take into account the meaning of their religious beliefs for daily life and for their professional practice.

As we have seen, this approach entails a world-view itself and in fact one that does not do justice to full human existence. A previously developed model of professional practice, which is called 'Normative Practice Model' offers a different view entailing a structural role for man's religiosity.¹² Below I summarize the key points of the model and briefly elaborate it for the practice of DC.

Structure

A professional practice can be seen as a socially established coherent intertwining of human action with a particular structure which can be summarized as follows.

- a) It is a historically grown, coherent set of human actions, in which the individual acts derive their meaning from the finality of the practice as a whole;
- b) it has a certain orientation or finality that is the reason of the practice's existence and qualifies practice as a whole,
- c) that destination is adequately realized by the observance of a set of standards (the 'rules of art'); these standards not only cover theoretical knowledge and technical skills that are specific to the profession but also other aspects that are important for the practice, especially the psychological (experience), the informational, social (treatment and communication), the economic, legal and ethical.

What does this model imply for the practice of DC ? To answer this question we must first determine what we mean by 'Development'.

¹¹ Department for International DC. Faith partnership principles. Working with faith groups to fight global poverty. DIFID (UK) 2012; see also book by Fowler and Biekart hs 3

¹² Jochemsen, 2009: 18-26.

People pursue well-being, at least in the threefold interpretation of basic needs for living, perceived quality of life, and experience of meaning (Pouw, 2011).¹³ Usually people do not do so individually, but in a variety of social practices and institutions that are focused on the realization of certain essential values in human life and society. In my view development can be understood as *the process that is the fruit of human action aiming at value-realizations in the diversity of practices and institutions* (Jochemsen, 2009). Development is *not so much a product of objective rational goal-oriented human action but fruit of qualified activity in a variety of practices*. If the realization of values that are central in those practices are pursued in a manner that observes the finality of each of those practices and the related standards, those practices lead to meaning disclosure and good development. This means, for example, that education is aiming at the formation of the students and not primarily on profit for the school; that health care is focusing on the health needs of the patient regardless of ethnicity, gender, status, health status; that justice is carried out indiscriminately; that agriculture is arranged such that the natural and cultural basis of the productivity is not impaired, etc. etc. The various social practices have thus distinguished leading value patterns and associated language fields. In health care the language of the market is not at home -which is not to say that people in care should not work efficiently- nor in education. Similarly, development and DC in their broadness cannot be adequately described in the language of the market or in the language of public administration and law, essential as those domains are in themselves. The language of values, of well-being and experience of meaning is essential. And not only as a derivative of greater prosperity and political freedom, but as primary values that people pursue in a variety of contexts. The well-functioning of the various practices in mutual interaction provides a good basis for the experience of well-being by people. DC is, in short, meaning-oriented formative activity, in which those formative activities cover both the social and the physical reality.

So, DC is cooperation between organizations and people in shaping a desirable development with regard to the various practices in which human life and society develops. That in recent decades the term DC mainly refers to the collaboration between organizations and people from the richer Northern countries with Southern countries with a severe poverty problem, a situation that historically developed the concept of 'DC', is not essential for the concept of 'development'. In all societies there is a kind of development, sometimes for the better, sometimes for worse. Worldwide there is an exchange of knowledge and capital, people and resources in view of promoting a desirable development. At the same time, precisely the problem of poverty has shaped the DC as it evolved during the latest half century. And in light of the above defended broad conception of DC, there is reason to understand the problem of poverty also in a broad way. Poverty exists where certain critical values are hardly realized in the lives of people. An elaboration of this goes beyond the scope of this paper.¹⁴

DC is cooperation across national boundaries to work towards the realization of values. Primarily this concerns the values that are intrinsically linked to the various social practices, some of which are mentioned above. In the second place, this also involves defining a

¹³ See also: http://www.governance.unimaas.nl/training_activities/seminar_series/archives_downloads/McGregor_Maastricht_01_08.ppt # 256.1, Wellbeing in Developing Countries ESRC Research Group.

¹⁴ A good starting point is the broad definition of poverty as developed by the OECD/DAC which distinguishes in poverty five main dimensions relating to protection against disasters, economic situation, personal situation in terms of health and education, socio-cultural and political situation. In addition to these dimensions and from a Christian perspective, we can also discern the spiritual poverty that covers the knowledge of and relationship with the God who reveals Himself in the Bible.

hierarchy of values. For example, how do welfare and prosperity and, to take another example, the rule of law, to democracy as a political system. A (Christian) view on DC should deal with questions like these, but they are not the focus of this paper on DC and religion.

