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Faith, Policy & Action: reconsidering religion and social justice – how faith communities have been drawn in to the delivery of government policies

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Religious faith may seem an unlikely starting point for social justice. Religion, along with politics, is frequently cited as a cause of division, oppression and even war, rather than social justice and the social goods associated with it. It is said that religion and politics are certainly two topics best avoided at dinner parties, as I have observed elsewhere (Dinham 2009). Yet religious faith has most emphatically re-entered the public lexicon in recent years and is seen, at least from some public policy perspectives, as a force for social good. In particular, faith communities have come to be constructed in policies about them specifically as resources for social justice. This is surprising to many, and in this paper I will explore why, and how this has come about.

My main focus is to consider the things faith communities *do* in relation to social justice, and the challenges and dilemmas posed. Some of these are about the practices of doing social justice. Others are about their implications for the faiths which participate.

In exploring what faiths 'do' for, or about, social justice, I will also pay regard to the other part of the equation in the title of this conference – inequalities. This has been a flashpoint for faiths in public policy terms and I will look at how and why this should be the case. Some of this is about attitudes and practices towards women, minority groups and human rights. Another element is the differentials in power and capacity between faith traditions and I will consider how this risks consolidating existing proxy inequalities, especially race and class, by reflecting them in faith based engagement too.

In summary, my starting point is that, whilst faith may seem to many an unlikely candidate for social justice, a great deal of faith-based social justice activity is going on. While this may be helpful, it is not always welcomed and in this sense it unsettles what had been assumed to be the 'secular settlement'. Yet a bold and explicit policy context has emerged which engages faiths as civil society actors, and whatever the contests and debates about its legitimacy, it exists and demands a thoughtful response.

Faiths and a Tradition of Social Justice?

When we talk about social justice in the context of faiths, we take on debates about what social justice means which are already complex and which are consolidated and extended by the faith dimension. The idea in contemporary form has been expanded upon most resoundingly by John Rawls **SLIDE** where the proposal is made that the just society is one with which we would agree its shape prior to knowing our place within it. But the idea has religious roots and was first elaborated in its modern form by the moral theologian John A. Ryan, **SLIDE** who initiated the concept of a living wage as a Godly imperative. It also goes right back to Aquinas **SLIDE** and, earlier in to Plato **SLIDE** and Homer **SLIDE**. It has evolved as a central tenet of community development practice, too, much of which arises in the context of liberation theology. So I'll give a brief review of some of the religious roots of social justice thinking to set a context.

It is an idea which is central to Catholic social teaching where it is rooted in biblical text, which is seen as calling the people of God to lives of justice and mercy, compassion and hope, solidarity and peace. Over the centuries, in response to changing conditions and situations, the magisterium (the teaching authority of the Church - the bishops, popes, and councils) have responded to the changing circumstances of the human condition with ever more detailed doctrine on subjects including economics, war and peace and human sexuality. For example in **SLIDE** *Laborum Exercens* (*On Human Work*, Pope John Paul II, 1981), Christians everywhere are exhorted to be involved in the transformation of existing socio-economic systems. John Paul II presents work as a fundamental dimension of human existence through which the "social question" must be viewed. He argues that the meaning of work can only be properly understood when the dignity of labour is taken as an underlying premise. Social justice from this perspective is a reflection of the divine purpose, therefore. It is played out in many charitable activities which are often enormously well resourced. In recent years some of these have clashed with competing views of social justice, most notably in the work of Catholic adoption agencies which do not want to work with potential same sex parents for religious reasons.

Anglicanism, too, has a long tradition of social justice work which has been expressed very practically in the contemporary context in the *Faith in the City* movement. **SLIDE** This challenged the logic of the market economy in the context of inner city poverty in the 1980s and led to Margaret Thatcher's description of the Church of England in 1986 as 'Marxist'. The Church Urban Fund continues to make grants to projects in areas of urban disadvantage and some of these have been quite innovative – almost risky – for example, funding for a health and well-being traveling health bus for street prostitutes in a city in the north of England.

In fact it has been argued that we can find social justice aspects woven in to all

the major faith traditions in the principles of community service, cooperation, peace-making, and the acceptance of others. There is a major danger here, of course, in oversimplifying, finding similarities in language where different meanings remain. Nevertheless, Oliver McTernan concludes that there are 'important resemblances in belief that exist between the mainstream world religions' (McTernan, 2003, p148).

So Judaism, too, has a strong contemporary social justice narrative. In *To Heal a Fractured World: The Ethics of Responsibility*, **SLIDE** Rabbi Jonathan Sacks claims that social justice has a central place in Judaism. One of Judaism's most distinctive and challenging ideas is its ethics of responsibility reflected in the concepts of simcha ("gladness" or "joy"), tzedakah ("the religious obligation to perform charity and philanthropic acts"), chesed ("deeds of kindness"), and tikkun olam ("repairing the world").

In the case of Islam, it is true that a binary distinction has commonly been made between the dar al- Islam (abode of Islam) and the dar al-harb (abode of war) – the world of Islam and the world of others. The ummah constitutes a community of specifically Muslim faith. However, the Qur'an also refers to a wider community, qawmi ('my people'), which involves a fraternal relationship between Muslims and other people, regardless of their beliefs, and a wider respect for diversity endorsed by the Prophet (see Hussain, 2004). Islam holds as a central principle the 'oneness' of humanity and shares with Christianity an understanding of God as compassionate and merciful and the obligation of believers as free moral agents to work for peace and justice. Regarding peace, the Qur'an rejects conversion by force, insisting that there be no compulsion in religion (Qur'an 22:256). And, in terms of justice, zakat, the paying of alms (or charity) tax to benefit the poor, is one of the Five Pillars of Islam.

Similarly, a fundamental tenet for Sikhs is the essential unity of humanity and the equality of all people before God. Through personal and collective perseverance, Sikhs are expected to develop in honesty, compassion, generosity, patience and humility. The practice of kar-sewa involves selfless voluntary service for religious activities.

