Religion, social exclusion and development

The purpose of the second seminar organised by the Religions and Development RPC was to examine ways in which the relationships between religions, societies and states lead on the one hand to the exclusion of particular social groups (particularly groups defined on religious lines), and on the other to their social inclusion, through providing a positive sense of identity and social worth, being a source of social capital or motivating philanthropy and social service. A total of 70 people participated. The programme combined contributions from invited speakers, presentations from one of the RaD research component teams, and two parallel sessions in which researchers who had responded to the call for abstracts presented their papers.

James Beckford, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, University of Warwick, sociologist of religion and author of *Social Theory and Religion* (2003) introduced the theme by outlining the contribution of social theory to understanding religion. He argued that between the 1950s and the 1990s, theorists had little to say about religion, with the exception of the sociology of religion and anthropology. Since the mid-1990s, however, there are signs of growing interest among some theorists in religion and politics, identity, gender, spiritualities, the media etc. He identified a number of issues on which their work can contribute to improving understanding the political and social relationships between faith communities, religious organisations and states in developing countries:

- The *social construction and regulation of religion* within a framework of institutions that shape the opportunity structure for religions in any particular time and place: recognition that ‘religion’ is socially constructed requires analysis of the varied phenomena to which people attribute religious significance. The concept of ‘religion’ should not be taken for granted, as religion is continuously constructed, negotiated or challenged. Rather, we should ask ‘in what ways does religion gain meaning in different contexts’, including the uses to which notions of religion are put in social life by both individuals and collectivities such as the state and the media. Because these meanings are often disputed, the social construction of religion is inseparable from questions about the regulation of religion. Topics of interest might include
  - The processes whereby indigenous and imported religions compete for public recognition, resources and legal standing
  - The salience of personal and collective identification with religion in different contexts and times.
  - State encouragement or discouragement of different forms of religion and its interactions with religious organisations in such attempts at regulation
  - The ways in which the legal and political framework conditions both the scope for religions to operate in the public sphere and the means through which the state can attempt to regulate them

- *Globalization*
  - diversifies the religious influences and activities in any particular country
  - increases the likelihood that new forms of religious expression and hybrid strains of religion will emerge
  - facilitates the circulation of religions from developing to developed countries, in turn increasing resource flows in the opposite direction, with implications for
religious groups themselves, and more broadly for political and development processes
  o enables, through the internet, the mobilization of external ideas, campaigns and resources which have different effects in different countries
  o is associated with international codes, charters, courts and committees that aim to safeguard religious freedom, but embody ideologies that are more acceptable in some countries than others.

Research questions include the ways in which the intensification of globalization is impacting on religions and societies, in turn influencing the evolution of religious traditions themselves.

- Studies of the interface between religions, social policy and development can be valuable. In practice, for example in the UK, they have concentrated on analysing whether religion contributes to social exclusion (e.g. the relatively low work participation rates amongst Muslim women) and whether religion is a relevant factor in the design and evaluation of policies, for example ensuring access to social care or providing for the introduction of Shari’a friendly financial services.

Social scientists must, he concluded, explain religion both in its own terms and in terms of the social, cultural, political and economic contexts in which it is defined, applied, used and regulated.

Religion, politics and governance in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.

Underlying any association between religion and social exclusion are a set of political trends and dynamics. To probe into the links between religion, politics and governance, researchers from the RaD team summarised some of the findings of their research in Pakistan, India, Nigeria and Tanzania.

Pakistan:
Mohammed Waseem of the Lahore University of Management Sciences identified four possible models of Islamic statehood: a sacred state, excluding or admitting human will, and a secular state, excluding or admitting divine will. The operational dynamics of an Islamic state include an Amir (a male executive president), who commands the unreserved allegiance of the people and may consult but is not accountable to the Shura, an all-male body elected by a mosque-based constituency. In theory, in an Islamic state, political parties are disallowed, lest they divide the Umma or Muslim community, but in practice they are widely accepted. In a Muslim state, all laws would be based on Sharia. In Pakistan, he described a gradual shift from a secular to a religious model of statehood since 1947. Secularism continues to be important in terms of the persistence of pre-conversion beliefs and practices (e.g. caste), interest-based banking, a largely secular education system and a constitution based on democratic principles, including the protection of human rights, equality before the law and rule by public representatives.

