Abstract

In much international development work, religion has been a marginal if not ignored topic. The inverse applies for many faith institutions, which have viewed the work and thinking of development institutions with skepticism. Research, operational action, joint reflection, and dialogue on common issues have been patchwork. Recent initiatives, notably the Jubilee 2000 campaign spotlight on issues of poor country debt, have highlighted how significant are the linkages and areas for exploration, yet many opportunities for dialogue on topics of common concern and differing perspectives (like education, social impact of modernization, roots of poverty) are still missed. The events of September 11, 2001 have underscored starkly the powerful links between religion and modernization, and posed a host of new questions about how the links operate and how thinkers and actors should respond.

This article focuses on a specific initiative aimed at bridging this gulf, the World Faiths Development Dialogue, which aims to engage a wide-ranging international and national dialogue among faith and development institutions, with the effort to combat world poverty the central focus. The experience illustrates both opportunities and pitfalls. WFDD and some recent events bridging the development and faith worlds highlight the importance of this dialogue for the work of development institutions, faith organizations and academia as they address the wide array of topics around the globalization themes of world poverty, inequality and social justice. It has brought to the fore ethical and pragmatic dilemmas for practitioners in quite diverse fields.

Introduction

This article focuses on a topic, perhaps an entire dimension, that has been strikingly disarticulated from much mainstream international development thinking: the role of religion and religious institutions in development. It recounts how an effort inspired by two leaders, one from the development world and the other from the world of religion – James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank, and George C. Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury – to bridge the divide through a structured and probing dialogue bringing faith and development leaders and networks together, has unfolded. The World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD) effort generated, initially at least, significant doubts and criticisms (some of them echoed later in the U.S. in debates about the Faith Initiative launched by the administration of US President George W. Bush). Nonetheless the dialogue has introduced new ways of thinking and sparked new questions and new partnerships. The events of September 11, 2001 have brought home the need to understand much better how religion and modernization interact, opening a new set of issues for dialogue, among them the roots and role of fundamentalist thinking and movements.

This piece is essentially a narrative of the course along which the ideas behind the WFDD have evolved. It also describes two recent events which have consciously sought to confront the worlds of development and religion: a Millennium Summit of Religious Leaders at
the United Nations preceding the Millennium Summit of World Leaders in September 2000, and a Colloquium in Fez, Morocco, which approached the “globalization” debate with divergent perspectives and spiritual dimensions as key ingredients. The article concludes with an exploration of how the worlds of religion and development might intersect in the global effort to achieve the “Millennium Development Goals” which world leaders set out at the United Nations in September 2000 as barometers of their success in combating misery and want.

This is an article drawn from direct experience, much more than abstract analysis or research. I am a “development practitioner” with close to three decades working on programs aimed at helping poor countries (mostly Africa, also Latin America and East Asia). I was asked in early 2000 to work on the World Faiths Development Dialogue, and served for a year at Interim Chief Executive (with Canon Richard Marsh, Dean of Canterbury Cathedral). In some respects, therefore, this article recounts a personal intellectual and practical journey.

A Parable

In 1992, I found myself driving south across dusty, flat, desert terrain, from Mauritania’s capital, Nouakchott, to the Senegal River Valley, with a senior government official. We were discussing, from many angles, the theme of poverty and how best to combat it. Poverty was the organizing theme of the relationship between Mauritania and the World Bank (I was Country Director at the time) yet it was far from a simple matter to see how this translated into action, on both sides. The official, a former military leader who had taken on a development position fairly recently, was friendly yet guarded. More and more, though, it was apparent that he found my focus on poverty elusive and even irritating. It was obvious, he asserted, that all his government did was directed to improving the lives of the poor.

The next part of our discussion was pregnant with pause and discomfort. When I asked how many Mauritanian refugees from the conflict with Senegal two years earlier were still in camps in Senegal (I knew the number to be well above 100,000), he replied that there were no Mauritanian refugees. On probing, the answer came that those who had left were not Mauritanian. They could nonetheless return if they wished, but had forfeited their right to land and showed disloyalty to their country. Though I knew the topic was considered taboo, I asked about slavery in Mauritania, and received a quick and dismissive response that it did not exist. I broached delicately the issue of female genital mutilation, to a simply blank look. Queries about human rights led to angry rebuttals of the charges and comments on the motives of those who raised such issues.

The Senegal River Valley had long been a cauldron for conflict and controversy, a complex river basin set on one of the world’s fault lines between races and religions. A massive dam project, supported by the international community in response to long years of drought, altered its dynamics in fundamental and important ways. As we approached the Valley, it was eminently, and visibly, clear that any development challenge you could imagine – economic or social – was there. In the early 1990s, ethnic tensions were on the boil, refugees camped on both sides of the border with Senegal, discussions of women’s roles and rights caused tempers to flare, human disease issues were myriad, a complex land reform program faced daily dilemmas, ethical and practical, and troubled rural institutions were charged with any manner of challenge, and any number of sins. School enrollments were low even at primary level and quality issues were pervasive. Environmental problems were Legion.

We found common interest in a discussion of the Valley’s livestock economy. On the subject of Mauritania’s camel herd, the official’s answers were quick, elaborate, remarkably
precise and well informed. It seemed he knew each Mauritanian camel (it is highly likely that he himself owned a substantial herd). He talked fluently about herd size, diseases, growth trends, and the camel trade (mostly north to Algeria and Libya). He acknowledged, though, that camels were not important in the Valley (where some half of Mauritania’s people were concentrated). We then talked of cattle. Comments were less precise but nonetheless very knowledgeable, again with specifics on herd size, the nature of trade, challenges posed by recent droughts, and desertification. When I asked about sheep and goats, the answers, though still informed, were hazy.

We were passing through a village at this point, full of life but clearly very poor. Amidst the precarious houses, two sights stood out for me: the ethnic diversity of the people, and the many donkeys. There were sheep, goats and chickens also and I spotted a camel in the distance, but it was plain that donkeys were central to life there: they pulled carts, carried water cans, hauled straw and produce, were loaded with furniture for a family on the move, and children rode them. When I asked my companion about Mauritania’s donkeys, his answer was quick: “we have no donkeys”. It was clear that for him they had too little importance even to discuss. He stuck to his guns even as I pointed to several donkeys. The topic was dismissed.

We spent an intense, inspiring and daunting day of visits spotlighting development challenges. A large private farm highlighted management and governance problems, a dynamic women’s cooperative contrasted hope and disappointment, as stacks of ripe tomatoes began to rot because there was no way to take them to market. Land reform was a hot topic everywhere, with onion layers of tensions and problems as teams of Mauritanian and foreign specialists tried to work in a fraught and changing situation. In schools, large numbers of children and a few teachers struggled with virtually no books and equipment. It took uncomfortable questioning and visible counting to generate discussion about why the boys outnumbered the girls.

As the visit progressed, the topic of poverty as I described it took more form for the official and his colleagues, but I was uncomfortably aware how far the policy discussions and talk of possible action was set against a backdrop of unmentionable or unseen issues. Despite good will and much common vocabulary, we often approached a situation and conversation from vantage points far removed from one another.

**Comprehensive Versus Selective Approaches**

My story about the camels, the donkeys, and the Valley in Mauritania, was once greeted with blank stares and the implicit question: “but what’s the point?” At least two points have jolted my own thinking and action. The first is the recognition of how powerful blind spots can be. My official traveling companion simply did not see very real donkeys, nor was he open to consider their role, even when they were before his very nose, because he was so conditioned to a different frame of reality. This was not unrelated to his approach to the problem of poverty and explained in part the complexity for us both of finding intellectual and practical bridges across differing perceptions of reality. The second was the kaleidoscope of issues in a place like the Senegal Valley, their constant turning and reforming, links and disarticulation. If an important part of the constellation was unseen or ignored, this was not immediately apparent in the array of issues and problems but eventually it undermined almost all efforts to bring change. If donkeys were necessary for bringing cooking firewood to villages or taking children to school, ignoring them could damage the broader vision. With hindsight I am conscious of the many issues I missed also, among them the role that religion was playing in the conflicts there.
The world of religion has been an unacknowledged and often unseen force for many development practitioners in the past. Many reasons, good and bad, explain this divorce; long traditions of separation of state and religion are deeply engrained and deliberately place a remove between development and faith issues. Institutions like the multilateral development banks which interact with governments as a matter of basic institutional structure may find limited vehicles to interact with a broad range of civil society institutions, religious institutions among them. The vocabulary and approach of spirituality seemed, often though not always, inimical to the technical, hard-nosed approach of development practice. Yet religion is such a pervasive and vital force, at individual and community level, that the tendency to ignore it has had important, even grave consequences in some situations. It has left large areas, some very tangible, like religious provision of social services and religious roots of social tension, largely unexplored. More broadly, the complex issues of social justice, and the links between social conflict, social cohesion, and change, seen by many as the root causes of fundamentalist movements, are topics that suggest powerful links between modernization, development strategies and programs, and religious thinking and institutions. The fear that Karen Armstrong sees as perhaps fundamentalism’s most salient characteristic can be seen as a part of the disarticulation between the worlds of development and religion. The need for broader and clearer sight, and for creative and dynamic efforts to see and understand the whole emerge as fundamental lessons of recent decades of development experience.

