

## **Religious Faith and Development: Rethinking Development Debates**

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### ***The Story***

The missions of the wide array of faith institutions and development agencies across the world are linked in important and intricate ways. Poverty and social justice are the most immediate and central areas of common concern; ancient core concerns of virtually every known religion, they lie at the very center of the work of the development institutions generally, and the World Bank more specifically. This focus on poverty is a strong bond that ties both faith and development communities to the global consensus that underlies the 2000 Millennium Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals.<sup>1</sup> Between the worlds of faith and development there is a shared focus on poor people, patterns of exclusion and the disappointment of unfulfilled human potential. This important common ground opens opportunities even as it poses an array of practical challenges.

This conference in Oslo is testimony both to a widening appreciation of these links and the growing awareness of the need to fill many gaps in knowledge and documentation in the areas where the worlds of religion and development overlap. My presentation is based on *lived experience* (rather than the academic research on which most of you have grounded your presentations). It focuses on the story of how one institution, the World Bank, has engaged over the past seven years with the world of faith, and outlines lessons that this experience suggests for the broader challenges of linking faith and development work more effectively.

Some maintain that religion and development belong to different spheres and are best cast in quite separate roles, even in separate dramas. However, three starting premises suggest a quite different approach. We live in dangerous times, with dangerous roads ahead, and such roads are best traveled together with those whose direction and path are essentially the same. Second, despite different language and many basic differences, the common ground between faith and development institutions is broader and more important than the disparities. And finally, we live in a world with phenomenal opportunities, where the ancient assumption that “the poor shall always be with us” can and must be disproved. As we explore ways to pursue common paths, avoiding dangers, not always as fellows but at least as fellow travelers, as we aim to build on the common ground and approach with forthright honesty our differences, and as we seek to build a common future that brings to life the shared dream of a world without poverty, we need to work to build stronger and wider bridges to link the realms of faith and development.

### ***The World Bank and Religion?***

It is perhaps wise, in view of what may be differing prior conceptions of the role of the World Bank, to highlight briefly how I see our role. This vision underpins why we have set out to build greater understanding and stronger ties to faith institutions. At the front door of the World Bank’s main building is, engraved in marble, the phrase: “Our dream is a world free of poverty.” That mission unites many who nonetheless work in widely differing areas and may see very different paths and priorities to this poverty-free world. There is increasing appreciation that the task is complicated and involves a wide variety of interventions and actors, that there is no

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<sup>1</sup> <http://ddp-ext.worldbank.org/ext/MDG/home.do>

magic bullet, no single recipe. A kaleidoscope of partnerships and a fundamentally interdisciplinary approach are thus vital if we are to attain our dreams.

As “front-line operational officers” and international civil servants in a multilateral institution, we encounter a wide variety of issues, “from AIDS to zebras,” one might say. We work with villagers to raise crop yields, build pumps for water, and reduce maternal mortality. We work in urban areas with slum communities on housing, with city administrators on sanitation and with women’s groups on how to confront the HIV/AIDS pandemic or to expand a promising micro-credit scheme. Education and environment are central and constant concerns, as are jobs and social safety nets. We deal all too often with the consequences of economic crises and effects of economic mismanagement (including corruption which siphons resources away from social services and development programs). Effects of changing technology, trade, capacities of public institutions, and land rights are all issues that affect programs in many ways. We aim always to help find long-term solutions and visions for better lives. Yet, we grapple daily with the practical, immediate consequences of strategic choices for countries as different as Bolivia, Mali, Morocco, Turkey, South Africa and Cambodia. Debt problems, corruption, gender dimensions, environmental assessments, and many more such topics are our hourly fare.

Though this listing of issues and subjects of concern would be familiar to any faith-based NGO, church, or imam working in a poor community, the World Bank, over its 60-year history, had remarkably little contact with the worlds of faith and with the people who worked in that world, at global and at community levels. Faith perspectives, including the visible roles of religious institutions which owned land, ran schools, helped poor people in need, and cared for orphans and disabled people, were often invisible to the development teams. They were rarely glimpsed in project analysis and documentation, general institutional vocabulary, research agendas, dialogue with countries, speeches, and internal staff training. Even today you will find rare mention of faith issues on the official website. There were naturally some encounters with churches, temples and mosques, but these interactions were driven by specific individuals and thus proved both patchy and ephemeral. The neglect was often the product of lack of familiarity or of preconceptions about differing roles; sometimes it reflected specific suspicions and assumptions that faith institutions stood against development goals.