Generalisation is especially difficult in the case of Hinduism which is neither strongly theistic nor unified or codified. However, Hinduism upholds 'the divine qualities of the common good. It sees the world as having 'a common ancestry' (McTernan, 2003, p133) and Brahman, the universal principle, as including 'all the diversity of the cosmos as part of itself' (Ward, 2004, p 134). The teachings of dharma are that the bliss of enlightenment is reached by valuing all beings more than ourselves. In social contexts, Ghandi challenged the spiritual sanction given by Hindu tradition for the divisions and inequalities of untouchability. He saw the essence of Hinduism as being captured in an Upanishad scripture verse that has been paraphrased as saying: 'God is the Lord who pervades the whole universe and all of it is his. Therefore, you must renounce the world because it is not yours

and then enjoy and work in it because it is his and he wishes you to co-operate with him in the destruction of evil' (Zaehner, 1962, p 181).

This brief sketch indicates some important social justice themes among faith traditions. All have commitments to peace, justice, honesty, service, personal responsibility and forgiveness – at least in their theologies. In particular, all faith traditions contain the hope and possibility of tolerance, and indeed a respect and obligation to 'the other'.

Yet we must also recognise that religion can be a powerful source of division. McTernan recognises that 'competing claims on the exclusivity or superiority of one interpretation of truth over the other have often led to abandonment or outright violation of these ['connecting'] principles' (McTernan, 2003, p 148). **SLIDE** Expressed in the starkest terms: 'There is brutal, callous, intolerant religion and there is compassionate, kind and tolerant religion' (Ward, 2004, p 121).

Clearly religious notions of social justice can be controversial and some have been criticized precisely for their *injustice*, especially to women, gay people and certain minorities – including each other. **SLIDE** The specifics are certainly debatable – and we should debate at the level of the specific. After all that is what really matters in the experience and outworking of justice and injustice in the lives of individuals, families and communities. When considering the role of faiths in social justice, the specifics must be explored and, where they seem to serve injustice, they must be challenged.

But in more general terms, as an orientation, social justice is based on the concepts of human rights and equality and involves a greater degree of socio-economic egalitarianism through a range of approaches: progressive taxation, income redistribution, or even property redistribution, policies aimed toward achieving that which developmental economists refer to as more equality of opportunity and equality of outcome than may currently exist in some societies or are available to some classes in a given society. It is interested in both structural critiques and individual ones. In these contexts we shall see that faith based activity currently focuses rather more on symptoms than causes in the things they do to address such issues and the structural has decreased in importance for faith communities. I noted this in my analysis of the successor report to *Faith in the City - Faithful Cities*. There I argue that the Church of England has shifted from a highly structural stance in relation to economic and especially social policy in the mid-1980s to a much more consensual one in the mid-2000s in a way which accepts the logic of 1989 and after, to use the Giddens phrase. Perhaps this is a reflection of a wider disinclination to the macro-structural in policy-making and practice generally.

We should also note that redistribution of wealth and power may be a *right* aspiration but that is not always the same as it being a *good* one, as Plato points

out in his exploration of Kallipolis, and as Zimbabwe shows us today. Likewise, religious moralities and doctrines may have as their goal the goodness and justice of the world but, as Plato reminds us, the relationship between justice and goodness is not automatic and religious views of what is good and what is right may not always chime with those of wider society or be in its interests.

A Public Context for Religious Faith

Religious faith has re-emerged in public policy after a long period in which it had been assumed that it was off the public agenda. This assumption was rooted in various versions of the secularism thesis. But this is complicated - like faith, 'secularism' is a term with a broad public currency which at the same time lacks in public critique and nuance. I want first to consider this briefly here so as to make an intellectual space for public faith in the first place.

Coming from the Latin 'saeculum', 'secular' denotes the distinction between the temporal and the atemporal and thereby implies a turn away from the religiously 'beyond' preoccupations of the religious age, towards the worldly imminent ones associated with the age of science and reason. In fact these distinctions can be traced way further back than Kant and the other key figures of the enlightenment who are often supposed to be its originators. Religious figures such as Augustine, Anselm, Abelard and Aquinas all ask versions of the question about the relationship between reason and faith. Indeed, Aquinas has a volume on the question 'Is theology science'? It is not solely the territory of rational philosophers.

In addition, these are specifically Christian and Abrahamic binaries, anyway, arising out of ontological views of a fallen universe and a perfect God, and in turn an imminent and a transcendent realm. Secularism can be challenged in the first instance, then, for its philosophical one-sidedness – it is an idea which emerges in response to and against the Abrahamic and especially Christian traditions. It has less currency with other traditions including the polytheistic and atheistic traditions of Hinduism and Buddhism, for example, to which the idea of secularism has little or less traction. This matters in an age of migration, trans-nationalism and globalization. A simple assertion of the public realm as 'secular' will not wash in such a context.

Many have also challenged explanatory versions of the secularism thesis which locate it as a process arising out of urbanization and technology. They point to the USA, where, despite hyper-urbanisation and technological sophistication, levels of reported religiosity remain very high indeed (see Norris & Inglehardt YEAR). While we may associate these processes in Europe with a decline in religiosity, it simply does not look right to say that medical and other technological advances, and dislocation from small rural communities and the pulpits which dominated them, can give an adequate account of the declining public role of faiths.

Another account which is frequently given is that the rise of state social policy after the second world war took the philanthropic activities of many faith groups out of their hands and professionalized them instead in the machineries of government welfare (see Prochaska 2006). But the evidence is that faith based social action persisted throughout the hay-day of welfarism and that, in any case, this was a project of positive social intervention rather than the concerted rejection of public faith. The effects may have been to diminish the social significance of religion but this does not imply the intention to do so and there is no automatic read-across to secularism as an explicit value or project.

Either way, the shift from Keynesian to monetarist fiscal policy after the mid-1970s led to the ever-increasingly mixed economy of welfare such that faith based activities have been participating in the delivery of public welfare services both in the UK and the US in very significant numbers, as well as in international development through NGOs.

