RELIGION & STATE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

*A German-South African dialogue on
historical and current challenges*

Editors
Renier Koegelenberg
Udo Hahn

EVANGELISCHE AKADEMIE
TUTZING

EFSA

Religion and development – opportunities and limitations of cooperation

Bernhard Felmberg¹

“Religion and state – between co-option and cooperation: South African and German experiences in dialogue”. At least with regard to the first part of this title, it is not easy for me to maintain my personal distance, but perhaps that is not even necessary or desirable. Because in a way I know “both sides of the coin”: as Evangelical theologian I have worked at the university and in political offices for the (Evangelical) church – and I continue doing so to this day as pastor of a congregation in Berlin, and I particularly enjoy doing so.

As director of the Central Directorate-General in the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (in short BMZ), which also includes the directorate responsible for cooperation with churches, I have come to know and am still coming to know the perspective from the side of the state.

That is why I do not want to talk of an “area of tension” between state and church, because the cooperation between the BMZ and the two largest Christian churches in Germany has proven its value during the course of its existence for almost 57 years now. Not that there are *never* tensions – but generally these tensions (if they can even be described as such) can be resolved through

¹ Dr Bernhard Felmberg, Head of the Central Directorate-General for Civil Society and Churches, Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Berlin

regular meetings, discussions and constructive exchanges, sometimes even on controversial matters.

That there may well be different perspectives and approaches is part of the very nature of things – or rather: in the different nature of the actors. But constructive engagement can indeed be inspiring and invigorating in the daily business of politics and can promote common goals, and this applies to both sides.

What I do find exciting is that in the next two days we will be hearing about and discussing from very different perspectives the different experiences of Germany and South Africa with regard to the relationship of religion and state – for example, when we think of the role of churches and religious communities in social processes of change. Or when we think of the implementation of Agenda 2030. Or of the relationship between religious communities, civil society and the state.

I will structure my presentation tonight into a number of compressed sections, so that it will remain “digestible” for you in spite of the late hour and our dinner together. And I would be delighted if, afterwards, you would all still find the time and energy to continue the discussion.

I have divided my presentation into the following sections:

- Firstly – a brief Introduction;
- Then – secondly – I wish to sketch the role of religion in development processes and to present the opportunities arising from this, also for development;
- Thirdly – I shall briefly present the principles of our BMZ strategy on religion and its opportunities;
- In the fourth section – I shall also point out the limitations of cooperation;
- And, finally, I wish to pose three questions regarding the state and religion with which we in the BMZ are currently dealing.

Introduction

Our relationship between state and church has been through many controversies during the past centuries and it is only in the last hundred years that it has reached calmer waters. For example, the arrangements between state and

churches over the past 70 years were seldom discussed by the broad public – unless the so-called “privileges of the church” were involved around questions of levying church taxes, or special provisions under labour and social law for employees of religious communities, or the continued state contributions with which the churches can, among other things, pay the salaries of their clerics, with churches, in this instance, referring to Catholic bishoprics and the Evangelical regional churches.

Why is such support granted? I could now digress into history and reflect on the Religious Peace Accord of Augsburg of 1555, the Peace Accord of Westphalia of 1648, on Napoleon and the German state agreement to support churches financially. But that would exceed the scope of my presentation tonight. What is important is that in the course of the various secularization processes the secular powers of the times acquired a significant amount of ecclesiastical assets and land. In return, the rulers assumed responsibility for the financial security of the church. And the federal states today – with the exception of Bremen and Hamburg – as legal successors of the federal states of those times continue to offer this support.

And so today the relationship between state and church is no longer a prominent point of discussion. Perhaps this is another reason why many believed that religious communities would increasingly lose their significance and would, in the best-case scenario, continue their existence as unobtrusive yet indispensable and practical service providers, for example, in schools and nursing care.

On the other hand, public controversies here in Germany on the “decree on the cross” or the “headscarf ban”, the circumcision of Jewish or Muslim boys, or the slaughtering of animals have shown very clearly that the topic of religion has long ceased to be merely a “private matter” for individuals, but that in a secular state with increasing cultural diversity, it is gaining significance in social and political discourse.

