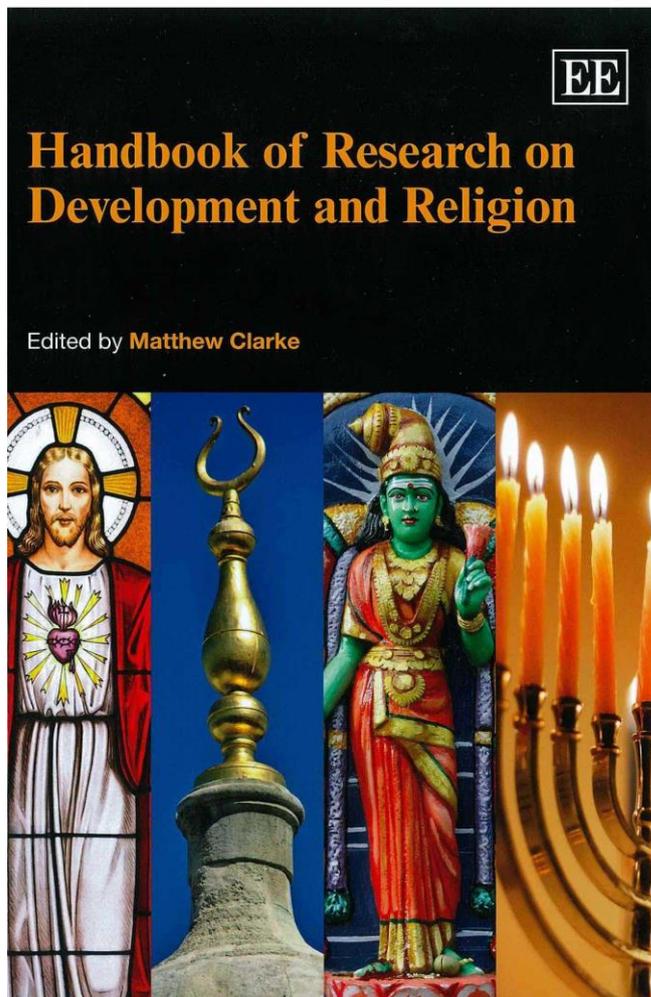


Trail-blazing book on religion and development

Reviewed by Bruce Duncan

Handbook of Research on Development and Religion, edited by Matthew Clarke (Cheltenham UK: Edward Edgar, 2013), pp viii+ 602. Hardback: US\$280.

This is a landmark book highlighting the critical role that the world's religions are playing in the processes of economic and social development. As Matthew Clarke points out in his introduction, since the Second World War there has been far too little research on the role religions play in processes of economic and social change, despite being significant in identity formation and cohesion, inculcating social values and concern for the poor or disadvantaged, and as a motivating force for positive change. Religions can also be a negative influence undermining economic development, as Clarke well recognises.



It is difficult to review this book and do it justice because of the range of topics and authors. Yet it will be essential reading for people studying socio-economic development as it recovers this missing dimension in the literature about development processes. The chapters contain a wealth of condensed scholarly information on particular aspects, are well presented and argued, with footnotes, very helpful lists of references for further reading and a professional index.

The 33 chapters cover a wide range of topics and are gathered into four main sections. Part 1, "Religious Faith and Development", introduces eleven faith traditions and how they influence the development processes. The chapters on Hinduism (by A. Whitney Sanford) and Islam (Peter Riddell) are particularly well done. There are crisp, lucid presentations of

Buddhism (Emma Tomalin and Caroline Starkey), Judaism (Matthew Clarke), Sikhism (Darsham S. Tatla), Daoism (James Miller), Confucianism (Xiangshu Fang and Lijun Bi), and global Pentecostal movements (Matthew Sharpe). The chapter on Christianity (by Séverine Deneulin) focuses on the social engagement in Catholic and papal documents but oddly omits other Christian streams.

These chapters uncover some of the immense complexity within and between religious traditions. They talk of the origins of each tradition selected, the differences within that tradition, their relation to moral action and social behaviour, and critically to the processes of development, both positive and negative.

“Part II, Development Issues/Themes and Religion” systematically takes up key issues: “Gender, religion and development” (by Emma Tomalin), “Moral power at the religion-development-environment nexus” (Cynthia Moe-Lobeda with Fredericka Helmiere), Corruption and religion (Heather Marquette), Islamic education (Masooda Bano), Religion, conflict and peacebuilding (Shawn Teresa Flanigan), Religion and international financial institutions (John Rees), Sustainable Islamic microfinance (Aimatul Yumina), Religion and post-disaster development (Ismet Fanany and Rebecca Fanany), Religion and urban space (Yamini Narayanan), and Cultural heritage in South East Asia (Jonathan Sweet and Jo Wills).

Part III looks at faith-based organisations and mission. Michael Jennings surveys faith-based organisations and poverty alleviation; Bruno De Cordier examines “‘Pan-Islamism’ as a form of ‘alter-globalism’? Hizb Ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Khilafah State”; Gerhard Hoffstaedter and David Tittensor consider faith-based organisations and development efforts; and Steve Bradbury reflects on missionaries and development. Looking at why Western Australia Pentecostals undertake community development in South East Asia are Vicki-Ann Ware, Anthony Ware, Matthew Clarke and Grant Buchanan.

Part IV consists of case studies on Nigeria (Insa Nolte), Brazil (Rowan Ireland) and Tanzania (Michael Jennings). Jane Anderson writes on “Partnership through translation: a donor’s engagement with religion”; Bruno De Cordier examines “The (in)visible hand of Muhajirat” in Tajikistan; and James Astley Connell considers religion, violence and human security in Afghanistan.

In the final chapter, Lindsay Rae and Matthew Clarke examine “Australian development FBOs and NGOs”, tracing the changes in development agencies and policies, rating organisations by the degree of local participation and ownership in the development and control of projects. They note the advantages faith-based organisations may be presumed to have over more secular organisations, with highly motivated staff and extensive local networks, but conclude that both sets of organisations covered a similar range of outcomes.

Those with an interest in the Latin American background of Pope Francis will find Rowan Ireland’s analysis of “Religion and Development in Brazil 1950-2010” very illuminating. Ireland traces the shifts in the Catholic Church from its old alliance with the ruling and military elites, into the challenges of liberation theology from the 1960s and the lasting effects of conscientisation with demands for social justice.

He explains the changing religious complexion of Brazil, ranging from more cautious elements in the Church, the stronger emergence of New Age movements and Afro-Brazilian religions, and especially the impact of the Pentecostal movements, including some ‘Prosperity Gospel’ movements. There has been massive drift from the Catholic Church in Brazil. Since 1990, the percentage of people self-reporting as Catholics fell from 84 per cent to 64 per cent over 2006-07. As Ireland says, religion remains massively important for the development process in Brazil which, one might add, is generally the case through developing countries.

The case studies on Nigeria and Tanzania illustrate further complexities from ethnic groups, language and history in the context of Muslim and Christian relations, conflict resolution and social inclusion.

The authors and the team around Matthew Clarke at Melbourne's Deakin University are to be congratulated for such a substantial and compelling contribution to our understanding of development. It demonstrates in multiple ways how significant religion can be in helping shape, foster or retard such massive and unprecedented change.

The *Handbook* is an outstanding and in some ways pioneering addition to the development literature, and will be an invaluable resource for faith-based organisations and NGOs generally, as well as development specialists and economists.