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## **Religion and development: contributions to a new discourse**

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## RELIGION AND DEVELOPMENT: contributions to a new discourse

Wim van Binsbergen

This is an extensive review article of the collective volume entitled *Religion and development: Towards an integrated approach* (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers, eds, 1988). The author assesses that book's claim of presenting a new paradigm based on the unification of two social-science disciplines: approaching the sociology of development with the analytical tools of the anthropology of religion. A number of fundamental objections are raised. Given the institutional and political context of scholarly production, the relation between the two social-science disciplines cannot be one of subordination. And being a social product itself, religious anthropology cannot place itself on an objective, meta-social pedestal. The political economy and organization sociology of development are underplayed in Quarles van Ufford and Schoffeleers's approach, and so is the state. Part of their collective work is not about 'religion as development' but about an underanalyzed residual category of 'religion as an alternative to development'. Yet their view of 'development as religious discourse' addresses fundamental dilemmas of production, alienation and north-south relations in scholarship today, and for that reason deserves to be taken seriously. Arguing that this approach could be further developed in the direction of popular culture and endogenous models of development (i.e. local agendas of desired change), and that it throws new light on the developmental relevance of cults of the land, the author advocates further empirical studies to be undertaken on its basis.

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

On the occasion of the retirement of Professor J.W. Schoorl as professor of the sociology of development at the Free University, Amsterdam, the members of the department of cultural anthropology and sociology of development produced a *Festschrift*, entitled *Religion and development: towards an integrated approach*, the editors are Philip Quarles van Ufford, a development sociologist, and Matthew Schoffeleers, an anthropologist of religion (Quarles van Ufford & Schoffeleers 1988).

The book is excellently produced, carefully copy-edited, and is reasonably free of the homespun Anglo-Dutch which is the hallmark of academic publications in the Netherlands. As far as form is concerned, the reader can only complain about the absence of indexes of subjects and authors, and about the fact that the few pages specifically dedicated to Schoorl's own, impressive contribution to the establishment and growth of Third World studies in the Netherlands<sup>2</sup> are the only part of the book to appear in Dutch and therefore inaccessible to an anglophone readership.

But then, the book as a whole is not about Schoorl's work and its impact. Most of the fourteen contributions, including the editors' ambitious introduction, make hardly any reference to Schoorl's publications<sup>3</sup>. His impact has been as much in the field of academic leadership and administration – creating and maintaining the conditions under which his department has formed a productive and congenial productive base for scores of Dutch scholars – as it has been in the field of scholarly production. Acknowledging this fact, the editors decided to present primarily that organizational inheritance to the wider world: a broad panorama of the department's research in progress, organized around the theme of 'religion, power and development' that has formed its major focus throughout the 1980s, in a way that particularly reflects Schoorl's inspiration. Around this focus, the book's aim is to bring together, for cross-pollination

and even amalgamation, the two main descriptive, analytical and theoretical orientations available in the department: cultural anthropology and the sociology of modernization.

In the editors' words:

'Exchange of insights and the growing willingness to communicate led the staff [of the department] to move towards a theoretical perspective able to accommodate the various disciplinary interests in ways beneficial to each. Some of our work is presented in this book. We hope that it will interest kindred minds uncomfortable with the rift between anthropology and development sociology and willing to work towards their reintegration' (p. vii)

Meanwhile the book's topic, focusing on religion, suggests that it commemorates not only Schoorl's contribution but also Matthew Schoffeleers', who as programme coordinator has been a major driving force behind the department's successful research programme, and who as reader (1975-1979), subsequently professor of the anthropology of religion has done a great deal to raise the department's religious studies to international standards. Among other things, this edited collection is one stanza in Schoffeleers' own's swan's song: he took an early retirement from the department in 1988, but has since taken up a part-time chair in Utrecht. Meanwhile André Droogers succeeded him in the Free University chair of religious anthropology.

In stature, scope and physical perfection the book does justice to these two fine scholars, and to the research efforts they have shared with their colleagues in the department. The twelve regionally-based case studies cover four continents (North America and Australia being the only exceptions), with a concluding thirteenth contribution on the succession of dominant idioms in the study of women and development. The introduction seeks to cover the entire history of the anthropology of religion and of the sociology of development, as a mere steppingstone towards the integrative perspective on religion and development on which the collection revolves. All this makes the collection more than just a book: it is a proud summing-up of an aggregate hundred years of research, and a programme for presumably a similar volume of research efforts in years to come. The book makes repeated reference to the difficulties that beset current academic work in the Netherlands: funding, the burden of teaching and administrative commitments (e.g. p. vii, p. 51 n. 1). If this collection is more than just a book, it is particularly a meta-scholarly political statement, meant to publicize and justify the departments' research during the 1980s, and thus to secure continuing staff establishment and research funding for the imminent future. This poses a dilemma for the reviewer, who is supposed to assess scholarly merit rather than meddle with strategies of academic survival.