And, thinking ahead, if religion is already becoming a topic of debate in Germany, how much more does this then apply to countries where the vast majority of people say that religion is important to them? If you looked at the so-called “third world” in the 1970s and 1980s from the vantage point of the secularization thesis in Germany, you would have considered your opinion to have been confirmed:

the stronger the role of religions in a country, the bigger the presumed need to catch up in terms of development and modernisation. Religion thus became a measure of backwardness.

Although secularization may not be a guarantee of development, the separation of state and church was an act of liberalisation and an opportunity for growing prosperity for both society in general and the church in particular. And so, the point has had to be made that civil society groups – NGOs – and religious actors that do not represent the state church can make a definite contribution to necessary change and sustainable development.

In Germany we experienced both: on the one hand, the difficult role of churches during National Socialism with their at times uncritical acceptance of an inhuman ideology. On the other hand, a small but significant opposition by the church with Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Barmen Declaration (1934). And the reunification of the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany would have been unthinkable without the prayers for peace in the Nicolai Church in Leipzig and the subsequent Monday Demonstrations of 1989.

In South Africa, too, there were two sides: some churches cooperated with the apartheid regime, while others opposed it; the same applied in the case of the ANC (African National Congress) – and then also the important, even initiating, role of the churches in the subsequent process of reconciliation. But more about this later.

Jürgen Habermas – who incidentally resides in Starnberg that borders on this Academy – after 11 September 2001 declared a *post-secular society*. This implies that in his opinion a secular society had existed for a certain period of time. Since the 1990s already there has been increasing talk of a “return of religions”, as was also stated by Hans-Peter Müller, Professor of Sociology at the Humboldt University of Berlin in an essay which he wrote in 2012. But has this “return” of religions actually taken place? Had religions actually “disappeared”?

The secularization thesis as a self-description of the West probably arose because politicians and intellectuals did not want to see piety in its full extent. And abroad it was acknowledged only where religion was useful as a presumed measure of backwardness. And this brings me to the second section.

The role of religions in development processes and the consequent opportunities

Even if we do not always agree on the role of religion in Western countries, the facts about religion in developing countries are clear. Religions play a crucial role in developing countries. This is proven by impressive figures and examples.

- In 40 partner countries of our German development cooperation, four out of five people state that religion is “very important” to them.
- In Nigeria 90 percent of the population go to church on Sundays or to the mosque on Fridays – in our country we may experience this only on the highest holy days, Good Friday or Christmas Eve. But generally we can only dream of such numbers: in Germany, a mere six percent of the population regularly attend church services on a Sunday.
- In Nigeria 97% of the population think that a politician who is not religious cannot be a politician.
- In many developing countries religious representatives enjoy a significantly higher level of trust than the state.
- This is not least due to the fact that a significant share of all social services in sub-Saharan Africa, for example, is rendered by religious organisations: in Kenya 40%, in Uganda even over 50%. In many countries healthcare or education would be unthinkable without the support of religious communities. For many people church institutions are the only hope and local port of call, because churches and religious communities are there if the state is too weak, especially in situations of war and conflict. Often they are the only ones supporting local people, when state cooperation is not possible, for whatever reason.
- Churches and their authorities in many places provide a space for social debate; they give a voice to the poor and disadvantaged and thus promote a civil society that in many instances is still weak.
- A current and, in my opinion, very impressive example of the intervention of the church was recently witnessed in the DRC: the Catholic church mobilised an astonishing 40 000(!) electoral observers. The result was that after 40 years the first free presidential elections could be conducted largely peacefully.
- Religious communities form networks that at local level often extend to the remotest areas and they reach people where there are no state structures.

RELIGION AND STATE: BETWEEN COPTION AND COOPERATION

- Representatives of churches and religious communities often prepare the ground for de-escalation measures, and the relaunching of discussions and peace processes after conflicts.
- A religious approach is often also helpful for the legal-political reappraisal of a conflict that has been ended. Experience has shown that contractual provisions alone often do not bring about reconciliation and healing of traumas. The contrary is true: truth and reconciliation commissions in post-conflict societies show that a change of worldviews, of perceptions of history and of behavioural patterns requires a holistic approach.
- Respected (religious) personalities can often serve to build bridges.
- Rituals and ceremonies can be points of departure for reconciliation, forgiveness and a new beginning because behaviour during conflict is often based more on emotion than reason. A religious approach to reconciliation that touches people at different levels can under certain circumstances thus be more successful than a purely rational approach.