Noting the persistence of religious faith in both statistical data and in these other evidences of faith based social action, **SLIDE** Peter Berger has one answer: he updates his view that "by the 21st century, religious believers are likely to be found only in small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture" (1968) with the alternative, that "the world today is as furiously religious as it ever was" (1996).

Others point out that 'secular' thinking is itself a slippery notion anyway. Where does 'the secular' begin and end? Who or what *is* secular and how is the distinction maintained as we move between the spaces and places of our multiple identities and locations in the world? For some, society is infused already with religious thinking, both in the cultural legacies inherited from religious traditions and in the practices and outlooks of religious people (Brown 2006, for example) who are already everywhere.

So what is a secular society anyway? Is it a society undergoing *processes* of secularization, and, if so, what are these processes? Are they desirable? And, if they are happening, does this necessarily enjoin a *stance* of secular*ism* which requires or demands, as a point of principle, that faiths play less and less a part in the public realm? If so, how 'hard' or 'soft' a stance should we take, and how should we enforce it? We see these debates played out in the differing contexts of France, Turkey and the USA in particular. At the same time, how do we account for the *values* and beliefs inherent in the secular stance itself? Do we really think it possible to claim secularism as a position of neutrality which stands above the fray of public debate and contest? And what account do we give, in turn, of the values underpinning liberalism and neo-liberalism which infuse the contemporary social?

Faith and Public Policy in a Context of Ambivalence

The assumptions of secularism provide the dominant, or at least the noisiest, context for public faith and it makes this context one which is highly ambivalent. There is by now a widely embedded public expectation that faith is a private matter, cut off from the neutrality of public spaces such that, to cite a hoary but indicative example, Alistair Campbell could say that 'Tony doesn't do God'. The public language of revelation is displaced with one of knowledge: ethics are replaced by legislation, and myth with science. At the same time the long cultural legacy of Christianity, Islam and Judaism and, in the case of the UK especially, a shorter but also impactful encounter with Hinduism, Buddhism and Sikhism, are in evidence everywhere – in philosophy, art, drama, mathematics, poetry, music, law, and ethics.

But alongside the rise of a popular tale of the decline of religious faith, the census data nevertheless have two thirds of people in Britain saying they are Christians. Non-belief is massively in the minority according to that measure, even if there has been a shift from 'believing to belonging' (Davie 1996).

Of course, the data are disputed and it has been observed that "sociologists are always suspicious of statistics…even more [so] of religious statistics" (Davie 1999 p45). Nevertheless this is not a simple story of the decline of religion. What does seem clear, if anything, is that it is less and less convincing to appeal to secularism as an explanation or a value-base or context for faith as a public category. It may be broadly *available* as a public discourse but that is not the same as it being deeply embedded. And certainly public policy reflects a resurgence in public interest in faith. This is challenged by some, notably for example the British Humanist Association which describes itself as 'campaigning against religious privilege'. The public role of faith requires our more considered attention in these contexts.

I suggest that there are basically three related strands in policy engagement with religious faith in the UK which ender it public. Each has something to say to social justice and vice versa. These are: welfare services; new forms of governance; and community cohesion. These are pragmatic policy agenda which construct faith as a public category in very specific ways. Together they raise a set of very specific questions, as we shall see.

Welfare

In the UK, the post-1997 Labour government stated that it is "increasingly conscious of the importance of effective co-operation with faith communities" (Home Office 2004, foreword) and that it saw them as "gateways to access the tremendous reserves of energy and commitment of their members, which can be of great importance to the development of civil society" (Home Office 2004 p7). This starts with government's understanding of the role of faiths as repositories of resources - buildings, staff, volunteers and relationships - which have the

potential to be deployed in the direction of social benefits and community services. This extension of the mixed economy of welfare in the direction of faith communities is presented as an opportunity for faiths to engage in the delivery of services, building on an already established tradition of welfare projects and community action over a long period of time (see Prochaska 2006).

There is a body of research which shows that faith communities have long been highly active in social and community action initiatives at community level. In this they stand in a long tradition of working with people, particularly in disadvantaged areas, to achieve change and development. It has been argued that this arises out of "an holistic, faith based view of communities which values and dignifies all people" (Finneron et al 2002:12). This tradition is, in one sense, timeless. Indeed, all of the Abrahamic faiths invoke their followers to give service to one another in community. Thus it is that John Wesley, the eighteenth century revivalist, proclaimed that believers should not only 'earn all you can' and 'save all you can' but also 'give all you can' (Wesley, 1771, vol.1, pp.705-12).

In another sense, religious or faith-based service provision is in many ways rooted in Victorian philanthropy, when society "boasted millions of religious associations providing essential services and a moral training for citizenry..." (Prochaska 2006 p2)[1]. The Victorians, in this view, "believed that religion and the public good were inextricably linked" (Prochaska 2006 p3) and that "charity could only be effectively exercised under the influence of sacred principle" (Prochaska 2006 p3).

In many ways the Victorian period has been seen as a golden age for faith based social action when faiths (or rather, Christian traditions) were not just active, but were leaders in providing services in response to need. This was a time when there were "2,349 subsidiary associations to dispense the Bible" (Prochaska 2006 p17) and the "myriad parish societies…had membership numbers that varied from under ten to hundreds" (Prochaska 2006 p17-18). At the same time, though there was debate about religion and faith more widely, this was not the white-hot period of the Enlightenment when the nature, existence and purposes of God were widely and heatedly disputed in ways which affected the very political foundations of society. Rather, this was a time when the idea of God was relatively settled, in England at least: God was Christian, male and English. The role of the churches in social action was, in this context, seen as both legitimate and necessary. From a missiological point of view it was, too, seen as no less than the duty of people of faith to provide for need. Thus for deToqueville, Christianity was "not an opiate, nor a morality of slaves but a religion of self-discipline and personal service that answered social and political needs" (in Prochaska 2006 p26) and in his 'memoir' on pauperism written in 1835 after a visit to England, he writes that one of the merits of Christianity is that it makes charity a divine virtue.