Interpretation

What does this have to do with religion and with what has been said above about religion? Well, the realization of the finality of practices requires the observance of standards. Within professional groups there is agreement to some extent about the professional standards. But the way these standards are interpreted and applied in practical situations also depends on the *interpretation framework* that implicitly or explicitly is used by the professional. I quote two sentences from the above argument. "The human being is a religious being in the sense that he is looking for a framework from which he can interpret reality and his life and can experience meaning.... This search for survival and meaning is guided by the deepest, ultimately religious, beliefs in a culture, communities and individuals". The human being cannot avoid 'hearing', interpreting and 'responding', while living in this world and trying to shape his life. And all he does is inevitable from a certain frame work of interpretation; in that sense religiosity is an anthropological structure. Thus every actual performance of practices is also influenced and shaped by the whole constellation of motifs, images, beliefs and aspirations that people largely derive from their religion or world view.

When asked what religion has to do with the DC, the first response is: in their content they cannot be conceptualized separately. Anyone who is active in DC is a participant in a debate in which one can contribute only from a certain position and one can never be just a spectator. This to me is a fundamental issue in the theme of religion and OS. Which does not mean there are no other important things to say about it.

Part II. Religion in its forms and content

II.1 Religious Organizations

So far religion has been discussed from the viewpoint of the substantive meaning that of faith and religion to people, independent of the content of that faith. But religion is also a social and cultural phenomenon. In a descriptive approach to religion as it manifests itself in societies, some aspects can be distinguished.¹⁵ These are:

- religious idea's; this aspect, together with the next, is central in the above;
- religious experiences; the experiences of people with what they regard as ultimately determining reality;¹⁶
- religious practices (actions, habits, certain places or objects that have religious significance, such as the sacraments in Christianity)
- religious organizations, institutions; organizational shaping and control of the transfer of religious idea's, practices and experiences.

This working definition of religion rightly draws attention to the fact that religions also manifest themselves in visible structures and activities. Religions present themselves also in social structures that bring together and influence groups of people and as such represent a particular social and political power. In this context we may think first of those institutions that constitute the primary organizational form of a religious community such as synagogue, church (fellowship), mosque, with their leadership structures and networks. This is the presentation of religions that usually figures in the study of the relationship between religion and DC. But there are other organizations that are not a religious institution but a civil society organization (civil society), that are inspired by or based on a particular religious belief. In the literature those organizations are referred to as 'Faith-based organizations' (FBOs). This term appears to cover a broad spectrum of religious and religiously inspired organizations (for a classification see Berger, 2003; Aiken, 2010). In the literature it is increasingly recognized that in (most) traditional donor countries for a long time a suspicion existed against religiously inspired DC organizations. However, at this point we notice a change: governments in donor countries realize more than before that religion plays a major role in the lives of many people, especially in many 'developing countries'. As a consequence there is a growing awareness that FBOs at some points may have an advantage over secular DC organizations (Alkira, 2006; James, 2009, Aiken, 2010; Duncan & Rees, 2010; Petersen, 2010).

Rick James, an expert in this area from the UK research centre Intrac, lists the following potential comparative advantages of FBOs and churches over other NGOs:

- a. Provide efficient services in the context of DC
- b. Reach the poorest people
- c. Are appreciated valued by the poorest people
- d. Offer an alternative to the secular development theory
- e. Initiate lobbying by and on behalf of civil society organizations
- f. Motivate to action

¹⁵ The following distinction is taken comes from Ter Haar and Ellis, 2011; see also Boenders et al 2011;. 16 and www.religie-en-ontwikkeling.nl

¹⁶ Sometimes this is called the transcendent (Ter Haar and Ellis), others speak of the sacred (J Haynes, in Duncan & Rees, 2010).

Point a) states the actual situation that applies in many countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa. Points b) and c) are related to the fact that religious institutions (eg. church, mosque) and NGO's that collaborate with those institutions, reach the 'ordinary' population and not only intermediary layers of representatives of groups of people. Points d) - f) are linked to notions discussed earlier in this paper. Suffice here to quote from the paper by James (p. 8). "*Religion brings in questions of values and meaning. successful development can only take place if 'due attention is paid to the different ways in which people give meaning to the world and their existence in it.'*" These points present an interesting mirror to FBOs like Prisma members to evaluate their work.

