

# Religions and Development Research Programme

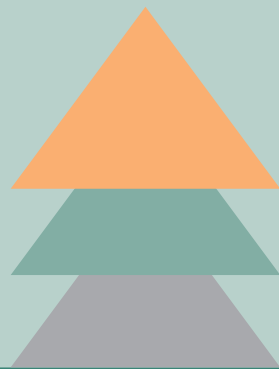
## Sociology, Religion and Development: Literature Review

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Working Paper 4 - 2007

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# Religions and Development

## Research Programme

The Religions and Development Research Programme Consortium is an international research partnership that is exploring the relationships between several major world religions, development in low-income countries and poverty reduction. The programme is comprised of a series of comparative research projects that are addressing the following questions:

- How do religious values and beliefs drive the actions and interactions of individuals and faith-based organisations?
- How do religious values and beliefs and religious organisations influence the relationships between states and societies?
- In what ways do faith communities interact with development actors and what are the outcomes with respect to the achievement of development goals?

The research aims to provide knowledge and tools to enable dialogue between development partners and contribute to the achievement of development goals. We believe that our role as researchers is not to make judgements about the truth or desirability of particular values or beliefs, nor is it to urge a greater or lesser role for religion in achieving development objectives. Instead, our aim is to produce systematic and reliable knowledge and better understanding of the social world.

The research focuses on four countries (India, Pakistan, Nigeria and Tanzania), enabling the research team to study most of the major world religions: Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism and African traditional belief systems. The research projects will compare two or more of the focus countries, regions within the countries, different religious traditions and selected development activities and policies.

The consortium consists of six research partner organisations, each of which is working with other researchers in the four focus countries:

- University of Birmingham, UK: International Development Department, Department of Theology and Religion, Centre for West African Studies, Centre for the Study of Global Ethics, Department of Political Science and International Relations
- University of Bath, UK: Centre for Development Studies
- Indian Institute of Dalit Studies, New Delhi.
- Nigerian Institute of Social and Economic Research, Ibadan.
- University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania
- Pakistan

In addition to the research partners, links have been forged with non-academic and non-government bodies, including Islamic Relief.

# Religions and Development Working Paper 4

## **Sociology, Religion and Development: Literature Review**

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# 1 Introduction

The aim of this literature review is twofold. Firstly, I will discuss key theoretical debates within the sociology of religion regarding definitions of religion, the role of religion in society and the future of religion. These issues have occupied sociologists of religion since the nineteenth century and are also relevant to our current task of examining the relationship between religion and development. However, within this discussion I will also assess the extent to which the debates that have emerged reflect a western context or if they provide theoretical models that are useful to understanding religion and its transformations globally. The second aim of this review is to discuss research within sociology that is relevant to our theme of religion and development. There are clear overlaps here with literature reviews that have been done in other disciplines, most markedly within anthropology, religious studies and political science. For this reason I have chosen to focus upon several areas that have not been covered in the other reviews. Firstly, I will deal with 'religious/spiritual capital and social capital' and, secondly, with 'civil society and social movements'. While discussions about religion and social capital have been explored with respect to the US, there has been much less focus upon religious social capital in the non-West. There is, by contrast, a substantial literature on religion, civil society and social movements globally. Nevertheless, this has not been reflected in research undertaken within development.

## 2 Method and theory: sociology of religion – the founding fathers and their impact

Hamilton notes that, “while sociological studies of religion are generally seen as being towards the fringes of the discipline, those who are normally regarded as the founding fathers of sociology gave considerable prominence to religion in their work” (1998, p. 1). The writings of Marx (1818-1883), Durkheim (1858-1917) and Weber (1864-1920), for instance, have had a significant impact upon subsequent theorising about the nature, role and future of religion. For Marx, religion played a crucial role but as a response to the social alienation inherent to the capitalist system rather than as a positive social force: this is expressed in his now famous depiction of religion as the ‘opium of the people’. Marx considered that social change was the product of material forces rather than any extra-human agency. Throughout the course of human history, the differing relationships that people have established with the material world are reflected in the types of social relations they engage in. In this current capitalist phase the working class are exploited by the upper class for the purposes of producing excess capital. Thus, for Marx, when people seek solace in religion they are compensating for their sense of alienation and suffering: it masks and mitigates the true nature of the exploitative structures of capitalism that oppress the lower classes. Religion provides explanations for the causes of human suffering, yet they are not the right explanations. Thus, it acts as an ‘opiate’, creating illusions about the human condition. Religion, for Marx, is a human invention, blinding people to the real source of their oppression and serving the interests of the ruling class through enabling them to retain their power and status. According to this position religion would wither in a socialist society: thus, secularisation is both desirable and inevitable.