What has certainly become clear is that religions have a great potential to reach people. But to whom am I preaching here? Without the influence of churches and their international network, the end of apartheid would not have been possible in South Africa 25 years ago. The subsequent work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa did not only inspire me personally but many people around the world – and it also informed our strategy on religion. In the last 25 years since the end of apartheid South Africa has achieved significant progress from which Germany and the rest of the world can learn a lot.

When Minister of Justice Abdullah Omar and Archbishop Desmond Tutu formally convened the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 1996, crimes committed by all population groups were heard, reappraised and in some instances resolved irrespective of the colour of the skin of those involved. Thus, the Commission not only laid the foundation for dialogue and communication between different population groups but also for the reconstruction of the country. I would argue that such a social communication process between perpetrators and victims could only be facilitated by credible personalities, such as Desmond Tutu. From afar, we followed this process with admiration and great respect.

Yet the many very positive examples – and luckily there are quite a number of them – should, however, not allow us to become uncritical. Because a glance at

many of our partner countries shows that religious actors harbour the potential of achieving much that is very positive but, unfortunately, also much that is negative. In any event, they have *great* potential for sustainable development.

Religion can create identity and can bring together people from different backgrounds across borders and continents – but it can also exclude others. It can promote social development processes and peace – but it can also be a stumbling block or hindrance for development processes. In conflict situations religious authorities can extinguish many a fire – in some instances, however, they can also actively fuel fires. Cultural contexts influenced by religion at times also establish social rules that are in conflict with human rights or that constitute discrimination.

As we are aware, religious organisations accomplish great things in the area of education and health and in that way also reach people whom the state does not reach. What is essential, however, is *what* is offered there: does it actually contribute to education or does it lead to intolerance and radicalisation instead? Are all needy people reached, or only sisters and brothers of your own faith? Are barriers in society overcome in this way or are new barriers erected? And of course: is the superiority claim of a religion the cause of conflict?

In many places, religion is instrumentalised. The terror militia that calls itself the “Islamic State” claims to be acting in the name of Islam and commits murders, tortures, causes indescribable human suffering and mass exoduses, destabilises entire regions and thus destroys the peaceful coexistence of humans. The same applies to the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda that describes itself as “Christian”, or the nationalists in India who invoke Hinduism.

These civil wars waged in the name of religion destroy the successful achievements of decades of development-political measures – be it in the establishment of democracy, in the framework of healthcare, or in endeavours to promote dialogue and reconciliation between different ethnicities. Religion is also instrumentalised to secure power, to suppress critical opinions and to avoid democratic reforms.

Once again I need to stress that violent conflicts between religions or confessions are not unique features of other, remote countries. Unfortunately, we know these in our very own country too. European history over many centuries is a sad story of military conflict. In the name of the Christian(!) religion and/or confession

almost 40 percent of the population was wiped out in the Thirty Years' War. It took over 500 years until the increasing confrontation of confessions could be turned into an ecumenical movement and togetherness.

What remains is the insight that around the globe religions play a central role in people's lives – and thus also in politics. It would not only be politically negligent but also simply stupid to ignore the role of religions in international politics – and especially in development politics. Religion as a factor in sustainable development processes is at least as important as climate, justice, economics – and is thus also of elementary importance for the attainment of the goals of Agenda 2030. So, what would make more sense than to use the positive potential of religions for development processes at last? And this brings me to my third point.

BMZ strategy of religion as a partner in development cooperation

We were given the task to define clearly how and with whom we should establish and promote ties of cooperation and sustainable development. Incidentally, we were pioneers in the inter-ministerial group and are all the more delighted that the Foreign Office has taken up this issue and is now considering it with a focus on the contribution of religion towards promoting peace.

The BMZ strategy has three core concepts: value-based orientation, potential-based approach and development-political principles.