The Islamization of the Pakistani state increased rapidly during the period of Zia-ul-Haq’s rule (1977-88) through the introduction of a range of measures including Islamic banking, taxes, textbooks for schools, laws and courts, which were criticised for being anti-human rights, modernity, democracy, minorities and women. During the 1980s and 1990s, local and international factors, including the spillover of the Afghan conflict into Pakistan, led to the emergence of a strong Islamic establishment in the country. With members educated in madrasahs of the various Muslim sects, iconoclastic organizations such as Tablighi Jamaat and Al-Huda emerged, and a variety of religious political parties were formed. However, not until 2002 did they capture a significant share of the vote, with an alliance of parties (the Mutahida Majlis-e-Amal or MMA) coming to power in the North-West Frontier Province in that year.
The MMA's Islamic agenda included bans on alcohol and gambling, establishment of the Nifaz Sharia Council, passing of a Sharia Act in 2003 and a Hasba Act in 2006, and opposition to the Women's Protection Act, which was nevertheless passed by the national parliament in 2006. The Hasba Act provided for the appointment of Islamic ombudsmen at various administrative levels. In practice, investigations in three constituencies (Dir, Bannu and Peshawar) found that the MMA government has behaved similarly to provincial governments elsewhere in the country, softening some of the more extreme aspects of its policies and emphasizing others in order to maintain the flow of donor funds, using public funds to reward supporters and build electoral support, awarding contracts to party cadres, condoning absenteeism amongst health and education facility staff who are party supporters, and subordinating poverty reduction policies to the introduction of Sharia law. Despite investment in education and health services, quality remains poor and access by the poor has generally not improved. On balance the effects on women have been negative: while investment in education services has enabled more girls to enrol in school, the gender gap in enrolment and education remains, and the government has been hostile to women’s NGOs, has protected anti-women cultural practices and has colluded in preventing women from voting. In practice, therefore, the secular state has resisted attempted Islamization at both national and provincial levels and the Islamic agenda of the religious political parties has been diluted when they have been elected to office.

India:

Surinder Jodhka and Guppreet Mahajan, from Jawaharlal Nehru University in Delhi, identified three views that have shaped their thinking about religion and politics:

- A liberal view that sees the presence of religion in the political sphere as a source of conflict, and therefore believes that it should be restricted to the private domain and remain separate from politics
- Religion as a source of social and moral regeneration, a form of solidarity that may be tapped to provide services to marginalized communities, especially those governments fail to reach
- Religion as either a facilitator or inhibitor of development.

However, none of these, they argued, capture the complexity of religion and religious communities or the fluidity of relationships between religion and politics.

In India, for example, there is no established state religion, but nor is religion restricted to the private domain, because individuals are likely to carry their religious beliefs into the public arena. Moreover, religion is a matter of practice and not just faith, religious practices have a collective dimension, many are performed in public arenas and therefore the state, which has an obligation to safeguard freedom of religion expression, has a duty to ensure that religious practices can be performed safely and smoothly in public spaces. In addition, while religion is considered an important part of individuals’ identities, contradictions between certain religious and cultural practices and the state’s democratic and egalitarian ethos are recognized and the state is empowered to legislate to rectify such contradictions. It is recognized that groups or religious communities may wish to mobilize and express their demands in the public arena, including forming political parties to advance their cause. They are entitled to organize themselves for internal functions and self-regulation, and for external roles, such as the provision of social services. Because religious majoritarianism led some religious minorities to feel that they were being denied access to education, they were given the right to set up their own educational institutions, with state funding provided that half the places were made available to the wider public. Although some political parties are religious in origin, religious communities are heterogeneous, secular parties appeal to religious people and also the tendency of religious groups to be exclusionary is checked by the cross-cutting nature of other sources of identity (especially caste).
The particular question addressed in the presentation was how the concerns of marginalized groups enter politics and the governance agenda, and what role, if any, religion plays in this process. It was examined through case studies of three marginalized communities. Amongst Scheduled Castes in Punjab, for example, the Congress Party has used its patronage resources to woo a section of Sikh Dalits, in order to wean them away from supporting the Akalis, the Sikh political party. Amongst Hindus in Maharashtra, lower caste Mahars converted en masse to Buddhism in a quest for dignity and recognition. Thirdly, a section of the Muslim minority in Maharashtra sought recognition as Other Backward Castes in order to qualify for quotas in government jobs and education, shifting away from Muslim identity politics in a quest for better lives and full citizenship rights.