A similar portrait could be drawn from the perspective of many faith-based institutions. The World Bank and other development institutions are too often painted as large, difficult to understand, arrogant, driven above all by an agenda to create, and even concentrate, wealth, and removed from daily issues. Worse, they have often been seen as contributing to social and even economic problems because they are associated with policies that curtail subsidies, introduce or enforce taxation regimes, constrain civil service employment or expenditures on schools and health, and reduce barriers that protect crop production or local industry. Among topics where tensions have mounted highest have been perceptions of how the World Bank has advised governments on managing their finances, including what to do about large debt, how to manage crises, and on how to handle the very large and often poorly managed public sectors which characterized many countries. Privatization of water systems was often laid at the door of the World Bank and seen as detrimental to the poor (whereas World Bank teams saw such measures as the best, if not the only, way to attract investment and offer decent services to all people).

To be clear here, the central concern in painting this picture of disconnects is not about how much money flows or does not flow to faith institutions. Putting money at the forefront of this exploration of links between development and faith institutions can be insidious. It overstates both the importance of money as a key to development and the role of finance in the wide array of instruments that the World Bank can use. It also suggests that a primary goal is to

transfer funds. This is both an improbable and generally an undesirable outcome of the building of faith development partnerships. For faith institutions, their development roles have a multitude of dimensions beyond financial support and most are not seeking direct finance from development institutions. On its side, the World Bank has little to no capacity to finance faith institutions directly even if it sought to do so. The World Bank is an institution that is profoundly respectful of its relations with the governments which are its shareholders; it is in partnership with our member governments that we determine how loans, credits and grants are structured and who implements programs on the ground. This discussion of faith development relationships is about whether and how we understand the realities of poor communities, whether different actors communicate about what they see and learn as they work on development, and about the critical role of strategies and policies that we use to fight poverty.

Many different forces have shaped the jarring realities and perceptions of difference that divide faith and development institutions. Among the most important is the tendency on all sides to work in distinct silos and sectors. This separation and segmentation of effort has contributed to a significant tension among different actors who, at a fundamental level, share a deep common concern for the welfare of the world's poorest citizens and for the future of the social, political, and environmental systems of the world. It is also worth stressing the related issue of "language," accentuated by a long-standing tendency for the World Bank to employ very technical, often dry vocabulary. The language of ethics and values, of spirituality, of the soul, has rarely been employed. Let us be very clear: the World Bank and other development institutions are profoundly ethical institutions, in their origins, in the passion of their staffs, and the structure of rules governing, for example, procurement and project evaluation. But you would find it difficult to divine that from the normal institutional prose, which tends to be figure-laden and quite dry. Some consider that it is "preachy" in the certainty of tone and tendency to prescribe.

Under the leadership of Jim Wolfensohn, President of the World Bank from 1995 to 2005, important efforts have been undertaken to bridge these divides. This outreach has covered many other sectors (civil society, business, culture among them) but the effort to build links with communities of faith is among the most important and ambitious. In sum, the effort has involved a combination of high level meetings of faith and development leaders, building over time a global alliance of senior and respected leaders. An institution, the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD)<sup>2</sup>, was created, charged with engaging in action and dialogue on issues of common concern (including poverty, culture and diversity, services to the poor, and equity). The WFDD led a review which focused on the Poverty Reduction Strategy process (PRSP) – which is a central instrument for linking debt relief to strategies for poverty alleviation - to find out how faith institutions were involved and how they saw the process. There have also been operational activities, both country pilots in Ethiopia, Guatemala and Tanzania, and active efforts to engage faith institutions on programs on HIV/AIDS, environment, and some other issues.