#### A unifying theoretical perspective?

The book's preface, introduction, and blurb are so insistent that a reviewer simply cannot refrain from assessing the extent to which the book lives up to the expectations kindled there:

'Religion is a crucial factor wherever people define, initiate, adopt, oppose or circumvent development processes. In virtue of this, development activities and the responses to them are like a dialogue carried on in code. To learn how and why religion plays its varied roles, to understand the discourse, to become sensitive to the human dimension in social transformation, cultural anthropology and the sociology of development should join forces.

Moreover, an integrated approach in terms of religion will correct [*sic*] the self-awareness of the two disciplines, and put them on the way towards fruitful rapprochement. This, at any rate, is the thought that inspired a five-year research pro-

gramme at the Free University, Amsterdam. It is the contention also of the editors of the present volume. The collection of essays offered here is meant to demonstrate its truth'. (blurb text on back cover)

The central focus of the book, therefore, in the editors' perception, is on *religion*: religion as a touchstone, to measure and understand hitherto underplayed cultural and symbolic aspects of development or the resistance to development – and religion as an all-encompassing category under which even the idea of development, the organizational efforts clustering upon this idea and the specific activities undertaken in the name of development, can be subsumed:

'to get at the religious depth-dimension of development studies and people's reactions to development activities' (p. 1).  
and

'treating development studies and activities as a quasi-religious phenomenon' (ibid.)

In both perspectives it is religion which, as a supposedly more profound and primary concept, is alleged to help us understand development – and scarcely the other way round. In their desire to integrate anthropology and the sociology of development, both editors, each with his feet firmly in either discipline, yet seem to agree that fundamentally the interdisciplinary relation should be one *not of coordination but of subordination*. The anthropology of religion is presented as being eminently equipped to understand the rhetorics, power games and legitimating tendencies of the development idiom in its impact on North Atlantic and particularly on Third World societies; and this should be so, in this editors' opinion, because development is said to have in common with the more obviously religious phenomena that it upholds (and this allegedly suffices to define these phenomena as instances of *religion* in the first place) two images of the world: one this-worldly, immanent, the tearful valley of everyday misery, – and one other-worldly, transcendent, ideal, after which the former should be modelled.

'By means of acquainting themselves with the experiences and analyses of the developed world – as enshrined in the latter's development models – the inhabitants of developing countries are supposed to obtain a clearer idea of the problems facing them and the possibilities of overcoming these problems. These models are salvific in that they contain not only a promise but also a prescription to make that promise come true. The development experts are the 'priests' (Berger 1974), who mediate the two worlds' (p. 19)

The editors' argument on this central point, based on a 1982 essay by Mary Douglas where she makes a point about religion as involving transcendence, and about bureaucracy as a form of transcendence (Douglas 1982), is far from elaborate – after just over a page it rushes on to discuss the present collection's various contributions in terms of this and related perspectives<sup>4</sup>. Although this review article examines the editors' overall perspective rather than the individual chapters, below I shall briefly return to these and examine the extent to which they converge with this view. But let us first have a closer look at the editors' judgement of Paris, which makes them attribute such great relevance to religious anthropology for the sociology of development, without attempting to make this relationship balanced and symmetrical.

My doubts on this point are twofold: first on grounds referring to the organization, politics and economics of the social sciences, and secondly on epistemological grounds.

## The political context of departmental research

Some major underlying incentives for the attempt to integrate anthropology and the sociology of development remain outside the scope of the editors' explicit argument. They derive largely from the meta-academic political realm of recent Dutch academic policy at the national level. From the late 1970s onwards, Dutch researchers in the social sciences and the humanities have been told to give up their fragmented individual research, to bundle their efforts, establish linkages within their departments as well as at the inter-departmental and inter-university level, work towards integrated research programmes with a common theme if not with a shared theoretical and methodological perspective. And with the development idiom pervading the political scene and public opinion in the Netherlands from the 1970s onwards, funding success in the social sciences and humanities has become more and more related to the extent to which a project or a programme manages to assert an explicit development component.

This is why the editors should go to such pains to argue that, in their book and in the research programme that volume reflects, the relationship between anthropology and the sociology of development should be so harmonious and integrative. Thus, the 'alarming' disciplinary heterogeneity of the programme could be transformed into a very strategic division of labour. The sociology of development would be capable of providing, automatically, the development component to whatever research undertaken within the programme; while the anthropology of religion would live up to the expectations of theoretical and existential profundity, conjuring up the 'founding fathers' of the discipline if not of the social sciences in general, meanwhile offering us, in the perspective of 'development as religious discourse', such relativist distance and ideological critique of development as might satisfy even the most entrenched anti-development purist of academic production.

