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# **HOLY SPIRIT DEVELOPMENT**

Charismatic Belief and Development  
in South Africa

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## **Abstract**

This is a study about how charismatic belief affects incentives for development, which aims to identify what mechanics that could be working in this relationship. Based on the theoretical framework of the capabilities approach and the role of religion expressed by Martha Nussbaum, a qualitative research using semi-structured interviews and participant observation has been applied to the case study of a charismatic missionary organization in South Africa called Iris Ministries. Respondents belonging to the organization, aid recipients and third party-actors have been interviewed in order to see how charismatic belief in general and belief in miracles in particular encourages or discourages incentives for development.

Several mechanics were identified. Firstly, the religious beliefs of the Iris respondents shaped their moral convictions so that they for example were against abortion but positive to religious freedom. Secondly, the belief in miracles seemed to produce hope among aid recipients, which could be an inspiration and motivation in improving their situation. Thirdly, belief in miracles could be harmful when it made people despise practical help. The impact of charismatic belief is thus mixed, and includes more mechanics than Nussbaum discuss in her theory, which only is focused on morality.

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# 1. Introduction

Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity attract about 584 million people worldwide, which is 27 % of all Christians and 8.5 % of the world's population (Pew Forum 2011, p. 67). It is a very broad and heterogeneous movement, with adherents across all different sorts of denominations, nations and theological perspectives, but the most distinctive characteristic is a strong emphasis on "the gifts of the Spirit", such as healing, prophecy and other miracles (Gernau & Schwadel, 2012, pp. 340, 343).

The movement is the fastest growing form of Christianity (Elphick & Davenport 1997, p. 227) and has been very influential not the least on the African continent. Over a 100 million Africans are Pentecostals (Kalu 2008, p. 3) and the number keeps rising. This is to a large extent a result of foreign mission; Pentecostal missionaries started to go to Africa almost immediately after the movement started, and even today evangelists like Reinhard Bonnke gather enormous crowds on their gospel and healing crusades (Kalu 2008, p. 240). But the African Pentecostal church is in many cases growing on its own, either with the help of famous prophets like Nigerian T. B. Joshua and Kenyan Dr. Owour, or simply through grass-root evangelism and local church planting.

The American couple Heidi and Rolland Baker have been called "among the most influential leaders in world Pentecostalism" (Stafford 2012). Their missionary organization Iris Global is working in over 20 nations, primarily in southern Africa, with the goal to spread the Christian gospel, as well as promoting development through a broad variation of social programmes. The latter involves well drilling, education, health care, microfinance, orphanages and more. (Iris Global Website)

In spite of its influence, Iris Global has received scarce attention by academics. It has mainly been studied by Candy Gunther Brown who has focused on putting their charismatic theology in its historical context (Brown 2011), as well as investigating some of the healing claims (Brown et al 2010). However, neither she nor anyone else has studied the development assistance of Iris, and what impact their charismatic belief has on development.

## 2. Purpose and Research Question

The purpose of this study is to identify mechanisms between charismatic belief and incentives for development in the example of Iris South Africa, using the theoretical framework of the capabilities approach. The term "belief" is preferred rather than "theology", since the former is less connected with theological schooling but rather reflects personal opinion and faith. Being the most distinctive characteristic of charismatic belief, this study will pay special attention to belief in miracles, while

not limiting itself to it. Not being a religious study, it will not focus on observing and explaining the charismatic belief in itself, but only as it relates to the development. Furthermore, the study will look at *incentives* for development rather than trying to analyze empirical evidence of development progress where Iris is working, which would require a more exhaustive research.

Thus, the research question is formulated as follows:

*How does the charismatic belief of Iris South Africa affect incentives for development, defined by the capabilities approach?*

Because of the heterogeneity of charismatic Christianity and the small scale of this study, it would be very hard to generalize the results. However, it will hopefully be a good case study of Martha Nussbaum's theory about the capabilities approach in a charismatic context.

Being one out of several countries where Iris Global is active, South Africa was chosen for being one of the main bases for the organization and for being a country practical for the author to travel to.

## **3. Theory and Previous Research**

### **3.1 Religion and Development**

Deneulin and Rakodi (2011) show how religion should be of high interest to development researchers. The arguments are many: people in developing countries are often religious, politics and religion are often intervened in complex ways in these countries, many civil society organizations working with development are faith based, etc. According to Deneulin and Rakodi, "because religion deeply influences people's construction of meanings about the world, development studies need to engage with believers' interpretations of social, economic, and political reality in the light of their faith." (Deneulin & Radoki 2011, p. 46).

Formerly primarily discussed by missiologists and theologians, more and more development researchers have started to look at this connection, and the academic material has grown over the last year (Clarke 2007, Haynes 2007, Lunn 2009). In other fields, the connection has been acknowledged as well, for example when German philosopher Jürgen Habermas writes about how religion can be a motivator for political action, and thus be beneficial for democratic development (Habermas 2008, pp. 101-113).

The growing interest can to some extent be explained by a shift within development studies, from primarily viewing economic growth of GDP as the main component of development, scholars now

tend to have a broader perspective that includes well-being, human rights, equality, and more (Deneulin & Radoki 2011, p. 48). Amartya Sen's "capability approach", where development is seen as increased capabilities to lead lives we have right to value (Sen 1999), has been very influential in forming this broader perspective. According to Sen, capabilities are neither measured by material resources, nor merely happiness, but people's access and ability to lead a life of good quality. It is basically based on the Aristotelian view of self-fulfillment, and laid the ground for example for UNDP's Human Development Index (HDI), which aims to measure development in broader ways than just through economic terms.

