

WORLD FAITHS DEVELOPMENT DIALOGUE

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December sees the completion of my first year as Director of WFDD. I have been blessed with good support from our Trustees and especially from my two full-time colleagues: Wendy Tyndale and Maggie Clay (soon to be joined by a third). I have been enriched by a growing circle of contacts especially among people of different faith communities from my own. I am grateful to those of you who have worked with us in a very active way. WFDD in the end is no more than a network of committed people.

And I have much enjoyed clarifying WFDD's direction and making work plans for the next year or two. Like most of you I expect, we still worry about having sufficient resources both human and financial for the tasks we have set ourselves. Above all we must remain self-critical and keep testing whether we are adding value to the faith inspired struggles of very poor communities.

Warmest wishes for all the religious festivals which fall at this time of year!

Michael Taylor

Leaders' Meeting

October 6-8 2002 saw the third meeting of World Leaders on Faith and Development. It took place at the Canterbury International Study Centre in the Precincts of Canterbury Cathedral, UK. It was hosted jointly by George Carey (then Archbishop of Canterbury, now retired) and James Wolfensohn (President of the World Bank).

The agenda of the meeting was inspired by the same concerns which have inspired the work of WFDD from the beginning. How can faith communities, working together and in dialogue with major agencies like the World Bank, maximise their contribution to poverty eradication and human development?

That these issues are deeply spiritual was underscored by music and meditations from different faith traditions, by prophetic voices including that of the rock star Bono, and the presence of representatives of the Hindu, Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Sikh

and Baha'i communities. That these issues are also highly practical was underscored by a workmanlike agenda and the presence of practitioners in the field, politicians, economists, agency officials and business people.

The context of the discussions at Canterbury was the challenge of ongoing poverty, the implications for the poor of globalisation, and the sharply contrasting fortunes of rich and poor in an unjust and unsafe world. The discussions focused on the Millennium Development Goals which aim to cut abject poverty in half by 2015; the scourge of HIV/AIDS; empowering poor communities so that their voices are heard and they can be influential participants in Poverty Reduction Strategies; and conflict.

Participants noted the sad ironies of a world in which 'globalisation' draws us closer together and yet seems to drive us relentlessly apart; and of religious communities which seem to have so much in common when it comes to shared commitments to compassion, peace and justice and yet are perceived as a source of growing and bitter hostilities.

A full report of the meeting is available on WFDD's website.

On the last day the meeting addressed the question: where do we go from here? It was at this stage that WFDD was able to share its work plans and take the advice of the those present. The general tone was: 'yes we must talk and hold dialogue, but we must also act together'.

One particular challenge landed on WFDD's plate, strongly endorsed by James Wolfensohn. Put briefly it acknowledges that faith communities in many countries are already heavily committed to education, healthcare and HIV/AIDS programmes for example, which directly contribute to the Millennium Development Goals. The question put to the meeting and which WFDD will now pursue is whether these programmes can be 'scaled-up' if the necessary funding

resources can be made available by agencies like the World Bank.

This is a challenge we readily accept but it is quite daunting and calls for a great degree of sensitivity. Details can be found in the section of our work plan headed 'Achieving the Millennium Development Goals'.

'Scaling-up' could mean a number of things. A programme could be vastly expanded, or replicated in many other places, or draw in other faith communities as partners and so grow bigger and stronger.

WFDD has two roles to play. One is to find out where programmes exist which faith communities regard as suitable for 'scaling-up'. The other is to put those communities in touch with the donor community, including the World Bank, on the understanding that the Bank and others are willing to help prepare proposals and secure funding. WFDD itself will certainly not be the arbiter as to which programmes should go ahead but will try to facilitate good and productive working relations between faith communities and development agencies.

The potential in all of this is exciting: an even bigger contribution by faith communities to poverty eradication. But the dangers are obvious. Good programmes can be ruined by resources they cannot absorb. Funding proposals can demand changes in programmes which fundamentally alter their character. Expectations can be raised and not met. Faith communities can be co-opted into strategies they are not convinced about. And what happens if support for expansion is only short-lived and what has been 'grown' cannot be sustained?

So WFDD and its networks must seize this opportunity with firm commitment but eyes wide open to the pitfalls.

We are eager to hear from your faith community if you have poverty eradication programmes (especially in primary education, health care and HIV/AIDS) which in your view could be significantly 'scaled-up', given the resources.

World Development Report 2004

Each year the World Bank produces a 'World Development Report' (WDR) on a different topic. The one for 2004 (WDR 2004) will be on 'Making Services Work for Poor People'.

The main argument is that poverty cannot be reduced until poor people receive adequate levels of health care, education, clean water and sanitation. The report is concerned with looking at ways in which these services can be improved as well as why they have failed in the past.

Health and education, in particular, are services where faith groups have traditionally made significant contributions. Without their involvement these crucial areas of service provision would often have been weakened or even non-existent. Their contribution to this report is therefore of great importance, as it will influence the policies of governments and development agencies over the coming years.

In view of this, WFDD intends to write an interfaith comment on the first draft of the WDR 2004, in much the same way as we did on the WDR 2000, 'Attacking Poverty'. The draft itself can be found on the World Bank's website (<http://econ.worldbank.org/wdr/wdr2004/>) but, since it is 54 pages long, we have prepared a Discussion paper (available from our web site or from WFDD via e-mail or post).

For our response to be authentic, it is essential that we receive comments on the report from as many members of our network as possible. The ideal would be that you gather together members of your own and/or other faith communities who are involved in or have close knowledge of the delivery of social services in your country and send us your general opinions as well as answers to the questions on our paper.

We would greatly appreciate any contributions which you would like to make (if possible by 31st January 2003).

More case studies needed!