Yet, in an ideal world of relatively plentiful research funding and of a national government that takes pride in the academic work being conducted at its universities, one should be able to admit that the growing-apart of sub-disciplines and, subsequently, disciplines is only the most predictable of results of an increase of scale, intensifying rates of production, increasing bureaucratization and professionalization, in academic life over the past fifty years. The editors tend to hold a idealist view of the various disciplines as revolving on a set of leading ideas and founding fathers – although they do seem to realize, at other points in their argument, that these leading ideas are subject to fashionable paradigmatic changes (e.g. p. 12), and although their own eclectic and cursory treatment of such founding fathers as Marx, Weber, and Durkheim suggests that these names, far from defining an unequivocal body of ideas and paradigms, may be invoked to back up a great many essentially different social science approaches (cf. my note 4). Elsewhere however, applying Mart Bax seminal paradigm of the *religious regime*<sup>5</sup>, the editors do admit that the two disciplines might rather be seen as 'inter-related regimes' (p. 18), as *both ideological and organizational conglomerations involved in an internal and external power struggle*. This aspect might have been developed further to render the treatment of the relation between the two disciplines less static and idealistic. More in general, closer assessment of the economics, the organizational sociology, and the internal politics, of academic production – against more of an awareness of the relation between academic production and wider political and ideological structures in modern society – is missed in this argument that seeks to define and to alter the relationship between religious anthropology and the sociology of development. They are simply two disciplines which, on the contemporary academic scene, have carved out substantially different 'ecological' niches, with

substantially different relationships to meta-academic idioms of legitimation and political support in the wider society. The obvious alternative solution, of divorcing the two disciplines and breaking up the Procrustean bed of the joint research programme, is not even explicitly contemplated. The specific set-up and political situation of the department which produced this volume appears to have persuaded the editors not to problematize their desire to integrate and amalgamate the two disciplines involved<sup>6</sup>.

## A note of caution

The epistemological argument is simple. The subordinative relationship between the sociology of development and religious anthropology as advocated by the editors reminds one in a very disconcerting way of a similar subordination which has too long haunted the social sciences: the pretention that our conceptual and methodological apparatus as social researchers is *not* some relatively ephemeral social product wrought with myriad limitations springing from the make-up of our society, its history of global expansion, and from our specific academic relations of production – and as such essentially comparable with the social phenomena we seek study with that apparatus<sup>7</sup> – but instead constitutes an absolute (*transcendent?*) touchstone for these other social phenomena, and existing at a different, typically higher, plane of existence (of objectivity, of illumination) from the latter. In the form of an equation:

$$\begin{array}{l} \text{religious anthropology: sociology of development} = \text{social science apparatus:} \\ \text{society under study} \end{array}$$

Perhaps the hope of having access, as a privileged, intellectually better-equipped minority, to such a higher plane of reality, constitutes an essential element in all specialized intellectual production. But surely, from here it is only one step to calling also the social sciences, and *a fortiori* the anthropology of religion, a form of religion *tout court*. Here again the officiants (the scientists), the generation and manipulation of symbols, the production of value and patterns of evaluation on that basis, and the organizational projection through which the value thus produced can be turned into societal and political power. If religious anthropology is to teach us how to understand the more profound aspects of development and counter-development, where is the ulterior analytical framework that helps us to understand what, after all, is religious anthropology? Can the subordination be reversed?

It is significant that the editors do not explicitly invite us to explore, symmetrically, the extent to which a sociology-of-development perspective might illuminate our religious anthropology. Yet this is precisely what many of the contributions they brought together succeed in doing; here I think of Hans Tennekes on modernization processes in contemporary Dutch Protestantism (chapter 2), Joop van Kessel & André Droogers' contribution on the sociology of development and the significance of religion in Latin America (chapter 3), and Philip Quarles van Ufford's piece on the Dutch Reformed Church mission in Central Java, 1896–1970 (chapter 4). Is, after all, the relationship coordinative rather than subordinative, and are we not in fact looking for a meta-science that can throw light on both? Philosophy? Sociology of knowledge? Societal praxis? *Development?*

Considering what a modern, soul-searching anthropology has painfully learned about the nature of the anthropological enquiry in field-work, about the transcultural encounter which

defeats and renders ridiculous all attempts at social scientific imposition in terms of the subordinate model (cf van Binsbergen & Doornbos 1987), – considering the growing awareness that, in general, the production of scholarly knowledge on the Third World should take the form of a dialogue rather than a North Atlantic monologue (van Binsbergen 1988a), I am tempted to suggest that a real touchstone of either discipline does not lie in any of the entrenched academic disciplines within our intellectual horizon. It lies in the eminently practical attempt to break through that horizon and to allow ourselves to be guided by the pre-scientific transactions, expectations and evaluations as will be engendered between ourselves and that mystical category of 'the people' – be they the members of our research population in some Third World setting, or the development experts with whom we associate ourselves (without necessarily sharing their idiom of redemption, but neither explaining away that idiom as merely instrumental for power aspirations), or even the fellow-members of our department in their day-to-day attempts at academic production and survival.

This concern is in fact central to many of the contributions in this book (it is most articulate in van Kessel & Droogers' paper), and turns out to have inspired the editors in a more courageous way than their own pronouncements in the introduction would suggest. It is here particularly that *Religion and development* opens up a new discourse.

#### Development and religion: beyond intellectual irrelevance and alienation

For strangely enough, when we subtract the meta-academic implications from the editors' argument, the concept of 'development as religious discourse' does ring true to a considerable extent, casting light on the moral fervour, the normative aspirations (sometimes bordering on moral blackmail vis-à-vis the sceptics – not to believe in development is the modern heresy *par excellence*) and the redemptive claims that many of us are familiar with in the context of a development idiom, as used by either North Atlantic experts, Third-World recipients, or the Third World elites who mediate between the two. This 'new piety', with all its Eurocentric and neo-imperialist overtones, has managed to captivate a considerable portion of current political, ideological, religious and academic discourse in contemporary society.

