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# INSPIRING DEVELOPMENT IN FRAGILE STATES

By Seth Kaplan

**W**estern development agencies are largely secular. Standard bearers of a rationalist and bureaucratic culture, such institutions see the job of promoting economic and political modernization as one that requires scientific objectivity, dispassionate analysis, and number crunching. Few agencies seriously contemplate the idea that religion—whether in the form of spirituality or of organized religion—could make a positive contribution to such decidedly earthly matters as economic development and state building.

Yet religion’s potential to spur development is enormous, especially in the world’s poorest, most fragile states. From the Congo to Pakistan, faith-based organizations (FBOs) are often the only locally organized groups working among the destitute, filling in for governments where they are too feeble to provide even basic schooling and health care. In recent years, some international development agencies have enlisted FBOs to deliver various services in impoverished communities. Such schemes, however, see FBOs merely as cogs in a distinctly Western, top-down approach to development. They ignore the potential of religion and indigenous institutions to play a greater role in repairing the societal fractures and government weaknesses that hold back struggling countries.

The Western development community views the concept of development too narrowly. Part of the problem is a misdiagnosis of the major causes of the dysfunction that plagues fragile states across Africa, the Middle East, and

elsewhere. Agencies execute initiatives as if economic reform, elections, and administrative training alone could fix these countries’ problems. Sociopolitical dynamics have been practically ignored. When it comes to development, building social cohesion, social capital, and the capacity for self-governance should be the starting point for any initiative—and few organizations are better equipped to reverse social atomization and catalyze local capacities for self-governance than FBOs.

## How Religion Spurred Western Development

In Africa, the Middle East, and many parts of Asia and Latin America, religion and governance were closely intertwined before the European imperialists arrived, and a similar pattern has reemerged since the Europeans departed. Today, religion continues to exert a powerful influence on how individuals and communities in the developing world interact with each other and with their governments. “For most people of the ‘South,’” concluded one Western scholar after working in the field for several years, “spirituality is integral to their understanding of the world and their place in it, and so it is central to the decisions that they make about their own and their communities’ development.”<sup>1</sup> Indeed, faith is such a key component of the social fabric in the developing world that “some languages do

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1 not even have a word for ‘religion’; life is steeped  
in belief and belief is life itself.”<sup>2</sup>

5 In the West, by contrast, the separation of  
church and state is generally considered to have  
been a milestone along the road to  
modernization and is still hailed as a cornerstone  
of the West’s prosperity and democracy. But  
10 even Westerners acknowledge that religion was  
instrumental in helping spur the economic and  
political revolution that enabled first Europe and  
then North America to enjoy global  
predominance. As Max Weber famously argued  
15 in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the “Protestant ethic”  
and “the spirit of capitalism” went hand in hand.  
Weber and subsequent sociologists identified at  
least five ways in which faith encouraged  
development.<sup>3</sup>

20 First, certain types of Protestantism—  
notably, Calvinism—promoted capitalist  
development in Britain, Holland, Germany, and  
the United States because they indirectly  
reshaped social ethics and economic activities.  
Protestant teachings encouraged, among other  
25 things, planning, frugality, diligence, discipline,  
capital accumulation, risk taking, a commitment  
to one’s secular vocation, and the pursuit of new  
ideas such as the sciences and technology.

30 Second, the organizational structure of some  
denominations instilled attitudes and taught  
skills that encouraged economic and political  
modernization. For instance, some  
congregations encouraged widespread lay  
participation in the management of their affairs  
and debate among members, a style sharply at  
35 odds with existing norms in the wider society at  
that time. Some groups promoted greater  
egalitarianism, with the Quakers even  
instituting approximate equality between  
women and men within their congregations.<sup>4</sup>  
40 Their practices created an autonomous social  
space within which even the poorest  
congregants counted as individuals and were  
expected to demonstrate initiative.<sup>5</sup> At the same  
time, the breakdown in the religious monopoly  
45 previously held by the Catholic Church  
promoted pluralism and a fierce competition in  
ideas. All these things would lead, in time, to a  
population clamoring for a freer political and  
49 economic climate.