Split

The growing attention for FBOs does not mean that at this point of faith-based work in DC there are no problems. The literature also points out that the governments of donor countries demand that public money is not used for 'proselytism' and that this – in itself understandable - requirement sometimes makes FBOs hesitant to express their religious identity in their communication with the government. In the work that requirement sometimes leads to a split between different types of activities that in the vision of the FBO belong together. Uncertainty about how broad or narrow the prohibition of proselytism should be interpreted, plays a role. For example, in working on agricultural development, views of creation, sustainability, human responsibility and stewardship come together; issues on which the Christian faith has a lot to say. In our view the prohibition of proselytism cannot mean that the stakeholders involved in this type of developmental work, financed by such a donor, would not be allowed to contribute to that work on the basis of their own views. For the actual work of Prisma members that prohibition means that no evangelism, church or community work, or theological education is financed with public money. This sometimes means that in management and accountability a split must be made between such activities on the one hand and DC on the other (Westerveld, 2011).

Churches and NGOs

In this context it is appropriate to make some general observations about the relationships between NGOs and churches (in the sense of local churches and religious denomination).

- In many developing countries churches are the strongest 'social organization'; sometimes in fragile states they are even more clearly present in society than the government. Churches are true grass roots organizations; they reach and mobilize local people who form the congregations.
- Many churches in the Southern countries develop various forms of mutual aid and joint activities as a manifestation of the Christian life and in that way work towards improving the living conditions of people inside and outside the church. Sometimes churches have organized forms of diaconate (diaconal committee etc.) that in the local situation work on structural improvements.
- Those properties make churches attractive partners for (northern) Christian DC organizations. They can make a major contribution to achieving the objectives of the DC organizations. And in many situations much good will have been accomplished.
- But the involvement of churches in the context of DC also has serious risk's. Especially when cooperation with a northern NGO means that relatively much money flows through the

church organization that must be used for DC and cannot be spent for things that the church itself might find most important. One risk is that the most qualified professional people will work for in the development department and that the integral mission of the church in which the visible and audible spread of the Gospel is central, will be supplanted by the objectives of the NGO and its back donor. Even when the objectives of the different stakeholders are not contradictory, it is possible that a process of expropriation takes place of a large part of the work in which the church organization is involved (cf. Elbers and Schulpen, 2013, which does not deal explicitly with churches, but it is unlikely that such mechanisms would not occur in relations between (northern and southern) churches; see Lederleitner, 2010).

- One drawback for northern NGO 's working with churches are their often slow and sometimes unpredictable decision-making processes, that are related with their often layered organization structure in which many people are involved. Additionally due to their own nature and method churches often do not excel in transparency of financial management and accountability; eg. offerings in cash or in kind often form an important source of income. Sometimes the problem is avoided by establishing a foundation whose board is named by the church but that formally has its own governance and does the financial management of donor money. But this solution has its own problems.
- When developmental work in a particular region is realized by a foundation of the church or possibly entirely outside the churches through local NGO 's, again certain risks arise. The presence of a relatively large amount of money and the existence of attractive positions in the foundation or NGO may draw the best people away from the churches and thus indirectly weaken the work of the churches. Sometimes a church leader/pastor will be the director of a Christian NGO simply to earn a living for his family or obtain a better income.
- In short, in developmental work by northern Christian NGOs with churches and NGOs in the South, it is important to make sure that the developmental work is realized in good cooperation and coordination with the churches in order to strengthen and not undermine each other's mission. The own diaconal work of the churches should be supported and not pushed away by the work of (in terms of effectiveness, stronger) NGO 's. In the case of co-operation, there should always be good consultation in which the Southern church and the Northern partner jointly make decisions and set priorities. These should reflect the objectives of both. When diaconal work of (local) churches is supported by an NGO it is important that it is not limited to the members of their own religious communities but is offered on the basis of criteria that equally apply to everyone in the community.
- A nice, relatively recent example of good cooperation between northern NGOs and local communities is the Umoja program of Tear Fund (and Tear Netherlands).¹⁷ In that program, also known as CCMO, religious communities are stimulated to work from their own vision and opportunities and the NGO is only supportive and does not come with its own program.