Durkheim was similarly interested in the function of religion and also drew attention to its role in maintaining social institutions. In his book *Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995[1912]) he provides a study of Australian aborigines and argues that their totemic gods are actually expressions of their understanding of society. Extending the implications of this study to ‘traditional’ human societies more broadly, he considers that religion is an expression of society upon which humans impose notions of the supernatural: religion has social rather than ‘divine’ causes and when people worship gods they are actually worshipping society. Moreover, for Durkheim, society has a *sui generis* quality; it exists apart from and is greater than the sum of its parts (i.e. individuals). People are born into a social reality that transcends their individual existence, yet that shapes and limits their beliefs and actions through the action of the ‘collective consciousness’. Religion operates through this ‘collective consciousness’ (constituted by, yet greater than, the totality of individual consciousnesses), which embodies the moral codes and beliefs that are shared amongst members of society. It is



through the collective consciousness, therefore, that religion contributes towards social cohesion and stability. Thus, belief in divine or supernatural powers is really a reflection of our experience of this collective social consciousness. And religious believers are mistaken that their relationship to God is in anything other than their relationship to society. The idea of a distinction between the 'sacred' and 'profane' is also crucial to understanding Durkheim's view of religion:

"A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them" (cited in Thompson, 1982, p. 129).<sup>1</sup>

Here, religion relies upon the division of things into either 'sacred' or 'profane': religious beliefs and actions are directed towards the 'sacred' whereas the rest of human activity involves the profane. However, for Durkheim the two are intrinsically dependent upon each other: the religious/sacred and the social/profane are mutually dependent. Although traditional societies depend upon religion to maintain social cohesion, Durkheim was concerned that the complex division of labour in modern societies was fostering social fragmentation and increased individuation. Under such conditions individuals experienced 'anomie', a sense of alienation, as their communities disintegrate and religion begins to lose its integrative function. Thus, the impact of a decline in religion and religious belief (secularisation) was of utmost importance to Durkheim. While the combination of fragmentation and secularisation could result in anomie and anarchy, he did, however, predict that the *function* of religion would be replaced by other 'secular' institutions in society, particularly to foster and transmit a sense of moral consensus that binds people and their societies together. Some more contemporary studies of Durkheim's sociology of religion have applied his thinking to considerations of the role of what are seen as secular phenomena (such as sport) as styles of 'modern religion' or 'implicit religion' that perform similar functions to traditional religiosity (Bailey, 1997; Berger, 1971; Luckmann, 1967).

This, however, points to a more general critique of 'functional' definitions of religion for being potentially too inclusive and, therefore, losing sight of what, many would argue, separates the religious from the profane or secular. 'Substantive' definitions of religion, by contrast, attempt to list attributes of 'religion' that are thought to cut across all cultures and that, therefore, enable us to clearly distinguish religion

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<sup>1</sup> Durkheim's definition of religion is a 'functional' definition.

from other social phenomena. Some substantive definitions, however, can be critiqued for being guilty of deciding what a religion is or should be before an investigation (particularly if they are detailed or comprehensive). This can mean that the researcher fails to investigate all actual forms of religiosity. Even Tylor's minimal definition of religion (1871), as 'belief in spiritual beings', would mean that some forms of Buddhism would not be counted as a religion, when in important senses Buddhism resembles other religious traditions. Geertz (1973, p.90) defines religion as (1) a system of symbols which acts to (2) establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [and women] by (3) formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and (4) clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that (5) the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic. This functional definition has been one of the most widely used. However, as Glazier writes: "although his definition may be useful in elaborating what religion is like conceptually and what it does psychologically and socially, Geertz has been criticised for failing to explain specifically how a researcher might identify religion when encountered in the field" (1998).<sup>2</sup> The extent to which the elusiveness of religion in the field is really a problem is, nonetheless, debatable. This critique arguably has more to do with the overly positivist thrusts underpinning the way sociology has dealt with religion (including the founding fathers) – i.e. that religion is something that can be easily identified and classified. If religion is, after all, elusive then the onus is upon sociologists to develop appropriate research methods and theories to account for this, rather than rejecting definitions which suggest that it cannot easily be pinned down.

Weber, however, was reluctant to posit any definition of religion that imposed an 'outsider' understanding upon the meaning of religious behaviour for the individual:

"To define 'religion,' to say what it is, is not possible at the start of a presentation such as this. Definition can be attempted, if at all, only at the conclusion of the study. The essence of religion is not even our concern, as we make it our task to study the conditions and effects of a particular type of social behavior. The external courses of religious behaviors are so diverse that an understanding of this behavior can only be achieved from the viewpoint of the subjective experiences, ideas, and purposes of the individuals concerned—in short, from the viewpoint of the religious behavior's 'meaning'" Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (1963, p.1).

<sup>2</sup> <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/ency/Anthropology.htm> (last accessed 2/1/07).

In contrast to Marx and Durkheim, he placed his emphasis upon religion as a system of meaning rather than upon its social function, as either a pacifying opiate or a source of cohesion. As Hamilton writes: “the roots of religion, for Weber, lie in the necessity of accounting for the conditions of life in which individuals find themselves, for their good or bad fortune...it is always at root an attempt to make sense of the world” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 13). Moreover, Weber sees religion as separate to or autonomous from society (i.e. it is not a product of class interests or of the collective social consciousness). He separates the issue of the truth claims of religious traditions from his analysis and hence avoids the reductionism of Marx, Freud and Durkheim. This bracketing of truth claims has influenced the ‘methodological agnosticism’ found in the phenomenological method that has shaped religious studies as a discipline. See also the work of Peter Berger (1974), who argues that it is not ‘scientific’ to comment upon the truth claims of religious studies, since they are not empirically available to the researcher (see Tomalin, 2007).