In conclusion, they noted that while popular discourse tends to see politics as either secular or religious, in practice, the relationships between political processes and religion are more complex, since political processes present to religious communities and sub-communities alternative ways of articulating their identities and making demands. In some cases whole religious groups experience active discrimination (e.g. Muslims), but within others there is considerable inequality (Hindus). At the same time, religion is an important source of self and community identity, providing marginalized groups with a source of dignified self representation. Thus in making political demands, adherents of a particular religion may or may not have common interests, with the result that the democratic political process and development discourse produce more differentiated identities around particular interests and developmental concerns than adherence to a particular religion.

Nigeria:

Insa Nolte, Centre for West African Studies, University of Birmingham, assisted by Dr Nathaniel Danjibo of the Nigerian Institute for Social and Economic Research first sketched an overview of Nigeria as characterized by a mainly Muslim north, based on the Sokoto Caliphate of the early 19th century, with Christianity being adopted amongst groups opposed to the Caliphate in the 20th century; and a mainly Christian south, in which indigenous Christian elites had emerged by the middle of the 19th century, although Islamic groups linked to the empires of Mali/Songhay and the Caliphate also existed, particularly in the southwest. Since independence, ethnic and regional politics has gradually given way to increasing religious competition because while educational standards are higher amongst southern Nigerians, both the military and civilian regimes controlling the central state have been more closely associated with northern interests.

State structures are designed to maintain a regional and religious balance. Thus Sharia law and courts were permitted in the north under British rule, under the Federal Character Principle offices rotate in order to permit equitable access to patronage resources, and an ongoing process of State and local government creation has a similar purpose. Since the return of civilian rule in 1999, central government has been in the hands of fluid coalitions, which have had little control over politics at State level. To investigate the role of religion in State politics, three States are being examined: Kano, Anambra and Oyo.

Kano is a northern state with a majority of indigenous Muslims, a minority of indigenous Christians and large immigrant communities of both Muslims and Christians. Preliminary fieldwork findings show that while local Muslim religious organizations have strong political influence through their members being represented in the State government, the operations of local Christian organizations are hindered by bureaucratic discrimination, compensated only symbolically by concessions such as State funding for ‘pilgrimages’ to Jerusalem (to mirror sponsorship of local Muslims to undertake the Haj). Immigrant Christian and Muslim NGOs are even more marginalized, by heavy taxation or appropriation of their schools, delays in the issue of building permits and prohibition from accessing State radio and TV.
Anambra is a southeastern state with a local Christian majority, a mostly Christian immigrant community and a few small Muslim groups. Local Christian groups are divided over State politics, with Catholics more critical than Anglicans but also less well represented. Immigrant Christian groups are little involved in State politics, perhaps because of political violence in the State since 1999. Muslims are not organized and do not participate in State politics, perhaps because they are recent immigrants.

Oyo is a southwestern state in which the local population is almost equally divided between Christianity and Islam, and there is also a large mixed immigrant community. Local Muslim organizations are strongly engaged in educational provision and proselytizing and are well represented in State politics. As in Anambra, Christians are divided, again with Catholics being more critical than Anglicans but less well represented.

Overall, the findings show that local groups are more politically influential at State level than immigrant groups, with origin and ethnicity being as salient as religion. While the majority religious group tends to have more influence, this is varied and fluid. The extent to which immigrant religious groups become involved with State politics varies more than is the case for indigenous groups, depending on historical and local circumstances. Members of religious organizations discuss politics and development in terms of community-owned infrastructure and representation in office, adopting the same communal discourse as those in power. Access to resources and marginalization are not discussed in terms of class or gender. While women are frequently mobilized by religious organizations, they tend to be relegated to women’s wings rather than being represented in decision-making bodies, so while religion can form a basis for increased political participation by women, this is certainly not guaranteed. Political participation also has an influence on inter-religious dynamics, as seen in the different positions of Catholics and Anglicans and the divides between local and immigrant Muslim religious organizations.