The global meetings were important markers and helped shape an agenda for action. The first was held at Lambeth Palace, London (February 1998), where a quite small group of leaders from the major world faiths met under the leadership of Jim Wolfensohn and George Carey, then Archbishop of Canterbury; His Highness the Aga Khan also was present. The meeting explored a wide range of differences but concluded that the common ground and shared concerns about poverty were far more important. A second meeting in Washington DC in November 1999 deepened this consensus and concluded with an action plan involving creation of an institution with a continuing mandate to promote dialogue (the WFDD). A larger group of leaders met at Canterbury, England in October 2002 and related their work on dialogue to the broad global

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<sup>2</sup> [www.wfdd.org.uk](http://www.wfdd.org.uk)

challenge exemplified in the Millennium Development Goals which were the centerpiece of the 2000 United Nations Summit.<sup>3</sup> Most recently, a meeting at Dublin Castle in Ireland in January-February 2005, chaired again by Jim Wolfensohn and Lord Carey, together with Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, reaffirmed the vital importance of faith/development dialogue and common action.<sup>4</sup>

The dialogue process started smoothly and a growing network of supporters saw the topic and the work as offering major potential for enhancing development work in a wide arena. In 2000, however, the overall initiative inspired by Jim Wolfensohn encountered serious opposition from the World Bank's Executive Directors, the representatives of the 184 member countries. They raised widely varying and fundamental objections to the faith dialogue in which the Bank was engaged. This resulted in a cut-back in the level of effort and changes in the form of engagement with faith institutions. Over time, internal dialogue within the Bank and its member governments highlighted many reasons why the dialogue made eminent sense and addressed many of the concerns raised in different ways. Meanwhile, the events around September 11, 2001 put a much sharper spotlight on the importance of religion in global affairs and the dynamic changes that were taking place – it was as if a “revelation” had taken place in the sense of removing a veil from realities that were present all along. But, within the World Bank, the aftermath of the tensions and criticisms was never fully resolved and they impeded the development of the WFDD. The uncertainties as to future direction persist to this day, though in some areas, notably work on HIV/AIDS and community approaches to the environment, work undertaken has truly embedded an awareness of the importance of faith roles in Bank operations.

### ***Questions about Engaging with Faith Institutions***

At no stage was there doubt that, if a government chose to engage with faith institutions in a specific country, it was quite appropriate for the World Bank and other institutions to follow suit. Where faith institutions were part of civil society forums that too was considered quite appropriate. However, there were a host of questions when it came even to dialogue (as opposed to partnership involving joined action) beyond the country level. What were these questions about? They fell essentially into three categories: (a) concerns about the politics around religion; (b) concerns about how some religious institutions viewed and affected development; and (c) differing views as to whether a systematic dialogue with faith institutions was relevant or of priority importance for the World Bank.

- (a) *Political dimensions of faith:* since the World Bank operates under a strict and basic injunction to avoid political interference in the affairs of member countries, it was not surprising that many raised questions as to whether religions were essentially involved in a political field, and whether tensions among faiths were not essentially political in nature. The age old and often hard won separation between church and state (the laicite defended so keenly by France in particular) was seen as threatened if the World Bank itself engaged with leading faith figures or global debates involving faith communities. Concerns were expressed that the World Bank might find itself drawn into the forces underlying fundamentalist movements. Where religion was seen as contributing to conflicts and civic tensions some held that World Bank involvement might accentuate these tensions and even contribute to violence.

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<sup>3</sup> See Katherine Marshall and Richard Marsh, *Millennium Challenges for Faith and Development Leaders* (Washington DC, World Bank, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Katherine Marshall and Lucy Keough, *Finding Global Balance: Common Ground between the Worlds of Development and Faith* (Washington DC: the World Bank, forthcoming June 2005).

