

# Religion and Development: the case of the Catholic Relief Services

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis attempts to understand the nexus between religion and international development in development studies. For the past two decades, scholars have claimed that religion is returning to the development field, due to world events that have paved for this 'comeback' to take place and subsequently, the interest in development studies journals (Tomlin, 2015). Others have argued that religion never went anywhere but have been gradually pushing its presence to the public sphere (Casanova, 1994). This research is a case study of the Catholic Relief Services, a US based faith-based organization (FBO), using reports and documents from CRS in order to understand secularism and religion in international development. Using Foucault's discourse analysis, this research explores how CRS has navigated and adapted their religious identity in a secular world system (Berger, 2014) through the past nearly eight decades and attempts to explore trends in international development related to religion.

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# 1. Introduction

Throughout the centuries, belief in the supernatural has undeniably played a large role in the daily lives and practices of people in all cultures, across the planet (Peoples et al. 2016). From polytheism to monotheism, animalism to shamanism, spiritualism and mythologies, humans have long tried to make sense of our existence, purpose and the world around us. It comes naturally to humans to seek answers and make sacrifices accordingly, whether that might be an all-knowing God, science or capitalism. Enter the 20th century, where religion, especially in the West, has become second to the state. People shifted their trust away from religion and towards the state (Habermas, 2008), and the secularization hypothesis was that the more modernized societies would become, the less religion would matter to people (Berger, 2014). Deriving from this discourse, a secular paradigm of international development driven by economic and technological growth came to light, after World War II. What followed were decades of international development and development studies that were colored by structuralist approaches to development, as well as modernization theory and the secularization thesis (Berger, 2014). In an ever-globalizing world, rapid progress in science and technology can rationally give explanations that have overtaken the mysticism that religion has long relied on (Habermas, 2008). Simple scientific explanations are given to phenomenon that for long were put on God's will (Ager, 2011). Naturally, shifts in ideologies change over time with different emphasis unique to each era. Whether we look a century back or to ancient civilization, arguably, it is within human nature to find ways to reason for the external, may it be the elements, wars, famine or fertility.

However, social scientists across disciplines have argued that religion is on the rise again in development studies, with rise in faith-based organizations (FBOs), more donor interest in FBOs and political events that have shaped reaction towards religion (Hovland, 2008; Lunn, 2009; Tomlin, 2015). Habermas (2008) argues that in reality we live in a post-secular society, since the secularization thesis has indeed failed as 80% of people in the world still profess religious faith (Clarke and Ware, 2015). By following the trajectory of a FBO, Catholic Relief Services, how it navigates its religious identity as an international development organization as well as a Catholic organization, through a secular and later a post-secular international development paradigm.

## 1.1 Motivation

Although my interest on why humans are so fascinated by deities and find comfort in organized religion lie deeper and further back, my interest in this particular research topic at an international consultation that I attended in November 2019, called *Churches Witnessing With Migrants*. I attended, somewhat reluctantly, on behalf of Amman Center for Human Rights Studies (ACHRS), a think tank NGO I was interning with from August 2019 to January 2020. When the director of ACHRS had asked me to attend the consultation, I was immediately sceptical of the religious part of its premise and just the name seemed off and out of touch with modern times.

At the consultation however, I found it fascinating how religious leaders from all over the world were present working with migrants and refugees in their respective countries. Although representatives from Christian organizations clearly made up the majority of attendees, Muslim and Jewish representatives working with refugees and migrants were also present. Since the consultation was held in Quito, Ecuador, the participants were also largely from North, Central and South America, although representatives from all over the world attended.

I found it refreshing to see religious leaders coming together and sharing their experiences with working in the field with refugees and when responding to humanitarian crises or helping migrants with their labor rights, as religious and faith-inspired local organizations have not taken up many pages in the literature on forced migration provided by the social sciences, nor within the humanitarian regime as far as I had noticed. However, there they were, the bishop of the Mexican Methodist Church, priests from all over the US, theologians from Canada, reverends from the Philippines, Imam from Indonesia, etc. They were all sharing their lived experiences of their personal interaction with migrants and refugees, what their faith community was doing in order to specifically help people being displaced for whatever reason.

Coming from a Scandinavian background, where secularism has been the prevalent framework, I felt like there was a whole field of faith-inspired organizations that I have been overlooking when reading about humanitarianism and the response to humanitarian crises. The fact that these organizations and the work they do had not even crossed my mind, led me to question the literature in international relations and more widely within the social sciences. It became evident to me that there is some sort of a gap

in the literature and moreover in the language and rhetoric around humanitarianism. It is from this terrain of thought that I will attempt to dive deeper into how religious leaders, who for centuries have been framing most aspects of people's lives, are now navigating and making sense of a secular framework within humanitarianism.

## 1.2 Problem Area

There is no denying that for a long time, religion was overlooked in the social sciences, and especially in international relations, (Hurd, 2007). For decades the axiom for developing countries was the secularization thesis, namely that as countries develop, the less important religion would become in the public sphere and in people's lives in general (Habermas, 2008). However, most social scientists agree that the secularization thesis has failed, as this stance is not as widely accepted in the rest of the world (Berger, 2014), where for many people separating religious practices and a more secular working life is not an option, as the two are highly interconnected (Kirmani and Khan, 2008). Looking to testimonies from refugees and migrants that largely come from and migrate within the global south, religion and faith have become a cornerstone within their cultures and daily lives, providing strength and hope that they turn to when in need and desperate situations (Goodall, 2015; Kirmani and Khan, 2008). Moreover, the acceptance of religion as a part of daily lives and rituals are interconnected. Hence, in large parts of the world, divisions between the religious and the secular in the daily lives of people, are not as clear as was once argued, as a natural reaction to modernization processes (Goodall, 2015). This stance supports an interesting argument for the grounds why religion is pertinent to development studies and furthermore, how faith-based organizations fit into international development. Looking at the literature of Religion and Development (RaD), scholars have claimed that religion is now on the rise in development studies and has been for some time (Tomlin, 2015; Davis, 2019; Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011; Clarke, 2006; Hurd, 2007; Fountain and Juul Petersen, 2019).

The concepts of secularization, modernization, religion and faith-based organizations are complex in nature and often overlap. FBOs vary immensely in identity. They are not solely religious in nature, they also have complex structures of social and cultural parameters that reach beyond their religious identity (de Kadt, 2009). As stated

by some development scholars, it has become evident that polarizing religion and secularism as two opposite approaches to development studies does not capture the complexities involved in international development (Hovland, 2008; Davie, 2002; de Kradt, 2009; Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011). According to the literature, it seems that around the new millennium, something started to change in the way religion was viewed as a force within development studies, but also for international relations and politics (Hurd, 2008). After a comprehensive study of religion in development studies journals from 1982-1998, Ver Beek called religion a development “taboo” (2000). It is here, around the millennia that the shift started, and some scholars have argued it is ongoing (Ferris, 2020).

Driven by these considerations and my own motivation as outlined above, this thesis seeks to understand the role of religion in development by looking at the Catholic Relief Services (CRS), a faith-based organization established in 1943 as a response from American Catholic bishops to help refugees in Europe after World War II. As a case study, CRS is interesting to look at as it navigates its religious identity over the years in a secular international development milieu to a postmodern and post-structural way of looking at development.

### 1.3 Research Statement

The aforementioned considerations resulted in the following research question that will be explored in this thesis:

*How has the Catholic Relief Services navigated their religious identity in international development over the years, and what can the case of CRS showcase about trends between religion and development?*

Furthermore, the following research questions have worked as guidelines to structure and answer the research statement:

- How has religious resurgence manifested itself in international development and development studies, according to scholars?

- What has contributed to the space for religion to enter international development for the past two decades?

## 2. Setting the Scene

Religious communities of all faith traditions have long helped the ones in need for various reasons, providing safety, food and shelter. All the major religions; Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism and Sikhism all share the commonalities of having mechanisms of helping those in need (Deacon and Tomalin, 2015; Goodall, 2015). Desire to help those in need is deeply ingrained in these religions and some of the practices are personal responsibilities for each individual “[...] to be performed without attachment to personal gain or reward” (Deacon and Tomalin, 2015: 69), for example the *zakat*<sup>1</sup> and *sadaqah*<sup>2</sup> in Islam, *dana*<sup>3</sup> and *seva*<sup>4</sup> in Hinduism, Sikhism and Buddhism and *Dasvandh*<sup>5</sup> in Sikhism (ibid), as well as *Tzedakah*<sup>6</sup> in Judaism (Barnett and Weiss, 2011: 51). Humanitarian work and charity thus, is an extension of religion and an old tradition for many communities and was carried out by religious leaders (Moore, 2020). Charity became much more organized and public in the 19th century, as a part of social reform (Barnett and Weiss, 2011).

In 1862 Henry Dunant, a Genevan businessman, published the book *Memory of Solferino*, a European bestseller that three years later became the foundation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRS). On his way to Italy in order to venture on business opportunities in Algeria, Dunant witnessed a gruesome battle between French and Austro-Hungarian troops (Barnett, 2011). “The Battle of Solferino became to modern humanitarianism what the Treaty of Westphalia was to modern international politics” (Barnett, 2011: 1). It is from the ICRS that humanitarianism is usually defined as “[...] neutrality, impartiality, independence and humanity; invoking a non-politically embedded ethical commitment to responding to suffering by seeking only to keep people

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<sup>1</sup> Zakat: calculated at the end of each year and expects 2,5% of all wealth to be given to the poor (Deacon and Tomalin, 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Sadaqah: given directly to charity, without any intermediary (Deacon and Tomalin, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> “Selfless giving” (Deacon and Tomalin, 2015: 69).

<sup>4</sup> “Service” (ibid).

<sup>5</sup> To give tenth of

<sup>6</sup> Charity but beyond that, a part of the Jewish identity is making the world a better place (Barnett and Weiss, 2011: 51)

alive in times of crisis” (Moore, 2020: 402). Although ICRC tried to urge states to “outlaw uncivilized weapons” (Barnett, 2011: 2), it did not have much success until World War One where it was busier than ever, providing medical aid and helping prisoners of war.