Third, the Protestant emphasis on reading  
the Bible encouraged literacy and promoted the  
rapid diffusion of printing press technology  
across much of Europe. The resulting increase in  
human capital (the stock of skills and knowledge  
able to produce economic value) significantly  
contributed to economic prosperity.<sup>6</sup>

Fourth, Protestantism also played an  
important role in expanding trade and finance by  
how it built social capital, ensured the  
implementation of contracts, and expanded  
business networks. As Adam Smith noted,  
close-knit faith groups could enforce social  
norms; this encouraged repeated interactions  
among members, cooperation, and trust—all  
essential for expanding commerce and lending,  
especially in societies lacking state institutions  
able to guarantee contracts. Similarly, Jews  
historically enjoyed many advantages in  
businesses that depended on a delay between the  
delivery of a good and the payment for it—trade  
in small, portable, and valuable commodities  
such as diamonds, fine metals, and expensive  
dye-stuffs, and banking and money lending—  
because of how their religious communities were  
able to instill and enforce social discipline.<sup>7</sup>

Fifth and last, Protestant “enthusiasm”  
helped “break down, delegitimize, and otherwise  
weaken the hold of authoritarian political and  
social structures.”<sup>8</sup> As even David Hume argued,  
“enthusiasm [is] not less or rather more contrary  
to [priestly power], than sound reason and  
philosophy.”<sup>9</sup> This type of religion inspired an  
intense morality among believers, who  
committed themselves to virtuous behavior and  
campaigns against corruption in public office,  
thereby encouraging citizens to hold their leaders  
to higher standards. In the Nordic countries,  
reformist churches operated more or less  
democratically from the 18<sup>th</sup> century onward,  
setting the stage for later social and democratic  
change.<sup>10</sup>

This is not to say that Christianity did not  
also deter development (Catholicism’s dictates  
against the study of the sciences, for instance,  
surely held back many countries), nor to argue  
that other factors, such as the Enlightenment,  
were unimportant to Europe’s emergence from  
feudalism and obscurantism. However, at the

very least, religious belief significantly influenced the capacity of societies to develop, encouraging it in those places that developed first and discouraging it in areas that developed later.

## How Religion Spurs Development Today

Today, a variety of religions and denominations in different developing countries are effecting similar changes to those wrought by the spread of Protestantism in early modern Europe.

In most African, South Asian, Middle Eastern, and Latin American states, religious belief shapes not only moral and ethical outlooks but also political opinions on subjects such as the legitimacy of leaders and governments. Some Brazilian Pentecostal and African charismatic churches, for example, are transforming many of the values, skills, and activities of their members by emphasizing the importance of acquiring wealth, encouraging congregants—especially women—to play a much greater role in their communities, and teaching leadership and management skills. “The initial impact of Evangelical conversion [in Latin America and other parts of the developing world] occurs . . . as a major mutation of culture: restoration of the family, the rejection of *machismo*, the adoption of economic and work disciplines and new priorities,” writes David Martin, a sociologist of religion. These churches create “an autonomous social space within which people may participate in the creation of a different kind of sub-society . . . those who count for little or nothing in the wider world find themselves addressed as persons able to display initiative and to be of consequence. . . . As these enclaves multiply, religious monopoly breaks down and pluralism develops.”<sup>11</sup>