Negative aspects

The more positive attention to the significance of religion in DC cooperation should not prevent us to realize that religion can have harmful effects on communities and lives of individuals. This is most clearly the case where religions are used - perhaps more accurately stated, misused – to justify violence against people of other faiths. But sometimes religions are also used to justify

¹⁷ http://www.tearfund.org/en/about_us/what_we_do_and_where/initiatives/umoja/ ; see also <http://www.tear.nl/waarom%20werken%20via%20kerken>

ethically unacceptable socio-cultural situations. For example the caste system in India, based on Hinduism, degrades many millions to 'untouchables' who actually barely have rights even though the system has no legal basis anymore. Incidentally, it should be realized that many ethically problematic situations that are sometimes defended with religious arguments, often have a cultural rather than a clearly religious background. One can think of various aspects of the male-female relationship, e.g. the subordination of women in several societies, and of the phenomenon of selective abortion of girls in India and China, from different cultural and political reasons (Mosher, 2010; Pande 2010).

Later in this paper a method to deal with religious and cultural differences will briefly be discussed. Before we come to that, I will first elaborate on the meaning of the Christian faith for development cooperation.

II.2 Development cooperation and the Christian faith

Up to now, we have spoken about religion in a generic sense. Religiosity as a feature of human existence and religion as the organizing principle of groups of people. These approaches provide insight into the way in which religious beliefs function in the life and communities of people and how religions manifest themselves in culture and society. But in the real life of people there are no generic religions but only concrete people with specific religious beliefs, experiences, practices and organizations. And those ideas, experiences, practices and organizations differ. This brings us back to the question posed at the end of paragraph 2: does it matter how human beings respond to the challenges presented by life and in particular by what religion they are inspired and guided in this response? In other words, does it matter how 'development' takes shape?

From the arguments put forward so far, it will be obvious that a reply to this question can never be given from an objective, neutral position. A relativistic position that would argue that all the answers are equivalent, is itself a 'religiously' influenced view. The 'response' that a person or a community gives, can only ever be justified in the light of a view on what is considered to be determining reality, so from the religion one holds. Also the ethical values to be pursued according to that answer, can ultimately only be justified from the religion and culture that shape and direct that 'answer'.

This also applies to the Christian religion. This originated as a response to the claims of the living God. These are revealed in different forms. First, God's self-revelation in the history of the patriarchs, Moses, Israel and the prophets. Then His revelation in Scripture that testifies thereof. Then decisively in his Son Jesus Christ and in the Scriptures that testify of Him. Furthermore, also in the history of Israel and the Christian church in which He is present as the Sjechinah, as the Holy Spirit. In short, God reveals Himself in His Word and in the history of his people. But God's address also comes to mankind in creation. This is the work of God's hands, originally made as a shaping of His thoughts in a pristine order. Christian ethics, that reflects on the moral good response of people to God's claim, therefore has creation, (salvation) history and human experience in it, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit as sources. These are not equivalent. The Word is primary and authoritative. God's call in His Word, creation and history can be understood at most partially by human beings in themselves (cf. Romans 1: 18-23, 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23). The illumination and renewing of people's hearts and minds is required. This is the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word.

It is good to realize that the Word of God comes to us in a certain historical and cultural form. The events and accounts described in the Bible refer to a particular culture and are written in a particular language. This is not to say that the meaning of the gospel might be limited to a particular culture. The contents of the Word of God is beyond every culture and concerns at the same time every culture in a decisive manner. But God takes human life so seriously that He has revealed himself in historically and culturally specific forms and stories. That demonstrates that the Word wants to manifest itself in our lives in historically and culturally specific forms and contexts. This is what Christian development organizations are trying to achieve: that the message of the Gospel that addresses people in their in their full existence will be given shape the lives of people in all their aspects. But it also means that the embodiments of our response to God's call are also historically and culturally specific in their formulation and shaping and thus never above criticism based on the Bible.

Church and Theology in international relations

A lot has been written about a Christian vision of DC has been written and a summary of the most important Dutch publications on it is beyond the scope of this note. However, it is good to call to mind here that the post-modernization also had implications for the study of theology and the position of the until recently powerful position of the churches in the rich global North.