During World War II many private voluntary agencies and governments delivered relief to those in need and set out to rebuild Europe after the war. As Europe became more stable, these agencies moved its relief assistance beyond Europe and into the global scene and so, humanitarianism became global and moved from “help to self-help” (Barnett, 2011: 179). The establishment of the UN in 1945 as a response to the war and in order to maintain international peace, promote social progress and improve relations between countries<sup>7</sup>, contributed to the spreading of a global human rights regime (Donnelly, 2017). Although Dunant deserves credit in the formation of secular humanitarianism, rapid industrialization, urbanization and modernization all played a part as well as the UN to globalize international human rights norms. Humanitarianism was global (Barnett, 2011). Former colonial powers involved themselves in the economic progress of previous colonies through development economists who, through the Marshall Plan, had been highly influential in the reconstruction of Europe after the war, creating a North-South relationship (Aghajanian and Allouche, 2016). The Marshall Plan, also known as the European recovery Plan<sup>8</sup>, inspired former colonizers to develop their former colonies (Aghajanian and Allouche, 2016). Looking at development through economic processes proved to be insufficient and restraining and hence, from social sciences came a new multidisciplinary branch, namely development studies. Although definitions vary, there is a general understanding that development can be defined as “organized intervention in collective affairs according to a standard of improvement” (Pieterse, 2010: 3 in Rakodi, 2015: 18). In its early days, ideas and theories of development saw technology as the motor for social change and a pathway to development, as well as economic power and materialism (Aghajanian and Allouche, 2016).

By the 1970s, development studies had moved beyond economic factors, considering instead a wider “movement upward of the entire social system” consisting of “economic, social, and political stratification” (Myrdal, 1974: 729). After the Cold War, the

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<sup>7</sup> Un.org. n.d. *History of the UN | United Nations Seventieth Anniversary*

<sup>8</sup> History.com available at: <https://www.history.com/topics/world-war-ii/marshall-plan-1#:~:text=The%20Marshall%20Plan%2C%20also%20known,rebuilding%20efforts%20on%20the%20continent.>

secularization thesis became highly criticized and deflated as postmodernism and post-structuralism became influential in looking at development. Through the postmodernist lens, development was seen as “hopelessly evolutionary, of being colonial in intent, of being masculinist, of being *dirigiste*, and of being a vehicle for depoliticization and the extension of bureaucratic state power” (Corbridge, 2007: 180). The post-structural lens also provided a space for religion and FBOs to be acknowledged as actors in international development after years of marginalization (Lunn, 2009).

## 2.1 Religion, Faith and Spirituality

Often, the literature on religion and development (RaD) tends to use the terms *religion*, *spirituality* and *faith* interchangeably. However, it is important to distinguish between these in order to avoid any misunderstandings. For example, secular NGOs sometimes use faith in its development discourses, meaning trust and not a religious tradition. This research uses Jenny Lunn’s definitions on these terms, namely “*religion* as an institutionalized system of beliefs and practices concerning supernatural realm; *spirituality* as the personal beliefs by which an individual relates to and experiences the supernatural realm; and *faith* as the trust or belief in a transcendent reality” (Lunn, 2009: 937).

## 2.2 Faith-based Organizations

FBOs have historically been active in providing aid for the poor, with central concepts such as *compassion*, *solidarity* and *care* found in most religions (Juul Petersen, 2019). Scholars have argued that FBOs are the main providers of services such as health care, conflict resolution and humanitarian assistance in many places in the world (Lunn, 2009; Clarke and Ware, 2015; Swart and Nell, 2016). Although faith-based organizations (FBOs) are complex and can vary in religiosity, structure and sizes, they can be seen as local or global non-governmental organizations that associate themselves with some religious traditions or any specific understanding of tradition within faith (Clarke and Jennings, 2008). To try to simplify, the definition of Clarke and Jennings is helpful. They define FBOs as “any organization that derives inspiration and guidance for its activities from the

teachings and principles of the faith or from a particular interpretation or school of thought within that faith“ (Clarke and Jennings, 2008 in Ferris, 2011: 607). Although the diversity and definitions of FBOs are not the focus of this research, it is important to note that scholars agree that defining FBOs is a complex work (Lunn, 2009; Occhipinti, 2015; Butcher and Hallward, 2018), depending on the extent of their religiosity. Also, some FBOs are spiritual in nature, but not all religious people are spiritual (Lunn, 2009).

## 2.3 Secularization as a Process

The most influential thinkers of the 19th century, Max Weber, Auguste Comte, Karl Marx and Émile Durkheim, all believed that religion would slowly cease in importance as societies modernize (Norris and Inglehart, 2004). This process is called secularization. The secularization thesis derives from the Enlightenment and Scientific Revolution, “making the world more rationally comprehensible and manageable, and thus, supposedly, leaving less and less space for the supernatural” (Berger, 2001: 336). The reasons given to explain secularization are that religious expression became more and more private as massive migration processes, urbanization, “progressive differentiation of modern institutions” and “mass communication that undermined traditional ways of life” (Berger, 2001: 336), fundamentally severed the relationship between state and church. According to Berger, these processes and understandings of secularization in modern societies were not necessarily anti-religious, although the assumptions of religious decline were widely shared and not necessarily opposed: even “The Roman Catholic church” seemed to adapt to it, “with reactions ranging from defiant resistance against secularity to a cautious adjustment to it (aggiornamento<sup>9</sup>)” (Berger, 2001; 337).: , Although many social scientists have since debunked (Tomalin, 2015) the secularization thesis and wanted to send it straight to the graveyard of failed theories (Stark and Finke, 2000) or have changed their minds from supporting it to not - Peter Berger being one of them - it is not without empirical emphasis of social processes happening at the time. The works of Gabriel LeBras, sometimes called “father of sociology of religion (Berger, 2014), in the 1930s demonstrate that with urbanization in France, people were indeed becoming

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<sup>9</sup>“Bringing up to date: modernization” (Merriam-Webster)

less and less religious, going so far as to call the Gare du Nord, the railway station which most people arrived at when moving to Paris, a “magical piece of pavement” since according to LeBras, people arriving on these steps ceased to be Catholic (LeBras in Berger, 2001).

As the years have gone by, the secularization thesis has not lived up to its promised outskirts. Religion has not become any less important with modernization, in fact, religion is as fiercely present as it ever was, maybe even more so (Berger, 2014). Rather, the secularization thesis has exposed its Eurocentrism.

### **3. Literature Review**

It has become public knowledge that religious traditions have deep connections to humanitarianism and international development, as well as across the political and cultural spectrum (Jan Egelund, in Barnett and Weiss, 2011). For key humanitarian figures like Henri Dunant and Florence Nightingale, their religious background influenced their work (Ager and Ager, 2011). Given this wide acceptance of religious contribution, most major international development players, social sciences and other academic disciplines only relatively recently started to research the topic of “religions and global development” (Tomalin, 2015: 1).

For decades development studies were governed by secular outlook and assumptions (Bompabi, 2019). The *World Development* Journal published a special issue entitled “Religion and Development” in 1980, where editors called for practitioners and academics alike, in the international development field, to re-evaluate the relationship between religion and development (Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011). At the time, “[...] international policy defined development largely in terms of economic growth” (Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011: 45) and subsequently, religion was mostly neglected in the development studies. However, their pleas mostly fell on deaf ears (ibid). In this regard, it is necessary to locate this specifically, as religious organizations and institutions had long contributed to political resistance in Latin America, Asia and Africa (Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011). Thus, narration to a secular paradigm in the development studies and to international development more widely were mostly located within the West. Some have argued that post-colonial governments in Europe and North America as well as

multilateral and bilateral donors reproduced these omissions in order to support “analysis for the transformation of post-colonial societies, namely “development studies”” (Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011: 45). What followed was decades of “secular assumptions and attitudes dominating development studies” (Bompani, 2019: 171).

It is widely accepted that religion has influenced and affected the humanitarian regime as we know it today (Ager and Ager, 2011; Barnett and Weiss, 2008; Deacon and Tomalin, 2015; Goodall, 2015) although, sociological studies tend to leave out theology (Groody, 2009) and religion is often left out of most development policies and programs (Gozdiak, 2002). Some have argued that International Relations is in fact the most secular field in all of the social sciences, and that IR scholars have disregarded and ignored religion since its establishment as an academic discipline (Derakhshesh and Saeidi, 2019). According to Derakhshesh and Saeid, the ground for this neglect is that due to the secularization and modernity of societies in the West, some IR scholars deem religion insignificant to the field (2019). Moore argues that not only did many IR and development scholars frequently ignore religious actors and practices, but also marginalized them (2020). This account echoes what Ager and Ager have argued, namely that religion has become marginalized within secular humanitarianism (2011). They call this *functional secularism*, where the actual neutrality of the humanitarian regime towards religion is challenged. This secular humanitarian manuscript is generally uncritically accepted (Ager and Ager, 2015) by the people involved; beneficiaries, policy makers and those implementing development projects. This is in line with what Elisabeth Hurd argued in 2007 in the discipline of international relations, namely, “[...] the unquestioned acceptance of the secularist division between religion and politics” (2007; 12). Upsurge in political Islam has shaped the geo-political environment and has subsequently, contributed to this new interest in the religion and development (Swart and Nell, 2016).

Arguably, excluding religion from the field of development studies does not give a whole picture of the phenomena that are occurring. Ver Beek declared religion to be a *development taboo* as a result of his research on three leading development journals, from 1982-1998, that found hardly any references related to the subject of religion and development (2000). Furthermore, he points out how “Development journals are replete with analyses of how effective development practice must integrate those factors that influence people's world-view, such as gender, indigenous knowledge, and social structure” (Ver Beek, 2000: 31), yet religion seems to be “conspicuously under-

represented in the development discourse” (Ver Beek, 2000: 31). However, it is like something shifted in the whole discourse around religion and development after Ver Beek’s article and most scholars agree that for the past two decades it has become more and more mainstream to research religion in development and faith-based organizations (Davies, 2019; Hovland, 2008; Clarke, 2007). A decade later, Jones and Juul Petersen claimed that the abstinence of religion in international development was over (2011) since, according to them, the secularization and modernization narratives had been challenged by religion.