“Comprehensive” and “holistic” are two words that crop up continually in writings about contemporary international development challenges. The significance of comprehensive is plainly to counter what is seen as a segmented, overly narrow, and sectorally focused perspective (for example, the focused vision of an economist or transport engineer or an aid official preoccupied with disbursement of funds). The challenge for “comprehensive” development is not to do everything, all at once, but to set any action in a comprehensive framework. The challenge of “holistic”, which contrasts with “partial”, seems to point more specifically to an integration of perspectives.

It is no accident that development actors are often exhorted to take a “comprehensive” or “holistic” approach. Current trends and vocabulary are the product of much bitter experience and a process of learning that the earlier and seemingly straightforward visions of linear progress towards “development” need rigorous, and “comprehensive” rethinking. Time and time again disappointing results can be laid at the door of experience ignored, a piece and perspective missing in analysis, design, or implementation. Forgetting the roles of women in village planning, of religious calendars in planting advice, or social patterns in location of water points or schools are examples of evident gaps with clear consequences. Almost as telling, development actors have often operated in ignorance or oblivion of the actions and perspectives of others, with the proverbial left hand and right hand moving in conflicting directions. This is as true for government departments as for development agencies.

1 Among many works on fundamentalist movements Karen Armstrong’s The Battle for God (New York, Ballantine Books, 2000) stands out. She makes a strong link between the phenomenon of fundamentalism and the forces of modernization
2 The framework for this comprehensive perspective is termed by the World Bank the “Comprehensive Development Framework”. The effort to apply it generally is far from uncontroversial, and critics contend that pursuit of a comprehensive framework goes against the need for focus, selectivity, and proper definition of respective roles of different institutions. The issue is starkly presented in a recent article by Jessica Einhorn, “The World Bank’s Mission Creep”, Foreign Affairs, September-October 2001. Plainly both a broad framework and good focus are necessary; the point here is that there are specific pitfalls in ignoring important voices and experience.
To give just one example, the optimistic and sensible plans that decades ago predicted full primary school enrollments in Africa by the end of the twentieth century took too little account of the impact of the demographic explosion, of the fragility of government budgets, and the seeds of conflict that could not only delay but also destroy what was built. This gap explains in part why despite bold plans, often committed leaders and supporters, billions of dollars expended on investments, and countless development programs, the goal of universal primary education in Africa lies far on the horizon still.

Religion and Development?

The suggestion that religion is important for development and the converse, that development is important for religion, and hence that dialogue between religious institutions and leaders and their counterparts in development institutions should be enhanced has jarred a goodly range of people. The two worlds are often seen as far apart: religion deals with spiritual matters, while development is very much in the material world. It takes little reflection to advance past this first reaction\(^3\), but the initial take has significance: it highlights the vast differences in the perceived worlds and also the emotional reaction that bringing them together can stir. This is reflected, for example, in the very different vocabulary and tone that prevail in institutions of religion and development respectively.

In fact, given how wide is the impact of religion, and how pervasive the impact of the social and economic transformations that we term development, it is hardly surprising that the worlds, however alien they might appear in a first instance, overlap and are woven together in countless ways. This awareness is far from new and indeed discussion of basic issues that we see as central to the world of “development”: social justice, welfare, and the meaning of progress, for example, are core issues in major religious traditions with intellectual and moral roots that can be traced back for thousands of years. Poverty is an issue as old as human thought, and it has often arisen first or primarily in the framework of religions and religious debate. Theologians from every religion have grappled with the whys and hows of poverty and misery, and faith institutions, every one, play a role in helping those in need and, in much more varying ways, working to overcome underlying roots of poverty. To take only one illustration, the Islamic injunction against interest and usury has its origins in principles of social justice that called on those with resources to share them with those without; charging interest is presented as flying directly in the face of this fundamental social obligation.

Religious institutions, especially the non-governmental organizations\(^4\) which have developed as operational, service arms of many faiths, have a long-standing and much honored role in development work. These NGOs and other faith-development institutions have engaged with many development organizations since they took form, notably since the early 1960s. There are also significant institutionalized links between international development agencies and faith institutions. Two interesting examples of formal linkage are the International Labor Organization (ILO), which from its creation has had senior religious advisors because of links between Churches and Trade Unions, and the United Nations, where many religious organizations maintain permanent representation and active participation in many facets of its work. Many bilateral aid programs, especially of European countries, actively seek to channel funds through

\(^3\) There is a worthy body of scholarship about links between development and religion. The IDRC (International Center for Research and Development) supports a website which has many citations of research and publications on the topic; see [http://www.bisharat.org/srd/](http://www.bisharat.org/srd/)

\(^4\) Often termed FBOs (faith-based organizations); these include (just as examples) Catholic Relief Services, World Vision, Christian Aid, and Lutheran World Service.
religious organizations. In recent years, with the strengthening of focus on links between civil society and development agents, religious organizations have been acknowledged as prominent civil society actors. Especially in conflict resolution and in relief programs, the role of religious organizations has been critical. There has been an upsurge of research about religion and development, with courses taught on the subject at several universities.5

An area of early and particularly probing thought has linked the spiritual and secular worlds has involved nature and the environment. For many faiths the condition of “planet earth” and man’s failures of stewardship have become a central concern, and several interfaith efforts also have focused on these issues. This has paralleled the keen interest and rapidly increasing work on environmental issues in the development institutions. Collaborative efforts appear still to be largely at an exploratory state, taking the form of numerous meetings with groups of faith leaders about environmental issues. The “Earth Charter”6, born at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, has drawn much inspiration from spiritual ideas and support from faith leaders and communities. A notable example of a joint effort was a November 2000 World Wildlife Fund (WWF) andFaiths meeting, entitled “Sacred Gifts to the Earth”, in Katmandu, Nepal.7 The Alliance for Religions and Conservation (ARC) is an active organization pursuing the specific objective of bringing the resources of world faiths to bear on the challenge of environmental protection.8

**Religion and the Work of the World Bank?**

In this pattern of emerging relationships, there have been prominent gaps. In particular, the international financial institutions, especially the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and the regional development banks9, have historically had very few and patchy relationships with religions. Indeed, as an illustration, a recent lengthy history of the World Bank’s first 50

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5 One example of research on the linkages is work supported by IDRC (International Development Research Center, and published in Sharon Harper (ed), *The Lab, the Temple and the Market: Reflections at the Intersection of Science, Religion and Development*, Ottawa, 2000.

6 For over a decade diverse groups throughout the world have worked towards an “Earth Charter” that sets forth fundamental ethical principles for a sustainable way of life. Hundreds of groups and thousands of individuals have been involved in the process. Representatives from government and nongovernmental organizations worked to secure adoption of an Earth Charter during the Rio Earth Summit in 1992. However, the time was not right. A new Earth Charter initiative was launched by the Earth Council and Green Cross International in 1994. [http://www.earthcharter.org/](http://www.earthcharter.org/)


8 ARC had its origins in a 1986 meeting in Assisi, Italy where HRH The Prince Philip, as International president of WWF, invited leaders of the world's five major faiths to join him and fellow-conservationists. Together they explored what the world's faiths could offer to the struggle to save the environment. Out of this gathering came the WWF Network on Conservation and Religion. [http://www.religionsandconservation.org/](http://www.religionsandconservation.org/)

9 World Bank, or International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, IBRD.

10 International Monetary Fund, a global institution working for financial stability, founded in 1944. The regional development banks include the Inter-American Development Bank, working throughout Latin America, the Asian Development Bank, based in Manila, the African Development Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development.
years of operation\textsuperscript{11} has only one reference to religion in its index, and none to Islam. This does not convey, in fact, the reality, as there have been many specific and significant links with faith organizations, and even common programs or initiatives, joining efforts of faith institutions and development agencies, in specific countries at various stages of history. Education is a prominent example, as the role of religion in education is of obvious significance and has been much discussed and explored. It is plain, though, that generally these links have been ad hoc. Overall, there has been no systematic relationship, research has virtually passed over religious issues and organizations, and knowledge of what has been done has not been captured in a systematic fashion.

Why is this? The reasons lie in part in the traditional divide between religion and economics, with the latter being so critical in shaping the World Bank’s philosophy and approach to development. By statute and practice, the World Bank and other traditional development actors have tended to divorce what were seen as political dimensions from development work, thus sticking to technical issues and arguments. The concentration of relationships on governments in the past also contributed to weak relationships with civil society as a whole. This in turn led to limitations in partnerships and differing focus.