Whereas the government may barely exist outside a few main cities, faith networks (and traditional social groupings that have a strong religious component) may be deeply enmeshed in communities across a country, providing in some cases the most reliable form of security, justice, and support for the poor. These closely-knit religious groups are often the main catalyst for the formation of robust social networks,

which are the main storehouse of social capital in countries where society is heavily fragmented and the state is too weak to govern effectively. The more cohesive groups, such as the Mouride brotherhood (a large Islamic Sufi order found

mostly in Senegal and the Gambia) and the Sikhs in India, have been able to leverage their spiritual networks to foster entrepreneurship, trade, and wealth creation in ways their states cannot. Throughout the developing world, FBOs have a tangible and profound impact on the everyday activities of people underserved by their governments. FBOs are essential providers of education, health, humanitarian relief, and microfinance to hundreds of millions of people, substituting for absent governments across large swathes of the developing world. They range from large Western-based, faith-based development organizations such as Catholic Relief Services, World Vision, the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, and Islamic Relief to the much smaller locally based organizations typically centered on churches, temples, or mosques; on madrasas, seminaries, and other religious schools; or on informal groups such as those teaching the Gospel or the Quran in the plainest of settings. Local religious organizations account for the bulk of organized group activity in many places, provide the primary means of relief for families in crises, and even play major roles in economic endeavors. The World Bank’s 2000 *Voices of the Poor* study confirmed that “in ratings of effectiveness in both urban and rural settings, religious organizations feature more prominently than any single type of state institution.”<sup>12</sup>

The importance of these groups is especially palpable in the education and health sectors. They deliver, for example, half of all such services in sub-Saharan Africa, according to the World Bank.<sup>13</sup> In some places, such as parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Pakistan, churches and mosques have effectively replaced the state as the primary supplier of public goods. One study concluded that “the only significant reductions in HIV prevalence that have been recorded [in Uganda] are in contexts where the faith community took on a leadership role.”<sup>14</sup>

1 In fact, given the loss of confidence in formal  
government institutions and the dearth of  
professional opportunities available in stagnant,  
5 unstable environments, many talented local  
people see FBOs as one of the best outlets for  
their ambitions and energies, producing a  
noticeable shift of entrepreneurial skills from  
politics and business to religious entities. Groups  
10 such as Sri Lanka's Buddhist Sarvodaya  
Shramadana Movement (Sarvodaya), Turkey's  
Muslim Gülen movement, and Latin America's  
Jesuit-based Fe y Alegría all play important roles  
helping societies develop.<sup>15</sup>

15 To be sure, religion can cause problems. It  
can inspire bloodshed (either by itself or in  
combination with other markers of identity),  
and it is a very effective recruiting sergeant for  
terrorism. The same characteristic that makes  
20 religious groups so useful in commerce—social  
cohesion—also makes them highly effective  
perpetrators of violence. Faith is also a major  
determinant of social exclusion in some  
countries, and thereby contributes to poverty,  
25 disempowerment, and conflict.

30 Some religious doctrines—such as those  
against usury and private enterprise, and those  
that deny the rights of women and members of  
lower castes—continue to be a major obstacle to  
economic and social progress in some parts of the  
world. And countries that actively discriminate  
35 against minority faiths, as in Saudi Arabia, or  
allow a religious hierarchy to monopolize the  
interpretation of political and economic laws, as  
in Iran, are similarly likely to hold back the  
establishment of the accountable institutions and  
40 block the creative thinking necessary for  
development.

45 All these obstacles to development, however,  
are overshadowed by religion's potential to play  
an important role in promoting a gradual  
transformation of the political and economic  
landscape in the poorest parts of the world.  
Indeed, faith plays such an outsized role in the  
49 lives of people in such places that finding ways to  
take advantage of its values, organizations, and  
capacities to catalyze and transform how groups  
of people behave and cooperate is one of the few  
ways to change the dynamics of development in  
fractured, dysfunctional countries.