Academic theology in these countries, with its search for doctrinal systems to be rationally justified, has been stamped by modernism. This has led to many valuable insights. And though in academic settings rational analyses of theological reasoning and claims to truth continue to central, neither post-modern man -nor premodern mankind for that matter- asks primarily for a rational justification of a claim to truth. People in postmodern culture are primarily seeking a life changing event, the experience of *belonging* and meaning. In any case, in recent decades there has been increasing awareness the 'western' academic theology, orthodox and liberal, is also strongly influenced by culture and context. From the 60s of last century non-Western theologians and churches started to realize that the 'Western' (intended primarily Western European and North American) academic theology is not a universal standard for practicing theology. It became to be realized more and more that that theology bears the stamp of modernity and embodies an involvement with a process of secularization; also, for example an orthodox, rational theological opposition to secularism, is form of a processing secularization. These are cultural developments that have not taken place in other parts of the world, at least not in the same way. The churches in other parts of the world that not rarely grow strongly, practice theology in a different cultural context and form a different perspective. In some contexts, the gospel is understood foremost as a message of liberation from the (spiritual) powers in this world, and not first of all as a message of forgiveness and justification. Understandably, the emphasis on contextual theology went together with the development of a variety of theologies.¹⁸

In addition, within global Christianity the position of the churches in the rich countries of the world is significantly changed. Numerically Christianity in the rich countries, especially in Europe, decreased substantially for decades. Simultaneously, the churches in many Southern countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, in India and in China, have experienced a sometimes

¹⁸ The African theologian JO Kombo mentioned alone for Africa the following forms of theology: African enculturation theology, black theology, liberation theology, African women's theology, evangelical theology, reconstruction theology; Kombo, 2003.

stormy growth, though about the latter country there are no clear statistics. In Latin America, the Protestant/evangelical churches grew strongly, often at the expense of (nominal) members of the Roman Catholic Church. This means that at least numerically and also regarding the spiritual dynamics the centre of gravity of Christianity has shifted from the northern to the southern hemisphere. Even though in terms of financial resources the North it is still the centre of gravity. During the world mission conference in Edinburgh in 1910, by far the larger part of the Christian Church existed in the northern hemisphere. Among the mostly European and American participants lived an optimism about "reaching the entire world with the Gospel in our generation."¹⁹ In contrast, in the world mission conference in 2010, again in Edinburgh, many people from the southern countries participated and had an important input in the program. This reciprocity is also reflected in the joint statement issued after the conference: .
"... we are called as communities of faith to mission from everywhere to everywhere."²⁰
All this makes clear that a reflection on DS and on the place of religion in it in general and the Christian religion in particular, can no longer be a purely northern affair. Worldwide we are called as Christians to constantly search for formulations and forms of living the Word of God in daily life that are tailored to the specific situation of people in rapidly changing conditions. Without denying - sometimes basic - differences, it is good to be open to sharing and learning from each other.

Key notions

With this in mind, I want to present some general Christian notions which could provide an initial framework for a Christian view of DC, as a start for a broader debate.²¹ In this I use the four focal points of the history of salvation as a structuring principle.

First, *the creation motive* . This emphasizes the unique value and equality of all people as created in the image of God. God the Creator is also the God of the people who holds their leaders accountable (cf. Psalm 82). God has created the world in an ordered way (for example, the plants and animals according to their nature). This requires respect and care for human beings and creatures in their individuality; core value here is stewardship. This motif represents a commitment to doing justice to creatures and creation as a whole and it opposes any exploitation and destruction of God's creation and any absolutization of something of created reality. So, no worshipping of wealth, health or even of nature itself. But neither of spiritual powers in the world, which originally are also part of the created order but that when they are worshipped, always lead to a form of slavery.

Second, *the motive of evil and brokenness* in the lives of people and in reality. These ultimately have religious roots, namely the broken relationship with God through unbelief and disobedience. Therefore evil, injustice and suffering ultimately are problems that cannot be overcome with science and technology in themselves, nor with laws and regulations and good

¹⁹ "Out of the 1400 Participants, 17 came from the global south"; see <http://www.oikoumene.org/en/who-are-we/organization-structure/consultative-bodies/world-mission-and-evangelism/history.html>

²⁰ www.edinburgh2010.org/fileadmin/files/edinburgh2010/files/conference_docs/Edinburgh%202010%20Common%20Call%20with%20explanation.pdf. This shift of the center of gravity of Christianity to the south was also reflected in the World Conference of the Lausanne movement that took place in October 2010 in Cape Town; see <http://www.lausanne.org/cape-town-2010>

²¹ For the sake of clarity, I continue to speak of development cooperation (DC), even though we see a tendency that this type of work is referred to as International Cooperation.

institutions. The Christian faith is anti-utopian. This implies modesty regarding our understanding -we all know in part- and possibilities. And it implies an awareness that social and economic changes, as well as the introduction of new technical possibilities, always involve a price and that appropriate norms and standards are required to keep that price as low as possible. Sources for the standards DC and the application of techniques should observe, are the Bible and church, creation and history. For specific situations in the world today the relevant standards are not always evident, partly due to the brokenness in the creation and of the limitations of our understanding. Reaching an ethical judgment on desired activities and developments in legal, political and social terms is therefore a quest in which we seek to understand the concrete situation as well as possible in the light of all the available knowledge and to interpret it in the light of Scripture and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. In such a quest it may happen that several people in a concrete situation on the basis of the same principles still come to a different conclusion.