Here it becomes clear that it was not just for opportunist, university-political reasons that the editors sought to integrate a theoretically-inspired religious anthropology and a sociology of development which, critically or naively, starts out from the popular common-sense concept of development. When they speak of 'development as religious discourse', it is not only *other people's* religious discourse (which could then be intellectually appropriated and taken to pieces by religious anthropology), but also their *very own*: as Christians no doubt, but also – and this is more relevant in an academic context – as conscious participants in a global society, seeking to lend meaning to their intellectual production, and to discharge their intellectual responsibility by applying themselves to the conditions of the poor, the oppressed and the suffering.

The development perspective is analyzed as religious discourse, not primarily in order to debunk and expose it in its intercontinental economic and political ramifications: where it does generate power for North Atlantic interests, for their salaried expert personnel and for associated elites in the Third World. There is in fact, as I shall point out below, too little attention to these aspects of development in the present book. But what does come out in a stimulating manner is the attempt to explore the extent to which we as researchers can share in the

development discourse, deepen it without destroying it, trying to make it more effective and more attentive to the voice of the ordinary Third World people we, as anthropologists (including religious anthropologists) have such direct, intimate access to. This aspect of the book amounts to an exhortation to use our scholarly insights in order to better understand the development idiom, as well as the complex, too often ignored responses of the people at the grass-roots level, whose symbolically-coded expressions tell us, more than questionnaire surveys can do, about how they experience their present conditions and the planned change they are subjected to, and what sort of betterment they envisage themselves.

Here the book begins to suggest attractive, sophisticated alternatives to the current type of development-oriented research. The latter, especially in the context of consultancies, too often takes the interests and preoccupations of the commissioning agencies for granted, and shuns fundamental theoretical and politically sensitive questions. It is particularly important that such alternatives as suggested in *Religion and development* could be pursued in research at Third World universities, where because of the paucity of academic research funds and pressure of routine work, consultancy research is increasingly the only, intellectually barren, option available to local scholars.

Despite the shortcomings of their introductory *tour de force*, the editors therefore merit praise for exhorting us to explore the ultimate ideological consequences of this aspect of current North-South relations.

Yet one wonders if here, again, an idealistic strand can be detected in their reasoning. A number of awkward questions come to mind.

#### Awkward questions

Where does the concept of development come from in the first place, and what explains its gaining such tremendous global appeal and power precisely as from the 1960s?

To what extent is the contemporary development idiom merely a secularized version of a religious, missionary idiom of an earlier epoch, rather than a new religion in its own right? (Cf. the chapter by Quarles van Ufford, and that by Dick Kooiman on multiple religious affiliation in nineteenth-century Trancore, India).

The editors make the obvious link with the decolonization of the Third World; but what remains of the idea of 'development as religious discourse', once we are prepared to expose much development effort as an *attempt to expand the capitalist mode of production beyond its Third World periphery, or – if cultural rather than material imperialism fits the bill – to facilitate the cultural hegemony of the North Atlantic region?*

Religious anthropology may be well-equipped to gauge the depth of the development idiom as semi-religious, to explore its symbolism and the organizations and transactions into which it ramifies, but one seriously doubts if the works of such prominent religious anthropologists as Turner, Fernandez and Douglas do really offer us a sufficient, or even a necessary, basis for the ideological analysis of the development idiom as yet another idiom of subordination, manipulation and legitimation.

In this connexion we need a number of concepts which the editors failed to include in their summary of the anthropology since 1960: the state, class formation, accumulation, modes of production, ideology, hegemony, ethnicity, regionalism, patronage. With these concepts, among others, and with the sophisticated use we have learned to make of them when applying

them to national and intercontinental power relations, we might be able to understand the generation and maintaining of such social and political power as springs from and settles around the development idiom. At the back of all this is current world politics and the super-institutions, like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which dominate the development scene at the material and political level. One cannot analyze the idiom without coming to terms with the material realities, where power and privilege are created and redistributed, and countries are beaten into regional (i.e. sub-continental) and intercontinental submission, and made to sink into debt ever deeper. These international connections are far too much ignored in the present book.