Mohamed Bakari, University of Dar es Salaam, noted that, although other religious groups exist, discussions about religion and politics in Tanzania focus on Islam and Christianity, in particular on which community dominates the state. Although religious freedom is guaranteed by the constitution, the extent to which it exists in practice is contended, with Christian groups being content while some Muslim groups consider that their religious freedom is more circumscribed than for Christians. As a result, tensions tend to be between some Muslim groups and the government, rather than between Christians and Muslims. The standard view is that state-religion relationships are harmonious, but some Muslim groups challenge this, while many Christian groups blame Muslims for friction between religion and the state. Research is still under way on the ways in which various religious organizations interact with the state.

Religion, politics and education

In this parallel session, the first two papers explored additional aspects of the links between religion and politics.

First, José Lingna Nafafé, Department of Sociology, University of Birmingham spoke about Religion, politics and national development: Amilcar Cabral’s use of African traditional religion as a political tool in Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. He argued that Cabral used religion as a political tool, reinterpreting the concept of ‘sacrifice’ in African traditional religion and giving it a modern significance in order to achieve his political goals, namely independence, national unity and a just and equitable society.

He was followed by Jeff Haynes, London Metropolitan University, author of a recently published book on Religion and Development: Conflict or Cooperation? (Palgrave Macmillan) who considered the Conflict, conflict resolution and peace-building: the role of religious
In the first part of the presentation some of the reasons religion is implicated in many international and domestic conflicts were summarised, drawing on the massive literature that has appeared on religious contributions to conflict and violence. Religion, Jeff Haynes suggested, contains within it various sources of danger, especially if it claims exclusive validity. Three types of contemporary conflict may involve religion: resistance by religious fundamentalisms to perceived threats, the breakdown of government in failed states that creates an environment conducive to religious appeal and the operation of extreme groups, and the supposed ‘clash of civilizations’ between the Islamic and Christian worlds. Many conflicts are, he suggested, identity conflicts, to which religious and ethnic competition are often central. However, whether or not conflicts occur in multi-religious and/or multi-ethnic countries is related less to their social structure than to the ability of their governments to deal with the effects of widespread, rapid socio-economic changes that affect local power structures, including religious groups.

In contrast to analyses of the links between religion and conflict, he noted, the role of religion in conflict resolution and peace-building is neglected, even though many religious traditions have core beliefs that can foster a peaceful multicultural world. Our understanding of the relationships between religion and conflict and ability to identify alternatives is reduced by this failure to analyse the role of religion in conflict resolution. To illustrate the potential, he outlined examples from Mozambique, Nigeria and Cambodia: the role of the international lay Roman Catholic community of Sant' Egidio in mediating an end to the civil war in Mozambique between 1989 and 1992, the efforts of a Nigerian Christian pastor and a Muslim imam to foster inter-faith dialogue in Nigeria since the early 1990s, and the initiation of an annual Dhammayietra (45 day pilgrimage by monks and lay people) to build links between people divided by years of conflict in Cambodia by a Buddhist monk. Peacemaking ability, he concluded, is associated with individuals and groups of high moral standing, credibility and perceived neutrality, who may act under the auspices of a religious group.

The third and fourth papers considered some of the relationships between religion, education and social exclusion.

Manal Aldaihani, School of Education, University of Birmingham, examined Islamic perspectives on inclusive education. She noted that despite policies that espouse the inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education in the Middle East, in practice, negative attitudes towards disability constrain progress. As part of her examination of the social roots of attitudes and practices relating to disability and education in Kuwait, she has examined relevant Islamic teaching. Using categories common in the analytical discourse related to disability (perfection, diversity and equality, labelling, causation, inclusion), the paper reviews common and alternative interpretations of the teachings of the Qur’an, the Sunnah and the narratives of the companions of the Prophet. It comes to the conclusion that Muslim teachings on disability are positive, and so cannot be blamed for the disadvantaged and oppressed situation of disabled people in most developing countries. Instead, it suggests, the teachings have often been misinterpreted, cultural attitudes shape attitudes towards disability even more strongly than religion, earlier Western ideas on the segregation of disabled people have been more influential than newer approaches and poverty is an important explanation of the neglect of disabled people’s needs.