The recognition of the reality of brokenness and evil in our world does not mean that a Christian worldview is pessimistic. The motive of *liberation or salvation* by Christ means that created reality is fundamentally placed on the road to the realization of its original destination. But now as God's gift. In principle Jesus has overcome the powers of evil and the wickedness in and outside mankind. By His Spirit His kingdom and its righteousness is given shape in the lives of those who are united to Him by faith, personally and as a community (congregation) and through them also in the wider society. Core value in this context is love, not so much as a feeling but as an attitude that focuses on justice and shalom in all relationships. Acknowledgment of His kingship moves people. People are called to put themselves on that road and to make something visible of that justice and shalom in their work. Then by His Spirit wonderful things can sometimes be experienced. Yet, in doing so we will also be confronted with our own weaknesses and what we do will often remain at piecemeal. That makes us all the more long and look forward to the breakthrough of God's reign.

Finally, the motive of the *expectation* of the coming of the Kingdom of God in fullness. This faith and hope inspire, motivate and raise expectation! Injustice, violence and suffering will not have the final word! Eventually God will connect again goodness and truth with power and there will be no place to evil and falsehood. At the same time this motive makes our efforts relative in the sense that the coming of the kingdom of peace and justice ultimately does not depend on us, even though we are called to acknowledge and serve the King of that kingdom as our king. That protects against rigidity and fanaticism.

II.3 Cooperation

What does taking a clear Christian position mean for our positioning in the wider society? In a reflection on this question it can be helpful to distinguish three ways in which Christians and Christian organizations can behave in society. These are also three models in which we can see the relationship between Gospel and Culture. These three relations are: the Gospel as improvement of society, as the crisis of society, and as the renewal of the life of the believers, personally, as church and in their social relationships. These three relationships can be connected with three ways in which the Church (as an institution or in its members) can

participate in society and towards the government. We use these three relationships and ways of participating in more detail.

1) Improve

In the first relationship Christians, alongside others, attempt to bring about improvements in society so that the values and standards of God's Word will be better reflected in social relations and people's lives. They try to counter injustice, for example in wrong laws and disturbed relationships, and to alleviate suffering of people, even where the direct cause cannot be removed. This can be pursued through politics but also through private initiative, for example through assistance and social change, and through diaconal activities of churches. What is good and beautiful and true has ultimately finds its source in God, Creator and Sustainer of all (Phil. 4:7-9). Any time those values are promoted, a glimpse of His government and grace is shining. With respect to this relation one can think of all sorts of institutions and professional practices in which Christians "seek the peace of the city" (cf. Jeremiah 29). This means an serving attitude in which the specific-Christian influence often is not made explicit. It may nevertheless be an important contribution to maintaining or promoting humanity in society and as such be a manifestation of God's kingship.

In the context of this relationship the church could fulfil two tasks.

a) First, the church as an institution can get in touch with the government to promote the good of society and play its own role in that. For example, with regard to the way governments deal with the HIV and AIDS problem, e.g. the awareness-raising, prevention, treatment, prevention of stigmatization etc. In this context it may belong to the task of the church to contradict cultural and social prejudices that harm people. For example, the idea that AIDS is a punishment of God for a sinful lifestyle, implying that one should not bother to provide care to people with AIDS. Or the discrimination of people with a different religion or culture or the justification of violence against women or against homosexual people. Opposing such practices need not stop the church to analyse problems from her own perspective and ethical position. But it requires wisdom to find the right time and manner.

b) Secondly, the Church has the task of equipping its members to live as Christians in society and fulfil their own profession as a calling from God. "That they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16).