The changing development scene, beginning in the 1980s but accelerating in the mid-1990s, worked to challenge this traditional remove of the worlds of religion and development.

Through the 1980s, religious leaders and institutions were among the most vocal and vehement critics of development programs and institutions. To be specific, seen from the vantage point of the World Bank, faith institutions, starting from village level and extending to world summit meetings, criticized many aspects of the World Bank’s work and policies. Particular areas of contention included structural adjustment policies, family planning, debt, and cost recovery policies for services like health, education and water. There were sharp criticisms of what was seen as the World Bank’s overall philosophy of development (driven by materialism for example) and its specific mechanisms for implementation (negotiation of conditionality, for example) and style of operation (generally quite capital-city focused and finance and efficiency driven). While it was not always apparent at the time (and, to some, still is not), these criticisms, even as they stung, stimulated deep reflection in many parts of the development world and the results were significant efforts to change practice, to open up to new voices, and to find better ways, above all, to respond to social imperatives, especially in times of crisis.

This criticism took its most coherent form in the coalition for Jubilee 2000, an international coalition which drove a bold campaign to bring about, in conjunction with the year 2000, the “Jubilee” year in biblical parlance, cancellation of poor country debt. Initial responses by the international financial community, including the international financial institutions, sought to deflect the critique of debt per se to broader issues of poverty. The argument went that the complexity of debt issues was not properly understood, and that the institutions involved were already doing all that was feasible to address the problem. Nonetheless, the campaign gained momentum, and it swiftly caught the ear and imagination of many leaders (in churches, governments, the arts and beyond). The result was a transformation of thinking and practice on international debt and progress towards debt restructuring that was barely thinkable only two years before. Relationships with religious organizations will never be quite the same.

A second strand which brought development and religion together was mounting
evidence of disappointing results in work to conquer poverty in many countries and specific
programs. While there are resounding successes (which need to be kept in the spotlight as
pessimism pervades debate), there are also bitter disappointments. Too many promising
situations have given way to cycles of economic crisis, administrative quagmires (including
diversion of resources through corruption), and disruption by war and other conflicts. Growing
awareness and appreciation of the complexity and difficulty of the task of social and economic
development in turn gave rise to reflection about causes of poverty, a broader quest for
understanding, recognition of past errors and new thinking. Values and ethical considerations
have begun to enter more prominently into debates. The ideas of people like Amartya Sen, Nobel laureate and frequent participant in conferences and task forces, expanded definitions of
what development was for and what it meant. James Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank
and his counterparts speak about “the challenge of inclusion”, empowerment, inequality, and
about the problem of corruption, far more openly than before. The move beyond technical
framing of issues and the expansion of debates beyond technical and economic considerations has
served to bring together the apparently separate domains of religion and development.

A related transformation of mainline development thinking was a marked trend to reflect
more fully social considerations and to open up discussion and participation to broader groups in
the society. This has led to heightened awareness of roles of the wide range of actors outside the
sphere of government, including religious organizations. Nowhere was this more evident than in
social services, where the role of both private and religious institutions in providing health and
education services has long been vital. The fact that many national policies ignored this reality or
did not fully reflect the experience (good and bad) and the wisdom that it offered for policy
debates and action was an obvious “missing link” to be rectified. Most recently, the
unprecedented crisis presented by the HIV/AIDS pandemic has brought home how shortsighted
and counterproductive is the exclusion of the voices and hands of faith institutions who are
present in communities, counseling and caring for victims.

Within the World Bank, another significant transformation in thinking and approach
came through a research project entitled “Voices of the Poor”. This exercise captured studies
and research in many countries, including specific surveys of some 60,000 people in far-removed
poor communities, to capture their perceptions of poverty. Two findings were striking in the
present context. The first was how often poor community respondents indicated higher
confidence in religious organizations and leaders than in most others (including government and
nongovernmental organizations). This was both a rather negative reflection on other institutions
(for example, the deep perceptions of corruption in public sector services and of narrow interest
among many NGOs) but it also appears to underscore how vitally important faith and spirituality
are as a life force in all, but perhaps even more, in poor communities. This finding (a rather
unexpected one) generated discussion and more awareness of the vast reach of faith
organizations, in the aggregate, and their presence and influence in so many poor communities.
The second finding (or rather the underlining of a facet that many had noted from ancient times)
underscored that poverty is complex and multidimensional. The “holistic” nature of the
phenomenon of poverty - economic, social, psychological, physical and psychic – came to feature

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12 Amartya Sen, *Development as Freedom*, New York, Knopf, 1999 is a prominent example of Sen’s prolific work.
13 Deepa Narayan, *Voices of the Poor: Can Anyone Hear Us?* Washington DC, Oxford University, for the
World Bank, 2000 summarizes the study and major findings. Two other volumes have been published plus
country working papers (see http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/voices/reports.htm)
more centrally in thinking and discussions of poverty. The need for “comprehensive” approaches came to be better appreciated.  

Beyond the broad new appreciation of the deep roots of faith issues and institutions in poor communities, worry about the many conflicts all over the world brought home that in all too many countries, especially those where conflicts rage or are a recent memory, faith-based institutions are often virtually the only vehicles that provide services and support in poor communities. These institutions also have particular and important perspectives on both causes of conflicts and on avenues to conflict resolution (note for example the work of the Vatican-based Community of Sant’ Egidio which has played roles as peacemaker and in post conflict reconstruction in many countries, notably in Africa).  

Yet despite these several currents for change, in the late 1990s the voice of faith organizations was still reflected quite rarely and quite partially in most development discussions.

The World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD)

Thinking about links between religion and development among various leaders in both development and faith institutions prompted the organization of a meeting in February, 1998 at Lambeth Palace, London (seat of the Archbishop of Canterbury). The Lambeth meeting has often been termed “unprecedented” because it was seen then, as it is now, as a significant departure, not built on any existing institution or initiative. It reflected a personal conviction of a small group of leaders that something must be done to ease tensions played out in the public arena, especially hostility towards the World Bank, and to bring to light the strong common interests and sense of purpose of faith and development institutions: their passion to fight poverty. Entitled “World Faiths and Development,” the Lambeth meeting focused on the challenge of poverty and how religions and development institutions were approaching it. It was called and chaired jointly by James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank and Dr. George C. Carey, Archbishop of Canterbury. Leaders from nine major world religions participated.

At a broad level the meeting highlighted how much agreement and common anxiety existed about the evils of poverty. It also brought home the richness of work underway by so many organizations and the many common areas of endeavor. The discussions, though, also highlighted large differences in understanding and approach, and tensions were obvious even in this polite setting. The major outcome was that the leaders concluded that a continuing dialogue should address the many unanswered questions and insights that emerged during the encounter. Major thematic issues highlighted as the starting point for this work were food and hunger, management of social services, post conflict reconstruction and reconciliation, and the role of culture in development. A focus on poverty was to be woven throughout the dialogue. Collaboration on the World Development Report (WDR) then in the works, and whose specific topic was poverty, was highlighted as a priority task.

The dialogue that was initiated at Lambeth took the form of a small organization, based in Oxford and known as the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD). It operated for some

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16 Baha’i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikh, Taoism.
two years as an informal organization and network, funded largely by foundation grants and bilateral programs (notably DFID, UK, and Switzerland), with close if modest engagement of some World Bank staff. It focused on the World Development Report on poverty, engaged in discussions and preliminary analysis on the topics defined at Lambeth (for example on issues arising from faith-based work on social services and food security), and started modest and exploratory interfaith programs in three countries: Tanzania, Ethiopia, and Guatemala.

A second WFDD meeting of leaders in Washington DC, in November 1999, a follow up to the Lambeth meeting, set a bolder agenda. It had broader participation, particularly among development institutions (the International Monetary Fund, in particular, was actively represented). An agreement emerged here that a larger and more formal institutional base for the dialogue was warranted. This led to a strategic review by management consultants (Bain and Co), launched in January 2000 (see wfdd website for the report), and culminated in a decision by a group of the leaders in May 2000, led by the Archbishop of Canterbury and James Wolfensohn, to move forward with a small but more formal organization. Funding for the initial launch of the new WFDD was secured, the great majority committed by the leaders of the faiths represented at the meeting.  

The term “Dialogue” in the WFDD title is significant as it reflects the central purpose: to use dialogue to bridge the gulf of understanding separating development and faith institutions, with poverty the central focus. Whereas many traditional development institutions tend to separate material from spiritual well-being, faith communities take a much broader view and see the causes and the solutions to poverty as encompassing both. The guiding idea for WFDD is thus, in a modest way, to bridge the gaps and debates between the worlds of religions and of development, in the first instance for the World Bank, by enhancing knowledge of different faith institutions and their work for development, and by promoting dialogue on key issues for poverty reduction as well as some of the more delicate or difficult topics that divide the participants. A further avenue is joint advocacy work for the fight against poverty, for example through support of Millennium Development Targets (see glossary and below).

