RELIGION & STATE DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

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

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A perspective from Bread for the World

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My colleague at Misereor, Peter Meiwald, has already addressed this topic, and his points apply to *Brot für die Welt* as well. Fortunately and thankfully, we both benefit from the good cooperation between the state and the development agencies of the churches in Germany. I will not repeat his comments in detail, but will rather pose some systematic questions. In his talk, Prof. Hans-Jürgen Papier noted that in Germany the cooperation between the state and the church in the field of social services is based on the principle of subsidiarity, irrespective of whether these social services are provided in the form of development services in Germany or worldwide. In our case, i.e. in the case of development cooperation, the principle of subsidiarity means that the state assumes and places its trust in us that the churches, through their thousands of partners around the world, are closer to the people in Africa, Asia and Latin America, that they know their situation better than we do, and that they know more about their respective concerns, goals, potentials and plans. And so this also means that we ourselves can determine the countries of focus, the priority issues, the methods and instruments of our work. The Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and the Church's Central Offices for Development maintain a constructive-critical relationship with each other, as Ministerial Director Bernhard Felmberg has already said.

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The principle of subsidiarity has generally proven to be very fruitful in Germany, not least because it is in the interests of all and the common good. In a certain, somewhat simplistic way one could say that we, for our part, also maintain a principle of subsidiarity vis-à-vis our thousands of partners - in the sense that we provide them with resources which they can use to implement what they deem to be the most appropriate course of action on the ground. The current form of cooperation between the Federal Government of Germany and our partners in the South could therefore be called (even if this would never be stated in this way) a 'passed-on subsidiarity'.

To explain in brief: we are granted a so-called general authorisation by the BMZ to determine for whom, what and where we use the approved lump sum. We do this by passing the money on to our partners in the global South, who in turn are close to the people and their needs so that they can use it to finance what they consider appropriate and necessary locally in order to overcome hunger, poverty, injustice and violence. In doing so, we pass on the conditions that we - like all other recipients of funds - have received from the ministry. They are of a technical and technocratic nature, i.e. they relate to the type and scope of accountability, auditing, impact monitoring, etc., and are subject to the same conditions as those for all other recipients.

However, when it comes to determining which topics to work on, which target groups, which methods and which working methods to select, we trust our partners - as the German government trusts us - to use the funds in such a way as to ensure that they best serve the common goals, as currently formulated globally in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

In other words, we are in a way passing on the principle of subsidiarity, even though we are rather talking about the partner principle, which is even more comprehensive. Incidentally, unlike other recipients of BMZ grants, church development agencies have so far paid their own administrative costs. This means that the state also gains the positive side effect from this form of cooperation that it can pass on the money earmarked for the projects to the project partners in the South at zero cost, so to speak.

Why am I giving such a detailed account of this? In my following remarks, I would like to emphasize the new situation in which the German government, with the

BMZ as a participant and actually as a motor of PaRD, is considering how it (or the implementing organization GIZ) can work directly with churches and other religious communities in the South when discussing religion and development with international organizations such as the World Bank and UN organizations. Here for me the question arises as to whether the BMZ, or its implementing organisation GIZ, will also apply this principle of subsidiarity to this direct cooperation with churches in Africa.

We, *Brot für die Welt* and Misereor, have a contractual basis for our cooperation with the BMZ under the basic treaty dating from 1962, and with the general authorisation an agreement which stipulates the self-determination of the church development services. If in future BMZ or GIZ want to work with the churches directly or via PaRD, for instance in Africa, and would like to support them directly, then the question of the contractual basis has to be asked. More precisely, the question is whether the principle of subsidiarity and thus also the principle of self-determination of the partners (in our case today: the churches in South Africa) will be applied in this cooperation as well, in terms of priority setting, project goals, target groups, methods and measures.

In other words, will churches in South Africa be able to set their own priorities and pursue their own plans and get support in such a possible direct partnership with the GIZ or PaRD? Or – to state it more extremely – will they only be implementation bodies, an instrument of the German government to pursue its own goals and priorities? Probably and hopefully this is not the intention. However, how is self-determination, which implies the principle of subsidiarity, institutionalized as a reliable basis of cooperation so that the churches do not have to enforce it anew time and again, and each church partner for itself in this cooperation? How can it be guaranteed that the GIZ actually cultivates cooperation with potential church partners in the South on an equal footing and that the churches themselves determine their goals and tasks – even if one has a very good common frame of reference with the Agenda 2030?