Although Sen himself does not talk so much about religion, other scholars using the capabilities approach do. Martha Nussbaum dedicates a whole chapter in her work *Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach* (2001), to "The Role of Religion" (Nussbaum 2001, pp. 167-240). Writing about women's rights in India, she discusses how religion is impacting this in various ways.

Firstly, she states that religious liberty in itself is a very important capability. She writes:

“When we tell people that they cannot define the ultimate meaning of life in their own way – even if we are sure we are right, and that their way is not a very good way – we do not show full respect for them as persons. In that sense, the secular humanist view is at bottom quite illiberal.” (Nussbaum 2001 p, 180)

Freedom of religion is something that modern liberal democracies recognize (Nussbaum 2001 p. 168), and is thus not very controversial. However, Nussbaum points to the dilemma of this freedom contradicting other freedoms that these democracies also recognize. Since her focus is women's rights, she gives examples of how some religious values do not want women to inherit an equal amount of money as men, allow child marriage for young women and polygamy for men, and support insufficient maintenance for women at divorce (Nussbaum 2001 pp. 169-172). Nussbaum refers to how Indian courts have faced dilemmas concerning all of these incidents when one part has referred to freedom of religion and the other part to some other liberty that the Indian Republic value.

Nussbaum criticizes those who “treats the dilemma as, basically, a non-dilemma” (Nussbaum 2001 p. 174), either because they think that the secular values of human rights and feminism easily outweigh religious claims (a position Nussbaum calls “secular humanism feminism”), or because they think that religion and tradition outweigh any other claims (something Nussbaum calls “traditionalist feminism”, even though she recognizes that it is seldom that this position agrees with

feminism) (Nussbaum 2001 p. 176). The problem of satisfying conflicting liberties is not easily overcome, and needs serious reflection based on the will of the people.

However, Nussbaum also emphasizes the internal diversity of the religions and discusses how the same religion that can hinder people's capabilities can also have a positive impact on them. Even within a patriarchic religious tradition, the perspectives of women within that tradition are often different from the perspectives of the men, and so a plurality of religious interpretations of capabilities exist that cannot be dismissed. Nussbaum gives examples of religious traditions that are positive for women's rights and feminism (Nussbaum 2001 p. 197) and argues that if one fails to take these traditions into account, one gives a false account of the religion one is discussing (Nussbaum 2001 p. 182). Meanwhile, a religious tradition that is hindering some capabilities could promote others, for example when a patriarchal tradition still emphasizes justice, peace and compassion for people in need.

One can thus summarize Nussbaum's argument into three very broad points:

1. Freedom to belong to and express a religious faith is a main capability and has a high intrinsic value.
2. Religion can on the other hand come in conflict with other capabilities and thus hinder human development.
3. Religion can also promote other capabilities and be a driving force for social change.

This is the theoretical framework that will be used in this study. Before moving on to the research, let us look at what the literature says about the impact of charismatic Christianity in Africa.

### **3.2 Charismatic Christianity in Developing Nations**

It is an interesting phenomenon that the Pentecostal and charismatic movement grows rapidly among the poor, something that has been explained with the charismatic promises of healing, prosperity and answered prayers (Togarasei 2011, Pfeiffer et al 2007). But how do charismatic churches in developing nations tackle the poverty of their members? In 2007, Donald Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori published a book called *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement*. Originally the authors wanted to write about churches in general that work with social justice in developing nations, but when they, to their surprise, discovered that the vast majority of churches that did so were Pentecostal, they decided to study this movement further.

According to the authors, the stereotype of Pentecostals being so caught up in eschatological

expectations and evangelistic focus that they are not “wasting time” on social and political change (Miller & Yamamori 2007, p. 21), is not very relevant for Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity in the global south. Instead, the authors come up with the term “Progressive Pentecostals” to describe what they believe is very common: Pentecostals seriously involved in social action. Throughout the book, they give examples of how Pentecostals and charismatics run charities as well as mobilize political campaigning for social justice as a result of their faith.

The authors contrast Progressive Pentecostalism with another stream of Pentecostalism: “prosperity or ‘health and wealth’ churches” (Miller & Yamamori 2007, p. 29). Originating in the mid-1900’s in the United States, it is a theology influenced by individualism and materialism that at least originally claimed that if you have strong faith you will be constantly healthy and rich. Modern forms of prosperity teaching are often more nuanced, but the basis is still that God always wants to heal and bring financial blessings to a believer’s life. This theology is very popular in Africa. Even though Miller and Yamamori note that some prosperity churches are involved in social action as well, they argue that many are too busy with revival meetings and that their theology defends inequality – there are examples of how prosperity pastors live in luxury while their church members are very poor.

However, Lovemore Togarasei (2011) defends the prosperity gospel and argues that even though there are examples of abuses, the gospel is generally positive for poverty reduction. This is because the message of the church suddenly is not only about how to get a good life after death, but also here and now. This will be a motivation to help oneself while trusting in the blessings of God as well, according to Togarasei.

In contrast to these positive views on charismatic Christianity’s impact on development, negative impacts have also been identified in the literature. The prosperity gospel has been criticized for impoverishing church members in teaching that the way to receive wealth from God is paradoxically to give away money to him – i.e. the church (Jenkins 2010).

Critics also argue that charismatic belief turns focus away from more concrete solutions of poverty and oppression, and that when the blessings and healings are absent, already hurt and broken people may feel even worse (Brown 2011, p. 10, Stolz 2011). In fact, when healing is pronounced although nothing has happened, the situation can turn quite dangerous; for example when it comes to the popularity of faith healers among HIV positive African Christians (Manglos & Trinitapoli 2011).