- (b) *Faiths as opposed to vital elements of the development agenda or standing in contradiction to essential values of the development community.* In dialogue it emerged that important groups saw--both in general and through specific positions on issues--the fact that many religions were working towards a basically different agenda from the development institutions. At a general level, many religions were seen as standing against modernization and social change. At a specific level the positions taken by important faith institutions on roles of women and men and particularly on important reproductive health issues that affected the lives of women colored the vision of the role of religion in very important ways. The issue of how far the work of faith institutions, even if it focused on classic social services like health and education was primarily motivated by a desire to gain converts or to serve a limited segment of the community was of concern to many, accentuating the concerns of frictions linked to evangelizing or proselytizing activities of some faiths. The argument was that it was best not to engage with institutions whose agenda was so fundamentally opposed to important areas of consensus and priority in the development community.
- (c) *Faith as decreasingly relevant in a modern society and with concerns removed from the development agenda.* It emerged that in important ways an underlying though often unspoken assumption was that adherence to religion declined with modernization and economic growth. There was a bias towards or vision of a future quite secular society. Religion was thus seen as peripheral or even retrograde; to engage with faith institutions was thus unnecessary and deserved a low priority among many partners and actors working on development.

As a simple if somewhat caricatured summary, the objections presented religions as **divisive, dangerous, and defunct.**

Each of these areas of doubt poses significant and important questions. The questions need answers and highlight areas of risk that deserve to be addressed. The process of reflecting on them, engaging in dialogue and debate, exploring the implications, has proved both sobering and enlightening. In sum, however, there are good responses to each issue; more important, our dialogue to date has suggested more sophisticated ways to approach the issues and challenge for the faith development dialogue.

**"Religion is divisive".** The "politics of religion" is well known and it is foolhardy to approach religion with naiveté or rose-colored glasses. Religious politics are ferociously complex and often quite ferocious. Competition is hard-wired into faith systems at a fundamental level and, with ultimate stakes (who is saved) plus shorter term stakes (such as financial survival or comfort) both at play there is plenty of overt tension. More complex is the tension and intolerance that is masked behind the veils of polite rhetoric and solemn ritual. There is both wisdom and hard politics in the legal and social norms that guide separation of church and state.

Some preliminary conclusions:

- (a) Respect for individual country norms on respective roles of church and state is essential and needs to be grounded in an understanding of history; for example, in France, the influence of centuries of religious wars are a shaping force in contemporary approaches to new Muslim communities and religious symbolism in schools.

(b) It is necessary to engage in the ongoing global dialogue on how the boundaries of Church and state apply differently and how they are evolving. There are wide differences in approach and these are dynamic times. The debates have many implications for development programs at a micro level (approaches to civic and religious education in schools for example) and in terms of macro strategies (whose voice is determinant in overall national and transnational politics). These debates will extend from village to United Nations and deserve to be followed.

(c) Care and humility are needed in the complex process of determining whose voice to listen to; who, of the host of possible choices, should be invited to participate in a dialogue? It is patently impossible to hear *all* voices. There should be no pretence of doing so. Learning from organizations such as Religions for Peace (WCRP) and the World Parliament of the Religions which have invested decades in global discussions about representativity is important. More important still is to make no claims to all inclusiveness and to be prepared at all times to hear new voices.

(d) Engage with open eyes with groups who are engaged in conflicts and work to establish an environment where it is understood that the objective is to listen, not to judge, to understand, not to preach. It is important to reach beyond the circles of the universally accepted to those who are at the boundaries of tensions and conflicts both because that is vital for understanding and because therein lies potential for helping to advance dialogue and work towards solutions.

(e) In engaging with interfaith institutions and events, there is much to learn and their core goals (world peace and harmonious relations among peoples) could scarcely be more important or admirable. There is also much room for exchange and direct inputs as interfaith dialogue extends to a wide range of issues of concern for development (witness the World Parliament of the Religions core agenda in 2004: debt, water, refugees, and religiously-motivated violence; the Community of Sant'Egidio focus on HIV/AIDS). It is useful nonetheless to avoid focusing exclusively on positive dialogue and to probe both into the underlying areas of disagreement and seek forums where there is less focus on surface unity and harmony.