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[1] It should be noted that faith based philanthropy in this period is almost exclusively Christian because faith in general is almost exclusively Christian at that time.

When practically every aspect of social service, from health, to the family and community development came under the auspices of central government in the period after 1945, this was a period of high idealism whose effect, despite all good intentions, was to recast the widespread, experienced and highly effective network of non-government providers, many of which were faith-based, as outside the strategic idealism of government. The needs of post-war Britain were seen as too important to be left to the well-meaning amateurs and giving and philanthropy changed accordingly.

But in turn, the dawning realisation that the post-war welfare consensus had not resulted in the eradication of society's 'five great evils' led to renewed enthusiasm for community-based policies rooted in neighbourhood and self-help – precisely the sorts of work faith-based providers had been so good at. Much of the new community work which emerged was conducted in neighbourhood level projects and many of those were initiated by faiths. This was in part a result of the Church of England's parish system which ensured that there were long-standing staff, buildings, relationships and resources in every area of the country, even where other agencies had withdrawn, and this continues to be the case.

But it was the shift to "market led approaches in the 1980's and early 1990's" (Mayo et al 2003 p28) which really opened up new spaces for faith based activities and was characterised by a focus on the economic, as opposed to community, development of local areas and the 'trickle down' approach to wealth. Galbraith critiqued this in "the less than elegant metaphor that if one feeds the horse enough oats, some will pass through to the road for the sparrow" (Galbraith 1992 p108). But it also marked a conscious shift towards provision of all sorts of services, not by government, but by voluntary sector agencies and community bodies. **SLIDE** The mixed economy has continued to extend and it is very difficult currently to draw hard lines between the private, public and voluntary sectors at all.

Figure 10: A Chronology of Phases of Service Provision in the UK

19th Century	Post World War II	1980 onwards	1997 onwards
Faiths	Government	Government & the Voluntary Sector	Government, Voluntary Sector and Faiths
Philanthropy	Welfarism	Mixed Economy of Welfare	Extended Mixed Economy of Welfare

Faiths & the Third Sector

There is a thriving grey literature on faiths and 'Third Sector' or community development activities and this reflects the significance and value of these activities in the radically mixed economy. Resources published include *Neighbourhood Renewal in London: the role of faith communities* (GLE/LCG 2002), *Faith and Community: a good practice guide for local authoritie*s (LGA Publications 2002), *Faith Makes Communities Work* (Smith & Randolph-Horne 2000) and *Angels and Advocates: church social action in Yorkshire and the Humber* (CRCYH 2002). There has also been a growing tendency for faith groups, especially at regional level, to conduct impact evaluations, especially economic impact studies.

We conducted a national review of this literature in the UK in 2007 (Dinham 2007) and this demonstrates the breadth and scale of what faiths are doing in community initiatives in England. In the South East, *Beyond Belief* (March 2004) claims that there at least two community action projects for each faith centre in the region. In the **SLIDE** East, *Faith in the East of England* (July 2005) identifies 180,000 beneficiaries of faith based community development. **SLIDE** In London, *Neighbourhood Renewal in London: the role of faith communities* (May 2002) identifies 7000 projects and 2200 faith buildings deployed to the social 'good'. **SLIDE** In the West Midlands, *Believing in the Region* (May 2006) reports that 80% of faith groups deliver some kind of service to the wider community. **SLIDE** In the North West, *Faith in England's North West* (November 2003) shows that faith communities are running more than 5000 social action projects and that faith communities are generating income of £69m - £94m per annum. **SLIDE** In Yorkshire and the Humber, *Count Us In* (2000) shows that in Hull 90% of churches are involved in social action and *Angels and Advocates* (November 2002) reports that there are 6500 social action projects in churches. **SLIDE** In the South West, *Faith in Action* (June 2006) demonstrates that 165,000 people are supported by faith groups in the region by 4762 activities. **SLIDE** In the East Midlands, *Faith in Derbyshire* (May 2006) claims that, on average, churches run nine community activities each. **SLIDE** A 2005 study commissioned by the North West Development Agency analysed the impact on quality of life and economic prosperity in the region by measuring the value of faith communities' buildings and volunteers. The report estimates that overall faith communities in the Northwest generate between £90.7million and £94.9 million per annum to civil society in the region (North West Regional Development Agency, 2005). A more recent report examines faith's contribution to social and economic wellbeing in the same region (RWRDA, 2009). With the South East region about to undertake a similar study, such an approach suggests there is a growing emphasis on the value of measuring faith communities' financial contributions.

Taking all the self-reported activities in each of these research reports together, there is a very significant amount of faith-based community and social action taking place in each of the types of work listed in the table below. **SLIDE**

Advice and counseling	Health
Alcohol abuse	Health & Fitness
Anti-Racism	Health & sport
Arts & Music	Homelessness & deprivation
Cafes and drop-ins	Housing
Campaigning	Local forums of faith
Child related	Local issues
Children, young people and families	Lunch clubs & coffee mornings
Community support (credit unions, drop-ins, counselling, education, drugs, homelessness, crime prevention, ex-offenders)	Meeting places
	Neighbourhood projects
	Older people
Crime Prevention	Partnerships (services)
Disability	Partnerships (strategic)
Drug abuse	Refugees
Economics/shops/sales	Religious based groups
Education & training	Social activities
Employment & training	Social capital
Employment/social enterprise	Social enterprise
Enterprise	Substance abuse
Environment	Support groups (prison/hospital)
Faith buildings	Support network
Family support	Uniformed
Finance, debt counselling	Vulnerable groups
Governance	Women
Hard to reach groups	Young people

The review also shows that the majority of faith based community activity takes place through projects and associations, as the pye charts show.