In 2011, the advertising authority of South Africa stopped a marketing campaign by the charismatic “health and wealth” church Christ's Embassy, which claimed that their prayers have cured AIDS. Interestingly enough, the country's Council of Churches also criticized the same church



one year earlier, calling faith healing from life-threatening illnesses "irresponsible and extremely dangerous" (IOL News, 2010).

Thus, many interesting, and partly conflicting, dynamics have already been found in studies of how charismatic theology impacts development in Africa. They are mostly written from a theological and sometimes sociological perspective. To my knowledge, very little has been written about charismatic impact on development by development theorists. And it is probably safe to say that the capabilities approach never has been applied to such a setting. This is what this study wants to contribute with.

### **3.3 Developmental Impacts of Hope**

Both when Brown as well as Miller and Yamamori describe the charismatic movement's impact on development, they argue that it brings *hope* to people living in poverty (Brown 2011, p. 8; Miller & Yamamori 2007, p. 32). This concept has previously been connected to development. In her book *Framework for Understanding Poverty*, Ruby Payne is writing:

As one meets and works with a particular family or individual, there is such frustration and, ultimately, grieving because many situations are so embedded as to seem *hopeless*. It's like dealing with the legendary octopus; each time a tentacle is removed, another appears. (Payne, 2001, p. 48, original emphasis).

In an article about how children living in poverty are doing in school, Kevin Sheehan and Kevin Rall refer to Payne when they argue that hope is a very important factor for the children's achievement skills. "The real problem for children of poverty may not be weak academic skills, poor teachers, or scant resources, but a lack of hope that they can alter their life conditions through effort." (Sheehan & Rall, 2011).

Likewise, J.C. Snyder, who was one of the leading psychologists when it comes to the phenomena of hope, was convinced that hope leads to better coping while hopelessness may lead to stalemate and even depression (Snyder, 2001). He did not agree with the idea that people would be happier if they accepted their current circumstances, but argued that even if the hope is never actually realized, it brings more satisfaction to an individual than living without hope (Snyder and Rand, 2003).

## 4. Methodology

### 4.1 Operationalization

According to Nussbaum, the capabilities approach is asking "What is a person actually able to do and be?" (Nussbaum 2001, p. 71). It thus cannot be restricted to a question of money (although that often is important to increase capabilities), nor is it really a matter of what gives satisfaction or not. According to the capabilities approach, development is freedom (Sen 1999).

Nussbaum list ten central capabilities which, although not being an extensive list, give some guidelines about what the concept is about:

#### *Nussbaum's list of Capabilities*

1. Life.
2. Bodily Health (including reproductive health).
3. Bodily Integrity (secure against violent and sexual assault, sexual satisfaction).
4. Senses, Imagination, and Thought (Education, freedom of thought, religious exercise).
5. Emotions (to love, to grieve, to experience longing, gratitude, and justified anger).
6. Practical Reason (critical reflection, liberty of conscience and religious observance).
7. Affiliation (to engage in various forms of social interaction, non-discrimination on the basis of race, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin and species).
8. Other Species (being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature).
9. Play (being able to laugh, to play, to enjoy recreational activities).
10. Control over one's Environment (political participation and property rights). (Nussbaum 2001, pp. 78ff.)

These are the capabilities this study will use as a definition of development. To operationalize them, issues have been chosen that are relevant for a South African as well as a Christian context, that are fairly easy to have an opinion about even on a quite uneducated level, and that to the best extent possible captures Nussbaum's list:

### *Operationalization of the Capabilities*

- Poverty (relates to 1, 2 and 10).
- Health and HIV/AIDS (relates to 1, 2 and 3).
- Gender Equality (relates to 2, 3, 7 and 10).
- Abortion (relates to 1, 2 and 3).
- LGBT rights (relates to 3, 5 and 7).
- Environment (relates to 8).
- Religious freedom (relates to 4 and 6).
- Freedom to play (relates to 9).

Based on how charismatic theology affects incentives to work with these issues, we will hopefully be able to draw conclusions about the underlying capabilities that Nussbaum uses. As stated before, the reasons why incentives for development have been chosen as the dependent variable rather than development in itself is because the latter would require a larger, quantitative analysis that would fall outside the scope of this study.

There are of course downsides with this. A study that looks at the actual impacts on these social issues, measuring for example poverty rates or equality standards, would perhaps get more relevant results that would be easier to generalize. One could also have compared this organization with a secular and/or a non-charismatic religious organization to spot differences and try to isolate the impact of charismatic belief. Again, the limited scope of the study as well as practical reasons had to exclude such an option.

### **4.2 The Field Study**

This study is based upon a minor field study in Mpumalanga, South Africa, between May 2<sup>nd</sup> and July 30<sup>th</sup> 2013. Using qualitative research, the data that was being analyzed was received through participant observation as well as through 15 interviews, whereby 8 were conducted with respondents belonging to Iris Ministries and 7 with other respondents (labeled in the study Iris respondents and non-Iris respondents, respectively). All were South Africans with the exception of

the Iris respondents “Paul” and “Mary”, who were Western missionaries. Besides this, two study booklets from Harvest Bible Collage: *Breaking Poverty Bonds* and *The Fivefold Ministry*, were also analyzed for a broader understanding.

The research was two-phased. The first phase was mainly based on participant observation where charismatic belief was identified as well as its impact on the development assistance of the ministry. Here, key actors among the Iris staff and volunteers, aid recipients and third party-actors were also identified. Based on this information, semi-structured interviews with some of these key actors were arranged.