The field of issues and perspectives for WFDD is thus broadly defined, multi-disciplinary in nature, multi-faith in most instances, and focusing on policies and the policy dimensions of operational experience.

These initial plans were called significantly into question from late 2000, as the nature of the World Bank’s involvement in the launching of the formal organization of the World Faiths Development Dialogue came under intensive discussion within the World Bank itself. This reflection was sparked by probing questions about proposed governance arrangements posed by World Bank’s Executive Directors. The major questions turned around the nature of the partnership of the World Bank and its planned direct support for WFDD. There were concerns that the relationship with faith leaders and institutions would take the World Bank too far into the realm of politics. This was seen as inappropriate for the World Bank’s core mandate and also opening the World Bank to a new range of risks. Concerns were also raised about how significant the role of religion was in development work, and whether the goals of fighting poverty and working for sustainable development were indeed shared. Most significant was the critique that the initiative to engage in dialogue with faith institutions went counter to the perceived need for the World Bank to ensure clearer focus on priority issues and “selectivity”.  

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19 For the framing of this issue, see Einhorn, op. cit.
The internal World Bank dialogue, which also drew in the WFDD’s faith community partners, resulted in some significant changes in the concept and governance structure of the WFDD. Most important was an agreement that the World Bank would no longer be formally associated with the organization itself (notably through participation in WFDD’s Trustee body), though it would participate actively in the process of dialogue, including in meetings of faith and development institution leaders. Joint activities are anticipated in areas which fit the World Bank’s mandate and instruments, for example capacity-building or research on key dimensions of poverty reduction, HIV/AIDS and post conflict transitions. In many respects this change in governance structure can be viewed as a positive step, as it reinforces the essential aim for WFDD, that it be distinct from the institutional arrangements of the development institutions and (to a lesser extent) faith organizations, beholden to no specific organization. The dialogue that took place, however, highlighted the many sensitivities involved in what had seemed a modest and straightforward effort to explore how to engage in a better dialogue about issues of clear common concern.

So what is the WFDD doing and what are plans for its future? The central concept is to work at both international and country levels, and thus to bring the experience of development at community level, from poor people, to bear on discussions among thinkers and leaders at international level and vice versa. A constant flow of ideas, experience, and questions is expected. At country level, the idea is to encourage largely interfaith efforts to engage in policy discussions, for example on Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Country Assistance Strategies, the central planning documents of the World Bank. At the international level, a series of leaders’ meetings (bringing together on a regular basis leaders of major faiths and development institutions) aims at joint advocacy for combating poverty and putting forward the voices of poor communities, and to progress in engaging the participants on issues that divide as well as unite them. International activities also include “think tank” type dialogues and analysis. WFDD aims to work with the rich array of interfaith institutions with its specific focus on the link with development institutions and on poverty; WFDD is already a member of an Interfaith alliance.

WFDD’s most powerful asset, though, is the network of engaged participants who have found the vision and the practical base and link it offers to open new doors. Most of WFDD’s contribution and impact has come and is likely to come in the future through this continuing

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20 WFDD’s Trustees plan to change the title of the organization from WFDD to Center for Faiths and Development (CFD) to reflect the think-tank and support character of the organization, but this has not taken place yet either legally or in references to the organization.

21 The PRSP process was essentially born of the recent debt relief initiatives, and represents a system for elaboration of country strategy pieces focused on strategy, necessarily involving participatory processes, and their review by the international financial institutions as a basis for providing debt relief and other development financing. Ideally funds released by debt relief are to be channeled to poverty programs and there is to be a focus on their efficient, honest and effective use. The PRSP process is evolving, with much gained from early experience, and with a particular focus on the innovative dimension of this process: to bring a wider range of voices into the strategy discussion. For an update of progress see: International Monetary Fund and International Development Association, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Progress in Implementation, September 14, 2001 (available at http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/prspprogress.pdf). As of September 2001 five countries had “completed” a full PRSP and some 36 were engaged in preparing PRSPs.
exchange, a compassionate, hard-nosed, frank and continuing exchange among people from every continent and most countries about the topics that link the worlds of development and faith.

The activities that the WFDD has undertaken to date illustrate both the range of potential activities for the dialogue, and the type of issues that are emerging within the growing network of engaged participants. In many respects, the most substantive and complex activity has been the WFDD’s participation in the preparation of the *World Development Report 2000/1: Attacking Poverty*. This World Development Report entailed a quite elaborate participatory process, at a global level, which provided an opportune framework for WFDD engagement. WFDD organized a set of consultations about the topic of poverty in several regions (with over 200 people involved), with the ideas, reactions and comments reflected in a publication entitled *A Different Perspective on Development and Poverty*. This represents a consolidation of views of different faith communities about the ethical and spiritual dimensions of poverty and development.

A second “global” exercise was the invitation to the WFDD to organize and guide workshops on poverty at the Millennium World Peace Summit for Religious and Spiritual Leaders, held at the United Nations in New York in August 2000. This event (described below) brought together many faith leaders, and the focus on poverty was a rare opportunity to explore the widely ranging views of the communities represented there. Third, the WFDD has started a continuing process of dialogue around thematic areas. Most significant, an internet-based consultation on issues of culture and development resulted in the publication of *Cultures, Spirituality and Development* in July 2001, an issue-focused piece that aims to stimulate continuing dialogue on a subject of central concern to many in faith institutions. WFDD has run a website to provide information on the development work of faith based organizations and interfaith relations. This information includes news and publications specific to WFDD but also links to other organizations, work and events.

WFDD’s aim of stimulating and catalyzing meaningful activities at country level has proved rather more complex. The focus has been on policy dialogue, at either the national level (for example on a poverty strategy overall or post-conflict approaches and issues) or for a specific sector, for example health. While the issues emerge quite readily, and while there has been a clear gap in dialogue to fill, including as a start catalyzing the organization of the “voice” of the faith communities, bringing the disparate groups to a table with common concerns and vocabulary has proved a time-consuming effort. To date, country level work has focused on Ethiopia, Guatemala and Tanzania. In each case, initial efforts to promote interfaith dialogue focused on a specific development theme (in Ethiopia, on food security; in Guatemala, on peace and reconciliation; and in Tanzania on social service delivery). In all three countries as faith groups have come together, they have increasingly begun to define for themselves a more broadly based agenda around poverty. HIV/AIDS has also emerged as a priority issue in Ethiopia and Tanzania. In all cases broad strategic issues of sector and national policy direction and the quality and adequacy of faith institution participation in policy dialogue (including the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers – PRSPs and World Bank Country Assistance Strategies) have generated considerable interest, even passion, but the practical obstacles to better dialogue remain rather sobering. There is much scope for further work at country level, though each situation will lend itself to a very different approach.

To date the product of these explorations takes the form of new insights and a host of questions and areas for exploration and investigation. The dialogue is often in unfamiliar turf, and the historic tensions separating the faiths from one another and from development institutions have dictated a cautious approach. Where there are obvious and known differences of view – for
example on birth control, or on language of instruction, the tendency has been to leave these
issues for later stages of dialogue. Obvious areas of common concern such as the role of ethics in
education or corruption in government programs, have lent themselves more readily to the initial
discussions. Seen from the perspective of the World Bank, the dialogue has been welcomed as
bringing a new set of issues and partnerships to the table, though the protracted and consultative
steps that are involved in moving towards tangible results tend to militate against the pace set in
the “output” culture of the international financial institutions and many of their government
partners.

A raft of information including WFDD publications can be found at the WFDD website:
www.wfdd.org.uk. Included there is a “Progress Report” that gives a complete history including
full details on financing and a listing of many participants in meetings and activities.

Religion and Development – Some Related Developments

Over the past three years, as the emerging WFDD agenda has stimulated a sharpened focus
on the linkages between faith and development issues, in parallel several regional and global
eXamples of engagement and collaboration, beyond country level, have engaged the World Bank
and religious organizations. Structural adjustment (reform programs generally negotiated in the
context of economic and financial crisis) has long proved a “hot button” issue and has sparked a
number of contacts, of varying productivity, between faith organizations and the World Bank
(and other partners). The evolving dialogue on poor country debt (before, during, and following
the Jubilee 2000 campaign) is of keen and continuing interest to the organizations. There has
been a marked warming in the dialogue with the Jubilee 2000 coalition, an inter-Christian faith
effort, which began in the United Kingdom, and which sought to engage the international donor
community, including both bi-laterals and multi-laterals, to forgive their debt to the developing
world. Tensions still exist, but the progress made in tackling issues long thought untouchable is
heartening.

In situations of war and tension, historically and at present there been active discussions
involving faith and development partners, with many examples of practical collaboration also
(though these are poorly documented). There would appear, however, to be much room for
further exploration, along the lines of tentative cooperation between the World Bank and the
Community of St. Egidio in several war-torn countries (Mozambique and Sierra Leone, for
example).