The bargaining power of the churches in the South vis-à-vis the government of another country is almost nil – after all, we have a treaty! This means that we have reached an agreement with the government on principles of cooperation – in the sense of subsidiarity – and no longer have to enforce them. Yet how can

the churches in the South achieve such a position as cooperation partners? What kind of negotiations will there be? Which principles will be the guiding ones? And finally, whose resources? Will the resources of the churches be strengthened in the field of development as a result of cooperation with the German government, or will their resources be tied up as a result of cooperation? Will they also, just like us, have to bear their own administrative costs and only receive project funding? In that case, the rather modest resources of the churches in the South would no longer be available for their own agenda, their own priorities, but will be needed for enabling the programmes of the GIZ or PaRD.

These are very central questions that we should clarify together in the coming months and years. So far we have all been guided by the – certainly justified – euphoria that such cooperation between e.g. the South African churches and PaRD or the GIZ could have great potential. However, now we need to get our feet back on the ground and ask the right and important questions – because the churches in Germany as well as in South Africa are not an instrument of another government or the UN. And our task is not to serve their goals, but to try to be God's instrument, to serve his goals for the world. Of course this would be the ideal position, and we all know that the way to actually work as an instrument of God is not easy!

My second point has to do with the role and importance of religion and churches in development cooperation and the achievement of the SDGs. Their contribution towards reaching Agenda 2030 is considered to be so valuable because churches are so different. Therefore, it is important to preserve their otherness so that they are able to make use of their other potentials. Yesterday Lindiwe Makubalo mentioned as an added value of church development work that churches can procure additional resources from abroad – all well and good. Surely this is not the key point. The fact that they are also present in the most remote corners and can reach the poorest and that they have the trust of the population, moral power and values, that's all true and makes them special and unique. But their otherness has something to do with their other mission. In fact, the biblical mission of the churches is by no means development. Yesterday we talked about the necessity of bilingualism, i.e. the ability to navigate different linguistic worlds. In this sense, we talk about what we do, about development work when we agree with other actors on what it entails, not least with the state. And we can identify those parts

of the programmes that correspond with the understanding of development in society and politics. However, the mission as such is not development; one would speak of the diaconal mission of the Church, including prophetic diaconia. In any case, the understanding of political development, especially of Agenda 2030, and the church's mandate often coincide. The latter, however, is not absorbed by development work.

In the nature of the church's mission there is, among other things, the orientation towards the common good and its interest in creating community and making it just and conducive to peace. This includes pointing to the limits of individual freedom, or the freedom of individual social groups, and emphasizing one's responsibility for the welfare of all in one's own society, as well as of all people, the welfare of creation and the welfare of future generations. The mission includes the imperative for justice, counteracting inequality (social and global), and finding and defining structural compensation mechanisms. And even when injustice and inequality have occurred, these mechanisms become more and more important to counteract them again and again.

This includes ensuring that no one is excluded, marginalised or abandoned: leave no one behind! The church's mission is to provide for reconciliation, i.e. to reconcile oneself and make reconciliation possible to help establish social and intergovernmental peace, and to work towards maintaining and sustaining social cohesion and the cohesion of the international community.

I only mention these elements of the mandate because they have already been discussed at one point or another over the course of this conference. However, what is behind it? A different view of the world and a different view of humanity that stem from faith in God and shape our understanding of our responsibility to the world. Part of our view of the world, for instance, is the understanding that all natural resources are God's gifts, that they do not belong to anyone, that therefore no one can dispose of them at will solely for their own benefit and for the satisfaction of their own interests. We therefore regard natural resources such as water, air, etc. as global commodities. Therefore, the concept of stewardship is central to the understanding of one's own treatment of resources entrusted to the church: churches and Christians consider themselves – or should at least consider themselves – good stewards of God's resources.

