
Editors' Introduction to *Christian Relief, Development, and Advocacy: The Journal of the Accord Network*

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Is Christian faith relevant to how we address global poverty, imagine a better life, and work together to ensure that everyone enjoys the opportunity to thrive in the world we share together? Does our faith have anything to say about economic inequality, ethnic conflict, gender discrimination, corruption, environmental management, disaster preparedness, children's well-being, health care, social justice, or good government? How about political/economic systems and political engagement? How important is faith to human development itself? Is it true that spiritual development is part of human development? For the editors and editorial board of this new journal, as well as to many others, the answer to these questions is an emphatic yes.

If our Christian faith is indeed relevant, many additional questions come to mind. For example, in terms of practice, what does our faith say about *how* we should work to fight global ills and promote the global good? What ethical guidance does scripture offer? What values should underpin and infuse our work? Should we work to transform individuals or institutional structures? How should Christian NGOs relate to governments, and should they accept government money? How important is advocacy, and how should we go about it? What kinds of partnerships should we work in? How do we work together with Christians from other theological traditions? How do we work well across cultures and with people of other faiths, or no faith?

All of these admittedly complex questions, as well as many more, cry out for thoughtful people of faith to take them up, research them, reflect on them as practitioners, and converse about them with like-minded people so that we can all grow in our knowledge, practice, and, ultimately, our faithfulness. True, there is already a huge literature in the field of relief, development, and advocacy, but it is rare for this literature to take up issues from explicitly faith-based perspectives.

The existence of this large secular literature and its associated professional establishment raises another set

of questions for Christians. How do we interact with the relief, development, and advocacy (RDA) world at large? What are the pros and cons of different theoretical paradigms, like Modernization, the Capability Approach, or Postdevelopment? How should Christians relate to theories and explanations built on philosophical foundations different from those of Christianity? To ask a similar question, as Dena Freeman does, are we "Christians doing development" or are we actually "doing Christian development?" (See Offutt and Reynolds in this journal, 2) A professional conversation about all these things and more, one that engages both scholars and practitioners, is what *Christian Relief, Development, and Advocacy (CRDA)* hopes to facilitate.

The idea for this journal arose several years ago when one of those small groups of "thoughtful, committed citizens" that Margaret Mead famously told us about got together to talk things over. The group wondered how we might bring about some positive change in helping Christian practitioners and scholars how to care for and help people in need around the world. Led especially by David Bronkema of Eastern University, members of the group had all experienced how hard it was hard to get explicitly faith-based work published in secular journals. We were also aware of how committed faith-based organizations were to integrating Christian faith into their work, but we also knew that the conversation about how to do that needed to grow. So, we hatched the basic plan for this journal. Since those first conversations, we have joined up with the [Accord Network](#) to be their official journal, organized an editorial board of a dozen knowledgeable and experienced Christian RDA professionals, and figured out (no small thing) the software we're using to publish *CRDA* as a semi-annual, online journal.

This is our inaugural issue. It has two articles, one study of best practices, one perspective on how we should work together, and five book reviews. We think it is a promising start, and hope for a lively, rich, faith-centered discourse in years ahead. We believe the questions raised above require rigorous thought and

scholarship. We also believe that Christians working in the trenches to implement RDA projects and programs need answers to these questions that are accessible and meaningful in their vocational contexts. Our goal is to strike the delicate balance of practical yet rigorous scholarship. We thus welcome contributions from practitioners in the field, leaders in home offices, scholars in universities, and fellow travelers everywhere. We also acknowledge that there are areas where we need to stretch and grow. For one thing, we need to cultivate the diversity of our board, our contributors, and our readers, because we know how much identity, experience, and perspective matter to how we think about faith and all the issues of global relevance that need to be addressed.

If you are doing research on issues in RDA, engaging in serious reflection, or working with strategies that work well, and if a central part of your work and reflections revolves around issues related to the Christian faith, then *CRDA* may be the ideal vehicle to get your work to the people with whom it will have the most influence. Hopefully, *CRDA* will put your research and reflections into a public discourse that contributes to making the world more like the one God wants us to have.

We invite you to join us, to submit your work to *CRDA*, to read the work of other contributors, and thus to join the conversation.