## At Arm's Length: FBOs and the Western Development Community

Western governments and Western-led  
multilateral institutions such as the World Bank  
have tried in recent years to better engage faith  
groups. James Wolfensohn, in particular, tried to  
increase cooperation with FBOs during his term  
as president of the World Bank, but resistance  
within the institution eventually limited the  
impact of his work to the creation of a small  
internal unit offering policy advice. European  
government agencies, such as the United  
Kingdom's Department for International  
Development (DFID) and the Dutch Ministry  
of Foreign Affairs, have launched research  
projects and conducted policy reviews on  
religion's role in development, but  
simultaneously have felt obliged to “specifically  
point out” that such programs “should not be  
taken to imply that they have themselves  
abandoned their secular nature and outlook,” for  
fear of offending their citizens or their  
employees.<sup>16</sup> The Bush administration had no  
such qualms and tried to boost support for and  
cooperation with FBOs, but even in that case  
cultural blinders and political realities dictated  
that the great majority of contracts went to US-  
based Christian bodies (just two Muslim groups  
received any grants or contracts between 2001  
and 2005).<sup>17</sup>

Many religious groups feel excluded from aid  
programs. Muslim organizations, for example,  
“are not part of major humanitarian reform  
efforts; they often see themselves pushed aside.  
... When Western groups come to the Muslim  
world, they try to work only with secular  
organizations, not with grassroots religious  
organizations that are well-represented in the  
local communities.” The broad secular bias has  
serious practical implications for programs. For  
instance, “women seeking international help are  
completely left out unless they are secular.”<sup>18</sup>

“Typically, secular and governmental  
donors' willingness to contribute varies inversely  
with an organization's overtly religious  
behavior,” concluded a study published by  
Georgetown University's Berkley Center for  
Religion, Peace, and World Affairs.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, a  
2004 DFID-funded report concluded that the

organization’s “quasi-secular model of development and its focus on partnership with mainstream Christian development organizations are increasingly untenable in the post-Cold War and post-9/11 worlds.”<sup>20</sup> Relationships between Western governments, aid agencies, multilateral organizations, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), on the one hand, and, on the other, the great majority of local faith groups—especially those working in the Islamic, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, and African religious traditions—remain severely limited, with cooperation generally restricted to a very narrow set of secular activities. There has been almost no attempt to engage faith groups in developing countries on their own terms or any attempt to take advantage of the unique capacities that these groups bring to the table.

### Faith Networks: Catalysts for Development

Development agencies cannot make states function properly from the outside. International assistance may be necessary but it is never sufficient to establish governments that are legitimate and sustainable and that can provide the positive societal incentives necessary to jumpstart the development process. Instead, communities need to look for ways to take advantage of their own resources, capacities, and institutions if they are ever to advance.

While government is often weak in these countries, just as often religion is strong: it shapes values and develops skills, it is the primary means of association and of conflict management, and it offers a way to build social capital and to hold community leaders more accountable. As Gerrie ter Haar and Stephen Ellis explain:

In many of Africa’s poorest countries, effective, centralized bureaucracies hardly exist. . . . In countries of this type, power is, literally, dis-integrated. It becomes a matter of necessity rather than choice to consider how development could be enhanced by using the resources in society at large. Many of the communities or social networks that carry the burden of

development have a religious form or convey religious ideas in some sense.”<sup>21</sup>

In the Middle East, notes Bernard Lewis, “religion, or more precisely membership of a religious community, is the ultimate determinant of identity . . . the focus of loyalty and, not less important, the source of authority.”<sup>22</sup> Islamic organizations have in many cases—and certainly in all the poorest communities—such legitimacy and constituency that it would be hard to effect substantial change without their participation. Indeed, various studies and symposia have concluded that there is enormous potential “in more purposeful efforts to associate development issues, practices, and organizations with Muslim traditions and actors.”<sup>23</sup>

### *Enhancing FBOs and Other Homegrown Social Networks*

The international community’s development agenda focuses far too much on top-down state building, which overemphasizes the role of Western development agencies, foreign NGOs, and national government ministries in capital cities often geographically and culturally remote from most of the population. Building states from the bottom-up around local groups would likely produce a much more sustainable process, as it would enmesh the state in the surrounding society and make the state dependent on the capacities and loyalties of local peoples.