Secondly, much has already been said about the other image of humanity: on the subjects of dignity, equality, inclusion, etc. In terms of these aspects I say: we are guided by a specific view of the world and of humanity which is based on our faith and which guides us in the fulfilment of our – also specific – mission. This is certainly in line with the SDGs as they convey, among other things, a more holistic understanding of development than many development concepts in the past, because they aim to leave no one behind, etc. Yet the mission to testify to God's will – not only to lead one's own life according to him, but also to shape the world accordingly – is the foundation of church work in the field of development.

From the mission entrusted to the church and the Christian understanding of humankind arises – my third thought – an added value, which I would like to emphasize once again, although I have already said a few words about it, because at this point in all the discussions that we have had so far with the BMZ or with others on the subject of religion and development, there was always disagreement: the added value and special potential that churches and other religious communities bring to development work is essentially their faith and their hope:

- the hope that another, a better, a more just, a more peaceful life is possible for all people living in harmony with creation;
- the hope that the stone has been rolled away from the tomb and therefore death, violence, man-made destruction of life and livelihoods do not have the last word;
- the hope that, with God's help and in his footsteps, we will always be able to remove all the obstacles that stand in the way of a just and peaceful life.

This is a huge potential. On the one hand, there is the potential for resistance. Resistance against all those who consider unfair conditions to be cast in cement, or who continue to cement them. Here I do not have to say much as the South African churches during apartheid had already very much put into practice precisely this element.

Another source of hope for the survival of communities in violent contexts, for the collective and individual coping with traumatic experiences such as war, flight and natural disasters is resilience. Hope is the source of the ability to survive in regions in which – when one travels through them as a Western

European – one can only be amazed at how people can live and survive here. This power of resilience and also the power of hope, both of which emanate from faith, are manifested in the activities of the churches. However, they are empowered, nurtured, cared for and lived in ways that are not easily identifiable by the secularized development community as so-called development measures.

As an example, I would like to mention pastoral care as a central instrument used by the church to assist with trauma management. In Nigeria there are practically no psychologists in the violent regions of the North East. But there are churches and pastors who, as spiritual counsellors, help women, children and men who have experienced the trauma of violence to come to terms with these experiences and to open themselves again to facing their future, and perhaps even towards reconciliation.

If one wants as a government to acknowledge the potential of religion for development, such as that of hopefulness, encouragement, coping with existential pain and suffering, which are very eminent in restoring people's self-efficacy, where would the subsidies end?

Up to now it has been the case that government funding agencies for development cooperation have said: "This is all church stuff", i.e. church services, pastoral care and so on, which all has nothing to do with development but is instead the business of religion. "We have nothing to do with that."

Let me describe a case from the 1970s, which at that time sparked a great debate. The Mekane Yesus Church in Ethiopia (EECMY), an Evangelical Lutheran church, built a hospital with BMZ funds mediated through us. However, when they wanted to build a chapel in this hospital, we had to calculate precisely on the basis of the total construction expenses what this chapel would cost. The BMZ would certainly not support this part of the costs.

This raises a new question which, in the context of the debate on religion and development, we must once again raise with public authorities: Is our technocratic understanding of development, which excludes the psychological component, actually adequate? The question is what enables and mobilizes people to rise again after devastating experiences, to become active against the apparent normality and against the status quo, to change themselves, to undertake social-ecological transformation? It is of course quite clear that development funds

should not be used to fund the construction of churches in general and that the churches cannot cover their institutional costs – we are not talking about that, that goes without saying. We are talking about marginal areas: Is it appropriate to say that your spiritual ministry or theological training (e.g. of religious leaders so that they can find adequate biblical answers to the challenge of HIV/AIDS) is not relevant to development? The theological, which we have created and promoted together with the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the All African Conference of Churches (AACC), was highly relevant to development! Yet not eligible for government-supported funding!

These are just some of the fringe areas. As I have already mentioned, this is not a question of black or white: we are not talking about the need to promote the proclamation of the Gospel as such. However, we also consider it inappropriate that such activities conducted by the churches be denied as relevant to development. Who decides what is relevant to development? In the context of this debate on religion and development, what is needed is a serious discussion rather than blanket answers. Churches and religious communities must now call for and encourage this discussion!

A fourth point: at the beginning of this conference the director of the Academy, Udo Hahn, mentioned that we, as *Brot für die Welt*, together with Civicus have published an “Atlas of Civil Society” in which we examined the status of societies with respect to the possibilities they allow for citizens to get involved and enjoy their political and individual rights.