**"Religion is dangerous"**. The "religious agenda" is not the same as the "development agenda." Religions are not, as Archbishop Anastasios reminded us, "just other NGOs." There are many cases where it is important to recognize differences and to "agree to disagree". The most important conclusion here, however, is that the different agendas, different visions, different vocabulary and different fields of action do offer a wealth of possible insight which can be of direct benefit for development programs. But it calls for a willingness both to learn and accept difference and to avoid the "easy path" of focusing on the "easy issues" like common agreements that poverty is bad. The "search for common ground" has come a long way, with much consensus on principles of a global ethic and many examples of practical areas where there is agreement among religions. In important respects, though, it is the apparent differences that are most important to reflect upon - how is globalization experienced? Why the focus on water? Why such different views on roles of men and women? What avenues are suggested on both national and personal indebtedness? What do faith perspectives suggest on the future agenda for equity?

(a) We must take care in selecting venues and partners to avoid association with those who hold extreme views which are directly counter to our mission and philosophy (advocates of violence or bitter critiques of other faiths).

(b) It is critical to listen and try to understand a range of opposing or different views.

(c) We should look for good ways to advance dialogue on critical issues with civic education, family, women, and reproductive health rights leading potential areas.

**"Religion is defunct"**. The "religion is defunct" argument is just plain wrong at a global level; religion is patently not dying out and there seems to be a very broad consensus that the "liberal assumption" that religion will decline as incomes rise is at best a gross oversimplification. It is important, though, to argue this in a thoughtful way, with data and evidence because it is an underlying if unspoken assumption in many quarters still. Beyond that is the need to work to counter the many assumptions about religion that individuals or institutions may bring; many of these are the product of personal experience and reflection - someone who has a personal atheist code or who has bitter personal experience with the Catholic or Muslim faith may approach religion in very different ways from someone who finds insight and consolation in their relationship with a congregation. And, third, our approaches to faith and development need to take account of the dynamics of change in religion which are part of modernization - that includes the important changes that come with increasingly pluralistic societies, the potential for more "personal" religious beliefs and practice ("bricolage" - putting together beliefs in personal ways), changing ways of communication driving religions (internet, for example), as well as understanding what, in relation to modernization generally and development agendas more specifically is in some fashion part of the trends towards more fundamentalist beliefs and faith organizations. What do we learn from "movements" which have agendas with much overlap with development agendas? And how can we work to reach those who at core feel excluded from the benefits of modernization?

(a) We can learn more about how attitudes to the secular assumptions are shaped; secure and use data thoughtfully

(b) We can focus more attention on the "boundary areas" of change in the geography and demography of religion to understand better how these affect development perceptions and issues.

(c) Get to know the religious media better

(d) Invest more work in case studies of interesting and instructive experiences of partnership both to learn and to communicate. This is important as a way to address the questions about priority and operational impact of partnership work,

### ***Why do we nonetheless see faith development Partnerships as an important priority?***

In reflecting on why indeed the faith development dialogue deserves focus and priority, we have focused on five major reasons: (a) the major roles played by faith organizations as community organizations and the high levels of community trust in them; (b) the major roles that faith institutions play, directly, in development work, with the most significant areas being large roles in health and education. Faith institutions have particularly critical importance in strategies to fight HIV/AIDS, but are also very significant in wide-ranging fields like environment and water; (c) faith institutions are involved in underlying causes of many conflicts and also in fueling communal tensions in too many situations. They also, though, work through a myriad of peace-making channels and in many conflict areas play the central role in keeping communities going

and in the rebuilding and healing process; (d) faith institutions play a role in helping people grapple with ethical issues ranging from corruption to use of power and prophetic roles in helping to trace positive future strategies based on a true appreciation of the importance of human dignity; and (e) faith institutions span national boundaries and, in the spirit of globalization, help to bring human beings together. This relates to important faith roles in promoting public support for development assistance, support for many migrant communities across the world, and, more broadly, the quest for global equity. In all these areas, faith leaders and institutions have special gifts and tools of communication to help weld consensus and to wield influence particularly where hard choices must be made.