Lastly, Matthew Nelson, School of Oriental and African Studies, reported findings from his research on Dealing with difference: religious education and emerging mechanisms of political exclusion in Pakistan. His motivation was to explore the compatibility of religious education with democracy, which requires, in his view, a willingness to discuss social differences openly. First, he notes that only a tiny minority of those attending school are full-time residential pupils in a madrasa, but that the vast majority of parents arrange for their children to receive part-time religious education (mostly in the local maktab or madrasa) in addition to their daytime schooling in government or private schools. He draws on evidence
from more than 750 interviews with parents in different parts of Pakistan carried out between 2003 and 2007 to explore their views about the importance and nature of religious education. Two thirds of parents believe that religious education is extremely important. The majority also consider it desirable that the religious teaching their children receive conforms to the doctrines of their own sect, although some acknowledge that children should be made aware of the existence and teachings of other sects, if only to ensure they know what is to be avoided. Nelson attributes this attitude not to ignorance of sectarian conflict (though parents prefer to leave the fine differences in sectarian teachings to interpretation by the ulema) but to fear of fragmentation (fitna) if sectarian differences are openly acknowledged and a carefully nurtured belief in the importance of religious unity, harmony and consensus (ijma). Nevertheless, a tiny minority of parents believe that religious education should provide awareness of the teachings and practices of different sects and that diversity within Islam should be accepted and celebrated. Nelson puzzles over how the discussion of different points of view inherent to a democratic system can be institutionalised in a society that is so reluctant to acknowledge and discuss religious diversity in its religious education. To explore how it might, he suggests that we need a better understanding of the characteristics and religious reasoning of those who do believe it is possible and desirable.

Religion, gender and social inclusion/exclusion

The second parallel session focused on relationships between religion, gender and social inclusion/exclusion. First, Sarah White, University of Bath, examined *Domains of contestation: gender politics and Islam in Bangladesh*. Her concern is with the paradoxical combination of religious revival, women’s increased engagement in the public sphere and consumer capitalism. Gender is located within a broader set of contradictions between Islam and modernity, which have usually been seen as incompatible, although some Muslim scholars have recently argued that modernity could be conceptualized as spiritual progress rather than Western materialism and secularism. In seeking to improve our understanding of social change, she warns, there is a danger of compensating for the previous neglect of religion by over-emphasizing it and of highlighting Islamic distinctiveness over characteristics and trends that are shared with other faith traditions. In particular, in Bangladesh, acceptance of the State’s increasing identification of the country as a ‘Muslim nation’ might lead to minority religious and ethnic groups and shared culture and historical experience becoming invisible. Nevertheless, Islam has become increasingly visible in Bangladeshi politics and society, especially through mosque building, proliferation of madrasahs, increased Islamic practice especially amongst the young, and discrimination against religious minorities.

Drawing on research on marriage and the family, she uses case studies of two deeply religious women from northern Bangladesh to explore attitudes to politics and gender. These attitudes vary greatly, being related in part to social characteristics such as class, personality, urban/rural residence and family culture as well as religion. Both women, one a middle class local leader in the pietist Tabligh revival movement and the other an older widow with well educated children, stress the importance of the core practices of Islam and their religious responsibility towards others. Both recognize the centrality of women to the family and the family to women and see religion as significant in this. However, their views about how to respond to social change (for example, movement by women outside the home, women’s dress, marriage), their attitudes to their non-Muslim neighbours and their views about the relationship between religion and politics differ. Her husband’s involvement in politics through the Jamaat-i-Islami religious political party meets with the approval of the first, whereas the second’s more liberal views lead her to support freedom of religious expression and to reject the mixing of religion and politics. Care must be taken, Sarah White concludes, to understand people’s views about religion, gender and politics in their own terms, and to be aware that individual women’s agency in their own domain may be harnessed by movements that have illiberal and ultimately disempowering agendas.
Nida Kirmani, University of Birmingham, RaD programme Research Associate and member of staff in Islamic Relief's Policy and Research Unit, discussed some of the findings from her in-depth research in a mixed middle and low income Delhi in-migrant neighbourhood: *Narratives of insecurity amongst Muslim women in Zakir Nagar, New Delhi*. She notes that although Muslim women in India have attracted much attention, studies generally view them as a single category that is doubly oppressed, firstly by patriarchy (especially Islamic patriarchy) and secondly as members of the Muslim minority in a predominantly Hindu country, disallowing their agency and the possibility of them defining their own identities. When her respondents were asked why they chose to live in a Muslim majority neighbourhood, a pervasive sense of insecurity due to the perceived heightening of religious-based violence targeting religious minorities (Muslims and Sikhs) and based on both individual experiences and collective memory was evident. This was exacerbated by women’s greater sense of vulnerability arising from the pervasive use of sexual violence in conflict situations.