Parallel case study research shows that much of this work is rooted in community development principles and practices and this is the dominant story. These are projects bubbling up from the grassroots in very local areas, many working in areas no bigger than a collection of streets and parks. They are a self-help response by communities for communities, helped out with usually very small amounts of grant from community chests and similar funds. They are interested in the political in so far as it is personal – they recognize inequality and social injustice in their own lives and in the lives of others around them, and act to address them by providing services and spaces which restore dignity and meet needs. In these ways they are social justice activities.

But we should note that what we cannot know from these data is who is contributing what and how. What we see is an overall 'faith' contribution which is clearly significant but conceals, as it is presented, differences in power, wealth and capacity between different faith traditions and organizations. For example, the Church of England employs Social Responsibility officers in Boards of Social Responsibility in every diocese in the country. They have the capacity to develop projects and resource them with staff and networks of volunteers in ways which some other traditions may only dream of. Among Christian denominations, the Catholics, Methodists and Baptists certainly also have well developed social action structures and resources. The Salvation Army is another example of a

highly developed organizational capacity. But what can be said of non-conformist denominations, house churches and black majority churches? It is probable that they, too, engage in social and community activities and some may be backed with significant sums of money. There are national and European bodies like the Evangelical Alliance which wield considerable wealth and political influence on behalf of their members, for example, but the community-level research does not identify which, what or to what extent. And these are the Christian traditions only. What about multifaith, interfaith and single other faith activities? How do their structures, approaches, participants and activities differ and with what impacts in terms of opportunity, fairness and empowerment? The evidence is tantalizing. But we simply do not know in sufficient detail about the social justice implications in any of the three areas which pertain: who is participating in service development and provision; who is using services; and what factors leave some people out? And is the work symptom-focused or more structural, or both?

What is also clear about faiths and social action in community projects is that some faiths are particularly well placed to engage because they maintain a long-term and very rooted presence in every area, even where many other agencies may have withdrawn. Others draw on their long histories as providers of community support through established charitable organisations. But it is possible – if not probable – that the distribution of wealth and power amongst faith traditions results in the greater participation of some than others in this respect too.

Another aspect of this is who uses faith based initiatives and their services in communities. It is almost always a condition of grant that services be provided without prejudice and case study research strongly indicates that faith-based services are predominantly open to all, regardless of faith. But there may be cases where they are restricted, even if that is informally through cultural barriers and a sense of their inaccessibility.

Others have observed that there may be instances where it is appropriate for services to be offered exclusively, to single faith groups, for example. A Muslim women's group in North London argues for this for example, saying that without them some constituencies simply won't be reached by anyone else. In this example this is by no means as sinister as it might sound – this is a group which celebrates modesty rather than feeling oppressed by it and wishes to preserve this aspect in their public engagements and encounters.

It is important that research be carried out to find out which traditions are doing what and for whom, to track inequalities in service provision and service use as a result of capacity differentials, which can be significant inhibitors of social justice.

But there is a bigger picture too. The first is that engagement in a mixed economy of welfare has been criticised for enjoining market methods and values

which risk commodifying faith-based activity. Luke Bretherton has noted this in the context of Christian community organizing. Philip Goodchild provides an important but under-read critique of the extension of markets to everything in his book Capitalism and Religion: the price of piety (Goodchild, 2002). He suggests that market capitalism has become the dominant form of social interconnection. He argues that this displacement of religion has left no common conduit for the ethical and that religion is the most likely candidate for the restoration of this function.
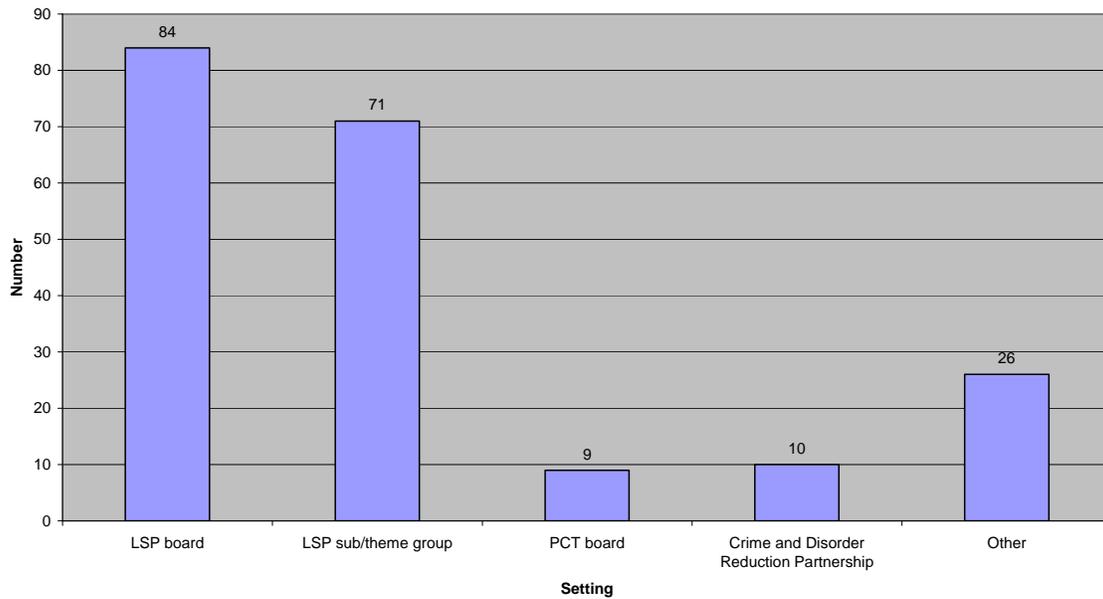
The grants culture, which is effectively a market culture, also risks faiths being drawn in to the sorts of competitive processes which could set them up against one another in the pursuit of funds and grants. Though this may be a legitimate and appropriate aspect of public activities for some, it is also the case that success in competitive processes depends again upon the power and capacity of competitors. Some traditions will certainly fall behind and existing inequality is likely to be extended. At the same time, some of the collaborative work between traditions remains somewhat fragile and many have chosen to make themselves vulnerable by daring to open up dialogue. Some of the competitive processes and methods of a commodified civil society might threaten that dialogue by setting people up in competition rather than partnership.