- (a) *Presence and trust.* The extraordinary reach of faith institutions in many parts of the world is evident in physical facilities, active community engagement, communications means (radio, newspapers etc.), people employed – in short, what might be termed the world’s largest distribution system. Still more important is the increasing evidence that poor communities across the world trust faith leaders and institutions more than many other types of institution.<sup>5</sup> With sometimes centuries of engagement in countries and communities and daily engagement in many dimensions of peoples’ lives, it seems deeply logical to hear views gained from this experience and to draw lessons from it.
- (b) *Active engagement in development.* Faith communities are seen by some as primarily about *Sunday, Friday, Saturday*, days set aside for worship or other formal meetings, or about funerals, marriage, baptism and other rituals and preaching. The strictly pastoral and spiritual facets of religion are obviously important. Faith institutions, though, have a host of other roles and many are core elements in social services and development. We have poor aggregate information about how many hospitals are run by faith institutions, how many schools. We do not know how many hectares of forests are protected by faith groups, how many watersheds; and it is unclear exactly how much investment faith communities have in developing countries but we know that the numbers are very large. Some estimates, for example, put the share of faith run hospitals in Africa at around 60%. With a primary focus of the MDGs and development agendas on health and education, dialogue and common engagement seems absolutely critical. Facing the challenge of the HIV/AIDS pandemic, the logic is still more powerful. Faith institutions are deeply involved in community after community, providing counseling, caring for the sick, taking on responsibility for orphans, burying the dead and advising survivors. Faith institutions, leaders, and communities have great roles to play in accentuating or defeating stigma which is a primary vector of the disease. They are vitally needed in looking to the huge challenges ahead and devising strategies to combat the disease that will work.
- (c) *Conflict resolution, prevention, and humanitarian support.* In many conflict-affected countries and regions and in other catastrophes, natural and man-made, faith institutions are almost the only surviving institutions that can support and help people. They run schools and hospitals even when bullets are flying and when all that is left is rubble. They are present to help with rebuilding after calamities; witness the key role played by faith organizations after the December 2004 tsunami. And faith communities, whether individually or as part of inter-faith alliances, are engaged in a large and constant set of peace-making activities. Their voice, consolation, and moral leadership can help with healing.

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<sup>5</sup> A series of surveys led by the World Bank affirmed these high levels of trust; see Deepa Narayan, *Voices of the Poor* (Washington DC: the World Bank, 3 volumes 2000-2003).



- (d) *Ethical and values role.* Faith institutions and leaders often stand as courageous leaders who “speak truth to power” and help with difficult moral transitions, witness the role of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in the fight against Apartheid in South Africa and many other heroes, heroines, and martyrs of many faiths. In the fight against corruption, as an example, but also in confronting harsh realities like child soldiers, trafficked girls, female genital cutting, continuing persecution of witches, oppression of women and other excluded groups, the support, voice, and leadership of faith leaders are vitally needed. Faith institutions and leaders have no monopoly of ethics and morality, but it is worth recalling that thinking deeply about such issues is central to their calling in many instances, and that there are centuries old traditions to build on.
- (e) *Global Support for development agendas.* The leadership, communication skills, and stick-to-it commitment to fighting poverty that we need in the path ahead stands to benefit greatly from alliances with faith communities. Such leadership drove the Jubilee 2000 campaign which was so instrumental in changing global thinking on debt and spurring new action. Strong leadership is needed more than ever as we look to implementation of the MDGs, as we look beyond to a broader social justice agenda, and as we contend with the myriad complex challenges that the goal of equity among peoples in a world that respects diversity will present.

At its heart, the arguments for engaging in an active dialogue between institutions of faith and development turn around the growing appreciation that there are enormous areas of overlap, convergence, shared concern and knowledge, and a core common purpose. Both faith and development institutions seek to work *WITH* poor communities to improve their lives and ensure them a better future. There is also growing awareness of the critical challenges at the global level, which demand our common alliance and efforts. Among our common passions and challenges is the determination to focus on Africa and recommit ourselves to this special and remarkable continent. At the broadest level, and with the metaphor of a common journey in mind, we face a complex and dangerous road ahead in world affairs, and we need to travel it, where we can, together.