Let me start by saying a few words about the value-based orientation. Our point of departure is Germany: Germany is not a “Christian state” – but Christian values, such as responsibility, justice, sustainability, appreciation, solidarity, humility and peace form the foundation of our society. The Federal Constitutional Court stated this very concisely and to the point: *The Federal Republic of Germany is neutral in terms of its worldview but not neutral in terms of values.*

Germany does not adopt “Christian politics” – but a politics on the basis of the Christian understanding of humanity and with a Christian sense of responsibility.

And this brings us to the common basis of values which I mentioned earlier and which should form the foundation of the strategy of religion. As a matter of fact, all world religions embrace similar values. To bring all of these down to the point

in a very concise manner, I wish to quote a German idiom that many of you may know:

*“Was Du nicht willst, das man Dir tu, das füg auch keinem anderen zu.” –
“Don’t do to others what you don’t want to be done to you.”*

From this can be deduced the “golden rule” of reciprocity. And this rule is found not only in the words of the 18th-century German philosopher Immanuel Kant, albeit in slightly different terms, but much earlier already: in the New Testament, in the hadiths of Islam, in the Torah, in the writings of Hinduism and of Buddhism.

Religion is at the same time a source of the ethics of “enough” and for an understanding of development that does not only refer to economic or technical progress. Having been created in the image of God, human beings are equipped with inalienable dignity. And this dignity fundamentally deserves to be protected – even if you do not follow *any* religion, or do not want to follow any religion.

Thus our value-based orientation can be summarised in the following two points:

1. Our politics are neutral in terms of their worldview, but they are not neutral in terms of their values. Value-based development politics that takes each individual person seriously must also take his or her perspective on the world seriously. Being value-based means that at the same time certain fundamental values – e.g. human rights – are non-negotiable for us;
2. For most people around the world, this perspective is significantly shaped by religion. If we take the basis of values of religions seriously, if we understand that people act out of religious convictions, it becomes evident that religions at times reach people more effectively and on a completely different level than states can do.

In this, we follow the approach of recognising potential. We are not interested in the religion or the respective denomination as such, but rather in its possible positive contribution to the attainment of the United Nations’ sustainable development goals.

These 17 SDGs practically constitute the obligations for future-oriented development. They contain a canon of values that was largely influenced by religious communities and which is now demanded from this community of states. This is because many of the sustainability goals reflect, in a secularised form, impulses from churches: caring for the poor, health, education, good

governance, justice, peace, protection of creation – to this very day these are genuinely Christian impulses in the worldwide church.

The point of departure for cooperation is thus to focus on these – and other – joint goals on the basis of fundamental values. These are informed by representatives from politics and religious communities according to their different roles. For us in the BMZ and for our consideration of cooperation with religious actors this also implies “sorting the wheat from the chaff”, or in the words of 1 Thessalonians 5:21: “Test everything, hold fast what is good.” Thus we follow the guiding principle of working together where we can achieve more together – or where we can prevent worse things from happening.

One of the biggest challenges was the development of a strategy for cooperation with religions, religious communities and religious actors that

- keeps in mind as many facets as possible,
- takes into consideration the differences of our partner countries,
- recognises the differences of religions and
- is based on a foundation and on values that, insofar as possible, are common to *all* world religions.

And because we as a single department can possibly achieve all of this on our own, we consulted the scientific expertise of our long-term church partners, as well as a number of institutes and universities. In particular, with regard to the social role of Evangelical and independent churches in Africa and Latin America, there is quite obviously a great need for research, also regarding the implications for development politics.

This was our insight as BMZ and, together with the Humboldt University of Berlin, we developed a research programme where we followed up, in particular, on the contribution of the AICs (African Initiated Churches) to sustainable development.

Two essential insights of the study were, first, that AICs promote African solutions, i.e. they are local actors deeply rooted in local societies. And second, other than the “established” Catholic and historic Protestant churches, AICs also incorporate the African spiritual worldview, i.e. they consider the spiritual dimension as being fundamental to their holistic understanding of development.

These and further research results, as well as the consideration of insights gained from our practical development politics, from our country strategies, from defining focus areas, projects and measures entailed much hard work in our own ministry. There, too, we had to start by expanding our knowledge of the importance of the “factor of religion” for sustainable development processes; we had to create awareness and then we had to ensure that this topic is firmly and explicitly incorporated into the respective country strategies.