The second 'big picture' issue is the depoliticisation of faith and social justice which sees it recast from critiquing causes – poverty, inequality, education, and so on – to addressing its symptoms through community-based service provision. As the community data (above) seem to suggest, a great deal of social action is taking place which works with the individual and local impoverishments of injustice. But the big narratives and critiques seem to have dropped away.
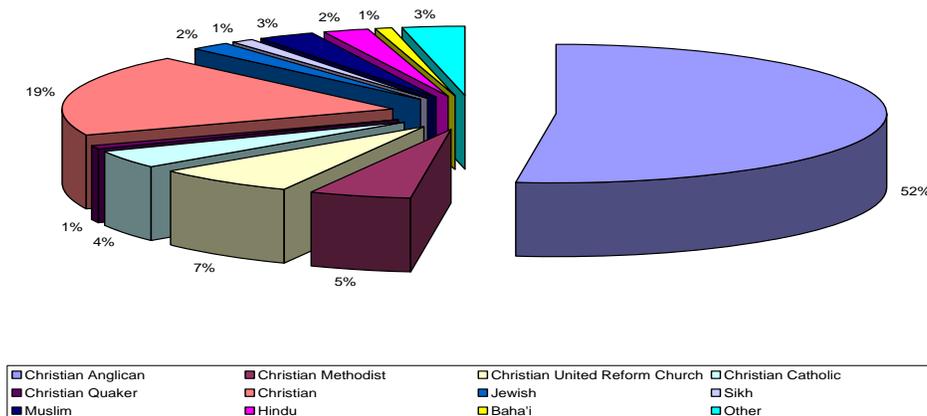
Participative Governance

Alongside these social and community activities there has been an extension of new forms of participative governance to include faiths (amongst others) in a broad-based civil society rooted in 'active citizenship'. In the context of the UK's New Labour governments this has been another aspect of the new welfare settlement, rooted in the infamous aphorism 'rights with responsibilities'. It seeks to recast people away from passive dependency upon welfare and towards being its co-constructors and deliverers. This claims to see more people taking part in decision-making and activities affecting the areas in which they live. This in turn, it is anticipated, will strengthen the work ethic and skills for employment and lead to lower rates of unemployment. It will also plug the democratic deficit by making decision-making local and relevant. Neighbourhood boards, local strategic partnerships (LSPs) and regional assemblies are all examples of this sort of 'active citizenship' governance and they are all examples of where faiths have been increasingly encountered in public space. **SLIDE** This slide shows some evidence of where faith groups are participating in such governance settings.

Faith Representation by Setting

It is followed by another showing the breakdown of participation by faith tradition.

Representation on LSPs by Faith Tradition

Christian Anglican	Christian Methodist	Christian United Reform Church	Christian Catholic
Christian Quaker	Christian	Jewish	Sikh
Muslim	Hindu	Baha'i	Other

The presence of faith communities is founded on what faiths are presumed to have to say about community after a long-term dominance of the market under the New Right. It also rests on a presumption that a traditionally socialist response to the resulting social disintegration which was observed is politically and economically impossible and unnecessary. The Third Way instead "accepts

the logic of 1989 and after" (Giddens 2000 p27) and proposes a post-Soviet reformed alternative of recasting individuals as citizens through active democratic engagement – which is played out here in the extension of new participative forms of governance. Their role in challenging the body politic may be compromised by their enlistment to it, however.

Faiths are participants at the public table because they are regarded as good, already, at the things which make it valuable. The data show that faiths are already particularly effective as 'active citizens' in terms of participation in public activities. The UK Home Office's Citizenship Survey found that 23% of people participate as volunteers in a faith-based setting (Home Office, 2005). Within this, the proportion is higher among women than men and higher among minority ethnic groups than White citizens (63% of Black people and 59% of Asian people) (Home Office, 2005). While religious affiliation on its own makes little difference, the data show that those who actively practice their faith are more likely than others to volunteer. A similar pattern can be detected in relation to civic engagement more generally. Rates of participation in consultations and lobbying, and involvement in decision-making bodies (Home Office 2005; National Council for Voluntary Organisations 2007) are higher for those actively practicing a faith. And individual rates of participation are reflected in collective engagement too in the range and extent of community level projects they operate. If faiths are such sites of activity already, how much more can they contribute by their inclusion in and harnessing to formally extended forms of governance?

But there are challenges here, too. There can be problems in identifying individuals who can legitimately represent faiths in the first place. This is associated with difficulties in getting people to give their time to participate. But it has also to do with lack of clarity, sometimes with weak relationships between faiths and often a lack of skills for effective engagement on the parts both of faiths and their potential partners.

There are also more conceptual questions about what confers such legitimacy in the first place. What seems clear is that, given the sheer diversity of faiths, representation cannot claim alignment with forms of direct democracy. Rather representation is delegated or designated by general consensus and it is understood that there is little or no numerical relationship between representatives and the whole constituency of faiths. What representatives do, in these contexts, is give voice to the general issues and perspectives which having a faith might bring. The strong representatives are those trusted across traditions to assert the presence of faiths generally, not specifically, and ensure that faith is a remembered dimension at the public table.