Because of practical issues like communication difficulties and tight schedules, some of the interviews with non-Iris respondents became quite short (around 10 minutes). This particularly refers to interviews done with visitors of the feeding program, where there was a lack of people who could interpret to English.

## **5. Empirics**

The operationalizations of the capabilities appeared in various forms during the research: some did not seem to have a relationship to charismatic belief at all; others had just one link while others had several. Since this is a study of the mechanisms of these links, the main mechanisms are presented in the subtitles 5.3-5.9. Some mechanisms were general, affecting almost all of the operationalizations of the capabilities, while others only involved one.

### **5.1 The Theological Context of Iris**

In South Africa, around 10 million people are Pentecostals. These are organized in a great variety of denominations and church movements. The Apostolic Faith Mission – which bears the same name as the church that started Pentecostalism in Los Angeles 1906 – is the biggest, and it is followed by Zion's Christian Church – an African initiated church that has mainly developed independently from Western influence, and which to some extent mix Christianity and traditional religion (Elphick & Davenport 1997, pp. 217ff.). Younger charismatic churches have also rooted themselves in the country, like the traditionally conservative Word of Faith movement and the slightly more progressive Vineyard Church. Finally, there is a great amount of independent and very small “neo-Pentecostal” church movements that have a strong charismatic emphasis.

Iris South Africa is connected to one of these neo-Pentecostal church movements, Partners in Harvest. Founded in the 1990's, it is a young denomination with influences from various

charismatic streams. Its major influence is naturally Iris Global, which is based in neighboring Mozambique. As stated in the introduction of this thesis, this is one of the major Pentecostal influences in the world. Iris also has a strong relationship to another very influential charismatic ministry, Bethel Church in Redding, California. Iris has offices in Redding and its leader, Heidi Baker, has described their relationship as “being married”. (Baker, 2011)

It seemed like Iris South Africa also had some influences from other, South African, sources. The teaching about prosperity (5.6) rather reminded of Word of Faith teaching than what Iris Global and Heidi and Rolland Baker are teaching.

## **5.2 Social Ministry**

The social ministry of Iris South Africa is based in a township called Backdoor, 10 kilometers from White River, where the organization has a community center called Village of Hope. It includes:

- a bible college to train pastors called Harvest Bible College, with about 60 students per year;
- a preschool for about 20 children;
- a feeding program which hands out free food once every Monday to Friday, with attendance of between 30 and 100 people, mostly children;
- a sowing center for a few women (not very active);
- and a youth center to teach computer skills and job skills, with around five youths attending.

Close to Village of Hope is a church connected to the ministry, Partners in Harvest Church. Right outside Backdoor is Michael's Children's Village (MCV) which is also a part of Iris Ministries, and which has been acknowledged by the South African government as a safe home for children who have been orphaned, abandoned or abused. Around 25 children were staying there. MCV cooperates with the Social Department of Mpumalanga, while Village of Hope works independently of the government.

Non-Iris respondents were pleased with the social ministry of Iris. Especially the ministries aimed for children were much appreciated. As we will see in 5.7, Iris was criticized for some other things, but both respondents that received its aid and third party-respondents were in favor of this social work.

This entire social ministry was mainly localized in a civil society context, not a political one. There were no visible traces of specific lobbying or campaigning. What could be seen through the participant observation was that several of the church members supported ANC, wearing t-shirts

that proudly stated that they had voted for these. Iris respondents generally did not speak much about politics at all, however.

### **5.3 Moral Convictions**

Both when it came to abortion and LGBT, the Iris respondents were negative:

“When they talk about [homosexuality], I’m really not happy. [...] The Bible says that God created a male and a female.” (Goodness)

**“What are your views on abortion?”**

“That is wrong. Abortion is killing. But it is common here.”

**“Here in Backdoor?”**

“Yes. But not in our church.” (Stephen)

“God loves all people. I do believe God’s word is clear that homosexuality is not God’s design and therefore committing homosexual acts is sin... I believe the Bible is also clear that he creates life within the womb and therefore life is infinitely precious at conception... So abortion is also against God’s plan. I think it is important to mention that there is forgiveness and healing for any repentant person in these areas.” (Mary)

Because of the references to God and the Bible, it is clear that this was mainly based in their religious conviction. Conservatism on these issues is very common in the charismatic and Pentecostal movement in general, why this result is not very surprising (Gernau & Schwadel 2012, p. 340).

The respondents were positive to religious freedom and freedom to play. The latter did not seem to have any connections at all to the respondents’ religious beliefs, while the former were justified with some theological reflections:

“We believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to Heaven, to God. But it is a matter of free choice. That is why we support freedom of religion. Everyone should have the ability to choose. But we hope that they choose Jesus.” (Stephen)

When it comes to the issue of environment, it did not seem to have received much reflection. Even though one of the missionary respondents said that they want to be “good stewards” of the environment (Mary), other Iris respondents said that they did not have any opinion about it (Fortune, Goodness). Also, as far as the participant observation could identify, the organization did not work with this issue.

## **5.4 Charismatic Teaching**

The belief among all the Iris respondents was that miracles are very important in the Christian life.

“If you are a true believer, you have to believe in miracles. And from there, the miracles will take us to a place of total peace – I mean in peace in society.” (Elijah)

“Jesus said great things would we do because of the Holy Spirit... Miracles are important because they point people to Jesus... and they are the fulfillment of Jesus’ victory on the cross.” (Mary)

Teaching about miracles and Christianity in general was prevalent not only in the church and at the bible school but also in the social ministries. The preschool included morning devotions with worship songs, prayer and a short message from the Bible. The daily feeding program had the same thing which almost everyone participated in before the food was distributed. Finally, Michael’s Children’s Village included prayer meetings, Bible teaching and prophetic workshops.