While we need to pay the keenest attention to the *state* in this context<sup>8</sup>, much more is involved than an *a priori*, 'classic' (p. 20) opposition between church and state over development activities and institutions (p. 19) - nearly the only form in which the state enters into the editors' introductory argument<sup>9</sup>. On the one hand, the contemporary development industry is largely a matter of inter-state interaction - to such an extent that even the private organizations involved define themselves by reference to the state - as NGOs (non-governmental organizations). Hence development activities are intrinsically, and often in a rather sinister way, tied up with the ruling, exploiting elites that have appropriated state power in large parts of the world. Alternatively, an examination of the role of organized religion in African countries would show that the contribution of religion to state formation is far more complex, and often far less conflictive, than the mechanical assumption of church/state opposition would suggest. The world religions have greatly contributed to the formation of attitudes, values, images, skills and organizational forms on which the colonial and post-colonial state could rely in its penetration into rural and urban peripheries, and as such they could be said - on one level of abstraction - to belong to the state rather than, or even while, being opposed to it. For instance, the contribution of organized Christian religion to African political independence movements was typically slow to gain momentum, and often tinged with opportunism in other words, for decades Christianity continued to converge with the colonial state. And whereas all over Latin America, and in the Republic of South Africa, mainstream Christian churches have now become very vocal in their confrontation of state policies, in other parts of the Third World acquiescence and accommodation more readily characterize the relations between world religions and the state. Islamic fundamentalism since the 1970s of course shows the lasting prophetic potential of world religions challenging the secularizing state, but on the other hand its theocratic tendencies make it eminently amenable to the state once it has managed to appropriate its central institutions - as not only the Iranian case demonstrates.

#### Popular culture and endogenous models of developments

To look at development as religious discourse ties in with a rapidly expanding movement calling attention to the *cultural dimension in development* (cf. Geldhof et al. 1987). Many Third World states now go through a phase where the more or less deliberate, state-facilitated construction of a national popular culture, with its constructed images and expressions mediated through consumer electronics, becomes a major legitimating and stabilizing force for the ruling elite. The concept of development - worn to a cliché - has rapidly invaded local discourse all over the world, dragging North Atlantic images of achievement, gratification and prestige in its trail<sup>10</sup>. It features prominently in the transformed images as upheld by modern popular culture - but so

do selected elements of neo-traditional local culture, and of the world religions.

In such a context it becomes interesting to assess to what extent people's expectations and preferences reflect models of a better life as ingrained by exposure to world religions, or alternatively reflect *endogenous concepts and models of desired 'development' springing more directly from a neo-traditional socio-cultural heritage*. It is on this point that the contribution from religious anthropologists would be particularly valuable for the study and the practice of development; for they are trained in reading between the lines of formalized normative statements, probing for experience, for often non-verbal symbolism to convey meanings and contents that are too subtle, if not too politically sensitive and dangerous, for words. The identification of obliquely phrased *local agendas for desired change* is time-consuming and difficult - partly because their overt expressions tend to be phrased in terms which seem to ignore or oppose modern state penetration and participation in capitalism, and instead may rely on values and institutions which at superficial analysis may only appear to the researcher and the development agent as a irrational desire to return to an isolated, unadulterated past experience. For example, in my research among the Nkoya people of central western Zambia the complex dialectics of rejection and *rapprochement* vis-à-vis the central state and its development initiatives could only be understood against the background of Nkoya endogenous models of development, revolving on traditional political leadership, ethnic pride, the integrity of the kin group and the cultural perception of land and space (cf. Van Binsbergen 1985c, 1986, 1991, and references cited here).

#### Lands, cults, protest and development

Speaking of endogenous models of development, from a book co-edited by Matthew Schoffeleers one would have expected more of an explicit treatment of the central contribution religious systems have often made to the upkeep of ecosystems in a precolonial, pre-capitalist setting. The development idiom is increasingly becoming an environmentalist idiom. Well, concern for the land, for nature, is one of the few constants of African religion over most of the continent. Schoffeleers' edited collection *Guardians of the Land* duly explored this dimension of regional cults and pilgrimage systems in South Central Africa (Schoffeleers 1979), in line with convergent work by e.g. Ranger (1985) for Zimbabwe and van Binsbergen (1981) for Zambia. The patterning of essential agricultural tasks, such as the onset of firing the bush and the beginning of the planting season, has combined with perhaps more symbolic agricultural activities such as rain-calling, and planting and harvest ritual, in order to underpin, if not to create in the first place, a mode of agricultural production where man's reticent, respectful use of natural resources guaranteed the relatively stable persistence of the ecosystem. Much of what is called rural development has amounted to either

- a the disruption of time-honoured ecosystems under the impact of cash-crop production, enlargement of scale and so-called rationalization of agricultural production, changing gender relations in production, labour migration etc - in short the impact of the capitalist mode of production, or
- b the subsequent attempt to partially redress such ecological disruption

It remains to be seen if such redress can still make effective use of the regulative potential offered by territorial cults. Their hold on rural society has usually diminished because of: the

introduction of new foci of power; new systems of circulation, movement of people, and distribution; and new forms of organization including Christian churches. When the latter then adopt (in response to local expectations as much as in reminiscence of the rural European agrarian world many expatriate missionaries would hail from) an ecological, territorial dimension (harvest ritual, prayers for rain) in their own ritual, this could be seen as an attempt to reconstitute some of the lost potential of the old cults. The concerns of religion and development would then merge to a very illuminating extent. Religion in this context is not a way of upholding a transcendent, and *alien*, ideal for the transformation of the world, in order to make it resemble that model more closely: the 'developed', i.e. industrialized, urban, capitalist North Atlantic world, etc. Religion is here primarily an immanent, this-worldly and *local* model for the production and reproduction ('conservation') of human society in an immediate natural environment whose essence is that it is only partially transformed by human hands – the typical village setting in much of the Third World up to the 1950s.

