

## **Implicit Religion and Faith-based Urban Regeneration**

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*An examination of the current literature in urban regeneration reveals a growing amount of policy-related research about the potential and actual contribution of faith communities and religious organisations to social welfare, community cohesion and economic and community development. However, there appears to be little or no analysis of the values and theologies that underlie the action in different faith traditions. This article, based on recent research for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, tries to address this gap.*

### **Introduction**

The study of implicit religion has for the most part concentrated on popular or vernacular forms of believing without belonging within the broad context of Christendom (Bailey 1997; 1998). There has been relatively little attention paid to belief and practice in communities of the other major world faiths or in situations of religious diversity. Nor has there been much attention paid to the relationship between implicit faith, or for that matter explicit doctrine and social action. This paper attempts to explore these areas, by drawing on the data collected in nearly 100 in-depth interviews carried out by myself and colleagues in the course of a Joseph Rowntree Foundation funded study on the theme of Faith in Urban Regeneration. The report of this project has been published under that title (Farnell, *et al.* 2003) and a summary of it appears on the JRF web site ([www.jrf.org.uk](http://www.jrf.org.uk)).

The context for this research project was the growing level of interest in the academic and social policy communities in the involvement of

faith communities in social action in contemporary urban Britain. A number of recent publications have sought to document the range of such activity.

My own earlier research in one multi-ethnic East London borough (Smith 2001) identified nearly 300 religious organisations from all the major world religions. Between them they were responsible for some 620 activities and groups, in addition to public worship. Over two-thirds of these (437) were defined as religious activities and less than a third (183) as secular groups, social activities and services open to the wider community. A high proportion of the social action was the product of a relatively focussed network of mainstream Christian churches. Evidence from a wider and more recent postal survey of some 665 congregations and faith-based groups in 20 inner London boroughs (30% response rate, with highest response rates from Christian and Buddhist groups, and lowest from Muslim ones) (GLE/LCG 2002), seems to confirm the picture, with well over half the respondents reporting some work with children or young people, and half, work with elders. Overall the 665 organisations claimed nearly 70,000 users for their community activities, and the involvement of over 8,000 volunteers. Similar work in the north west of England (NWDA- 2003) has surveyed the contribution of over 3,000 religious organisations in the region. It should be noted that the vast majority of this social action is low-key, at the grass roots and operates on a shoestring budget, with no receipt of public funds. For the last decade government has been encouraging faith communities and religious organisations to a more active role in service delivery and civic governance for a range of more or less transparent motives, and has offered a range of funding opportunities (Smith, 2003), and a minority of them have taken up the challenge.

Christian and other faiths' community involvement and partnership in formal urban regeneration is fairly well-documented in case studies (Farnell, *et al.* 1994; Shaftesbury and DETR 2000; Jump 2001; Sweeney, *et al.* 2001; Finneron and Dinham 2002; LGA 2002) Again, the bulk of activity appears to be in the white majority mainstream churches, with Anglicans in particular playing a leading role. The huge disparity in resources, be they financial, buildings, political influence or cultural normativity, between the Church of England and ethnic minority Muslims or Pentecostals, allows the former to operate as a key player and broker on behalf of their 'weaker brethren', and gives them the imperialistic confidence to offer services (in both senses) open to the whole

local populace. While the current literature helps us to understand what faith communities do in social action, how they seek to do it and how much this contributes in economic and social capital terms, there is as yet little discussion of why such groups become engaged and how they relate their action to their religious beliefs.

In this article, therefore, I look specifically at the conversations we had in which respondents talked about the theologies and values that motivated their work in social service and urban regeneration projects. The texts of the transcripts which we marked as relevant to this theme of values and theologies amount to some 150 pages. The interviews were with about equal numbers of 'faith actors', leaders, staff and activists in religious congregations and organisations, and with 'secular actors', employed or active in the world of urban regeneration, some of whom were active 'wearing other hats' in religious organisations or made no secret of the fact that they held personal religious beliefs. Thus, while the majority of comments on this theme come from 'faith actors', numerous 'secular actors' also had significant things to say.

The interviews covered people from Christian, Hindu, Muslim, Sikh and Jewish organisations or backgrounds, with a mixture of gender and ethnic backgrounds, in four urban regeneration areas in London, the Midlands and two cities in Northern England. Our respondents are obviously a purposive rather than a representative sample of religious leaders and community activists which is highly biased in favour of that minority of religious people and organisations that is deeply involved in the community, and deeply thoughtful about the religious and social issues that arise. There are obvious dangers in relying only on these accounts or in taking their claims at face value. Hopefully, the interpretative task is made somewhat easier and the hermeneutics more plausible by my long experience over nearly three decades of active involvement in, and sociological and theological reflection on, community work in the religious sector of multi-ethnic neighbourhoods.

The structure of this article is in two main parts, looking first at the theology of those who do get involved and then at the reasons other believers eschew active involvement. Thus the discussion moves from the explicit articulation of theological principles and scriptural sources, which are developed by leaders and activists in the faith communities who are engaged in urban regeneration, to the implicit assumptions that underlie their work and are revealed in the everyday practice of their organisations.

As we delve deeper into the conversations we uncover a number of tensions between some of the open and progressive, sometimes radical, thinking and practice, in which articulate activists are engaged, and some of the implicit theologies which are reflected in the faith communities they come from. Often these implicit theologies are more conservative, locked up in the institutional dead weight of religious organisations, or bound up in the traditional thinking of congregations, who may be elderly or have a relatively limited educational or cultural experience. If we can show that this is the case across a number of faith traditions we will need to consider whether implicit forms of religion inevitably are a force resisting the progress of modernity, in contrast to explicitly articulated and scripturally referenced religion which may be used, not only to support and sustain the project of modernity but also to offer a radical and prophetic critique of its failings. This indeed is the argument put forward by some scholars of religion, in their arguments that ‘fundamentalisms’ of various kinds are a response to the conditions of late modernity rather than a throwback to an earlier pre-modern way of thinking.

## **Section 1**

### **The implicit and explicit theology of faith activists in urban regeneration**

In this first section of the article I intend to examine the accounts given by respondents of their motivations for active involvement in urban regeneration and community work and the ways they sought to legitimise this by reference to spirituality, religious principles, faith-based values, and the Scriptures and traditions of their faith. Next I will discuss how and why the accounts of some of the actors are more theologically articulate and explicit than others.