But this is difficult. Similar issues were identified in a study of faiths' participation in neighbourhood renewal which found a number of obstacles including: **SLIDE**

"a lack of 'religious literacy' among regeneration professionals; a perception among religious groups that they are discriminated against in the allocation of funding; difficulties in engaging minorities, women and young people; some incompatibility between secular and faith definitions of appropriate gender roles and equal opportunities; and competition and sometimes conflict within, as well as between, faith groups"

<div align="right">(Farnell et al, 2003, p 39)</div>

This strategic level of engagement in policy and decision making at the local and regional levels is echoed in new forms of participation at the national, where, for example, the Faiths, Race and Cohesion Unit in Whitehall focuses on making policies affecting the role of faiths, and the 'Faith Communities Consultative Council' attempts to give voice to faiths at the heart of politics and the civil service. The Council is made up of people who in one way or another are regarded as somehow leading or representing a tradition or traditions. And yet the nature of those claims about representation varies significantly. In some cases they are clergy and therefore have some claim to 'lead' their worshipping community. What does this mean for the parts of their 'faith communities' which are outside of the worshipping domain, for example in associated groups, clubs and projects? We should not assume a linearity from worshipping communities through to social action projects acting in their names. Others are prominent commentators in their own traditions who are invited because they are well known. Their claims to represent may be disputed by some while others may legitimate their participation quite happily. In most cases they are delegated, not elected, to give voice to the concerns and interests of the groups they represent. The processes by which they form their messages are in themselves a crucial determinant of the degree to which such 'voicing' can be associated with democracy. In each of these settings the representation of faiths throws up new challenges and questions about how it can be achieved and what it should mean. How are representatives chosen? Who do they represent? What is their legitimacy? The process of addressing these questions is as likely to lead to strife and injustice as to participation as people jostle to become the voices of their tradition while others feel misrepresented, distanced or silenced.

Participation, then, may be a laudable aim – the 'hurrah' concept to which White and Pettit refer (White and Pettit 2004) – but it is also a difficult thing to achieve. At the public table to which faiths are invited, places are limited and it requires the finding of representatives to occupy them. This is one of the key challenges of extended forms of governance which require more and more participation from 'newcomers' to the public table. Inevitably there is jostling amongst people and communities of faith and the number of formal places available for voicing faiths at the public table is limited. In some cases this is negotiated with care and mutual respect, as in the establishment of many of the English regional faith forums. For example, the East of England Faiths Council (EEFC) has come in to being over a period of years in which great care has been taken to include as

wide a range of traditions as possible, to work with those whose capacity is lowest and to make relationships with others whose interest was not initially there. It has set up a community development body to take these journeys forward. The creation of the mutuality, reciprocity and trust on which the success of participation depends has been painstaking. At the same time, there have been many debates, some of which continue, about precisely who speaks for whom, both at the council and externally to other bodies on its behalf. And there is ongoing acknowledgement that the faiths council cannot claim to represent the people of faith in its region except in a delegated form. There are certainly some who feel disenfranchised by the systems of participation which have emerged and there are those who are convinced that they are not adequately or appropriately represented. In some cases this is associated with disputes with or dissent from 'leaders' in their communities. In others they arise from theological, missiological or values differences which can result in argument. At worst they have resulted in division. It is clear, then, that what form participation takes is an important consideration with regards to new forms of governance. They are associated with modes of democracy, too, since the choice of representatives and their function once chosen, determines its shape fundamentally.

And even where faiths are generally quite good at associating and at the deliberation required of participation, they are not always so good at ensuring the participation of the women, gay people and minorities amongst them. Important critiques of democracy and faith come from feminism, for example, where it is suggested that both treat women systematically as inferior. The minority faiths are also often aligned with the minority ethnicities and thus their over-representation in indices of deprivation is likely to be doubly compounded where racism is involved. We might also consider the impacts of discrimination on gay people, young people and people with disabilities in this regard too.

Community Cohesion

A third dimension in the story of public faith is the value governments have attached to faiths as potential sources of social capital and therefore of community cohesion. In the UK this has been important to a Labour government which came to power on a wave of communitarian celebration. In response to the years of Thatcherite individualism, the UK Labour government of 1997 focused intensively on Etzionian notions of community (Etzioni 1993) and of community participation. Over the years since then this was extended to the idea of the 'strengthened community', lifted up by the participation of an ever-wider cast of actors in 'civil society'. Faith groups have been embraced in this rhetoric in documents such as 'Working Together' (Home Office 2004) and, like other parts of the social, such as residents' associations and community projects, recast as members of a newly rediscovered nation 'community'. A community focused agenda for religious faith has taken shape in the document Face to Face: Side by Side – a framework for partnership in our multifaith society (CLG 2009). This

emphasizes the role of faiths in working well together in local communities, knitting together people in relationships which strengthen community and therefore society. It is rooted in principles of community development – social justice, participation, inclusion and empowerment – and in the notion of social capital, which faiths are seen as 'good at'.

But there is a flip side of the policy coin which has also developed under the theme of 'prevention of violent extremism'. The question is being asked in this strand, how can faiths in Britain be encouraged to work in their communities to strengthen British civil society and not be agitators against it? This approach is frequently criticised for 'problematising' Islam. What 'prevention and promotion' strategies seem most to have achieved, Cantle argues, is a sense of 'separateness'. It is feared that in some cases, this separateness may result in the building of "a common bond of disaffection, both within nation states and across national borders, embracing a transnational identity, rather than with their fellow citizens" (Cantle 2005 p10). It is this which is seen primarily as the threat to cohesion. And yet the UK government's approach has emerged under the banner 'Preventing Extremism Together' which starts with the premise that

> "Addressing the problem of extremist activity within communities in the UK has never been more important. Whether it is people planning terrorist attacks or attempting to subvert British values of democracy, tolerance and free speech, the Government is committed to tackling extremism head on."
>
> (Home Office 2005 p1)

The language is strong and government claims that it has been asked "to deal firmly with those prepared to engage in… extremism; and most particularly those who incite or proselytize it." (Home Office 2005 p1). It seems hardly a social justice theme, reflecting rather more an 'othering' and homogenizing of one tradition.

At the same time the rhetoric attempts to avoid the separation out of Muslims, for example in the statement that the "Muslim community in the UK is a responsible and respected part of our multi-cultural and multi-faith society and, in particular, has insisted on taking action against extremism, lest the activities of extremists in recent months taint the good reputation of the mainstream Muslim community." (Home Office 2005 p1).
And yet, in doing so, it singles Islam out as a special case. And within this, the problem of radicalisation is seen as a particular issue "for young men" (Home Office 2005 p2).