Living in a ‘Muslim’ space was perceived by respondents to protect them against their sense of social exclusion and the persistent threat of religious-based riots, whatever the intensity of their own religiosity. However, although respondents’ experience of insecurity and their feeling of security in Zakir Nagar were tied to their religious identity, they were also influenced by social characteristics such as age, class and gender, and by residents’ experience of housing discrimination. Thus both men and women felt that women were safer in a Muslim area, and their sense of security was enhanced by the self-contained nature of the neighbourhood with its local shops and facilities, but poor residents living in slum areas still felt insecure because of their vulnerability to eviction. Residents’ motivations for living in a Muslim area and their representation of the characteristics of Zakir Nagar thus include religious dimensions but are not confined to them. Identity, Nida Kirmani concluded, is both socially constructed and multi-faceted. Even religious identity takes on different forms. While important to Indian Muslims’ sense of social exclusion, therefore, it must be considered alongside other bases for identity and discrimination with which it interacts, such as class and gender.

The third presentation had a very different geographical setting but some fascinating parallels with the work in developing countries. **Pauline Logue Collins**, School of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Leeds, examined some of the findings from her research in Ireland: *Lost wisdom: the systematic exclusion of the moral voice of the inner city – religion and community in inner city Dublin*. An multidimensional and creative ethnographic study of Fatima Mansions, a 500 unit local government housing estate located two miles from the city centre, which was built in 1949 to re-house families from inner city slums, her research examined the value systems and moral practice operating within this four-generation social excluded community. Through participant observation and other methods, she concluded that residents of the area have distinctive values, codes and practices that are shaped by their exclusion, internally logical and different from those dominant in Irish society. They comprise a communitarian ‘survival’ ethics born of four generations of struggle, including resistance to oppression; moral action (e.g. the collective ousting of drug dealers); care for children and the vulnerable; family, friendship, group and gender-based solidarity; interdependence; and insistence on the right to good quality housing and services; but only to a limited extent on day-to-day involvement in formal religion. There is no church in the estate, although a statue of Mary is treated with respect, and many residents’ links with the church are confined to the main life cycle events (birth, marriage, death). The survival of this community and its strong sense of local identity, Pauline Collins asserts, depends on its women, who are strong and resourceful, although their sphere of influence is limited to the family and community, they lack voice and choice, and they are relatively powerless in relation to the wider society. Behaviour in Fatima Mansions is based on cultural codes that are transmitted between generations of women, a contextualized
morality characterized by a moral right to lie to outsiders and an obligation to protect each other in the face of real or perceived threats from ‘the outside’, as well as the perceived necessity of communal resistance to threats (e.g. drug dealing) as well as the individualistic and capitalist ethics of Irish society.

The social exclusion, lived wisdom and moral voice of inner city residents is, however, Pauline Collins asserts, ignored in Irish Catholic moral theology, as are the findings of social research. Teaching of the Irish bishops and theological studies in Ireland, she concludes, fail to recognize not only relevant areas of feminist theology, theologies of justice and Christian social ethics, but also the culture, everyday experience and moral voice of inner city communities.