#### *Response to everyday need a key motivator*

When asked about reasons for their involvement in social action and urban regeneration projects the majority of my ‘faith actors’ talked about the obvious and evident needs of people in the local or faith community. In a sense they did not seem to need any theology to justify their caring actions. Their narratives for the most part take it for granted that responding to human need is doing a divine work. And most of it is

delivered through the mundane everyday activity of *gurdwaras*, churches, mosques and community centres. For example:

We need to touch people's lives on a daily, weekly basis. We deal with the fall-outs, when they come back from the prisons, when they have lost their minds, we deal with the fall-outs, the problems.... It is our children, our mothers and our fathers that are being touched, who better to really understand to deal with them but ourselves. (Adventist minister; Midlands)

... giving people a locus in the community where people are feeling alienated and isolated and have nowhere to turn to. That is their primary function... People go along to the *gurdwara* sometimes to hear the music, just as much as they do to pray ... or for a wedding or where the baby is being named for the first time ... I think there is a lot of activity that happens in terms of natural, almost organic, support that families offer each other, which often gets hidden. (Sikh community work consultant; London)

... kids just come for the youth club, maybe just come to play pool or table tennis, or meet their mates ... but there is a significant minority who have got problems, it might be drugs, it might be housing, it might just be general confidence and self-esteem, it could be major stuff... (At this point a homeless man off the street knocks wanting to use the showers!) ... that was Pete, one of his key needs is a shower. Again it's a good example in a sense, he drops in three times a week, sometimes he needs a bus pass because he's going somewhere, sometimes he wants a shower or a meal ticket for across the road, sometimes he just wants somewhere to sit and have a moan. (Christian manager of community centre; London)

There's a lot of unemployed people. We train them, they go into jobs and they're better off. Create employment ... we feel that if through our organisation you are able to empower people to improve their standards, then we believe that is regeneration. (President of Hindu Temple / community centre; North of England)

*Christian activists talked more theologically than those of other faiths*

In fact, the majority of our 'faith actor' respondents made little reference to their scriptures or religious traditions. Among the Sikh respondents no one quoted Scripture directly and only one traditional story from the gurus was cited. Among the Hindu respondents likewise no reference was made to any Scripture. There was, however, talk of rituals

and culture and transmission of this to the next generation and descriptions of the celebration of various festivals, including Christmas. One person (but only one) entered into a theological discussion and talked at length about the meaning of *karma* in relation to urban regeneration, significantly rejecting any interpretation of it as fatalism, while promoting the idea as a self-realisation faith which can become a driver of enterprise.

One might have expected more explicit references to scripture within the context of Islam, as a religion which is steeped in the study and interpretation of the Quran and *hadith*. However, such references were rare in the interviews. One or two Muslims spoke of historical models from Medina in the early years, and Moorish Spain in which there were lessons for building a prosperous and harmonious community, or of the example of the prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) as an honest business entrepreneur. Some Muslim respondents were more expansive and explicit in pointing to Scripture when they talked about Islamic apologetics, or rules for ethical and moral behaviour in the personal sphere. There was however, with the exception of one interview with an imam, a noticeable shortage of Quranic theology applied to the field of urban regeneration and social action.

Christian respondents, on the other hand, particularly ordained clergy, were eager to engage in explicit theological discourse with our interviewers, and the vast majority of transcript segments coded for this theme come from such interviews. I will delay for a while discussion of the content of these, but can ask at this point why there was such a great imbalance between the faiths in our data. I would suggest several factors which may together offer some explanation of this.

(i) Longer track record and discussion of social action principles in Christian churches:

It is probably true to say that all the major religions have from their foundation encouraged charity and the giving of alms and/or service to those in need, and have often established institutions to promote it. However, the hegemony of Christendom in western culture has given the church a massive advantage in the contemporary British context. Both within the UK and in the world-wide mission enterprise of the church there have been two millennia of the practice of charity and social care (for example, through the monasteries and mendicant

religious orders, and the foundation of hospitals and almshouses), and at least two centuries of explicit theological discussion about the social and political impact of the gospel (emerging most clearly as the 'evangelical social conscience' of Wesley, Wilberforce, Shaftesbury and General Booth). The twentieth century saw churches divided over the 'social gospel' with 'liberal' denominations taking the lead in community action, in movements such as 'South Bank' Christianity. But from the 1960s onwards a more holistic social teaching emerged, in Catholicism following the second Vatican Council, and in evangelicalism building on the work of the Lausanne Congress in 1973. In Britain, an urban mission movement grew rapidly following the publication of *Built as a City* (Sheppard, 1975) and was given great impetus by the *Faith in the City* report (ACUPA 1985).

Meanwhile for other world faiths the twentieth century was marked by struggles against colonialism in the Two Thirds World, and in UK cities in the post-war period by the processes of migration and settlement, and economic struggles in the face of racial discrimination. While such a context may have been fertile ground for self help and community development it was hardly likely to offer much leisure time for sustained theological reflection. And in South Asia at least there is some evidence to suggest that growing concern for social action within Hindu and Muslim communities, and the formation of mission and welfare organisations, was in part at least a response to the impact of Christian missions in the subcontinent. Gandhi, for example, drew inspiration for his self-help movement from the teachings of the Gospels and the example of some of the more radical missionaries.

(ii) Christians have theologically trained leaders involved in social action:

A second reason for the more extensive explicit discussion of theology among the Christian respondents was that a far higher proportion of them were 'clergy' with theological training, than in the other faith communities. Our experience suggests that this reflects the picture of faith community involvement in regeneration overall. It is far more likely to find a Christian minister managing a regeneration project or serving on a SRB partnership board than an imam, Hindu priest or Sikh Granthi. Partly this reflects a difference in role, as the latter tend to be more specifically religious teachers or ritual experts, rather than secular community leaders.

If I take my own Imam, he is much more concentrating on teaching.... actual learning, teaching beliefs... that sort of thing. (Muslim community activist; Sheffield)

Where Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims are found as activists in regeneration they are more likely to be secular leaders of their community, perhaps as wealthy and high status members of the management committee of mosques or *gurdwaras*, or younger generation professionals from a business or community politics background. Furthermore the majority of priests and imams are still likely to be either older generation or recent migrants to the UK, and less likely to have been educated to a high level in English or the Western cultural tradition.