2) Crisis

The second relation concerns the proclamation of the Gospel with words taken from the Bible. The Gospel that brings the lives of every person and every society in a crisis by making clear that this life is not as it is meant to be and, if it would depend on human beings alone, never will be. The crisis in which the Gospel brings, aims to lead people to repentance and faith in Christ and to following Him. This approach emphasizes the radical nature of sin, the corruption of creation and the fundamental gap between all human morality and the Kingdom of God. This can also lead to the experience of pain in partaking in the injustice and brokenness in life, including that of Christians.

Also in this perspective the task of the Church could be twofold (in addition to what is mentioned above).

a) In some cases, the Church will speak prophetically against government and society. This may not be about issues in the daily political business. It must, in the light of the Gospel, concern

matters of principle, for example, freedom of conscience or serious attacks on fundamental human rights such as the persecution of Jews in the Nazi era. More recent examples are the abandonment of the basic legal protection of all citizens, for example in a situation of ethnic conflict, and persecution because of religion or inadequate response to epidemics or other disasters. It is important that in letting hear God's call to repentance and His instructions for life, the church emphasises the liberating character of the Gospel and not just the normative. It will be clear that the church should be cautious with such messages and that its power is greater when it is supported by many churches.

b) The church, at least part of it, also asks of herself and of her members a conversion of being internally oriented or self-centred too much. The Gospel of guilt and grace, of faith, repentance and deliverance, of acquittal and service, is a gospel for people that fail. This means that the church and its members have the task to look for people that fail, at least in the eyes of society. In other words, this task means that the church is looking for ways and forms to achieve those in the margins of society. In the big cities in many countries in the world all kinds of churches are trying out new forms of being a missionary-diaconal church trying to reach out to people, and they should!

3) *Renewal*

The third relation is about examples of *Christian life*, about practices in which, in an imperfect and tentative way, something becomes visible of the salvation of God and His wholesome intentions. Central in this model is the belief that in the Kingdom of God, creation and culture will be redeemed and renewed, also to its material side. Salvation does not mean giving up the creation and cultural reality, but its renewal (cf. Revelation 21: 24-26). This implies that the original meaning will become manifest. This requires that life, all relationships and all creatures are related to God and so find their destination. The Church and Christians are called to already pursue this in their lives, even though it will always remain piecemeal. In this vein, for instance, knowledge and skills, forms of medicine and care, but also art and techniques, e.g. music and musical instruments and other liturgical forms from various cultures, can be transformed by the Gospel and become instruments in the service of the Kingdom of God and so for the true good of people. A contemporary example in the health care in several Western countries is the so-called hospice care, integral palliative care in the last stages of life in which dedicated care together with high quality technologies if necessary, including pastoral care and including support by volunteers, tries to provide the best possible end of life. For against the trends in those countries this form of care demonstrates that people are worthwhile also in situations in which they have become 'useless' to society.

This relationship manifests a missionary-diaconal attitude:

a) There is primarily a task here for the *individual Christians* and *Christian social organizations*. In care and welfare, , in education and culture in DC and economic activity, with special attention to people in the margins, Christians are called to give expression in specific ways to the meaning of the Gospel for people's personal and communal life. In the context of this model, in contrast to the first model, it is not so much a matter of incremental improvements in existing general social structures, but of Christian initiatives in which Christians try to give shape to the meaning of the gospel in a particular social context. Not from a self-sufficient pretence but from a humble faith-inspired intention.

b) Also for the church as an institution we can identify tasks.

- First, we mention the task of equipping the church members in all kinds of training activities.

- Secondly one can think of how the diaconal work of churches operates, primarily in the local church itself. Is the church a creative, contrasting minority that in its very existence and functioning already fulfils a mirror function for the broader society entailing at the same time an invitation to join? A community in which other values predominate than in the world around? Where respect and prestige do not depend on social position and performance or possession and wearing designer clothes. In which spiritual consumption and good feelings are not decisive for the members but the furthering of the church's mission and the good of people, etc.

- In the thirdly place the diaconal efforts of the church can be mentioned, in the sense of providing assistance and human labour in social projects in the area; for example, organizing a food bank, or courses that help people to provide for their maintenance, or by assisting people that threaten to fall (back) in extreme poverty.

Conversation with people of other faiths

In this paper we first examined religion in general, as something that characterizes human existence. Subsequently this is placed in the context of development cooperation. Then the generic approach is elaborated for the Christian faith and the relationship of Christians, Christian communities and organizations with the surrounding culture is examined.