The broader links that the WFDD initiative opens are illustrated by a significant meeting
involving the World Bank, in Nairobi, Kenya, in March 2000, entitled “the Conference on
Alleviating Poverty in Africa.” Convened jointly by the World Bank and the Council of Anglican
Provinces of Africa among representatives of 21 African nations and 19 Christian denominations,
the meeting concluded with a commitment from both sides to forge a new partnership based on
the complementary strengths of each side. It identified several priority areas for joint action:
women and assets; children and youth; education and health; HIV/AIDS; governance, leadership
and corruption; enterprise, debt and economic growth; and, finally, conflict prevention and post-
conflict reconstruction.22

22 A book reflecting presentations at the meeting was published recently: Deryke Belshaw, Robert
Calderisi, and Chris Sugden, Faith in Development: Partnership Between the World Bank and the
It is striking that, quite independently, the Inter American Development Bank has also convened a significant series of meetings with faith leaders which, interestingly, have evolved towards a bold program that focuses on ethical issues for development. The most recent meeting was in Honduras in early September, 2001. There, the focus was on the “hunger for ethics” which many referred to, and specific discussions focused inter alia on corruption issues, employment, and on ethical issues for the education sector.

**WFDD Versus the Bush Administration Faith-Based Initiative**

An evident question is how the international initiative reflected in the WFDD is related to the faith-based initiative recently promoted by the administration of US President George Bush. It bears emphasis that WFDD long precedes the new US initiatives. Put simply, there are broad similarities but important differences.

The most important similarity is the recognition that in many poor or marginal communities, in both the industrialized and the developing worlds, faith based organizations play important social transformation roles, including through social service delivery. Suffering and poverty are deep concerns of virtually every faith. In the developing world, faith based organizations frequently provide very significant shares of education and health services. In Uganda for example, it is estimated that nearly half of primary health services come from faith based organizations. In West Africa, Muslim schools account for an important share of primary education. Throughout Africa, faith groups are key providers of HIV/AIDS prevention, counseling and care. In many countries emerging from conflict, religious schools and health posts have filled key gaps in social services where state facilities have not been available. Similarly, in the industrialized world, there is growing recognition of the contribution of faith groups to a wide range of social services, including education, community development, HIV/AIDS interventions.

Another factor which has driven the Bush Faith Initiative is the perception that performance by public institutions in addressing social ills has been flawed, and that in many instances faith institutions appear to do a better job at bringing real help to the needy and real and lasting social change. The same argument is made in development work, where the perception is that public institutions are, to say the least, often disappointing. This is, to underline, the argument and a quite common perception, not a judgment of relative impact and performance. There, the available data make answers particularly difficult. One of the most frustrating findings in debates at both US national and international levels is how little rigorous comparison there has been of the different programs and thus models. There is evidently wide variation in performance, among institutions, countries, and programs, and generalization is perilous. The need to get a better grip on what is happening and how different programs perform, with emphasis on understanding those that seem to work, is a high priority.

A major difference, though, between the Bush Administration Faith Initiative and the WFDD is the clear and explicit focus of WFDD on dialogue, and not on funding. The Charitable Choice initiative aims to provide funding directly to faith based groups. WFDD, in contrast, has made clear that it does not aim to address the challenge, real as it is in many settings, of providing or seeking funding for faith-based programs and NGOs. The WFDD initiative is centered around dialogue, dissemination of best practices and learning. Similarly, at the level of its country specific interventions, project implementation is not a focus; instead, activities are aimed at network building and organizational support to nurture inter-faith dialogue around key development concerns.
A theme common to ongoing discussions in WFDD and in the US is frustration about gaps in information about the nature, scope, and impact of interventions by faith organizations in social areas. It is indeed remarkable how weak the information systems about faith-based work in development are, and research and analysis are patchy. Efforts to enhance information systems to capture experience and writing, and to undertake more research about work and impact deserve high priority.

The Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders at the United Nations

A visible and striking illustration of how contemporary international events highlight links between religion and development is the “Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders”, in August 2000. Designed as a practical and symbolic prelude to the September 2000 UN Millennium meeting of World Leaders, the aim was both to demonstrate the commitment of faith leaders from all corners of the world to peace and fighting poverty, and to offer specific practical and moral guidance to the world’s political leaders as they assembled to reflect on the turn of the millennium. Although the Summit was not a United Nations event, it had the “blessing” and active engagement of Secretary General Kofi Annan. Moral and organizational support came from a wide array of faith and interfaith organizations, and it drew intellectual support from many sources including the Harvard Divinity School, and financial support from foundations, including the Turner Foundation and Ford Foundation as well as other private groups. Maurice Strong, international guru who had chaired the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, was also much engaged.

The visual imagery of this meeting was spectacular, and it may be remembered as one of the great pageants of our times. The UN General Assembly witnessed the gathering together of about 2000 participants, perhaps 1000 of them religious leaders in full ceremonial garb, each with their "aura". The leaders included indigenous leaders from several continents, alongside leaders of virtually every major religious tradition - Hinduism, Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, and many others. Special efforts had been made to gather people from some conflicted areas, notably Ethiopia and Eritrea and the Balkans. There were some significant gaps and the absence of the Dalai Lama was a media focus throughout, also the topic of frequent comment by participants, but the gathering was without precedent in scale, location, and the focus on what were defined as the central issues for the new millennium: peace, protecting the environment, and the fight against poverty.

Some especially memorable and symbolic parts of the pageantry bear highlighting. A resounding Japanese drum performance opened the event with stark power and simplicity, while faint and haunting conch calls by some ancient religious leaders from far-separated faiths recalled both the power of traditions and human fragility. Jane Goodall, the primatologist, made a heartfelt plea for the protection of the earth and its animals, ending with her rendition of a chimp call in the General Assembly Hall, a clear “first”. The menu of speakers was very long, extending over four days, with common messages of hope, concern, appeals to harmony and human dignity, but also wide variations in tone, vocabulary, approach and message. Just to offer some illustrations, Ted Turner’s rousing speech focused on his personal spiritual journey from a small Christian group that believed they alone had access to heaven to his current firm conviction that all faith paths lead “to the same mountain top”. Many of the rabbis wove humor through their messages, while culture, music and symbols were present in virtually every intervention. The jarring notes that recollected ancient historical tensions and those of today were tempered by vibrant messages about the wish for reconciliation among so many peoples. A striking event in the final day of the Summit brought to the stage the large gathering of indigenous peoples, with a native American chief noting that “we are what is left after you all finished”. A musical
performance by Paul Winter included an invitation to the assembly to howl like the wolves who
had inspired his composition.

As a partner in shaping the substantive agenda for the event, the WFDD ran three poverty
workshops. In these meetings tensions held in check during the large formal plenary sessions
emerged and simply finding mechanisms to allow people to speak, and above all to be heard,
required extraordinary facilitation efforts. There were three strong themes in what participants
wanted to say: first, a strong desire of many participants to recount their experiences in working
with poor communities, both their achievements and their insights. Second, several voices were
raised to redirect the workshop focus and discussions, which were tending to practical, human
experience at community level, to broad international social justice issues, including debt,
structural adjustment and cost recovery. Finally, explosive tensions, including anxiety about
perceived prostelization linked to development work, generated heated exchanges. Interestingly,
these workshops proved virtually the only Summit opportunity for any floor participation and
underscored the importance of clear mechanisms in such events to allow for “voice” and
meaningful engagement of individuals.

In sum, the Summit highlighted dramatically the gulf that separates faith communities from
the development institutions, and the myriad of actions in poor communities that are initiated and
run by faith communities. The Summit may represent a turning point in international interfaith
efforts, highlighting the dangers and difficulties of large meetings like this one. One wise
observer hazarded that inter-religious work may divide from henceforth, between those who
focus on such showmanship, and those who opt to work more quietly but grappling with real
problems.

Religion and Development in New Debates about Globalization

Hubris and other pitfalls always challenge the evolution of new ideas, but rarely has such
a challenge been greater than at present, in the realm of what is termed globalization. A wide and
quite loosely organized coalition has mobilized itself around these issues (defined in various
fashions), challenging in diverse and often angry terms some central tenets of international
thinking. Their movement has been marked by a series of protest events in, inter alia, Seattle,
Chiang Mai, Prague, Gottenburg, Barcelona and Genoa. An equally broad coalition has
responded in frustration, and with barrages of “facts”, arguing that globalization is inevitable, and
that its benefits far outweigh its faults. Both the World Faiths Development Dialogue and the
World Bank\textsuperscript{23} find themselves at the fulcrum of these fraught debates, both because members of
the network of engaged participants reflect the full spectrum of views, and because the core
issues, whether framed in “secular” terms of human material welfare or in an ethical or spiritual

\textsuperscript{23} The website for the World Bank, \url{www.worldbank.org}, includes a number of research pieces on
globalization issues. These include a rich array of studies and information documents that summarize the
basic argument that the benefits of globalization outweigh its costs. Perhaps more significant are recent
speeches, including James Wolfensohn’s speech in March 2001 to the German Bundestag on Globalization
which reflect on the complex issues poses by inequality and challenges to global governance and what is
termed “international architecture”. The arguments of the diverse array of critics of globalization are more
difficult to distill, but two places to start in looking to them are a recent book, Michael Hardt and Antonio
protest, including the Mobilization for Global Justice: \url{http://www.a16.org}. Alan Wolfe has a powerful
critique of Hardt and Negri in “The Snake: Globalization, America and the Wretched of the Earth”, \textit{The
context, are precisely those of common concern. The events of September 11, 2001 add urgency and new complexities to this challenge.