(iii) Marginalisation of ethnic minorities:

Of course, the low levels of explicit discussion of non-Christian theology about involvement in government-sponsored programmes also reflects the reality of marginalisation for minority faith communities. Concentrated as they are in areas of urban deprivation, and facing further levels of social exclusion arising from institutional racism and direct discrimination, it is no surprise if they appear less included in and less familiar with structures and politics of mainstream society than the mainstream Christian churches. To some extent the marginalisation of Muslim, Hindu and Sikh groups is shared by many Black Majority churches. One of our research findings is that Government officials have limited 'religious literacy' and few active contacts with the faith communities. In some cases there is overt hostility to the world of religion. It may be hard for them to conceive of a 'faith sector' that involves anyone other than the local Anglican vicar, and perhaps the Roman Catholic priest. If they have dealings with the mosques or *gurdwaras* they are likely to approach them as ethnic minority voluntary groups and apply policies which actively discourage any up-front reference to religion. Some of this may have carried over into the conversations with our research team, as our faith actor respondents may have felt that religious discourse was inappropriate.

(iv) Interaction with interviewers:

Finally, there is in our data the issue of rapport between respondents and interviewers. Three of our team were white, male, middle-aged Christians, quite well-known as such among the local church networks



in the cities where the fieldwork took place. One member of the team was a white British Muslim male, another a white female agnostic ex-Catholic, and the final member, who only did a few interviews, was a young Muslim female of Pakistani family background. With the first three interviewers it would have been quite natural for Christian clergy to discuss theology on the basis of common assumptions, while there was no one in the research team who had the shared cultural, theological and linguistic assumptions that would have facilitated deep conversations about Islamic, Hindu or Sikh theology.

### **Common core religious values**

Although the faith actors we talked to, with the exception of Christian clergy, did not for the most part offer explicit theological rationales for the regeneration and community development work in which they were playing an active part, it was possible to recognize some shared common core values in their discourse and practice. These values centred round three main themes: peace and co-operation (what government now likes to describe as ‘community cohesion’), social justice and equality, and care for neighbours.

#### **(i) Peace and cooperation**

There would appear to be a widespread implicit presumption, among people of various faiths and none, that life in an open, democratic, and indeed ‘good’ society, demands that the majority of people are willing to live at peace and strive to cooperate with others. Respondents from all the faith communities to a greater or lesser extent presented these values as central to their world-view.

For some of our faith actors global and local diversity was important. Interfaith action, dialogue and prayer was highly valued, which suggests an implicit understanding that God is concerned for the whole of humanity. One Christian respondent, a female lay activist in Sheffield, talked of similar concerns but referred them explicitly to a scriptural verse, without considering any academic exegesis which might have narrowed its scope.

Well I thought about the neighbourhood and there’s a Scripture that’s in St John, that says that they all may be one and that’s of concern. ... we have to live with each other and it will be lovely. It will be absolutely fantastic! But just for there to be better community

relations, not so much division within each community...peace in the area and better community relations I think.

Similarly in an interview with a group of elders of a Sikh *gurdwara* a traditional story from the gurus about openness to other faith communities was cited to stress the commitment to the whole multi-faith local community.

J: once the Sikhs and Muslims were actually fighting, because remember when the Moguls were in India and they were trying to convert everybody to Islam and the Hindus were the ones that were there. One person was actually providing water to the people who were hurt in that fighting and he was giving water to everybody. It doesn't matter whether he was a Sikh or a Muslim or any other person and he was the first one to help. So one of the guys went to the *guruji* and said 'Look, he is helping everybody', and the *guruji* called him over, and said 'Our faith is to help the one who has been hurt'. Those whose feelings have been hurt we must help.

B: ... there are so many things like that in Sikhism.

For a couple of Christians at least an explicit link was made with the Old Testament concept of Shalom, which would not surprise anyone familiar with recent Christian thinking about urban ministry, where it is a regular topic of both sermons and books. Obviously this term was also familiar to Jews for whom it is a daily greeting. Our Christian respondents saw struggling for Shalom as a down-to-earth everyday experience, and not as the exclusive property of Christian believers, as in the following two quotations:

The idea of the kingdom of God is that there is a sense of community, a Christian view of how we connect together ... it is not a solitary thing but there are values and ways of behaving within a community. ... Another theological thing would be this idea of wholeness and peace and restoration that is sometimes embodied in the idea of Shalom. (Christian community development manager; national organisation)

Talk about housing and the biblical vision, if you look at any stories about houses, build houses with a garden, preferably with a tree in it, that's the biblical vision of 'Shalom' ... and it's about safety, people want to feel safe in their homes; they want to feel safe in the streets; they want to feel safe when they go shopping; they want to feel safe when they go to the mosque or to the church. (Methodist minister / theologian; Sheffield)

For our Muslim respondents the idea of Shalom is also familiar through the cognate Arabic term '*salaam*', which is used as an everyday greeting and is the consonantal root which underlies the term Islam. However, for Muslim interviewees the need to articulate their religion's commitment to peace was set in a very specific and critical historic context, as we were doing fieldwork in the few months immediately following the attacks on New York and Washington in September 2001, on Afghanistan a couple of months later, and on numerous individual Muslims, and people who looked like them (including several Sikhs) in British and American cities. They tended to stress the openness and tolerance of mainstream Islam and to disown any association with terrorism, as in the following extracts:

So that is the concept of Islam because Islam is an open religion, it is not a ghetto religion and that is very important. So those who turn Islam into a ghetto religion would be really corrupting Islam. (Imam; Midlands)

... unfortunately events like the 11 September and Al Qaeda and Usama Bin Laden do not help. What we need to understand is that they are not representative in terms of the 99.9% Muslim communities in the world or over here. But for whatever reason that little minute elements, which cause damage to the name of Islam are always portrayed, as being the norm, and that doesn't help. The value of Islam is as a peaceful religion, you cannot be a good Muslim if you are even thinking about hurting another human being. (Muslim community activist; Newham)

Several respondents from various faith communities spoke of specific programmes for peace and reconciliation they had been involved in, following the events in the USA:

The one that most easily comes to mind is the [interfaith] programme with [our local community mediation service] where we work campaigning for peace. Striving for peace, that is what we are all about. We are also engaged heavily, nationally and internationally, in protest for peace. As I say we are a charitable organisation here that is striving for peace. (Secretary; Islamic Centre, Newham)

One vicar from the Midlands described a local community response replete with symbolism and implicit faith:

... post the September 11th situation, we set up in the church what's called a prayer theatre which was photos from the effects of

September 11th, with the opportunity for people to pray, to write their prayers and to put candles in.