If Western development agencies opted to emphasize programs that help societies reform from within, those agencies would quickly discover the merits of investing more of their resources in faith groups (and other indigenous networks). For instance, training the spiritual and administrative leaders of FBOs—everyone from ministers and imams to school principals and the heads of waqf foundations—on management, economics, education, and social welfare would help their organizations take on larger projects, expand their services, and improve their operations. Similarly, assisting well-established groups in introducing (in partnership, perhaps, with NGOs or private companies) savings and loans schemes,

1 sanitation and garbage-collection systems, and  
 2 housing development cooperatives would speed  
 3 the spread of such programs throughout the  
 4 developing world. Helping faith networks  
 5 provide services such as microlending and trade  
 6 facilitation—services that require cohesive  
 7 groups able to ensure member compliance with  
 8 commitments—would open new opportunities  
 9 for members to advance themselves. Measures  
 10 that fostered greater cohesion—by improving  
 11 internal governance, by expanding services, by  
 12 helping codify norms and discipline regimes, by  
 13 and by creating stronger ties between members—  
 14 would foster more “spiritual capital” (social  
 15 capital created through religion), an invaluable  
 16 resource in the low-trust environment common  
 17 in fragile states.<sup>24</sup>

18 Greater financial and material aid from the  
 19 international community would enable mosques,  
 20 churches, and temples to expand the numbers of  
 21 poor children who benefit from the schooling  
 22 they provide. The consequent boost in levels of  
 23 literacy would, in turn, enable the poor to  
 24 participate more fully in social, political, and  
 25 economic life; give developing economies a  
 26 better chance of meeting the challenges of  
 27 globalization; and improve many other  
 28 development indicators. An expansion of faith-  
 29 based education might be a mixed blessing in  
 30 parts of the Muslim world, where local madrasas  
 31 play a key role in delivering education but have  
 32 been accused of spreading political  
 33 fundamentalism. Since 9/11, many groups have  
 34 encouraged madrasas to renounce extremism and  
 35 introduce new subjects, including secular  
 36 subjects, into their curricula. For instance, the  
 37 International Center for Religion and  
 38 Diplomacy (ICRD), based in Washington, DC,  
 39 has worked with leaders of Pakistani madrasas to  
 40 promote peace and tolerance.<sup>25</sup> Such efforts  
 41 should be expanded.

42 Religious networks also offer unique ways to  
 43 enhance government accountability and  
 44 performance. These networks shape values and  
 45 behaviors—and could be urged to do more to  
 46 persuade bureaucrats and businessmen to eschew  
 47 corruption. A partnership of the major networks  
 48 within a city or region could constitute a  
 49 powerful lobby for bottom-up reform of state

institutions and for greater accountability of  
 officials. Such a partnership could gradually be  
 extended to encompass other stakeholders with  
 similar interests in government reform (such as  
 companies, tribal chiefs, and non-religious  
 NGOs).

### *Reorienting Western Development Organizations*

In order to take advantage of the human  
 resources embedded in religious networks,  
 Western development organizations, donors,  
 multilateral organizations, and NGOs must seek  
 a closer—and more evenhanded—partnership  
 with local communities and the faith groups that  
 play such prominent roles within those  
 communities. This will require major changes in  
 how these organizations operate. Besides  
 reconsidering how development actually  
 occurs—and how this might affect their  
 programs—they will also have to reevaluate “the  
 secular gospel underpinning the development  
 enterprise,”<sup>26</sup> and begin “taking seriously  
 people’s world-views and considering their  
 potential for the development process as a  
 whole.”<sup>27</sup> Western organizations that treat  
 religion and development as separate and even  
 incompatible phenomena not only undermine  
 their ability to be effective but also risk offending  
 and alienating the people of the communities  
 they wish to serve. This danger is especially acute  
 in non-Christian environments, where local  
 populations tend to equate “Western” with  
 “Christian” and thus will regard any denial of the  
 importance of their religion as a Christian slur.