What the media tends to notice and comment on is the way some people are reacting to the rapid spread of 'modernisation', coupled with the exclusion of the vast majority from the global wealth and from all positions of power or decision-making processes, by entrenching themselves in religious fundamentalism. But there are also wide-spread, if largely unnoticed, movements of people who are feeling the need to return to the "fire" of compassion, justice and peace to be found at the heart of their spirituality.

For them it is not a question of rejecting western scientific rationality but of combining it with other paths to wisdom which lie at the roots of their people's culture. These movements seldom seek public recognition, being more interested in getting on with their work of individual and social transformation at the grass-roots level. This makes it easy for the mainstream media, academics and development agencies to pass them by.

WFDD attended a workshop in New Delhi at the end of September, held jointly by the Ford Foundation and the Vikram Sarabhai Foundation, at which several case studies of spiritual movements working on 'development' in India and Sri Lanka were presented. They showed, in different ways, how religious/spiritual motivation can influence both the aims and methods of carrying out programmes to improve the quality of life of impoverished communities.

WFDD is now continuing to collect up more of such studies. The intention is to make known some of the work of faith-based groups and to illustrate how religious faith/spirituality gives rise to different visions of "development" and possibilities of realising them in practice. We hope that the studies will be written up in such a way as to bring the work alive, rather than as "programme reports".

We are not looking for academic studies but we are hoping for a certain standardisation of the kinds of questions asked and material included in the studies in order to ensure a focus on the religious/spiritual aspects of the work being studied. We want to ensure too that some generally useful conclusions may be drawn and comparisons made from the studies as a whole.

On our web site you can find an Outline or guide for people writing the studies as well as two examples: the National Fish Workers' Forum in India and the Sarkan Zoumountsi Movement in Cameroon. (We are very grateful for the kind help of the Cercle International pour la Promotion de la Création – CIPCRE who invited WFDD to Cameroon in November and put us in touch with this and other movements).

Your comments and observations on these studies would be very welcome but even more welcome would be any studies you would like to send in of your own work or

the work of spiritual/religious movements you know.

(Our focus is on religious communities themselves rather than on faith-based NGOs, as the latter are more likely to have been influenced by the mainstream development views and practices.)

The Poor will help the Poor

WFDD's Director was glad to leave behind a cold and foggy England in late November for a few days in warm and sunny Tanzania. It was not just the weather however that made the journey worthwhile. Tanzania has a history under Julius Nyerere of social policies built on a strong sense of solidarity among its people. It remains however a very poor country and attempts at creating an economy that can sustain a decent way of life for everyone have so far failed. In addition there are signs that the old community spirit is under stress.

Like other HIPC Countries (Highly Indebted Poor Countries) Tanzania still shoulders a debt burden and is in the midst of a Poverty Reduction Strategy in order to qualify for further relief and loans. The faith communities in Tanzania, including Muslims and Hindus but with a strong lead from the Catholic Church, were demonstrating once again their intention to play their part by organising a three-day conference with the title: 'The Poor will help the Poor'.

The papers presented by leading academics (two of them Muslims) and others, and the discussions which followed, maintained a proper balance between on the one hand recognising the crucial role which poor people and local communities can play in the fight against poverty and, on the other hand, the need for governments and outside agencies to create the conditions which make it possible for the poor to tackle their own problems.

The need for adequate health care and education is obvious, but credit facilities and participation in effective village-level government were also cited as examples. The poor can only help themselves if they are given a chance to do so.

It was a far wiser message than the one heard from some officials who seemed to have swallowed whole a free-market type philosophy and translated it into the

suggestion that if only poor people were more imaginative and entrepreneurial in business and made more effort then their troubles could be over.

A visit to the World Bank gave an opportunity for preliminary but constructive conversations about 'scaling-up' some of the programmes of faith communities to help achieve the Millennium Development Goals, along the lines proposed at Canterbury in October (see above).

The Challenge of Globalisation: Towards a Shared Universal Spiritual and Moral Ethic

This was the title of a Roundtable Discussion hosted near Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, at the end of November by the International Movement for a Just World. WFDD was privileged to participate in what turned out to be a wide-ranging discussion about the ethics of globalisation in its relation to economics, culture and values, politics, military strategies and attitudes towards different ethnic groups.

The general view was that globalisation has not worked for the large majority of the world's population, as a crass consumerist culture is undermining time-honoured values of restraint and moderation sustained by communitarian concerns and the public good.

There was criticism of religious institutions which, having lost the necessary dynamism to respond to the crisis of 'modernity', are leading people to retreat on the one hand into fundamentalism and on the other into secularism. This led to a call for a vigorous and comprehensive endeavour to develop a spiritual and moral vision, committed to human dignity and social justice, rather than a blinkered adherence to religious dogma.

An action plan was drawn up which includes both sharing ideas about alternative policies and practice, as well as practical support for inter-religious initiatives working for peace and an improved quality of life for the poor.

One theme of the conference was the need for a new way of thinking which isn't founded on purely cerebral analysis but takes intuition as an equally valid and necessarily complementary way of understanding reality. An appeal was made to us to 'come forward as witnesses' to what is going on in the world, rather than taking refuge in standing back as "objective" observers.

The religious communities were called upon to apply their collective wisdom to specific aspects of globalisation, such as property rights, free trade, economic growth, investment and industrialisation and the notions of risk taking and restraint. Only thus will they be able to give useful support to those who are searching for signposts towards an alternative.

WFDD hopes to move a step towards this with its comment on WDR 2004.

International Interfaith Network (IIN)

WFDD is a member of a 14-strong network of international interfaith organisations which work on a variety of topics including peace, ecology, development and better understanding among young people of different faiths. The determination to work together wherever possible so as to strengthen rather than dilute our efforts was confirmed at a recent meeting in Budapest.