When asked about how they felt about this confessional development assistance, all non-Iris feeding program visitors interviewed said that they had no problems with it. In fact, one respondent even stated that if they did not speak about God, he would not come there (Blessing). However, Iris respondents did say that some visitors had shown displeasure with the preaching and praying, although they were a small minority (Joy, Mary). When asked how they themselves felt concerning that religious practices at MCV were mandatory, one respondent answered:

“I think what we have to keep in mind is that MCV as a community is a giant step-up from where they come from. For all the children there the food is better, the house is better, the love is better, the life experience is better. So it would be very unusual for a child to go ‘I want to leave because I have to do the Jesus thing.’ What’s more likely is that they would go

along with it, because everything else is cool. And we have to be very aware of this. But we also trust that he is real enough so that if we are truly walking in his presence, even a child who doesn't want Jesus, as Jesus is manifest his beauty will create a desire for him." (Paul)

## **5.5 Ministry of all believers**

One of the most distinctive aspects of charismatic theology is that miracles are not only for special saints but for all believers. The teaching material "*The Fivefold Ministry*", which is used at Harvest Bible Collage, says that the "ministry of all the believers" includes "[t]he fullness of [Jesus'] actions and deeds. Jesus says, 'The works that I do you will do also and even greater works because I go to My father', John 14:12." (Rasmussen 1998, p. 42). Interestingly enough, one of the respondents referred to how all believers can experience miracles when arguing for gender equality:

"According to my personal view, the power of God does not go in gender, does not go in education, and what. Because I have seen like for instance a boy that planted a church when he was eight years old. [...] I have seen very old people operate in miracles, intense miracles. So to God there is nothing, that he looks to gender or whatever. I saw ladies – we have quite a few pastors that are ladies – that operate in miracles more than men. They know how to curse the demons more than men." (Elijah)

Similarly, other respondents said that the "body of Christ" includes equality:

"True equality can only be found in Christ... In Christ – all believers are truly equal in his love." (Mary)

"The Bible says that Jesus is the head of the church. [...] We as Christians are the body of Christ, Christ is the head of the body. Thus, we understand that everyone are the body of Christ. There is no gender in Christ. Although you are a female, although you are a man, you are one body in Christ. Thus, we are all equal to God." (Goodness)

However, one respondent was critical to the concept of gender equality:



“[...] here in South Africa, the 50/50 between men and women – we are struggling a little bit about that. At the end of the day, we find out that men and women don’t respect each other because of this 50/50 equality.”

**“How do you mean? They don’t respect each other?”**

“Because of the equality, yes. They say they have a right to do whatever to a man.”

**“So what are you teaching then?”**

“We are teaching about respect. That it’s good to respect each other. And to have the limit.”

**“So in your opinion, what are the place of a man and the place of a woman?”**

“A place of a man is to love his wife. Then the place of a woman is to submit to her husband. And to treat each other equal.” (Fortune)

## **5.6 Prosperity**

Many of the sermons and teachings concerned how God wants to bless or prosper the believers. This prosperity mainly concerned money, but had according to some respondents also a broader meaning in that it includes getting a better life in various aspects. Thus, there was an interesting parallel to the capability approach.

“Prosperity is an abundance of Christ. [...] I believe that if we are walking with Christ, there will be an onflow of each and every area of our lives, and that includes capacity for choices, capacity to eat, and clothing and blessings and financial blessings.” (Paul)

The teaching material “*Breaking Poverty Bonds*” used at the Bible School talks to a large extent about financial prosperity:

God created wealth and He gives people the ability to gain it. Notice in verse 17 [of Deutoronomy 8] that it is not man’s cleverness that gains him wealth. God gives the ability.

God gives some individuals a greater ability to create wealth, but then He also gives them a greater responsibility as to how they handle that wealth. Luke 16:1-2

As we apply the principles of God’s Word in our lives, God will cause us to prosper. It does not matter what culture we come from. (Schuetz et al 1998, p. 4).

The hope of being prospered by God was evident in the interviews with non-Iris respondents.

“I am having a really hard time now, yes. But God is good. He can turn this situation around. I trust in God.” (Hope)

“God is good all the time. When I need money, I pray to him.”

**“Does he answer those prayers?”**

“Yes.”

**“How?”**

“In different ways. The church, Village of Hope, neighbors – even people I don’t know.”  
(Wisdom)

Prosperity could thus be labeled as the hope to escape poverty and other financial or practical problems supernaturally. *Breaking Poverty Bonds* did not say however that this blessing was without requirements. It emphasized that the key to prosperity is to give offerings to the church. And nobody is too poor to give, it claimed.

The condition [to prosperity] is that we honour God in our giving. In fact, God says that the more we give, the more He will bless us. Luke 6:38.

This condition to God’s promise of abundance is actually the key to breaking the spiritual bondage of poverty. We can meditate on God’s promises and we can pray against the spiritual strongholds of poverty but, unless we start giving, this bondage will not be broken.

As we give, we release God’s promises to work in our lives. Then, as we pray, poverty bonds have to release their grip and God’s abundance is released. (Schuetz et al 1998, p. 8)

[...]

Let us pull down the stronghold of poverty and crush it under our feet.

1. Repent for believing the lie that you were too poor to give.
2. If you have taught people that they were too poor to give, then repent now.
3. Repent of the times that you have not given generously in obedience to God’s Word.  
(Schuetz et al 1998, p. 10).