In the South Central African case the specific, cosmologically anchored views of social, economic and political well-being as found in territorial cults tend to be at variance with the changes which, often under the aegis of 'development', occur when the communities involved are opened up to capitalism and the modern state. In Zambia, the cultic response was largely accommodating to these changes in this respect that older symbolic and organizational material was redefined into new, healing cults which were eminently compatible with the new status quo; however, the massive Lumpa cult as founded by Alice Lenshina in 1953, while representing another instalment in this ongoing redefinition process, did challenge the colonial state, capitalism and Christian missions in a very articulate way, leading on to the violent 1964 uprising which meant the end of Lumpa (van Binsbergen 1981). A similar redefinition process, not so much of the ancient cult of the land but of notions of causation, sorcery and evil which appear to have formed its complement for centuries, was channelled into an even more widespread cultic response in South Central Africa: the Watchtower movement, which constituted the main anti-colonial and anti-traditional expression in the 1920s–1940s, and which has since settled down to a theoretically theocratic movement of economically active citizens who reject but do no longer combat the secular state (cf Long 1968; Cross 1973; Fields 1985). In Zimbabwe, alternatively, phases of acquiescence alternated with the territorial cults' essential support for protest and violent struggle marking both the beginning and the end of the colonial period (Ranger 1967, 1985; Lan 1985).

With regard to the cult of the land, a similar case is explored in the present book by Peter Geschiere and Jos van der Klei in their analysis of the Diola uprisings in Southern Senegal, 1982 and 1983<sup>12</sup>. It is somewhat regrettable that a similar line of reasoning failed to inform Venema's otherwise interesting analysis (chapter 7) of Islamic revival in Tunisia in general and in the northwestern highlands of Khumiriya in particular. Here, where the Berber-derived cult of the land has taken the form of the veneration of saints and shrines in an idiom of popular Islam (van Binsbergen 1980, 1985a, 1985b), the thwarted development of the 1950s and 1960s did lead to a far greater entrenchment in local, popular religious expressions (very partially controlled by the Islamic brotherhoods)<sup>13</sup> than is suggested by Venema's discussion – only to give way to a greater emphasis on formal<sup>14</sup> Islam, and even to a limited fundamentalist presence, in the 1970s and 1980s.

These examples in themselves contradict the editors' view (p 4 and *passim*) of religious anthropology in the post-colonial era as entirely concentrating on the a-political analysis of symbolism. It is not the only place in the introduction where they fall victim to sweeping gener-

alizations and over-elegant distinctions. Meanwhile the actual insights gathered in this field do converge with the fundamental thrust of their argument, corroborating the significance of the study of even traditional and neo-traditional religion for an understanding of development processes

#### Further permutations of the relation between development and religion

With all their emphasis on the subordinative relationship between religious anthropology and the sociology of development, in actual fact the relationship between religion and development in this book shows several other significant permutations. An examination of the chapters makes this clear.

In a very loose sense the first seven contributions do deal with 'development as religion', but they do so in rather a predictable if fascinating way: mainly by looking at obviously *religious* institutions such as Christian churches, mission bodies, and varieties of Islam in East Asia and North Africa, and assessing the extent to which an implicit or explicit development idiom, cast in religious or in more secular terms, enters into the religious discourse and religious action of the participants involved. A borderline case is Selier & van der Linden's piece, discussing the half-hearted development efforts of the Pakistan government with regard to housing, agricultural production and migration, which leads them to the conclusion that such a policy apparently seeks to gain popular legitimacy not so much by its deeds but by its words. Hardly a word on religious anthropology here; in a skilful way, the chapter deals with (thwarted) development only.

What one misses in this part of the book, having read the introduction, is *an empirical study of 'development as religious discourse' in a context that is not already obviously religious*, in the more established sense, in the first place. The study by Selier and van der Linden, or the discussion of changing paradigms in the study of women and development by Lilian van Wesemael-Smit, could have done just that, but they fail to make even the remotest application of the editors' ambitious theoretical schemes. One would have expected that the editors had commissioned one or two chapters specifically devoted to the careful, empirical *in vivo* study of the development industry, to development debates at international and intercontinental meetings, or to precise mapping-out of the micro-history of specific projects, with real actors, their organizational apparatus, their ideologies, the transactions they engage in among themselves as dispensers, brokers or beneficiaries of development, the perceptions and power relations that are created and transformed, and the moral fervour and missionary zeal generated in that process. Ironically, all this happens to sum up the speciality of one of the editors, Quarles van Ufford (cf Quarles van Ufford 1980, 1986; Quarles van Ufford et al 1988), who could have matched his historical overview of the Dutch Reformed Mission in Central Java with an excellent chapter on the development industry along the lines suggested here. With regard to a somewhat narrower subset of such research (notably into 'the difference between what is so loftily intended and what comes out of in the field') the editors realize that

'Development organizations are often less than enthusiastic about this type of research' (p 16)

But that in itself is a very good reason to undertake it, especially when the central claims of the book could be very much more substantiated by the results of such prospective research! The

claim so proudly stated in the book's blurb is as yet rather unfounded as far as its own contents are concerned. For however interesting the discussions of world religions and development are – they are about 'religion as development' much more than about the illumination that a religious-anthropology perspective might bring about when applied to a *secular* development setting that is not already dominated by world religions from the outset.