(ii) Social justice and equality

Within current secular discourse about urban regeneration and social inclusion, rooted as it is in the communitarianism of the New Labour Project, there is a major theme around equality and social justice. In the local politics of the inner cities such issues were well-established much earlier and equal opportunities policies and anti-poverty programmes were established against the political grain, even under the bleakest times of the struggles against 'Thatcherism'. Most of our faith actors seem to share a lot of political assumptions which are left of centre, and some at least present their own views as more radical than those of local or national government. Even a couple of the secular respondents portrayed religion in its various forms as a progressive force. One senior community development practitioner who described himself as currently exploring the possibility of a personal Christian faith told us:

I think there are huge benefits within the values [of the Faiths]. There are some really quite radical ideas about equality and that those who have should share what they've got. So I think a lot of those values are of value to the wider community and also shared between faiths ...the values that would underpin a healthier and more successful community...

And another chief officer of a national secular community work organisation recognized that:

[There are] ... philosophies behind them that are entirely in line with regeneration principles ... I would say the faith communities are more radically regeneration-oriented than the Government even. People don't always practice what they preach, but the ideology of most faith communities does not approve of huge gaps between rich and poor. I've never come across a religion yet that says Goody Goody for the rich.

In the interviews with faith actors we found several explicit references to justice and equality, in reference to the everyday practice of the faith community, or to support or criticism of regeneration policy. For example:

My background is, although I am not one of those who are regularly going to Mosque, but my principles and my ideals are based on the

Islamic culture. And it would furnish equality and fairness, and justice. That's what our faith features. (Muslim community activist; Sheffield)

... the temples provide a free kitchen, which is available throughout the day for anybody whether you are Sikh, white, black, Chinese or whatever. It's a question of equality, everybody eats the same food and sits at the same level, irrespective of your standing within the community and it sort of brings the community together. (Sikh community leader; Coventry)

... a group I chair, a group of evangelical charismatic fellowships, our vision is that God's kingdom would come in Newham, that we would see truth and justice, that people would be treated equally and rightly, so we share those aspirations and goals with the council. (Baptist minister; Newham)

We need to ask, Is there an overriding responsibility on every person living in a society to seek to perpetuate equality and justice within that society? To seek to perpetuate a level of productivity which ensures a level of good quality of life. (Pentecostal Mission Consultant; London)

All the stuff of the kingdom that Jesus was talking about, so where there is the appalling injustice, I mean you can almost see Amos speaking against it ... you know ... sod Sheffield First talking about all their regeneration strategy, let's have some justice for these kids turning to drugs. (Baptist minister; Sheffield)

**One Catholic described the official thinking that lies behind the Peace and Justice movement in his denomination thus:**

In the Catholic Church this has come mainly through letters of the Popes, but then other things kind of tag on with it. It has developed into a rather sophisticated and extensive literature on church social involvement—the involvement of the church in the world, for the good of the world, for the sake of justice, welfare, helping the poor that sort of thing. So I think regeneration sits easily with the social teaching of the church. (Roman Catholic National officer)

**An ordained Anglican presented his motivations, social analysis and praxis in categories familiar to theologians of liberation of Latin America.**

It's the experience and the belief that, if you have a divided society between rich and poor, God's option is for the poor. And that, where

people are poor and are marginalized and begin to do something for themselves they experience hope in a way in which the rich who ignore them never will....If we have an unjust society, then struggling for justice one uncovers really what the Gospel is all about. (Industrial chaplain; Sheffield)

If the implicit theology here is that one can find God in the struggles of marginalized people for justice, a contrasting view, that God has commanded believers to share their material wealth with others, provides a utopian motivation for radical community work, for an African Pentecostal pastor in Newham:

My ideal is to see the Christian faith lived out more than preached verbally, but preached through our living if that makes any sense. What I want to see is a complete eradication of poverty, and a fair distribution of wealth. Some people when I speak to them like that think I am a communist. I say I'm not. And they say you're socialist. And I say I'm not, but if you look at the Scriptures the Bible says that none of them lacked in the Acts of the Apostles, and a distribution was made to everyone as they had need. If that comes across as communism, but it is not communism, it's having a communal system or community, where everyone's needs are met and where everyone's skills and talents are employed in such a way that everybody feels fulfilled and acknowledged.

(iii) Neighbour love and community

The most common value referred to by respondents from across the range of faith communities is that of neighbour love which derives directly from a text in the Christian gospel but is recognised and owned by Muslims and Sikhs.

My belief system is that the Bible says love thy neighbour as thyself, and that means if you see a brother naked clothe him, if you see a brother in need then help deal with that need. (African Pentecostal pastor; Newham)

I think that because of my religion, the main belief is to love God and to love your neighbour as yourself, and you can't ignore at all how other people live. So your whole life really must be dedicated to making other people's lives as good, or better than, your own in order to show this love that you have for God and for other people. (Quaker women's activist; Bradford)

... you may have heard this before but Islam does teach love thy neighbour. ... Islam teaches love thy brother, love thy sister. Islam is actually a way of life, it is not just a religion. (Secretary of Islamic Centre; Newham)

Interviewer: In Christianity for example we have the teaching, Love thy neighbour, for example.

B: even Sikhism has the same thing.

J: plus we do actually share the feelings of the other people if somebody gets hurt, we are the first ones to jump in to spend time with him. (Group of Gurdwara committee members; Newham)

Several of the Muslim respondents offered a quite extensive commentary and expansion on this text, one even quoting a passage from the Christian New Testament:

First doctrine is to help your family and neighbours .... Creating a good neighbourhood is more important or at least on the same level of importance as inviting people to go to the mosque. ... So looking after the neighbour is in fact an act of worship, which makes people nearer to God ... there is one particular saying that if really you are feeding a hungry man or a destitute it's equivalent as if you have worshipped for whole months or several days at prayer. There is a famous saying that on the day of judgement God will come along to you and say that 'I was hungry you never fed me ...'

'Oh God! How can you be hungry?'

'Such and such time a man approached you and asked for food... you did not give. I was naked you did not clothe me'.

'How can you be naked, oh God?'

'Such and such a person. ... was unemployed. I was this and that ...'

The saying means that to serve God is to serve humanity, the people around you.

(Director of Muslim voluntary organisation; London)

And an imam in the Midlands drew on Islamic Scripture and tradition to relate a number of relevant stories:

Love thy neighbour and what we mean by neighbour? From an Islamic perspective the neighbour isn't just your next door neighbour. It's fourteen houses in all directions. That is the starting point of the neighbourhood, so it extends therefore a kind of sense of community, a sense of belonging. Citizenship we are talking about, it's not just who lives next door, irrespective of their creed, language, race, background or whatever.