International development organizations will  
 also have to stop emphasizing the amount of aid  
 they disburse and focus instead on ensuring that  
 the financing they provide complements and  
 reinforces local capacities and institutions rather  
 than undermining or warping local  
 arrangements. While such organizations may  
 gain prestige from the size of their budgets,  
 community building based on a large number of  
 small organizations—and most of the FBOs that  
 serve the poor are small—requires a delicate  
 approach consisting of modest, carefully targeted  
 investments that reinforce capacities without  
 undermining internal coherence and

accountability. Understanding the special needs of—and crafting the right strategy to partner with—the large number of small organizations in underdeveloped areas may even require the creation of a new, intermediary organization to bridge the large gulf between the large donors and multinational NGOs and the many small grassroots entities that need support.<sup>28</sup>

Of course, any undertaking that engages religion needs to be careful on a number of fronts. In particular, any activity that smacks of favoring one faith or denomination over another risks exacerbating, rather than healing, divisions. Assistance needs to be distributed in an evenhanded fashion, so that no religious community feels itself excluded from international largesse. The provision of assistance must also be handled very carefully when dealing with any organization that proselytizes, especially in a sectarian environment. The goal should be to ensure that aid is not used in any way to promote a specific religious or political viewpoint, and that where it is used to fund the delivery of services, those services are available without discrimination to everyone in a given area.

However, proselytizing is an integral part of most religions—especially among the world’s largest faiths, Christianity and Islam—and avoiding such groups will prove impossible in some cases. Indeed, given that missionary organizations are especially active among the most deprived sectors of society, and often have a closer relationship with them (living modestly and sharing the same deprivations) than do other NGOs, development agencies should not want to steer absolutely clear of proselytizers. Taking full advantage of religious networks and FBOs to promote development will require partnerships with a much broader set of organizations. A more nuanced and flexible approach should be formulated that balances the need to ensure equal access to services with the need to expand the range of organizations that agencies engage.

### *A Proposal for a New Organization*

While government agencies, multilateral agencies, and secular NGOs can enhance their ability to promote development by working with

FBOs, they are unlikely to overcome all of their hesitancy about working with religious bodies. That problem would be mitigated if an organization was created by and for the FBOs themselves. Such an organization could pool the knowledge, experience, and skills of numerous FBOs from different faiths. Unlike most FBOs, this organization would not concentrate on delivering services, and unlike existing interfaith bodies such as the World Parliament of the Religions, Religions for Peace (WCRP), and United Religions Initiative (URI), it would not focus on conflict resolution. Instead, with the financial and material support of major foundations, development agencies, and leading religious organizations from all creeds and from both the rich and the poor worlds, this new organization could explore a broader agenda for using religion to catalyze development in fragile states.

To begin, the new organization could launch a series of ambitious research programs on all facets of the relationship between religion and development. Although some universities have recently begun to explore this field (see below), the traditional reluctance among economists and other academics to analyze faith’s impact has only reinforced the tendency among development professionals to ignore religious belief and the role of FBOs in their own work.<sup>29</sup> As one DFID-funded report explained, there has been “widespread neglect of the role of religion in both mainstream academic analysis of people’s lives and social relationships and in development theories and practice.”<sup>30</sup> As a result, few aid specialists are familiar with the many faith networks that dominate the landscape of the poor—from Brazil’s *favelas* to Pakistan’s tribal areas—and thus do not incorporate such networks into their studies and plans.

The new organization’s research programs would do more than catalog information. They would seek to understand how faith networks function, how they influence the values of believers, how they are led, how they are funded, how effective their services are, and how well they are able to mobilize and discipline their members. Researching how religious values and relationships affect attitudes toward business and

1 modernization would help development  
 5 specialists learn how to better engage local  
 10 populations—and how to do so without  
 15 unnecessarily and unwittingly undermining their  
 20 traditional beliefs and norms. Discovering how  
 25 the groups within a particular country or region  
 30 relate to each other and to the government  
 35 would create a clearer picture of their capacity to  
 40 work together to improve governance and  
 45 enhance social cohesion. Studying local social  
 49 structures and identities, and the role of religion  
 in influencing these, could generate ideas for  
 bridging the deep divides that scar these  
 societies. More specific studies could focus on,  
 say, faith-based patterns of poverty and social  
 exclusion, lessons learned by donors from their  
 past engagement with faith groups, and the  
 process by which religious organizations build  
 social capital. The resulting databases, case  
 studies, historical analyses, and interfaith  
 comparisons would offer a rich assortment of  
 information to help the wider development  
 community and governments better engage these  
 groups.