In the practice of DC also Christian organizations will often meet and cooperate with people and organizations who live and work from other faith traditions. The conversations with one another can take place in a variety of contexts and degrees of intensity. Functional, business consultations, discussions on common programmes such as setting up a health system or promoting land rights for women, or intensive substantive discussions on view of development and human life and the world.

It is important to always keep in mind the context and the objective of such encounters. Is the goal to reach consensus with respect to a form of cooperation? Then the presentation of one's own views or beliefs or the intention to convince others about one's fundamental beliefs is not a fruitful approach. People with different views can agree on specific programmes. At the same time it is important that in the consensus participants do not feel they are asked to go against their basic beliefs but the consensus is in accordance with everyone's faith and principles.

A conversation can also focus on mutual understanding with a view to good relations between groups of people in society. In such a conversation a personal testimony can have a legitimate place. In such a conversation a Christian may have the desire that other participants will be receptive to the gospel, but this is not the primary goal in that situation. This distinction is important because people often feel very well from what attitude other persons participate in a meeting and in an open consultation will not appreciate to be the 'object' of conversion efforts of others. That would backfire, anyway.

Finally, it is of course also possible to organize meetings and talks which are clearly trying to convince one another of the truth and the value of one's own faith. Even then the dialogue can be used as a method, but the stakes are not just consensus and not only understanding, but change. The awareness that ultimately only the Holy Spirit can bring somebody to faith in Jesus

Christ can protect against a pushy nervousness that would lead to a lack of respect for others in the conversation. It is good to remember that respect for someone as a human being is not the same as respect for his opinion or belief, but an out of hand blunt rejection of someone's views can certainly be experienced as a personal rejection.

Summery and conclusion

The central question in this paper is: What does it mean for development cooperation in general, and for development cooperation by Christians in particular, that the great majority of the world population adheres to a religion, and as a consequence this will have impact on international transcultural and transreligious cooperation in combating poverty and injustice? We summarize the major findings in a number of statements.

a. It is inherent in humanity that human beings hold explicit or implicit basic beliefs about what is considered to be ultimate reality, entailing views and attitudes about the nature and structure of reality, mankind and the meaning of life and the 'good life'. In this anthropological sense everyone is 'religious'.

b. Also in development cooperation a form of religion in this anthropological sense is always operative. Each contradistinction between supposedly neutral, 'evidence based' or professional practice performance by non-religious people and faith-informed, subjective practices of 'religious' people is false. This insight puts everyone who participates in debates about 'development' and who works in development cooperation on the same plane and in the same position (level playing field).

c. Religion in development cooperation usually appears in the form of so-called Faith-based organizations (FBO's), where 'Faith' is associated with an organized religion. The term FBO is an umbrella term covering a wide variety of types of organizations ranging from religiously inspired foundations for development assistance and cooperation, to religious institutions, like churches and mosques, that are primarily dedicated to the organisation of specifically religious activities. In development cooperation it is important that the various types of FBO's respect and give space to everyone's individuality.

d. About FBO's there is a growing body of literature. As features for FBO's are mentioned : rooted in populations, reach the poorest, are generally trusted by (groups of) the population, offer their own view of development as an alternative to the secular discourse, and motivate to action.

e. This does not deny that organized manifestations of religions can also play a negative role in the pursuit of certain broadly supported goals, for example by providing a basis for opposition and enmity or by promoting inequality between people, or between men and women.

f. From the perspective of the Christian faith some key convictions are presented that are important for development cooperation. These are: The dignity and equality of all people regardless of age, ability, gender, ethnicity, culture, etc.; the severity of evil and harm in human life and in the world, that affects everyone to at least some extent, which impels us to be modest and renounce utopian ideals; the reality of reconciliation, renewal and victory over evil and death through Christ that starts to get shape in the lives of Christ's followers and effects the

wider society, particularly in giving attention to vulnerable people; the hope of world to be given by God in which righteousness dwells, that inspires and helps to persevere when work seems fruitless.

g. In the way Christians and Christian organizations can behave in society, three models are distinguished: the Gospel as improvement of society, as crisis of society and as a renewal of the life of the believers, personally, as a church and in their social connections. These three forms are seen as complementary.

In short, ignoring religion in development work is unfruitful and even counterproductive, because it does not take seriously religious people - the vast majority of the world's population. Taking religion seriously means that cooperation with people in other countries starts with meeting one another and exchange beliefs, views and hopes, in which there is openness for everything that people deem valuable. Only on this basis and from their own Christian understanding Prisma members want to provide aid, support people and cooperate in development.

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