Grace Davie (2002) pointed out that the rise of modernity in Europe and the subsequent processes of secularization and de-Christianization has not happened elsewhere, and thus should be thought of as a specific European concept. Asad (2003) argued that the ‘secular’ is not a contrast to religion, rather that secular is a complex multi-layered system. Ingie Hovland argued for the rise in faith and development in her analysis on the “hot debate” on evangelization and development within the Norwegian Mission Society (NMS) in 2003-2004 (2008). Jenny Lunn (2009) argued in *Third World Quarterly*, in her article *The Role of Religion, Spirituality and Faith in Development: a critical theory approach*, that for the past 20 years there was a noticeable turnover from neglect of religion and faith in the development studies and policy.

Around the turn of the 21st century, there were policy shifts in both the USA and the UK, supporting FBOs (Occhipinti, 2015). This follows the Evangelization debate mentioned earlier. During his first days in office, George W. Bush signed two executive orders increasing funding availability for FBOs, one establishing a White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) and forming centers Faith-Based and Community Initiatives in five federal departments (Chaves, 2003 in Occhipinti, 2015). Subsequently, government funding doubled during his presidency from 2001 to 2005, from 10.5 percent to 19.9 percent (James, 2009 in Occhipinti, 2015). In 2005, the UK Department for International Development gave a large grant, specifically to study “Religions and Development”, that was managed by the University of Birmingham (Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011). Subsequently, DANIDA (Danish International Development Agency, NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Corporations), the World Bank and various UN agencies have seen value in partnering with various faith communities (Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011). In 2010 the United Nations formed a Inter-Agency Task Force on Engaging Faith-Based Actors for Sustainable Development in order to provide

policy guidance on the intersections of religions and development, human rights and peace, as well as to deepen knowledge and training UN system staff<sup>10</sup>.

“The lack of attention to religion and faith in development research and policy thus stands in stark contrast to the paramount role played by religion in the daily lives of individuals and communities, particularly in the most active field of international development cooperation, the developing world” (Carbonnier, 2013: 1).

These accounts and arguably more, have made scholars claim that religion is on a rise again in development literature (Tomalin, 2015; Davis, 2019; Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011; Clarke, 2006; Hurd, 2007; Lunn, 2009; Feener and Fountain, 2018; Davis, 2019; Fountain and Juul Petersen, 2019; Leurs, 2012, Occhipinti, 2015). This comeback has been called many different names that attempt to explain the same phenomena occurring within the arena; Fountain and Juul Petersen (2018) called this trend a ‘religious turn’ in development studies, Feener and Fountain (2018) have called this the ‘rediscovery of religion’ in the field of development studies, whereas Hurd (2007) names it ‘Religious Resurgence’, Clarke and Ware (2015) call for an *upsurge* in interest in the role of religion and development studies, Feener and Fountain (2019) the “recent spate of production” in social sciences. Due to external events in the world as well as higher interest by scholars (Davis, 2019), Religion and Development (RaD) has become a new academic sub-discipline at the turn of the 21st century (Bompandi, 2019), although, thus far, most of them take point of departure from Judeo-Christian faiths (Lunn, 2009).

## 4. Methodology

The aim of the following chapter is to shed a light on the methodological considerations and practices that have guided this research. Starting with the methodological outset and an introduction to qualitative research methods, the chapter will hone in on the specifics of this methodology, namely discourse analysis. Following this, the empirical data and

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<sup>10</sup> <https://jliflc.com/organizations/united-nations-inter-agency-task-force-on-engaging-faith-based-actors-for-sustainable-development/#:~:text=The%20United%20Nations%20Interagency%20Task,human%20rights%20and%20peace%20and>

informants of the research will be introduced. Lastly, some ethical considerations and my own positionality will be explored.

## 4.1 Methodological Outsets

Originally, this research set out with the assumption that *naturally*, we live in a secular age (Taylor, 2007) and thus, asked how faith-based organizations are navigating this secular humanitarian paradigm. The aim was to get into contact with faith-based organizations here in Denmark, and to conduct interviews in order to research their experiences negotiating their religious identity with donors and secular international bodies. I had no luck with getting a response from my preferred FBOs, Danmission or DanchurchAid, after many calls and emails. I called and emailed three times, most often without an answer, but on two occasions I was told that due to Covid, there were no available staff to answer my questions. I also contacted Danish Muslim Aid, and they saw no relevance for their organization being a part of this research.

After diving into literature within both development studies and international relations, I found that the secularization thesis has in fact been debunked by many scholars (Davie, 2002; Asad, 2003; Habermas, 2008; Hurd, 2008; Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011). Although interest in religion within development studies never actually went away, there are some arguments that suggest that indeed they did “lay low” for a while and that there is now in fact a “religious resurgence” (Hurd, 2008) in these disciplines. This resurgence is what this research aims to analyze, shedding a light on a paradigm shift that has occurred in international development, by looking at the Catholic Relief Services (CRS). The methodological approaches are mixed with positivism and post-positivism, as the research looks at CRS over the years, and as outsets in development studies changed over time.

## 4.2 Mapping the Research and Discourse Analysis as a Method

Explanatory research has functioned as a guiding light in this research. Explanatory research observes social phenomena and seeks to answer *how* and *why* types of questions and furthermore, to “connect the dots” (Bhattacharjee, 2012: 6) by identifying causal

factors that affect an overall trend or a phenomenon. Explanatory research works well when a phenomenon is researched over time and space to explain causes and effects of the epistemology and ontology of a research. This is relevant to this research, because it seeks to understand how the relationship between religion and secularization in international development has been understood through the case of CRS. In order to not become normative, the research uses discourse analysis as a methodological tool in order to question the objectivity of a given truth and of knowledge. As a part of a broader postulation of social constructivism, discourse analysis provokes criticism of the epistemological orientation of knowledge and how it shapes the world around us and ourselves. Furthermore, discourse analysis invites us to raise questions about normative language and practices, to move beyond power relations and the production and reproduction of structures (Burr, 2015). Hence, in this approach, truths and knowledge are constructed and never seen as objective or factual. Rather, behind them always lies power relations that shape and create the way we look at norms in society.

Michel Foucault's concepts of *power* and *resistance* provide an interesting analysis to the religious and secular paradigms in international development. He is critical towards the conception that power is something that institutions or individuals possess over the powerless, rather, power is something that is performed (Mills, 2003). Looking at power relations beyond the repression of the powerless by the powerful allows for a more holistic way of looking at the interactions and relations between them, especially when examining the new behaviors that come into production in an oppressive state (ibid). Thus, Foucault gives resistance to power a space in his writings rather than focusing merely on oppression of power. These terms will function as an analytical lens to understand the nexus of religion and international development, to better understand the decline and subsequent resurgence of religion. This will be accounted for in the case study of CRS and how CRS have navigated and resisted their religious identity within a hegemonic, secular international development since its establishment in 1943.

Power relations are important to investigate, in order to understand what becomes 'mainstream' and normalized in the public sphere (Mills, 2005). The nexus between religion and international development is no exception. I will be using Foucault's bottom-up approach of power, which focuses "[...] on the way power relations permeate all relations within a society, enables an account of the mundane and daily ways in which power is enacted and contested" (Mills, 2005: chapter 2: 2). This model provides a more

holistic approach to power relations and how actors function as an active subject within it, constantly adjusting and resisting. This gives a more fluid understanding of how power relations are performed. In doing this I will use Foucault's understanding on *power* and *institution* in order to unravel the power struggles with the religious paradigm and secular paradigm within the humanitarian regime.

### 4.3 Case study as Research Method

In order to understand how CRS has negotiated and adapted their religious identity over time, as a response and a reaction to secular and post-secular international development, the case study method is appropriate. This research method strives to understand a phenomenon being studied at large (Yin, 1994), and thus functions as an invitation to understand secularism and religion better in development. Case study as a research method is especially appropriate when studying complex organizational processes in order to give explanations to larger phenomena and "for studies aimed at understanding complex, temporal processes (why and how of a phenomenon)" (Bhattacharjee, 2012: 94). Analysing the trajectory of CRS as a case study thus provides the research with an understanding how a faith-based organization is navigating a secular and post-secular international development and allows for specific questions that guide this research.

Although, other FBOs could have been chosen, for example World Vision, I chose CRS because of its internal transformation to a Catholic identity after decades of secularist outlook to development (Hackett and Piraino, 2006), as well as accessibility to documents and reports, although naturally, it proved complex to find all CRS reports from 1943 to 1990s. Hence, some accounts are retrospective, although from staff that experienced the given phenomena, relayed in their own words (Hefferan, 2015). This applies especially to Ken Hackett, an employee for CRS from 1972 to 2011, who later became the executive director and the biggest architects of the Justice Lens, the CRS's reclaiming of religious identity as a response to the Rwandan genocide. This provides for an interesting observation for understanding how FBOs react and navigate their religious identity in a secular and post-secular international development.

## 4.4 Post-Positivist Approach to Research

Post-positivism can be seen as an umbrella term for other approaches to research; constructivist, post-structural, feminist, and postcolonial and “while these approaches vary in their interpretations, they share a number of epistemological and ontological assumptions” (Joachim et al, 2019: 101). Approaches to religion and development are based on historically and socially constructed meanings (Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011: 46), and therefore a more post-positivist approach can be more effective in order to get a more holistic understanding of the phenomena, especially in an academic field that for a long time highly relied on positivist approach. Realities are shaped by social context and are thus, “best studied within its socio-historic context” (Bhattacharjee, 2012: 103). Post-positivist approaches move beyond the given fact of a positivist approach and seek to understand the dynamic and heterogeneous ways of looking at the relationship between religion and development. Positivism essentially believes that science is the only way to understand truths through an objective scientific research performed by an objective individual (Dudovskiy, n.d). This research attempts to move beyond positivism that together with secularism were the hegemonic approaches to international development (Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011; Berger, 2014), although, the research recognizes that CRS followed these trends for a long time.

## 4.5 Empirical Data and Informants

This research primarily looks at the existing literature on Religion and Development (RaD) studies, international relations and policy, as well as archived reports from the War Relief Service, later Catholic Relief Service in order to answer the problem formulation. These social science disciplines and topics often inter-relate to one another, thus this research will be interdisciplinary, although with a clear focus on RaD literature. The reports and documents from the War Relief Service were obtained from Social Compass at Sage Publications and from the International Catholic Migration Congress held in Geneva in 1956. Furthermore, CRS’s own reports and statements from their online presence and scholarly articles that have monitored CRS’s programs or conducted extended research about CRS, for example, Barnett (2011), Gerstbauer (2010) and Hollenbach (2020) will be used in this study. While my research was extensive, I don’t

claim that it is complete, and of course, I was not able to read every article about the religious and development nexus, so I cannot account for them all. However, I detected a theme in many of them, that argues that religion is indeed claiming a seat as an entity in development studies (Tomlin, 2015). Here it is important to state that the literature that this research relies upon applies to various disciplines of social sciences and not solely development studies, international relations, anthropology, political science and more.