Weber was, however, interested in the ways that religious values have shaped societies in different contexts. In his most famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5), where he began his work on the sociology of religion, Weber argues that religion was one factor explaining differences between occidental and oriental cultures. He attempts to show that Protestantism, particularly Calvinism, “was part of the causal chain that led to the development of world-system dominance by Anglo-American capitalism” (Swatos, 1998).<sup>3</sup> He compared Protestant (Calvinist) Britain with Protestant (Lutheran) Germany and Catholic Italy and Spain to test his view that ideas have an independent and determining role in society. He demonstrated that economic development was greater in Protestant than Catholic countries, arguing that some link existed between Protestantism and capitalism. Moreover, the Lutheran view of German Protestantism was not conducive to capitalist development, since the individual was required to accept his/her position in life and to look forward to rewards in heaven. It was the Calvinist doctrine, by contrast, that fostered a this-worldly emphasis upon hard work that had stimulated capitalist growth in Britain. While the doctrine of predestination in Calvinism meant that one could do nothing to change whether or not one was amongst God’s ‘elect’ (and therefore assured of a place in heaven), hard work leading to worldly success and the accumulation of wealth (which was then reinvested for the purposes of capital growth, since the puritanical values of Calvinism shunned obvious signs of wealth) was considered to be a sign that one

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<sup>3</sup> <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/ency/Protestantism.htm> (last accessed 2/1/07).

had been 'chosen'. Thus, a rationale was given to the accumulation of wealth, which, according to Weber, was one impetus that stimulated the emergence of capitalism. By contrast, when he studied some other non-western cultures (e.g. China and India), he found that the existence of certain traditional cultural systems did not foster an environment where capitalism was likely to flourish. In *The Religions of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism* (otherwise known as *The Religion of India*) (1958) he is interested in examining the links between the structure of Indian society and its religious systems (e.g. caste and Hinduism). He suggests that the 'spirit' of the caste system, reliant upon the idea of cycles of rebirth and the superiority of the Brahmin class, acted against an indigenous development of capitalism in India.<sup>4</sup>

Like Durkheim and Marx, however, Weber is responding to a political and intellectual climate which is concerned that the impact of the rapid social and economic changes brought about by capitalism and industrialisation upon European societies was not all to the good. He considered that the Protestant reformation and the rise of capitalism heralded the beginnings of the disenchantment of western society. He described the modern world as one 'robbed of Gods', where mysteries could be solved by science and technology rather than recourse to the divine. Dobbelaere writes that, for Weber, "declining religious authority allowed the development of functional rationality. The economy lost its 'religious ethos'" (1998).<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Weber drew attention to what he called the 'rationalisation' of society: in the past social activity and relationships tended to be based upon custom, tradition or emotion, whereas increasingly we find the ascendancy of considerations of efficiency or calculation. Thus, religion as a system of meaning was in decline and with the 'rationalisation' of the economy and other social institutions, religion loses the significance that it once had as an overarching and integrative source of meaning. However, Weber was interested in the breaking up of traditional societies and the transition to new rational ones. Religion was required for this process as it had an ultimate sanctioning power. So it was in decline but 'oversaw'/legitimised the process of change. This concern with the social and psychological cost of capitalism, evident in the work of Marx, Weber and Durkheim, has influenced the thinking of more recent sociologists of religion.

<sup>4</sup> See Dasgupta (1977) and Moddie (1968) for texts that are influenced by Weberian thought. Both examine the idea that the 'Brahmanical mind' in India prefers to follow rules and authority and is not inclined towards innovation and risk. This, they argue, has hindered India's modernisation. Note that both texts are quite dated.

<sup>5</sup> <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/ency/Secularisation.htm> (last accessed 2/1/07).

Literature that builds upon the work of these thinkers has continued to shape the sociology of religion during the twentieth century and into the twenty-first. Gramsci (1891-1937), for instance, taking a Marxist view, considered that bourgeois cultural values in Europe maintained their 'hegemony' *via* Christianity. A founder of the Italian Communist Party, imprisoned by Mussolini in 1926, he drew attention to the power that the Catholic Church exerts over people's lives: particularly how the bourgeois values of the church become normative and controlling for all classes. His thinking about religion offers a potentially fruitful route within this programme for understanding the ways in which religious views that represent particular interests can be brought to bear more broadly upon different groups within society. With respect to Durkheim, the American sociologist Robert Bellah, famous for his work on 'civil religion', draws attention to the social role of religious forms and symbolism beyond institutionalised religion (1967, 1985). As Wimberley and Swatos (1998) write, Bellah "claimed that most Americans share common religious characteristics expressed through civil religious beliefs, symbols, and rituals that provide a religious dimension to the entirety of American life".<sup>6</sup> However, he acknowledges that this American civil religion is unsuitable for a global society and posits the emergence of a global or international civil religion (1967, p. 18).

The above discussion has outlined some of the key debates concerning the definition and function of religion, particularly with respect to the 'founding fathers' of sociology. However, much of this literature has also been concerned with the issue of 'secularisation': what is the future for religion? The next section will present an overview of some of the main positions within the secularisation debate.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://hrr.hartsem.edu/ency/civilrel.htm> (last accessed 2/1/07).

### 3 Secularisation: what is the future for religion?

Woodhead and Heelas (2000, pp. 307-41) identify four main positions on secularisation within the sociological literature in the ninth chapter of their reader on religion: 1) the *disappearance thesis*; 2) the *differentiation thesis*; 3) the *de-intensification thesis*; and 4) the *coexistence thesis*. The main starting point for all these positions is the recognition that religion has a less significant role in modern public life than it did in the past. Two main critiques of the dominant trajectory of this debate have been, firstly, that it has tended to focus upon western societies and, secondly, that even in western societies, religion continues to have a public role.