In other words, even an extremely poor person should give money to the church, because that will

only help him or her to escape poverty through supernatural prosperity. As the students at Harvest Bible College received this teaching from *Breaking Poverty Bonds*, the teacher emphasized that they as pastors never should be afraid of demanding offerings even in very poor churches because of this. However, he also emphasized that offerings should be voluntarily and not forced or coerced.

## 5.7 Healing

When asked about their view on HIV/AIDS, some Iris respondents emphasized the importance of education to reduce the epidemic, while others emphasized supernatural healing and even said that they had seen healings from HIV:

“HIV is something that God can heal. God can heal anything.” (Stephen)

“Last year we had four people that went to the test and got completely HIV negative. They all testified at our church that they got healed from HIV. And I believe they were not lying.”  
(Elijah)

It should be noted that another Iris respondent recognized that at least one HIV healing they had experienced could be the result of a false positive report when a child was born, which later was corrected to a negative one (Mary).

The main point of criticism towards the ministry concerned prayer for healing. Several of the non-Iris respondents said that people in the area dislike Village of Hope because *they had neglected helping someone practically in order to pray for miracle*. They shared how a girl in the community had experienced an accident two years earlier:

Justice: “A car came and hit her, and passed that side, it pulled aside over there. They took her and put her to the car to take her to the hospital because she was very damaged, it was bad, bad. And these pastors, they said ‘No, no, no, stop, stop, stop! Let us pray, let us pray!’”

Nhlanhla: “And she was bleeding.”

Justice: “You see? They said stop, stop, stop and they start calling down fire. I don’t know where they thought the fire would come from. And she just died there. And the ambulance

came [...] and then they took her to the hospital. But she died.”

Nhlanhla: “And the pastors said ‘No, this person should come back.’”

Justice: “Yes, the pastors prayed that she would wake up.”

This event was well-known in the area and one non-Iris respondent claimed that it had resulted in decreased popularity of the ministry.

“This place used to be packed with people, with youths, but now many people don't come there anymore. [...] The feeding program is good, the pre-school is also good, they are helping the children. I don't know what to say, I both like and dislike the place.” (Vincent)

The non-Iris respondents did believe that healing miracles could occur, but the ones that had experienced this incident emphasized the importance of combining prayer with action:

**Do you believe that God can heal the sick?**

Nhlanhla: “Yes I believe that.”

Justice: “Yeah, we pray, we pray, we take medicine, and we will be fine. Pray and take medicine.”

Nhlanhla: “And you know what the Bible says: God helps the one who is helping himself. If you will get sick, and not taking medicine, and keep on saying that ‘God will help me’; God never helps you without you helping yourself. You have to take the medicine; while you are taking the medicine, you pray ‘God please help me’.”

When asked, Iris respondents said that they do not want to neglect health care or other forms of practical help in order to pray for miracles, but combine the two:

“I believe both [prayer for miracles and practical help] are crazy important and biblically mandated... and both point people to Jesus.” (Mary)

“They are both important. Because some people, when they see a miracle is when they believe. And some people, when you help them physically then they see the love – because when you help them physically you are demonstrating the love of Jesus, you are not just speaking about love, but you are acting the love of Jesus.” (Peter)

However, one respondent was open to the possibility that hospitals could be “idols”:

“I don't have a problem with taking someone to the hospital. But I have a real problem if we take a person to the hospital before we come into the presence of God. Coming into the presence of God might not necessarily even mean laying hands on the person and pray for them, but we're continually in prayer. And so hospitals can be an abomination to God because of idolatry, or it can be worship to God because it's a fruit of intimacy.” (Paul)

## **5.8 Prophecy**

The gift of prophecy, to receive messages from God, appeared several times when the Iris respondents described their ministry. One of the respondents said that God had told him to move to White River in a dream (Elijah). He also claimed that he had seen the archangel Michael standing on the field where the children's village later was built, thus it was named Michael's Children's Village. Another respondent said how they eagerly seek to hear God's voice when taking decisions in the ministry.

“It's an audible voice, it's not an outside-in voice, it's an inside-out voice, but it's audible. He says things that are way beyond my intelligence or my capacity to solve a situation. Then I know it's him and not me. Or he says something so random that you weren't even thinking about. Or he'll say 'give away all your money!' Then you know for well that it's not you, because the flesh desires to hoard and store and create storehouses for itself.” (Paul)

In other words, the Iris respondents believed that their ministry was partially led by God himself, and they wanted their decisions to be impacted by prophetic messages. It is hard to know how well this was working in practice and how it looked like, but at least this was the ambition.

When asked, non-Iris respondents also said they believed that God could speak, but none of them had experienced it themselves, nor did they have any example of when they thought that this had impacted their capabilities.

## **5.9 Deliverance**

When asked about what creates development, one Iris respondent answered "deliverance", which refers to the practice of commanding demons to leave people's bodies:

“Some of the other things, like poverty, is based on generational curses, so we do deliverance.”

**“So you use deliverance to free people from poverty?”**

“Yes.”

**“And how does that look like?”**

“It’s working because... - since those years when we pray for them, and they are getting delivered mentally, then some of them start to enjoy life and having that freedom.”

[...] **“And then you see a change in their lives?”**

“Yes. Most of the time we... - sometimes we visit where they come from, and it changed the development.”

**“And what has happened then?”**

“There’s a lot of impact. Yes. Because the same people who are getting deliverance here, they take that deliverance to where they come from and we see the change. Other people are getting delivered in that place.”