We should never forget that dialogue and alliance are far from easy. Dialogue has limited meanings within many development circles. It does imply listening and exchange, but is often confused with debate (which involves making good points and keeping score) or even explaining, even preaching. The real significance of dialogue, though, can take a page from many ancient dialogue processes that are engrained in faith traditions. Dialogue means listening, being open to learning and transformation. It means learning from and understanding others in a deep way. With the wide array of very complex issues ahead, building on traditions and a spirit of dialogue is especially important. It is needed, for example, in the difficult and contentious areas of gender roles, sexual ethics, differing visions of globalization, and approaches to the looming threats of global warming.

The critiques of the World Bank and other development institutions from many religious leaders and institutions has been part of the process of awakening of many institutions and global movements to new ways of seeing problems and programs, with extraordinary exchanges facilitated by the internet explosion and burgeoning civil society activities. While the Jubilee Campaign helped to advance a process of change in policy and approach to poor countries at a global level, there are still many unanswered questions about what debt should be forgiven or rescheduled and what this means for future financial operations. On many issues, unfortunate negative images of development work have been seen and vividly portrayed through faith institutions—there has been particular attention to structural adjustment, the drive to globalization

and free markets, privatization, user fees, and cash crop projects, among other knotty topics that are daily fare in development work. It has taken much careful dialogue to advance beyond mutual condemnation and misunderstanding to what we see as an emerging mutual appreciation of why such different images (with development institutions and faith communities having quite different understandings of the same policies or approaches in some cases) have taken hold.

### *An Array of Bridges*

The first necessary step to bridge such gulfs is dialogue leading to understanding, respect, and a grappling with differences. At the Dublin meeting in early 2005, the community spoke of a covenant for action, built on common determination and commitment. This global partnership of leaders from quite different sectors echoed a common fervent hope that concerted efforts could bridge gulfs in dialogue and action and bring real results for poor communities across the world. In the words of Archbishop Diarmuid Martin, “Development is about real people, people in concrete situations; they possess one great asset, their dignity.”

We are hopeful that the efforts of the past years, including the explorations of poverty and culture led by the World Faiths Development Dialogue (WFDD), work on HIV/AIDS by many institutions, including Religions for Peace (WCRP), Christian Aid, CARITAS; the two year dialogue involving the World Council of Churches (WCC), the World Bank, and the IMF focused on economic models for development; determined work across continents and faiths by Islamic Relief, and the work of the Alliance of Religions for Conservation (ARC), among countless other institutions, can make real the common interest in fighting poverty, protecting the environment, and building on plural cultures within a framework of a global ethic and values. Yet, there is much more work to be done.

### *Challenges Ahead*

Where there is strong agreement between faith and development institutions is that humanity’s most critical challenge is to end acute poverty and fight for social justice. Poverty in the world today is an outrage, not only because of the misery it causes but because we so clearly have the means to defeat it. From ancient times, wise religious leaders have taught compassion and love, have seen the faces of poor people, and have heard their voices (even when they were silent). Faith institutions have a wealth of experience, an array of instruments, infinite compassion and love, and a community of believers.

The good news is that for perhaps the first time in human history a powerful consensus unites the global community in believing that we can and must ensure that all people, everywhere a minimally decent standard of living. The Millennium Development Goals affirm the unified goal of overcoming the scourge of poverty. The MDGs challenge the global community to do what is needed to achieve the goals, based on a covenant that involves trade reforms, more development assistance, better governance including citizens’ participation in determining their own destinies, and good, honest use of development funds. As Jim Wolfensohn, president of the World Bank, says again and again, “there is no place to hide” today, because everyone has so clearly agreed to act to address the problems of poverty.

Despite this positive framework, progress is not encouraging, as many goals are not “on track” for time-bound targets. Recent reports, including reports by the UN Secretary General, the World Bank, Jeffrey Sachs, and others show a mixed picture and far still to go. The reasons are complex, and include the many competitive priorities for major countries and leaders (terrorism, Afghanistan, Iraq, humanitarian crises). They also reflect the failure to date to capture the full

imagination of many citizens to the challenges. That is why there is so much talk now of the new mobilization for the MDGs, with the UN Summit of Leaders in September 2005 a major rallying point. We are convinced that this mobilization requires many elements, among them, critically, new kinds of partnerships and alliances. The ethical dimension of the challenge is an area where faith leaders can bring special insight and conviction. This mobilization and “recommitment” cannot succeed without all our common efforts.