Our findings show that only 2% of the world’s population lives in countries where that is still possible. However, an increasing number of people are living in countries where civil society has limited or no room to manoeuvre. Many of our partners are under enormous pressure. And others are now already experiencing fear, fear for their lives, especially in Brazil, after President Jair Bolsonaro announced that he wants to “eradicate” social movements. One of the ways to “turn off the tap” on social movements, trade unions, etc. is by freezing their accounts abroad or by requiring them to label themselves as foreign agents when they present themselves in public.

Given this situation, where we are dealing with shrinking spaces worldwide, where states worldwide restrict civil society and hinder their international

networking, churches do not have to believe that they can adopt a neutral stance alongside civil society and are not affected. Increasingly, the capacity of the church to act in the developmental, social and political spheres is also directly affected in this situation.

With this in mind, I would like to ask what the direct cooperation between the German government and churches in Africa that GIZ and PaRD are aiming for should look like? Or what could it look like? Or, most importantly, how would governmental funders like to avoid the danger that any direct cooperation between the state and the churches in the South would lead the governments of the churches to suspect that they are “foreign agents” and would therefore be subject to restrictions?

Because many of our partners get money from us, no matter where they present themselves and whatever brochures they publish, they must always include the words: “We are foreign agents.” This is sometimes true, even though we ourselves are not the German government and we are free from political guidelines in our cooperation with our government, we do not have to pursue or implement our government’s agenda, we are not an extended political arm, we are not government instruments, but the government gives us full freedom. They do not say: “Now go and do this and that in South Africa – that’s what the government here wants.” No, the government does not do that at all, as I have already stated. That is the great thing about this cooperation.

There are governments who want evidence that we are not an extension of the government, should our partners legitimately argue this. In that case, we refer to our contractual arrangements. But how can the accusation of being the extended arm of a foreign government be avoided if a federal government cooperates directly with the churches in another country? How can the danger for the churches be minimized? Perhaps everyone is already aware of this, but in times of shrinking space for direct partnerships between federal government and PaRD churches in the global South, I want to highlight this potential danger once again.

Fifthly and finally: I believe – but these are future dreams – that we are already moving in the direction of what is referred to as a state Beyond Aid. This means that the financial support, the counselling, the kind of personnel support provided from the north to the south are increasingly being given new functions,

and perhaps in the future these will allow financial support to take a back seat. The SDGs have defined global tasks for all governments of the world, for our partners and for us. Many of our partners, with whom we deliberate on the SDGs together, say: “Okay, you have to do your homework in Germany. You have to do more advocacy there. And you have to make sure that the SDGs are implemented in Germany.” We as *Brot für die Welt* are in a favourable position to be part of the Protestant Service for Diakonia and Development, i.e. under one roof with Diakonie Deutschland and thus with social work in Germany. We are very well positioned for the future, to also promote our homework in our own country.

Every government must do its part to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. But there must also be more multilateral cooperation. Multilateral cooperation between states is not in the best of shape – nationalism is on the rise. We have seen for quite some time in the course of all the climate negotiations that the UN is becoming progressively weaker and that further alliances among willing parties are needed. And we as *Brot für die Welt*, in association with our global network ACT Alliance, have begun to help forge other alliances on the periphery of and alongside the world climate conferences. Parallel to the necessary strengthening of multilateralism, it is also necessary to ensure that civil society cooperates with civil society, civil society with the economy, the economy with the economy, governments with the economy, and governments with civil societies. Our partners from the South have told us that our main job in the future will also have to include being networkers and facilitators, collaborating with ecumenical networks and organizations to contribute towards bringing together actors from the South and the North, i.e. civil society and churches from all regions, in order to promote common goals, such as in this case the achievement of the 1.5 degree goal. This is particularly true in areas where governments themselves may not show great willingness. In the USA this is made very clear: the federal government has withdrawn from the Paris Agreement, but the states, the municipalities, the trade unions, the churches, all sorts of other stakeholders have started to take on this job. And we must prepare ourselves for this. That is an essential and common task between ecumenical partners worldwide.

This is wonderful in so far as we engage as equal partners.