In the process of writing this research, informants have helped shape the research. Firstly, Søren Jørgensen a priest in Nestvæd who has extended experience working with Danmission in Cambodia. Laust Gregersen, a former chief advisor for the secretary general at Danmission Aid and lastly, Gísli Bjarnason, director of Icelandic Church Aid. Informal discussion is the main contribution to this research, although semi structured interviews were conducted, with two of the three informants. Informants are individuals who hold a specific expertise about a particular phenomenon (Field-Springer, 2017), since the informants are not experts on the specific analysis this research focuses on, they will not function as a main driver for analysis but sit in the backseat and have helped navigate the research. Furthermore, the informants play a role in the discussion part of this research, as they all have some interesting perspectives and knowledge of FBOs. It is important to emphasize that the conversation with Gíslason was an informal discussion, as a consequence of the researcher taking advantage of her Icelandic nationality, and calling Gíslason, as one sometimes casually does in a small community. This was not a plan of the structure of the analysis; however, it did provide for some interesting discussion and so, the researcher was allowed to record the last couple of minutes where Gíslason gave some understanding to explain the momentum of religious inclusivity in international development. Thus, this will be found in the appendix.

## 4.6 Positionality

My journey through life and subsequently the reasons behind my limited understanding of life and my own existence is very much colored by my middle class, white, female, educated experience. Therefore, the illusion of the 'god-trick', my subjectivity, will always penetrate this research, no matter how much I try to distance myself from it (Haraway, 1991c).

As has been accounted for earlier in this research, the initial spark for this research topic illuminated after attending a conference in Ecuador, all expenses paid, on relations between faith leaders and organizations and migration, “Churches Witnessing with Migrants”. Here I think it is important to position myself. I was heavily critical before accepting the invite. I thought that religion in the 21st century, when it comes to real solutions to problems of our time, was a time fallacy. Put differently, I thought religion had had its time and space in history, following a secular agenda. But I decided to attend and off I went, full of ignorance and prejudice about the people attending. How my opinion changed over the next week. It felt so good talking about the issues of migrants with someone that had any type of authority that actually wanted to make some changes to the status quo. In Europe, I felt like the influx of refugees over the previous years had already had its time in the public sphere, and now we were not only tired of it, but also more than ready to move on to other things. And here were religious leaders and faith-based organizations staff from all corners of the world, eager to share their own experience working with migrants and discussing what can be done better and how to navigate policies. My western and secular brain had to come to terms with the fact that these people had years and years of experience, and I had very limited experience. For the rest of the time, I tried to notice whenever I became judgmental and note it down. What was so triggering to me? Of course, these people in front of me were not triggering, but the religious institutions behind them were. I thought about all the wars and murders that were committed in the name of organized religion. But did I really connect to these or just to the general understanding in my society of religion as outdated and ridiculous. Being cuddled by scientific research and *truths* felt really good so why was I being so judgmental towards them?

I also felt really guilty for being there in the first place, representing a Jordanian NGO, being Scandinavian, white and privileged, judgmental and secular. If the organizers thought that my voice would add to the diversity of both religions and ethnicity, they were wrong. My experience with religion and refugees is limited to Scandinavia, and even there it is limited. So, I just listened and learned, with an open mind, had good conversations and discussions, for example, in an open discussion, I raised the question that maybe the name of the consultation *Churches Witnessing with Migrants*, should be revisited as it referred to its Christian origin and might be excluding other religions, grassroots and civil

society organizations, a very secular observation, and the attendants did agree that maybe it was time to change it.

Attending this consultation did open my eyes to the impact religious leaders and faith-based organizations do have, as I had no religious literacy from my studies insofar that I kind of thought we all lived in a secular age, which I can now see is an arrogant stance toward the lived realities of others. I was not arrogant enough to share this opinion about every aspect of the west and the rest, but I genuinely thought there was a consensus about the expiration date of religion.

## **5. Theoretical Framework**

In the following chapter, discourse analysis and secularization thesis will be introduced to guide the reader to understand the theoretical frameworks of the analysis. As secularization discourses were the hegemonic standard for international development and development studies for a long time, this research analyses documents from CRS through the lens of secularization as a theory and a process, in order to understand the historical context of a given time. This is done in order to best answer the research statement and research questions. As I mention in a previous chapter, I use a post-positivist approach in order to make the analysis more nuanced.

### **5.1 Discourse Analysis as Theory**

Beyond the methodological outset, discourse analysis will also function as a theoretical framework for this research. In a theory, discourse analysis encourages the motion beyond a given truth and continuities of discourses, beyond empiricism. Discourses are statements and utterances which have meaning and effect as well as groups of statements (Mills, 2003) which, in this research refers to discourses of secularization and discourses of development. Furthermore, discourses are “regulated by a set of rules which lead to the distribution and circulation of certain utterances and statements” (ibid: 54). Moreover, discourses are kept in distribution and circulation due to complex operations which keep them in the public consciousness and thus, “discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines it and exposes it, renders it fragile

and makes it possible to thwart it” (Foucault, 1978: 101). Discourses are constructed systems of resisting and enforcing power, and power is *performed*. According to Foucault, power is a *strategy* and that individuals should be seen as the “place” where power is legitimized and resisted (Mills, 2003). This research attempts to understand the enforcement of secularist language production and eventually, the resistance of CRS in the secularization discourses of development.

*Epistemes* can be understood as a system of knowledge for a given historical period (Pinkus, 1996). In this research, this is found in the reproduction of secular discourses being mirrored in CRS’s documents in the first part of the analysis. This is further seen throughout the analysis as CRS’s religious identity is transformed through time and space. Foucault’s work on history becomes an important point of departure in understanding discourses in this research. His notion of *archaeology* attempts to “define discourses in their specificity; to show in what way the set of rules that they put into operation is irreducible to any other; to follow them the whole length of their exterior ridges, in order to underline them the better” (Foucault, 1972: 139). In other words, archaeology tries to understand discourse in a historical context in order to understand the present which this research attempts to do by analyzing the discourses of CRS over time, in order to explain the larger historical context of international development.

## 5.2 Secularization and Post-secularization as Theory

I introduced secularization earlier in this research. Here, secularization will be understood as a theory. Secularization theory argues that with modernizing societies, religion will become less and less important to and within the public sphere. Religion is pushed to the private with hopes that it will in the end disappear as a natural consequence of progression in technology, urbanization and science. Arguably, this process did take place in Europe, although the rest of the world did not follow (Habermas, 2008; Berger, 2014). This leads to two exposures of secularization. The first one showcases the European *exceptionalism* or *Euro-secularity*, as testimonies from around the globe demonstrate that people are still fiercely religious (Berger, 2014). Secondly, looking at it through a post-structural lens, the secularization thesis is arguably a colonial continuation enforced by hegemonic West, influenced by Eurocentrism (Zai, 2013).

“Rather than being the norm, secularization now appears to be the exception, found chiefly: (1) amongst an international intellectual and cultural elite; and (2) in Western Europe” (Berger, 2001: 343).

In this research, secularization will be used to explain the discourse production of CRS in the beginning decades of their operation. As I will demonstrate later on, CRS indeed followed the secularization discourses, as was common in development agencies at the time after World War II (Barnett, 2011). Discourses should be analyzed in the historical context of their production in order for them to give meaning (Foucault, 1972). This is why secularization is used as a theoretical tool in analyzing older CRS discourses in the first part of this research, although the notion has now largely been dismissed by social scientists (Berger, 2014).

*Post secularization* suggests that there was a secular society, and as has been demonstrated, that was never reality for all societies in the world. Post secularization is a process made by Habermas (2008), a former secularist himself, that debunked and devalues the secularization process. Post secularization follows a larger trend of post-structuralist arguments in social sciences that allow for a space for religion. A similar argument is made by Peter Berger, although he prefers the term *pluralism* (2014), which basically calls for diversity, that there are multiple identities and structures that can simultaneously be lived in each moment.

## **6. Analysis: The Catholic Relief Services, a case study**

The following section of this analysis will engage with these broad understandings of secularization and religion, using discourse analysis through the navigation and adaptation of the Catholic Relief Service (CRS), a Catholic faith-based organization as a case study. Established by the National Catholic Welfare Council (NCWC), which was the annual conference of American hierarchy (Scribner, 2015). The agency understood itself as an international relief agency, based on Catholicism but highly influenced by the global humanitarian regime which was mostly secular in its nature at the time. In the 1990s, the CRS experienced an identity crisis that led to an institutional transformation and a

rediscovery of its Catholic identity through the Catholic Social Teachings (Hackett and P, 2006). Honing in on CRS and the Catholic social teachings gives an example of how a Catholic FBO navigates the secular humanitarian regime.

## 6.1 The Catholic Relief Service: the secular years

War Relief Service (later Catholic Relief Service) was established in 1943 by Catholic bishops in the United States, as the official relief aid arm of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) (Gerstbauer, 2010). CRS was formed as a response to help resettle war refugees and displaced people in Europe after WWII. From its origins, the CRS has been funded largely by the US government, during its first three years, the US government donated \$12 million dollars to CRS (Barnett, 2011).

In a statement during the International Catholic Migration Congress in 1956, Edward Swanstrom, president of the then War Relief Service, called out for solidarity amongst Catholics all over the world, particularly in the West, about the migration as a reaction to the World War II, stating:

“In this time of crisis when so many millions of human beings have been uprooted from their homes by war and upheavals, it is of vital importance that all Catholics should have a truly Christian attitude towards migration” (Swanstrom, 1956b; 384).

Finding its origin in the exile of Jesus Christ, the “first born and brother to the migrants and exiles of the world” (Swanstrom, 1958: 109), Swanstrom and CRS as a whole found the obvious connection between helping refugees and displaced people and Jesus. As an extension of the USCCB, this is not a surprise. The way towards tackling and handling the issue of migration in the beginning decade of its establishment saw its foundations in Catholicism. Drawing on Pope Pius XII<sup>11</sup>, Edward Swanstrom, the director of CRS said in a speech at the International Catholic Migration Congress held in Geneva in 1956.