The approach is consolidated in the UK government's strategy 'Preventing Violent Extremism: winning hearts and minds" (Home Office 2007) which emphasises four approaches: 'promoting shared values'; 'supporting local solutions'; 'building civic capacity and leadership'; and 'strengthening the role of

faith institutions and leaders'. This picks up on themes across the three strands I have identified wherein the overall goal is a situation

> "whereby all communities, and particularly British Muslim communities identify themselves, and are accepted, as part of a wider British society, reject and actively condemn violent extremism, develop community capacity to deal with problems where they arise and support counter terrorism work by the police and security services"
>
> (Home Office 2007)

Yet Arun Kundnani challenges this implied rebalancing, arguing that the Prevent agenda can be shown to be primarily motivated by an 'othering' of Islam which is socially unjust and problematic. He correlates the top twenty spends from the Prevent budget with the twenty most Muslim-populated areas in the UK and shows that they directly correlate throughout. He concludes that, whatever the rhetoric, it is a generalized 'othering' of Muslims, wherever they may be and whatever they may do, which motivates policy in relation to them.

Muslim Population

Birmingham 2,413,000
Bradford 1,425,000
Tower Hamlets 1,349,000
Newham 1,197,000
Kirklees 893,000
Manchester 817,000
Waltham Forest 817,000
Brent 741,000
Ealing 741,000
Leicester 741,000
Redbridge 741,000
Hackney 741,000
Luton 665,000
Blackburn with Darwen 665,000
Enfield 665,000
Haringey 665,000
Oldham 665,000
Sheffield 665,000
Camden 665,000
Birmingham 140,033
Bradford 75,188
Tower Hamlets 71,389
Newham 59,293
Kirklees 39,312
Manchester 35,806
Waltham Forest 32,902
Brent 32,290

PreventExpenditure

Ealing 31,033
Leicester 30,885
Redbridge 28,487
Hackney 27,908
Luton 26,963
Blackburn with Darwen 26,674
Enfield 26,306
Haringey 24,371
Oldham 24,039
Sheffield 23,819
Camden,22

As a matter of social justice, the Prevent agenda clearly has its many critics. It others Muslims, echoes the 'prevent and promote' approach which characterized race policy in the 1970s and 80s, and sets faith communities up as both heroes and villains. This is experienced as contradictory in the faith settings in which social justice activities take place of the sort that dominate – in community settings at local level. They ask, how can government both celebrate us as good at community and at the same time say we're its biggest threat? The 'othering' which is enjoined tends to focus on those very communities who are already most marginalized – mainly Asian Muslims in areas of urban disadvantage. For them, social injustice is consolidated by a sort of 'faithism' alongside the racism to which they had already grown used. I overheard a version of this in action on Mile End Road just recently when two young white men accosted two Jews coming round the corner from the synagogue behind the East London mosque and called out 'Fuck off out of my area you Muslim bastards'.

Conclusions

I have considered the ways in which faith plays out in public spheres through welfare, governance and community cohesion. The evidence is that faiths are highly active as service providers in local community settings and as participants in local forms of governance. These activities make them 'active citizens' from the perspective of public policy makers. I want to suggest that faiths have much to offer to social justice and are effective in offering it. I am hopeful that the assumption that we live in a secular society, or desire one, is evolving in to a more sophisticated intellectual understanding which can make a positive space for the public role of faiths. But I have also argued that policies have to some degree sought to depoliticize faith communities by engaging them in a Third Way logic of marketised social justice. In the UK many have retreated as a result from more thoughtful critiques of social justice rooted in their experiences of the societies around them to activities which address symptoms rather than causes. This blunts the prophetic potential which has been so much a part of the wisdom of public religion in the past.

Alongside this, I have considered the rise of policies for the 'prevention of violent extremism' and suggested that, while claiming to be rooted in community development approaches, these have had the primary effect of fragmenting community differences and isolating an *idea* of Islam in a public category of its own. In constructing extremism as an issue for community-level prevention rather than transnational relations, immigration, and the democratic deficit, this agenda too is thoroughly depoliticized. The international challenges associated with the distribution of power and wealth in the UN, the Security Council, the World Bank and global trade are entirely without mention in these policies, for obvious reasons. Yet it is contests across national borders about the dominance of capitalism and American values to the detriment of social justice which motivate the radicalization which is feared and which is occasionally played out in local settings, as we know in both London and Glasgow. We should pay tribute to the

people who have died at the hands of religious extremists – as to those who are abused by extremists of all kinds and backgrounds. But we should set this in the context, too, of the recognition that the vast majority of faith-based activity is directed towards the enrichment of human beings in the communities in which they live. What evidence there is seems to suggest that homophobia, sexism, a preoccupation with human sexuality, and violent extremism are very overblown parts of the picture. The deliberation required of public participation, and the fielding of public participants, does not appear to be leading to 'conversation-stopping certainty' amongst people of faith so much as to a growth in public understanding that religious faith can be a force for social justice, as well as a force against it. What the academy can contribute to the re-emerging conversation about faith and social policy is two things: first, a critical unpicking of the policy perversions – the heroes and villains dichotomy which cast faith in two ways at once. This happens in lots of policy areas but in relation to faith it is especially pernicious because the different policies: a) see themselves as complementary when they are actually contradictory; and b) impact in many cases upon the same sets of people.

Second, the academy can contribute robust research around some of the questions I have highlighted here: who participates, where and how? Who does not participate, and why? What are the differentials in power and capacity between and within traditions? How do they affect what people of faith do in public realms? And these empirical studies should be accompanied by close encounters with theoretical explorations, especially with academics in Theology and Religious Studies, to consider how what people believe and feel about their faiths affects and determines their public action too. I look forward to taking some of these questions forward myself, and I hope some of you may want to work on such questions too in such a way as to extend the faith contribution in the direction of constructive, prophetic, structural macro-critiques as well as symptom-solving.