The dimensions and difficulties of this dialogue are well illustrated by an encounter in June 2001 in Fez, Morocco, at a Colloquium entitled, boldly, "Globalization and the Soul". This event was framed as an effort to add an "intellectual" segment to the acclaimed Fez World Festival of Sacred Music, now in its seventh year. Faouzi Skali, Director for the Festival, sought to create a new Forum for dialogue among the polarized forces addressing the globalization phenomenon (roughly along the lines of the Davos Economic Forum, but with a spiritual dimension and bringing together a much wider spectrum of voices). The colloquium was indeed successful in bringing together very different perspectives, with the significance amplified by the backdrop of an extraordinary music festival. Skali's hope is that the colloquium feature of the Festival (introduced in June 2001 for the first time) will continue as an annual event, though form and focus remain to be worked out.

The colloquium was explicitly inspired by the "globalization" debate and brought together some 30 participants, who, over a four day period, took part in a program of workshops, supplemented by some formal lectures. Participants included some prominent critics of globalization, as well as others seen more as part and parcel of the phenomenon.24 The Colloquium confronted two radically different views of globalization (with numerous perspectives in between). At one extreme was a profoundly pessimistic view of a world whose spirit, culture and physical environment are on a rapidly descending slope. Globalization was repeatedly described as a predatory phenomenon, by one participant as a vampire. At the other extreme was the view of globalization as a complex, unstoppable force bringing opportunity for most of the world's peoples, even though it also posed "downside" problems and challenges that can and must be managed. The meeting offered rare promise, with its special setting and diverse participants, in bridging gulfs in understanding. Nonetheless, moving beyond individual statements to real dialogue was a persistent and thorny challenge.

The opposing arguments, as they emerged in Fez, are illustrated in starkly contrasting presentations by four of the participants. At one extreme stood Father Houtart, a Catholic priest and activist among NGOs, and Luis Lopez-Llera, a Mexican activist who works with very poor communities in Chiapas. Houtart presented a strong and cataclysmic view of the forces of globalization, making clear how far he associates the IMF and World Bank with its most evil aspects. Structural adjustment programs have, he said, wrought devastation and are doing so still, and the current mainstream approaches to development are working systematically against the rights of peoples and cultures. His challenge: "how to globalize local battles against globalization", and his main villains are primary product prices, debt, and brain drain. Inequality is the main villain, capitalism the most inefficient system mankind has created. Lopez-Llera also gave a cataclysmic vision of our world, a "murderous" society where the unnoted deaths of the

24 Participants included Dominique Strauss-Kahn, (former minister, France), Thierry de Montbrial (Director of the French Institute of International Relations), Hanne Strong (NGO leader, advocate for environment), Francois Houtart, (Louvin University and leader in the Porto Alegre Forum), Jean Morin, John Lane (British ecologist), Rev. James Morton (head of the New York Interfaith Center), Luis Lopez-Llera (leader of a Mexican NGO), Katia Legeret (professor and dancer), Jean-Claude Carriere, (film maker), Paule Salomon (French feminist and author), Andre Porto (Brazilian NGO and URI coordinator), Thierry Velhelst, (lawyer and anthropologist from Belgium), Jean Staune (Inter-disciplinary University of Paris and Templeton Foundation), and Hassan Zaoual, (Moroccan specialist in culture and economics), and myself.
poor are more than 300 jumbo jet crashes a day, where the ravages of AIDS are rising, and global warming threatens countless ways of life. The poor, he said, have said "BASTA" - enough! The idea that life depends on competition and profit needs to be challenged at its moral and intellectual roots. He noted the traditional generosity of very poor people, calling for a "new globalization" that works from this spirit and human diversity as its base. His call: (a) for recognition of all the different world cultures (10,000, he said); (b) a change in values of all societies and governments to strip governments and business of their murderous powers and agendas; and (c) radical change in commerce, with a new currency reflecting the value of work.

A sharply contrasting set of arguments came from two thought leaders from France, Dominique Strauss-Kahn(former Minister of Finance) and Thierry de Montbrial, writer and professor. Strauss-Kahn’s analysis of the causes of opposition to globalization was lucid, even as he reiterated globalization’s fundamental advantages and inevitability. Democratization is a first reason for disaffection: the sense of peoples who have struggled for rights to decision over their fate feeling robbed of power. According to this view, much real global decision-making is the province of a shadowy elite, in global level institutions that are themselves far from democratic and reflect a facade to impose the world of the rich on the poor: a modern form of oppression. Second is the perception of decisions taken far from the individual, and a sense of abstraction in how they are taken. Third is the fear of loss of cultural diversity, in the way we raise children, eat, in language, accentuated by the growth of large cities, segmented now between rich and poor. This is leading to a "modern agony" and uncertainty about what the future will bring. His focus in sketching solutions was in the creation of new institutions and new modes of regulation. Montbrial, in a brilliantly articulate lecture, argued that there is no point in being against globalization: it IS, it is a fact. The challenge is to understand it and identify its dangers and faults, all the more important as in all likelihood the greatest changes are yet to come. He described the "victory of liberalism" and its immense sociological consequences, noting that some of these can be perceived as a type of genocide. He argued that methods of governing must change radically. In the face of the need for world institutions he highlighted the "laboratory" of the EU. The "international community", he said, does not exist. Many possible futures lie before us, including chaos and civil disintegration and real prosperity at the other. His counsel and solution: to focus on clear concepts of morality and a return of spirituality.

Another striking set of issues was advanced by a group that focused on environment. They presented a cataclysmic and frightening picture of pending catastrophe and need for radical change. The crisis, of facts and ideas, said one, is "unbelievable serious". Their critiques were fundamental: they brought in belief systems, government, education, values, perhaps most of all the unequal system in the world. In the face of the "global seduction" of consumerism, there is a need to "reconnect with the earth". One call was for a "reincharment" - a rediscovery of beauty as a part of eschewing the impossible consumerism that dominates our lives across the planet. There was a call also for a "Marshall Plan" for the earth.

Some key themes that emerged from this Colloquium were the compelling and highly complex challenges of poverty, the need for "transdisciplinary" approaches taking in all facets of thought and life, and issues around the velocity of change. The problem of inequality, within and among nations, is a topic that deserves much more focused attention. As is so often the case in discussions of globalization, individuals bring very different perspectives and values, but also a contrasting and often contradictory array of facts. In this setting, where the range of disciplines, nationalities, and experience was so broad, it was still more apparent how very widely the pictures of reality differed. The twin themes emphasizing the importance of harking to core values and holding a moral compass to basic dialogue and action were a key contribution of the spiritual framing of discussion.
The Fez Colloquium was sparked and inspired by a festival of sacred music, and its focus on the “soul” opened doors to bringing spirituality and religion more directly into the globalization debates that mark our times. The Fez event itself was not framed to segment “faith” and “non-faith” perspectives. Indeed, the debates there highlighted how the issues are woven together, with culture, intellectual approach, personal experience, and geography playing a role in shaping perspectives. Unspoken, except in almost stereotypical manner, in the event was the language of power, and how the forces were shaped. Nonetheless, the sharply contrasting perspectives, the challenge of building even small bridges among them, and the important role that the full range of views disciplines must play: arts, music, anthropology, theology, economics, and history, to start, in looking to global dialogue and global progress in the future.

Education, Religion and Development: Some Avenues to Pursue?

One possible focus for joint work between faith and development institutions is the “Millennium Development Goals, termed now MDGs. The MDGs represent a quantified and time bound set of ambitious goals linked to fighting poverty and enhancing social justice, on topics ranging from social development to gender and environment. The objective and specific numbers originated in the extraordinary series of United Nations global meetings in the 1990s, on gender, social issues, family planning, etc. and the group of specific goals received an endorsement from the September 2000 Millennium Summit of World Leaders. Then, and in subsequent meetings, world leaders have vowed to keep these goals under continuous review as a mechanism for accountability. Thus, for example, the MDGs featured on the agenda of the G-8 meeting in July 2001 in Genoa. They will be a central focus for an upcoming UN meeting on Financing for Development in Monterey, Mexico in March 2002.