Finally, Anna Toner, U of Bradford, analysed findings from longitudinal ethnographic research in Uchira in rural northern Tanzania under the heading 'I prayed and God gave me this car' – the integration of religion, personal power and hierarchy. The paper examines how religion has contributed to the shaping of collective village life. Different religious affiliations offer opportunities for individuals to enhance their identity and agency but, Toner stresses, are not the only source of either. In addition to the earlier religious presence of Islam, Catholicism and Lutheran, evangelical Christian groups have expanded at the village level, offering some individuals opportunities for increased agency in relation to access to money, power and allocative and authoritative resources. Life history interviews showed the fluidity of religious identity, with individuals changing their religious affiliation for a variety of personal reasons and in response to their assessment of the perceived benefits of alternatives. They also showed how ethnicity and religion are intertwined in individuals’ construction of their identities. Faith-based organizations are often the most active organizations in community development, providing a range of social services, especially education and health care, often on a cost recovery basis. Thus higher income people use the Catholic health centre, middle income people the Lutheran dispensary, and the poorest use the free services provided by the poorly equipped government health centre. Thus service provision appears to be regarded as social enterprise rather than charity.

Religious groups also have a major impact on shaping values and practices, interacting with other influences and people’s own interpretations and choices in different ways over time. Religious leaders are visible and vocal in shaping local norms and behaviour and mobilising financial and labour contributions for collective activities. For example, they provide teaching on sexual behaviour (emphasizing abstinence rather than the use of condoms to prevent the spread of HIV/AIDS) and become involved in divorce cases. Because all the religious organizations have international links, their leaders can assemble substantial funds not just for their organizations and buildings but also for themselves: the quote in the title comes from a Pentecostal pastor. Religious leaders are often powerful local actors, commanding considerable authority and resources, and thus able to shape mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion. Successful religious organizations can require their wealthier adherents to give generously, although poor people may be unable to attend church if they cannot afford the smart clothes and financial contributions required. Nevertheless, affiliation gives the latter access to hardship funds in times of crisis. Thus religious groups may both reinforce and compensate for inequality, include and exclude, and increase people’s agency while at the same time reinforcing prevalent social structures through their own hierarchical organisation.

The role of religion in achieving socially inclusive development

The speakers in the final session were asked to initiate a debate on the role of religion in achieving socially inclusive development by posing alternative points of view. Wendy Tyndale, editor of Visions of Development (Ashgate, 2006) examined the positive role of religion in achieving socially inclusive development, defined as non-discriminatory access to employment, housing, education and health care, everyone feeling included in the
mainstream of their society, and everyone having the possibility of participating in and influencing the social processes that affect their lives. First, she emphasised that spiritual experience is intuitive and largely impossible to describe in purely rational language, thus religion must not be regarded as solely a social or cultural phenomenon. In her view, recognition that intuitive and rational ways of knowing are equally valid leads to two particular insights.

First, religion is valued by, the main source of meaning for and important to the worldviews of most people. Assessments of needs must, therefore, consider not only material needs but also the needs of the soul. Second, all religions stress the inter-relatedness of material and non-material reality (that the spirit is integral to material reality - the whole of life). They also adhere to basic common ethical guidelines, the Golden Rule, which requires us to treat others as we would like them to treat us, that is with respect, compassion, understanding, patience etc. She gave four illustrative examples.

- The Vivekananda Tribal Welfare Centre in Karnataka was initiated by a Hindu, and practises equal sharing and empowerment of the Soliga people amongst whom it works through community development, education, vocational training and health care provision.
- The Swadhyaya movement, which is active in India and beyond, aims to foster ‘devotional activism’ as a means of self transformation, based on the belief that awareness of the divine in all people leads both to increased self esteem and an obligation to treat others with dignity. Members’ openness to the divine, the movement believes, makes them free to listen without preconceptions and to respond to others rather than prioritise their own interests. Their small-scale projects focus on the farming, fishing and tree planting, the primary aim of which is not to achieve economic prosperity (profits are shared with the most needy), and creation of joint religious spaces. Women are included as full members of the organization, even undertaking priestly functions. Although not oriented towards predetermined results or termed a ‘development programme’ by the organization, the community development outcomes are, Wendy Tyndale asserted, as significant as the self-transformation that is the main aim.
- Sarvodaya is a Buddhist-inspired movement that originated in Sri Lanka, and whose founder emphasised the importance of building relationships with others without expecting a return. It now works in over 15,000 villages.
- Nahdlatul Ulama, a Muslim women’s organization in Indonesia, has local leaders in more than 14,000 villages. Members say that the greatest strength of the organisation is their shared spiritual identity, even though they also have practical objectives.