The second part of the book, covered by the chapters 9 through 13, shows examples of an even more familiar permutation of the relation between religion and development. Here the book's emphasis shifts from 'religion as development' to 'development or religion'. The editors identify 'the religious dimension of survival strategies', in societies experiencing the inroads of such forces as commonly associated with development: the modern colonial and post-colonial state, and the capitalist mode of production. Surprisingly, the editors treat this part of the book as a large residual category, which they barely manage to integrate in their general theoretical perspective, and for which they even have to resort to a superficial common-sense categorization in terms of physical, political, cultural and psychological survival, without any systematic foundation in social theory. In fact, what we have here is various endogenous notions of desired change or development as conceived in (more or less transformed) neo-traditional terms. The contributors in this section<sup>15</sup> are eminently capable of subjecting their data to adequate analysis, but apparently the time or the editorial power was lacking to persuade them to present their material more fully in terms of the overall thesis of the book. In particular, this section hardly addresses the inspiring theme of development as a possible solution to scholarly irrelevance and alienation – perhaps with the exception of Schoffeleers' sociological contextualizing of the controversy between Black and African theology in the Republic of South Africa (chapter 10).

All this makes for considerable heterogeneity in the book. Rather than attempting to conceal this under the cloak of their introductory claims, the editors should have felt sufficiently confident of the quality and the novelty of the collection as a whole, and set out to explore the systematic advantages of such a variety of perspectives. Now the claim of unity, so obviously unwarranted, can only do undeserved damage to the book and presumably to the research programme on which it is based.

## Conclusion

That Philip Quarles van Ufford and Matthew Schoffeleers marked, with this book, the beginning of a new discourse on development is obvious. My critical remarks mainly anticipate on the range on new questions that are now opening up for further enquiry and debate: both on the level of theoretical reflection, and in the way of specific research tasks, whose outcomes could demonstrate the potential of the approach advocated.

Here empirical operationalization towards anthropological methods in the narrower sense appears to be a necessary step. It is remarkable that some of the contributions which treat the central inspiration of this book most fully (I am thinking here of the chapters by Tennekes, van Kessel & Droogers, and Schoffeleers) are discussions of existing publications and the deductive construction of a possible interpretational framework, rather than reports of empirical anthropological field research. The more empirical pieces on religion as development are largely based on historical documents, whereas the field-work pieces largely deal with the 'religion or development' theme which in the editors' treatment is somewhat peripheral to the book. The

application of the methods of participant observation to development in action, in a secular contemporary setting, as suggested above, appears an obvious next step.

In conclusion I should remark that for the further elaboration of these themes, particularly in view of the blind spots identified in my review (epistemological implications, the state, the international framework of political economy, endogenous agendas of development, etc.) fruitful cooperation might be sought, not only with those scholars abroad whose names rightly feature in the preface, but also with colleagues in the Netherlands, with whom the Free University research group not only shares a number of research interests and specific activities, but also the same meta-academic political space

## Postscript (April, 1991)

Upon the request of the *Antropologische Verkenningen* editors, this text was completed and submitted in June, 1988, but its publication was delayed during my prolonged absence for field-work in Botswana. The continued relevance of *Religion and development*, both as a book and as a research programme, did not prompt me to make major changes in my original text, which, however, I did shorten at the editor's request.

## NOTES

1. A draft version of this review article was discussed at the workshop on Religion and Development, Institute of Cultural Anthropology/Sociology of Development, Free University, Amsterdam, June 15, 1988. I am grateful to the participants, including the editors of the book under review, for constructive and clarifying remarks on that occasion.
2. 'Woord vooraf' (preface), pp. ix-xiii; and Schoorl's list of publications, p. xiv-xvi.
3. In the various lists of references as attached to the individual contributions: p. 30, 70, 165, 229, 264; in fact, only Geschiere & van der Klei, in a footnote on p. 225, and Sutherland, pp. 158, 162-163, engage in a slightly more than perfunctory discussion of Schoorl's work.
4. In passing I note that the major omission in this part of the argument is Max Weber, whose study on protestantism and the rise of capitalism offered the classic paradigm of 'religion and development' (Weber 1976; ironically, cf. Schoffeleers & Meijers 1978). Mary Douglas' assertions in her 1982 paper are simply not enough to consider bureaucracy – the dominant form under which the state and development present themselves in the modern world – a form of transcendence and therefore of religion (introduction, p. 18). References to Weber's distinction between charismatic, traditional and legal authority (Weber 1969), his discussion of bureaucracy (Gerth & Mills 1974: 196-244) and in general the massive Weber-inspired literature on bureaucracy, would have enabled the editors to avoid this far too facile short-cut from development to religion. Instead, they do quote Weber, out of context, as an exponent of the type of Eurocentrism and progressivism that was to become part and parcel of an uncritical variant of the sociology of development (p. 11-12). This must be, in Weber's otherwise enlightened work, an echo of his times and intellectual climate in general: his own extensive studies on Oriental societies and their religions (in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft* and in *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*) can still be fruitfully consulted by readers seeking for a comparative, profound and non-Eurocentric perspective!