The *disappearance thesis* (this is sometimes called a 'hard' version of the secularisation thesis) argues that "the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations....we have enough data to indicate the massive presence of...[the secularisation of consciousness] in the contemporary west" (Berger 1969, p. 108). This is the argument that one might normally equate with the notion of secularisation: that religion will eventually disappear. Although Berger is careful here to base his argument only upon evidence from the West, there is a tendency within this version of the secularisation thesis to assume that once non-Western societies modernise (i.e. once they 'rationalise'), they will also secularise.<sup>7</sup>

The *differentiation thesis*, by contrast, is more cautious and argues that although religion is hardly influential in the public sphere of society it still has relevance in the private lives of individuals (this is sometimes called a 'soft' version of the secularisation thesis). The differentiation of society into 'public' and 'private' spheres is taken by many sociologists to be a key feature of modernity. The public sphere is the domain of the 'rationalised sub-sectors' such as the economy, medicine or science (each has its own logic, language, specialists and fields of action, and this separation is considered to have intensified in the modern era). By contrast, the private sphere is the 'life-world' of the individual, where he/she finds meaning (Beyer, 1994). It is here that theorists locate the place and role of religion in the modern era, having lost its former overarching and integrative function in what has become the public

<sup>7</sup> The secularisation of society was a major theme of the modernisation literature and its advocates (see Nkurunziza, 2007).

sphere (Berger, 1969; Berger et al., 1974; Beyer, 1994; Luckmann, 1967).<sup>8</sup> As Wilson writes, secularisation does not “predict the disappearance of religiosity, not even of organised religion; it merely indicates the decline in the significance of religion in the operation of the social system, its diminished significance in social consciousness and its reduced command over the resources (time, energy, skill, intellect, imagination, and accumulated wealth) of mankind” (1985, p. 14). Thus, societies secularise whilst religion becomes ‘privatised’. Another feature of the privatisation of religion has been the transition of organised, traditional religious forms to various expressions of ‘deregulated’ religiosity. This would include, for instance, types of ‘alternative’ or ‘New Age’ spiritualities that people might choose in the modern era now that traditional religious forms have lost their hold. This freedom to choose which type of religion to participate in (if one chooses religion at all) is a key feature of religiosity in ‘late’ modern, western societies.

Some would argue that the shift to ‘deregulated’ styles of religion as well as styles of liberal religiosity is also a reflection of the *de-intensification thesis*: “the idea that religion remains but in a ‘weak’, insubstantial form” (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000, p. 306). Woodhead and Heelas also allude to the ways in which religion has become a ‘consumer product’ in modern western societies.

Finally, the *coexistence theory* refers to the “idea that whilst secularisation takes place in particular circumstances, in other contexts religions retain their vitality, even grow (Woodhead and Heelas, 2000, p. 307). These authors draw attention to the work of David Martin, who is interested in the explosion of Protestantism in Latin America. Martin (1990) suggests that secularisation in Europe is more the exception than the rule, and is not a model that is appropriate for understanding social change in other contexts. Thus, we cannot take secularisation to be an inevitable process: rather than being able to assume a predictable decline, the future of religion depends upon the particular context. In fact, religion continues to be central to processes of social change in many contexts (both developed and developing) and, thus, the coexistence theory is arguably a more accurate basis for thinking about the future of religion in modern global society. The recent renewed interest in the influence of religion on

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<sup>8</sup> Methodological atheism is a term coined by Peter Berger (1969) to describe a sociological approach that seeks to understand religion as a human creation and deliberately leaves open the question of the truth of religious beliefs. Berger’s *Sacred Canopy* (1969), where he argues that the researcher should demonstrate a ‘methodological atheism’ towards the truth claims of believers, draws upon Weber, in particular. Although religion has lost its overarching source of meaning (since societal subsystems have become rationalised) it can provide solace and meaning for the individual in the ‘private sphere’ of society.

public life, which is taking place across the social sciences and humanities, is giving rise to a new phase of theorising not only upon the future of religion but also concerning its interaction with the secular and with societies.

These debates about secularisation are related to thinking about secularism: a socio-political ideology about the role of religion *vis a vis* the state (typically that it should lose some if not all of its previous appeal and authority at the public or state level). In terms of the four main countries being considered in this programme, it has been in India that discussions about secularism have at times dominated the political landscape. In 1948 the post-independence government of the Congress Party, under Nehru, adopted a secular form of politics: one where there would be a distinction between religion and the state. There have, however, been anti-secularist thinkers, such as Ashish Nandy (1997) and T.N. Madan (1992), who argue that this is a model that has been imported from the West and is not appropriate for a country such as India where secularisation has not really taken hold. Such thinkers argue that secular politics in India has in fact allowed the rise of aggressive forms of religious nationalism, because the Indian version of secularism (which emphasises that the state should be equidistant from different religions rather than reject religion) has resulted in a situation in which the government is seen by rival religious factions as favouring one religion over another (e.g. the Shah Bano case, see Nussbaum, 2000). Thus, the state has been unable to deal with religions equally (and at times has clearly shown favour to one over another), which has allowed religious unrest to multiply (Varshney, 1993). Others, such as Meera Nanda (2002), are avowedly secularist and whilst they draw attention to the shortcomings of current understandings of Indian state secularism, are against any call for a greater formal involvement of religion in political matters. These concerns and debates in India have a clear relevance for thinking about the work of FBOs in development. For instance, with respect to Hindu groups there seems to be suspicion that they are typically affiliated to various Hindu Right groups or that they can be easily co-opted. In recent years, many have become wary of the so-called 'Hinduisation of civil society', which specifically refers to the endeavours of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (one wing of the Sangh Parivar – 'family of organisations', also including the BJP – Bharatiya Janata Party - and the VHP – Vishva Hindu Parishad) to infiltrate erstwhile Hindu organisations or to co-opt secular groups under their mandate (see Sarkar, 2002; Roy, 2002).