“The earth and its resources are given to man by God to permit him to lead a decent life. In our day there are countries with large surpluses of population

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<sup>11</sup> The pope during the war and post-war years <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Pius-XII>

and others vastly underpopulated. Thus in some areas land offers the opportunity of supporting a large number of people” (Swanstrom, 1956b; 384).

However, as will be shown below, the CRS reports from their field agents does not show a Catholic identity: Swanstrom was the director for 35 years from its formation in 1943 to 1978<sup>12</sup>. and as such, influenced the entire organization. Discourses are co-produced by many individuals, and as a co-producer of CRS, Swanstrom was performing power as an individual vehicle, contributing to CRS’s discourses as an institution (Foucault, 1980; Mills, 2003). Although Swanstrom had no problem with reminding fellow Catholics of the moral responsibilities they have in the name of God, for fellow humans in need, the rhetoric in the reports, documents, reports and programs of CRS from the 1950s already show a highly secular language production. This of course is in the context of refugee camps in Europe with the long-term goal of resettling people, directed by CRS and funded by the US government (Catholic Relief Services, 1956b; Barnett, 2011). In 1952, the United States had established a resettlement program from refugees escaping former Communist countries called the United States Escapee Program (USEP). CRS had agents on the ground, organizing the “escapees”. The term “escapees” is highly political and comes from the anti-Communist discourses of the US government, but CRS had no problems following this language production. From the start, CRS, co-operated as the largest single agency working with the government on the USEP program and subsequently, its biggest receiver of funding (Catholic Relief Services, 1956b; Barnett, 2011).

“N.C.W.C.<sup>13</sup> has spent more than a million and a half dollars of U.S.E.P. funds to sponsor escapee projects ranging from language instruction for potential migrants to the making of wash-basket beds for newborn babies coming into the world in the bleak, poverty-ridden surroundings of a refugee camp. Experience has shown the value of this joint N.C.W.C./U.S.E.P. co-operation” (Catholic Relief Service, 1956c: 237)

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<sup>12</sup> American Catholic History Classroom, n.d. - Biography - Edward Swanstrom. Available at: <https://cuomeka.wrlc.org/exhibits/show/immigration/documents/Bio-Swanstrom>

<sup>13</sup> National Catholic Welfare Conferences

As is well known, the UNHCR's definition of a refugee came into being at the 1951 Refugee Convention which the US ratified<sup>14</sup>. From looking at these documents, the CRS seem to be committed to relocate and resettle numerous refugees from Europe to what they call the chief countries<sup>15</sup> in the Western hemisphere (Catholic Relief Service, 1956c), working closely with governments in these countries in order to make the resettlements for the immigrants, as well as setting up waiting camps for people, before resettling abroad.

“The U.S. Escapee Program aims, first of all, to assist those who flee Communism to establish themselves in the free world and to provide them with certain measures of care and maintenance from the time they arrive in a country of asylum until their final permanent resettlement in one of the countries of immigration” (Catholic Relief Service, 1956c: 240).

The rhetoric in most of these documents are arguably highly influenced by the US government's strict policy on the separation of state and church, given its secularist tint (Barnett, 2011). The US government's approach of merging human rights and anticommunism found a fruitful channel with CRS, that as Barnett argues, was highly anticommunist (ibid). *Escapee* is political, it already implies that there is somewhere to escape from, in this instance the Soviet Union, somewhere that one is treated badly. This follows Foucault's understanding of *productive* or *performative* (1972) and can be understood as texts implanted in larger discourses that are inclined to produce and reproduce the social forms it describes. Following the larger secular discourses, the CRS's reports actively support this. Discourses construct the way CRS looks at the humanitarian relief work they do and knowledge production (Foucault, 1972) since language shapes realities. The uses of certain words construct the way realities are being made (Foucault, 1972). This contributes to how CRS perceived itself as well as how others saw them. Using “escapees” instead of, for example, “refugees” reproduces a specific political stance towards people that get the stamp of being escapees. According to Barnett, the US government provided large grants to the Catholic Relief Service, hoping that the “agency would cultivate intelligence contacts in Europe” (Barnett, 2011: 109). The White House

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>

<sup>15</sup> Canada, USA, Australia and South America (N.C.W.C.-Participation in the United States Escapee Program, 1956)

decision to provide these grants were further inspired by their interest in encouraging “a possible partnership between the NCWC and the Vatican as a way to support the Allies” (ibid: 113).

For the thousands of displaced people who found themselves in refugee camps in Western Germany, Italy, Austria and Greece, the purpose of the USEP was threefold:

I. supplementary care and maintenance; 2. counseling, vocational and language training, and medical or dietary assistance designed to help equip them for emigration to the West; and 3. funds for free transportation to their new homes when the long processing period is over and visas have been granted” (Catholic Relief Service, 1956c: 240)

The report is factual, explanatory and could well be written by a representative from the US government. This is in line with the rhetoric that was used by CRS at the time and for decades to come. No trace of religious discourse has been detected in any of the documents and reports except one. The only reference to the Catholic faith that implies that in fact CRS was a faith-based organization is the following:

“As far as spiritual care is concerned, the assistance rendered to the new immigrants depended in a large measure upon the availability of Catholic priests, schools and lay organizations in the community where the immigrants settled. In the large urban communities many of the immigrants could find special churches run by pastors of their own nationality. In other places it was no problem at all to find priests who spoke the language of the immigrants and who could, therefore, hear confessions and consult with them regarding any problems they might have. In the rural communities churches are not always easily accessible and, furthermore, it is sometimes quite difficult to find a priest who speaks the language of the immigrants. The latter factor undoubtedly contributed to the movement of some of the immigrants from their initial placements to second or third placements” (Catholic Relief Services, 1956b: 255-256).

Here it is clearly stated that there was a religious element to the work the CRS provided in refugee camps in Europe in the 1950s. The service of spiritual care heavily relies on the availability and language skills of the Catholic priests available. CRS was mostly concerned with resettling the refugees and displaced people, although their programs in refugee camps in Europe as a part of the USEP project included language courses, laundry, sewing, children's center, shoe repair and recreation and gardening (Catholic Relief Services, 1956b). Given its discourses in its reporting that has been analyzed here, CRS is following an American hegemony in development, constructing the then secular normative landscape for human rights (Wong, 2014). Relief agencies like CRS that were founded to help those in Europe after World War II, began giving attention to the rest of the decolonizing world, transporting its 'expertise' on humanitarianism, once Europe was settled and, on its feet, (Barnett, 2011). "These relief-turned-development agencies now imagined transforming traditional into modern societies, and doing so without touching politics, which would have been an even grander feat of magic" (Barnett, 2011; 108). As CRS stepped into this new reality that was occurring in the West, it added on a new identity as many other relief agencies at the time, as a development agency. Subsequently, some discussion began internally about changing its name to include *development* or *overseas* in order to follow the trend at the time. Following this trend CARE initially stood for Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe but changed its name as the external landscape of the world changed, and its work moved from Europe and to Asia and Africa: in 1953 CARE became the Cooperative for American Remittances to Everywhere (O'keefe et al., 1991). In the end, name recognition won over fitting when it came to the name of the agency and CRS kept its original name (Barnett, 2011). Additionally, it is important to state that postcolonial scholars claim that the origin of international development is much older than as a continuation of the relief work of World War II. Rather, development is a prolongation of the exploitation of the colonial era (Kothari, 2005 in Deacon and Tomalin, 2015).

In the 1970s and 1980s, CRS was following the secular development agenda:

"In the 1970s and 1980s, there was an evolution toward socio-economic development and more efficient emergency response. Although this evolution

was for CRS a positive step, it was largely secular in nature and driven by increased funding from the government” (Hackett and Piraino, 2006; 15)

This account correlates to the trends of the post-war era, the secular approaches to development with focus on economic growth. At this point, CRS had been working since its establishment towards “corporal works of mercy” (Hackett and Piraino, 2006), delivering food, clothing and other material goods to those in need, a reaction-based relief assistance organization, reacting to world events and natural disasters. This might be a simplistic way looking at the work of CRS for over five decades, but that is indeed how they perceive themselves<sup>16</sup>, although always as a Catholic agency at its core. This follows Ver Beek findings on a trend amongst NGOs resisting any religious or spiritual affiliations in his research on three leading development journals in the 1980s and 1990s. He looks at the language production in the discourses of CRS as well as USAID and CARE where they all explicitly state that they will not finance programs nor discuss religion or beliefs, neither from staff nor program participants (Ver Beek, 2000). Ver Beek’s findings suggest that for a period in time, not even the biggest NGOs at the time wanted to be affiliated with religion, or at least not publicly (2000). He also points out how strange it is that these NGOs do not want to associate themselves with religion, as they do not shy away from “[...] discussing equally sensitive topics such as land reform or violence against women when they believe that to do so is necessary for the development process” (Ver Beek, 2000: 38).

Ken Hackett, who at this point was already working for CRS, prior to becoming president in 1993, recounts the work of CRS in the 1980s and 1990s:

“Events in the late 1980s and early 1990s fundamentally changed the world in which we worked. Those years brought two new factors. The first was the end of the Cold War, which led to volatile political and social climates in many developing and Third World countries. Throughout Africa and parts of Europe, Asia, and Latin America, governments were weakened—and sometimes destroyed—by ethnic conflict coupled with famine, drought, and other natural disasters” (Hackett and Piraino, 2006; 15)

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<sup>16</sup> Historical overview of the timeline of CRS <https://impact.crs.org/timeline/>

Maintaining a relatively secular image internally and externally since its establishment, the 1980s saw some turning points in world history, contributing to some serious reflection on the organization's approach to development (Hackett and Piraino, 2006). This account also suggests that the whole identity of CRS swung with the flows of trends that were happening externally. During the 1960-1980s, CRS was committed to uphold a "professionalization of its development and emergency programs" (Gerstbauer, 2010: 854) partly, in order to be more eligible for US government grants. From 1983-1993, the executive director of CRS was an ex-diplomat who arguably saw "the world through the geopolitical lens of his career as an ambassador, reinforcing the secular bent of the organization" (Gerstbauer, 2010: 854). Although this research does not have access to CRS's *mission* and *values* during this time, Foucault claims that although organizations might present themselves in one way, there is a distinction between what an organization wants and what actually happens (Mills, 2003). Age and Ager see clear benefits for FBOs to adapt to a secular humanitarian regime, since this stance "supported co-ordination and governance of the sector, facilitated faith-based organizations' access to sources of public funding and fostered transparent commitment to humanitarian principles of neutrality and impartiality (2011: 457).