Of course, there are also **limitations of cooperation**. And as federal government we need to define these clearly. Such a limitation arises, for example, if religious actors call for discrimination and violence. In development cooperation of states we are also intent – and reliant – on the respective partner governments being fundamentally in favour of incorporating religious actors. We also need to speak to those who are considered “critics” of the so-called Western values because we are acting according to the maxim: Dialogue is not dangerous, but the refusal to enter into dialogue is.

Thus, our selection criteria and principles for cooperation include the following:

- respect for the standards of human rights;
- orientation of our partners towards development and their alignment with the goals of Agenda 2030;
- competence and capacity, including technical and organisational skills to implement the agreed measures in the respective area of cooperation;
- existing networks and the scope of influence of the actor; and
- the moral authority and trust that the actor enjoys in society.

What is of particular importance – in development cooperation as a whole, but particularly in cooperation with religious actors – is mutual respect. And this includes the recognition and appreciation of different roles that state and religious actors play. Possibly the biggest danger is mutual instrumentalisation. In order not to fall victim to this, all parties involved must adhere to some fundamental rules:

- In development politics we must always be aware that religion(s) is not merely another “tool” in the “toolbox” of our implementing organisations (such as GIZ), as this is referred to in development-political jargon;

- And, conversely, the state may not be captured by a religious community, for example by promoting missionary work with tax money or by “exclusively” promoting one religious group.

This is the theory. And it is common cause that putting a theory down in writing is much easier than implementing it in practice. And in the very same year in which we presented our strategy – in February 2016 – the Easter edition of the news magazine *Der Spiegel* carried the title story, “*Abuse of faith – the dangerous return of religions*”.

For their contributions, the authors travelled around the world and described examples of the growing influence of religions on politics and society – and they mainly presented negative examples. For Muslims – this was the bottom line – this was mainly wars and terror; for Christians this was the growing influence of Evangelicals on political opinion and power relations, for example, in Latin America; and in Russia, the close ties between State President Vladimir Putin and the Russian-Orthodox church. The conclusion was – and I quote: “*In many areas of the world, the sinister political influence of religions is growing*”. This was also established by a study of the Bertelsmann Foundation in terms of which the share of states where religious dogmas have a noticeable influence on politics was said to have increased from 22 to 33 percent.

This was somewhat disillusioning – but it could not keep us from believing in the opportunities that cooperation with religious actors on the ground presented. To give a first impression of how we turn these opportunities into practical projects at local level, I would briefly like to present two examples.

In the **Philippines**, Christian and Islamic actors, as well as representatives of indigenous communities, are brought together for intercultural and interfaith dialogue. The goal is to promote the narrative of a joint origin and descent, to strengthen their identity as Filipinos. In addition, common religious values are to be emphasised and the stereotypes of the respective other that have become established in history are to be broken down. How important this is could be seen from the news at the beginning of the year: during a bomb attack in and in front of a Catholic church during a mass at least 20 people were killed and over 110 people were injured. Politically the place of the attack, Jolo island, is part of Mindanao – the place where our project is carried out.

In **Egypt**, we support a forum for intercultural dialogue. The forum brings together Christian *and* Islamic clerics, as well as other socially relevant actors, including the media, artists and school teachers. Together future-oriented, socio-political topics are discussed. In a safe space sensitive or politically sensitive topics can be addressed: for example, the future development of the state, religion and democracy in Egypt, freedom of expression and religion, Islamic-Christian relations, gender and social justice.

This is only a small impression of the practical work of development politics. What is important is that for the selection of our partners we have defined clear criteria. Respect for human rights is the first priority. It is a matter of great concern that freedom of religion as a core human right is increasingly limited or even completely questioned around the world. This applies to numerous religious minorities worldwide. That is why we continue emphasising that our solidarity extends to *all* disadvantaged religious minorities. Three quarters of humanity are living in states that impose full or partial restrictions on the freedom of religion or worldview. This extends from administrative hurdles to social stigmatisation and even to the death penalty. Thus strengthening the principle of freedom of religion is a very pressing concern for us. Since the beginning of this legislature, the BMZ thus has a representative in the federal government who is responsible for overseeing freedom of religion worldwide (Markus Grübel MP).