25 But this organization should aim to do more  
 30 than just conduct research. It should also seek to  
 35 fill an important gap in the development field by  
 40 providing training, guidance, and support to  
 45 faith networks in poor countries, both directly  
 49 and in partnership with aid agencies and  
 Western FBOs, such as Saddleback Church,  
 which has developed and trained its own  
 international network of pastors in recent years.  
 And by working directly with Muslim, Hindu,  
 and other religious philanthropists and FBOs,  
 the new body would be well placed to encourage  
 more private resources be directed toward  
 development.

40 To some extent, the research arm of this new  
 45 organization would complement the promising  
 49 work now being undertaken in a handful of  
 institutions. The University of Birmingham in  
 the United Kingdom, for example, is in the  
 middle of a five-year research program on  
 religions and development funded by DFID.<sup>31</sup>  
 Georgetown University has taken over much of  
 the work originally performed under the auspices  
 of the World Bank to establish a program on  
 religion and global development.<sup>32</sup> The Institute

of Social Studies in The Hague has set up a  
 Knowledge Centre on Religion and  
 Development.<sup>33</sup> Harvard University and Johns  
 Hopkins University also have been active in this  
 area. But with the possible exception of the  
 Birmingham program, none of these projects is  
 attempting to systematically analyze all the issues  
 raised in this paper related to development and  
 religion. Most have only a handful of researchers.  
 And their output is limited to papers,  
 conferences, and catalogs of activities, which  
 reach only small audiences. In short, there is as  
 yet no agency proactively conducting research  
 across all faiths with the intention of seeking to  
 turn that knowledge into programs that can  
 reach the great majority of religious groups and  
 leaders around the world.

## Conclusion

How might this gap be filled? What would it  
 take to launch the kind of organization that can  
 pool the intellectual capacities of FBOs and  
 explore a broad agenda for catalyzing  
 development? An initial step in this direction  
 would require considerable commitment but  
 only modest resources. Indeed, just one leader  
 might be able to accomplish much if blessed with  
 the threefold ability to develop a coherent vision  
 of such an organization, to inspire individuals to  
 embrace that vision, and to cajole institutions to  
 fund its realization. As a first step, this person  
 could seek to persuade a handful of the major  
 religious organizations operating in the  
 developing world—such as Caritas  
 Internationalis, World Vision, the Aga Khan  
 Foundation, Sarvodaya, and the Gülen  
 movement—to form a partnership to establish a  
 new organization around a few research and  
 training programs. Each of the founding partners  
 might play a different role—one might provide  
 funds, for instance, while another offers  
 intellectual advice—to support the work of the  
 organization's staff and leadership. Slowly but  
 systematically, the organization could broaden  
 its agenda, expand its team of researchers and  
 trainers, and invite other FBOs to participate.  
 Similarly, the number of countries and  
 denominations served and the types of assistance  
 offered to FBOs in developing countries could

gradually be expanded. Within a few years, this new organization might begin to have a major impact not only on the capacities and ambitions of faith groups engaged in promoting development but also on how development is perceived and approached.

Such change in perceptions might well extend even to secular-minded Western development agencies, which are well aware that their past efforts at repairing fragile states have yielded few positive results. For instance, the World Bank's own Independent Evaluation Group, which reports on the organization's activities to its board of directors, concluded that "past international engagement with [fragile states] has failed to yield significant improvements, and donors and others continue to struggle with how best to assist [them]."<sup>34</sup> There is thus a potentially receptive audience for any organization that can demonstrate an effective method of helping fragile states.