The end of the Cold War came into reality with changes in political structures and social climate. Casanova argued that religion went public in the 1980s, forcing itself into the public consciousness (1994). This is not to say that religion in any means was not an important factor of people's lives before, rather, that events in the 1980s allowed religion to come into the public sphere (ibid). Casanova argued for four significant events in the world that reminded the world that religion never left anywhere: the Islamic revolution in Iran, the solidarity movement in Poland, Catholic Sandinista revolution in Nicaragua and the re-emergence of the Protestant fundamentalism in the US politics (ibid). Put differently, these events and others in the 1980s suggest that it was hard to find political struggles in the 1980s that were not influenced by religious forces. Based on this, Casanova argued in 1994 that a common theme was happening that religions were stepping into the public sphere as well as the arena of political debate in order "to participate in the very struggles to define and set the modern boundaries between the private and the public spheres, between system and life-world, between legality and morality, between individual and society, between family, civil society, and state, between

nations, states, civilizations, and the world system” (Casanova, 1994: 6). As a faith-based organization that was established as an extension of the American Catholic bishops, the CRS followed Casanova’s arguments.

Needless to say, CRS had always been Catholic, but over the years the religious discourses and overtones had taken a backseat to a professional and technocratic ethos. At the time, there was no “Catholic” way of doing development, there was however, “methods underpinned by technical, objective knowledge learned from development manuals and economic departments” (Barnett and Weiss, 2011: 203). CRS was indeed following a secular trend that was occurring within international development, and that also helped at the time, avoiding accusations of continuing the colonial process and continuing US political interests (ibid).

## 6.2 The Justice Lens

In 1993 the CRS board, consisting of 12 bishops, wanted the organization to become more anchored in the Catholic religion (Gerstbauer, 2010). As a consequence, Ken Hackett became the new director. Hackett, who had already been working for CRS since 1972<sup>17</sup> led CRS through the rediscovery of its Catholic identity with a strategic planning towards a Catholic identity (Gerstbauer, 2010) through what came to be known as the *Justice Lens*, a process that started in 1995 and ended in 2006.

“After much reflection, we resolved to address not just the symptoms of crises—burned-out houses, homeless refugees, and food shortages—but also the systems and structures that cause crises. We concluded that this was sound policy as well as a moral imperative. Without true systemic change necessary to produce more peaceful or tolerant surroundings, relief and development efforts could not succeed. Events in Rwanda were a catalyst that impelled CRS through what can only be described as an institutional transformation” (Hackett and Piraino, 2006; 16).

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<sup>17</sup>Berkley Center for Religion, n.d, available at: <https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/people/ken-hackett>

The rhetoric used by the CRS, is not the one of “victimization of modernity” or secularization, rather, it is a discourse of reclaiming power. It is a thorough, local and global adaptation strategy to the status quo, a back to the drawing table, reidentification plan. This echoes what Foucault argued that power is a strategy that is performed and hence, can always be refined and renegotiated (Foucault, 1978). Power relations are not stagnant and never set in stone. Although the secular humanitarian regime is arguably the biggest power player in a global context of humanitarianism and development, Foucault’s understanding of power relations encourages to look at the relationship between power and resistance, as there is no power without resistance (Foucault, 1989). Here we can see CRS resisting the structures of the humanitarian regime at the time, redefining and renegotiating its own identity. This is not to say that CRS was powerless, however it was arguably following secular discourses of doing development, which has of course also changed over time and space, as changes of ideology and governance occur (Halperin, 2018). Furthermore, Foucault emphasizes the importance of the individual in a structural relationship, as they are the vehicles of power (Foucault, 1980: 98). This feeds into the structure/agent paradigm that is so prevalent in social sciences. Hence, the CRS is an institution resisting and renegotiating their power in a larger humanitarian paradigm, but also, individual agents that contribute to the power relations of the institution in a larger power relation. In 1995, when CRS stepped into its religious identity, it renegotiated their whole structure and shredded the secular snakeskin that had been building up for decades, in order to grow and expand into Catholicism. At the time, post-development scholars had already made space for religious engagement although it had not led to an inclusion in the discipline (Bompani, 2019).

Although publicly the CRS cites the Rwandan genocide as a catalyst driver that encouraged CRS to look at its own identity as both “development professionals” and as a faith-based organization, decisions about this religious transformation had already been established. Already in the 1980s, World Vision had undergone a similar rediscovery of its Protestant identity (Barnett, 2011) that arguably inspired the bishops when it came to CRS. According to Barnett and Weiss (2011), there is little evidence to the notion that CRS sought to recover its Catholic identity for financial reasons. They argue that in fact, there was indeed some concern that this turn to Catholicism could jeopardize the government

funding that CRS had relied so long on, and the capacity for raising money from non-Catholic sources.

The justice lens is based on what Hackett himself calls the *jewel* of the Catholic religion, the Catholic social teaching. The Catholic social teachings are “a rich treasure of wisdom about building a just society and living lives of holiness amidst the challenges of modern society. The Catholic social teaching derives “from the theological orientation laid down by the Vatican II and its emphasis on social engagement and justice” (Barnett and Weiss, 2011: 203). Modern Catholic social teaching has been articulated through a tradition of papal, conciliar, and episcopal documents”<sup>18</sup>. Originating from the Hebrew prophets, the teachings are founded in helping the poor and are divided into seven themes that together will guide the way to justice in our modern societies; life and dignity of the human person, call to family, community and participation, rights and responsibilities, option for the poor and vulnerable, the dignity of work and the rights of workers, solidarity and care for God’s creation. The teachings centralize humans as sacred, made in God’s image and thus should live in dignity and peace (ibid). Moving beyond the normative perspectives of the Bible, the Catholic social teachings are based in ethics, extracting from the common human experiences (Hollenhach, 2020). Hence, CRS and other Catholic institutions argue for the relevance and commonality shared beyond religious beliefs. Secular NGOs are usually based on some moral and ethical stance towards human life and dignity. Consequently, it can be difficult to spot if an NGO is faith-based or not. Derived from these teachings, the justice lens was a new structural manifest to do development and subsequently, an extensive and long process began of rediscovering its own religious identity.

“Catholic social teaching provides the perfect framework for an organization like ours. It calls people to solidarity, to balance relationships in society and among themselves. It places the dignity of the human person at the center of all we do. It upholds the principle of subsidiarity, which says that higher levels of an organization like CRS should perform no function or duty that could be better handled at a more local level, by people who know the cultural, social,

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<sup>18</sup> Seven Themes of Catholic Social Teaching | USCCB <https://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/what-we-believe/catholic-social-teaching/seven-themes-of-catholic-social-teaching>

and political context better than CRS people do” (Hackett and Piraino, 2006; 16).

This account by the then-director of CRS does not suggest anything new within development studies. Critical perspectives to development have highlighted the ethical and cultural dimension of north-south development since the 1970s (Halperin, 2007). This account suggests however that CRS was indeed a centralized organization before its rediscovery or rebranding, not trusting or considering local populations to make their own decision in a context they know much better than the headquarters in Baltimore, USA. Through the justice lens, CRS was relying more on the local agents that were more familiar with the local perspective in any given area. This decentralized agenda-implementation (Wong, 2014) has been vital in challenging the traditional hierarchical structures of NGOs (and FBOs), where decision making processes were for the most part resting in a centralized agenda setting (Davies, 2019). As a response to this criticism, some NGOs have moved their headquarters from north to south, for example ActionAid and Oxfam International (Walton et al, 2016). Hackett admitted that although according to him, CRS made efforts to include people from the whole agency, headquarters of CSR in Baltimore, led the strategic planning of the justice lens. This resulted in staff in the countries they served experiencing the justice lens as a “headquarters initiative” (Hackett and Piraino, 2006; 16). Subsequently, in 2002, local partners and staff were still living in uncertainty regarding the implementation of the Catholic social teaching and CRS’s development goals. In 2002 CRS staff from both headquarters and regional offices from the Emergency Response Team and Agriculture Technical Advisors met in Ghana where concerns about the implementation of the Justice Lens were raised: “We need a framework that links the Justice Lens with the Food Security Framework and our relief and development goals” and “We need practical ways to incorporate the Justice Lens into our programs” (Heinrich et al, 2008: 1). Staff were still confused about the actuality and implementation of CRS’s Catholic identity and its larger development goals. Confusions are common when local staff and community leaders realize that they are expected to implement and respond to “something called “the justice lens” which has been dropped on them by their main international funder and the representative of their international church, Catholic Relief Services” (Milofsky, 2018; 2). Taking these concerns into consideration, CRS headquarters went back to basics, more specifically to the Integral

Human Development (IHD) approach, a cultural, economic, political, social and spiritual approach to development introduced by Pope Paul VI in 1967, stating that “development cannot be limited to mere economic growth. In order to be authentic, it must be complete: integral, that is, it has to promote the good of every man and of the whole man” (Heinrich et al, 2008: 2). IHD is a methodological tool based on the Catholic social teachings. In 2008 CRS created a comprehensive guidance for its staff and partners “A User's Guide to Integral Human Development; Practical Guidance for CRS Staff and Partners” (ibid), in order to ease earlier confusions about the Justice Lens. Balancing centralized and decentralized structures is a difficult transnational dilemma that NGOs and FBOs must settle (Wong, 2012). Being a strong centralized organization for a long time, CRS attempted to balance this dilemma through the Justice Lens, by including local staff more in decision making processes, although as has been accounted for, that did not always work as planned. On the other hand, CRS did react to requests and concerns from its local staff which resulted in the adaptation of IHD. However, in a case of a banana project in Rwanda initiated by CRS, Milofsky has pointed out that local partner staff members often do not possess the level of language skill needed for report writing of the high caliber that is needed and so college graduates “are hired to sit in the back offices of local country programs re-writing field staff reports so that they are clear and analytically pointed assessments of what worked and what did not work” (Milofsky, 2018; 5). This is a tendency that reaches beyond CRS as many NGOs and FBOs follow this line of working.