The Millennium Goals, and the framework they represent, are laudable and potentially powerful as an underlying mechanism to keep attention fixed on progress towards specific and measurable indicators. There are some large challenges, not least the very broad and general nature of goals like halving world poverty, and the highly complex real pattern of accountability: who is responsible if a global goal seems to be slipping? Nonetheless, the WFDD, among other institutions, is exploring how the MDG framework might be employed specifically to spark and nurture dialogue on issues that affect poverty among development and faith institutions, networks and leaders.

Among all these goals, those that touch education may lend themselves most readily to the faith-development dialogue, which might lead both to effective joint advocacy and to tangible progress in addressing issues that block progress. This is because education is such a universal and central concern for faith institutions, as it is for those engaged in development. It is a topic on which, at many levels, there has been long-standing consensus on priority and needs, yet results have fallen short. The new focus on education reflects a renewed determination to overcome obstacles and ensure real progress towards tangible objectives.

The MDG framework sets out two educational targets: (a) universal primary education (UPE) by the year 2015; and (b) gender equity in primary and secondary education by the year

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25 *Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); also referred to as International Development Targets (IDTs); or International Development Goals (IDGs);* various formulations of a set of poverty fighting and development related global targets (for example, to halve world poverty by 2015), agreed in the context of UN global meetings and affirmed at the Millennium UN Summit of World Leaders in New York, September 2000.
2005. The magnitude of the challenge has been well traced, and some key elements can be summarized as follows:

- Over 20% of school age children, two thirds of them girls, do not benefit from primary education – within formal schools or elsewhere.
- Over 40 countries report net primary enrolment rates of below 80%.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, where 42 million of the 113 million out-of-school children live, the enrollment rates are lowest (61%).
- 47 out of the 113 million live in South and West Asia.
- One third of children enrolled in primary school drop out before reaching the fifth grade and many do not achieve literacy.
- An estimated 140 million children between the ages of 6 and 11 work full or part time. Around 23% of these children enroll at school but 77% of them subsequently drop out.
- Probably less than 2% of disabled children globally are at school.
- Since the mid-eighties, public expenditure on education as a proportion of the GDP in Africa has decreased in 15 countries, and is now less than 3% in 12 of them.
- In the year 2000 over 1 in 5 adults was illiterate. This amounts to about 800 million people. Of these, around 600 million were women. Rural illiteracy is twice as high as in urban areas.

Against this stark and quite quantitative backdrop, faith networks, in preliminary consultations, have focused attention on the problem of quality, which to their minds is insufficiently highlighted in the MDG framework. The classic quality issue, put simply, is what is the point of a lousy education? More broadly, they raise concerns about the content of education and what are commonly called “life skills”, of which a key ingredient for the religious communities would be ethical values, such as tolerance, justice and generosity. Quality education should respond to the needs and circumstances of all children, including those habitually excluded. This could mean, for example, a readiness to include several different languages for literacy teaching as well as flexible time-tabling for working children. The faith perspective also puts emphasis on the importance of a high degree of participation by the parents and the community in general – including religious leaders - in setting policies and strategies and monitoring educational results and the use of funds. Only thus will teachers feel obliged to turn up and education officials be held accountable.

Dialogue on the gender equity goal is likely to be difficult and prolonged, where success may depend on the engagement and support of the religious communities. This in turn will call for raising awareness among religious leaders, within religious communities and in the public at large, as well as teacher training in gender awareness and the re-writing of text books so that they are as relevant to girls as to boys. Acceptance of the importance of education for girls will in many cases require deep cultural changes, which can only be carried out over a period of time and by the communities themselves. It will require discussion and dialogue about the issues, fears, and concerns of parents and faith leaders and a continuing spotlight on practical obstacles, some as mundane as properly located and sex segregated latrines.

Meeting the MDG education objectives will also require dialogue and action on the nagging and passionately argued opposing views about cost recovery policies. While there is growing consensus that reliance on general taxation and other forms of public revenue are both

effective and equitable means for covering the cost for basic social services, especially for the poor, there are still many obstacles in cash strapped societies. If universal primary enrollment is to be achieved, an essential measure would appear to be free education, and (a clear lesson from many situations) this needs to cover not only the direct cost of schooling (free education for all) but also the common practices of indirect charges for books, uniforms and other hidden costs (“informal” payments to underpaid teachers, “fees” to pass examinations, for example). How free schooling is to be achieved is a topic for national and international dialogue, and pragmatic transitional efforts such as scholarship programs and the abolition of uniforms can be applied to state and religious schools.

Discussions with faith networks, even more than development institutions, highlight how far and in how many ways success in achieving universal primary school enrollment will depend on improvements in other areas of development, such as health, employment practices, gender policies and sanitation. While child labor, early marriages, unwanted pregnancies, sexually transmitted diseases and malnutrition all pose threats to schooling, good health, clean water and available transport, provide a context in which education is made more accessible. In turn, higher educational levels promise improvements in other areas. Educated mothers are not only likely to have smaller and healthier families but also to send their own children to school. The more people who are educated, the more likely that equitable economic policies will be introduced. All primary education should be programmed with poverty reduction, the promotion of sustainable livelihoods, security and democracy in mind.

In sum, religious communities are certain to have highly significant roles in the global effort to ensure universal primary education by 2015 and equally in ensuring gender equity in schools by 2005. To date, the minds, organizations, and even hearts of many faith institutions appear too little engaged in the effort, whether at international or country levels. Issues, practical and philosophical obstacles, lessons of past experience, and options for action are not clearly framed so debates often tend to be overly general or ineffectual in progressing towards better understanding and common goals. A first vital step is a dialogue that engages the issues of central concern and that transcends the boundaries of the different worlds.

Concluding Thoughts

Perhaps the most demanding challenge of our time is to work towards a more just and equitable global society. The scandal of continuing poverty and misery for billions of human beings at a time of plenty and technological progress is the first priority for action, but the challenge extends well beyond to a complex of issues involving social justice, in essence the continuing struggle for the “four freedoms” of Franklin D. Roosevelt: freedom of speech and belief, freedom from want and from fear. The challenges involved are practical (how to cut infant mortality, educate all children, protect watersheds), they are highly political (how far and how can popular participation be “globalized”? they have deep cultural dimensions (how can different paths and cultures be accommodated in our highly linked society?), and they have a powerful ethical and moral character (what is just, for whom?).

The point of departure for this article was the practical and complex challenge that development institutions and practitioners face in working towards comprehensive and “holistic” approaches to the work of fighting poverty. Both positive and bitter experiences attest to the importance of achieving this breadth in approach, but the path far from simple. Returning to the parable of the camels and donkeys, the perils of “blind spots” emerge starkly. The dangers of narrow perspectives, limited partnerships, and realities ignored are vividly apparent in many disappointing development experiences. Rather like the proverbial, frustrated blind men, misled
in describing an elephant differently from their vantage points at the ear, foot or tail, development discourse has reflected different elements without always seeing the whole. Programs fail when the brilliant technician designers ignore perspectives that may well be known even by the small children in a community. It is important to find better ways to understand and reflect these varying perspectives, however complex the task of reaching into a widening range of disciplines, experience and institutions, as we address the agenda ahead. The vision of a broader development perspective and above all the openness to new voices and common efforts gives hope for the future.

The role of religious institutions, leaders, and programs in the development process is one of the more significant “blind spots” in past development practice. These institutions, ideas, and perspectives have been too little understood, and their potential role in the complex kaleidoscope of development insufficiently explored. In many parts of the development business and in many religious programs and institutions, dialogue has resembled ships passing in the night. Even though the institutions and perspectives are present in the same communities, often involving the same people, the tendency to separate the world of religion from that of development has often constrained thoughtful dialogue and cooperation. At the extreme, the two worlds have scarcely been aware of the other, and even in more positive climates misinformation and preconceived ideas have abounded. There is wide scope for better dialogue here, starting with increased understanding of the two worlds, through training, reading, and discussion, and more elaborate efforts to highlight areas of disagreement and delve into the perceptions, experience and thinking that have led to division. An example of a topic where thoughtful dialogue could help is the tense ongoing debate around charging fees for school attendance in poor countries: opinions are strong and dialogue generally weak, yet underneath is a powerful common interest in ensuring quality education for all children.

The sudden interest in the United States today in religion post September 11 and a widespread awareness that we need to understand much better the phenomenon of religious fundamentalism drive home this point. This renewed focus on religion is also reflected in the development community and gives an indication of direction for future dialogue and action.

The World Faiths Development Dialogue experience underscores the interest, intellectual grounding, and direct practical on-the-ground work that faith institutions bring in confronting these development challenges. Left often outside debates of many kinds, whether about health policy, curriculum reform, or approaches to land reform, the modest efforts since 1998 to launch a meaningful and probing dialogue have illustrated graphically that the ideas and experience of faith institutions deserve much more attention than they have received in the past, especially from international development institutions. The challenge to faiths and faith institutions themselves have also a broader import for the broad processes of social change, and argue for efforts to bridge the dialogue guls that have arisen. The events of September 11 brought home the powerful links between development and religion: the “battle for hearts and minds”, the power of emotions and perceptions, the links to peace and stability at national and global levels. It made plain how far we need to strive for better understanding across cultures, and a stronger dialogue to bridge the gulfs that separate different worlds.