As this article has argued, Western blueprints for development are only partially effective because development is not primarily a top-down process but rather is fundamentally an organic, bottom-up process driven by local capacities and social relationships. International action should first and foremost facilitate these local processes, leverage local capacities and complement local actions so that local citizens can create governance systems appropriate to their histories, values, and societies. In fragile states, the most effective institutions and most potent capacities are often to be found not within formal state structures but within non-state groups, organizations, and networks. And, in many cases, the most important of these are religious in nature.

If the new, FBO-funded organization could demonstrate this, it might make believers out of even the most secular of development professionals. ❖

1. Ver Beek, "Spirituality: A Development Taboo," 60.
2. de Jong and others, *Religion and Development Policy*, 8.
3. Gerrie ter Haar and Stephen Ellis divide religious resources into four major categories—ideas, practices, organization, and experiences—all of which can "produce knowledge that, in principle, could be beneficial to a community for development purposes." See ter Haar and Ellis, "The Role of Religion in Development," 356.
4. Tilly, *Democracy*, 31.
5. "Autonomous social spaces" is a phrase generally attributed to David Martin, who uses it often in his writings on evangelical Christians. I find it equally useful in a historical context. See Martin, *Tongues of Fire*.
6. Becker and Woessmann, "Was Weber Wrong?"
7. Richman, "Community Enforcement of Informal Contracts," 49–51.
8. Shah, "The Bible and the Ballot Box," 128.
9. Hume, "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm," 47–8.
10. Tilly, *Democracy*, 30–1.
11. Martin, "The Evangelical Upsurge," 39, 41.
12. Narayan et al., *Voices of the Poor*, 222.
13. Wolfensohn, "Millennium Challenges for Faith and Development."
14. Berkley Center, *Mapping the Role of Faith Communities*, 20.
15. See <http://www.sarvodaya.org>, <http://en.fgulen.com>, and <http://www.feyalegria.org/default.asp?caso=10&idrev=43>.
16. ter Haar and Ellis, "The Role of Religion in Development," 364.
17. Stockman et al., "Bush Brings Faith to Foreign Aid."
18. Georgetown University Center for International and Regional Studies, "Global Development and Faith-Inspired Organizations."
19. Berkley Center, *Faith-Inspired Organizations and Global Development Policy*, 17.
20. Centre for Development Studies, University of Wales Swansea and the Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of Wales Lampeter, *A Leap of Faith?*, v.
21. ter Haar and Ellis, "The Role of Religion in Development," 362.
22. Lewis, *The Multiple Identities of the Middle East*, 15, 22.
23. Georgetown University Center for International and Regional Studies, "Global Development and Faith-Inspired Organizations."
24. For more on spiritual capital, see, among others, Berger and Hefner, "Spiritual Capital in Comparative Perspective."
25. See United States Institute of Peace, "Promoting Peace and Tolerance through Madrasa Reform."
26. Clarke, "Faith Matters," 3.

AQ2

## INSPIRING DEVELOPMENT IN FRAGILE STATES

- 1 27. ter Haar and Ellis, "The Role of Religion in Development," 353.
28. Georgetown University Center for International and Regional Studies, "Global Development and Faith-Inspired Organizations."
29. "Development economics remains largely silent on the role of religion, largely maintaining a traditional approach of assuming religion away as part of 'society' or 'culture.'" Jackson and Fleischer, "Religion and Economics," 23. Although there has been "a vigorous interest in political science in examining the relationship between politics and religion ... very little of the current output is focused on developing countries." Singh et al., "Political Science, Religion, and Development," 1.
- 5 30. Rakodi, "Understanding the Roles of Religions in Development," 10.
31. See <http://www.rad.bham.ac.uk/index.php?section=1> (accessed May 1, 2009).
32. See <http://berkeleycenter.georgetown.edu/programs/127> (accessed May 1, 2009).
33. See <http://www.iss.nl/> (accessed May 1, 2009).
34. World Bank Independent Evaluation Group, *Engaging with Fragile States*, ix.

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