From the point of view of thinking about the role and future of religion in contemporary global society, theories about secularisation, which have largely been developed by western social scientists and are arguably based upon western experience, are incomplete. As Hamilton writes: "secularisation has come to look like quite a localised affair" (1998, p. 2).<sup>9</sup> However, it is not just that secularisation has tended to dominate thinking about religion in (western) social science, but also that when religion is theorised (as an instrument to guide and interpret empirical research in different contexts) there has been little attempt to move beyond the tools offered by the classical western theorists and to assess, for example, how useful Weber is to understanding the sociology of religion in contemporary India. In 2004 the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the sociology of religion journal *Social Compass* included four articles that examined sociology of religion (SR) in Europe and North America; Asia; Africa; and Latin America. As the author of the Asia article states: "the sociology of religion is globalizing hesitantly, but still gives little attention to Asia" (Lang, 2004, p. 99). Lang suggests not only that Asian sociology of religion is underrepresented in English language SR journals (e.g. *Sociology of Religion*, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* and *Social Compass*) but that SR both *upon and within* Asian societies is not that well developed: it is a neglected field of study within sociology. With respect to India, for instance, he notes that where SR does feature it tends to draw upon the classical European theorists, notably Weber (see Venugopal, 1988; Robinson, 2003). The article on Africa, in the same edition of *Social Compass*, similarly notes that "the sociology of religion in Africa has been only briefly represented...in *Social Compass*" (van Binsbergen, 2004, p. 86). Yet, the author suggests that the social-scientific study of religion in Africa "has grown from a mere trickle to a massive undertaking" over the past fifty years (2004, p. 86).<sup>10</sup>

The above discussion has provided an overview of some of the main themes within the sociology of religion as well as the social role of religion. While religion was an important field of enquiry to the founders of sociology, the dominance of a version of the secularisation thesis that predicted the disappearance of religion has relegated considerations of religiosity to the fringes of the discipline. Much twentieth century sociology tended to pay little attention to the importance of religion, reflecting an "ethos which saw secularisation as an ever more widespread and dominant process and religion as an increasingly anachronistic phenomenon in a world dominated by scientific and technological

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<sup>9</sup> A discussion of secularism has been provided in the political science literature review (Marquette and Singh, 2007).

<sup>10</sup> See Hamilton (1998); Sharot (2001); see also *Social Compass* yearly 'International Bibliography of Sociology of Religions' (e.g. 52(3), 2005, 355-405).

rationality” (Hamilton, 1998, p. 2). Many would argue that more recently there has been a shift in attitudes towards religion as a relevant topic for investigation. Firstly, the inevitability of ‘secularisation’ has not been borne out. Religious forms persist across the globe and in many cases have developed and spread with modernity rather than withering away. Secondly, the rise of religiously based terrorism has created an escalating interest in religiosity amongst western publics, which is reflected in the emergence of a new commitment to the study of religion within the social sciences. Arguably, the ‘religious turn’ in development studies is a reflection of this wider growth of interest in religion as well as experience within the study and practice of development itself.

In many senses, the notion of a sub-discipline called ‘sociology of religion’ (although it is obviously not clearly delineated from other fields within sociology)<sup>11</sup> has tended to mean that religion has not emerged strongly as an object of enquiry within sociology more broadly. One consequence of a new commitment to the study of religion within the social sciences is likely to involve the study of religion within areas of the social sciences that have previously not paid it much attention. In the following sections of this literature review I will look at some of this emergent literature within sociology that is concerned with religious issues and development-related concerns (but which are areas that do not typically draw upon the ‘sociology of religion’). The first relates to ‘social capital’, a sociological category that has become fairly dominant (although not unproblematically) in development thinking. The second is concerned with civil society and social movements, and the third area relates to recent work on ‘religion and globalisation’. I will indicate the potential fruitfulness of these areas of research to our project and will also indicate possible limitations, drawbacks and caveats.

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<sup>11</sup> The sociology of religion is a diverse area, concerned with questions about the nature of religious knowledge or why people are religious to the social impact of religion or the influence of religion on socio-political change.

## 4 Social and spiritual/religious capital

For many nineteenth and twentieth century sociologists the decline of the public or social significance of religion in the West was both a symptom of and a contributory factor towards the social fragmentation that accompanied the shift towards modernity. Discussions about social capital and civil society are relevant to the concerns of sociologists (e.g. Durkheim, Weber, Berger) that modernity has seen the emergence of ‘fragmented’, ‘rationalised’ societies in the West, where people experience ‘alienation’ from their communities and ‘traditional’ systems of meaning. The work of Robert Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000), in particular, has popularised considerations of social capital, which now inform the way that development agencies think about ‘development’.<sup>12</sup> The term ‘social capital’ was first used by the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu in the early 1970s (see also Loury, 1977; Coleman, 1988) and by the late 1990s had become the subject of a World Bank research programme. Putnam defines social capital as follows:

“Whereas physical capital refers to physical objects and human capital refers to the properties of individuals, social capital refers to connections among individuals – social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital” (Putnam 2000, p. 19).