Finally, I would like to address the **current challenges and questions**, as mentioned earlier. The conclusion of my deliberations is that we want to use the opportunities that lie in dialogue and cooperation with religious actors. Much of this has already been started in the context of religions and sustainable development. But I want to say this very clearly: we still want to achieve much more. And to this end, we need to explore new paths and ways of cooperation.

That is yet another reason why I am delighted to be able to enter into discussions with you here and now. In our cooperation with religious actors in a widely varying spectrum of countries we are continuously faced with new questions in the individual contexts. And we are searching for answers to these three questions. Perhaps we can find them here in our subsequent discussion?

Question 1: To whom are we actually talking? Who are the right contact partners for us on the topic of religion and development?

When the BMZ was established in 1961, this question could be answered relatively easily: 96.6% of the German population were either Evangelical or Catholic, with slightly more Evangelical Christians. Of course, the regional distribution in Germany was very different. Many spoke of the “Evangelical North” and the “Catholic South” in Germany. Naturally, this portrayal may have been slightly too simplistic, but the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) and the German Conference of Bishops (DBK) represented the majority of believers in Germany and were *the* contact partners for government. Also the *only*.

Today, almost 60 years later, the picture in Germany is very different and the dialogue between state and religion is much more complex, since only 56 percent of our population are members of the Evangelical or Roman Catholic churches. Yet the Evangelical Church of Germany (EKD) and the German Conference of Bishops (DBK) remain the central representatives of German religious communities in the interaction of state and religion.

But 36 percent have now become non-denominational – who speaks on their behalf? And who speaks on behalf of Islamic believers, who make up about 4.4 percent of the German population? Since a couple of years, we have had an Islamic Conference of representatives from government and Islamic associations, as well as individuals. The large number of mosque associations and different umbrella organisations of the respective Islamic perspectives, however, sometimes makes potential cooperation difficult. We as the BMZ also ask ourselves to whom in Germany we should talk about development cooperation with regard to the topic of religion and development.

In both central churches and their respective aid organisations, Bread for the World and Misereor, we have very reliable, well established and greatly appreciated partners – and this has been the case for almost 60 years now. And for the same time, the federal government has been supporting the development projects of both churches with significant funding that, in this year alone, amounted to 301 million euro (cash) from our BMZ church budget. Unfortunately, no comparable, well established cooperation exists with Islamic aid organisations yet.

When looking at South Africa, the overall picture of the landscape of religious actors becomes even more complex. According to our understanding, the religious

landscape in South Africa is still much more diversified than in Germany. The most important movement is that of the African Initiated Churches – AICs – of which 25.4 percent of the population are members and that originated through separation from traditional mission churches. These are followed by members of Evangelical churches and Pentecostal churches that make up around 15 percent of the population. And then 4.2% are members of the Reformed Church, 6.4% are Catholics, followed by Methodists (5%), Anglicans (3.2%) and other Protestant churches (5.3%)... In summary: a very colourful picture indeed!

Just as in Germany, the question arises for South Africa: for whom do these religious communities and churches speak? For certain groups – rich or poor, black or white, women or men, for certain population groups or ethnicities?

And we also need to ask our long-term church partners in Germany, Bread for the World and Misereor, whether they seek an exchange with the new actors, the African Initiated Churches, beyond their intensive contact and cooperation with South African churches that has in many cases been in existence for many decades. What contact has been made – or do we possibly have some “blind spots” on our map? In principle, we must think about the opportunities and the establishment of new formats of cooperation, also with followers of the Islamic faith, the Jewish faith or of other religions.

So Germany and South Africa are faced with the same question: Are there networks or cooperation partners that represent the diversity of religions and churches and that are suitable for cooperation across the different denominations?

Question 2: How can such a cooperation be successful? How can we enter into business on the topic of religion and development?

In development cooperation, the BMZ as a state actor cooperates with partner governments. All measures, focus areas and funds are jointly discussed and coordinated within the framework of government negotiations – also with South Africa in the past year.