I think one of the worries that the Muslim communities have had is that they have come to this notion of community as the sense of belonging and the sense of neighbourhood and they have found that the white man is in his castle and been very sort of insular ... when you have communities from minorities, they live together, close by the mosques, the shops and all the facilities. You are able to share things so that you cope with your neighbour and you feel that it should be returned in the same way.

There is a very famous saying of Prophet Mohammed which says, the Archangel Gabriel was so insistent on maintaining good relations with the neighbour, and that point ... would come where the neighbour would become an automatic heir to one's estate.

There is another situation where a Jewish lady, when the Prophet was preaching the message, used to continuously put obstacles in his way, putting stones and thorns in his way. One day that did not happen and the prophet got worried. ... So they actually went to visit her. She was ill and the Prophet said, I have come to enquire because there has been a change in the normal sort of response. She was touched by that, that despite what she had done that she was visited by them.

Another incident where a lady who wasn't part of Muslim community came to enquire. The prophet took off his shawl ... and placed it on the floor so that she could sit on it. Some of his companions were amazed. They themselves felt that anything that had touched the Prophet's body must be sacred. It was so special ... how come an anonymous person, and a woman at that, ... for the Prophet to take off his shawl and put it on the ground. He said, 'Well, she is a neighbour'.

Among Sikhs there were also several references to the norm of '*sewa*', freely given voluntary service for the benefit of the community. But it was a Christian who drew on Old Testament Scriptures to add a more challenging edge to what has become a commonplace statement affirmed in public and accepted implicitly by most people of goodwill.

'What do I preach about most?'. And what I find myself saying more than anything else is that it's about solidarity, not segregation; hospitality, not hostility ... And what I've discovered is that, in the Hebrew Scriptures, only once does it say 'Love your neighbour as yourself'. But 37 times it says 'Love the stranger'. So the neighbour is somebody you love, you know, somebody who is a bit like you, but



the stranger is somebody who is really different from you. And there's a great opportunity here, I would say, to actually meet those who are really, really different from you ... to accept those who are different, to welcome them and to embrace them. (Methodist minister / theologian; Sheffield)

(iv) Theology in context: Christian use of biblical themes

A number of the Christian respondents referred more explicitly to fundamental doctrines and Bible passages as the basis on which their social action was founded. For many the Incarnation, the notion that in Jesus Christ God entered human life in a unique way, provided the pattern for earthing their faith in community service. Familiar Gospel stories, such as the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and the separation of the sheep from the goats at the final judgement (Matthew 25) were cited. More generally the lifestyle of Jesus as a 'friend of sinners' gave legitimation for the 'option for the poor'. The model of the New Testament church as an inclusive egalitarian community was also cited. Eschatology and the kingdom of God also played a part for some, either as a millenarian hope, or as a contrast with the mundane and oppressive reality of 'churchianity'. Finally the urban context in which people operated tended to turn thoughts towards some of the great 'city of God' passages in Scripture, for example:

What I'd like to see is ... There is a passage in Zechariah, where it talks about the streets of the new Jerusalem being places where old people with sticks can walk freely, where children can play safely, and that word 'safely' is really, really important, just the environment is well being, a beautiful place. God's creation (so we are), trying to encourage recycling (we've got a recycling bank as well), just a clean environment, it is safe and clean. (Baptist minister; Newham)

However, if there is one key characteristic of Christian reflection about the everyday practice of life and ministry in urban communities, it is not utopianism, still less triumphalism: but the ability of practitioners to identify their own stories with the grand narratives of their faith tradition (as above). It involves reading the Scriptures through the lenses of the local social context, and an implicit trust that 'this is that'.

The other thing that is my role here is to try and interpret what God is doing. I have students ... people who come and see and try and

hear what it is that God says to them through their being here. I don't have anything clever to say, but sometimes people just come in and experience something here which they interpret in their own way but I would summarise the whole thing as like yeast in the dough. Yeast in dough... (Baptist minister)

For example, living long-term in a deprived community is implicit solidarity both with local people and with Christ in his incarnation and suffering:

I live here and work here—you know, a lot of the professionals who work here don't live here. So we have a different kind of commitment, it's important for us to actually live in the context in which we work. Often in housing estates the only professional who lives there and works there is the local vicar or minister or church worker. I think that that's a really good and distinctive thing... Secondly, we have a capacity to stick at it. We have a stickability. There's something in our faith that resources us and [helps us] cope with failure and not to feel that that's the end of the road. You know, the Cross story and so many stories in Scripture are about getting nowhere and being in the wilderness for forty years and so on, and just keeping at it, keep working away at it. So I think faith gives you resources, stamina, which help sustain your commitment.... (Methodist minister / theologian; Sheffield)

This inability to see many signs of success in terms of urban regeneration or ministry is for some of our Christian activists an implicit confirmation that they are walking the same path of powerlessness and suffering that Jesus walked:

God is with us in the mess ... That's absolutely right ... we're not an escapist faith at all, and it drives us back into reality—our understanding of the crucifixion, which is that power in the normal way is not what counts; if you want to change the world, you have to be ready to be weak. If you're vulnerable; and it's out of weakness and vulnerability, fragility and even death comes true transformation and change for the world. Our understanding of the cross is fundamental to the way we try to operate. (Senior Anglican clergyman; Bradford)

As such, vulnerability and broken-ness, experienced in solidarity with the socially excluded communities of the inner cities, resonates well with the familiar symbolism of broken bread and poured out wine which is at the heart of the central ritual of almost all the Christian churches:

It's probably my Christian faith that inspires me to do this; it's living out my Christian faith in the words of—this very day—at the Last Supper when Jesus said to his disciples: 'A new commandment I give to you: love one another as I have loved you'. And that's what inspires me, to put that into practice here. And that's living out my Christian vocation, trying to reach out to people of other faiths, other countries, and that's at the core of the Christian message, the Christian vocation. For too long we've been concerned about our own, our own community and that's the challenge facing the Christian community now. ... Jesus reached out to those at the margins, those who were strangers and that's the challenge for the Christian community here. (Roman Catholic priest; Bradford)

As Furbey has pointed out (1999) the discourse of regeneration, though presented as secular and economically driven, has theological roots and resonances. Regeneration also has sacramental overtones, linked as it is with the other Christian ritual of baptism. Is it not possible that implicit in pairs of words such as community / communion, regeneration / rebirth, solidarity / incarnation, deprivation / crucifixion, there are theological resources sufficient to inspire Christians to radical involvement in community action, and to challenge believers from other faith communities and unbelievers alike to do likewise or better?