### ***Strategies for Change: New Partnerships of Mind, Hearts, Soul, and Hands***

An important challenge is to build a new kaleidoscope of alliances and partnerships with faith-based organizations. This effort needs to build on two major lessons we can draw from our recent history: the problems we face in today’s troubled world are complex, and the motivations of human beings and institutions are far more intricate than we often imagine. This means—in terms of the challenge of engaging the potential of faith communities—that we, all of us, need to see this as our common fight, with us working as allies. We need to address both our different views and perspectives. Only then can we achieve the potential in which we have so much faith. In the battle ahead, we need to combine *mind, heart, soul* and *hands*.

A first step is to learn from the rich experience of this wide potential partnership. Our recent book, *Mind, Heart and Soul in the Fight against Poverty*<sup>6</sup> represents an effort to engage in such learning and it has indeed provided a wide array of lessons and ideas for further action. It focuses on a host of stories of different partnerships across the faith and development worlds. Examples include creative efforts in the fight against HIV-AIDS, in education, health, community development, conflict resolution, and dialogue across wide divides including proponents and fundamental critics of globalization.

At the risk again of oversimplification, we can trace four dimensions that are essential for many partnerships to flourish, and particularly those that involve the worlds of faith and development. The challenge is to combine them with intellect, passion, creativity and energy, to bring to bear the combined force of mind, heart, soul, and hands.

We need to look facts in the face and use them to learn and to clarify. This is the intellectual, mind dimension of our challenge, and it has its own dangers, including intellectual arrogance, bogs of complexity, cylindrical divisions among professions like economics and business. There are many analytic challenges ahead. We need to understand, for a start, what we are doing, and learn from our collective experience. In short, we need the rigors and science of the mind, but it is not enough.

We know well that we cannot succeed in any human endeavor without caring and compassion. There is a twist here; we do need charity, in the sense of direct care for those who face destitution. But a focus on the arguments and instruments of charity alone can and will lead us astray. And looking at misery also can lead to despair, fatalism, romanticizing of the past, perhaps the worst enemies of the heart. We need to keep the gift of a human face as an image in looking to every technical problem; we need that sense of caring. We need, even in moments of crisis, to keep our minds on the causes of crisis and how to address them, together, at the same time that we provide help to our brothers and sisters. We need to focus on relationships built on caring and respect, as well as on trust. We need wise hearts.

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<sup>6</sup> Katherine Marshall and Lucy Keough (Washington DC: the World Bank, 2004)

The meaning of soul goes far beyond what I can articulate well. Suffice it to say that we cannot fight poverty without tending to the dimension of spirituality in human beings and its many institutional manifestations, in religious institutions, leaders, and movements. A focus on the soul can give us the wisdom to reflect more deeply on what we are trying to achieve. We need to beware of the pitfalls of false certainty, of exclusiveness, of over abstraction in the face of real problems like the suffering of women and children. But without this dimension, our work can be arid. *The call to consider soul is a call to critical qualitative dimensions of our challenge: courage, integrity, and a sense of stewardship.*

We live in times of rich rhetoric, transmitted so widely by communications magic. Yet we suffer, including in the “fight against poverty,” where the gap between rhetoric and reality is immense in too many areas. This is perhaps the most significant challenge we face-- to maintain momentum, to translate our words and commitments into action, over long periods of time and in the face of difficulties and competition for attention. We need to bring our hands to this effort (our effort and our financial resources), to make sure that words mean and lead to action. There are traps here too-- too much focus on action, the risk of duplication of efforts, overlapping and competing mandates, lack of follow-through, lack of engagement with and respect for the people affected. But, at the core this battle is about translating our ideas and ideals into reality with the many means at our disposal.

For too long, the world and its challenges among institutions have been parceled into head, heart, soul and hands. This is a dangerous fallacy. Even as we work to creative new partnerships and alliances, we need to see the role of each element for us all. The temples are not only about heart and soul; the international institutions are not only about mind and brawn (money). We have much to share with each other.