As state actor, we obviously pay attention to the fact that the respective partner government consents to the incorporation of civil society and religious actors in “their” country. We consider this an additional opportunity within the framework of our joint efforts. It is often said that with civil society much can be achieved,

without it – almost – nothing. And we have learnt that even the direct contact of the BMZ with religious partners in partner countries is wanted by both sides and regarded as meaningful. So, the Federal Minister for Development, Dr Müller, on his journeys regularly seeks an exchange with religious dignitaries and local congregations. He last did this during his visits to Malawi and Zambia in January, when I accompanied him.

Are there – irrespective of these very personal encounters in rather small circles – also “formal ties” between the German federal government and/or the embassy in South Africa and South African religious communities? And if not, are these actually wanted? If we now wish to utilise the potential of cooperation in the context of religion and sustainable development, how do we go about this? Round-table discussions with religious representatives from Germany and South Africa, together with governments? Working groups on specific topics? New projects within the framework of existing church partnerships – or within the framework of new partnerships? You can see that we already have many ideas, but much still remains to be discussed. But one aspect has hopefully become clear: we do not want to fall into the trap of mutual instrumentalisation that would present a threat to the respective added value of cooperation.

The third and last question is: What are we talking about? What does concrete cooperation look like?

In view of the arguments given, we are (hopefully) convinced of the meaningfulness and value of closer cooperation. But what can such cooperation work like in practice if we do not want to run the risk of irritating partners, religious communities and church organisations, or of questioning the responsibility of the state for its own development processes or, in the worst case, of even thwarting such responsibility?

A solid understanding of the actors and acceptance of their respective roles is certainly a core aspect. Similarly, a common understanding of what the joint interest in cooperation could be. And because this kind of cooperation implies moving into uncharted territory and being innovative, we should concentrate our cooperation on a few strategic aspects and not get lost in all too many small cooperation projects. The list of topics of possible cooperation and common points of departure is long: good governance, human rights and corruption, gender

equity, population dynamics and sexual and reproductive health, prevention of violence, social justice, reconciliation, education, and last but most definitely not least: sustainable development and Agenda 2030.

Cooperation also implies working together, as equals with equal rights. Thus, it would be important for us to hear first of all: What would *your* strategic topics of cooperation be? What contents would you want to focus on?

But it is not only religious communities, religious authorities, inter-religious networks or organisations that are based on an ethical canon of values are important partners for us. For successful development cooperation and sustainable development, an active and critical civil society is indispensable. This applies especially where state structures are not yet or not always present. That is why we do not only cooperate with churches and religious communities, but also with businesses, scientists, political foundations and numerous non-governmental organisations.

But that is a topic that could fill yet another evening.

Conclusion

In summary, I would like to come to a conclusion tonight and I would like to express one big wish.

The conclusion is: with cooperation between state and religion and with our strategy on religion, we are following an approach that the peace researcher Markus Weingardt from Tübingen summarised as follows, “*You neither need to be religious, nor do you need to like religions in order to recognise their contribution and potential with regard to peace policies. But if religions harbour such potential for peace, then it must be our endeavour to utilise this in the interest of peace and to the benefit of the people and to incorporate them into politics.*”

And I wish to add to that: also, and specifically, into development politics.

But not as national “lonesome riders” but on the basis of the tried and trusted approach of partnerships – as practised in the **International Partnership on Religion and Sustainable Development (PaRD)**.

Here, almost 100 state and multilateral actors, as well as civil society and religiously motivated organisations at international level cooperate in order to make a contribution towards achieving the sustainability goals. The partnership benefits immensely from the diversity of its members, as well as from the enormous capacity and radiance of the religious actors involved. From the faith-based community we already have five members from South Africa, some of them present here today.

And now my wish right at the end: as one of the initiators of PaRD, the BMZ would be absolutely delighted if the South African government would become the first country from the Global South to join PaRD – and this is not to be understood as a “pious hope” at the end of my presentation, but as an explicit and warm invitation! And not only the BMZ would be delighted, but all PaRD members, because we are convinced that the South African experience of the interaction between state and religion will greatly enrich our discussions in PaRD.

Perhaps the representatives of churches present here today could inform the South African government of this possibility and opportunity. Or South Africa could be the host of the next annual general meeting of PaRD and would thus have the opportunity of gaining first-hand insights into the working methods, the contents and the structure of PaRD? We are convinced that PaRD can also offer some of its experiences to South Africa.