## Section 2

### **The implicit theology of why some religious people and groups do not get involved in social action programmes**

Having examined and discussed some of the accounts of the faith actors we interviewed, and delved within them to extract both explicit and implicit theologies of social action, it is tempting, but unwise, to end on an upbeat note that 'God's in His Heaven and all's right with the world'. While the government may believe for a variety of sincere and political reasons that involving faith communities in urban regeneration and social service delivery is a bright new opportunity, our research also identified a number of problems, some of which are intrinsic to the field (see Farnell and R. Furbey, *et al.*, 2003; Smith, 2003). Obviously in interviews with people who are committed both to their faith and to the enterprise of urban regeneration difficulties and problems, and contradictions between their belief systems and practice, are not likely to come to the fore. Even if respondents are being open and honest, or willing to

confess their sins and their spins, they may not want to lose face by talking of failure, may not be able to see things through the eyes of a more objective outsider, or may be sincerely blind about issues that are obvious to others. Since this final section of the paper will need to discuss values and theologies that were not often spoken about directly in the interviews with faith actors, we will need to draw on evidence that is harder to document, but which we encountered both in the course of the project (in stories related about third parties by our faith actor respondents, in interviews with secular actors and critics, and through our observations of the practice of our respondents and their organisations), as well as through long experience as practitioners in this field.

An Anglican clergyman in a parish where Muslims were a numerical majority, told us:

Now I did meet an Imam when I was first in the place and he just said to me, 'Well, to be honest, I don't do social'. By which he meant he did not want to get involved in things, and I thought, Well, fair enough....

This allows us to open up the discussion of the question, who is it that 'does social', and why, or, more formally, what are the sufficient and necessary conditions which enable religious groups to engage in social action? In the section which follows we examine some of the implicit theologies which emerge from reflections on conversations and practice in this area, most of which tend to limit social and political participation. However, we will first need to look at the economic and social factors which favour or hinder active involvement.

#### *Questions of capacity and social exclusion*

One initial comment about the kind of religious people who get involved in community action is required. Almost of necessity they are people who are *not* totally in despair, or alienated from society as a whole. They must be people who in some sense believe that it is possible to reform, transform or renew the present world order to make it somewhat more like the world as God intended it to be, and that it is therefore worth the effort to get involved in community action. Such religious 'Fabians' are more likely to be drawn from relatively well-educated and prosperous people with a conscience, rather than from the grass roots people who themselves experience poverty and deprivation

at first hand (although there are always a handful of local activists who find in community action both a meaningful lifestyle where they can contribute to society, and a pathway to upward social mobility). The messy world of urban regeneration is not congenial territory for the utopian millenarian who would bring about the Kingdom of God on Earth by tomorrow lunchtime. Nor is this the religious territory for those who despair so much of the present world that they look to God for a radical intervention to transform situations.

If fundamentalisms can be described as a rational response to modernity, for those who are excluded from the material benefits of modern society, then we would expect to find many fundamentalists in the inner city. Indeed we do, among Christian Pentecostals in the black communities, many of whom seek salvation from the evils of the urban world and find a God who promises (and often provides) material blessings which allow them and their families to prosper and move out of the inner city. Among Muslims there are small numbers, at least, who take on a religious ideology that motivates them to social and political action from outside the established system. But, for the majority of less affluent inner city residents the response to the situation they find themselves in is a secular one, concentrating on the struggle for economic survival and gathering the resources required for at least a partial participation in the consumer society. It is no surprise therefore that the majority of urban people, religious or not, play little part or take little interest in urban regeneration programmes, or organised community activity, and that public participation rates and social capital indicators, as measured by government, remain persistently low.

Secondly, social exclusion of minority groups is a key factor in helping to predict whether a religious community is likely to be involved in welfare or community action as recognised and funded by statutory bodies. My paper on religion and social capital in East London (Smith, 2001) clearly shows how most of the newer religious organisations managed by ethnic and religious minorities lack access to economic resources and the political networks which control funding and policy. Thus they become socially excluded organisations whose members for the most part are drawn from socially excluded neighbourhoods and communities. However, we should note that social exclusion is a contested and complex issue and that in the kaleidoscopic religious and ethnic diversity of the inner city, identities are complex, and ethnic and community boundaries do not simply map onto the religious affiliation

categories used, for instance, in the 2001 Census. For example a Sikh leader told us how he had felt unwelcome in one *gurudwara* because he came from the 'wrong caste' and one of our Muslim respondents pointed out that language is an issue which sometimes prevents even internal communication:

Because, if they go to the Mosque and talk in their own language, they may be Muslim but they have to understand what someone else is saying. There may be a local announcement to say that x, y, z is happening or this happened. ... I could go to a Somali Mosque with my friends, but if they had an announcement I had no idea so I will quickly leave, but if I go to a Pakistani Mosque, which at the end of the day is a Muslim mosque, they make an announcement I will hold on to see what they say, then I'll go. (Muslim community activist and local politician)

As a result of social exclusion many religious organisations (to use regeneration industry jargon) 'lack capacity' to develop and manage social action programmes which require legal and financial accountability to funding bodies and the state. Engagement therefore often depends on serendipity and the good fortune of having an entrepreneurial leader. In consequence our research found many cases and heard many anecdotes about entrepreneurial individuals who had developed social action programmes and centres independently of, or even despite the opposition of, the faith communities and religious leaders with whom they were associated.

A third crucial issue that helps determine whether and how a faith group becomes involved in social action is that of resources, in particular having access to a building, and a suitable one that gives a group an advantage over an organisation that is in permanent pilgrimage and has only social, cultural and spiritual capital to work with. If you have a large building that is underused for religious purposes, except perhaps on a weekly holy day, it makes sense both in terms of economics and 'good stewardship', or in terms of service and mission in the locality, to run social action projects, or offer rooms for hire to community groups. Running a building as an open access community centre almost inevitably leads the organisation into engagement with the world of urban regeneration, social services and the voluntary sector.