“[...] the principles of Catholic social teaching speak universal truths to people of other faiths. As an international agency, we faced the challenge of regrounding ourselves in our Catholic identity while at the same time maintaining and strengthening our community of staff and partners, who represent religions and cultures from every corner of the globe. Catholic social teaching promised to make that possible” (Hackett and Piraino, 2006; 16).

This account arguably sounds utopian, as many top-down development interventions often do (Milofsky, 2018). With over 5000 staff and partners across the world, imposing specific values into local settings can prove hard to do. This might explain why CRS prefers to work with Catholic institutions (CRS.org Our Catholic Identity, n.d). It certainly

proves to be easier to work with partners that already share the same religion, however CRS also works with non-Catholic partners, as will be looked into later in this analysis.

### 6.3 Religious Rise in International Development

As has been demonstrated above, in the case of CRS, documents and reports suggest that outwardly, CRS did follow the secularization trends occurring amongst relief agencies and development NGOs between its foundation and 1995. This section will hone in on events that contributed to a shift in international development, research, practice and policy.

As has been shown above, there is consensus in the social sciences that religion has become a relevant component to the discipline. The literature suggests that this shift occurred around the turn of the 21st century, as evidenced both by a rise in the numbers of FBOs and concomitant, increased interest from the discipline as FBOs are perceived to have some strengths that NGOs lack (Davies, 2019). Scholars have argued that some main events have occurred to contribute to the rise of religion in development studies. In 1997 the then-president of the World Bank James Wolfensohn, and archbishop of Canterbury Lord Carey of Clifton, organized a series of seminars on religion and development, where attendees were development actors, faith leaders and academics (Tomlin, 2015). This event was one of the first major factors in what became a shift towards religion in development. The initiative resulted in the foundation of the organization “World Faith Development Dialogue” (WFDD), which works to bridge the gap between religions and secular international development<sup>19</sup>. This merging of two polarized entities; secular international organization and a religious leader, cooperating on approaches to international development became monumental as a first step in bridging the two (Tomlin, 2015).

Scholars have named 9/11 as one of the major catalysts for bringing religion back to the public consciousness (Hurd, 2007; Tomalin, 2015; Deneulin and Rakodi, 2011;

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<sup>19</sup> “History and Objectives of the World Faith Development Dialogue”  
<https://berkleycenter.georgetown.edu/wfdd/about>

Hurd, 2012). Elizabeth Hurd argues that before 9/11, there likely was a consensus that religion was and should continue to be “on the margins of the study of the building blocks of world order” (2012; 947), since religion ought to be dealt with internally and privately per the secularization thesis. In the aftermath of 9/11 however, two anomalies from this stance emerged. The first one relates to the sole importance of religion as a reaction to extremism and to dangerous religion, specifically when it escapes state control (2012: 947). The second argument states that religion only becomes relevant “when it can be put to use to promote the common public international good. This is accomplished through humanitarian and development projects, human rights campaigns, transitional justice efforts, and so on”, like FBOs in general (Hurd, 2012: 947). This argument suggests that there are in fact two ‘sides’ of religion on the international scene, namely the ‘dangerous religion’ and the ‘peaceful religion’ (ibid). These two sides of religion are constantly being reproduced and negotiated in the public sphere. Although the aim of this analysis is not to get deeper into these arguments, they are effective in understanding the sudden return of religion into the international development scene. This is not to say that FBOs and religious organizations ever left the scene, but rather adapted to the secular development discourses. Already in 1994, José Casanova argued that various religious traditions indeed refused to agree to the “marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them” (1994; 7). Based on historical events in the 1980s, as has been mentioned earlier, religions were already pushing for its claimed space in the public sphere, although development studies had not yet caught up with the trend (Casanova, 1994).

The “Faith-Based and Community Initiatives” of the Bush administration aided to end FBO skepticism (Clarke, 2006) and to put the usage of the term FBO into the mainstream (Ferris, 2011). Religious leaders and FBOs have been invited to initiatives like the United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDG) that later became the Sustainable Development Goals (SGD) (Tomlin, 2015). Donors seem more open to fund FBOs, beyond the traditional and mainstream Christian FBOs, especially if the FBOs follow mainstream professionalism development discourses (Clarke, 2006). Following these trends, research articles on RaD in development study journals as well as academic books are increasingly being published. All of these contributed to the “noticeable shift

within some areas of international development policy, practice and research to include religion as a relevant factor” (Tomlin, 2015:1).

In an unprecedented move, the World Health Organization (WHO) realized in 2005, that it had no data over religious actors dealing with health care and subsequently, sent university-based researchers out in the field to find out, especially those engaging in HIV/AIDS (Olivier, 2015). Essentially, at the time, no one knew which religious actors were out there and what they were doing. Olivier argues that as secularization became the main development discourse, religion was written out of “any kind of public health or medical curriculum or research field” (2015: 348). Following this trend WHO, the world’s main public health authority, realized it had overlooked religion when it came to health care and subsequently, had to map the field (ibid). The World Bank estimates that in Sub-Saharan Africa, FBOs are responsible for as much as 50% of all health and education services (James, 2009 in Fountain and Juul Petersen, 2018).

As a response to trends in the field, the UN established its own task force on religion in 2010. The United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF) was established to provide policy guidance for staff on understanding the intersection between religion and development when engaging with faith-based actors (IATF, 2020). These external factors respond to the external globalized contributors to the rise of religion in international development. Internally, the increasing number of FBOs, across all religious traditions (Ager and Ager, 2011). De Cordier argues that “the expanded space for religion resulting from globalization and the social changes that it causes have...expanded the space for faith-based development and relief actors” (2009: 663 in Ager and Ager, 2011: 457). This calls for a post-secular and evolving humanitarian regime which in many ways is exactly what is occurring (Habermas, 2008).

All these factors have contributed to the acceptance of FBOs as major players in international development. Arguably CRS has capitalized on that trend, although CRS started its religious shift earlier than what development scholars have pinpointed as the start of “religious return” (Clarke, 2006; Lunn, 2009; Tomlin, 2015). One could argue that the implementation of the Justice Lens at CRS contributed to pave a way for the trends that came later and allowed religion to be a much more accepted factor of international

development. Looking through annual reports from CRS<sup>20</sup> suggest that the professional and technocratic ethos are mixed in with quotes from psalms and religious undertones, reminding its donors as well as whoever will read it, that we indeed are a part of one large human family. Although Catholic social teaching guides all work and values at CRS, it is subtle and tickles an empathetic nerve for the reader. The CRS's 2019 Annual Report is a good example of this. Whereas the introduction in fact is heavily based in messages of Catholic faith, as well as psalm quotes spread around its pages, the actual reporting from Afghanistan, Kenya, Guatemala, Indonesia and the Gambia show no signs of religious discourses. Here, it is the undertones and the structure that are religious. Inspired by the psalm "I have seen the limits of all perfection, but your commandment is without bounds" (PSALM 119:96 in CRS Annual Report, 2019), the name of the report is "Faith Knows No Bounds" and consequently, its sections are infused with this language; "Healing Knows No Bounds", "Resilience Knows No Bounds", "Courage Knows No Bounds", "Opportunity Knows No Bounds" and "Youth Knows No Bound" (CRS Annual Report, 2019). The accountability for Catholicism comes from the introduction:

"Grounded, empowered and moved by our Catholic faith—and with Catholic social teaching as our guide—our work knows no bounds. We go where we are called, to the most remote places, to achieve the greatest impact, alongside the world's most vulnerable people. Bold and ambitious, we will not stop until all of God's children can fulfill their God-given human potential in thriving families and communities, in just, peaceful and vibrant societies and in flourishing landscapes" (CRS Annual Report, 2019).

This follows the rhetoric of CRS's webpage, missions and values as well as other introductory parts and undertones in previous annual reports. Using the Catholic social teachings as a moral motivation and methodological tool for development seems to be the way that CRS conducts most of its reporting. Centralized and Catholic from the headquarters in Baltimore, and reason-based, standardized secular rhetoric in the field (Hollenbach, 2020). Catholicism has a tendency to "develop centralized services which may be organized on a national or regional basis" (Noor and Nawi, 2016: 18). This is not

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<sup>20</sup> Find CRS's last 19 annual reports here: <https://www.crs.org/about/financial-reports>

to suggest that local partners and field staff are not Catholic, or religious, rather, reporting from projects suggests it uses mainstream development discourses (CRS.org, Annual Reports). If CRS's development strategies reflect ideas about social wellbeing of its beneficiaries, given that according to CRS, all people are God's children, it provides for a religious discourse for helping those in need (Rakodi, 2012). This as well as the fact that CRS prefers to work with Catholic institution, might suggest that conversion could be on CRS's agenda, although as stated in the 'About Us - Catholic Identity' on its webpage states: "We provide aid on the basis of need, not creed. CRS does not proselytize" (CRS.org n.d). Although this research has found no arguments to the contrary, it can be difficult to know for sure. The predictability of questions regarding proselytization of FBOs in academia and the international development industry has become well known (Fountain, 2015). Fountain has argued that the fact that FBOs are imagined to be on a mission of conversion suggests that mixing development with religion is inherently illegitimate in our consciousness (ibid) from a western perspective. Furthermore, Fountain calls for a whole reconstruction of the linkage between FBOs and conversion in international development (2015). Although rightfully its origins can be found both in secularization and postcolonialism. Secularization theory does not have a neutral stance towards religion, although secularization as a process might seem to be (Berger, 2014). Postcolonialism points out that Christian missionaries were in fact a part of the colonial agenda and thus, Christianity and colonial powers became synonymous (Zai, 2013). To guard against accusations of proselytization, some FBOs have protocols which encourage staff to change the topic if it comes to religion or, in some cases, staff will be dismissed from their position if they are found attempting to convert recipients (Noor and Nawi, 2016: 19). Arguably, CRS should have some protocols around this, and they might, but nothing that is accessible to the public. This brings up another issue and that is the backlash from religious communities.