The contribution of religion, Wendy Tyndale suggested, is to provide a vision of a better world, a basis for trust that the desired changes can be achieved, and a set of values on which development objectives can be based. Thus the National Movement of Fish Workers in India, led by a Catholic priest, has gathered millions of adherents in India and beyond and managed to change Indian laws governing deep sea trawling. The same is true of the ‘David versus Goliath’ struggle of largely illiterate indigenous Mayan people and workers from the Catholic diocese of San Marco in Guatemala to oppose attempts by the government and MNCs to extend opencast gold mining, and attempts by the Assembly of the Poor set up by the Engaged Buddhists to confront the negative impacts on their lives of dams, loss of land rights, large scale farming and fishing, and poor factory working conditions.

Religious values relevant to development include the stewardship of natural resources, the Catholic Church’s social teaching, and the prominence given to honesty. In practical terms also, she suggested, religious traditions and organizations can play important roles in fostering inclusive development because their leaders live amongst (and often emerge from) the poor. Thus they are both well placed to identify real needs and also have the moral
authority to achieve inclusive development. However, to realise these potential contributions, religion should be understood and treated on its own terms, not merely treated in an instrumental way.

In contrast, Parita Mukta of the Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, spoke about *Impoverishing certitudes: religion, conflict and development*. She noted that the spaces for secular and democratic politics and agnostic views are shrinking, while there is widespread growing religiosity and religious fervour. In contrast to Wendy Tyndale’s examples of the positive role played by religious beliefs and organisations in development, she suggested that it is possible to identify many instances where religion has been an obstacle to the achievement of development objectives. To understand the role it plays in particular circumstances, we need to examine all the sources of social power (states, local power structures, patriarchy) and how they relate in complex ways to people’s lives and wellbeing. Development goals, she suggested, should focus on equitable sharing and the achievement of freedoms: from want, especially hunger, from ignorance and from the arbitrary use of power.

She argued that religious beliefs and organisations work against the achievement of such goals when the assertion and promotion of ‘religious certitudes’ lead to impoverishment and exclusion. Her first example was the campaign for abstinence as a way of tackling HIV/AIDS, which has been backed, for example, by some American Christian organisations, and which has led to cutbacks in programmes that support sex education and the use of condoms. The result has been not only increased infection rates but also impoverishment and exclusion. When the supply of free condoms is reduced, forcing poor people who wish to use them to buy them, they are financially impoverished. In addition, the association of infection with promiscuity leads to suspicion that women who are infected by their husbands have behaved immorally, resulting in stigma and social exclusion. The ‘moral certitude’ of such religious groups that abstinence is better than safe sex is, Parita asserted, both punitive and exclusionary.

The global growth in religious fervour, in her view, has led to a struggle for power between politicised religions in many countries. For example, the rise of the Hindu religious right was made possible in India by globalization and economic liberalization and fostered by the establishment of Hindu religious schools that inculcate in their pupils an adverse view of other religions. It has fomented conflict in tribal areas and, in her view, scarred the wider society, providing strong arguments that religion should be confined to the private sphere. Do the actions of religious organizations or individual believers result in a more caring society, Parita Mukta asked. Only, she suggested, if they are prepared to work together with secular organizations and individuals, since many FBOs see those with other beliefs as ‘fodder for conversion to their own moral certitudes’.

The discussion noted that

- a distinction needs to be drawn between personal religious faith and ideology – religion becomes very different when it is co-opted by states
- in practice many religious organizations and FBOs that pursue humanitarian objectives are pragmatic about religious teachings
- inspiration for accepting responsibility for the wider social good comes from many sources other than religion
- there is a need to distinguish between formal religious teaching and lived religion and between formal religious organizations and grassroots groups when analysing religious groups’ and their members’ understanding of and commitment to development objectives – often change will be achieved from the bottom up.
change in religious organisations can only come from within, and their resistance to external manipulation may deter development agencies from becoming involved with them.
It was also noted that while belief in a transcendent or metaphysical dimension of life that is closely linked to its material dimension but can only be known intuitively is intrinsic to all religions, certitude is not – indeed doubt is often more prevalent. However, it was agreed that when religion is associated with certitude, it tends to be more exclusionary.