### **Popular values and theology: implicit dualism**

I think a lot of Churches and Mosques have not been involved in regeneration because there's a certain philosophy which is about separating the spiritual and the temporal. And you get that both in Islam and Christianity. (Catholic priest, Bradford)

The most obvious area in which dualism emerges is in believers' attitudes to the places where they worship. Buildings may have architectural features which are thought to be aesthetically pleasing, or symbolically significant in terms of the faith, while over time they often become linked with notions of sacred space. They sometimes become precious both to practising believers, and to local residents with more diffuse religiosity who rarely cross the threshold. In deprived multi-faith urban areas such as East London, high property values and the excess of demand over supply for places to worship mean that many congregations worship in purely functional buildings, such as modern multi-purpose community centres, school halls and converted shops or warehouses. Though such buildings usually have little or no historical or architectural merit or symbolism in their design, even they can come to be regarded as sacred space.

Sometimes the implicit dualism of regular congregation members conflicts with a more integrated vision of religious leaders and community activists. For example, the following two quotations are taken from interviews with a Methodist minister and Muslim lay activist who operate from buildings less than a kilometre apart in East London. The church had recently considered entering a partnership to redevelop its building for use as a multi-purpose community centre in which the congregation would retain a shared space for Sunday worship. However, the plan was rejected by the church meeting, as the minister relates:

I think the decision to retain the church building by a very considerable majority vote left me feeling punch drunk. It was indicative of where the congregation sees itself. An anecdote, and all anecdotes are simply anecdotes, but one woman says, 'Reverend, you are not going to close our building, I have been here 35 years, and I want to be buried here', and I think that indicates a mentality that I am struggling with. Someone, when they were reading back the minutes, I actually corrected them over one word, because the person reading back the minutes said, 'the destruction of our church', was

voted against. And I said 'I want that word changed'. I wasn't having the word 'destruction' in the minutes. It wasn't about destruction: it was about redeveloping the whole site.

In a similar vein the Muslim community activist talks of his struggle to convince the congregation of the need and appropriateness of developing youth work at the local mosque:

Taking on any new projects is quite difficult because most people are very religiously minded and they can only contribute what is on the religious side ... for example we have spent nearly half a million pounds, originating from within the Muslim community, in the building of the mosque and developing it, so that we have washing facilities, and we have renovated almost all the structure of it. But when it comes to something that is related to the social side or cultural side there are hardly any donors, because they are only interested in the religious side.

Interviewer: Would it be possible for the mosque to organise sports activities for young people like the *gurdwara* has done?

We tried some time ago in the basement of our premises. But it was rather small and it couldn't take many at a time and then the congregation was in a head-on clash with them because they were making a hell of a noise when they wanted to pray on the floor above ... so we had to suspend that.

Where there is such dualistic thinking in a faith community, it is usually the case that 'the spiritual' takes precedence over the material or social. For example, in conversation with Sikhs there were numerous references to ritual reading of the *Guru Granth Sahib* as a centrepiece of *gurdwara* worship; Christians tended to see the Sunday congregational meeting as the main event; and Muslims stressed the ritual of five daily prayers. The more sectarian forms of all religions often make this explicit by prioritising and rewarding efforts in prayer, worship rituals and evangelism (saving souls). But even in more open and world-affirming traditions there can be an implicit assumption that the 'core business' of the faith does not include social action.

Such dualistic theologies which separate worship from welfare can be enough to prevent a religious community from 'getting its hands dirty' in social and community work. In our research we encountered such issues or tensions in all of the major faith traditions. In some cases the issue about the sacred space in places of worship had been resolved by



physically separating the social activity from the spiritual. A Sikh *gurdwara* in London had bought a separate building at the other end of the street for development as a youth and community centre, while a newly built Hindu temple in a Northern city has a worship centre with a separate entrance and distinct management structure as part of a major community centre complex which was funded in part from government regeneration bodies. Or, as an Imam from the midlands told us,

Maybe a mosque, *gurdwara* or church can't provide [a meeting place for the whole community] because it's quite obvious that it's a religious building. It's a place of worship and people might hesitate in attending that because there is this fear of the unknown. Whereas the resource centre will provide a neutral venue for people to just come in.

While this may have some advantages in avoiding the embarrassment of exposing non-believers to the evident symbols of particular faiths, it will tend to limit the amount and range of social activity that can be developed on a single site or meeting space within such a building.

On the other hand where a faith community was heavily involved in urban regeneration work, or other social action, our interviewers usually found people who had a more holistic theology, either implicit in their practice or explicitly expressed. (In fact, our sampling strategy meant that almost all the 'faith actors' we talked to were already involved in social action and therefore predisposed to think in these integrated ways, in comparison with more dualistic or 'spiritual' religious leaders.) For them the material and social world did matter and was closely linked to their understanding of the divine will or activity in the world. Some of the Sikh respondents in our research introduced us to the concept of *miri-piri*, a rhyming couplet which underlies the notion of the Sikh soldier-saint, and combines the imperative of prayer with that of political and social action. Muslim respondents tended to reject the division of sacred and secular:

In Islam you can't separate religion from the rest of the activities, it's part and parcel of life. (Muslim activist; North of England)

In the context of buildings, another Muslim social entrepreneur said:

I would advocate a halt to that process of secularisation of activities away from the synagogue or the mosque. As far as the mosque is concerned, the mosque is the centre of all activities. If you exclude

the mosque from taking direct steps in regeneration then the mosque will be a dry entity.

He went on to speak about the role of the mosque in the time of the prophet as a centre where not only prayer but politics, welfare, education, and sports such as wrestling took place. Christian ministers of many different denominations also rejected the dualism that is implicit in English popular culture and expressed in the dictum that ‘religion and politics should not mix’.