In his 1995 article *Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital* Putnam is concerned that although the USA has been held up to have a strong system of social capital, which has enabled it to maintain democracy, this is considerably weaker than in the past.<sup>13</sup> This concern has generated interest in the USA, in particular, in thinking about both the reasons for social capital decline as well as sources of social capital. The literature that has emerged highlights religion as one important way that social capital is generated (see for instance Smidt, 2003). As Fukuyama writes (see also 2001):

“General social science theories about the inevitability of secularization appear to apply primarily to Western Europe; there is little evidence that religion is losing its grip elsewhere, including the United States. Religiously-inspired cultural change remains a

<sup>12</sup> See <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/TOPICS/EXTSOCIALDEVELOPMENT/EXTTSOCIALCAPITAL/0,,menuPK:401021~pagePK:149018~piPK:149093~theSitePK:401015,00.html> (last accessed 3/1/07) - includes working paper series. See also [http://www.infed.org/biblio/social\\_capital.htm](http://www.infed.org/biblio/social_capital.htm) (last accessed 3/1/07).

<sup>13</sup> Not everyone agrees with this: see Paxton (1999), Lin (2001).

live option in many parts of the world; the Islamic world and Latin America have both seen the growth of new forms of religiosity in recent decades. Obviously, not all forms of religion are positive from the standpoint of social capital; sectarianism can breed intolerance, hatred, and violence. But religion has also historically been one of the most important sources of culture, and is likely to remain so in the future” (Fukuyama, 1999).

Fukuyama stresses that social capital (including that produced by religion) is not always positive and may lead to exclusionary group formation and hostile allegiances of various kinds. Moreover, he also reminds us that

“social capital more often than not is produced by hierarchical sources of authority, which lay down norms and expect obedience to them for totally a-rational reasons. The world’s major religions like Buddhism, Hinduism, Christianity, or Islam, or large cultural systems like Confucianism, are examples. Not only do norms from such sources not come about through decentralised bargaining; they are transmitted from one generation to the next through a process of socialisation that involves much more habit than reason. Path dependence- another word for tradition - means that norms that are clearly socially suboptimal can persist for very long periods of time” (Fukuyama 1999).

These caveats are important in reminding us not to romanticise social capital as coterminous with liberal values. Nevertheless, the role of religion (whether positive or negative) in social capital formation *per se* is poorly understood and under-researched (see Verter, 2003; Park and Smith, 2000), particularly in non-western contexts.

Some scholars have, however, begun to investigate the role of religion in social capital formation with respect to development. Candland (2000), for instance, points to the role that faith-based NGOs can play in community development and building social capital. Thus, from a practical point of view religious traditions and faith-based organisations provide a means of social capital formation through linking people together in a common belief system, as well as supporting initiatives that generate “higher levels of education, literacy, health, employment, and other public goods that increase social opportunity” (2000, p. 357). Candland’s study of four faith-based NGOs in Thailand, Indonesia, Pakistan and Sri Lanka respectively concludes that, “religious tenets and institutions are seemingly best employed for social and political change in a political arena in which religion is not already used by governments to legitimate arbitrary or dictatorial rule” (2000, p. 145). He is critical, however, that this has not attracted research interest within the social sciences and writes that:

“Many social scientists see in religious conviction an eclipse of reason and in religious motivation a constraint on enlightened social behaviour. Buttressing these perspectives is the observation that religious identity and religious differences are often seemingly the sources of prejudice and violence... Thus, in much social science literature there is an aversion to treating religion as the basis for progressive social solidarity” (Candland, 2000, p. 355-356).

Other scholars have called the religious dimension of social capital discussed by Candland ‘spiritual’ or ‘religious’ capital.<sup>14</sup> Berger and Heffner define spiritual capital as “a sub-species of social capital, referring to the power, influence, knowledge, and dispositions created by participation in a particular religious tradition” (1998, p. 3). However, as Iannaccone and Klick write, “despite the immense interest in social capital, relatively little work concerns its relationship to religion – almost certainly a serious oversight given [for example] Putnam’s finding that nearly half of all associational memberships, personal philanthropy, and volunteering in the U.S. are church-related” (2003, p.7). Research that has been done in this area remains focused upon the US context, which suggests a neglected area of study. In their article on this topic, Berger and Heffner begin to think through the implications of an Islamic resurgence for understandings of spiritual capital and for the sociology of religion more broadly. In particular they note that:

“The Islamic resurgence offers two general lessons for any comparative reflection on spiritual capital. First, it demonstrates that the political and economic consequences of an expansion in spiritual capital can be varied – sometimes democracy- and market-friendly, other times not. Second, the Islamic example indicates that, rather than attributing a single form of spiritual capital to a particular religion, as Weber did, we should recognize that there are competing varieties of spiritual capital operative *within* each religion or civilization. The future of modern democracy and capitalism will be as much determined by the outcome of rivalries among the bearers of different forms of spiritual capital in the same society as it will any clash of civilizations” (1998, p. 5).