As has been argued, looking at the CRS over time, founded on Catholic principles, it seems as if it has been going with the popular secular discourse of development and relief aid in the post-war era with focus on economic growth. However, this is not to say that CRS was a powerless player during those years. As has been said before, the Catholic Church was in fact an active player for democratization in Latin America (Casanova, 1994). The CRS did however, according to their own reporting, adapt to secular

development discourses, as a part of a post-war trend, aligning with a North-South post-colonial paradigm. The Catholic Church itself has also become increasingly adaptable to social trends (Habermas, 2008). This adaptability has come under criticism from other Catholic institutions that claim CRS “promotes the use and distribution of condoms to prevent sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and pregnancy” (Hitchborn in *The Boston Pilot*, 2020), and thus going against the Catholic social teachings. Hitchborn is the president of the Lepanto Institute, which can be described as a “Catholic watchdog”, making sure Catholic FBOs and charities comply with Catholic teachings. The Lepanto Institute has accused CRS of intimately working with organizations that promote and support abortions, use of condoms and distributing contraceptives (lepantoin.org). In a response, CRS board member, Reverend Frank Caggiano Bishop of Bridgeport responded, “I can personally assure you that CRS takes the allegations very seriously and investigates them to determine if they hold any truth” (2020), without naming Lepanto Institute as an accuser. Furthermore, he also pointed out that CRS partners with various organizations, both secular and Catholic, in order to deliver services around the world (Caggiano, 2020).

“We believe people should lead their own development. CRS community capacity building efforts invest in local people and strengthen local institutions and networks. We have an active network of church and local partners around the world united by our mission to help the poor and vulnerable” (Our Work Overseas, CRS.org nd.)

When working with local and international partners as a response to a need-based problem, it is inevitable that partners will not agree on everything. Although CRS has a clear message about following the Catholic social teachings, it can prove difficult in multilateral projects to be aware of each and every actor's affiliation. Also, if people should lead their own development, an important stance for CRS and a part of the Justice Lens, local people might want to actively make a decision that goes against CRS's Catholic views, maybe CRS views it as not within their mandate to criticize that. Furthermore, although CRS has publicly stated that the organization would never support any distribution of condom or contraceptives, one can easily make an argument based on the Catholic social teachings, that since every human is sacred, and each individual's dignity

protected, arguably, preventing HIV/AIDS is within people's rights for living a life of dignity and healthy communities (Catholic Social Teaching, Rights and Responsibilities).

“Catholic Relief Services, an organization of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, is a pro-life organization dedicated to preserving the sacredness and dignity of human life from conception to natural death. Every aspect of our work is to help life flourish. We are resolute in our commitment to the Church and its teaching” (CRS.org, 2014)

Arguably, as a faith-based organization CRS attempts to follow the Catholic dogma of taking a pro-life stance, however, as an international development organization, supporting local partners and staff, as well as working with multilateral organizations and overseeing and partnering on hundreds of projects, helping over 130 million people in 100 countries (CRS.org), following the Catholic tradition in every sense can prove difficult. CRS has to fend for its Catholic identity, while at the same time being accused of not being Catholic enough for some orthodox Catholic organizations and institutions, although the allegations have not come from the Catholic Church or United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB), with USCCB publicly supporting CRS<sup>21</sup>. Most religious individuals and arguably FBOs, do also operate in some ways within a secular discourse (Berger, 2014). Here it is helpful to borrow a psychological concept from Alfred Schultz 'multiple realities' (in Berger, 2014). Since all realities are subjective and fluid, religious identity and structures do not function in an either/or dichotomy, but rather in a construction of both/and (Berger, 2014). This follows Foucault's understanding of no fixed or definite structures of social identity, rather “both the formation of identities and practices are related to, or are a function of, historically specific discourses. An understanding of how these and other discursive constructions are formed may open the way for change and contestation” (Pinkett, 1996).

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<sup>21</sup> “Support for Catholic Relief Services: A Statement of the Administrative Committee of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops. <https://www.usccb.org/catholic-giving/opportunities-for-giving/catholic-relief-services-collection/support-for-catholic-relief-services>

FBOs can be looked at as too religious and probably proselytizing from one community and then receiving backlash from another community, for not being religious enough.

## **7. Discussion**

As has been demonstrated, there seems to be a consensus amongst social scientists that religion has been allowed to access and pushed into the public sphere as well as across disciplines. This momentum has not bypassed FBOs. This discussion explores how ACT Alliance has strategically pushed themselves into having a seat at the UN table, in decision-making processes. This was brought to the attention of the research during a casual conversation with Bjarni Gíslason, the director of Icelandic Church Aid.

ACT Alliance is a coalition of 135 Lutheran churches and FBOs, similar to Caritas for Catholicism. Icelandic Church Aid is a part of ACT Alliance, as are many other FBOs, like DanchurchAid. On the topic what strategic measures he sees being taken by FBOs, like ACT Alliance, Bjarni Gíslason, the president of Icelandic Church Aid pointed to steps that the Secretary General of ACT Alliance had done in order to gain recognition within the United Nation, in order to give ACT Alliance a larger voice in conferences and discussion. He said that he experiences that now, much more than before, there is a space for ACT Alliance and FBOs in general to be a part of the decision-making processes at the UN. Gíslason talked about changes that he has experienced as the president of a faith-based organization that is a member of ACT Alliance. Since taking office in 2017, Secretary General Rudelmar De Faria has made it his special mission to enhance ACT Alliance's relationship with the UN and other global agencies (actalliance.org, 2017). In his first week in office, de Faria held meetings with UN Women, UNICEF, UNDP, UNEPA, the office of the UN deputy-secretary-general's office and the World Bank (ibid). This is a strategic move on the behalf of ACT Alliance, made in order to get the foot in the door. Strategically and to its importance, de Faria sees the relevance for ACT Alliance and UN to work close together as twofold. Firstly, ACT Alliance is the largest Protestant/Orthodox coalition for humanitarian, development and advocacy world and secondly, ACT Alliance has grassroot engagements at all levels "from the community to the national, regional and global. Our forums bring together national and international members to work together

in a way that no other organization does”<sup>22</sup> (de Faria in [actalliance.org](http://actalliance.org), 2017). This follows arguments from social science scholars, that FBOs indeed have some strengths that secular NGOs don’t have, namely accessibility (Tomlin, 2015; Davies, 2019). It is interesting how ACT Alliance is aware of the momentum religion seems to be having for the past two decades, and subsequently, attempts to make the most of it. This indeed follows the post secularization that Habermas claimed that we live in a post-secular era (2008). As this account demonstrates and this research has counted for, there arguably is a space for religion to access and be a part of the humanitarian regime. But what does that mean in reality? To challenge this, the researcher looked at the United Nations’ Global Humanitarian Response Plan for Covid-19 to see if FBOs and religion was a part of that response.

In its guiding principle of the response approach to the pandemic, the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID 19 published on March 28th, 2020, faith-based organizations are mentioned once as a part of a broader community engagement strategy meant for UN field agents, NGOs, the Red Cross and the Red Crescent. Religion is mentioned twice, once in the localization of Iraq, as a part of a strategy to mobilize resources, given the religious importance of the country, “to ensure the preservation of low intra-community transmission rates” (Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID 19, 2020). The second time was for the localized plan for Iran, stating that religious gatherings, as other gatherings and meetings are cancelled. Based on this response plan, it suggests that the UN did not put a specific religious lens when strategizing and planning for this response plan for COVID-19. Three weeks later on April 18th, 2020, the United Nations Interagency Task Force on Religion and Sustainable Development (IATF) with the endorsement of the IATF Multi-Faith Advisory Council, published a joint statement supporting the Global Humanitarian Response Plan - Covid 19. The statement showed support for the response plan, as expected. Furthermore, the IATF reminded of the importance of FBOs and religious leaders in times of distress, like COVID has proven to be. Calling out for religious leaders, faith-based organizations and communities of faith to assist the UN in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, calling for solidarity and compassion, reminding members of the unique position they are in when bringing people together around shared humanity (IATF, 2020). Following the UN guidelines “including

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<sup>22</sup> <https://actalliance.org/act-news/building-relationships-with-global-agencies/>

by disseminating science-based information, facts, and evidence in accordance with UN policies and frameworks, and in particular with the guidance of the World Health Organization on COVID-19” (IATF, 2020). IATF reminds its members that beyond their religions and human compassion, this is not the time to forget scientific information and facts, that religion might not be able to account for, or at least, now is not the time to find religious based knowledge. Rather, to look at facts. It emphasizes that IATF and MFAC can juxtapose science and religion as not two separate entities, but rather, unifying components to strategizing and responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. Furthermore, IATF members call on FBOs and religious leaders to “promote and advocate with Member States and other stakeholders for the Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 and to help implement the Plan so that essential humanitarian relief operations can reach populations in the most fragile and vulnerable contexts” (IATF, 2020). To help and implement the UN’s Global Humanitarian Response Plan for COVID-19 to each own capacity.

These examples demonstrate how actively FBOs are working to be a part of decision-making processes on a global level within the humanitarian regime. As this research has demonstrated, there is a space for religion in international development and development studies now and FBOs are using the momentum that has been opening for the past 20 years and stepping into this space. In order to understand these changes, there needs to be an increase in religious literacy in the social sciences (Hurd, 2007). Since the fact of the matter remains, people are still as fiercely religious as they ever were (Berger, 2014).

## **8. Conclusion**

This research has attempted to shed a light on how CRS as a FBO, has adapted its religiosity over time, from its establishment in 1943 to present day. In its early years, CRS as a relief agency assisting refugees in post-war Europe and later, resettling displaced people from the Soviet Union, adapted to the hegemonic secular discourse of humanitarian relief. This was done to follow other agencies at the time and also, in order to be eligible for US government funding. Following the secular sentiment at the time, there was little space for religion in international development. Eventually, the Rwandan

genocide seemed to generate a transformation within CRS, at least officially. Conceivably, the decision had already been made by the bishops sitting on CRS's board that wanted a more Catholic structure. The Justice Lens allowed CRS to go back to its roots and rediscover its religious identity. This transformation took years and proved to be complex in implementation, as concerns from the field came into reality. Ultimately, CRS found the Catholic social teaching to be the invitation it needed to connect to partners and beneficiaries, as according to them, it celebrates the sacredness of human dignity which promotes peace. This did not happen without a backlash from Catholic institutions, accusing CRS to breach its Catholic identity and partnering with secular partners, going against its pro-life sentiments.

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