Yes ... fundamentally worship is our primary core activity—prayer and study. But then I don’t think we would make a distinction ... we want to deal with the whole person in following Jesus. I mean He made no particular distinction between healing someone physically on the one hand and their spiritual well-being on the other. These are part of the whole human being. (Vicar; North of England)

Traditionally, churches have *either* gone on evangelism *or* social action, and seem to look at each other across a great gulf. For me it’s all about wholeness and integrity in ministry. A lot of my more Pentecostal and charismatic partners would say, ‘No we are pointing people towards heaven, the earth is fading away, we are in the last days, let’s just help people to be saved, and get your ticket ready’. Now I don’t think that’s the right approach. (Evangelical Baptist minister; East London)

This is my belief and people do need to be helped spiritually, as physically, mentally, people need to be helped and some people need a lot of spiritual help and this is vitally important. The Bible says that if we see our brother destitute of daily food and we do not give them, if we know that they are hungry and call them and pray for them and do not give them the food, it is no good. So, although we give them the food, they need prayer, they need food. (Black Pentecostal pastor; Midlands)

One [relevant theme] would be the idea of the incarnation; you know, a Christian understanding that Christ became human and lived amongst us. (Christian community work manager; London)

Reflecting on such conversations we can see that an unchallenged dualistic view of the religious life is a strong disincentive to community involvement, while an implicit or explicit conviction that this world matters to God is the usual prerequisite to social involvement by people of faith. In one sense this contradicts commonplace understandings

about secularisation. One common assumption is that the church or mosque gets involved in social work as part of the process of secularisation, as it seeks to make itself relevant in a world where the 'sacred canopy' no longer exists and where belief in the divine has become implausible. However, if we define secularisation in terms of religion losing influence over various spheres of social life that it once controlled, then the real secularisers are the dualists who by concentrating on the metaphysical and spiritual realms, leave the material and social realms to the mercy of secularists, the market, the state and the devil!

### **Other aspects of implicit theology**

There are a number of other areas where implicit theologies widely held in faith communities have a negative impact on efforts to foster community development and combat social exclusion. Full discussion of these issues will need to be left for a subsequent article. However, it is worth stating that the key issues include:

The implicit assumption of 'original sin' means that children and young people are seen as in need of socialisation and domestication by means of the transmission of religious belief and values, as people 'in becoming', rather than as valuable beings in their own right. In our research we found it hard to access young people to talk to, and although older faith leaders often spoke about the needs of youth, and their desire to provide them with educational, religious and leisure activities, we also often detected negative stereotypes of young people who were seen as godless, dangerous and out of control.

The implicit patriarchy of religious discourse, which ascribes male characteristics to the Divine, favours male dominated forms of leadership in religious institutions. Religions' attempts to control and regulate sexuality (especially female and gay sexuality) may be especially significant here. Although there are many examples of women taking an important role in religious life and especially in practical community action, patriarchal theologies, coupled with structures of economic and social gender inequality, arguably prevent women from participating fully in urban regeneration, especially at decision-making levels. In our research we found that most of the time we were talking to male leaders of faith communities and the small numbers of women we spoke to often had very different and critical perspectives to the men, and about male priorities in urban regeneration. Male respondents

often claimed that women had an important role, and equal say in the activities of their religious organisations, and then went on to tell us how the ladies took charge of the catering and child-care arrangements, or were not permitted to join in certain spiritual activities. As women become more aware and more organized as a significant movement within most faith communities we cannot expect this situation to continue.

Competitiveness between faith communities and religious organisations may have deep historical roots and reflect explicit theological conflicts or differences of opinion. However, it is the implicit theology of religious identity as a 'chosen people' that often leads to the creation of ethnic or communal boundaries which make equal opportunities and community cohesion policies almost impossible to put into practice. Thus, in our research few people wanted to mention theological controversies such as the doctrine of justification by faith, which was fundamental to the split between Catholics and Protestants at the time of the Reformation, or the doctrine of the Trinity, which is anathema to Jews and Muslims. However, we did encounter some implicit evidence of inter-communal hostility, for example between Muslims and Christians, in the context of recent global events and of riots in segregated areas of cities in the North of England. Even more striking were some of the communal conflicts defined on religious lines between Sikhs, Hindus and Muslims, especially in interviews taking place in the months when India and Pakistan were on the brink of war over Kashmir. In urban regeneration, competition for resources between ethnic and faith communities, and bidding for funding by secular and religious projects, may in fact make matters worse.

Finally, there is an implicit assumption in most religions that God(s) favour(s) disciples by answers to prayer and the provision of material blessings. Despite the persistence in most religions of a contradictory ascetic theme, which applies to the most holy disciples, the offer of health, prosperity and success draws believers to forms of religion in which they are essentially consumers, rather than producers. While their lips may endorse the value of charity, advocacy for the vulnerable and humble service, the willingness to make sacrifices is generally limited. Even generous service may be undertaken for mixed motives, such as the search for approval and status, or the hope of salvation in the world to come. The corollary of this may be that individual self-help and self-improvement are valued at the expense of mutuality, and

even that the poor are patronised as victims, or blamed as authors of their own misfortune. In short, it takes an unusual and radical form of religion to motivate people to become involved in the type of community development which is necessary for the regeneration of deprived urban neighbourhoods.

## **Conclusion**

The research reported on in this paper has identified that there are substantial numbers of individuals who are motivated by and organised around their faith, who are deeply engaged both informally and in formal programmes in the regeneration of the neighbourhoods in which they live and work. For most of them their involvement is a natural and reflex response; they have seen a need and on the basis of implicit values and beliefs have sought to do something about it.

We have identified some common core values such as community, peace, neighbour love, social justice and equality which are affirmed by activists in all the faith traditions. Many activists, particularly Christians and some Muslims, if they are well versed in their Scriptures and theological reflection upon them, are well able to give a theological rationale for their work, often relating texts to these common core values. Crucial to many of them is the ability to make links between the text and the context, to be able to say 'this is that' on the basis of long and deep rooted involvement in neighbourhood communities.

However, by reading between the lines of their accounts, and understanding the context in which urban regeneration work takes place, it is possible to see how these attempts are often contested, or, more likely, ignored, by the majority of members of urban faith communities. Indeed, many more faith-based groups are not involved in community action. In part this is a function of social processes, most specifically of social exclusion, consumerism and the struggles of the poor for economic sustainability. And even among the faith actors and projects in our sample we were able to detect some implicit values and theologies which contradict stated values of social inclusion and/or the teachings of the scriptural traditions/founders of the faith, such as prejudice against young people, women and members of other faith communities.

However, as we have argued and hopefully demonstrated, fully engaged faith commitments such as those we discovered among our

activists, run counter to the mainstream and popular implicit assumptions about religion. The latter tend to favour a domesticated spirituality that does not engage with politics, and tokenistic charitable giving, rather than informing, radical, empowering social action that will challenge long established forms of social exclusion and discrimination. The lessons for government are clear. In the first place it should not expect too much from the religious sector in terms of service delivery or active citizenship. Secondly where faith communities, religious organisations and individual believers do get involved, government should not expect calm seas or an easy ride. For the kind of faith that drives believers to social action is always likely to retain a prophetic cutting edge, and perceived injustice or dishonesty cannot expect to escape unchallenged.

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