In the same vein the editors credit Durkheim (along with Mauss) for the belief in the complete *otherness* of alien cultures –

'an idea that was to become characteristic of French anthropology as a whole (Fabian 1983)'

Is this the same Durkheim who, in what the editors rightly identify as his quest for the moral reconstruction of North Atlantic society at the *fin de siècle*, turned to Australian aboriginal religion in order to identify and explain 'the elementary forms of the religious life' - implying, in his assumption of universal human comparability, not the fundamental otherness but on the contrary the fundamental sameness between 'their' society and ours (Durkheim 1912)?

5. Unfortunately, a contribution from this distinguished member of the department could not be included in the present collection, which the editors compensated by specific discussion of his work on pp 8-9; cf. Bax 1987
6. That the editors are prepared to go to extremes to bring the two disciplines together is clear from the fact that a considerable part of their introduction is taken up with the discussion of superficial parallels in their history. In passing, a third sub-discipline, women's studies, is included in the argument, probably because this is the only way to accommodate a chapter that is not in the least interpretable in terms of 'development as religion'. The main parallels between the three (sub-)disciplines appear to consist in
  - a) the fact that their history as summarized by the editors can be divided into three phases, and
  - b) an overall sort of tendency, in the history of each sub-discipline, which could perhaps be called 'routinization of charisma' (Weber 1969)

However, the characterization of the religious anthropology since 1958 as oblivious from political issues, and entirely concentrating on symbolic structures, is contentious; cf. Fernandez 1978; Fasholé-Luke et al 1978; van Binsbergen 1981; van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers 1985; Ranger 1986; and references cited there. Schoffeleers himself has never been contented to study symbolism as divorced from political and economic context, as is clear from his contribution to the present book (on the controversy between Black theology and African theology in the Republic of South Africa), as well as from many articles on the Mbona cult and other aspects of Mang'anja religion in Southern Malawi (to be reworked in Schoffeleers, in press).

This is perhaps the sort of distortion one can expect from authors who (claiming support from a passing reference to van Binsbergen & Schoffeleers 1985) are keen to avoid 'the cruder versions of Marxism' (p. 8); who reduce the enormous potential of modes of production analysis (cf. van Binsbergen & Geschiere 1985; Raatgever 1988; with regard to religious studies: van Binsbergen 1981, 1984a, 'in' 1988b) to

'a particular assessment of western culture as the standard by which other cultures are measured' (p. 12),

whereas the concept of modes of production, on the contrary, allows us to pinpoint the specific, irreducible logic of non-western economic and ideological systems; and who sneer at

'those expecting panacea from modes of production [drawing] their material from sub-Saharan Africa' (p. 15)

7. Cf. Asad 1973; Copans 1974, 1975; Leclerc 1972; Fabian 1983; van Binsbergen 1984b; and in general the growing body of literature on 'reflexive' anthropology
8. As is actually done, in the present book (but regrettably with exclusive reference to the internal operation of states within their national territories), in the chapters by van Kessel & Droogers already referred to above; by Selier and van der Linden on mobility, housing and policy in Pakistan; by Koster on religion, education and development in Malta; by Venema on contemporary Islamic revival in Tunisia; and by Geschiere and van der Klei on the Diola uprisings in 1982 and 1983 in southern Senegal.
9. This has to do with the editors' reliance on Victor Turner's (1969) argument concerning *communitas* and anti-structure, which would make religion appear as an eminently critical, prophetic force, challenging the status quo and the state which could be considered the latter's expression. Although some of the contributions in the present book (the excellent chapters by Tennekes, van Kessel & Droogers, and Schoffeleers) clearly demonstrate that this prophetic challenging of the state is part of Christianity in both the First and the Third World today, this is by no means a universal constant. The forms and effects which Turner attributes to *communitas* may also be observed in political discourse and collective action in the context of 'secular' politics in contemporary Third World states: mass rallies, public

humiliations, amputations and executions; etc. - the state itself makes use, and partly reconstitutes itself, by virtue of the very mechanisms by which it is said to be threatened.

10. Meanwhile we should not forget that it has only done so in recent decades. In this respect one is puzzled by the extent to which the editors manage to discuss the precise and imaginative historical contribution by Sutherland on power, trade and Islam in the eastern archipelagos, 1700-1850, as dealing with a development discourse (p. 22-23).
11. That a cult of the land very similar to that of the neighbouring Diola may also form the main element for a particularly well-balanced symbiosis between a viable neo-traditional socio-ritual order at home and massive outside participation in the capitalist mode of production through labour migration, is brought out by my study of the Manjaks of northwestern Guinea-Bissau (van Binsbergen 1984a and 1988b); a similar point in van der Klei 1989.
12. And not *fraternities*, p. 22.
13. And not *orthodox*, p. 130.
14. Including Kooiman's; Scheffold on ethnicity as expressed through housing among the Sa'dan Toraja and Tabo Batak of Indonesia; and van Wetering on the ritual laundering of black money among Surinam Creoles in urban Holland

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