This area of research would seem to be of interest to our programme. Commentators working in this field are above all interested in the social, political and economic influence of religion (both positive and negative) and find the notion of spiritual or religious capital a useful framework within which to theorise the interconnections. As Malloch writes, “spiritual capital can become a useful concept and term for a

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<sup>14</sup> They tend to be used interchangeably, although an argument could be made that they are quite different – see articles on the difference between religion and spirituality. See King, 1996; Zinnbauer et al, 1997.

vital feature of economic development that has been largely overlooked in modern theories of development. Indeed, the often used terms social capital and human capital themselves are based to a large extent on the existence of good faith, trust, stewardship, a sense of purpose and other moral characteristics which cannot persist in the absence of the piety, solidarity and hope that come from religion and spiritual sentiments. When this is lost, societies and economies often decline rather than grow. When this abounds societies and economies prosper” (1998, p. 8).<sup>15</sup>

However, social capital approaches can be evasive of power and gender issues and arguably need careful handling. There is often an assumption that all people benefit from ‘social capital’ equally or that its origins are ideologically benign. Moreover, the social capital approach has a strong instrumentalist flavour (Harriss, 2001; Fine, 2001). To what extent are discussions about religion as social capital really a mask for a desire to enrol religious communities to provide cheaper service delivery or to promote a particular development agenda? At a more critical level, discussion of social capital (now established within development studies) has arguably given birth to discussions of faith and religion. But we need to ask why this is so. For years development studies could not deal with religion (due mainly to the weight of modernisation thinking) and now with social capital it feels it has the tools to do so. But the question is: on whose terms and what are those terms? In focusing upon religion as social capital, the danger is that much is lost or obscured with respect to the meaning and significance of religion on its own terms (whatever they might be) and the relevance of this for development (conceived of more broadly than maximising social capital). Thus, while the emergent literature on religious social capital does seem to capture an important dimension of the function or role of religion, this approach will not suffice as a tool to think about the nature and relevance of religion within developing countries.

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<sup>15</sup> I would recommend the five papers that are available on the ‘Spiritual Capital’ research programme, (Metanexus Institute, Philadelphia) website [http://www.metanexus.net/spiritual\\_capital/rfp\\_intro.asp](http://www.metanexus.net/spiritual_capital/rfp_intro.asp) (last accessed 3/1/07).

## 5 Civil society, social movements and globalisation

The second area of literature that I will review involves three related research issues: civil society, social movements and globalisation. While research has been carried out in all these areas with respect to their relationship to religion, this work has not tended to focus upon religion and development issues. For instance, within civil society research there is little work on faith-based NGOs. This was recognised at a recent (April 2005) conference in Oslo in which I participated entitled: “religious NGOs and the international aid system”. It was noted that “the roles of religious NGOs - Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Buddhist, etc - remain underspecified, under-researched and generally neglected by mainstream NGOs and civil society research. In the process, understanding religious NGOs, and their implications for understanding broader theoretical, organisational and policy issues, is untapped”.<sup>16</sup> Civil society, or the ‘third sector’, (in addition to state and market) is defined by the London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society as:

“... the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women’s organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy groups.”<sup>17</sup>

Social and religious capital, thus, play an important in providing and supporting the social networks that sustain civil society (Fukuyama, 2001).<sup>18</sup> Unlike religious/spiritual capital, there is a large literature on religion and civil society (e.g. see Casanova, 2001),<sup>19</sup> although this has not really been incorporated into the development arena. Much of the literature does, however, deal with development-related issues and concerns. One important role of development is its aim of strengthening civil society, in particular as a means of promoting democratisation. Sazonova (2004), for instance, discusses the role of interfaith dialogue in the process of protecting and implementing human rights,

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.svf.uib.no/sfu/ngo/conference2005/background.htm> (last accessed 3/1/07).

<sup>17</sup> [http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what\\_is\\_civil\\_society.htm](http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm) (last accessed 3/1/07).

<sup>18</sup> Although he notes that “while awareness of social capital is often critical for understanding development, it is difficult to generate through public policy” (Fukuyama, 2001, p. 7).

<sup>19</sup> See also Becker and Dhingra (2001), Hepner (2003), Loy (2001), Thomas (2001), Uberoi (1996) and Vallipalam (2001).

at both international and local levels. Most emphasis seems to have been placed, however, upon Islam and civil society (Casanova, 2001; Heffner, 2001; Kamali, 2001; Kandil, 2004; Khosrokhavar, 2004; Mabry, 1998; Turam, 2004; Watts, 1996). A major concern in much of this literature is the extent to which and ways in which political Islam is supportive of civil society and democratisation.

Similarly, there is a substantial literature on social movements and religion, yet again this has not directly been absorbed into work on development. Moreover, there are clear overlaps and synergies between the literature on social movements and that on civil society (Oomen, 2004). Social movements are a key feature of civil society, particularly with respect to the pursuit of democracy, civil liberties or human rights.<sup>20</sup> However, as Wood (1999) suggests, recent work by political sociologists and social movement theorists on the role of religion in democratisation tends to focus upon religious institutions as institutions rather than what religion *per se* might contribute. There is already a tendency in the development literature to treat religious organisations as service delivery organisations. This is a very instrumentalist perspective that, like the literature on NGOs, tends to overlook important aspects.