**“And then they are also free from poverty?”**

“Yes.” (Fortune)

While such a claim is not possible to verify, this was one of the clearest examples of how a respondent connects development to a supernatural phenomenon. It did not seem to be any general teaching concerning a deliverance-development connection though; when asked how deliverance affects development, other respondents were surprised for such a question and said that they have not thought about it. The one exception is when the respondent Elijah mentioned deliverance (“curs[ing] the demons”) as an argument for gender equality, as described in 5.5.

## **6. Analysis and Discussion**

Let us now bring together the theory and empirics and interpret the data to try to draw some conclusions on how to answer the research question.

When Nussbaum talks about the role of religion in the context of women’s rights in India, the discussion is focused on moral tradition and moral teaching. Both when it comes to how religion hinders women’s capabilities, for example when forbidding them to inherit an equal amount of money as men, or when it promotes them, like when protesting against polygamy on religious

grounds, moral teaching and tradition is the key mechanism in explaining the relation between religion and development.

In this study, religious moral teaching was identified primarily in 5.3. Here, we saw that the religious moral of Iris seemed to have made them negative to abortion and homosexuality but positive to religious freedom. Nussbaum's theory is thus confirmed on this point, religious moral can both in- and decrease incentives to improve capabilities, which is not very surprising.

We should take this opportunity to discuss the subjectivity of the capabilities approach though. While it shouldn't be much debate whether increased religious freedom equals increased capabilities and thus development, an issue like abortion is more debated. Even though the dominant view, to which Nussbaum would agree, is that free abortion is a vital factor for women to have the capability to lead a good life (especially when it comes to the capability of bodily integrity, Nussbaum's no. 3), a pro-life view like the one of Iris would also see the fetus as a human being – which according to them should have some rights as well. For them, abortion decreases the capability to life, which Nussbaum sees as the most fundamental one (no. 1). Without going into further detail on this topic, let us just conclude that one of the complexities of the capability approach is this subjectivity of what “capabilities” and “a life we have right to value” really are.

When it comes to the environmental capability, “being able to live with concern for and in relation to animals, plants, and the world of nature” as Nussbaum puts it, there is more agreement upon that this is something positive. Here, Iris South Africa did not seem to have reflected very much, theologically at least. While no one argued against caring for nature, there was not much action nor reflection about the issue.

This is quite an interesting finding, and a bit hard to interpret. Why is it so that the religion of Iris seems to produce quite strong opinions concerning poverty, gender equality, homosexuality, abortion and other social issues, but not so much on the environment? Has it to do with the South African society, opinions in the charismatic movement in general, lack of Biblical mention? It is impossible to try to answer that question with the scope of this study, but something that could be developed in future research would definitely be views on environmental issues in the charismatic movement in developing nations.

Likewise, there were no signs of political lobbying or campaigning even for the issues Iris work with, and politics were not even discussed very much at the organization nor in church. This contrasts with the literature which argued that religion in general and charismatic Christianity in particular can easily mobilize political action. Of course, the finding of this study cannot claim to be anything more than an exception from the rule, and it is very hard to speculate about why the charismatic belief in this case did not produce many incentives for political action.

While recognizing the importance of religious freedom, most social ministries of Iris were very confessional with charismatic Christian teaching and practice intervened in the aid. Adult non-Iris respondents did not have any problem with this, but it becomes problematic when one realizes that many of these ministries included and/or were aimed for children, namely Michael's Children's Village, the feeding program and the preschool. Of course, families that give their children a Christian upbringing, which MCV could be viewed as, have to exist in a religiously free country; as well as Christian children's ministries like the feeding program. But a preschool which includes worship and preaching may sound problematic to Western ears. On the other hand, the preschool was voluntarily and it should not be surprising if the parents were Christian or at least would have no problem with allowing their children to participate in Christian activities.

Another impact that the charismatic belief had on the social ministry as a whole was through the belief in prophecy. What happens when a development organization is believed, at least by its own employees and volunteers, to be partly led by God himself? One implication that appeared in the respondent's own discussion was that drastic changes could come about quickly without forewarning. This may result in creativity and "thinking outside the box", but is also a risk for not very thought-through decisions, especially since the discernment to identify the voice of God is quite subjective.

The Iris respondents did have clear views on gender equality, but here the opinions were mixed. As we saw, one respondent argued that while men and women are equal, they are not "50/50" equal, which means that a woman should submit to her husband. In other words, even if they may have equal value they could still have different functionings and social positions. Although it was not explicitly stated, it would not be strange if this conviction was based in the respondent's religious views (or a combination of religion and culture). The respondents that argued in favor of gender equality clearly based their arguments on their belief, and one of them even referred to that he knew that women were equal to men because they had an equal portion of the supernatural power of God, and could "curse the demons".

It was also interesting to see that this power to cast out demons was argued by one respondent to produce development and free people from poverty. Since nobody else saw such a connection even when asked this should definitely not be viewed as a main finding, but it was an unexpected aspect of how charismatic belief could pop up in different forms when talking about development with some of the people from Iris.

The belief in miracles also seemed to produce a lot of hope, especially when it comes to prosperity and healing. Both Iris and non-Iris respondents believed that God could do miracles that would increase people's capabilities and help the poor and the sick. This was constantly repeated in



interviews, teaching materials, sermons and the like. Whether it was expressed through promises of prosperity, prayer for healing or testimonies of miracles, this was bringing hope for an increase of people's capabilities. Unlike the hope a secular organization can bring, this hope was unlimited, since it centered around the power of an almighty God. Even if peoples' situations looked really tough, Iris could beside the practical help offer a hope about that God could change their circumstances dramatically.