The call from faith institutions to a real, rich interdisciplinary approach to development thinking and practice is an important and valid insight. There are many in development institutions who also highlight the importance of crossing disciplinary, professional boundaries,

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27 Illustrated by the Oprah Winfrey program on “Islam 101” and Amazon.com’s remarkable demand for books on Islam and religion (6 of 10 best sellers for a time were about Islam).
but it remains among the weakest areas for progress, as technical excellence and the complexity of each field militates against efforts to reach beyond. But it is a central contention of those working at community level, including faith institutions, that efforts to compartmentalize, whether spiritual and material, gender and water, education and budgets, credit from ethnic background, are open to serious perils. This is an important and useful lens with broad applications.

The efforts described here to forge a bridge between faith and development institutions have opened the door to a wealth of new insights about poverty issues, suggested some clear conclusions about better paths, and posed many questions and enigmas that deserve thoughtful and careful discussion and analysis. It has raised even more questions about how to navigate these complex and sensitive waters. The world of faith institutions is vast and a single effort evidently cannot embrace the myriad perspectives and institution. The World Faiths Development Dialogue can usefully be seen as part of a growing effort towards interfaith dialogue, at a global level, joining forces with the World Parliament of Religions, the World Conference on Religions and Peace, and the United Religions Initiative, and it thus forms part of an alliance working together for peace and social justice. These interfaith institutions, it must be recognized, stand in marked contrast to institutions and traditions with clearly inimical goals and modes of operation, and there some tensions will surely. Even within the “alliance”, some issues are likely to be perennial sores (for example abortion) and conflicts are likely. The faith of those engaged, nonetheless, is that there is a powerful common interest and, with good will and strong efforts to dialogue, much more common ground than has been apparent.

Looking ahead specifically to the World Faiths Development Dialogue, the challenge is twofold. The first is to build on a central feature of the WFDD, which is its simultaneous effort to hear and learn from leaders of major faiths, together, and to bring direct, practical experience and voices from poor communities to the table. The concept is of continuous exchange among the very global perspectives and the very local and real level of very poor communities. The second is to navigate between a dialogue that focuses solely on issues where all agree and those which spark such tensions that understanding and progress is stifled. A dialogue on topics of such complexity and importance is feeble if it is so bland that it averts all controversy. What the WFDD has highlighted is that, given the real practical and ethical complexity of virtually every issue at stake for development, the effort of dialogue itself calls for thought and care: it needs to proceed with respect and sincerity in efforts to improve understanding. Such dialogue differs from debate, and “explanation” is not a part, nor is simple discussion. A genuine dialogue can only take place with a commitment to openness as the foundation, with the parties open to experiencing some transformation of their own paradigms and expectations.
Bibliography


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World Faiths Development Dialogue website: [www.wfdd.org.uk](http://www.wfdd.org.uk)

**Glossary of Terms and Personalities**

*Alliance for Religions and Conservation (ARC)*: had its origins in the 1986 Assisi meetings in Italy where HRH The Prince Philip, as International president of WWF, The World Wide Fund for Nature, invited leaders of the world's five major faiths to join him and fellow-conservationists. Together they explored what the world's faiths could offer to the struggle to save the environment. Out of this gathering came the WWF Network on Conservation and Religion. [http://www.religionsandconservation.org/](http://www.religionsandconservation.org/)


Community of Sant'Egidio: Began in Rome in 1968, in the period following the Second Vatican Council. Today it is a movement of lay people and has more than 40,000 members, dedicated to evangelisation and charity, in Rome, Italy and in more than 60 countries throughout the world. [http://www.santegidio.org/en/index.html](http://www.santegidio.org/en/index.html)

*Comprehensive Development Framework (CDF)*: an approach, articulated by the World Bank, which highlights multisectoral and multidisciplinary facets of development challenges and the need for those engaged in development, including government agencies, aid partners, and communities to work within a common framework.

*Country Assistance Strategy (CAS)*: A document prepared by the World Bank for a country with active development programs, and prepared with involvement of government and civil society in
the country, which sets out strategic challenges and issues and the proposed role of the World Bank as a development partner.


*Faith-based Organizations (FBOs):* Non-governmental organizations that have specific affiliations with religions.

*Father Francois Houtart,* Director of the Tricontinental Institute in Belgium, an organization that studies development in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. He was instrumental in the Puerto Alegre counter-Davos meeting in January 2001.

*International Labor Organization (ILO),* founded 1919, specialized agency of the United Nations, dedicated to improving labor practices and working for “decent work for all”. See [www.ilo.org](http://www.ilo.org)

*International Monetary Fund (IMF):* founded in 1944, is an international organization of 183 member countries, established to promote international monetary cooperation, exchange stability, and orderly exchange arrangements; to foster economic growth and high levels of employment; and to provide temporary financial assistance to countries to help ease balance of payments adjustment. For more information see [www.imf.org](http://www.imf.org)

*The International Development Research Centre (IDRC):* a public corporation created by the Canadian government to help communities in the developing world find solutions to social, economic, and environmental problems through research. It has sponsored considerable work on issues linking religion and development. Website at: [www.idrc.ca/index_e.html](http://www.idrc.ca/index_e.html). Note also the IRDC supported website on Science, Religion and Development [http://www.bisharat.org/srd/](http://www.bisharat.org/srd/)

*Jubilee 2000: *An international coalition of organizations, individuals and faith-based communities formed to work for debt relief or cancellation of debt of the world’s poorest countries. This was in conjunction with the jubilee year, 2000, and was inspired by the biblical injunctions on debt forgiveness in jubilee years.

*Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); International Development Targets (IDTs); International Development Goals (IDGs):* various formulations of a set of poverty fighting and development related global targets (for example, to halve world poverty by 2015), agreed in the context of UN global meetings and affirmed at the Millennium UN Summit of World Leaders in New York, September 2000.

*Non-governmental organizations (NGOs).* Also know as PVOs (private voluntary agencies); the term used for a wide range of organizations that are not part of government and which work in the field of development.

*Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP):* These are papers prepared by members of the IMF and World Bank through a participatory process involving domestic stakeholders as well as external development partners. PRSPs describe the country’s macroeconomic, structural and social policies and programs over a three year or longer time horizon to promote broad-based

Faouzi Skali: Director of the Fez Global Festival of Sacred Music, Moroccan anthropologist and specialist/author on Sufism. Citation in a UNESCO series of TV spots about people representing diverse cultures: “Every year, a very special festival takes place in Fez, Morocco. A unique event, it gathers people from all corners of the globe, and unites them across different cultures countries, traditions, languages and times. The Fez Festival of World Sacred Music does all this through the universal language of music. The festival is the brainchild of its Director General, Dr. Faouzi Skali. Faouzi believes that people can reach out across their differences through the power of music. Each year he invites musicians from around the world to share music that they hold sacred. In a world where technology is breaking down barriers of trade and communication so quickly, the spirit of the festival aims to facilitate a similar free flow of human dignity and spirituality, breaking down divides to allow all cultures to share goodwill and celebrate diversity of thought and religious belief.

Maurice Strong: was Secretary General of the 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (the Earth Summit) and Under-Secretary General of the United Nations. During 1985 and 1986, he served as Under-Secretary General of the United Nations and Executive Coordinator of the United Nations Office for Emergency Operations in Africa and was a member of the World Commission on Environment and Development. Born in Canada and a resident of Toronto, Canada, Mr. Strong has longstanding ties with both the private and public sectors. He served as Senior Advisor to the President of the World Bank from 1995-2000, and from 1992-1995, Chairman and Chief Executive Officer of Ontario Hydro, North America's largest utility.

Ted Turner: Media and business figure, influential in organizing the Millennium Peace Summit of Religious and spiritual leaders. For a biography see http://abcnews.go.com/reference/bios/turner.html

James D. Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank (since 1995); biography at http://www.worldbank.org/president/bio.htm

World Bank or International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). Founded in 1944, major development agency with 183 member countries, working towards poverty reduction in some 100 countries. www.worldbank.org


World Development Report (WDR): The World Bank's annual World Development Report (WDR) is described by the World Bank as an invaluable guide to the economic, social and environmental state of the world today. Each year the WDR provides in depth analysis of a specific aspect of development. Past reports have considered such topics as the role of the state, transition economies, labor, infrastructure, health, the environment, and poverty. The reports are the Bank's best-known contribution to thinking about development

World Wildlife Fund/Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF): The world’s largest and most experienced conservation organization, with some 4.7 million members and a global network
active in some 100 countries. Mission is to protect nature and preserve biodiversity (www.wwf.org).