The transnational status of many social movements has also meant that this area of study draws upon globalisation theory in attempting to understand the ways in which religious traditions are drawn into social movement participation as a consequence of globalisation (see particularly Beyer, 1994). Beyer's work is interesting here, since he argues that globalisation has affected religious involvement in social movements in two senses. Firstly, 'liberal' or 'ecumenical' types of religion have tended to participate in the globalised, transnational social movements that stress liberal values. He suggests that ecumenical/liberal religious politics include 'Liberation Theology' in Latin America and modern forms of 'religious environmentalism' pursued within the Christian tradition in the west (1994, 1990). The concerns of such movements are focused upon freedom, tolerance, individualism and other globalised values, such as environmental or human rights. Secondly, globalisation itself has created certain 'residual' social, economic or political problems that have given rise to local, particularist responses that tend to be conservative in terms of political outlook. He discusses the Islamic revolution in Iran and new religious Zionism in Israel as examples of particularist/conservative political engagement. These movements champion "the cultural distinctiveness of one region through a

<sup>20</sup> See the United Nations Research Institute for Social Development work on 'Civil Society and Social Movements': [http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BB128/\(httpProgrammeAreasForResearchHome\)F25CB3CC77AD656E80256B750053D399?OpenDocument](http://www.unrisd.org/80256B3C005BB128/(httpProgrammeAreasForResearchHome)F25CB3CC77AD656E80256B750053D399?OpenDocument) (last accessed 3/1/07).



reappropriation of traditional religious antagonistic categories” (Beyer, 1994, p. 93). They are isolationist, communal, oriented towards local and concerns, and are defined by religious goals and values. Thus, we find different types of social movement: those that are global and liberal/democratic in outlook and those that are local and conservative in outlook.<sup>21</sup>

Haynes similarly theorises about the political influence of religious groups (1995; Wald et al., 2004). Haynes begins his discussion with the observation that there are different types of religious group (culturalist, syncretist, fundamentalist and community oriented) and each typically has a distinct pattern of interaction with political and social institutions. Culturalist religious groups (such as Sikhs or Tibetans) “use cultural separateness to seek to achieve autonomy in relation to [a] centralised state” (1995, p. 11) and may either act through political parties or non-constitutional means (including terrorism). Syncretist groups (involving a fusing or blending of religious forms e.g. in sub-Saharan Africa), he suggests, aim to “achieve higher standing within national culture of diverse groups” (1995, p. 11) and will most often pursue goals through direct action and lobbying. Fundamentalist groups seek to “protect self-proclaimed groups of the ‘religiously pure’ against governmental attempts to belittle religion” (1995, p. 11) and adopt a wide range of political strategies. Finally, community oriented groups (such as the Latin American Basic Christian Communities) “direct community activities for enhancement of local groups’ self-interest” (1995, p. 11) and are formally uninvolved in the political process themselves although activists “ally themselves with most progressive political parties” (1995, p.11).<sup>22</sup>

The ways that religious traditions are being re-figured through globalisation constitutes an important area for the religion and development programme. For instance, one of the key areas of interest today is migration and its effects on religious practice (e.g. Bangladeshis working in the Middle East and

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<sup>21</sup> Beyer’s work was influenced by that of the globalisation theorist Robertson (1970, 1978, 1989, 1992). He suggested that globalisation has had two major effects upon religion: the rise of particularist fundamentalisms and “‘world theologies’ that address the eschatological implications of an inclusive humanity” (Beyer, 1994, p. 30). For Beyer, one of the most striking things about Robertson’s argument is that these “religious forms are not simply or purely religious, but also centrally political” (1994, p. 30). Earlier globalisation theorists also draw attention to religion, but do not afford it a particularly significant role within global societies. In the Marxian world-system theory of Wallerstein, religion is one means by which the capitalist system supports its rationalism and universality, but at the same time can become a vehicle for the antisystemic resistance of peripheral groups (1983; Beyer, 1994, p. 15-21). Meyer, by contrast, draws upon the model of classical Christendom to provide an insight into what the world polity (which from his perspective is a key feature of globalisation) could look like (1988).

<sup>22</sup> See also Haynes (1998), Beckford (2000) and Beyer (2001).

then returning to Bangladesh having been exposed to a 'different Islam'). These transformations go beyond private religious practice and can have a broader influence upon political and social structures.

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## 6 Concluding points

Although sociology as a discipline is ideally placed to deal with religion as a social and political force, it has tended to make religion on its own terms. It can be suggested that hitherto sociology has not been effective at analysing the kinds of things that are central to religion, so it tends to ‘translate’ religion into its own terms, and can miss important dimensions in doing so (Wood, 1999). It remains a question how far we can retain useful tools from sociology, such as an emphasis upon power/ideology or the mechanisms through which systems of belief and practice (such as religion) exert an influence at the social level, *and* at the same time deal sympathetically with religion more nearly on its own terms.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, there is also some evidence that there has been an emphasis upon sociological theorising from a western perspective that is not capable of dealing with socio-religious phenomena in non-western contexts (Ahmad, 2005). One example here is the overemphasis upon the separation of ‘private’ and ‘public’ that continues to dominate discussions of religion today. This arguably is a legacy of the ‘founding fathers’ response to industrialisation and social change during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the West. In practice, the boundaries between public and private are more porous (empirically this is particularly apparent in many non-western contexts). Thus, it would seem likely that the resurgence of interest in religion within sociology (apart from *just* sociology of religion) will benefit from a different cultural perspective that is concerned with theories grounded in local experience rather than purely extrapolating from the lessons of the founding fathers. Finally, there would seem to be a need to avoid an approach to social movements and social capital that sees religion purely in instrumentalist terms. While the social function of religion is important, within development and other policy related fields this can easily translate into a focus upon the extent to which religious organisations or values are capable of promoting certain goals.

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<sup>23</sup> This tension is discussed more fully in the ‘religious studies’ literature review. Social theorists are developing new ways of talking that are better at dealing with this kind of area and the ambiguities and ambivalences that it involves (e.g. see Lee’s (2005) *Childhood and Human Values*).

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