Unlike morality, which Nussbaum focuses on, hope is more characteristic for charismatic belief and a different type of mechanism when it relates to capabilities. There is a significant difference between moral teaching about poverty reduction, where one is instructing *people* to give generously to the poor, and belief in poverty reducing miracles, when one hopes and prays that *God* will give generously to the poor. The former is primarily only bringing about change through human action (the giver), while the latter plants hope in the mind of the one in need. The former is more adapted to those who already have capabilities to change, while the latter is adapted to the one who lacks capabilities and simply need a miracle. As Snyder, Payne and others have argued, hope seems to be an effective contributor to development, and that the charismatic belief of Iris produces this goes in line with the findings of Brown as well as Miller and Yamamori.

But hope was not the only thing belief in miracles resulted in. As Nussbaum states, the same religion that can promote capabilities can also hinder them. We saw this in two ways: how the hope of healing could be a stumbling block in helping sick people through taking them to hospital, and how the hope of prosperity could cause preachers to demand offerings from people living in poverty.

This brings us to the issue of false hope. As we discussed in the Previous Research section (3.2), critics of charismatic theology point out that already sick people may feel more hurt when healing does not manifest. Likewise, one could argue that already poor people are hurt when they give away money to get richer through prosperity but only gets poorer instead. Both of these phenomena are examples of when miracles are not merely seen as a possibility, but something that can be guaranteed. Even though the respondents never explicitly stated that this was how they believed, the examples mentioned in the empirical review showed that in practice this could be the attitude. Miracles are then viewed as not merely a hope, but as a law or a right.

In other words, belief in miracles can bring hope to people living under hard circumstances, but a belief that miracles will always happen automatically in response to faith or some sort of action, is very dangerous. Besides this double-edged extrinsic value of the belief, it has in itself an intrinsic value since the freedom to be able to express such a belief is an important capability as well, as the case is with all religious beliefs.

One final question to ask is if Iris South Africa should be seen as being a part of what Miller and Yamamori calls “Progressive Pentecostalism”. While the extensive social ministry and their theological reflections on justice and equality clearly backs this up, there is also some prosperity preaching and a few controversies that would place them in the “prosperity church” box instead. Perhaps this study shows that it is hard to create a distinction between “Progressive Pentecostalism” and “prosperity churches” in the first place. As Togarasei noted, prosperity preaching may have positive impacts on development as well, which we especially have seen when it comes through creating hope of receiving “health and wealth” from the Lord. Perhaps a new term could be used for this stream, “Progressive Prosperity Pentecostalism”.

## 7. Conclusion

This study has shown that the charismatic belief at Iris South Africa impacts incentives for development, defined by the capabilities approach, in various ways. First of all, having the freedom to believe and express this belief is in itself an important capability. Furthermore, the moral convictions it brings can both promote and decrease other capabilities. These findings are in line with Martha Nussbaum's discussion on religion and development. However, the study also looked at how the specific belief in *miracles* affect incentives for development, something which is outside Nussbaum's reasoning, and found different mechanics there compared with morality. Through belief in miracles, charismatic theology promotes a hope for capabilities to increase, which should be positive for motivation and incentives to an actual increase, based on the works by Snyder and Payne. However, hope for miracles can also lead individuals to despise practical help, and thus hinder incentives for development.

Hopefully, this can be a constructive contribution to Nussbaum's theory, and also a reminder of the importance of cultural sensitivity in development research. Religion is for many in developing countries not only something that they wish to have the freedom to enjoy but something that deeply affects most of their life. For the people interviewed in this study, charismatic belief was very important – something that should be taken into consideration by any development researcher who is working in an area where this belief is common.

Can these findings be generalized? Since we have only looked at one organization in one country, this should be viewed as nothing more than a case study. The charismatic movement is very heterogeneous, so it is very hard to draw any conclusions on how charismatic belief affects incentives for development in general based on these findings. However, it is reasonable to assume

that the mechanics identified in this study - morality, hope, and neglect of practical help - affect development in many other charismatic settings, to various degrees.

Previous research have, as we have seen, also identified how the moral convictions of charismatic churches affect development, as well as how its belief in miracles can cause a neglect of practical help. However, charismatic belief as a producer of development-beneficial hope is something that rarely has been discussed at all previously. Thus, here are potentials for further research: how substantial is this hope? How common is it? Can empirical evidence of its impact on actual development be found? Hopefully, these questions may be explored in the future.

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- Fortune – 9 May
- Goodness – 13 May
- Joy – 18 June
- Mary – 7 August (e-mail)
- Paul – 22 June
- Peter – 24 June
- Stephen – 13 May

#### *Non-Iris Respondents – Aid Recipients:*

- Blessing – 15 May
- Hope – 7 June
- Wisdom – 11 June

#### *Non-Iris Respondents – Third Party actors:*

- Justice – 20 June
- Nhlanhla – 20 June
- Tulsile – 20 June

- Vincent – 21 June

Note: All the names have been changed to protect the integrity of the respondents.

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## Appendix: Interview Guide

### **Iris Respondents**

- What motivated you to work with this organization?
- What are your views on the supernatural?
- What creates development?
- What is poverty?
- What are your views on HIV/AIDS?
- What are your views on gender equality?
- What are your views on abortion?
- What are your views on homosexuality?
- What are your views on the environment and sustainability?
- What are your views on racial equality?
- What are your views on religious freedom?

### **Non-Iris Respondents**

- What is your experience from this organization?
- Do you believe in God?
- Do you believe in miracles? Have you experienced any?

- What do you want to be capable of? Can this organization help you fulfill this?
- Are these issues, in your experience, something this organization works with: poverty, HIV/AIDS, gender, abortion, LGBT, environment, religious freedom, (freedom to play)?